

NETWORKING FOR LOCAL EMPLOYMENT:

How State and Community Agencies
should work together to deliver effective
Labour Market Programmes –

the lessons of Ballymun

by **Tom Ronayne** (WRC Social and Economic Consultants)

and **Mick Creedon** (Ballymun Job Centre)

Published by Dublin Employment Pact
November 2003

ISBN 0-9545661-2-2

Acknowledgements

This report would not have been possible without the participation and support of all the people who agreed to be interviewed about the issues addressed in this study. We thank them in particular for their openness, enthusiasm, and positive suggestions. An invaluable source of guidance and advice for the study was the local advisory group established at the outset of the work. This group included Anne Brown (City of Dublin VEC), Chris Kane (FÁS), Tom Leonard (Ballymun Partnership), Carol McGann (Department of Social and Family Affairs) and Fergus Kelly (Northern Area Health Board). Finally, we would like to acknowledge and thank the Ballymun Job Centre and the Dublin Employment Pact for providing the resources for the study and their support in bringing this report to publication.

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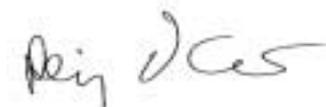
Preface

Impact, flexibility, commitment and collaboration – these are key factors in effective active labour market interventions at the local level in Dublin. It is recognised widely that what is required to maximise the impact of the Local Employment Services Network (LESN) is a coherent national policy framework and support structure married to flexible implementation shaped and directed by local conditions. However, it is important to identify more clearly the elements of public policy and local responses essential to achieving the most effective mix.

The Dublin Employment Pact has tracked innovative good practice in local labour market interventions and disseminated the resultant policy lessons learned. This led to the publication in 2000 of the baseline analysis, *Solving long-term unemployment in Dublin – The lessons from policy innovation*¹. One of the many lessons to emerge was the need to examine in depth the elements essential to enhancing the qualitative impact of local employment services, i.e. in the delivery of these services to the people for whom they are intended. Two core issues emerged rapidly: firstly that there was a widespread *ad hoc* but ultimately unsatisfactory level of inter-agency collaboration locally and secondly that the issue of co-operative local data collection and client-centred information sharing needed considerable development and a model of how best to implement it.

Arising from this learning process, in 2001 the Pact issued a call for tenders for pilot projects which would elucidate and define these elements. Two research projects were selected and then implemented in Ballymun and Finglas Cabra. The first, carried out through the Ballymun Jobs Centre by Mick Creedon of BJC and Tom Ronayne of WRC Consultants, focussed on the elements essential to achieving effective inter-agency collaboration at the local level. The second project, carried out through Finglas Cabra Partnership LESN by Eoin Collins of NEXUS Consultants, developed a model for client centred data collection and sharing between service providers. During the course of the research, an Advisory Group of managers of relevant agencies (Local Employment Services Networks (LESN), FÁS, CDVEC, Department of Social Community and Family Welfare and Health Boards) reviewed the progress of the initiatives.

The two reports which resulted from this process –Tom Ronayne and Mick Creedon *Developing Process not Structure: The Challenge to Inter-Organisational Action* and Eoin Collins *Integrated Responses to Labour Market Disadvantage in Finglas and Cabra* – are in-depth studies which add greatly to knowledge in this area. In addition, they each contain a set of clear and precise recommendations for action going forward. These set out very clearly practical solutions to the issues identified originally, and their implementation will be pursued vigorously by the Dublin Employment Pact. We commend these excellent studies to all agencies and organisations concerned with the development of a qualitatively effective local employment service and look forward to a positive response from policy makers to the recommendations they advance.



Philip O'Connor
Dublin Employment Pact

¹ E. Fitzgerald, B. Ingoldsby, F. Daly (Dept. Social Policy, UCD), *Solving Long-term Unemployment in Dublin – The Lessons from Policy Innovation* (DEP Policy Paper No. 2) (2000).

Executive Summary

A common theme in reviews and evaluations of labour market policy and labour market services and programmes is the call for greater co-ordination and integration of the range of services provided by different organisations dealing on a day-to-day basis with people who are long-term unemployed. However, to date no precise operational models have been advanced that put flesh on such calls for greater co-ordination and integration. For example, the most recent assessment of the extent to which the Local Employment Service Network (LESN) has led to greater co-ordination / integration of services for the long-term unemployed made by the NESF (2000)² does not deal in any systematic way with identifying the barriers to or factors facilitating greater co-operation / co-ordination / integration between organisations providing services to people who are long-term unemployed.

This study addresses this issue by looking at the actual nature of inter-organisation action among a number of organisations involved in the delivery of services to long-term unemployed people in Ballymun. The study sought to investigate the actual practices of and influences on inter-organisational contact and action and to identify the factors that have inhibited the development of greater co-operation / co-ordination / integration. It also sought to identify factors that could contribute to positive developments in this regard. While recognising the likely importance of personality based working arrangements in relation to inter-organisational contact and action, the study sought to move beyond these factors and to identify the organisational factors that are seen as inhibiting greater co-operation / co-ordination / integration.

In undertaking the research, no specific operational definitions of networking, co-operation, co-ordination and integration were adopted. The reasons for taking this approach included the diversity of practice associated with these concepts and the different understandings to be found of what they mean in practice in both the literature on these issues and from previous evaluations of the LESN. In this regard, the primary focus of the research was to identify the understandings and practices associated with what is termed inter-organisational contact and action and, on this basis, to build up a picture of what the reality of inter-organisational contact and action is like among a number of organisations involved in the delivery of services to unemployed people in Ballymun.

The methodology used involved undertaking semi-structured interviews with personnel from 12 local organisations. These organisations included; the Ballymun Partnership, Ballymun Job Centre, City of Dublin VEC, DSFA, Dublin Corporation, FÁS, FIT, Fingal ICTU Centre for the Unemployed, Local Drugs Task Force, MABS, NAHB, and Urrús. The personnel to be interviewed were identified with the assistance of a local advisory group established to facilitate and direct the research. A total of 35 persons were interviewed including front-line personnel, local managers, and senior personnel at national and regional levels. In association with the members of the local advisory group a semi-structured interview schedule was developed for use in the study.

The findings of the study showed that formal membership of inter-organisational structures was quite prevalent among interviewees and that the nature, frequency and formality of inter-organisational contact are closely related to the position and responsibilities that people hold within their respective organisations. However, based on the comments and observations of interviewees it was concluded that there is no structure providing an opportunity for organisations to come together to review and compare their policies, areas of operation, future plans and current practices.

² NESF (2000) Enhancing the Effectiveness of the Local Employment Service. Dublin: National Economic and Social Forum

Significantly, the absence of such a structure was not necessarily seen as a major barrier to achieving inter-organisational co-operation and co-ordination so long as all organisations positively participate in and actively support a process of inter-organisational contact and action.

For front-line personnel the pattern of actual inter-organisational contact was found to be closely related to person's job and, arising from and related to this, each person had a specific and fairly unique network of contacts. The following are a number of the issues and observations made by identified by front-line personnel in relation to this aspect of their work:

- in general the opportunity to make personal contact was valued and seen as a means of developing a sense of mutual trust;
- different organisational practices in relation to client confidentiality and the issue of maintaining client confidentiality presented difficulties;
- a considerable number of interviewees indicated that they did not know the full set of contacts relevant to meeting the needs of their clients; and,
- a considerable number of interviewees indicated that they lacked information on the precise nature of other people's jobs and responsibilities, particularly people outside their immediate circle of contacts.

In comparison to front-line personnel, local management personnel tend to make contact with their counterparts for reasons related to service development and delivery rather than for reasons relating to the specific circumstances of the clients of their respective organisations. Local management also tend to be members of a wide range of local committees as well as working groups and committees that are not locally based. More generally, the pattern of inter-organisational contact among local management tends to revolve around a combination of bilateral meetings with their counterparts, membership of various committees and sub-committees, and a certain amount of formal liaison with personnel in similar positions in organisations other than their own. The following a number of the issues identified by local management:

- a lack of transparency between organisations;
- concern about the duplication of services / actions;
- a lack of real inter-organisational linkages (as apart from the relationships described in relation to front-line personnel above) between the programmes and services of different organisations;
- the presence of a lack of trust between some organisations;
- the absence of a culture of co-operation between local management; and,
- the lack of a system to track the involvement of different organisations with the same client.

The overall pattern of the findings emerging from the interviews with senior / regional management pointed the absence of formal policies and practices in relation to inter-organisational contact and action among the organisations examined. In general, each organisation acts autonomously: each

organisation undertakes internal planning and review processes without recourse to considering the actions and plans of other organisations and without inviting external comment from other organisations. Organisational effectiveness is measured in terms of the extent to which each organisation meets its own targets and little active consideration is given to assessing the manner in which each organisation may be impacting on the effectiveness of the others.

On the basis of the overall pattern of the findings the study concluded that the main barrier to effective inter-organisational action at the local level is the absence of worked out policies and practices on the part of organisations in respect of this type of activity and the absence of practices that support such action. While it has been found that this does not necessarily present a barrier to organisations engaging in inter-organisational initiatives (mainly on a bilateral basis) it presents an important challenge in the context of developing effective forms of multi-lateral action between organisations. The main challenge that arises in this regard is developing effective practices to underpin any commitment to inter-organisational action rather than relying on existing or new structures to facilitate this.

In addition to making specific sets of recommendations in relation to particular personnel a number of core recommendations are made. These include the following:

- Inter-organisational action requires that participating organisations develop and implement inter-organisational policies and practices that are understood and supported at all relevant levels in the participating organisations. Such policies and their associated procedures and practices need to be clearly stated and integrated into the operations of the participating organisations.
- Inter-organisational action requires the identification of common goals and agreed targets between the participating organisations and associated with this the identification of the respective roles and contributions of the participating organisations in relation to these targets. Related to this is the necessity to develop and implement systems to assess individual and collective performance in relation to targets.
- As with other areas of organisational operations (e.g., personnel / human resource development, finance, health and safety), the pursuit of inter-organisational action would be enhanced by the appointment of a person whose role it is to support the development, implementation and review of inter-organisational policies and their associated procedures and practices. Among the more specific functions of such a role would be supporting personnel internal to the organisation to undertake the inter-organisational aspects of their jobs and liaising with their counterparts in organisations participating in inter-organisational action.

An indication of the practical manner in which these recommendations might be implemented is that organisations seeking to secure effective inter-organisational action between them should:

- engage in mutual exchanges of information regarding their activities, services and plans;
- identify activities and services that can be provided in a complementary manner in order to avoid duplication of activities and services;
- undertake planning in a collaborative rather than autonomous manner;
- set collective rather than individual targets and specify the role and contribution of each organisation in relation to achieving collective targets;

- participate collectively in reviewing collective targets;
- develop protocols providing guidance and support for inter-organisational contact and action on the part of personnel working at different levels; and,
- provide training for personnel to support them in undertaking tasks with an inter-organisation dimension.

Introduction

A number of issues form the background context for this research project. Among the more important of these issues are the trend in long-term unemployment and developments in labour market policies over the past number of years, the emergence of a debate regarding the concept of employability and its relevance to developing and delivering programmes and services aimed at assisting people who are long-term unemployed, and the persistence of calls for greater co-operation, co-ordination and integration in the delivery of services, specifically in this context, services for long-term unemployed people. A particular point with regard to the latter is that, despite the frequency of such recommendations, there is a lack of common definition and recommended practice associated with such calls for greater co-ordination and integration. By way of introduction to the research we briefly review some of the issues arising in relation to these three issues.

The Long-Term Unemployed in the Current Labour Market

As is now well documented, there has been substantial growth in employment and an associated fall in unemployment since the mid 1990s. Significantly, the rate of long-term unemployment - calculated on an ILO basis - has fallen from 5.5% in late 1997 to 1.4% in February 2003. The results of the most recent Quarterly National Household Survey show that since the spring of 2001 the rate of long-term unemployment has increased but at a slower rate than the increase in overall unemployment. In absolute terms the number of long-term unemployed persons is approximately 26,000.

At face value, these figures point to the capacity of the labour market to absorb people who were long-term unemployed. The effects of policy initiatives such as the National Employment Action Plan (NEAP) and the Local Employment Service Network (LESN) are also indicated by these figures. One of the side-effects of the high level of employment growth and the associated reduction in unemployment and long-term unemployment has been the emergence of an awareness of the severe difficulties experienced by particular groups of unemployed people within the recent favourable labour market conditions and the initiation of a discussion regarding the nature of an appropriate policy response to meet the needs of these groups. An illustration of this discussion is the comments of the ESF Programme Evaluation Unit on the National Employment Action Plan (NEAP):

The NEAP kicked in at a time when the market was effectively sorting out short-term unemployment itself ... However, the NEAP has not proposed any identifiable strategy to effectively deal with those who are long-term unemployed or other particularly marginalised groups (e.g., people with disabilities). ... there is a clear need to develop sustained re-integrative strategies for more marginalised groups in the labour market and this is a much sterner challenge. (p. 116, ESFPEU, 2000)³.

From a spatial perspective, unemployment fell in areas experiencing higher than average unemployment levels. However, as documented in the recent labour force survey of Ballymun, unemployment rates in disadvantaged areas - areas within which a Local Employment Service Network operates - continue to be in excess of the national average: in the case of Ballymun unemployment rates were

3 ESFPEU (2000) Challenges for Human Resource Development 2000-2006. Dublin: ESFPEU. It should be noted, however, that the National Employment Action Plan 2001 refers to the introduction of a High Supports Scheme aimed at addressing the needs of persons unable to either get, or keep, a job in the open labour market due to personal barriers such as age, health, literacy or numeracy factors (p.14). The National Employment Action Plan 2002 reported that this scheme will be launched in 2002.

found to be between three and four times the national average (Ronayne, 2001).⁴ From the analysis of the profile of unemployed people in Ballymun and similar analyses undertaken in Dundalk and Ballyfermot, it is apparent that certain groups of people continue to experience severe difficulties in accessing employment during a period of employment growth. In demographic terms, these groups include men over the age of 35 years and lone parents. There is also evidence that a substantial proportion of the long-term unemployed in disadvantaged areas experience multiple and severe barriers to labour market participation arising from their personal and family circumstances.

The distinguishing feature of the labour force - particularly unemployed people - in Ballymun and similar areas is the predominance of persons with very low levels of educational and skill levels. However, accompanying these low educational and skill levels in many instances is the presence of literacy difficulties, demoralisation, physical and mental health problems and problems related to various forms of addiction (Ronayne, 2000)⁵. For women, and particularly lone parents, the presence of care responsibilities and the absence of family friendly employment policies and affordable and quality childcare constitute major barriers.

The persistence of long-term unemployment as noted above has been documented in a number of recent policy reports (e.g., ESRI, 1999)⁶. What is of particular interest in the context of the present research is that the policy response advocated invariably calls for greater co-ordination between the work of relevant agencies as well as recognition of the wide range of agencies that are relevant to addressing the issues identified. For example:

.. if such an initiative (i.e., to tackle long-term unemployment) is to be successful in the widest sense of the word, it would require a co-ordinated approach involving a number of State agencies with responsibilities covering not only the labour market, but also areas such as welfare, health and justice. (p. 204, ESRI, 1999)

What is not provided by these reports is clear direction regarding how this co-ordination could be brought about or what it might mean in practice for the range of organisations involved in the delivery of services aimed at addressing the varying needs of the long-term unemployed and people experiencing marginalisation in the labour market.

Employability and the Long-Term Unemployed

One of the concepts to emerge out of recent discussions of the position of the long-term unemployed in the current labour market is *employability*. Among the positive aspects of this discussion is the acknowledgement that employability is influenced by a number of diverse factors and that addressing these factors requires tailored and sustained intervention. Among the range of factors that have been identified as influencing employability are the following:

- demographic – age, gender, ethnic status
- life history – criminality
- personal and family circumstances – caring responsibilities
- physical and psychological health status – depression, presence of addiction problems

⁴ Ronayne, T. (2001) Ballymun Employment Report 2K. Dublin: WRCsec and Ballymun Partnership.

⁵ Ronayne, T. (2001) Adult Long-Term Unemployment in the Tiger Economy. Report Commission by the Dundalk Employment Partnership. Dublin: WRCsec.

⁶ ESRI (1999) National Investment Priorities for the Period 2000-2006. Dublin: ESRI.

- educational qualifications
- basic / core skills – literacy, problem solving skills, self-sustained learning, teamwork
- occupational history
- locational – negative stereotyping of place of residence
- welfare – unemployment trap (i.e., employed does not present sufficient financial gain over remaining unemployed).

In the context of the above, the lines of policy action advocated have included calls for a greater use of profiling, tailored and integrated interventions, and greater co-ordination and integration of the range of relevant services provided by different organisations dealing on a day-to-day basis with people who are long-term unemployed (e.g., ESRI, 2001)⁷. However, we note that no precise operational models have been advanced that put flesh on such calls for greater co-ordination and integration. Against this background the lack of information on what might be described as the current state of play in relation to how these organisations actually interact with one another is clearly an issue. This study addresses this issue by looking at the actual nature of inter-organisation action among a number of organisations involved in the delivery of services to long-term unemployed people in Ballymun.

Co-ordination / Integration of Services Issues

Initiatives to introduce greater co-ordination and integration between statutory, community / voluntary and social partner organisations in Ireland have tended to overlap with initiatives concerned with local development and the establishment of local development structures. While not wishing to oversimplify the conclusions of the literature dealing with such initiatives it is evident that, in urban areas particularly, the initial rationale was and continues to be to harness and focus the resources of organisations operating in various sectors with a view to achieving a more effective and efficient impact than would be the case should these sectors and the organisations within them be left to operate independently.

Running through these initiatives since the introduction of the Area Based Partnership Companies has been a particular concern with reducing unemployment in localities characterised by higher than average concentrations of unemployment. The major development of note in this regard was the introduction of the Local Employment Service Network (LESN) following on from the recommendations of the Interim and Final Reports of the Task Force on Long-term Unemployment in 1995. Here we review briefly the literature dealing with the evolution of the LESN, particularly regarding its attempts to achieve greater co-ordination and integration in the delivery of employment and related labour market services for unemployed people.

Central to the concept of a local employment service as envisaged by the Task Force on Long-Term Unemployment are the concepts of integration and the provision of access to the range of services required to assist people to make the transition from unemployment to work:

⁷ ESRI (2001) *Employability and its Relevance for the Management of the Live Register*. Dublin: ESRI.

the local Employment Service would provide the gateway, or access point, to the full range of options which should be available to a long-term unemployed person to enable him / her to return to the world of work (p. 105, Report of the Task Force on Long-Term Unemployment, 1995)..(and)

the effective co-operation and co-ordination of services by all these groups (i.e., FÁS, the Department of Social Community and Family Affairs, the Education Sector, Area Partnerships, Centres for the Unemployed etc) is essential to make better and more effective use of available resources and, ultimately, deliver a better and more coherent service to the unemployed (p.105, Report of the Task Force on Long-Term Unemployment, 1995).⁸

At the time of the introduction of the LESN the focus of attention was primarily on directing assistance to groups of unemployed people identified as being at risk of continued long-term unemployment at a time of employment growth. It was recognised that the requisite package of services to assist these groups of unemployed people spanned the remits of and services provided by a wide range of statutory organisations and community based providers (e.g., welfare information and advice, debt management, information on training, enterprise and employment schemes, information and advice on housing, childcare, elder and sick care, physical and mental health services, addiction counselling, personal and vocational counselling). Arguably, the rationale for access to this range of services and for access to be structured in a client centred manner requiring co-ordination and integration across a diverse range of service providers is greater now than at the time the LESN was introduced. As noted above, there is evidence that a substantial proportion of the clients of the LESN experience multiple and severe problems that present barriers to their employment, particularly their capacity to develop a sustainable and developmental relationship with the labour market.

What has been the experience of the LESN in relation to the above issues to date? To answer this question we will review a number of evaluations of the LESN beginning with that undertaken by Forfás in 1997⁹. Among the key questions posed in relation to the LESN by Forfás was: *To what extent is the objective of greater co-operation and co-ordination by the State sector providers being met?* It is notable that the focus of this question was confined to the State sector and not the broader set of organisational resources available in localities in which an LESN was established. The conclusion reached by the evaluation is stark:

Progress has been made, but considerable work remains to be done to achieve the Task Force objective of greater co-ordination (p. 99, Forfás, 1997).

The report went on to state that: *the reality is that the work of building relationships with community groups, state agencies, and employers is complex and slow (p. 99)*. This conclusion reflected the comments of chairpersons of LESN Management Committees who, while not unanimously negative in their views, were generally reserved in their assessment of the extent to which a coherent and co-ordinated service was being provided by the LESN: for example,

At operational level there is reasonably good co-ordination between the staff of different LES service providers. At management committee level however the situation is more difficult. Some agencies seem more concerned about keeping themselves informed of the activities of the LES rather than what changes their own organisations might need to make to improve their contribution to achieving the objectives of the LES; and;

⁸ Report of the Task Force on Long-Term Unemployment (1995). Dublin: Department of An Taoiseach.

⁹ Forfás (1997) Initial Review of the Local Employment Service. Dublin: Forfás.

The service is not yet coherent and co-ordinated, but progress is being made. It has been a question of 'squeezing blood out of a stone' to get the agencies (semi-state) to work with us. (p. 89, Forfás, 1997).

In the context of a wide range of recommendations only one was specifically focussed on co-ordination between statutory agencies: *There should be in all areas periodic reporting to the LES Management Committee on all developments of local services for the unemployed (p. 104).* This seems to reflect a view that the presence of agencies on the LESN Management Committees is not sufficient to ensure co-ordination or integration of the actions of the members of the LES, let alone the effective communication and the exchange of relevant information.

Approximately 18 months later, Eustace and Clarke returned to the issue of what they termed networking and integration in their evaluation of the LES. They concluded that:

The findings indicate that while there are some excellent examples of success, there is a considerable way to go before integration is fully realised. Networking between agencies such as FÁS, Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs is largely based on personality and not on protocol. ...

The findings indicate that there is a range of different interpretations of the term network. There are those who believe that networking is about the LES being a nationally networked service i.e., that there is networking between and across all LES areas. ... Then there are those who believe that networking is about other agencies taking responsibility within the context of service provision by providing progression opportunities for LES clients (p. 20, Eustace and Clarke, 1998).¹⁰

The evaluation report went on to present *networking as the foundation for the integration of service providers, the provision of quality progression opportunities and the avoidance of confusion and duplication (p. 20).* In line with this conclusion the report went on to present networking as a relationship building process. Significantly, however, this presentation of the issue did not move the concepts of networking and integration substantially beyond personally mediated relationships and dialogue.

The most recent assessment of the extent to which the LESN has led to greater co-ordination / integration of services for the long-term unemployed has been made by the NESF (2000)¹¹. This assessment and its associated recommendations, however, focuses mainly on the concept of *networking* and does not deal in any systematic way with either identifying the barriers to or factors facilitating greater co-operation / co-ordination / integration between agencies. It concludes, like previous reports, that: *networking / co-ordination relies on local personalities rather than organisational protocol....(and) that there were numerous examples of mistrust or even hostility between agencies (p. 91).*

¹⁰ Evaluation of the Local Employment Service. Report Commission by the Policy Unit on Unemployment, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

¹¹ NESF (2000) Enhancing the Effectiveness of the Local Employment Service. Dublin: National Economic and Social Forum.

Investigating current practices of Inter-organisational Contact and Action: Rationale and Methodology

The issues identified above formed the rationale for the present study. In particular, the study sought to investigate the actual practices of and influences on inter-organisational contact and action among a number of organisations delivering services to unemployed people in Ballymun. In particular, it sought to identify the factors that have inhibited the development of greater co-operation / co-ordination / integration between these organisations and, conversely, to identify factors that could contribute to positive developments in this regard. While recognising the likely importance of personality based working arrangements in relation to inter-organisational contact and action, the study sought to move beyond these factors and to identify the organisational factors that are seen as inhibiting greater co-operation / co-ordination / integration.

Methodology

In undertaking the research, no specific operational definitions of networking, co-operation, co-ordination and integration were adopted. The reasons for taking this approach included the diversity of practice associated with these concepts and the different understandings to be found of what they mean in practice in both the literature on these issues and from previous evaluations of the LESN. In this regard, the primary focus of the research was to identify the understandings and practices associated with what is termed inter-organisational contact and action and, on this basis, to build up a picture of what the reality of inter-organisational contact and action is like among a number of organisations involved in the delivery of services to unemployed people in Ballymun.

There are a number of organisations in Ballymun directly involved in the design and delivery of active labour market programmes (ALMPs) and labour market services (LMS) (e.g., Ballymun Job Centre – BJC, City of Dublin VEC – CDVEC, the Department of Social and Family Affairs – DSFA, and FÁS). In addition there are organisations that to varying degrees and in differing ways provide services to the client groups of organisations directly involved in the design and delivery of ALMPs and LMS. These include statutory organisations (e.g., Dublin Corporation, Northern Area Health Board) and non-statutory organisations (e.g., Urrús, Ballymun Money Advice and Budgeting Service, CAFTA, Men's Network Centre, Fingal ICTU Centre for the Unemployed, Welfare Rights Centre, Women's Resource Centre etc.) Some of the latter also provide training and development courses. The following initial observations are made in relation to the operations of these organisations.

1. All are operating in a labour market context and policy that is considerably different from four or five years ago.
2. To varying extents there is an overlap in the client groups of the organisations.
3. Currently, there may be a degree of competition for clients as the number unemployed has fallen rapidly.
4. The profile of people needing assistance to improve their labour market position has undoubtedly changed and this is likely to be feeding through to each of the organisations.

5. There is an awareness of the need for and benefits of inter-organisation networking and co-operation in meeting the needs of people experiencing multiple barriers to entering or re-entering employment. Despite this awareness there is concern at the lack of practical progress in relation to developing inter-organisational networking, co-operation and integration to meet the needs of people experiencing multiple and severe barriers to entering or re-entering employment.

The research sought to document current inter-organisational practices in relation to issues and clients among these organisations, to identify the understandings of networking, co-operation and integration held by different organisations and by personnel holding different positions within these organisations, and to identify the barriers to greater co-operation and / or integration.

The methodology used involved undertaking semi-structured interviews with personnel from 12 local organisations. These organisations included; the Ballymun Partnership, Ballymun Job Centre, City of Dublin VEC, DSFA, Dublin Corporation, FÁS, FIT, Fingal ICTU Centre for the Unemployed, Local Drugs Task Force, MABS, NAHB, and Urrús. The personnel to be interviewed were identified with the assistance of a local advisory group established to facilitate and direct the research. This group provided an initial list of personnel to be interviewed. This list was supplemented during the course of the interviewing process itself. In the end a total of 35 persons were interviewed. In association with the members of the local advisory group a semi-structured interview schedule was developed for use in the study. It should be noted that while this interview schedule contained questions that attempted to quantify each interviewee's engagement in inter-organisational contact, the use of the quantitative questions proved problematic as many interviewees found it difficult to quantify issues such as the number of times they were in contact with or contacted by personnel from other organisations.

The following issues formed the focus of interview.

- Investigating current practices of inter-organisational communication and contact in relation to issues (e.g., programme eligibility, development of special projects, etc) and people (e.g., referral and advocacy) and examining this by the position of personnel within organisations (e.g., management, front-line operations personnel). Essentially, this is about identifying who is in contact with whom, how frequently, and about what.
- Investigating the extent and nature of any formal structures of communication / co-operation / co-ordination between organisations and identifying the reasons for the establishment of these structures. Essentially, this is about identifying formal structures supporting networking, communication and co-operation.
- Identifying the nature and extent of specific initiatives taken between at least two organisations in relation to effective delivery of ALMPs or similar initiatives.
- Examining the extent to which organisations see their operations as influencing the operations of other organisations or being influenced by the operations of other organisations. This involved looking at how organisations view their inter-dependencies with other organisations in order to achieve their own aims.
- Against the backdrop of the above, views of networking, co-operation, co-ordination and integration were examined and the factors facilitating or impeding greater networking, co-operation, co-ordination and integration were investigated from the point of view of different organisations involved in the design and delivery of ALMPs and LMS.

Inter-organisational Contact – Formal participation in Inter-Organisational Structures

Each interviewee was asked about their formal involvement in inter-organisational structures such as committees and working groups. The general pattern emerging from their responses indicated that such membership was quite prevalent and, moreover, that the nature, frequency and formality of inter-organisational contact are closely related to the position and responsibilities that people hold within their respective organisations. The following three broad categories of personnel were identified:

- A. Senior personnel operating at a national or regional level who hold roles in relation to formulating, implementing and monitoring policies in their respective organisations (all are based outside of Ballymun);
- B. local managerial, project management, and line-management personnel with responsibilities for the services delivered by their respective organisations to clients in Ballymun (some are based in Ballymun with others being based outside Ballymun); and,
- C. personnel with front-line responsibility to provide services for the clients of their respective organisations or clients living in Ballymun (most are based in Ballymun).

The personnel interviewed pointed to a wide range of structures - Boards of Directors, Management Committees, Working Groups, Task Forces, and Initiatives - in which they had a formal involvement. It was also possible to identify a broad relationship between categories of personnel and the types of inter-organisational structures in which they are involved (see Table 1).

From the number of formal inter-organisational structures operating locally in Ballymun (as identified by interviewees) it is evident that these structures provide the basis for a substantial degree of inter-organisational contact between personnel from different organisations. Among the main inter-organisational structures of relevance are the following: the Ballymun Partnership and its sub-committees, the Board of Management of the Ballymun Job Centre, Ballymun Regeneration Ltd, FIT Steering Group, the Local Drugs Task Force and its sub-committees, the Social Economy Working Group / CE and JI Framework Group, the Education Taskforce, the Childcare Taskforce, Obair Nua, the Young People's Facilities and Services Fund Youth Strategy Group and RAPID. In some cases interviewees held positions in a number of these structures.

Table 1: Typical Patterns in the Nature of Formal Inter-Organisation Contact Across the Three Categories of Personnel

	Membership and Consultation at National Regional Levels	Board Membership / Membership of Task Forces (Local Level)	Membership of Working Groups and Sub-Groups	Management Committee Membership / Steering Committee Membership of Local Initiatives
A	+++	+		++
B	+	++	++	+
C			+	

In addition to participating in these local structures a number of interviewees participated in various citywide (e.g., City of Dublin Development Board, Dublin Employment Pact Working Group on Labour Market Policy) and national inter-organisational structures (e.g., National Employment Service Advisory Committee). Participation in these structures was found to be confined to the first two categories of personnel identified above.

A number of points were made by interviewees regarding participation in the inter-organisational structures identified by them. First, participating in these inter-organisational structures was often seen as time consuming, particularly for interviewees with multiple memberships. Second, a considerable number of the structures have an operational focus on a particular initiative or project. A corollary of this is the narrow focus of discussion and terms of reference of these structures. This is not to say, however, that these structures are not valued as an input to the operations of the initiative or project of which they form a part. Third, there was general agreement that the number of inter-organisational structures in Ballymun is substantial and that it is difficult even for personnel on the ground to obtain a complete picture of what is going on in this area. Fourth, among the main benefits of membership identified was the opportunity to obtain information on what other members and their respective organisations were currently doing. Finally, there was a general consensus that membership of these structures did not necessarily provide the opportunity for reviewing the policies and practices of member organisations in respect of how they might work more effectively together in terms of the co-ordination of their respective services.

One overall point arising from the above is that, currently, there is no structure that is providing an opportunity for organisations to come together to review and compare their policies, areas of operation, future plans and current practices. However, as will be outlined later in this report, the absence of such a structure is not necessarily a major barrier to achieving inter-organisational co-operation and co-ordination so long as all organisations positively participate in and actively support a process of inter-organisational contact and action.

Inter-organisational Contact among Personnel with Front-Line responsibilities

The pattern of the inter-organisational contact between the personnel interviewed in this study indicates that the nature of and reasons for inter-organisational contact vary with the position and responsibilities of people in their respective organisations. In the present study, the broadest division in this regard is between personnel that have a *day-to-day involvement* and *front-line* interaction with clients and personnel that do not hold such responsibilities. Among the personnel interviewed in the present study falling into the former category are:

- Deciding Officers in the Ballymun Local Exchange Level
- the Job Facilitator of the DSCFA
- Community Welfare Officers of the NAHB
- special project and career development personnel in the BJC
- FÁS Senior Placement Officer (operating from the LEC)
- personnel providing particular services that involved mainly one-to-one work with clients (e.g., money advice, drugs counselling).

For these personnel contact with other organisations is mainly initiated in the context of the following:

- brokering information on behalf of clients;
- seeking / clarifying information regarding a client's status and eligibility for statutory payments and access to education and training programmes;
- as part of a referral process;
- seeking information on current education and training options provided by another organisation;
- requesting assistance or information regarding specific issues or services (e.g., specialist / professional counselling, local group providing particular services); and,
- to seek assistance in recruiting clients for particular services or programmes.

The pattern of actual inter-organisational contact is closely related to person's job and, arising from and related to this, each person tends to have a specific and fairly unique network of contacts. In very general terms the following three examples are illustrative of this (see also Table 1 in Annex 1).

- Deciding Officers in Ballymun Local Exchange are mainly in contact with Community Welfare Officers, Jobs Facilitators and Information Officers in the BJC. The majority of this contact is

by phone. The basis for much of this contact is formal and communications regarding issues such as whether clients are in payment or eligible for a particular programme are in writing. These personnel have very limited or no contact with personnel and organisations working in the area of education and training and would acknowledge that they are generally poorly informed regarding what they do.

- Community Welfare Officers have fairly frequent contact with personnel working in the Local Exchange with a view to obtaining and exchanging information regarding the establishment of entitlement to statutory payments. However, the network of regular contacts of the CWOs is wider than that of personnel working in the Local Exchange. The organisations with which CWOs are in contact on a regular basis include the MABS, Dublin Corporation, Ballymun Post Office, NAHB professional personnel, and the SVdeP. Most contact is by phone with some personal contact.
- The Training and Employment Links Officer of the BJC, arising from her role in providing career assessment and development services to clients who have a history of drug usage, is mainly in contact with professional personnel in the NAHB and community based organisations dealing with drug users and former drug users. Her main inter-organisational contacts are with NAHB personnel operating from Domville House, CE special projects (e.g., STAR Project), the Springboard Project, the Youth Action Project, and personnel in the Probation and Welfare Service.

Figures 1a to 1d present a number of examples using network analysis to show the range and direction of contacts that arise between front-line personnel in the course of their work.¹² Among the main points to emerge from this analysis is that, to a considerable extent, front-line staff have personal networks that they regularly use to enable them undertake their work. Also, front-line personnel state that these networks of contacts play a vital role in actually enabling them to do their jobs and to meet the needs of their clients.

From the data summarised in Table 1 in Annex 1, two additional points regarding the pattern of inter-organisational contact between front-line staff can be identified:

- the majority of contacts involve a mix of both formal and informal contact; and,
- the time taken up by inter-organisational contact varies substantially in line with the specific job a person is doing (though it should be noted that this may also be a reflection of how the different interviewees make use of such contacts in order to undertake their work).

A number of issues were identified by front-line staff concerning their contact with colleagues in other organisations. The more important of these points include the following:

- in general the opportunity to make personal contact was valued and seen as a means of developing a sense of mutual trust;
- different organisational practices in relation to client confidentiality and the issue of maintaining client confidentiality presented difficulties;

12 The five networks illustrated in these figures cover Workmate Early School-Leavers (BJC) in Figure 1a, Jobs Facilitator (DSFA) in Figure 1b, the Training and Employment Links Officer (BJC) in Figure 1c, and the Community Welfare Officer (NAHB) and the Information Officer (Fingal ICTU Centre for the Unemployed) in Figure 1d. Each of these persons is identified by the shaded circles in the set of figures. In each figure the direction of the arrows represents the main direction of contact (i.e., who initiates contact) and the thickness of the arrows represents the frequency of contact. In all cases the networks are based on information provided by the five personnel whose networks are represented in the set of figures.

- a considerable number of interviewees indicated that they did not know the full set of contacts relevant to meeting the needs of their clients; and,
- a considerable number of interviewees indicated that they lacked information on precise nature of other people's jobs and responsibilities, particularly people outside their immediate circle of contacts.

Figure 1a
Range and direction of contacts between front-line personnel Workmate Early School-Leavers (BJC)

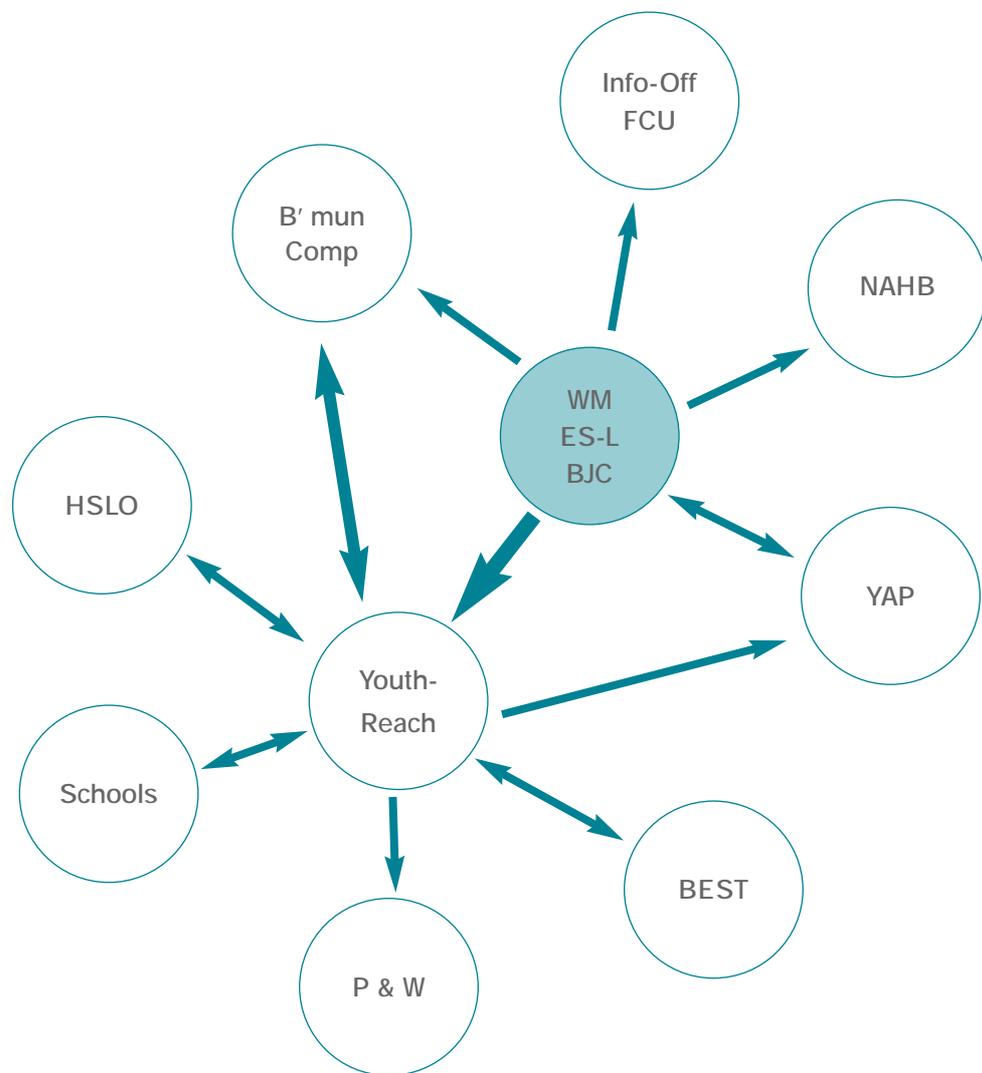


Figure 1b
Range and direction of contacts between front-line personnel: Jobs Facilitator (DSFA)

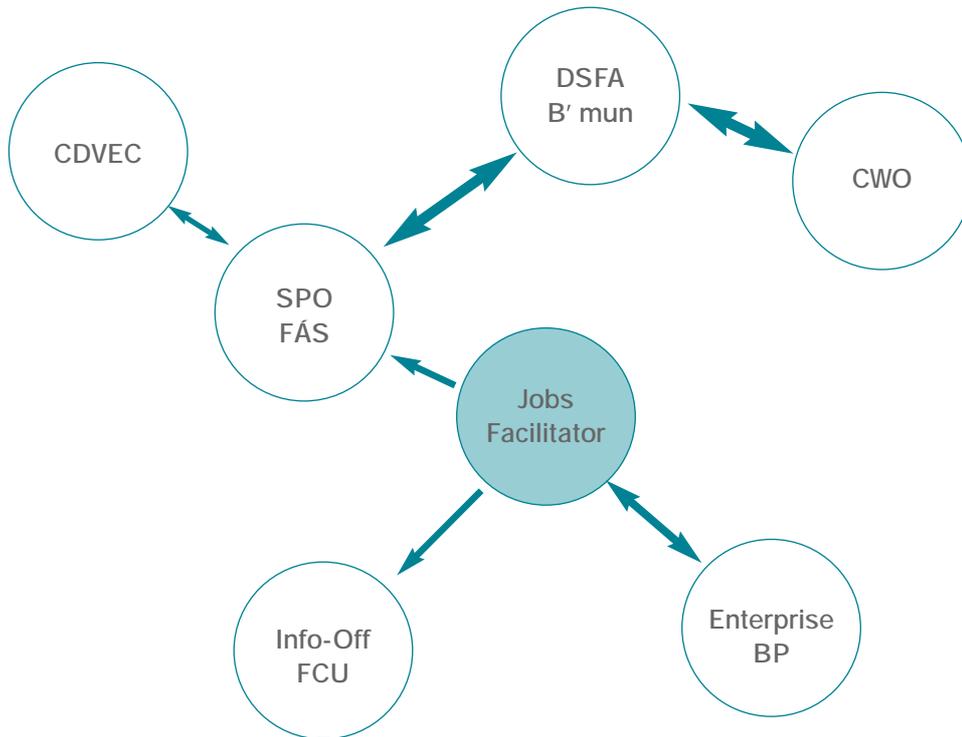


Figure 1c
Range and direction of contacts between front-line personnel: Training and Employment Links Officer (BJC)

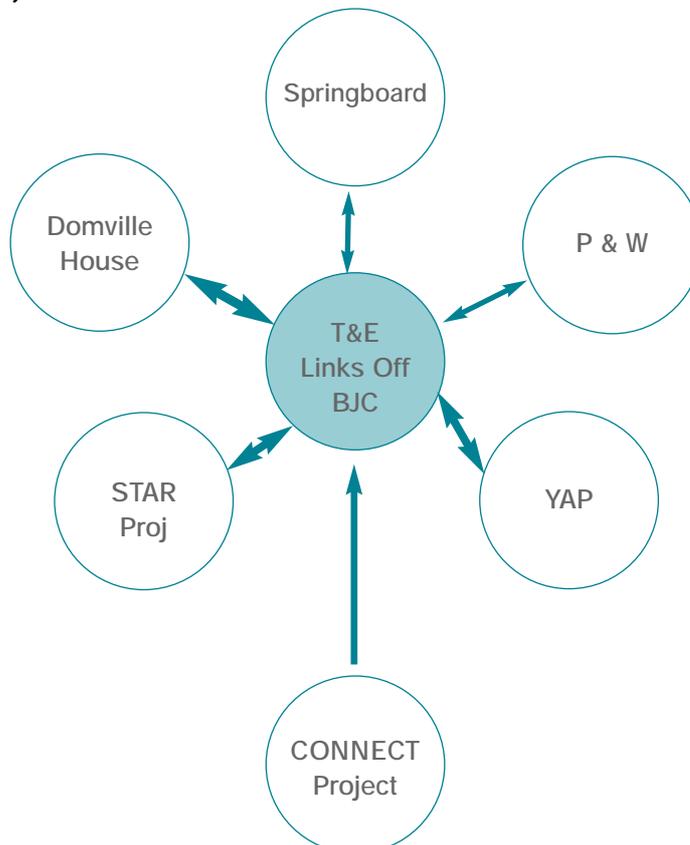
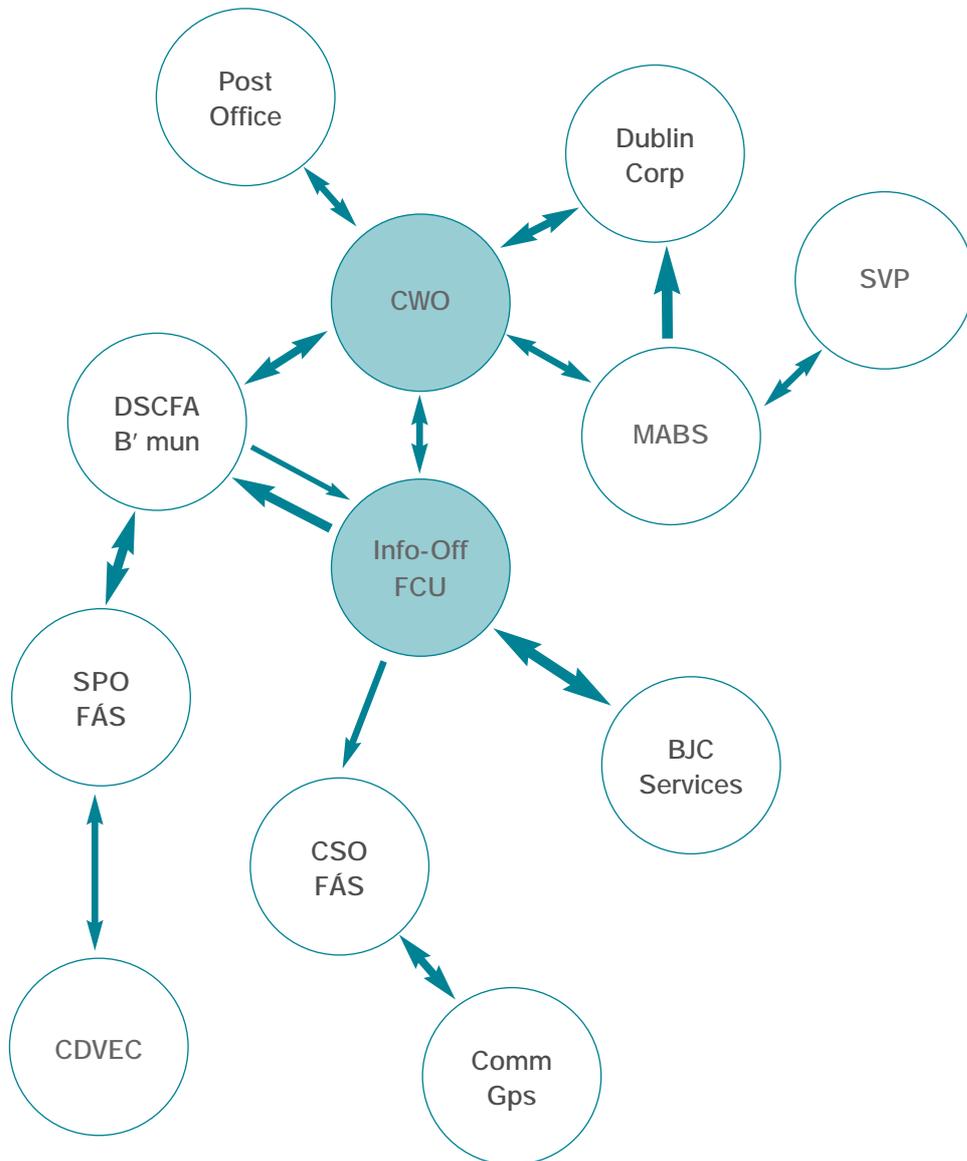


Figure 1d
Range and direction of contacts between front-line personnel: Community Welfare Officer (NAHB) and the Information Officer (Fingal ICTU Centre for the Unemployed)



In summary, what can be termed *task-oriented contact* was predominant among front-line personnel. By this we mean that the primary purpose of the contact was related to dealing with either the practicalities of a given client's situation and enlisting the assistance of personnel in another organisation or dealing with particular issues in relation to which the information and advice of personnel from another organisation was sought. Accepting and taking referrals from personnel in other organisations was also a key feature of this contact. Most of this task-oriented contact was based on the personal contacts of personnel in the respective organisations and involved elements of both formal and informal contact. In the vast majority of instances this form of inter-organisational contact occurred in the absence of any formal protocols or arrangements between the organisations of which the participating personnel are members. Exceptions to this are the formal contact between DSFA's personnel and FÁS personnel in the context of the NEAP and the protocol between personnel in the BJC and the NAHB concerning the referral of people with addiction difficulties for employment services.

As is summarised in Table 1 in Annex 1, personnel engaged in task-oriented contact do not necessarily have a full picture of the roles and responsibilities of the personnel they contact or by whom they are contacted. Associated with this is that front-line personnel generally have low levels of information about the roles of personnel outside of their immediate set of contacts. Also, it is apparent that different personnel build up a network of contacts that become their main points of contact and to a large degree rely on these contacts alone as a resource to assist them in their work. One of the adverse consequences of this situation is that changes of personnel cause difficulties in maintaining the inter-organisation relationships established on the basis of personal contact and mutual trust established over a period of time.

Inter-organisational Contact among Personnel with Local Managerial / Line Management Responsibilities in respect of their Organisation's Operations in Ballymun

In considering the nature and role of inter-organisational contact on the part of local management / line management it is important to recognise that the extent of autonomy they experience in relation to actually pursuing inter-organisational initiatives varies across the personnel interviewed. While it is difficult to identify the precise reasons for this variation, among the factors that were cited by the personnel interviewed were: the security of their positions (e.g., short-term contract versus permanence of employment), the extent to which either their parent organisation or funding agency encouraged or supported inter-organisational working; the level of "dependence" or otherwise on other organisations in relation to actually getting their work done and meeting their own organisational objectives; and the level of encouragement / support they received from their parent organisation. For a number of local managers, inter-organisational contact was considered to be an essential component of their jobs and it took up a considerable proportion of their time. For others, inter-organisational contact, while arising in their job, did not constitute a significant proportion of their working time (see Table 2 in Annex 1).

A further major source of variation across local management personnel was the extent to which they experienced flexibility in relation to the operational procedures they were responsible for implementing. For example, local management in statutory sector organisations generally experienced less flexibility in respect of their roles and responsibilities and in relation to dealing with specific client related issues than local management of particular projects or initiatives.

In comparison to front-line personnel, local management personnel tend to make contact with their counterparts for reasons related to service development and delivery rather than for reasons relating to the specific circumstances of the clients of their respective organisations. Also, as indicated in Table 1 earlier, local management tend to be members of a wide range of local committees as well as working groups and committees that are not locally based. However, there is general agreement that their membership of these committees, while providing a point of contact with personnel from other organisations, is not seen as platform for developing more effective inter-organisational working.

In examining inter-organisational contact and action between managers and line managers two issues in particular were investigated:

- the process of organisational planning and co-ordination in respect of the delivery services and activities in Ballymun ; and,
- the nature of inter-organisational contact between local management personnel.

The main points arising from the research are:

- there is limited *across the board* consultation in respect of the planning and delivery of services. One consequence of this is that there is no compendium or integrated document outlining what each organisation is doing in Ballymun;
- there are differences in the geographical basis of planning between organisations (e.g., BP and BJC operate on a Ballymun basis, FÁS and City of Dublin VEC operate on a regional (Dublin-North) and city of Dublin basis respectively) that contribute to difficulties for local management from the latter in respect of planning service delivery for Ballymun; and,
- there is no formal or informal forum in which the local managers / line managers / co-ordinators can meet as a group to discuss their respective understandings and concerns.

The last of the above points is of particular note and in this regard it is important to emphasise that we are not saying that local management do not meet each other. We have already noted that contact between local managers occurs through their membership of various committees and in some instances through their involvement in specific initiatives (e.g., the NEAP process at local level, the Social Inclusion Initiative and RAPID). Among the benefits of such contact cited by the personnel interviewed are the opportunity to obtain information on what other organisations are doing locally, to present information to others in relation to the activities and services of their own organisation, and establishing personal contact. The significant point arising here is that much of this contact is on a bi-lateral rather than multi-lateral basis and also there is no specific forum that provides an opportunity for local managers to develop and pursue issues related to the role and development of their respective services in Ballymun and through which they could identify and pursue inter-organisational objectives at the local level.

A number of more general concerns and issues relevant to the present study were identified by local managers and line management including:

- a lack of transparency between organisations;
- concern about duplication of services / actions;
- a lack of real inter-organisational linkages (as apart from the relationships described in relation to front-line personnel above) between the programmes and services of different organisations;
- the presence of a lack of trust between some organisations;
- a lack of a culture of co-operation between local management; and,
- the lack of a system to track the involvement of different organisations with the same client.

In summary, the pattern of inter-organisational contact among local management tends to revolve around a combination of bilateral meetings with their counterparts, membership of various committees and sub-committees, and a certain amount of formal liaison with personnel in similar positions in organisations other than their own. The latter arises in relation to undertaking specific projects or initiatives in which a number of organisations are involved. Examples of the latter include the NEAP at local level and the design and delivery of training courses with specific inputs being provided by different organisations (typically, the BJC, City of Dublin VEC and FÁS). In relation to the latter, it seems more appropriate to characterise them as *inter-organisational initiatives* (mainly involving two organisations) that have specific and time-bound objectives rather than being on-going forms of inter-organisational co-operation / co-ordination between the participating organisations.

Inter-organisational Contact at the Level of Regional Management

Regional managers from the City of Dublin VEC, DSFA, FÁS and the NAHB were interviewed with a view to obtaining their views and perspectives on the core issues being addressed in this study. In presenting the key points emerging from these interviews we have focused on those areas where there was a level of agreement across all interviewees.

Planning in Relation to Ballymun: Each of the organisations has its own planning process (it should be noted that strictly speaking only the DSCFA and FÁS are regionalised). This process is not wholly independent of national considerations: for example, both the City of Dublin VEC and FÁS at regional level are influenced by national policies as set out in the Human Resources Operation Plan 2000-2006 in terms of both key objectives and the complement of programmes they can provide in any given locality / region. None of the organisations from which regional managers were interviewed develops a *specific* plan or set of targets in relation to Ballymun.

The following observations arise with regard to this situation. First, many ALMPs are designed at national level to meet national objectives. As they do not take into account the specific circumstances of particular localities and the local profile of unemployed people these nationally derived and focused programmes do not necessarily meet local needs. Second, as noted earlier, local / line managers in statutory organisations are afforded limited flexibility in respect of adapting national programmes to meet local circumstances. These two factors inhibit the development of specifically tailored local responses.

Inputs to and Consultation in Relation to Planning: In line with the above, each of the organisations undertakes its own consultations and research in relation to developing its own plan regarding programmes and services. In all cases the inputs to the planning process involve a mix of reviewing relevant national policy pertaining to their sphere of operations, analysis of regional statistics, special studies, and consultation with organisational personnel. The formal process of completing regional plans (in the case of the DSCFA and FÁS) and plans for their geographical areas of responsibility (in the case of the City of Dublin VEC and NAHB) takes place without any formal process of consultation with the other organisations included in this study.

Organisational Culture and Dynamics: Each of the personnel interviewed referred to the unique culture of their own organisation in respect of how it goes about its business. The areas seen as relevant to the present study included the long established practice of each organisation planning and operating on its own and the generally low priority placed on inter-organisational consultation in relation to planning and delivery issues. There was a consensus, however, that the general policy climate in which they were operating was one that placed at least verbal value on greater co-operation and co-ordination. In this regard, a number of personnel referred to the challenges posed by the introduction of RAPID.

Common Membership of Boards and Committees: Each of the four organisations from which senior management were interviewed are represented on the Board of the Ballymun Partnership and three are represented on the Board of Ballymun Job Centre. While all interviewees acknowledged the role of structures such as the Boards of Partnership Companies as forums where they come into formal contact with their counterparts from other organisations, these arenas were not seen as requiring them to develop processes and practices dealing with inter-organisational planning and co-ordination in respect of the services in particular geographical areas such as Ballymun.

Policy and Practice in Relation to Inter-Organisational Contact and Action: None of the organisations had formal policies regarding inter-organisational contact and action. In general, there was a view that inter-organisational contact and action with view to developing co-operation / co-ordination in the areas of programme and service delivery within a given locality was best left to local personnel.

Overall, the pattern of the findings here indicates the absence of formal policies and practices in relation to inter-organisational contact and action among the organisations examined. In general, each organisation acts autonomously: each organisation undertakes internal planning and review processes without recourse to considering the actions and plans of other organisations and without inviting external comment from other organisations. Organisational effectiveness is measured in terms of the extent to which each organisation meets its own targets and little active consideration is given to assessing the manner in which each organisation may be impacting on the effectiveness of the others.

Conclusions, Issues to be Addressed and Recommendations

In presenting the specific conclusions of the study the major focus is on identifying areas of consensus across the organisations and individuals interviewed. Following the conclusions a set of issues that need to be addressed if greater inter-organisational co-operation / co-ordination / integration is to be achieved is presented. The final section presents a number of practical recommendations aimed at supporting more effective inter-organisational action taking into account the different nature of such action as it arises for personnel holding different positions and exercising different responsibilities within organisations.

As an orientation to the specific conclusions of the study presented below we begin by stating the main overall conclusions drawn from the study:

- inter-organisational action - whatever the specific form it is to take - will only come about when the participating organisations develop and implement inter-organisational policies and practices that are understood and supported at all relevant levels in the participating organisations; and,
- inter-organisational action will be effective only when it is recognised as a process in which participating organisations identify and pursue common goals and develop the inter-organisational practices to support the achievement of these common goals.

To a considerable extent the above two conclusions are based on the finding that the main barrier to effective inter-organisational action at the local level is the absence of worked out policies and practices on the part of organisations in respect of this type of activity and the absence of practices that support such action. While it has been found that this does not necessarily present a barrier to organisations engaging in inter-organisational initiatives (mainly on a bilateral basis) it presents an important challenge in the context of developing effective forms of multi-lateral action between organisations. The main challenge that arises in this regard is developing effective practices to underpin any commitment to inter-organisational action rather than relying on existing or new structures to facilitate this. As was noted earlier many interviewees commented on the proliferation of structures through which people from different organisations interact but also pointed to the inability of such structures to facilitate effective forms of inter-organisational co-operation, co-ordination and integration.

Specific Conclusions

There is general agreement across the range of personnel interviewed from the five key organisations that each is now engaging with people experiencing considerable and multiple difficulties in relation to accessing education, training and employment opportunities. Associated with this is an awareness of the relevance of identifying and developing an inter-organisational response to this situation in which the respective resources, capacities and expertise of each organisation could be harnessed.

There is general agreement that, at any given time – but particularly over a period of time – each organisation can be engaged in different ways with the same people. These people can be considered to be their shared clients. Also, but with some exceptions (e.g., the NEAP) there is no formal method or procedure by which their respective contacts with clients can be made transparent to each other and their mutual processes of assisting shared clients made more effective.

Four examples of inter-organisational procedures /processes to address this issue have been identified:

- the NEAP process formally established between the DSFA and FÁS;
- the protocol between personnel in the BJC and the NAHB in respect of people with addiction difficulties;
- the Social Inclusion Initiative mainly involving Dublin City Council and the NAHB; and,
- the case management system being piloted at the initiative of the DSFA.

With the exception of the NEAP process, each of the above is a very recent initiative and for the most part involves just two organisations.

At regional / senior management level there is positive sentiment toward more and better inter-organisational contact in respect of both dealing with particular issues and providing a better service to what are often mutual clients. Comments illustrating this positive sentiment include: "it's flavour of the month", "it's the way to go", and "other people's outputs are my inputs and we should work together on that basis". However, this positive sentiment is balanced by an awareness of the difficulties of achieving effective inter-organisational action. Comments illustrative of this included "we're all on the side of the angels on this issue, but reality is messy"; "there are real difficulties in translating commitments to co-operation into practice", and, "there is a need to recognise and overcome the culture of being proprietorial".

The processes and content of inter-organisation contact are very different in relation to strategy and planning type issues and front-line service delivery type issues. In relation to the latter, there is considerable evidence of on the ground contact and co-operation between personnel from a range of organisations providing labour market services to people in Ballymun. This, as indicated above, is not without its problems. However, actions were identified to strengthen the effectiveness of inter-organisation action at this level (see below). Inter-organisational contact is considerably weaker in relation to strategy and planning in respect of services in Ballymun.

There is general agreement that what is required is not more structures but more effective processes to support inter-organisational action across personnel operating at different levels and holding different roles and responsibilities in relation to the design and delivery of labour market services and programmes.

There is general agreement that the lack of information about how different organisations go about their business and the constraints that they work under is a factor inhibiting more effective inter-organisational action. The lack of information regarding these issues is one of the factors that was identified as contributing to mistrust between personnel from different organisations.

The absence of organisational policies and targets in respect of inter-organisational work is a major barrier to developing greater co-operation and co-ordination. To put this more strongly, it was felt that greater and more effective co-operation and co-ordination would only come about when such inter-organisational targets were inserted in the planning process of organisations.

Issues to be Addressed in Promoting Effective Inter-Organisational Action

On the basis of this study four broad sets of issues can be identified as needing to be addressed if effective forms of inter-organisational action are to be facilitated to emerge between the organisations involved in the study. These sets of issues tend to be mutually reinforcing and they therefore create difficulties and barriers over and above the adverse impact of each of them in their own right. Consequently, the promotion of a climate for effective inter-organisational action requires responding to all of them.

1. Barriers to Co-Operation

Five barriers to pursuing inter-organisational action were identified from the comments of the personnel interviewed. These are described below.

Geographical and Planning Considerations

Of the five main organisations included in the study only two (i.e., BP and the BJC) have geographical areas of operation that are coincident with Ballymun. The other three (DSCFA, FÁS and the NAHB) each operate with their own geographical bases of operation and in each case the areas covered are different. This is not necessarily a significant issue in its own right but it is associated with a number of other issues that impinge on the prospects for co-operation in relation to strategy, planning and resource allocations to Ballymun. These issues include:

- none of the organisations undertakes an analysis of its services and impact in relation to Ballymun and, associated with this, none of them has a specific plan of action in relation to Ballymun;
- it is difficult to precisely quantify the inputs (resources and personnel) of these organisations to Ballymun;
- each of the organisations has its own planning process which is primarily an internal process. Within this process issues related to Ballymun arise mainly through consultation with internal staff located in or with responsibilities for delivery of services in Ballymun.

Absence of Organisational Policies on Inter-Organisational Co-Operation

Despite the positive sentiment toward greater co-operation there is an absence of policies to support this. The issue here is not so much about the absence of structures through which organisations are brought together but the absence of mutually agreeable and effective processes to support contact and co-operation between decision-makers across organisations in respect of inter-organisational action.

Issues in Relation to Participation in Structures

It is of note that management personnel tend to meet each other through their involvement in a range of inter-organisational structures (e.g., City Development Board, Board of BP, Ballymun Regeneration Ltd, Membership of Local Drugs Task Force). These structures were identified as providing a basis for some level of informal information exchange. However, the general view is that these structures tend to be solely concerned with facilitating or managing the particular initiative with which they are associated and are not particularly seen as a means of fostering greater inter-organisational co-operation at a local level in relation to Ballymun.

Cultural Differences

Each of the main organisations in this study has a different way of going about its work and a different organisational culture. Compounding this issue, however, is the absence of a mutual understanding of how each of the organisations work. It is the latter, in particular, that can contribute to a poor climate for inter-organisational action and create an environment conducive to suspicion or even mistrust.

Allied to the different cultural systems of organisations is the fact that the internal systems / hierarchies / management – staff relationships of each of the organisations in the study are different. This has implications for communications about issues on the ground in Ballymun and particularly for feeding information up the hierarchy regarding the realities being faced by front-line personnel.

Lack of Performance Indicators for Inter-organisational Actions

Each organisation places priority on achieving its own objectives in relation to its services and clients and each has a system that enables performance in relation to objectives to be measured. A number of personnel with management responsibilities indicated that their role and actions are strongly influenced by the service and client objectives of their own organisation. In this context, they also mentioned that one of the barriers to greater inter-organisational action is the lack of inter-organisational (shared) objectives and, more particularly, performance indicators relevant to measuring the outcomes of inter-organisational action: “The brownie points are for doing what is required to ensure that you are achieving the targets in your own plan. There’s no system to measure what you might be contributing to other people’s work and, you might say, there’s no value placed on this.”

2. Concepts of Ownership

A key issue arising in terms of progressing from the current situation to a more effective inter-organisational process to assist people (particularly people with severe and multiple difficulties) to make positive and sustainable progression to employment is to address and resolve issues related to what can be termed “ownership of the problem” and “ownership of the solution”. With regarding to this, one of the overall conclusions of the study is that each of the organisations included tended to operate with what might be termed “partial ownership of the problem” and “partial ownership of the solution”. The parts of the problem owned were those aspects of their clients’ lives and circumstances for which they were statutorily responsible or which fell within their ambit of operations. Conversely, the parts not owned were those aspects of clients’ lives and circumstances being dealt with by other organisations. This partial ownership is a barrier to developing a shared ownership of the solution. As one interviewee put it: “we need a shared vision - everyone working to the same agenda at local level and being supported from above to achieve the shared vision”.

Service Development: A point related to the above concerns the development of “specialist” type services to meet the needs of particular groups of people. Given the profile of the groups of people most disadvantaged in the current labour market, what is needed – to paraphrase one commentator on this issue – is not “special services, but especially good services”. Finding the effective inter-organisation processes to support the delivery of such especially good services by the range of relevant organisations at a local level is a key challenge.

3. The Issues of Structure and Process

There was considerable agreement across interviewees that what is needed is not necessarily more inter-organisational structures but more effective inter-organisational processes. The reference to structures in this context refers primarily to participation in Boards of Management, Management Committees, and Working Groups. The general consensus regarding participation in these structures is that they did not provide for an effective process of inter-organisational action. In addition to the management / advisory functions of these committees other functions they fulfilled included providing an opportunity for obtaining information and being updated regarding the progress of a particular project or initiative and meeting with counterparts for general exchanges of information. One of the specific downsides mentioned in regard to participation in such structures was the time demands placed on members, particularly when people are members of multiple committees. Compounding this was the view expressed by a number of respondents that “We are up to our necks with committees in Ballymun”.

One of the key ingredients in moving toward more effective inter-organisation action is establishing an effective local process that provides a basis for organisations to work more effectively together across a range of levels, from front-line personnel; through line management and up to senior management. One of the emerging lessons of the study is that an effective process of inter-organisational action at local level requires that each of the organisations involved places a priority on this within their own organisation and ensures that this priority is understood and supported across all levels of the organisation. Without this the more practical actions that are identified below to support the development of inter-organisational action in respect of shared clients with multiple and severe difficulties in relation to accessing education, training and employment are unlikely to succeed.

4. The Different Levels of Inter-Organisational Contact and Action

A key point arising from the pattern of the findings regarding inter-organisational contact is the clear relationship between the content of inter-organisational contact and the position that respondents held in their respective organisations. The main point in relation to this is that in thinking about and developing structures and processes to support effective inter-organisation action it is necessary to recognise that these structures and processes must reflect the concerns, roles and responsibilities of the range of personnel in the organisations concerned. One of the key deficits in previous approaches to promoting inter-organisational co-operation / co-ordination / integration is their failure to recognise this. More generally, actions to assist greater inter-organisational co-operation and co-ordination need to be worked out in the context of the whole organisation and to take into consideration the roles and responsibilities of personnel working at different levels.

Recommendations

Inter-organisational action requires that participating organisations develop and implement inter-organisational policies and practices that are understood and supported at all relevant levels in the participating organisations. Such policies and their associated procedures and practices need to be clearly stated and integrated into the operations of the participating organisations.

Inter-organisational action requires the identification of common goals and agreed targets between the participating organisations and associated with this the identification of the respective roles and contributions of the participating organisations in relation to these targets. Related to this is the necessity to develop and implement systems to assess individual and collective performance in relation to targets.

As with other areas of organisational operations (e.g., personnel / human resource development, finance, health and safety), the pursuit of inter-organisational action would be enhanced by the appointment of a person whose role it is to support the development, implementation and review of inter-organisational policies and their associated procedures and practices. Among the more specific functions of such a role would be supporting personnel internal to the organisation to undertake the inter-organisational aspects of their jobs and liaising with their counterparts in organisations participating in inter-organisational action.

An indication of the practical manner in which these recommendations might be implemented is that organisations seeking to secure effective inter-organisational action between them should:

- engage in mutual exchanges of information regarding their activities, services and plans;
- identify activities and services that can be provided in a complementary manner in order to avoid duplication of activities and services;
- undertake planning in a collaborative rather than autonomous manner;
- set collective rather than individual targets and specify the role and contribution of each organisation in relation to achieving collective targets;
- participate collectively in reviewing collective targets;
- develop protocols providing guidance and support for inter-organisational contact and action on the part of personnel working at different levels; and,
- provide training for personnel to support them in undertaking tasks with an inter-organisation dimension.

In addition to the above the following sets of recommendations are directed toward specific personnel.

Senior / Regional Management

Provide the opportunity for input and feedback from other relevant organisations in the preparation of local plans and identify within these plans the resources and actions planned for localities designated for special consideration.

Actively recognise the presence of shared clients and clients that would benefit from a more co-ordinated / integrated approach on the part of different organisations. A corollary of this is the requirement to develop systems that would enable the respective contributions of different organisations to be identified in relation to issues such as securing client progression and employment outcomes.

Develop, in consultation with other relevant organisations, policy statements in respect of the role of inter-organisational contact and action. Such policy statements need to address the issue of client confidentiality not solely from the perspective of each organisation's role vis-à-vis its clients but also from the point of view of working with other organisations in the interest of providing an effective service to mutual clients.

Set targets and establish systems to review performance in relation to inter-organisational action.

Provide support to Local / Line Management and front-line personnel to undertake inter-organisational aspects of their work. This involves recognising that effective inter-organisational action is not without resource implications.

Local Management

Establish a local forum the initial purpose of which would be to facilitate the establishment of good working relationships and the development of mutual understanding regarding the objectives and services of participating organisations at the local level.

Enable local management of organisations involved in providing labour market services and programmes unemployed people to jointly review their actions and effectiveness and feed into the development of local planning that is explicitly based on an inter-organisational approach.

Where statutory organisations are concerned, local management should have the power and flexibility to make and implement local plans in consultations with their counter parts in locally based organisations.

Front-Line Personnel

Where front-line personnel share clients, the use of case conferencing and the appointment of key workers would be valuable additions to current practices.

Ensure that personnel who come into contact (by phone, e-mail, letter) for task related reasons have the opportunity to meet each other personally.

Provide the opportunity for "job shadowing exchanges" to promote greater knowledge of the roles and responsibilities of front-line personnel working in different organisations.

Compile and circulate an inter-organisational directory containing the job titles, roles and responsibilities, and contact information for front-line personnel involved in the delivery of labour market services and programmes.

Annex 1

Table 1: Front-Line Personnel

Personnel (Organisation)	Type of Inter-organisational Contact	% Time	Barriers	Actions
(Local Exchange, DSFA)	Most contact is with FÁS, LEC, and CWO. Contact is mostly reciprocal. Most frequent inter-organisational contact is structured through involvement in EAP referral process. Inter-organisational contact is an integral part of job – particularly in relation to checking situation of clients with CWO and FÁS.	15% of time with contact being mostly formal.	Different organisational practices in relation to dealing with clients. The actual practices of different organisations are related to both the regulations applying in relation to client interaction and organisational cultures.	There is a need to establish formal protocols regarding the nature and content of contacts with personnel from the LEC. A more "open relationship" would benefit both the Local Exchange personnel and personnel in the LEC in working to respond to needs of mutual clients.
Staff Officers (Local Exchange, DSFA)	Most contact is with CWOs and Jobs Facilitator. Some contact with Information Officer in LEC/BP and individual employers. Typically contact is initiated by others to SOs in relation to clarifying clients eligibility for various programmes.	10% of time with contact being mostly formal.	Lack of mutual understanding and knowledge regarding how people in different organisation work: - "We don't know what they do and they don't know what we do".	The opportunity to meet people in other organisations on an informal basis: "When you are dealing with people from other organisations so much it would be helpful to meet and get to know them". There is a need for direct knowledge of the pressures that different people experience in their work and the different responsibilities that they have in relation to their management and clients.
Literacy Project Co-ordinator (BJC)	Dealing with referrals from other agencies and organisations is one of the main reasons for inter-organisational contact. Much of this is done through a personal network and is a mix of informal and formal contact.	10% to 15% of time with contact being a mix of informal and formal.	The different ethos of other organisations and agencies. Different agencies and organisations have different regulations and practices in relation to how they deal with their clients. Both of these can make the referral process difficult.	More face-to-face contact would be helpful but it shouldn't be down to personal contacts to make inter-organisational contact work.
Development Officer (FÁS)	The main way in which inter-organisational contact takes place is in the context of implementing the Community Employment / Jobs Initiative Framework Agreement. The main contacts are with personnel from community groups implementing CE and JI projects.	30% to 40% in terms of actually dealing with groups implementing CE / JI. Mix of formal and informal.	People not being sure of what to expect from other people.	Drawing up clear guidelines within which people can work together and know what is expected from each other. An example cited is the Framework Agreement concerning CE/JI.
Training and Employment Links Officer (BJC)	The job involves regular contact with organisations and groups providing services for drug users and recovering drug users. A referral protocol / process has been established in order to exchange information regarding mutual clients.	25% of time involving both formal and informal contacts.	Lack of procedures and agreements regarding how to deal with client information / confidential information.	Development of formal procedures for referring clients between organisations.

Table 1: Front-Line Personnel (continued)

Personnel (Organisation)	Type of Inter-organisational Contact	% Time	Barriers	Actions
Jobs Facilitator (DSFA)	Contact with personnel from other organisations is focused on responding to clients' needs. There is frequent contact with personnel from the LEC and FÁS and these contacts are considered vital to job.	About than 15% of time. Contact has a formal purpose.	There is a tendency to stereotype people on the basis of the organisations that they work form. Efforts at co-operation in the interest of clients are often blocked by differences in procedures from parent organisations of personnel.	Drafting a protocol or set of working procedures setting out how staff from different organisations would work together in the interests of their mutual clients. More efforts at information sharing. Providing opportunities to discuss experiences and ideas.
Workmate ESL (BJC)	Contact with personnel from other organisations arises mainly in the context of dealing with referrals and providing feedback. Main organisations with which contact is maintained are Youthreach Centre, Ballymun CTW, YAP.	About 25% of time with contact being both formal and informal.	Issues related to confidentiality. Territory and competition for bums on seats. The time it takes to go to meetings and events on top of doing ones job.	Develop case conference approaches that allow a holistic response to each person's needs.
Workmate Over 40s (BJC)	Contact with other organisations arises through getting information on what they provide for clients, referring clients and taking referrals.	Up to 15% of time. Contact tends to be mostly informal.	Lack of trust between personnel from different organisations, especially between personnel from statutory and community organisations. Need more information on exactly what people from different organisations are doing and providing for clients. It takes time to develop good working relationships. Lack of a real network in which to exchange information between organisations.	Appointment of a person whose job it is to facilitate and develop contacts between personnel working in different organisations.
Information Officer (Fingal ICTU Centre for the Unemployed)	Main reasons for contact include checking clients eligibility for programmes, getting information on eligibility criteria for programmes and providing information and assistance to clients with welfare queries/difficulties. Main organisations with which contact is made include DSCFA, FÁS, EHB. BJC.	As much as 75% of job involves contact with personnel from other organisations. Contact is both formal and informal.	People setting too tight a boundary around doing their own job.	Training and development for personnel from all organisations sharing clients to enable them work better together.
CWO (NAHB)	Main contact arises in relation to exchanging information to facilitate the payment of statutory entitlement to clients. Main organisations contacted are DSCFA, MABS, Fingal ICTU Centre for Unemployed and Dublin Corporation.	About 25% of time involves contact with personnel from other organisations in relation to clients. Contact is mostly formal.	Lack of mutual information and understanding. Lack of understanding of the constraints that people operate under.	More informal meetings just to get to know people you are dealing with from other organisations.
Budget Support Worker (MABS)	Main organisations contacted include DSCFA, SVdeP, NAHB (CWO), Dublin Corporation. The main reason for contact is assist clients keep out of debt.	About 50% of time. Both formal and informal contacts.	Confidentiality issues. Lack of information on what exactly are services provided by and the responsibilities of personnel in other organisations.	More personal contact with personnel from other organisations would help establish the trust and confidence to refer clients to them.

Table 2: Local Management

Personnel (Organisation)	Type of Inter-organisational Contact	% Time	Barriers	Actions
Enterprise Officer (BP)	Mainly contact with organisations providing enterprise supports for clients including First Step, Guinness Employment Fund and the DSCFA. Also some collaborations with other Partnership Companies.	Up to 20%.	The actual amount of time arising from client contact inhibited more inter-organisational contact. Lack of opportunities for making face-to-face contact and establishing relationships.	More recognition and support from parent organisation for undertaking inter-organisational work.
Manager Training Centre (FAS)	Regular contact with the BJC in relation to training provision.	Probably not more than 10%.	Lack of trust hinders better relationships between organisations. Lack of transparency in relation to the "agendas" of other organisations. People "looking after their own patch".	Developing good personal relationships can provide the basis for trust and openness. Achieving clarity as to mutual obligations in relation to any actions undertaken with other organisations.
Training Centre Co-Ordinator (Urrus)	Main operational contacts are with LDTF. Contact with other organisations also arises through membership of a variety of local inter-organisational structures (e.g., BERG, LDTF, BEST)	About 15% of time.	Each organisation developing its own response without considering what other organisations are doing.	There is a need to move from personality based inter-organisational work to undertaking activity that is recognised and resourced by all of the organisations involved.
Superintendent CWO (NAHB)	Regular contact is made with the MABS, Dublin Corporation, DSCFA, BP, Ballymun Regeneration. Action contact is both in relation to clients and membership of committees and groups.	About 10% of time.	Organisations differ in terms of priorities, emphasis, approaches and even ideologies. People can be hindered in their efforts at inter-organisational co-operation by the specific practices and requirements of their parent organisation. Each organisation makes its rules regarding operational matters independent of other organisations that may have involvement with the same clients.	There is a need to develop an overall view of the problem and each organisation should contribute to and share in this view. This view should inform the operational policies of different organisations and enable them to develop policies that support inter-organisational work in the interests of mutual clients.
Co-Ordinator LDTF	There is regular contact with the Addition Service of the NAHB, Schools, the Probation Service, Dublin Corporation and community based organisations. A considerable amount of inter-organisational contact also arises through membership of various committees and groups (e.g., YPFSF, BP and Ballymun Community Organisations Network).	By virtue of position almost of time could be seen as involved in inter-organisational work.	Organisations, particularly statutory organisations have their own internal / vertical hierarchies and reporting systems. This impedes effective horizontal action at local level.	Recognising that each organisation /service has a role to play in developing a total community response to issues at the local level. As regards dealing with individual clients there is a role for developing a system of key-workers that would pull together the resources and provisions of different organisations.

Table 2: Local Management (continued)

Personnel (Organisation)	Type of Inter-organisational Contact	% Time	Barriers	Actions
Manager Ballymun Job Centre (Co-Ordinator of Local Employment Service Network)	Contact tends to vary from day to day; informal meetings, phone calls and e-mails to formal meeting of the Committees and Boards. The main purpose of the contact can also vary. The contact primarily centres on issues that arise from the day-to-day management of the BJC/LESN. These issues can have both a policy and an operational dimension. The issues include planning of training programmes, progression of clients, budgets and information exchange.	Approximately 20% of time.	Top-down decision making. Lack of understanding of the role of organisations other than one's own. Lack of support to front-line personnel for the inter-organisational aspects of their jobs.	Develop clear policies on inter-organisational action. Develop internal structures to support the inter-organisational aspects of work of organisations. Encourage the use of case conference in relation to meeting the needs of shared clients and ensuring their progression. Identify the inter-organisational aspect of each job and write it into the job specification.
Manager Community Services (FÁS)	Contact with other organisations is issue based. Organisations with which there is regular contact include Partnership Companies, VEC, Probation and Welfare and Dublin Corporation.	As much as 50% of time.	Mis-information creates a lack of trust. Lack of support from parent organisations can make inter-organisational work very frustrating for those involved in it.	There is a need to develop greater openness and sharing of information between organisations. Inter-organisational co-operation will only work if there is a value placed on it. Organisations need to develop policies on inter-organisation working and co-operation and to set clear and realisable targets for this work.
Manager Employment Services (FÁS)	Contact is primarily with Partnership Managers, LES Managers and Local Exchange Management (the latter in the context of the NEAP)	Very hard to tell.	General lack of commitment to working together on the part of organisations.	Seeing that we could benefit from the support and involvement of other organisations.
Deputy Manager, Training and Development (BJC)	Working directly with other organisations is part of the job. Main contacts are Ballymun CTW, Prospects Ltd., CDVEC, FÁS and FIT.	Approximately 50% of time.	Hierarchical structure of organisations and the distance of decision-makers from life on the group makes achieving effective inter-organisational work at the local level difficult. Personality clashes. Lack of understanding of respective briefs.	Greater co-operation at senior management level between organisations is necessary to support better working relationships between front-line personnel. Organisations working together need to be clear as to their own particular contribution to meeting clients' needs as well as to the particular contributions of the organisations they are working with.
Training and Development Liaison Officer (FIT)	The implementation of FIT involves direct contact with a range of organisations (particularly CDVEC, LESNs, and FÁS) as well as membership of a number of committees and groups.	About 80% of time.	Lack of mutual agreements and protocols between organisations as regards what they each should be doing.	There is a need to overcome existing management styles, especially those that emphasise sole responsibility rather than inter-organisational responsibility. Generating agreement that different organisations have a legitimate contribution to make in terms of a response to unemployment and the needs of unemployed people.

Table 2: Local Management (continued)

Personnel (Organisation)	Type of Inter-organisational Contact	% Time	Barriers	Actions
Education Co-Ordinator (BP)	The role involves on-going and mainly issue focussed contact with a range of organisations, particularly CDVEC, LDTE, FAS, Department of Education and Science, and the LES.	In the region of 35% of time.	People being "bogged down" in their own work. Lack of supports for information sharing and planning. Lack of involvement of senior personnel and decision-makers.	Establishing a forum for inter-organisation exchanges and contact.
Youthreach Co-Ordinator (CDVEC)	Considerable contact with local schools (via principals and teachers), Home School Liaison Officers, Social Workers (through Health Centre) and local projects dealing with young people including the Youth Action Project.	Job could not be done without the level of contact with others. About 35% of time involved in inter-organisational contact, much of which can be informal.	People being busy minding their own patch. Lack of openness about the limitations of what you can do by yourself.	Establishing personal contact is necessary (but not sufficient) for good inter-organisational working. Building trust between people is vital to enabling them to work effectively together. We need to be honest in response to the question why are we here – to better our own job prospects or to better the lives of the kids?

