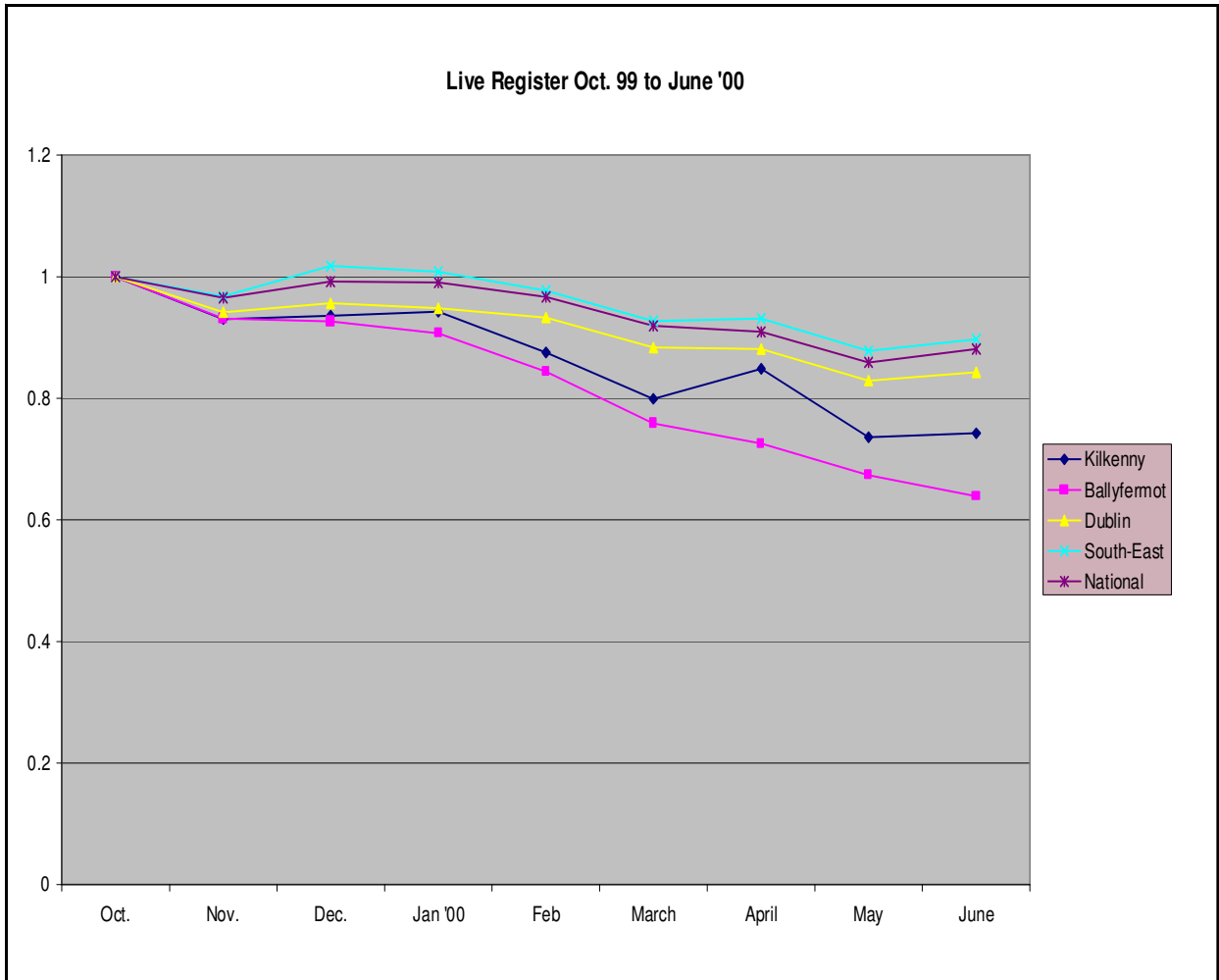


Review of Ballyfermot and Kilkenny Pilots



Review of Two Pilot ‘Full Engagement’ Projects in Kilkenny and Ballyfermot

Background

FAS in co-operation with the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs carried out two pilots in Kilkenny and Ballyfermot over the period October 1999 to May 2000. The purpose of the pilots was to test the usefulness of applying the ‘EAP’ process of full, systematic, engagement to all persons unemployed for more than 6 months. Thus, whereas the EAP process is essentially targeted at persons as they reach a threshold duration of unemployment (a flow), the pilots targeted the stock of unemployed. FAS’s Planning and Research Dept. were asked to conduct a brief review of the pilots.

Methodology

The review is based on an examination of existing statistics on the pilots and other data on the Live Register, and discussions with local FAS and DSFCA staff. It does not attempt to seek the views of the participants. Nor does it give any information about the long-term outcomes of the pilot. The report aims to present very briefly the essence of the operation, the resources and costs and impacts. Some conclusions are drawn at the end.

The Pilot Process

The pilot process was targeted at persons who had been on the Live Register for over 6 months. The process, in essence, was similar to that already underway in respect of clients assisted under the Employment Action Plan Guidelines 1 and 2. The pilot operated in two locations, Ballyfermot and Kilkenny. The local DSFCA offices were strengthened with additional and redeployed staff resources. Additional staff were deployed by FAS on a temporary basis and suitable office space and equipment acquired. The pilot became operational in October 1999 and officially ceased in May 2000.

Ballyfermot

In the case of Ballyfermot the local DSFCA office did not get an increase in its authorised staff complement, but three posts were filled that otherwise might not have been. In addition, the Special Investigation Unit devoted significant efforts to the process. All persons on the Live Register for more than 6 months were referred for interview with the exception of those signing-on for credits or working casually.

In respect of FAS, three Placement Officers and one Clerical Officer were employed on the pilot. Clients were referred by the local DSCFA office on a regular basis to FAS who arranged to interview and advise them (several times in many cases), put them on the case-load, and referred them to suitable jobs, training or other options. Because of space constraints and building work, some of the first-time interviewing took place in the DSCFA office while Portakabins within the Ballyfermot Training Centre grounds were also used. The FAS staff and manager regularly reviewed progress and discussed particular clients’ needs through ‘case-conferences’.

Four broad categories of clients were identified:

- (a) Persons with a positive attitude who wished to work and for whom FAS found it relatively easy to obtain a positive outcome. They were referred to jobs or training/further education.
- (b) Persons deemed to be not progression-ready. Reasons typically included persons with drug, alcohol or other medical problems. Significant resources were devoted to assessing such persons and referring them, where possible, to suitable organisations for assistance.
- (c) Persons who were reluctant to become involved because they saw little likely benefit to them. There was a mixture of persons of this type but many were older males (over 45) who felt that they were too old to obtain employment. Most of these persons had been employed in manual occupations previously and perceived themselves as unable physically to meet the requirements of such jobs. In addition, they feared that taking a job which, for any reason, did not last would put their benefit/allowance entitlements at risk (at least in the short-term). Other issues related to literacy, childcare, ex-offenders, illness or family problems. In addition, some clients had unrealistic wage expectations.
- (d) Persons who failed to attend for interview.

FÁS provided its normal interview and referral process to all clients under the pilot. In addition FÁS developed a new Group Support Programme which involved attendance for two days a week for a period of 12-14 weeks. An outside trainer/adviser was brought in to lead this programme which was funded by FAS under its Customised Training Fund. A significant proportion of these persons was supported into progression options, including referral to literacy options. This was an extension of the one-to-one guidance and counselling to a group environment. Here clients had the time and space to explore in depth their situation, reflect on their own experiences and on the experiences of others in the group. This proved useful in that clients were then better equipped to engage with their Placements Officer in developing their career path.

A total of 746 persons were referred to FAS. One hundred and ninety-five (26%) of these did not attend for interview of which the large majority, 157 (80%), signed-off the Live Register. The results at end-May in terms of direct FAS intervention were positive. A total of 547 persons had been interviewed, and of these 96 (18%) had been placed in jobs, 139 (25%) had been placed in training/education, 132 (24%) had left the Live Register, 141 (26%) were still on the Live Register but had dropped-out, were inactive or were not progression-ready and the remaining 39 persons (7%) were continuing with active FAS support.¹

Kilkenny

The Kilkenny Social Welfare office recruited one staff member for the period of the pilot². In addition, two other staff spent about 20% of their time on the project. FAS

¹ EAP Monthly Progress Report number 20, DETE. Locally-derived figures may be slightly different.

² This person did the work of an experienced officer who was assigned full-time to the project.

utilised five staff to conduct the Kilkenny pilot – three Placement Officers and two Clerical Officers. Training was provided including FAS computer and administration systems for the Clerical Officers. A staff development pack was prepared for the Placement Officers who were also given training in interview skills. Lists of contacts for networking in the area were drawn up.

Accommodation was rented and ‘fitted-out’ with suitable office partitions, decoration, cabling, telephone lines and computers. This accommodation was separate from the FAS Employment Services Office but close to it, which allowed for some sharing of specialist equipment.

All persons aged under 55 who were on the Live Register for over 6 months were referred to FAS for interview. FAS interviewed them and followed them up actively. FAS staff scanned local and national newspapers and telephoned clients frequently with job vacancies. Typically, FAS contacted clients two or three times a week, of which at least one contact involved the client attending the FAS office. The DSCFA officer was also actively involved with follow-up of clients; contacting the FAS staff and/or the individual, particularly in relation to persons that did not attend for interview, or failed to take-up options. In this way, close contacts and links were operated between FAS and the DSCFA.

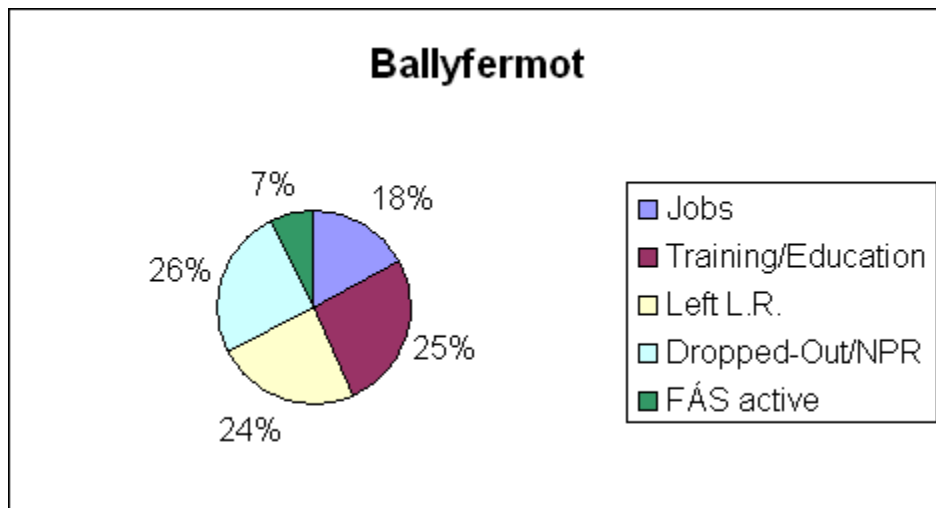
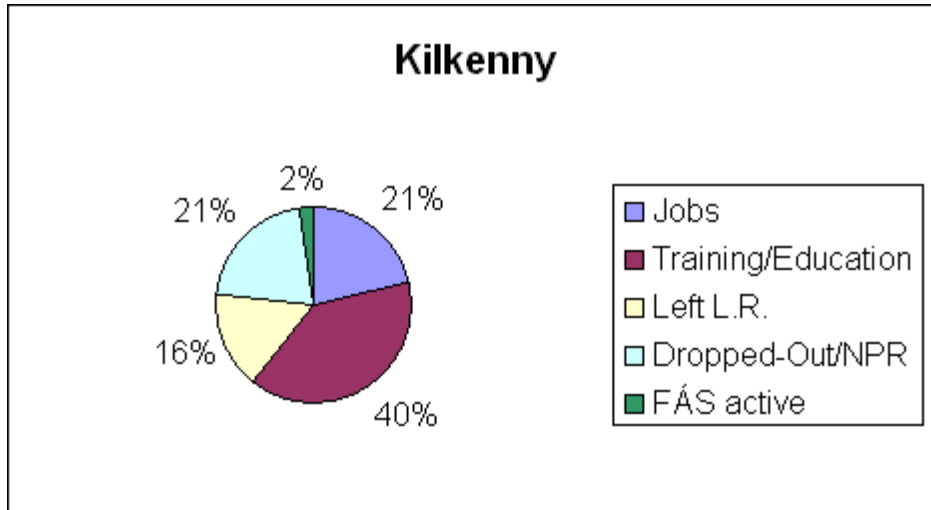
FAS used a number of means to assist clients. In relation to jobs, FAS promoted the Jobstart, Workplace and Back to Work Allowance schemes. A number of persons were assisted through specialised customised training. For example, arrangements were made to train locally persons in HGV driving. A five-week training course ‘Moving Forward’ was run six times. This was a full-time training course providing confidence building, career planning and information on options, schemes etc. This course was run on behalf of the FAS Training Services Unit by a specialist tutor and participants received standard FAS training allowances while in attendance. Other training courses were also run by FAS in Kilkenny including various computer-related courses and practical skills courses with a number of different modules.

The results of the pilot were successful. Many persons were assisted to progress to ‘regular’ employment, while others were placed in subsidised or Community Employment. It was also noted that there was a danger that the process could become too ‘numbers driven’ rather than ‘client-driven’.

A total of 808 persons were referred to FAS for interview of which only 81 persons did not attend and 63 of these signed-off. By the end of May 2000, when the pilot ceased, 719 had attended for FAS interview, of whom 154 (21%) had been placed in jobs, 281 (39%) had been placed in or referred to training/education, 117 (16%) had left the Live Register, 152 (21%) were still on the Live Register but had dropped out, were inactive or were not progression ready and a further 15 (2%) were continuing with FAS support.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of outcomes for Ballyfermot and Kilkenny. It will be noted that a significantly greater number of persons in Kilkenny were placed in jobs or

Figure 1 Pilot Process Outcomes



further education/training. By contrast more persons in Ballyfermot were categorised as 'dropped-out' or 'not progression ready' or left the Live Register.

Impact on Live Register

The statistical evidence presented below suggests that the two pilots had a very significant impact on the Live Register.

FAS statistics show that at end May 2000 73% of persons referred over the period were no longer 'signing on'. The actual figures are shown below:

	Ballyfermot	Kilkenny	Total
No. Referred	746	808	1554
Signed-Off Register	524	603	1127
% Sign-Off	71%	75%	73%

Thus, of a total number of 1,554 persons referred, 1,127 had 'signed-off', leaving only 427 of the referrals still on the Register.

To assess whether this performance is as good as it seems, it is necessary to compare it with that of other areas where the special pilot was not running. It is not possible to make a precise comparison. However, two alternative comparisons are presented below, which both suggest that the performance in the pilots was significantly better than elsewhere.

The Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs supplied a special tabulation of Live Registrants of the type covered by the pilot.³ They show that nationally at October 1999 there were nearly 70,000 persons aged 25-54 who had been unemployed for over six months. By February 2000 18% of these had left the Live Register and by May 2000 this had increased to 34%.⁴ This can be compared with the 73% 'sign-off' rate. A simple comparison would suggest that the pilot process had increased the percentage leaving the Live Register by nearly 40 percentage points.

An alternative comparison is based on an examination of trends in the published Live Register statistics from October 1999 to the present (June 2000).⁵ The monthly area statistics show total registrations by Office, as well as male/female and age group comparisons. Figures 2-5 present the number of persons on the Live Register in Ballyfermot and Kilkenny, and Dublin, the South-East Region and Nationally for comparison. The data is presented in index form so that the relative fall in each of the five locations is emphasised. As would be expected, the numbers on the Live Register fell in all areas during the period. However, the falls in the two pilot areas (Kilkenny 26%, Ballyfermot 36%) were considerably greater than in the regional (South-East 10%, Dublin 16%) or national (12%) figures as a whole. This pattern applied both to the total

³ My thanks to Katherine McSharry for this data.

⁴ It is important to note that the DSCFA figures relate to the stock as at October 1999 whereas the FAS figures refer to the stock during the period October 1999 – April 2000.

⁵ CSO Monthly Area Statistics of the Live Register.

numbers, to males and to females, and to Over 25s.⁶ These comparisons suggest that the numbers on the Live Register were about 15-20% lower in those areas covered by the pilot process. (Of course, the fall in the live register was also due to the 'normal' EAP process in these locations).

The figures shown above relate to the position at the end of the process. Naturally, the numbers 'signing-off' increased during the period as more persons were referred and persons were placed in employment, training or other positive options. The table below indicates the numbers that ceased to 'sign-on' on a monthly basis.

Numbers 'Signing-Off' the Live Register October 1999 – May 2000

Month	Ballyfermot	Kilkenny	Total
October 1999	-	-	-
November 1999	157	51	208
December 1999	245	70	315
January 2000	176	301	477
February 2000	273	385	658
March 2000	375	479	854
April 2000	455	554	1009
May 2000	524	603	1127

These figures provide a means to estimate the total number of person-weeks off the Live Register for the two pilots. As the figures refer to the end of the month, the estimate is based on averaging across two months. Also, assuming for convenience that there are 4 weeks in every month, the total number of person-weeks off the Live Register during the period was calculated. The totals are 7,772 for Ballyfermot and 8,566 for Kilkenny, making a total reduction of 16,330.

Costs and Savings

The costs of the pilot in principle include all the costs borne by FAS, the DSFCA and, indeed, other public organisations in providing for the clients involved. However, many of these costs were already covered in the existing budgets of these organisations. In respect of FAS, for example, the placement of clients onto FAS training and employment programmes was covered within existing Training and Community Services budgets. The additional costs of the pilot were those of extra staff, accommodation and telephone/computing.

The extent to which additional non-staff costs are required depends upon a variety of local circumstances relating to the availability of space in existing premises. In the case of the two pilots such space was not available within FAS and had to be specially obtained.

⁶ The relatively greater fall in Ballyfermot than Kilkenny seems to reflect an inflow of persons onto the Live Register in the latter town in April 2000. Such persons are not covered by the pilot process.

In relation to the Dept of Social, Community and Family Affairs, the additional staff costs of Kilkenny amounted to about £18,000. No additional budget was required in the case of Ballyfermot. No other significant, additional, costs were required by the DSFCA.

A detailed costing for FAS has not been undertaken for this review. Staff costings have been based on an estimated seven months full-time on the project followed by three months part-time involvement progressing the case-load (i.e. from May-July 2000). In the case of Ballyfermot this is estimated at about £75,000 and in Kilkenny at £90,000. Rent and fitting-out in respect of Ballyfermot is estimated at about £10,000, and for Kilkenny at about £18,000. Thus, in total, the additional costs of the pilot amounted to about £85,000 in Ballyfermot and £126,000 in Kilkenny.

A rough estimate of the savings in social welfare payments can be made on the basis of the number of weeks of payments foregone and the typical payments for such weeks. It was estimated above that the pilots saved 16,330 weeks of payment over the period to end-May. If it is assumed that on average a Live Registrant receives about £100 per week then the savings in social welfare payments would amount to about £1.6 million.

Two modifications need to be made in respect of this calculation. As noted above, about half of the persons would have 'signed-off' the Register in any case. Thus, the net savings would be reduced to around the £800,000 level. Against this, the calculation only includes Social Welfare savings up to the end of May. It must be assumed that most of the persons who 'signed-off' will remain off for a further period of time. If it were assumed that on average they would remain for a further three months off the Live Register that would increase the savings by another £600,000 so bringing them back up to about £1.4 million.

Conclusions

The evidence presented in this short review suggests that the pilot 'full engagement' process in Kilkenny and Ballyfermot was very successful. The pilot helped a large number of unemployed persons to access jobs, training or further education through career advice, counselling and referral by FAS. FAS ran a number of special training programmes to help achieve this success. Nearly three quarters of those referred to FAS under the process were no longer signing-on at the end.

Considering the approximate costs and benefits, the direct additional costs of the pilots amounted to about £200,000. The Social Welfare savings accruing from this expenditure are estimated at well in excess of £1 million.

The longer-term impact of the pilot on the clients needs to be monitored. At the end of May, many persons had entered FAS or other programmes. However, the 'proof of the pudding' will be when they complete these programmes and attempt to gain regular employment. This progression will be monitored under the case-load approach to ensure that as many as possible do achieve a viable career path. A further review of the pilots should be conducted in a year's time to assess their longer-term success.

Figure 2 Live Register Oct. 99 to June '00

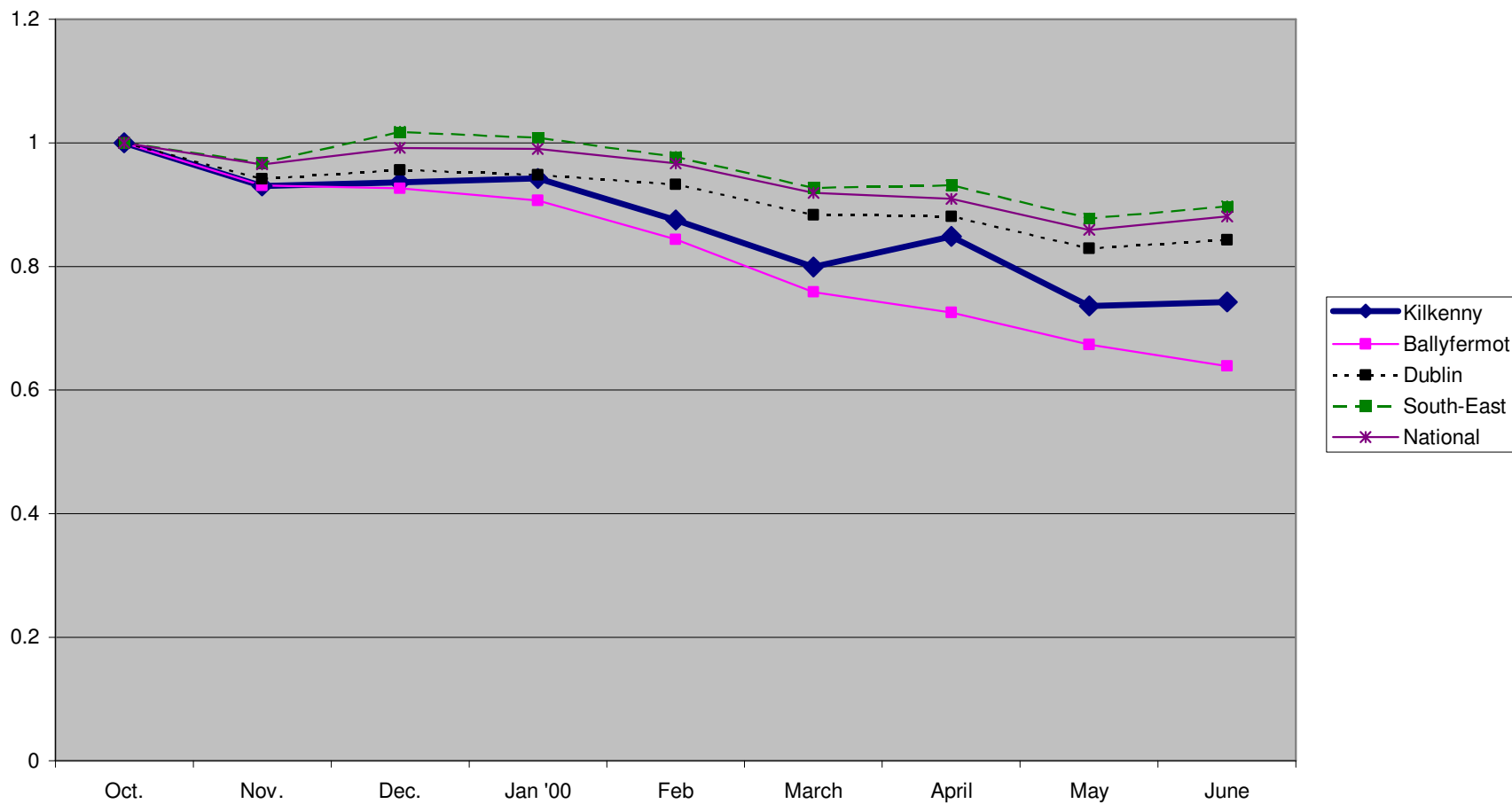


Figure 3 Live Register Males Oct '99 to June '00

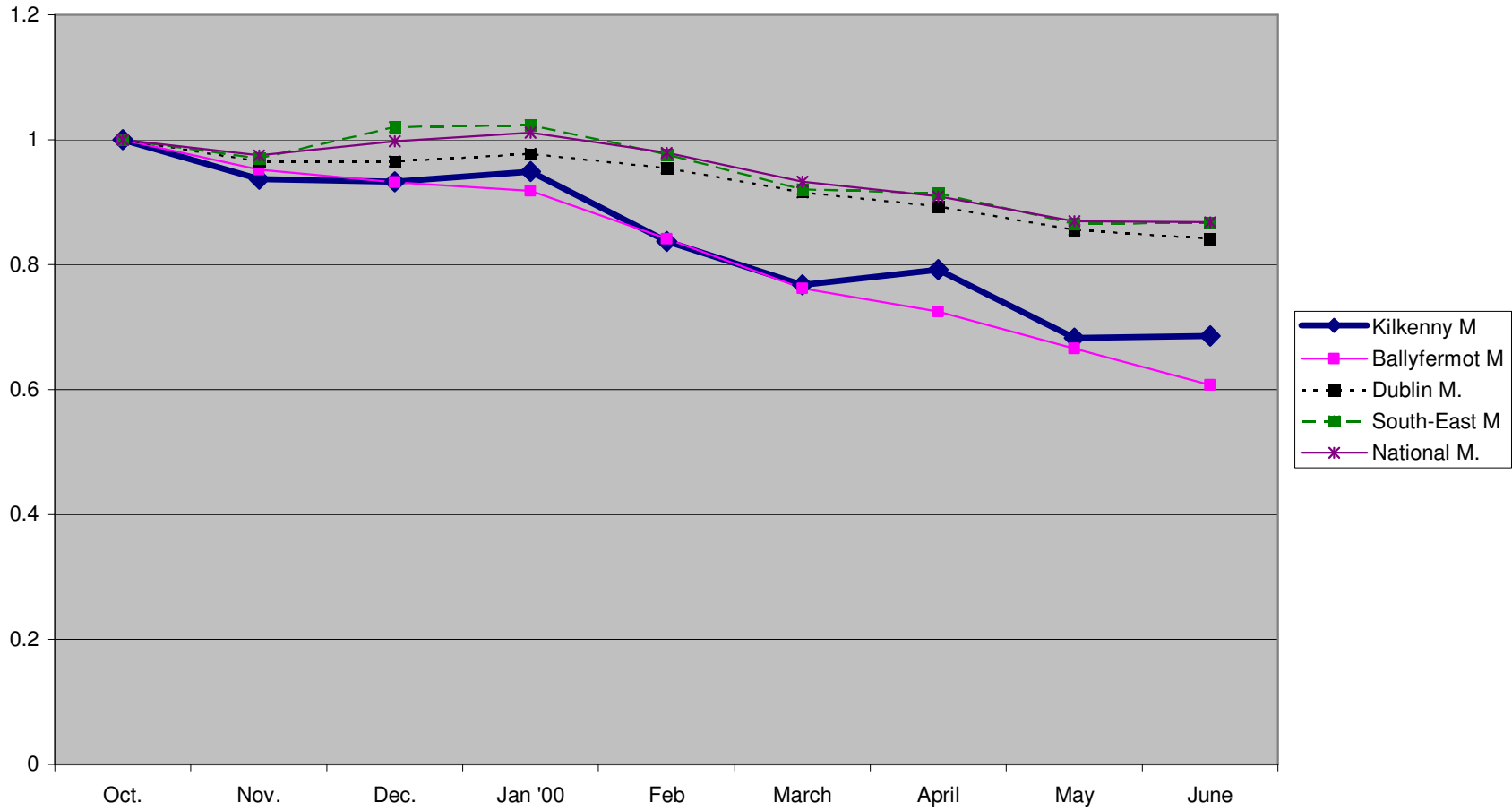


Figure 4 Live Register Females October 1999 to June 2000

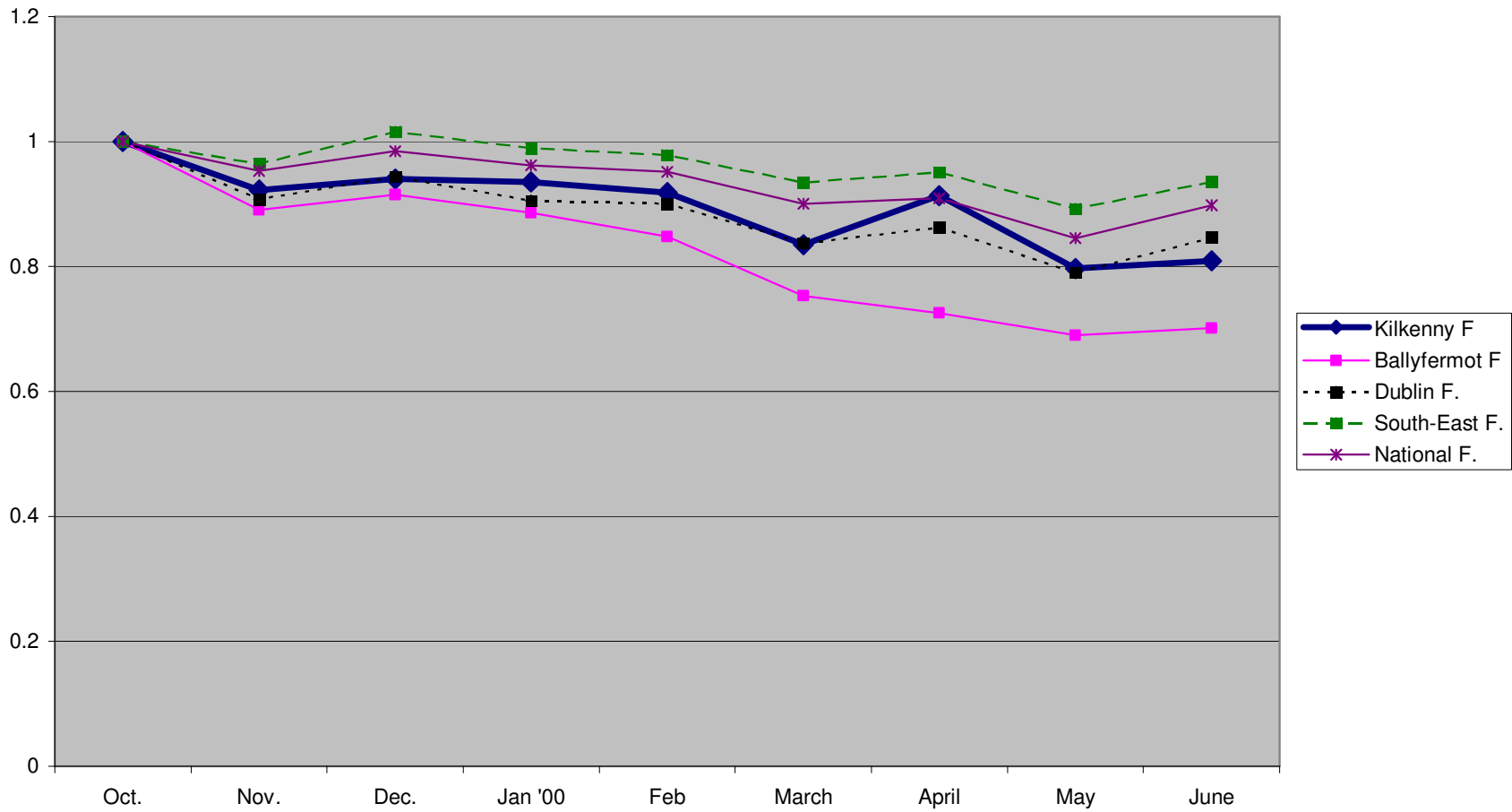


Figure 5 Live Register Over 25s October 1999 to June 2000

