

Cllr. Marcia D'Alton

Mobile: 085-7333852 • Email: info@marciadalton.net

Website: www.marciadalton.net

Facebook: www.facebook.com/cllrmarciadalton • Twitter: [@marciadalton](https://twitter.com/marciadalton)



22 Hillcrest,
Pembroke Wood,
Passage West,
Co. Cork.

Senator Ged Nash,
Dáil Éireann,
Dublin 2.

21st September, 2016.

RE: Equality for the self-employed and all those unemployed not on the Live Register

Dear Senator Nash,

I am certain that you spoke to many, many councillors during your Seanad campaign earlier this year. I am, however, hoping that you may remember your telephone conversation with me.

You asked for my support in the Seanad election, citing your work on the Living Wage and the increase you initiated in the National Minimum Wage. I, whilst acknowledging your work in this area, spoke of my particular concerns for what I consider to be discrimination against the formerly self-employed and the unemployed who are not in receipt of Jobseekers or any other form of social welfare support.

Someone who is self-employed is generally tremendously proud of their business. They put everything they have into it and, even though it may be faltering to a close, have little option but to continue to run it until the last. They frequently have no other form of income. Reinvesting all they have into attempting to keep the business running, they equally frequently have been unable to build up any financial reserve to sustain them and their families in times of hardship.

When their businesses are faltering, the self-employed would often be better off, both financially and emotionally, living on Social Welfare supports. Yet these brave entrepreneurs prefer to stand alone, support their own and give enterprise their best shot.

Yet should their best efforts fail and they be forced to cease trading, the endeavours of the former self-employed who preferred not to draw off the State's reserves are almost always met with a degrading battle in attempting to qualify for Jobseekers or other support payments. More often than not, they find themselves in that small but very real category of unemployed who are not on the Live Register and not registered as unemployed with the Department of Social Protection.

Their companions in this circle are those who are unemployed and have failed the means test. It is largely fair that if one is unemployed and one fails a means test one does not qualify for income support. But what is not fair is that although the Live Register is not designed as a measurement of unemployment, job activation measures are available only to those on the Live Register.

Should an unemployed person not on the Live Register wish to retrain, they do not qualify for Springboard, the Momentum programme, Skillnets training or any of the ETB training courses. They do not qualify for the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance or the Short Term Enterprise Allowance. But most importantly, should an employer choose to take on an unemployed person who is not on the Live Register for the minimum period specified, that employer cannot avail of the JobsPlus grants. If they take on an approved person from the Live Register, the employer will get these grants.

There is a massive gender-dimension to this issue. Consider a woman who has stayed at home to mind her children while her husband is working. The children grow up and go their way. The mother wants to reskill herself but she cannot. She doesn't qualify for Jobseekers payments because her husband is working and she therefore isn't eligible to take part in either training courses or the back to work schemes. This system also affects men whose partners are working and the youth who are living at home.

In 2013, the Advisory Group on Tax and Social Welfare issued a report to the Minister which recommended that all job activation measures and training schemes would be extended to the formerly self-employed if they do not qualify for jobseeker's payments. This recommendation was never acted on.

In fact, during 2014 alone, both the National Women's Council of Ireland (NWC) and the Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed (INO) made presentations to the Joint Education and Social Protection Committee of the Oireachtas on behalf of these unemployed people who, because of the eligibility requirements of current job activation measures, have become the invisible unemployed.

This system is absolutely discriminatory. Nobody who fails a means test can expect an entitlement to a State payment. But although they have an equal entitlement to a job, the current system is organised so that they do not. In fact, the exclusion of those who fail a means test from the State's job activation measures can have a profoundly negative impact on their ability to regain employment.

When we spoke during the Seanad elections, you said that you were aware of the inequality with which the unemployed not on the Live Register, including the formerly self-employed, are treated. I was glad to hear you say that you would attempt to tackle these issues if elected as a Senator. I congratulate you on your election and would appreciate your proposals for introducing these issues in the Upper House.

Yours sincerely,



Marcia D'Alton
Independent Member, Cork County Council