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# **Upskilling Vulnerable Workers in a Time of Economic Recession**

**Evaluation of the Dublin Employment Pact *Skills for  
Work and Learning @ Work* Programmes 2008-10**



**Hibernian Consulting**

with

Gráinne Healy, Independent Consultant

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## Foreword

We are going through the worst economic recession in the history of the state. The number of unemployed has increased considerably since the start of 2008 and the ESRI believes that up to one in eight Irish jobs (i.e. 250,000 jobs) could be lost between 2008 and 2010. Given the simultaneous need for lower public expenditure, this had led to a sense of despondency in some quarters, and a lack of a sense of how economic recovery will come about.

In this context, can two relatively small programmes implemented by Dublin Employment Pact and funded by FÁS and the Department of Education and Science contribute anything to the debate on how to return the country to a positive growth trajectory? My view, based on the findings of this evaluation of the work of both programmes, is that they can.

The *Skills for Work* and *Learning @ Work* programmes have targeted a cohort of workers traditionally overlooked by labour market programmes . the hundreds of thousands of people who left school early or with low levels of qualifications, who are in work, but who continue to have relatively low levels of education and skills. In the short term, these are the people feeling the brunt of the increase in unemployment. But in the medium term, all thinking about how the Irish economy can return to growth is based on a need to improve competitiveness and productivity, including through upskilling Irish workers. This means a need to reach this cohort of workers, and provide them with accredited training, linked to the future needs of the economy.

The DEP *Skills for Work* programme is part of a wider national programme funded through FÁS and managed in cooperation with a steering group that includes the Department of Education and Science, NALA and the social partners. This evaluation demonstrates a strong demand from workers and companies in the greater Dublin area for training around basic computer skills, communications, literacy and numeracy and other modules at FETAC Levels 1-3. It demonstrates that the DEP model of reaching companies and implementing programmes worked well over its year of operation, with training delivered or arranged for over 350 participants.

The *Learning @ Work* programme was developed by DEP some years ago to cater for young people entering the labour market with low skill levels during the economic boom. It operates at FETAC Levels 3-5 and the 2008-10 programme represented a significant expansion over earlier pilot programmes. The evaluation shows that *Learning @ Work* is on track to beat its targets and to train some 500 participants over two years. Training is taking place in small and large companies across Dublin and the quality of the tuition provided by the VECs and the on-the-ground programme management (mainly by Area Partnerships) are crucial ingredients in its success.

Feedback from both the companies and the participants involved in both programmes has been extremely positive. Our experience is that there is now an appetite for upskilling among workers that was not present when jobs were secure. The benefit/cost ratio of the programmes is extremely strong, both for the companies involved and for individual workers. The insistence in the programmes on FETAC accredited outcomes means that the education and training modules can act as a starting point for individuals wishing to progress further with lifelong learning options. In the experience of DEP, once workers return (often tentatively) to education and training, the increased confidence they gain from a positive learning experience often triggers a desire to continue to further learning.

*Skills for Work and Learning @ Work* were conceived during times of economic growth and the vision of FÁS and the Department of Education and Science in funding these programmes in a time of full employment is to be praised. While there is now an understandable need for more resources to cater for those who have lost their jobs, there is no logic to cutting programmes for low-skilled workers in employment. For a start, training such workers immediately helps to improve their own and their company's productivity, thus supporting their jobs. Secondly, even if such workers were to lose their jobs, the skills gained will help them to find new employment, either in Ireland or elsewhere. And finally, as mentioned, the path to recovery will have to involve an upskilling of low-skilled workers across the economy.

The report of the Special Group on Public Sector Numbers and Expenditure Programmes (An Bord Snip Nua) questioned the existence of a market failure in relation to public support for training programmes for people in jobs. In fact, the market failure in this regard has been set out clearly in the past by the NESC. Our experience in the DEP, supported by the research findings of the ESRI and FÁS, is that low-skilled workers are normally overlooked for training by their employers unless a public programme helps to organise the logistics of the training and to defray costs. Many of the people trained on the DEP *Skills for Work and Learning @ Work* programmes had never received work-related education or training at work prior to these programmes.

*Skills for Work and Learning @ Work* have proven models of delivery. They are not perfect and this evaluation suggests how they might be modified further to increase their effectiveness and to maximise outputs. However, Dublin Employment Pact is proud of both programmes, and of the work undertaken by a range of stakeholders in relation to them.

DEP would like to thank all of the people who helped to implement both programmes. In particular, we thank Frank Walsh and Bernard McNally of FÁS for their involvement with the programmes since late-2007, Marie Griffen of County Dublin VEC and Philip Treacy of City of Dublin VEC, and all of the people involved in the Area Partnership Companies and in Ballymun Job Centre that helped to implement the programmes on the ground. I would also like to acknowledge the work and enthusiasm of Catherine Durkin between 2001 and 2009 on the DEP's Employment and Education Group.

DEP would like to thank Finbar McDonnell and Sinéad Kelleher of Hibernian Consulting, and Gráinne Healy, Independent Consultant, for this objective and comprehensive evaluation report. We look forward to working with FÁS, the Department of Education and Science, the VECs, the social partners and others in continuing to develop and provide programmes for low-skilled workers in the years ahead and, by doing so, in supporting the national economy on its way back to economic growth.



Philip O'Connor  
Director, Dublin Employment Pact  
November 2009

## Executive Summary

*Skills for Work* is a national programme that is managed by FÁS and funded through the Workplace Basic Education Fund. It focuses on workers with the lowest levels of initial education and includes modules relating to literacy and numeracy. Courses under *Skills for Work* are accredited at FETAC Levels 1-3, i.e. at levels up to the equivalent of Junior Cert subjects. In 2007, the management of the programme was organised on a regional basis and this evaluation relates to the DEP *Skills for Work* programme, which operated in the greater Dublin area from mid-2008 to mid-2009.

*Learning @ Work* was developed by Dublin Employment Pact in 2001 and 2008-10 saw the third *Learning @ Work* programme. What began as a programme for young people in work who had left school early evolved in 2008-10 to a programme open to workers of all ages who wished to return to learning and training and complete modules at FETAC Levels 3-5 (equivalent to Junior Cert and Leaving Cert subject levels). The 2008-10 programme operated in six areas in Dublin: Ballymun, Blanchardstown, Clondalkin, Northside (Coolock area), Rathmines and Tallaght. Local implementation was managed in five areas by the local Area Partnership Companies and in Ballymun by the Ballymun Job Centre. Following a tendering process, the City of Dublin VEC and County Dublin VEC were jointly chosen to provide the tutors for the programme.

The focus of both programmes is on workers in private sector companies and the programmes aim to involve employers in the education and training processes, including through the provision of space for training on work premises and through time off (or pay in lieu) to attend classes.

The need for such programmes is high in Ireland as up to 30% of workers have levels of education equivalent to below Leaving Cert level. A number of reports, and the National Skills Strategy, call for substantial efforts to take place to upskill low-skilled Irish workers, as part of a longer-term move to a knowledge or smart economy. The rationale for the state to fund such programmes has been outlined clearly by the NESC and others in the past. The NESC has noted that (without intervention) people with low initial levels of education are least likely to benefit from employer-based training; that those on low incomes have less scope to invest in their own training; and that international research shows that reducing the number of people in the workforce with very low skills has a clear influence on economic growth.

The DEP *Skills for Work* programme began in July 2008 with the recruitment of two Coordinators. The recruitment of companies and participants was initially slow as the Coordinators made contact with companies, and as companies adjusted to a sharp economic downturn. A system based on a nine-step process was developed to support the Coordinators' work in late-2008 and recruitment picked up considerably in late-2008 and early-2009. By June 2009, 356 participants had been signed up for courses (compared to a target of 360 participants). The most popular courses were FETAC Level 3 IT-related courses (basic computer skills) followed by courses that develop personal skills (e.g. communications or personal effectiveness). The DEP programme ended in June 2009 and, due to a further reorganisation of the *Skills for Work* programme at national level, was not continued in the second half of 2009.

The experience of *Learning @ Work* was that while it was not easy to interest companies in training in an economic recession, workers were more open to lifelong learning than in times of economic growth. The DEP *Learning @ Work* programme had a target of 400 participants/modules over its two years and, by October 2009, the best estimates were that this would be exceeded by 20% or so, with up to 500 participant/modules being achieved. In some areas, the targets were achieved through a focus on a small number of large companies; in others, cluster groups of workers from small firms were formed (and in some areas there was a mix). A good mix of courses were delivered, at FETAC levels 3-5, with IT-related courses popular as well as courses in Communications, Customer Service, Occupational First Aid and Forklift Driving. Specialist courses (e.g. in relation to childcare or special needs assistants) were delivered in response to local demand. Programme implementation involved both national (FÁS and the VECs) and local organisations and, while somewhat cumbersome, this generally worked well and the local dimension accessed workers and companies that might otherwise not have been approached.

The future of *Skills for Work* and *Learning @ Work* depends on future national funding decisions, which are outside the scope of this evaluation. However, the evaluation shows a strong case for continuing to fund programmes for low-skilled workers, even in tough economic times. It also shows that the DEP *Skills for Work* and *Learning @ Work* programmes over 2008-10 achieved their goals, i.e. they reached low-skilled workers in employment, attracted them to lifelong learning courses, and delivered over 800 FETAC accredited outcomes. As such, the programmes provide considerable learning for future programmes.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.1 Skills for Work and Learning @ Work Programmes

#### 1.1.1 Overview of Programmes

*Skills for Work* is funded by FÁS and managed in cooperation with a national steering group that includes the Department of Education and Science, NALA and representatives of the social partners. It targets people in work with low levels of education and skills. Its courses, which support workers in acquiring basic education skills, including literacy and numeracy, are normally accredited at FETAC Levels 1-3 on the national framework of qualifications. This evaluation relates to the Dublin Employment Pact<sup>1</sup> (DEP) *Skills for Work* programme that ran for 12 months from July 2008 to June 2009.

*Learning @ Work*, an initiative of DEP, began in spring 2008 and is now largely completed, with the final participants set to complete their training in early-2010. Largely funded by FÁS and the Department of Education and Science, with supplementary funding and inputs from local implementing organisations, it supports relatively low-skilled workers to upgrade their education and skill levels. Training courses are normally accredited at FETAC Levels 3-5 on the national framework of qualifications.

#### 1.1.2 Skills for Work

*Skills for Work* is 100% funded through the Workplace Basic Education Fund set up by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment<sup>2</sup>. The fund is managed by FÁS and guided by a National Steering Group with representatives of:

- FÁS;
- Department of Education & Science (which has delegated its place to the Irish Vocational Education Association);
- NALA, the National Adult Literacy Agency;
- ICTU, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions;
- SFA, the Small Firms Association;
- CIF, the Construction Industry Federation;
- ISME, the Irish Small and Medium Enterprises

*Skills for Work* was established as part of the wider emphasis on life-long learning in the Irish education and training systems in the past decade. It provides opportunities

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<sup>1</sup> DEP was established in 1998 to tackle employment and labour market policy development issues in Dublin Region. With core funding from the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, DEP operates as an extensive network bringing together practitioners, experts and policy makers to collaborate on broad ranging initiatives, pilot programmes and other activities. For further information, see [www.dublinpact.ie](http://www.dublinpact.ie)

<sup>2</sup> See [www.fas.ie/en/Employer/One+Step+Up/Skills+For+Work.htm](http://www.fas.ie/en/Employer/One+Step+Up/Skills+For+Work.htm) for further information on *Skills for Work*



for employees to improve their basic education skills to enhance their performance and potential in the workplace. Its objectives are:

- To improve basic education and skills for the workplace
- To improve literacy and numeracy skills of employees
- To transfer these skills into the working and personal lives of employees
- To empower employees to continue on a life-long learning process
- To provide access to a workplace basic education and training solution, with training costs funded by FÁS

Basic education is defined by the programme as reading, writing, listening and speaking, numeracy and using everyday technology to communicate and handle information. It includes more than the technical skills of communication: it also has personal, social and economic dimensions

A booklet prepared by FÁS for the programme sets out the benefits of *Skills for Work* for both the employer and the employee, as listed in Box 1.1.

**Box 1.1: Benefits of *Skills for Work* Programme**

**Benefits for Employer**

- Increased quality and output levels
- Increased profitability
- Better team performance
- Better health and safety performance
- Improved ability to handle on-the-job training (and quicker training results)
- Increased retention of employees
- Improved labour-management relations
- Improved organisational flexibility

**Benefits/Features for Employee**

- Aimed at employees with basic education needs, in particular with less than Junior Cert qualifications
- Opportunity to improve basic workplace skills such as literacy, numeracy and communication skills, interpersonal skills, problem solving and report writing
- Offered on company premises where possible
- Usually 3 hours per week for 10 weeks (but depends on programme)
- Ideally allows employees to attend on paid work time
- Based on educational needs/interests and can be tailored to workplace skills
- Delivered by trained and qualified adult tutors
- Works towards accreditation, depending on level and duration of course

Literature for the programme lists the following as sample modules: Communications; Computer Literacy; Consumer Awareness; Caring for Children; Child Development and Play; Living in a Diverse Society; Mathematics; Office Procedures; Personal and Interpersonal Skills; Personal Care and Presentation; Personal Effectiveness. Modules are generally delivered at FETAC Levels 1-3.



This evaluation relates to the specific *Skills at Work* programme implemented by DEP from mid-2008 to mid-2009.

### 1.1.3 Learning @ Work

The sizeable cohort of workers with low skills that work in relatively low-skilled employment has been identified by DEP over the past decade as of strategic significance in the labour market, but as being largely overlooked by existing mainstream labour market interventions. While a range of programmes target people out of work, there has not traditionally been an emphasis on upskilling people in work. The thinking behind *Learning @ Work* identified a number of potential benefits from such programmes<sup>3</sup>:

- Upskilling people in low-skilled jobs supports them in maintaining their employment;
- Such upskilling supports potentially vulnerable firms in increasing productivity and competitiveness;
- Providing greater skills to people in jobs means that, should they lose their jobs, they are less likely to slide into long-term unemployment and better placed to return to the labour force;
- Left to their own devices, research shows that companies tend to invest less in upskilling low-skilled workers than in providing training for workers who are already well educated;
- Several national strategies promote the idea of Ireland becoming a skilled, "smart" economy in the coming years, and supporting all Irish workers to take "one step up" is a core element of this strategy.

DEP has managed two previous *Learning @ Work* programmes targeting people in employment. In both cases, and as with the 2008-10 programme, the core funders and partners were FÁS and the Department of Education and Science. The first, in 2001/2, was successful in reaching young people in work and was noted as an imaginative pilot project in the *Sustaining Progress* social partnership agreement. The second, from 2004-06, again had positive outcomes and was highly praised at its concluding seminar by both the Department of Education and Science and FÁS.

Both previous *Learning @ Work* programmes were evaluated independently and were found to have generated significant learning for mainstream organisations. The evaluations showed that the programmes had successfully developed interventions to reach low-skilled people in jobs, primarily through using local networks of Area Partnerships and other organisations with good on-the-ground knowledge to recruit small and large companies, and participants; as well as ongoing input from Partnership staff to reach and support participants, some of whom had not taken part in training for many years.

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<sup>3</sup> A Learning @ Work website, developed by the local implementing organizations in the current programme, is at [www.learningatwork.ie](http://www.learningatwork.ie)

A third *Learning at Work* programme, the subject of this evaluation, began in April 2008, following identification by DEP of six areas where the programme would operate. The programme was implemented through six on-the-ground organisations, five Area Partnership Companies and the Ballymun Job Centre. Following a tendering process, the Dublin City and County VECs were chosen to deliver the training across the six areas. All training has been accredited, with modules tailored to meet the different needs of the areas.

The 2008-10 *Learning @ Work* programme was larger than the previous two rounds and aimed to build on learning generated from them. The design of the programme, which involved discussion with both FÁS and the Department of Education and Science, led to a partial mainstreaming of the programme, with the programme moving from the Community Development division of FÁS to the Services for Business division. Implementation was managed and co-ordinated by DEP and local implementing organisations supplemented the funding from FÁS and the Department of Education and Science with local match funding.

## 1.2 Evaluation Research and Report Structure

This evaluation of the DEP *Skills for Work* and *Learning @ Work* programmes was prepared by Hibernian Consulting and Gráinne Healy, Independent Consultant.

The evaluation process was formative in nature, i.e. it aimed not just to provide information for an external audience but to improve the work of the programmes while they were being implemented, based on diagnostic learning. As such, the evaluation work focused on issues such as programme structures and processes as well as end outcomes. For example:

- The evaluators developed a system to support the *Skills for Work* coordinators in tracking their work and their progress. This was subsequently extended to the *Learning @ Work* coordinators;
- The evaluators undertook quarterly site visits with the *Learning @ Work* coordinators to gather information on their work and progress and to offer support and advice around issues or problems emerging;
- Between site visits, support was offered to both programmes and the evaluators were in regular contact with the local areas. For example, in early-2009, the evaluators encouraged and worked with the *Learning @ Work* sites to increase the number of participating companies, even though they were already achieving target numbers of individual participants;
- The evaluators attended Steering Group meetings for the programmes, sometimes preparing written input, and commenting on issues arising on the programmes;
- The evaluators provided a range of other general supports to the DEP around the roll-out of the programmes.

As well as drawing on these ongoing interactions with programme stakeholders, specific research and consultations in preparing this evaluation report included:

- Research on the current labour market and policy contexts for the programmes;

- Discussions with Dublin Employment Pact;
- Discussions with personnel in FÁS involved both in the *Learning @ Work* and *Skills for Work* programmes;
- Discussions with the managers in the City of Dublin and County Dublin VECs responsible for delivering the training under *Learning @ Work*;
- Discussions with the *Skills for Work* coordinators;
- Discussions with the *Learning @ Work* coordinators, through site visits to the six areas where the programme is being implemented;
- Sourcing of specific information from both sets of coordinators on the detailed working of the programmes.

The period since the programmes were designed in the first half of 2008 has seen significant change in the Irish economic and labour market environments. The ESRI and the IMF both forecast that Irish GDP will decline by about 14% in the three year period 2008-10 and unemployment is forecast to rise from around 5% of the labour force to perhaps 13-15%. The sharp contraction of the economy has also had a significant impact on public spending. These changes had a number of impacts on the programmes, which are reflected in the evaluation report, including the following:

- They led to a reduction in the expenditure on the *Learning @ Work* programme in the second half of 2009, although much of the work of the programme had been completed by that time;
- They changed the context for the implementation of the programmes, with the tasks of approaching companies, and workers, changing in nature.

**Chapter 2** presents information relating to the labour market and policy contexts for *Learning @ Work* and *Skills for Work*. This is important in that the programmes are relatively unusual in providing training to people who are in employment and Chapter 2 asks how this fits with national policy. Chapter 2 shows how companies have tended to under-invest in the training of low-skilled workers in Ireland, suggesting a market failure in this regard. It reviews recent changes to the Irish labour market and the increase in unemployment during 2008 and 2009 and locates the initiatives in this context. **Chapter 3** reviews the work of DEP's *Skills for Work* programme and **Chapter 4** reviews the work of the *Learning @ Work* programme. **Chapter 5** contains conclusions and learning points arising.

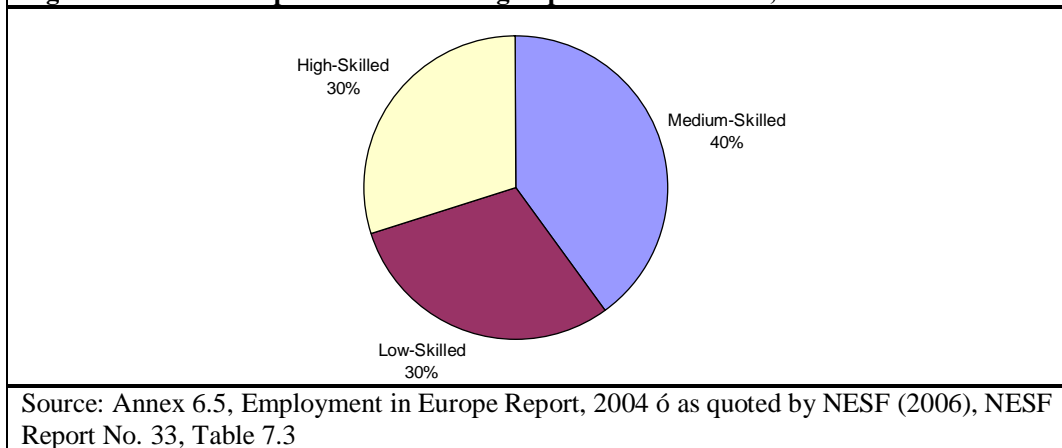
## Chapter 2: Policy and Labour Market Contexts

### 2.1 Target Groups for the Programmes

#### 2.1.1 Low Skilled People in Employment in Ireland

The skill composition of the Irish working population is shown in Figure 2.1 as per the 2004 Employment in Europe Report. This report found that Ireland has relatively high proportions of both low-skilled workers (below upper secondary education) and high-skilled workers. The proportion of low skilled workers in Ireland on this definition (30%) is higher than countries such as Germany (16%), Denmark (20%), Finland (22%) and the UK (13%).

**Figure 2.1: Skill Composition of Working Population in Ireland, 2003**



While some older workers may be low-skilled due to a lack of educational opportunities, the sustained Irish economic growth in the decade to 2007 created easier access to employment and incentivised young people to leave school early and take the opportunity to work. Data from the 2006 census showed that, for 15-19 year olds in that year, almost 80% were students but, of the remainder, 15% were working and 5% were unemployed, i.e. three-quarters of those not studying were in jobs, which created an incentive for many young people to leave education and enter employment.

The ESRI Annual School Leavers Survey of 2007 provided information on the status of school leavers going back to 1980. For the period 1980-2007, it found a persistent gap in the unemployment rates of those leaving school without any qualifications and those leaving school with a Leaving Certificate, and this gap has grown over time. In 1980, the unemployment rate among those without qualifications was 14 percentage points higher than for those with a Leaving Certificate but this differential had increased to 46 percentage points by 2006.

The ESRI stated: "Not only are school leavers who leave school without any qualifications at greater risk of unemployment, but they are also confined to certain sectors of the labour market. Those without formal second-level qualifications clearly have less variation in the option of sectors available to them. We see that a larger

share of school leavers who left school without any qualifications are confined to the wholesale and retail distribution sector in contrast with other school leavers.

The evidence therefore shows that:

- A significant proportion of Irish workers (almost one in three) is low skilled i.e. to below Leaving Certificate level;
- These workers perform less well in the labour market over time compared to other workers;
- The gap in labour market performance between low-skilled and other workers is widening over time and is likely to continue to widen in the future.

### 2.1.2 Basic Education and Literacy Skills

While both of the programmes under review target low-skilled workers, *Skills for Work* has a particular focus on literacy. The definition of literacy used by NALA, the National Adult Literacy Agency encompasses listening and speaking, reading, writing, numeracy and using everyday technology to communicate and handle information. NALA notes that literacy increases the opportunity for individuals and communities to reflect on their situations, explore new possibilities and initiate change.

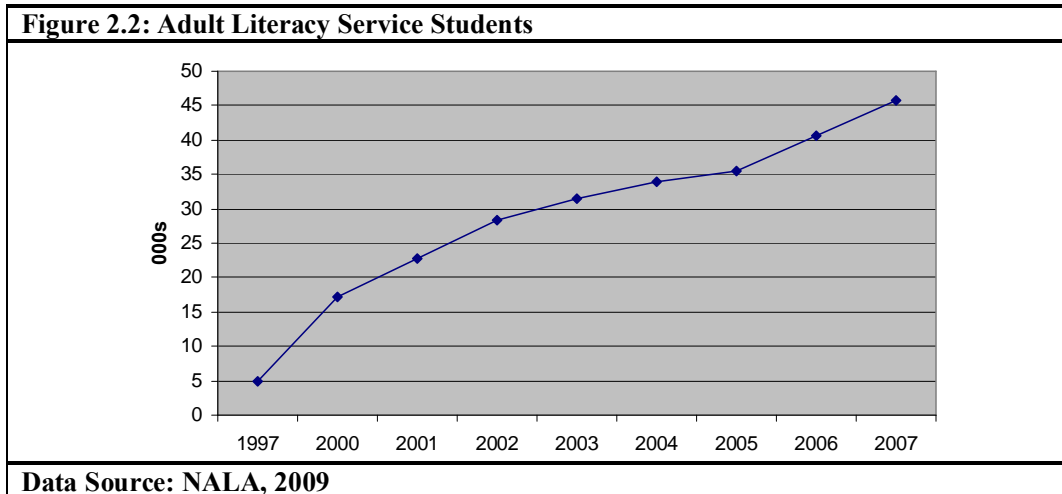
Although now somewhat dated, the most comprehensive data on literacy in Ireland is from the OECD's International Adult Literacy Survey, which was carried out in 20 countries between 1994 and 1998 and which assessed literacy levels of the working age population. Literacy was measured on three scales: prose (the ability to understand and use information from texts, such as newspapers and pamphlets), document literacy (the skill to use information from formats such as maps and timetables) and quantitative (the ability to use mathematical operations and carry out tasks such as calculating a tip and balancing a chequebook). Key results were as follows:

- Of the countries surveyed, Ireland had the second highest percentage at the lower levels of literacy and over half the population had levels which may cause difficulties in coping with social and economic life in a modern society
- About a quarter of the Irish population scored at the lowest level of a five level scale. People at this level have problems with basic literacy tasks, such as adding up a bill, understanding a pay slip, filling in a form or determining the correct dosage of medication. Another 30% of Irish adults scored at level 2, meaning that they can cope only with simple material.
- People with the lowest skill levels are least likely to take part in adult education.
- The proportion of Irish respondents at the higher level of literacy was about one-sixth, compared to one-third of the Swedish population.

In response to these results, the Department of Education and Science expanded adult literacy programmes in the adult education framework operated by the VECs, and increased funding to NALA to support it in coordinating, training and researching adult literacy issues. A number of initiatives were also launched by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment to improve basic skills of workers. In 2007, the

budget for the VEC Adult Literacy Service was €30 million and other programmes with aspects of literacy training received another €3 million.

Increased investment led to a large increase in the numbers availing of adult literacy services, as shown below.



Between 2002 and 2007 the age profile of participants in adult literacy services changed, with the average age falling from 46.6 years to 39.9 years.

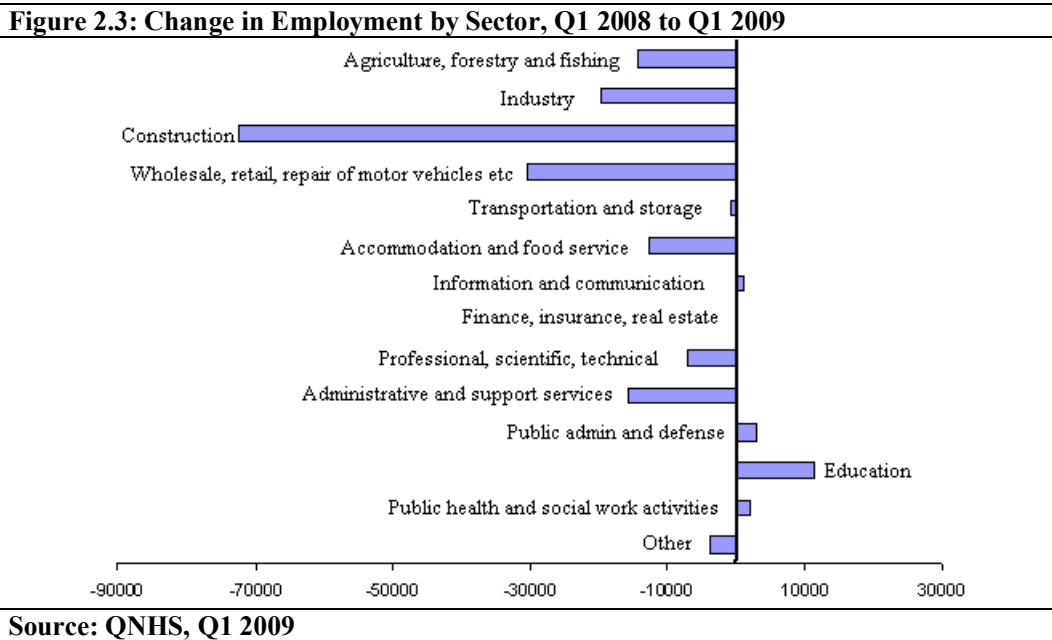
There are therefore considerable adult literacy needs in Ireland, although with increased efforts (mainly outside the workplace) to address the issue in recent years<sup>4</sup>.

## 2.2 Changing Labour Market Environment

Data from the QNHS show that in the second quarter of 2009, there were 1,938,500 people in employment in Ireland. This represented a drop of 185,600 or 8.7% from the number employed in the first quarter of 2008, when the two programmes under review were being designed.

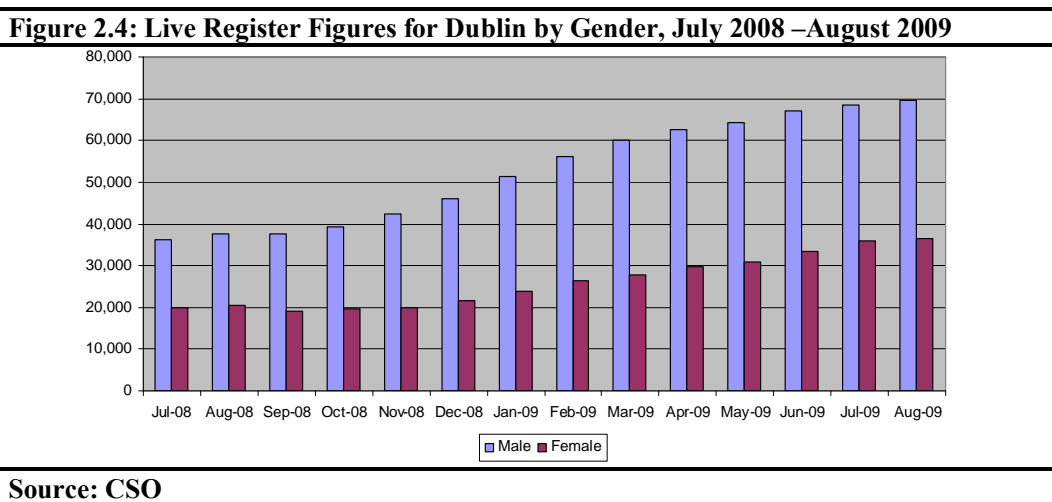
This significant fall in employment was reflected in sectoral data. The QNHS found that the number of people working in the construction sector in the first quarter of 2009 was 29% lower than in the first quarter of 2008 (and this decline is forecast to continue well into 2010). Other sectors where significant job losses occurred are the wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles, industry, administrative and support service, agriculture and accommodation and food service. The bar chart below shows employment by economic sector in Q1 2008 and Q1 2009.

<sup>4</sup> There remain problems of young people leaving the education system with literacy problems. Draft findings from an NESF study, as quoted by The Irish Times on 18<sup>th</sup> June 2009, found that almost one-third of children in disadvantaged areas have severe literacy problems, despite 25 years of targeted education programmes. NESF Chairwoman Maureen Gaffney commented: "We live in an era where literacy is super-important. It's like depriving children of oxygen. When they don't have literacy skills, there are serious consequences for their life chances."



Several of the sectors that lost considerable numbers of jobs between Q1 2008 and Q1 2009, such as construction (with by far the largest job losses), wholesale/retail, administrative and support services and accommodation and food service activities, employ high proportions of workers with relatively low skills.

In August 2009, there were 106,157 people in the Dublin region on the Live Register, an 89% increase from July 2008. Figure 2.4 shows the sharp increase in the 13-month period to August 2009, which overlaps with much of the period during which the DEP *Learning @ Work* and *Skills for Work* programmes were implemented.



Two thirds of those on the Live Register in August 2009 were men, and over one-fifth were aged under 25.

Inez Bailey, Director of the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA), noted as early as September 2008: "The amount of low skilled employment is quickly slipping away



and these people are most at risk of becoming unemployed, especially with the recent slowdown in the economy.

Writing in *The Irish Times* (15<sup>th</sup> May 2009), academic economist Jim O'Leary reviewed the sectors that had seen the largest declines in employment in 2008 and the first quarter of 2009 and, also citing the ESRI's Philip O'Connell, noted:

The data shows a pattern of change across occupations that is at odds with an impression created by some media coverage, namely that unemployment this time around had become a middle-class phenomenon. Yes, many middle-class people have lost their jobs since the slump started, but job losses between the fourth quarter of 2007 and the last three months of 2008 were concentrated in crafts and relatively low-skilled occupations. In the higher-end occupational categories (managerial, professional, technical), employment was still growing on an annual basis at the end of 2008. This is echoed in the pattern of change classified by education. Uniquely across the different levels of educational attainment, those with third-level qualifications saw an increase between the fourth quarter of 2007 and the same period in 2008 while those with the lowest levels of attainment saw the biggest employment losses (down 12 to 13 per cent year-on-year). All categories experienced an increase in unemployment, but the smallest increases occurred among third-level graduates.

This analysis was updated in autumn 2009 but O'Leary's central conclusion remained the same (*The Irish Times*, 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2009):

The data (from the second quarter QNHS) exposes as a myth the notion that this is a middle-class recession – at least as far as the labour market is concerned. Employment losses have been heavily concentrated among craft workers and the semi-skilled and unskilled. Across the relevant occupational categories, employment in the second quarter was 14 to 25 per cent below its year-earlier level. By contrast, the rates of employment loss among professional, managerial and technical grades are estimated at 1 to 3 per cent.

Workers with low levels of qualifications have therefore been particularly vulnerable in the economic recession that began in early-2008, with unemployment among this cohort of workers rising rapidly.

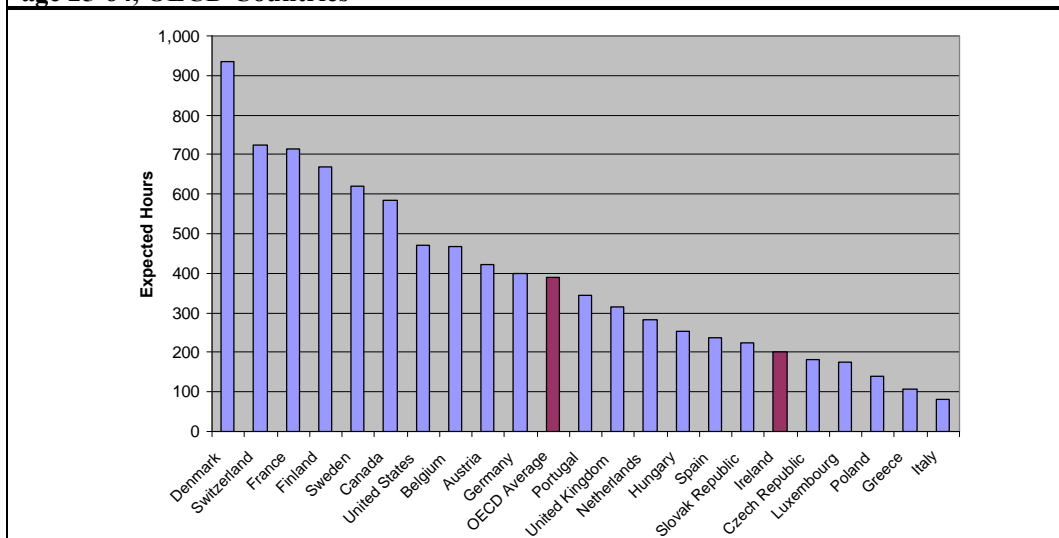
## **2.3 Training and Education at Work**

### **2.3.1 International Data on Training for People in Employment**

There is substantial international variation in participation in life-long learning by workers. An OECD survey of workers in 22 countries asked about the amount of time spent in job-related continuing education and training (outside the formal education system). Based on the data collected, shown in Figure 2.5, the number of hours which a worker can expect to spend in such education and training between the ages of 25-64 is highest in Denmark (at over 900) followed by Switzerland, France, Finland and Sweden (all over 600). By contrast, in Italy, a worker receives under 100 hours of such training during their career. Ireland is closer to Italy than to Denmark in the ranking, coming in sixth lowest of 22 countries, with a worker expected to receive

some 203 hours over their career. This is approximately half of the average OECD level of continuing education and training.

**Figure 2.5: Expected hours in Non-formal Job-related Education and Training between age 25-64, OECD Countries**



Source: Education at a Glance 2008: OECD Indicators

### 2.3.2 Studies on Training for People in Employment

A number of studies have investigated participation in work training and education in Ireland<sup>5</sup>. These include:

- -Who Generally Trains? The Effects of Personal and Workplace Characteristics on Training at Work (O’Connell P., ESRI, 2004);
- -Participation of the Employed in Education/Training (FÁS, 2008) and;
- -Education at a Glance (OECD, 2008).

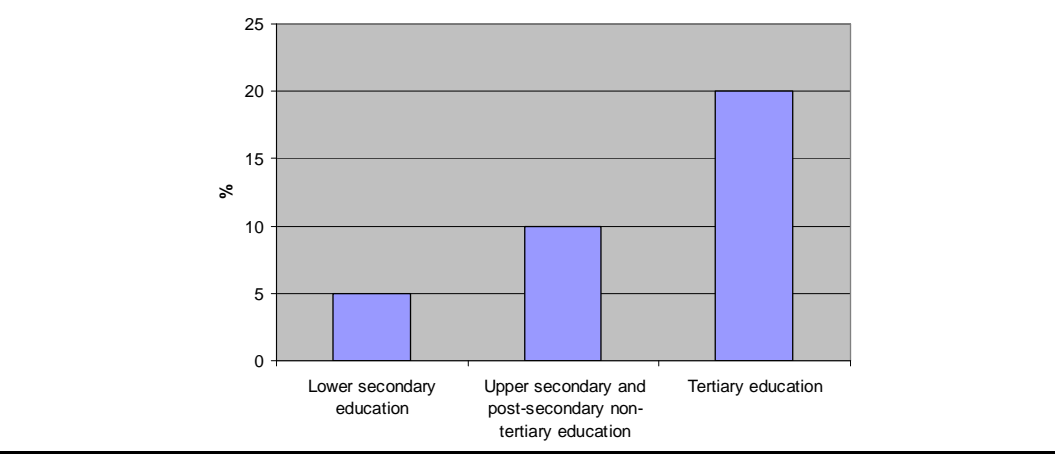
A first finding from the studies is that **those with higher educational attainment or skills are more likely to participate in training** (see Table 2.1).

<b>Participation in Employer Sponsored Training in Past Two Years</b>		<b>Education/Training of Employed (ILO, 25 – 64) Four Weeks Prior to the Study</b>	
No Qualification	34	Primary	3
Junior Certificate	38	Junior Certificate	4
Leaving Certificate	49	Leaving Certificate	7
Third Level	59	Post-Leaving Cert	7
		Third Level	15
		Other/Not Stated	8
<b>ESRI, 2004</b>		<b>QNHS and FÁS 2008</b>	

<sup>5</sup> Further information on these studies, and their methodologies, is provided in Appendix 1.

Table 2.1 shows that the likelihood of participation in work-related training and education is directly linked to a worker’s level of formal educational qualifications. This trend holds across the OECD, as shown below.

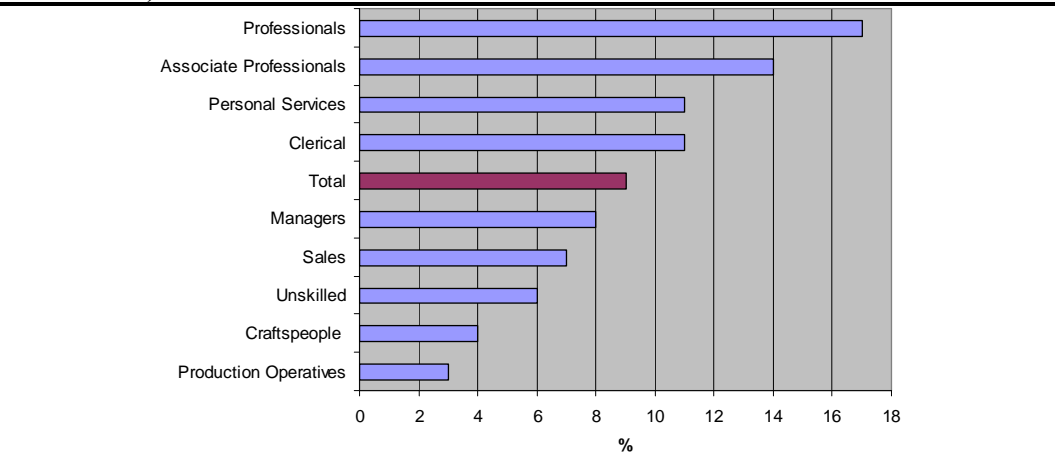
**Figure 2.6: Participation Rate in Training during Previous Year by Education Level**



**Source: Education at a Glance 2008: OECD Indicators**

A second, related, finding from the ESRI and FÁS studies is that **training participation is linked to the type of job a worker has**. The ESRI found that 63% of higher professionals had received training in the previous two years compared to 28% of unskilled manual workers. This is supported by the FÁS study which found that professionals and associate professionals were much more likely to be in receipt of education and training than production operatives and craftspeople. Data from the FÁS research is shown below.

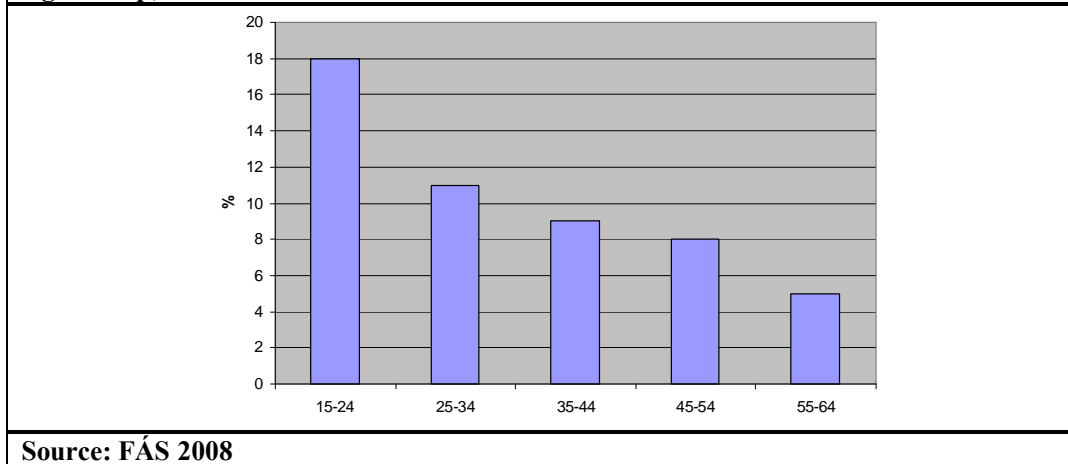
**Figure 2.7: Education/Training of Workers by Occupational Group (Four Weeks Prior to Research)**



**Source: FÁS 2008**

A third finding is an **inverse relationship between age and participation in job related training**, with training lower among older age groups. Figure 2.8 is based on data provided in the FÁS study and shows participation rates declining significantly as workers get older.

**Figure 2.8: Employed Persons receiving Education/Training in Previous Four Weeks, by Age Group, 2007**



A similar inverse relationship between age and levels of participation in education/training was found in the ESRI and OECD studies, although with most training in the 25-39 age cohort. Participation rates fell among older age groups and dropped dramatically above age 55.

A number of other findings from the 2004 ESRI study are as follows:

- **The nature of employment affects levels of upskilling** with full-time workers receiving more training than part-time workers, and permanent employees receiving more training than those working on a temporary basis.
- **Training is more common in the public than the private sector**, with 60% of those in the public sector undertaking training in the two years prior to the ESRI study compared to 45% in private firms.
- **Workers in large companies are more likely to undertake training than those in small firms** ó those in organisations of over 100 employees were twice as likely to participate in training compared to those in companies with 1-4 staff.

Thus, empirical evidence shows that training for people in work is more likely for workers with higher initial levels of education, in professional jobs, in larger companies, with full-time employees and in younger age groups. Conversely, workers with lower initial levels of education, in lower-skilled jobs, in smaller companies, on part-time contracts are less likely to receive training and upskilling during their careers, and this becomes even more the case as a worker gets older.

The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions noted in 2008 a growing divide between high-skilled and low-skilled workers: -Increasingly a polarisation is seen between high-skilled jobs and low-skilled jobs and the divide between knowledge workers and service workers is growing, with consequences in the working conditions of both. Low-skilled workers are at risk of becoming -poorøí with low skills being related to low pay and also to some extent with precarious employmentø

The 2007 Employment in Europe report from the European Commission concludes that, in the EU, access to training remains unequal, particularly for older workers, the less educated, those in precarious jobs and workers with the lowest income. This has a negative impact on the employability of these groups, and increases the risk of social exclusion and income inequality.

The 2008 FÁS report (Participation of the Employed in Education/Training 2007) states: "There will be a particular need for further measures for poorly-educated, low-skilled employees as emphasised in the National Skills Strategy and FÁS Training Strategy. Concerted, strong action will be required if the continuing training gap between the well- and poorly-educated is to be narrowed."

The ESRI report "Who Generally Trains?" concludes: "The stratified nature of training participation suggests that current allocation principles are in inverse relation to need, and training is more likely to exacerbate rather than mitigate existing labour market inequalities."

### 2.3.3 Training in relation to Literacy

In relation to literacy, a 2009 study for NALA reviewed results of the Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education (ITABE) programme being implemented by VECs. It estimated that for trainees currently in employment, the annual income gain from improving literacy by one level on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) is over €3,800. In addition, the government saves or gains about €1,500 in reduced social welfare benefits and increased tax repayments. The research found a range of other benefits to improved literacy, including in relation to health, civic participation (e.g. voting, volunteering) and other issues.

These gains compare to an estimated cost of just over €4,000 to raise the average trainee by one level in the NFQ. Thus, economic returns on literacy training are strongly positive. The research found that this is particularly so if training is for those in work. The Director of NALA commented as follows: "Since there is strong evidence that the economic gains from literacy are significant, literacy training should move further up the hierarchy of educational priorities."

## 2.4 National Policies on Upskilling Workers

Upskilling the Irish labour force has been the focus of a range of policy reports in the past decade and key findings from some of these reports are presented in this section.

### Learning for Life – White Paper on Adult Education (2000)

Published in July 2000, this White Paper contained chapters on: Second Chance and Further Education; Community Education; Workplace Education; new approaches to Higher Education; and Supports Required for these. The White Paper broke new ground on adult education in Ireland, which it described as "systematic learning undertaken by adults who return to learning having concluded initial education and

training". It noted that adult education remained the last area of mass education to be developed in Ireland. It also supported increased workplace education and envisaged partnerships of education/training and industry interests to deliver programmes, with a focus on overcoming barriers to participation and on flexible delivery.

### **Enterprise Strategy Group – Ahead of the Curve (2004)**

The *Enterprise Strategy Group* reported to the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment in July 2004. It recommended the positioning of Ireland as a knowledge economy and stated: "Upskilling of the existing workforce and raising education levels is essential in an environment of constant change". As a particular priority, policy interventions will be required to ensure the low-skilled are not left behind in the move towards a knowledge society.

A recommendation of the report stated: "Establish a national 'One Step Up' initiative, facilitated by the NFQ. While this seeks to engage with the workforce as a whole, it should pay particular attention to people with low levels of qualification and in low-level occupations, who are least likely to receive sufficient access to learning opportunities".

This recommendation was progressed through increased investment by FÁS in in-company training and through the Workplace Basic Education Fund, which funds the *Skills for Work* programme.

*Ahead of the Curve* aimed to bring national agendas on education (and life-long learning) and training (including up-skilling of low-skilled workers) closer together. The framing of the requirement for upskilling in terms of accredited education outcomes made this link, and practical cooperation followed (e.g. with the Department of Education and Science on the national steering group for *Skills for Work*). The linking of these agendas fitted with the philosophy underpinning the DEP's approach to *Learning @ Work*.

### **NESC – Strategy 2006: People, Productivity and Purpose (2005)**

This major *NESC* Report addressed the issue of training in some detail. In relation to the need for investment, it stated:

"The Council is of the view that the total level of investment by government, employers and individuals in the training and education of the adult population is not sufficient, having regard to the current economic and social pressures. There is widespread agreement across OECD countries on the need for increased investment in training and education of the adult population (see OECD (2004), *Co-financing Lifelong Learning: Towards a Systemic Approach*). This need arises for the following reasons. First, global competition places competitive pressure on many enterprises and sectors of the Irish economy and it is essential to develop further the capabilities of employees to meet this pressure. Second, demographic change implies a slowdown in new entrants to the workforce. The availability of new skills in the workforce will become increasingly dependent upon existing workers developing these skills. Third,

individuals who lose, or are at risk of losing, their current occupations as a result of structural change in the economy need access to better quality training or education than is normally available, in order to ensure their employability. Fourth, the widespread provision of quality training and education opportunities to those not at present in the labour force, such as lone parents and people with disabilities, is one of the key elements of the Council's strategy for a Developmental Welfare State.

In a section entitled 'Public Investment in Training and Education for Those with Low Qualifications or Low Incomes' the NESC stated:

The Council is in agreement with the OECD analysis that the state has a particular responsibility for investing in training and education of those with low educational qualifications or low incomes. This is based on the following considerations:

- Experience shows that those with low initial qualifications are least likely to benefit from employer-provided training and are most vulnerable to economic change;
- Those on low incomes have the least scope to invest in training and education from their own resources;
- From an equity perspective, there is a case for assisting investment in education and training for those who derived limited benefit from the initial education and training system;
- Researchers at the University of Ottawa (see Coulombe et al, 2004) found evidence that reducing the number of people with very low skills in the labour force shows up the most clearly as an influence on economic growth<sup>6</sup>;
- A focus on those with limited educational qualifications is of particular relevance in Ireland in view of the relatively high share of the adult population that has not completed second level education.

Following from this, the NESC recommends that state investment in training for low-skilled workers be increased. For some categories of low-qualified workers, the costs of training or education should be fully met and paid training leave should be provided by the state. Without this level of assistance and guidance, it is unlikely that there will be significant involvement in substantial long-term training or education by low-skilled employees.

### **Towards 2016 Social Partnership Agreement (2006)**

The need for greater training and education for workers with low levels of skills and qualifications was emphasised in the 2006 national Partnership Agreement.

Under its section on people of working age, it states:

The Government and social partners agree to work together to deliver policies focussed on ensuring that Ireland has a fully-trained, well-educated workforce to achieve the vision of a socially cohesive, knowledge-based innovation-driven economy whilst significantly increasing the skill levels of those in employment and

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<sup>6</sup> This study found that a rise of 1% in literacy scores relative to the international average leads over time to a 2.5% relative increase in labour productivity and a 1.5% rise in GDP per capita



consequently reducing the number of low skilled in the workforce. ... Actions to be prioritised include - Increasing participation in Lifelong Learning in particular among the workforce categorised as low-skilled/low paid by enhancing opportunities to access education and training, the development of new skills, the acquisition of recognised qualifications and progression to higher level qualifications to equip all individuals with the skills, capacity and potential to participate fully in the knowledge-based society and progress to better quality jobs.ø

### **Tomorrow's Skills: Towards a National Skills Strategy (2007)**

This report identified the skills required for Ireland to become a competitive, innovation-driven, knowledge-based, participative and inclusive economy by 2020. It predicted that services and high value added manufacturing will increase in relative importance. It states: "Employees in all jobs will be increasingly required to acquire a range of generic and transferable skills including people-related and conceptual/ thinking skills. Work will be less routine, with a requirement for flexibility, continuous learning, and individual initiative and judgment.ø

The report states: "Participation in education and training has an unambiguously positive impact on earnings for employees, firms and the economy in generalø and argues that state intervention in education and training is especially justified in the case of certain target groups, such as low-skilled workers.

The report sets out ambitious targets for the Irish labour force to be achieved by 2020. Reaching these goals would require an additional 500,000 individuals *already in the workforce* to progress by at least one NFQ level, including 70,000 persons to upskill from NFQ levels 1 and 2 to level 3, and 260,000 people to progress to levels 4 & 5.

The report says that individuals who do not currently hold a qualification equivalent to NFQ Level 4 or 5 (Leaving Certificate equivalent) should be assisted to achieve such an award, through either full or part-time study, without tuition costs and with a level of subsistence provided by the state. In addition, "Basic skills such as literacy, numeracy and the use of technology should be prioritised and embedded into all publicly funded education and training provision in so far as possible.ø The report recommends that "the provision of workplace based training which is fitted around working hours needs to be actively promoted.ø

### **NDP 2007-2013: Transforming Ireland – A Better Quality of Life for All (2007)**

Human capital is one of five spending priorities in the current National Development Plan. Lifelong Learning is a guiding principle and expected outputs include:

- Upskilling the workforce through promoting access to training and lifelong learning;
- Implementing the National Skills Strategy to increase the skill levels of a significant proportion of those at work in support of the aims of improved competitiveness and moving job quality up the value chain.

The NDP states: "Further investment in human capital will support greater adaptability in the education and training systems, with a particular emphasis on upskilling those already at work, those who wish to return to work and those whose need for learning is greatest"

It further says: "The private sector will always play the greatest role in the training of those in employment. However, the public sector does have a role in encouraging and providing guidance for that investment and in providing training in cases of market failure, such as for the low and unskilled and for those working in the SME sector."

## Development of a Smart Economy (2008)

Building Ireland's Smart Economy - A Framework for Sustainable Economic Renewal, announced in December 2008, is the government's medium-term vision for Irish economic development.

This strategy supports lifelong learning and states: "In the modern economy, a particular focus needs to be on efforts to increase participation in lifelong learning by providing opportunities for education and training, to facilitate required upskilling and re-skilling." The strategy particularly notes "the FÁS Strategic Alliance initiative aimed at training the low skilled, and the FÁS Workplace Basic Education Fund targeting employees with the lowest skills levels and particularly those with literacy and numeracy difficulties"

## Supplementary Budget (2009)

In response to the rapid increase in unemployment in late-2008 and early-2009, the government used the supplementary budget of April 2009 to announce a number of new labour market measures. These include the following two schemes<sup>7</sup> (administered by FÁS):

- **Pilot Training Scheme for Workers on Short Time.** Described by the government as a "significant new approach to supporting people in vulnerable employment" this scheme provides training and income support to workers in vulnerable employment. It introduces a pilot scheme for companies that have placed staff on a 3-day week to provide 2-days training a week to up-skill employees for a period of 52 weeks. The initial pilot scheme was to have 277 participants at a cost of approx. €1m for the training element, with participants continuing to receive social welfare entitlements<sup>8</sup>.
- **Work Experience Scheme.** There were to be some 2,000 places on this scheme which aimed to be cost neutral from the state's perspective with the state's

<sup>7</sup> This information is set out in Annex F to the budget and in a press release from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (27<sup>th</sup> May 2009)

<sup>8</sup> This pilot scheme reflects schemes in a number of other EU countries. The Economist (March 14<sup>th</sup> 2009) noted that Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy and Spain all had programmes encouraging firms to shorten working weeks rather than lay people off, with the government topping up the pay of workers on short hours, and perhaps providing or supporting training.

contribution at the social welfare Job Seeker Benefit/Assistance weekly rates. The scheme planned to provide work experience for 1,000 graduates and 1,000 unemployed people in 2009 (with at least 250 aged under 25).

Both schemes came into operation in summer 2009 and the Pilot Training Scheme for Workers on Short Time, in particular, showed an intention to engage with the upskilling of vulnerable workers at risk of losing their jobs (a similar target group to that of *Skills for Work and Learning @ Work*).

## **Report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure Programmes (2009)**

As part of a wide-ranging review of public expenditure in 2009, this Special Group jointly chaired by Mr. Colm McCarthy of UCD's School of Economics and Mr. Donal McNally, Second Secretary General of the Department of Finance, commented as follows on funding from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment to FÁS Services to Business and Skillnets (which fund training for people in employment):

The Group was not convinced by the argument that the funding of €27m provided through FÁS Services to Business and Skillnets is a necessary catalyst in the provision of training by businesses to their own employees. The Group is not convinced that any market failure exists and recommends that these activities be stopped as employers can provide for their own requirements.

This argument, which is not expanded on further in the report, therefore contradicts the rationale of other policy reports, including the NESC 2005 report and the NDP for 2007-13. These argue that, without state interventions, companies provide relatively low levels of training for low-skilled workers, especially in small companies. Yet, Ireland requires that this cohort of workers upskills, suggesting a market failure, as (left to itself) the market provides a sub-optimal level of training for these workers from an economy-wide perspective<sup>9</sup>.

### **2.5 EU Policy on Flexicurity**

Flexicurity is designed to combine flexibility in the labour market (with fewer jobs for life and easier processes for employers to lay off workers) with security of employment (with workers able to move from one job to another over their careers, assisted by access to training and life-long learning) and relatively generous social welfare rates for periods between jobs.

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<sup>9</sup> Technical reasons for market failure are generally not outlined in the policy reports but one possible source could be the existence of externalities (or external benefits). These exist as employers may be reluctant to provide training as employees may subsequently leave, with training benefits accruing to future employers (cited by Mc Aleese D. (1997), *Economics for Business*). Also, there may be public good elements to high levels of general skills in the workforce (with incentives for individual employers to be free riders) and information failures may arise if employers underestimate long-term training benefits.

Its objective as regards labour market flexibility is to support an ability to anticipate, manage and incorporate change. As more labour market flexibility could increase worker insecurity and reduce social cohesion, Flexicurity accepts that workers may be reluctant to take risks and change jobs without good training and social welfare schemes. Social welfare systems are used to facilitate education, upskilling, activation and job retention/creation. In the context of these schemes, employers are also encouraged, and supported, in upskilling employees on an ongoing basis.

Flexicurity measures were implemented in Denmark in the 1990s and have since been adopted in EU countries such as Austria, Finland and the Netherlands. Flexicurity, with upskilling and lifelong learning for workers as core elements, is an objective of the European Employment Strategy and supported through the European Social Fund.

In the UK, the government has invested heavily in the Train to Gain programme, which supports employers in identifying training needs of employees, sourcing training organisations and funding training provided<sup>10</sup>. Its website states: Train to Gain is a joint investment - you and the Government working together to boost your business by improving the skills of individual staff members. The UK government also supports employers in upskilling their employees in other ways<sup>11</sup>.

Flexicurity is a mainstream EU labour market policy and one of its principles, as adopted by the European Council in December 2007, is that it should involve a smooth transition between jobs by constantly up-grading employee skills and providing the necessary social protection in transition periods<sup>12</sup>. The European Commission's Social Agenda newsletter noted in March 2006 that flexicurity relies on a high level of workforce training.

## 2.6 Issues Arising from Review of Policy Framework

A number of points arise from the contextual overview provided in Chapter 2 in relation to the Skills for Work and Learning @ Work programmes:

- Some 30% of the Irish workforce has low levels of education and skills, i.e. below Leaving Cert level. Also, based on data from some years ago, Ireland also has a significant proportion of people of working age with low literacy skills.
- Studies by FÁS, the ESRI and others show that those workers *less likely* to receive upskilling over time have the following characteristics:
  - They have lower levels of education and training, i.e. they are low-skilled workers;
  - They tend to work as operatives, craftspeople and in unskilled jobs;

<sup>10</sup> See [www.traintogain.gov.uk](http://www.traintogain.gov.uk) ó research for Train to Gain suggests that a company with 50 employees can save UK£165,000 per year by filling the gaps in its employees' skills and that the average employee can increase their annual earnings by UK£3,000 through upskilling.

<sup>11</sup> See

[http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning/AdultLearning/TrainingAndWorkplaceLearning/DG\\_070911](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning/AdultLearning/TrainingAndWorkplaceLearning/DG_070911)

<sup>12</sup> Further information on the need to upskill existing workers in the EU can be found in the CEDEFOP 2008 report Skills Needs in Europe ó Focus on 2020 and the European Commission's 2008 report New Skills for New Jobs ó Anticipating and Matching Labour Market Needs and Skills Needs

- They are more likely to work in the private sector;
- They are more likely to work in organisations with under 100 people;
- They are more likely to be older.
- The evidence therefore demonstrates a gap in providing upskilling to workers with low levels of education and skills. This is the gap in which both *Skills for Work* and *Learning @ Work* operate.
- This gap has been recognised by a number of expert policy reports, which call for more investment in upskilling of the workforce, and specifically for investment in upskilling workers with low levels of education and skills. The 2007 report *Towards a National Skills Strategy* sets out clear goals for upskilling low-skilled people in employment, with 70,000 people to receive training to upgrade their skills to Level 3 on the NFQ and 260,000 people to receive training to upgrade to Levels 4 and 5 on the NFQ.
- Public policy justifications for public interventions to support low-skilled workers in employment were set out explicitly by the NESC in 2006. Market failure is also cited in the 2007-13 NDP as a basis for public funding to train low-skilled workers.
- Schemes to train people in work fit with the *flexicurity* policy and agenda of the European Commission and the European Employment Strategy, and correspond to programmes in other EU member states.
- In contradiction to these reports and policies, the 2009 report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure Programmes argued that no market failure exists in this area and that state funding should not go towards upskilling workers in employment.

Chapter 2 therefore shows that:

- Despite some opposition, there is broad national and international support for state-funded interventions to provide education and training to low-skilled workers. Workers targeted by such programmes are generally less likely to receive training and upskilling compared to better educated workers.
- Given that up to 30% of Irish workers have levels of education below Leaving Cert level, there is a need for programmes such as *Learning @ Work* and *Skills for Work*. This chapter has focused on the labour market and economic need for such programmes ó there is separately an equality rationale, which is outside the scope of this study;
- Low-skilled workers appear to be particularly vulnerable in the current economic recession, which is forecast to last until well into 2010, with employment growth lagging any recovery in GDP or GNP.

There is therefore a strong public policy rationale for the *Skills for Work* and *Learning at Work* programmes.

## Chapter 3: Review of Skills for Work Programme

### 3.1 Overview of Skills for Work and DEP Programme

An overview of the *Skills for Work* programme was presented in Chapter 1 and, briefly, its key characteristics are:

- The programme is funded under the Workplace Basic Education Fund, which was established by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment in 2004 and is managed by FÁS;
- *Skills for Work* has a national Steering Group which includes representatives of the IVEA, NALA and the social partners;
- The programme focuses on employees' basic education skills, including literacy and numeracy, with a view to encouraging participants to continue on a life-long learning process;
- Funding for *Skills for Work* nationally has been in the region of €3m per year in recent years;
- The programme adopts a broad definition of literacy, including the use of everyday technology;
- The programme aims to generate benefits for both workers and employers.

Between 2005 and 2008, *Skills for Work* developed a network of coordinators around Ireland to source participants and companies and link to local training providers. Progress was made during this period in developing programme resources, such as the 'Steps to Safety' and 'Safe and Well' publications, developed jointly by FÁS and NALA. (A further resource, 'Clocking in to Clocking Out' which incorporates numeracy skills, was subsequently developed by these partners.)

It was decided in 2008 to regionalise the programme (with budgetary control from FÁS Head Office) and, in this context, Dublin Employment Pact was chosen as the location for two Dublin Coordinators. Besides the DEP-based Coordinators, there was one Coordinator in each of the following areas: Wicklow, the South-East, the South-West, the Midlands, the Mid-West and the West regions. Equivalent training to that provided by *Skills for Work* was funded through another mechanism in the North-East and North-West. Some of the Coordinators were self-employed; some employed by private training companies and one was employed by a VEC.

In the year before regionalisation (2007), the *Skills for Work* budget of approximately €3m had led to training being provided to just over 2,000 people, with approximately €2m being spent on training delivery and €1m on coordinators and course materials<sup>13</sup>.

The DEP *Skills for Work* programme ran from mid-2008 to mid-2009 and, at that point, there were further changes in relation to the national programme. FÁS had invited declarations of interest in the delivery of the programme and the VECs were chosen as a strategic delivery partner for the second half of 2009.

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<sup>13</sup> An internal evaluation of *Skills for Work* up to 2007/8 was undertaken but has not been published.



This report focuses on the work of the DEP *Skills for Work* programme, which operated from July 2008 to June 2009.

## 3.2 Work Undertaken under DEP Skills for Work Programme

### 3.2.1 Promotion of the Programme

A first task of the Coordinators was to raise awareness of *Skills for Work*. Most employers are not aware of the different training and upskilling programmes offered by FÁS and other providers (and have not had time to research them in the economic climate of 2008 and 2009). As such, the Coordinators undertook a number of actions to raise general awareness of the programme with organisations that could generate interest among companies. A selection of these promotional activities is listed in Table 3.1.

IBEC eZine	Article describing <i>Skills for Work</i> . Sent to all IBEC members
Irish Exporters Association	Presentation to CEO, who forwarded information to members
DCEB Enterprise Week	Information stand in Central Library
Fingal CEB	Information stand at Fingal Day of Enterprise
Blanchardstown Centre	Information stand in conjunction with <i>Learning @ Work</i>
ICTU	Presentation at Trade Union Learning Reps induction training. Meeting with person who led this initiative
Mandate	Presented to Union Officials as part of their training
North Dublin Chamber of Commerce	Met Chairman who forwarded information to members
Various workplaces	Information stands (normally in company canteens) to deal directly with potential trainees

While these promotional efforts were seen as useful, the Coordinators also noted the importance of personal contacts and networks in getting word out about the programme.

### 3.2.2 Recruiting Employers and Participants

The *Skills for Work* Coordinators recruited companies and participants in two ways:

1. Through direct recruitment, whereby initial contact with the company was made by the Coordinators, leading to delivery of a *Skills for Work* course or courses in the organisation;
2. Through indirect recruitment, whereby the Coordinators were contacted by, or made contact with, a private sector training company that was already delivering training for a company and which identified that a *Skills for Work* course could be of benefit. The Coordinators then verified the need for a course with the company.



In the direct recruitment process, the Coordinators started from the publicity work described above and followed up on queries. They also used contacts from Area Partnership Companies working on *Learning @ Work* or from the VECs to generate relationships with companies. However, most of the direct recruitment entailed the following steps:

1. Identification of companies of potential interest using the Kompass Directory. Companies targeted were private companies with over 50 employees (more likely to have the critical mass for a course) where at least a proportion of workers were likely to be low-skilled and in need of support around literacy and numeracy.
2. Sending of a letter to the Managing Director of the company with information on *Skills for Work* and its potential benefits for the company.
3. Follow-up phone call to the person directly responsible for training matters.
4. Sending of a tailored e-mail to this person with information on *Skills for Work* and its potential benefits for the company, details of potential course modules and a 'Frequently Asked Questions' document.
5. Face-to-face meeting to discuss the programme.

The Coordinators used this process on a geographic basis, covering different parts of the greater Dublin area. In general, the work was time consuming as many companies had to be contacted, on multiple occasions, to generate meetings. There was also a time lag between the initial contact and the translation of that contact into the delivery of training courses.

In addition to the above process, the Coordinators did a small amount of cold calling to premises on industrial estates.

Where the Coordinators directly recruited companies/participants, training was delivered via the VECs, seen by the DEP as strategic partners on the programme.

Regarding recruitment via third-party training companies, two training companies (Access Skills Ireland and Empower) generated over 10 training programmes. Four of these (through Access Skills Ireland) were 'cluster groups' i.e. with trainees from a range of small firms.

**Box 3.1: Steps in Process of Recruitment and Delivery of Course**

The steps in the direct recruitment process fit with a nine-step process which was developed by the evaluators in association with the Coordinators to support this work. Monitoring information was recorded by the Coordinators in relation to the nine steps:

1. Identify company
2. Meet with company and outline programme
3. Contact VEC or private training provider and both meet with company
4. Consultation with company on course content and recruitment of trainees
5. Draw up proposal and start date
6. Start programme and ensure registration process is complete
7. Monitor programme on an ongoing basis
8. Review and evaluate programme on completion
9. Discuss future engagement with company

### 3.2.3 Liaison with Employers and Participants

If a company agreed to take part in the programme and participants, at appropriate levels of education and with similar needs, were sourced, then a course was organised. During course delivery, the Coordinators maintain ongoing contact with the employer, the participants and the training company.

Some of this contact linked to administrative tasks (see below) e.g. when a Coordinator visited the company before training began, or on the first day of training, this allowed interaction with the tutor and participants. This was also true for visits undertaken at the mid- and end-point of the course. These visits permitted a broad Quality Assurance role in ensuring the course met the needs of the company and the participants.

The visits also facilitated a mentoring role with participants. Discussions with the *Skills for Work* Coordinators suggested that many participants had not attended an education or training course in a considerable time. As such, participants could be nervous and anxious about the training, about using a computer, about having to miss a class etc. Given these issues, the Coordinators provided their contact details to all participants at the outset and encouraged contact at any point. This offer was accepted in numerous cases and one-to-one contact with a minority of participants was an ongoing role for the Coordinators. (Ongoing support and mentoring was also provided by the tutors through their relationships with participants.)

### 3.2.4 Liaison with FÁS and Training Providers

The programme functioned smoothly with good relationships between the Coordinators and FÁS, the VECs and the private training providers.

There was ongoing liaison with FÁS as regards signing off on new courses, submitting administration forms etc. In the second half of 2008, there were also regular meetings of the DEP Coordinators with the *Skills for Work* Coordinators from other regions. The Coordinators said that, in a number of cases, they had referred companies or individuals to other parts of FÁS, as appropriate, e.g. for other types of training or if somebody is on a redundancy list.

DEP perceived the VECs as partners on the programme and drew on their expertise in literacy training. Normally, if the VEC was to deliver a course, the Coordinators involved either an Education Development Officer (from County Dublin VEC) or a Workplace Education Officer (from the City of Dublin VEC) early in the process and arranged meetings on a joint basis with the client company. This allowed the VEC personnel to answer queries about course delivery. The VECs developed a good relationship with the two DEP Coordinators and the different roles worked well.

The Coordinators adopted a similar approach with the private sector training companies although a relationship already existed in these cases between the training company and the client company. As such, the role of the Coordinators was more to agree the courses with FÁS and ensure administrative requirements were fulfilled.

### 3.2.5 Administration around Programme Delivery

A number of FÁS administrative requirements in relation to *Skills for Work* were fulfilled by the Coordinators. Having identified an interested company, sourced participants and developed a training proposal with management, the following tasks were involved in administering the training:

1. Send proposal including CDP 10 Forms to FÁS. (Registration forms containing company and trainee details)
2. Discuss issues and/or omissions with FÁS, if any, concerning proposal
3. When signed contract received from FÁS, check against proposal and ensure that training company signs
4. Return counter-signed contract to FÁS
5. Give go-ahead to trainer to commence training
6. Attend launch of course, meet trainees and tutor, explain FÁS involvement and the *Skills for Work* programme. Encourage feedback
7. Get training company to invoice for part of course cost (depending on contract, and quoting contract number) with CDP 13 (training organisation claim form)
8. Undertake an official monitoring visit during the course, using CDP 9 Monitoring Form. Request feedback from participants and management
9. Visit at end to meet trainees and their manager to get feedback and possibly follow-on courses if demand exists
10. Training company to submit final invoice with required backup. Coordinator checks before forwarding to FÁS.

As well as the forms mentioned above (CDP 9, 10 and 13), the trainers used CDP 11 Forms (participant evaluation), CDP 12 Forms (end of programme report) and CDP 14 Forms (attendance records)<sup>14</sup>. The organisation delivering the training had a role in ensuring these forms were completed and forwarded them to the Coordinators. (The VECs had a number of further forms for their own purposes.)

## 3.3 Outcomes Achieved under Skills for Work

### 3.3.1 Overview of Outcomes Achieved

By June 2009, the following outcomes had been achieved under the DEP *Skills for Work* programme:

- Contracts had been signed for training delivery in relation to 26 courses;
- These contracts related to training for 276 individual participants;
- They related to 11 large companies in which courses were to be delivered as well as smaller companies that had contributed participants to the cluster courses;
- Proposed courses in relation to 80 participants, in 6 companies (1 already receiving training and 5 others), had been submitted to FÁS and were awaiting approval.

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<sup>14</sup> Blank copies of Forms CDP 10-14 are available at <http://www.fas.ie/en/Forms/default.htm>

The figure of 356 recruited participants meant that the programme reached 99.1% of its target number of participants, in a very difficult economic climate. In addition, contacts relating to a further 142 possible participants were passed to FÁS at the end of the programme, i.e. in June 2009.

### 3.3.2 Companies in DEP Skills for Work Programme

The names and sectors of the larger companies with which contracts had been signed, and of those awaiting approval, are shown in Table 3.2.

<b>Table 3.2: DEP Skills for Work Companies and Sectors (June 2009)</b>	
<b>Company Name</b>	<b>Sector/Type of Activity</b>
<b>Contracts Signed</b>	
Aramark	Catering
Body Shop	Retail
Cadbury	Manufacturer
Cagney Contract Cleaning	Contract cleaning
Highfield Nursing Home	Nursing home
NCPS	Parking Management Systems
ParkRite	Operators of car parks
St. Gabriel's Nursing Home	Nursing home
St. John of God Hospital	Provider of mental health treatment/care
TLC Nursing Home	Nursing home
Clery's	Retail
<b>Contracts Submitted for Approval (June 2009)</b>	
Criticare	Non-medical home care
Private Homecare	Care of older people
Cowper Care Centre	Day care centre
Caritas	Nursing home
TLC Nursing Home	Nursing home
Aer Lingus	Airline

In addition to the companies listed above, the DEP *Skills for Work* programme signed contracts for the delivery of four cluster groups, whereby small numbers of employees were drawn from a range of firms to construct a group of 8-12 people for a course. Workers attending the cluster group training included workers from small companies as well as larger employers such as Penneys and Argos. Two of these groups were organised in association with the Mandate trade union.

### 3.3.3 Participants on Programmes

Based on an analysis of course records, the following are estimates of characteristics of the *Skills for Work* learners:

- As regards age of the participants, 40% were aged over 45; 33% were aged 35-45; 22% were aged 25-34; and about 5% were aged under 24;
- As regards gender, an estimated 72% were female and 28% male;

- Over 95% of learners were Irish in terms of nationality.

A profile of *Skills for Work* participants by prior level of education achievement is shown in Figure 3.1.

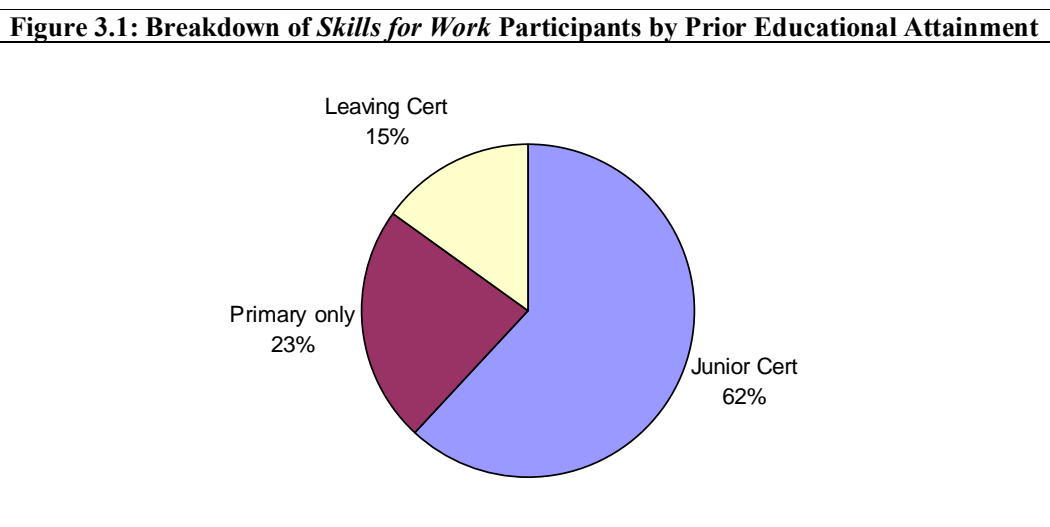


Figure 3.1 suggests that the DEP *Skills for Work* programme successfully reached the desired target group. The broad breakdown of participants by age shows that workers of all ages attended classes.

### 3.3.4 Training Providers on Programme

A breakdown of the training by training provider is shown below.

<b>Table 3.3: DEP Skills for Work – Training Providers Used</b>		
<b>Training Provider</b>	<b>No. of Companies</b>	<b>No. of Participants</b>
<b>Courses with Contracts Signed (June 2009)</b>		
City of Dublin VEC	11	133
Empower	8	69
Access Skills Ireland	6	67
County Dublin VEC	1	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>277</b>
<b>Courses including Contracts Submitted for Approval (June 2009)</b>		
Empower	14	149
City of Dublin VEC	11	133
Access Skills Ireland	6	67
County Dublin VEC	1	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>356</b>

Table 3.3 shows that, for courses for which contracts had been signed by June 2009, some 141 participants (51%) were trained via the VECs and 136 participants (49%) were trained via private training providers, an almost equal breakdown.

### 3.3.5 Views of Companies and Participants

Comments from the companies involved in the programme suggest that the companies were generally very happy with the quality of the tuition provided by both the VECs and the private sector training companies. Cadbury, the single largest company that implemented the DEP *Skills for Work* programme, was interested in running further courses, as well as progressing the people who had already completed the courses. Aramark (majority owners of Campbell Catering) also confirmed that it was very happy with the *Skills for Work* training its employees had received and that it was interested in further training.

Comments from Cadbury on both the *Skills for Work* and *Learning @ Work* programmes are provided in Chapter 4.

An outcome of *Skills for Work* noted by the Coordinators was that, in larger companies, courses led to improved communication between people in different work departments with a spin-off benefit for companies in this regard.

## 3.4 Issues Arising in relation to Skills for Work

A number of issues relating to the DEP *Skills for Work* programme arose from the research and are presented in this section. Conclusions arising from the evaluation are presented in Chapter 5.

### 3.4.1 Level of Accreditation of Training Delivered

While the *Skills for Work* promotional material states that the programme targets people at FETAC Levels 1-3, the experience of the DEP programme was that all of the demand is at Level 3.

Reasons for this were that people with needs more appropriate to Levels 1 and 2 often required one-to-one assistance and such classes were not possible in the context of *Skills for Work*. A second reason suggested was that, as people with needs at Level 1 and 2 have low levels of literacy and numeracy, they may have had lower levels of confidence and were less inclined to come forward to address their learning needs, especially in a work context.

In cases where it was identified that people did not have skills to enter the Level 3 course being organised, these people were supported in making contact with appropriate services, generally VEC Adult Literacy Officers.

### 3.4.2 Courses Chosen under Skills for Work

The experience of the DEP *Skills for Work* programme was that the highest levels of demand for courses were for:

1. Computer Literacy

2. Communications
3. Personal Effectiveness

Highest demand was for computer literacy courses, which the Coordinators found easiest to sell to employers and participants, and which had no stigma as can be the case with literacy courses. Computer literacy courses had direct workplace relevance as well as being useful to participants in non-work contexts.

On the topic of how the preference for computer literacy fitted with the focus of *Skills for Work* on literacy and numeracy issues, the Coordinators noted:

1. Computer literacy is a form of basic literacy in 2009.
2. Learning how to use a computer was a less threatening way to deal with the issue of literacy. In fact, as many *Skills for Work* courses were delivered by tutors experienced in teaching literacy, they used the courses to address literacy issues also. The VECs noted that their tutors have the skills to identify when people have literacy problems and to support them accordingly.
3. It was easier for employers to publicise courses in their company related to computer skills than to raise the issue of literacy.

### 3.4.3 Length of Courses

The length of time required by different training providers to deliver a course varied. For example, one provider could deliver a FETAC Level 3 Computer Literacy course in 49 hours while another could deliver the same course in 35 hours. This in part reflected the different backgrounds and cultures of different providers.

The Coordinators said that, in general, shorter courses were more attractive to employers as they involved a lower level of commitment, especially in an environment of economic uncertainty. Shorter courses were also cheaper to deliver as tutors were normally paid based on the time needed for delivery.

On the other hand, this raises the question of how it can be judged as to what is the appropriate number of hours required to deliver a particular course. While all providers must address the different requirements in a FETAC award, these may be delivered at different levels of depth and quality.

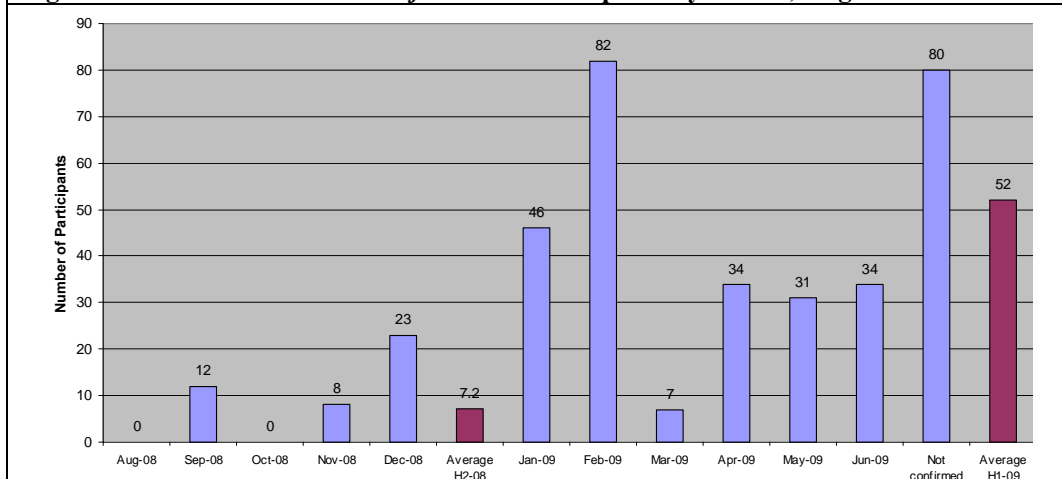
### 3.4.4 Build Up of Participants Over Time

The start-up phase of the work, in 2008, was relatively slow. There was to some extent an inherent time lag in the recruitment process: it took time to build relationships with companies and, once one course was successfully delivered, it was easier to persuade the company, or a related company, of the merits of *Skills for Work*. The full benefits of such relationship building cannot be seen over a one-year programme.



As shown in Figure 3.2, the number of companies and participants being signed to the programme increased from an average of 7.2 participants per month in the last five months of 2008 to 52 participants per month in the first half of 2009.

**Figure 3.2: Recruitment of Skills for Work Participants by Month, Aug '08 to June '09**



In discussing their performance, the Coordinators noted the high level of business uncertainty that existed for companies in late-2008 and early-2009. During this time, the Irish economy experienced a sharp contraction, with unemployment increasing rapidly. As such, many companies were not interested in training, either because they were focused on survival or because they were considering redundancies and did not want to commit to a training course. Some companies felt it was inappropriate to be seen to be organising training for some employees while making others redundant.

This helps to explain the lead time in recruiting participants, and the growth in the number of new participants in the second half of the DEP programme.

## Chapter 4: Review of Learning @ Work Programme

### 4.1 Background to Learning @ Work

The *Learning @ Work* programme for 2008-10, now coming to an end, is the third *Learning @ Work* programme implemented by Dublin Employment Pact. The programme originated from DEP's Employment and Education Group which in 2001 identified the need to target people leaving school early in a period of high economic growth to take up employment. From the start, the programme had elements of both education and training and a vision of being trainee-centred, to put people on a path to further education over time.

*Learning @ Work* was piloted in 2001-02 by Area Partnerships in Clondalkin, Tallaght and Northside. This pilot programme worked with 8 employers and trained 42 young people (aged 17-21). An evaluation by Mazars Consulting noted the programme's innovation and recommended a further extended pilot.

The 2003-05 **Sustaining Progress** national agreement acknowledged the programme's work and a section entitled 'Addressing the needs of low-skilled workers' referred to the project when stating: 'Co-operative action will take place between the Department of Education and Science/FÁS and employer representative bodies to address the learning needs of young people who leave school early and have taken up employment, within available resources, and reflecting the experience of a recently initiated pilot scheme in the Dublin area'

These reactions led to a second *Learning @ Work* initiative in 2005-06. This also focused on young people (up to 25 years old) and built on the model of working through local Area Partnerships. It recruited local Coordinators and had more focus on accredited outcomes. Again funded primarily by FÁS and the Department of Education & Science, *Learning @ Work* in 2005-06 trained 98 people in three parts of Dublin (Blanchardstown, Clondalkin and Tallaght) and in Kildare and Wicklow. Despite being free of charge to participants, it proved difficult to recruit for the programme in a very strong labour market as many young people did not see a need for further education and training. (For this reason, the programme was discontinued in two further parts of Dublin.)

An evaluation of the second *Learning @ Work* programme by Hibernian Consulting in late-2006 drew a number of conclusions:

- *Learning @ Work* remained highly innovative in a national policy context, although the national policy agenda was beginning to address the issue of education and training for low-skilled workers.
- The benefits of life-long learning for employers and workers, and the national requirement for upskilling, were not generally understood by either companies or workers.
- Further involvement from the social partners would enhance the programme, both at national and local level.

- While time consuming, site visits and face-to-face discussions with employers are needed to recruit them to the programme, backed up by well presented documentation and a business case for the training. Some programme materials should be developed across the areas, rather than locally.
- As many people with low skills left school early (perhaps after negative experiences), the presentation of training on offer is important. It should be seen as a positive route to career and personal development. The strong correlation of life-time earnings to educational achievement should be better publicised.
- The most popular modules, on a bottom-up basis, combined personal development, confidence building and communication skills with vocational modules around IT and perhaps applied modules such as book-keeping.
- Informal financial supports to participants were important in ensuring they stayed on courses. These ranged from personal support to extra classes and were provided locally through the Partnership Coordinators.
- While many employers and workers chose not to become involved in the programme, those that did take part were very satisfied with it.

The evaluation identified considerable potential learning for mainstream organisations delivering education and training to low-skilled people in employment and made appropriate recommendations for subsequent programmes.

The evaluation of the 2005-06 programme was launched by Minister Brian Lenihan at the Department of Education & Science. Senior representatives of the Department of Education & Science and FÁS spoke at the launch, expressing satisfaction with the outcomes of the programme and a desire to take forward the learning arising from the evaluation into a further, expanded, programme.

## 4.2 Overview of Learning @ Work 2008-10

### 4.2.1 Shape of Programme

A third *Learning @ Work* programme was developed in 2007 and early 2008, to represent an expansion and development of the two previous programmes. *Learning @ Work* moved from the Community Services division to the Services to Business division of FÁS as part of this mainstreaming process.

Key elements of *Learning @ Work* for 2008-10 were as follows:

- Extension of the model to low-skilled workers of any age
- Agreement that workers with or without a Leaving Certificate who felt that they could benefit from a FETAC Level 3-5 course would be eligible
- Agreement that the number of workers going through the programme should be increased, to feed into national targets under the One Step Up programme
- Continuation of delivery via local organisations and Coordinators
- Agreement that all training modules would be FETAC accredited and all trainers on the FÁS register

- Decision that the appointment of organisations to deliver the training would be subject to open tender, unlike in the pilot programmes where the local areas chose trainers to deliver the local modules

#### 4.2.2 Areas of Delivery and Targets

Following discussions with the funding organisations and local areas around Dublin interested in participating in a third *Learning @ Work* programme, a new programme was approved in early-2008. This involved delivery in six parts of Dublin and targets were established for the two-year programme. The unit for these targets was completion of a FETAC accredited module by a participant. This unit (participants/modules) ensured equality between an area training two people in one module each and an area where one person undertakes two modules. The targets are shown below.

Ballymun Learning @ Work	• 65 participants/modules
Blanchardstown Learning @ Work	• 65 participants/modules
Clondalkin Learning @ Work	• 90 participants/modules
Northside Learning @ Work	• 60 participants/modules
Rathmines Learning @ Work	• 60 participants/modules
Tallaght Learning @ Work	• 60 participants/modules
<b>Total Target for Programme</b>	<b>• 400 participants/modules</b>

This overall target represented a more than four-fold increase on the previous programme and was seen by all stakeholders as a challenging (stretch) target.

#### 4.2.3 Tendering Process for Delivery of Training

Following an open tendering process in spring 2008, the contract to deliver the training was awarded jointly to the City of Dublin VEC (which covers three of the programme areas: Ballymun, Northside and Rathmines) and County Dublin VEC (which covers Blanchardstown, Clondalkin and Tallaght). The logic of going with the two VECs across the six areas was in part to increase the coherence of the *Learning @ Work* programme. It also provided an opportunity to deepen cooperation between FÁS and the VECs in relation to education and training for people in employment. Furthermore, it had the potential to enhance cooperation with the *Skills for Work* programme, in which the VECs also had an involvement.

#### 4.2.4 Structure of Learning @ Work

*Learning @ Work* and *Skills for Work* were jointly overseen by a central Steering Group, chaired by Dublin Employment Pact. This included representatives from FÁS (for both programmes), the VECs delivering the training, two senior managers from the local implementing organisations and two on-the-ground Coordinators. (In addition, one or more members of the evaluation team attended meetings.) This was the main decision making body for the programmes, although decisions were taken between meetings based on bilateral consultation as appropriate.

In each area, a Coordinator was appointed on a half-time basis to work on programme implementation. While these people were titled ‘Coordinators’, their roles covered multiple functions:

- To publicise the programme in the relevant area
- To engage with local companies, including through local business organisations and Area Partnership networks
- To reach potential participants and persuade them of the merits of signing up for the programme
- To broker the practicalities of training with the VECs, including the course modules to be delivered and the location of the training
- To provide support to participants before, during and after training programmes, not covering support in the classroom (provided by the tutor)
- To undertake administrative work required by FÁS on the programme
- To cooperate with each other to make *Learning @ Work* a programme rather than a series of individual actions, and to participate in national activities as necessary
- To report on progress to FÁS, the Department of Education and Science, DEP and to the formative evaluators.

A website developed by the local Coordinators to publicise the programme was launched in early-2009 (see [www.learningatwork.ie](http://www.learningatwork.ie)).

The following sections describe the operation of *Learning @ Work* under a number of headings:

- Outreach work in relation to employers and participants;
- Course content and delivery of training;
- Outcomes arising from training and views of participants;
- Update on progress in implementation by area;
- Issues arising for *Learning @ Work*.

### 4.3 Outreach Work to Involve Employers and Workers

Given the substantial increase in participants expected on this *Learning @ Work* programme, there was a need for a concerted local effort to attract employers and participants to engage with the programme. Key methods used by area are summarised in Table 4.2.

Ballymun <i>Learning @ Work</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contact with 70 local companies</li> <li>• Used network of Ballymun Job Centre and local advertising</li> <li>• Early interest from two large companies so no further recruitment needed to achieve target numbers (further companies interested)</li> <li>• Recruitment within companies undertaken with HR Managers and in association with the VEC Community Education Facilitator</li> <li>• Employees in one company were facing potential redundancies over time so they had an incentive to up-skill in advance of this</li> </ul>
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Blanchards-town <i>Learning @ Work</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Link to Blanchardstown Centre very important ó General Manager of Centre on local steering group established for programme</li> <li>• Stand in Blanchardstown Centre for 3 days in 2008 and 2009 generated considerable interest. This was supplemented by visits to companies in Centre and by follow-on evening for interested participants</li> <li>• Cold calling and telephone calls to other local companies</li> <li>• Advertising in local press and via Partnership networks/publications</li> <li>• Recruitment mainly through participants</li> </ul>
Clondalkin <i>Learning @ Work</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Used Kompass directory to identify local companies of interest</li> <li>• Follow up through contact with HR people</li> <li>• Advertising in local newspapers, articles in local newsletters</li> <li>• Some cold calling ó visits on local industrial estates</li> <li>• Liaison with local VEC Education Development Officer</li> </ul>
Northside <i>Learning @ Work</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong leverage off existing NS Partnership contacts</li> <li>• Preparation of local brochure and advertising in local newspapers</li> <li>• Work through local Chamber of Commerce</li> <li>• Direct visits to local companies, retail outlets, childcare companies ó spoke to employers and sometimes employees</li> <li>• Recruitment of employees in Cadbury through 4 day campaign, on all day and night work shifts (176 people expressed an interest in upskilling)</li> <li>• Word of mouth through people already engaging with the Partnership</li> </ul>
Rathmines <i>Learning @ Work</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contact with 300 businesses, mainly via direct contact through visits from Coordinator to companies</li> <li>• Advertising in local newspaper, Partnership newsletter and on the Partnership website. Some use of Partnership contacts and networks</li> <li>• Recruitment campaign supported by flyers and pens with contact details for programme</li> <li>• Some referrals from prior course participants</li> <li>• Coordinator a former VEC tutor so had experience of working with the target group and was able to explain benefits to workers</li> </ul>
Tallaght <i>Learning @ Work</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survey of over 100 local companies</li> <li>• Information Packs sent to these companies and others</li> <li>• Links via four LES Coordinators and Chamber of Commerce</li> <li>• Stand in library during Aontas Adult Learning Week</li> </ul>

Table 4.2 shows that a variety of methods tailored to local situations were used to reach employers and participants. In general, these included a mix of the following:

- Use of Partnership and other local business networks;
- Production of local publicity material and information packs;
- Advertising in local newspapers and publications;
- (In some areas) stands in shopping centres, libraries or company premises;
- Face-to-face visits to local companies to target HR Managers and potential participants.

Coordinators said that face-to-face contact with companies and participants was crucial ó sending material or talking by phone helped but personal contact, and sometimes several meetings, were needed to recruit companies and workers.

Existing Partnership networks and contacts were used and an example is the work of Northside Partnership with Cadbury. The company's HR Director, who has an interest in life-long learning, sits on the Board of the Partnership. He arranged for the *Learning @ Work* Coordinator to meet the HR Manager responsible for manufacturing and this led (after several meetings and the benefits to the company being outlined in detail) to a recruitment campaign to attract workers in the company.

The Coordinators generally found it hard to recruit employers. Many companies did not engage, i.e. they took material but did not follow up in any way. This may reflect the general lack of training for workers with low levels of education and training, especially in small companies, as shown in Chapter 2, and a lack of interest by many companies in a life-long learning agenda. It also reflects the very difficult economic climate in Ireland in 2008 and 2009 where training was not a priority. It again shows the importance of a strong business case for training, the challenge to Coordinators of selling the programme and the fact that an enthusiastic 'sales' personality is required for this work. The lack of a national profile for the programme was noted by some Coordinators as making the on-the-ground work difficult.

Coordinators and Area Partnership Companies who had been involved in the previous *Learning @ Work* programme said that, despite these difficulties, it was easier to recruit workers in a tough economic climate. Many workers know that, if they lose their jobs, it will be difficult to find another job, and upskilling will assist them. The ability of *Learning @ Work* to engage with workers of any age, with or without a Leaving Cert, also assisted in reaching more participants.

In terms of size of companies recruited, there were three models across the areas:

- Model 1: Working with a small number of large companies to deliver training to workers, generally on the company site and during work hours, or with another company contribution. This model held in Ballymun (two companies) and Tallaght (five companies).
- Model 2: All or almost all courses comprising employees from a range of companies, with training normally outside work hours. 'Cluster' courses have predominated in Blanchardstown, Clondalkin and Rathmines.
- Model 3: A balance between the first two models, as emerged in the Northside area, with courses in one large company supplemented by cluster courses.

## 4.4 Content and Delivery of Training

### 4.4.1 Content of Training

Table 4.3 shows the training modules delivered across the six areas.

Ballymun <i>Learning @ Work</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 x FETAC Level 3 Computer Literacy</li> <li>• 1 x FETAC Level 4 Computer Applications</li> <li>• 3 x FETAC Level 5 Customer Service</li> </ul>
Blanchards-town	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 x Forklift training (RTITB accredited)</li> <li>• 3 x FETAC Level 4 IT Skills</li> </ul>



<i>Learning @ Work</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 x FETAC Level 4 Communications</li> <li>• 1 x FETAC Level 5 Care of the Older Person</li> <li>• 1 x FETAC Level 5 Customer Service</li> <li>• 1 x FETAC Level 5 Childcare</li> <li>• 1 x FETAC Level 5 Manual and Computerised Accounts</li> </ul>
Clondalkin <i>Learning @ Work</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 x Forklift training (RTITB accredited)</li> <li>• 2 x FETAC Level 4 IT Skills</li> <li>• 2 x FETAC Level 4 Computer Applications</li> <li>• 1 x FETAC Level 4 Communications</li> <li>• 1 x FETAC Level 5 Occupational First Aid</li> <li>• 1 x FETAC Level 5 Manual and Computerised Accounts</li> </ul>
Northside <i>Learning @ Work</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 x FETAC Level 3 Computer Literacy</li> <li>• 2 x FETAC Level 3 Personal Effectiveness</li> <li>• 1 x FETAC Level 4 Computer Applications</li> <li>• 2 x FETAC Level 4 Communications</li> <li>• 2 x FETAC Level 4 Personal Effectiveness</li> <li>• 1 x FETAC Level 5 Occupational First Aid</li> <li>• 1 x FETAC Level 5 Special Needs Assistants</li> </ul>
Rathmines <i>Learning @ Work</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4 x FETAC Level 3 Computer Literacy</li> <li>• 2 x FETAC Level 4 Computer Applications</li> <li>• 2 x FETAC Level 5 Occupational First Aid</li> </ul>
Tallaght <i>Learning @ Work</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 x FETAC Level 3 Computer Literacy</li> <li>• 1 x FETAC Level 3 Office Procedures</li> <li>• 5 x FETAC Level 4 IT Skills</li> <li>• 2 x FETAC Level 4 Communications</li> <li>• 1 x FETAC Level 5 Occupational First Aid</li> <li>• 1 x FETAC Level 5 Reception</li> <li>• 1 x FETAC Level 5 Customer Service</li> <li>• 1 x FETAC Level 5 Health &amp; Safety in the Workplace</li> </ul>

Table 4.3 shows:

- The *Learning @ Work* programme achieved a good mix of FETAC Level 3, 4 and 5 courses, with the vast majority of courses at Levels 4 and 5 (i.e. equivalent to Leaving Certificate subjects);
- The slightly lower number of FETAC Level 3 courses reflected the local complementarity of the programme with the DEP *Skills for Work* programme, which largely operated at FETAC Level 3;
- Courses relating to computer and IT skills were most popular, with courses offered in these subjects in all six areas;
- Other popular courses were Communications (four areas), Occupational First Aid (four areas, although not counted towards programme numbers in all areas), Customer Service (three areas), Manual and Computerised Accounts (two areas) and Forklift Driving (two areas);
- A number of specialised courses were delivered to meet specific needs as expressed by companies, e.g. Special Needs Assistants (Northside), Reception (Tallaght) and Care of the Older Person (Blanchardstown).

The list of courses offered, and the variation by area, shows that flexibility and responsiveness to local demand were features of *Learning @ Work*.

All training courses led to accredited outcomes. The widespread use of approved FETAC courses shows the good menu of course options now accredited through the FETAC framework.

One issue that arose in relation to IT courses was the desire of some participants for ECDL certification, based on their knowledge of the ECDL brand. *Learning @ Work* addressed this by delivering two equivalent FETAC Level 4 modules.

Due to efficient local management, e.g. in reducing the number of hours required per module, a number of the areas delivered more modules than had been originally envisaged at the outset of the programme.

#### 4.4.2 Delivery of Training

Delivery of training by the City of Dublin and County Dublin VECs was very successful. There were minor issues around boundaries as between local Coordinator activity and the VECs but these decreased over time and did not affect course delivery. (This issue is discussed further later in the chapter). The Coordinators were very happy with the quality of the tuition provided and their contact with participants indicated that the participants were similarly satisfied.

The Coordinators noted their own involvement with participants through the provision of mentoring or informal support before, during and after training courses. This included building participants' confidence before courses, contact to encourage people to attend classes or to enquire as to why somebody might have missed two classes in a row, contact if there was any problem, and provision of information about progression options. In Blanchardstown and Ballymun, supplementary modules on career development were delivered to participants by the Area Partnerships.

Ongoing support to participants was also provided by tutors and the experience of the VEC tutors meant that they could address some of the support needs of participants that were met by the local Coordinators in previous *Learning @ Work* programmes.

#### 4.5 Participant Training Outcomes

Most Coordinators began their publicity and recruitment work in April 2008 and courses generally started in September 2008 with a second round starting in early 2009 and a third round in September 2009. Progress as regards the training of participants is shown below.

<b>Table 4.4: Outcomes Arising from Learning @ Work (October 2009)</b>	
Ballymun <i>Learning @ Work</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Target: 65 participants/modules by March 2010</li> <li>• 46 participants/modules completed by October 2009</li> <li>• 15 participants/modules underway (to finish January 2010)</li> </ul>
Blanchardstown <i>Learning @ Work</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Target: 65 participants/modules by March 2010</li> <li>• 65 participants/modules completed by October 2009</li> <li>• 7 participants/modules due to finish in November 2009</li> </ul>

<i>Work</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 15 further participants/modules underway</li> <li>• 10 participants scheduled to start in November 2009</li> </ul>
Clondalkin Learning @ Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Target: 90 participants/modules by March 2010</i></li> <li>• 50-52 participants/modules to be completed by end-October 2009</li> <li>• A further 23 people completed an Occupational First Aid course (not measured against the area's target numbers)</li> <li>• 10 people identified for further Communication course &amp; delivery under discussion with VEC in October 2009</li> </ul>
Northside Learning @ Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Target: 60 participant/modules by March 2010</i></li> <li>• 93 participants/modules completed by October 2009</li> <li>• 47 further participants/modules underway</li> </ul>
Rathmines Learning @ Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Target: 60 participants/modules by March 2010</i></li> <li>• 62 participants/modules completed by October 2009</li> <li>• 10 participants/modules underway (to finish January 2010)</li> </ul>
Tallaght Learning @ Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Target: 60 participants/modules by March 2010</i></li> <li>• 34 participants/modules completed by October 2009</li> <li>• A further 8 undertook a FETAC Level 5 Occupational First Aid course (not counted towards numbers)</li> <li>• 22 participants/modules underway in October 2009</li> <li>• Four further courses due to start in November 2009, to have an estimated 32 participants/modules</li> </ul>

Table 4.4 shows that, based on the data from October 2009:

- Four areas (Blanchardstown, Northside, Rathmines and Tallaght) should exceed their original final targets for participants/modules once their courses conclude;
- One area (Ballymun) will be within four participants/modules of its original target;
- One area, Clondalkin, performed less well, in part because this area had the highest target number of participants at the outset and also and a change of Coordinator in late-2008 (see also later in this chapter);
- Some of the numbers achieved in Blanchardstown and Tallaght are based on training hours re-allocated from the Clondalkin programme.

The expected final outcomes, as compared to the original targets, are shown below.

	Original Target	Expected Outcome (October 2009)	Expected Outcome as % Original Target
Ballymun Learning @ Work	65	61	94%
Blanchardstown Learning @ Work	65	97	149%
Clondalkin Learning @ Work	90	50	56%
Northside Learning @ Work	60	140	233%
Rathmines Learning @ Work	60	72	120%
Tallaght Learning @ Work	60	88	147%
<b>Total Target for Programme</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>508</b>	<b>127%</b>

Table 4.5 shows that the area with the best performance as compared to the original targets will be the Northside Partnership area. This is partly due to its delivery of

Personal Effectiveness modules in association with Communications modules on a number of courses, where this was possible in the training hours available.

Table 4.5 shows that, even allowing for some level of drop-out from courses not completed by October 2009, the end outcomes may well be at least 20% above the original targets set for the 2008-10 *Learning @ Work* programme.

The original target numbers will have been exceeded in both participating VEC areas.

#### **4.6 Feedback from Participants and Companies**

As part of the evaluation process, feedback was gathered from companies participating in *Learning @ Work*, and from individual participants/trainees. A selection of this feedback is presented below.

Feedback from Ballymun is contained in Box 4.1.

##### **Box 4.1 Feedback from Boots Distribution Centre and Capita Ltd. (Ballymun)**

###### **Comments from Geraldine Geoghegan, Implementation Coordinator, Dublin Distribution Centre, Boots:**

öI would to thank Ballymun Job Centre and the City of Dublin VEC for their huge support to myself and the Learning Centre here in Boots. As well as their visits to the Learning Centre, their support on email and the phone have been over and above what I expected. I really valued their input at this time, which is hard on staff wondering what their futures will hold.

öThank-you also to the tutor, who worked really well with the staff. It was difficult at times with such a mixed class, in terms of both languages and levels.ö

###### **Feedback from Two Boots Employees:**

Jamie: öWhen I arrived in Ireland five years ago from New Zealand, I joined Boots. With Boots supporting staff re-skilling, I have caught the learning bug. I have now completed FETAC Level 3/4 in IT. Thank you to all who have supported me in this.ö

Aisling: öI have been with Boots for ten years. I am a single mother, who was happy to slog along in Boots with 4 hour shifts. Then the BJC/VEC came in to talk to us. This made me think. I have decided to start looking to my future and to hopefully continue learning and, when this recession is over, I will have a career rather than a job. Thank you. ö

###### **Comment from Aisling Morgan, HR Manager, Capita Ltd.**

öThe staff who attended the *Learning @ Work* FETAC training developed not only excellent customer service skills but became more self-confident and willing to take ownership on calls. This helps them to deal more effectively with complex customer problems and angry customers. I would highly recommend this training as a customer service training course but also as a personal development tool for staff.ö

###### **Comment from Capita trainee (name supplied)**

öThe course taught me a lot í I have more confidence and belief in myself, both inside and outside work. It made me think about my goals and what I want out of life. It also taught me about the company's development and how we can improve the centre's overall performance across the board.ö

Feedback from the Blanchardstown programme is shown in Box 4.2.

**Box 4.2: Feedback on Blanchardstown Learning @ Work training courses**

**Comment from Geraldine Donoghue, Director of Nursing, Elm Green Nursing Home**

“Learning @ Work was a fantastic opportunity for us to invest in our staff. All our staff are local people and the ultimate reward is that our residents will benefit from the knowledge our staff gained. The courses were perfectly timed as HIQA took over the assessment of residential homes from mid-2009 and all nursing homes have to ensure carers are educated to FETAC Level 5 in care of the older person. Thanks to Blanchardstown Partnership for all the help and support.”

**Comment from Participant from local solicitor firm (name supplied)**

“I found the course-work easy to follow most of the time but sometimes found it hard to get motivated to study and practice at home. But I am getting better at that as I see that when I put in the work, I get good results in the exams. I get to use some of what I learn at work although I would like to use more. The course will be great to have on my CV if I am looking for a new job and it has also given me more confidence.”

Feedback from course participants from Clondalkin provided on end-of-course evaluation forms is contained in Box 4.3.

**Box 4.3: Quotes from Participants in Clondalkin**

**Forklift Driver Training (2 session/8 participants)**

- “Course very good. Will recommend for future training.”
- “The course was excellent and I found it very satisfactory.”
- “Good course. Learnt a lot.”
- “Ran very well.”

**IT Skills FETAC L4 (with Computer Applications FETAC L4) (2 programmes/18 participants)**

- “Enjoyed it very much as I started off knowing nothing about computers. Feel I have come a long way.”
- “Was sorry it had to finish.”
- “Find the course helpful.”
- “Great.”
- “Enjoying class. Work is settling down now and I will be back to class next week.”

Information on Cadbury, a large participant in both *Learning @ Work* and *Skills for Work*, is shown in Box 4.4.

**Box 4.4: Feedback from Lorraine Clarke, HR Manager, Cadbury Ltd. (Northside Partnership area)**

Cadbury employs about 600 people in the Coolock area of North Dublin. Its HR Manager provided the following comment on the *Skills for Work* and *Learning @ Work* programmes.

“Upskilling people through learning in the workplace is a fantastic way to upskill people. A big contributory factor to the success of the courses in Cadbury has been that colleagues can learn on site in an environment they are used to, with colleagues they know. This accessible, 'safe' environment is key to colleagues signing up and to their commitment to courses.

“Benefits include upskilling, enhanced morale, giving back to the community and the satisfaction of knowing the courses make a huge difference to people’s personal lives, not just in skills but also in confidence and how they view learning.

“Cadbury is a major supporter of such programmes. One issue would be that the 49 hours required for the FETAC Level 3 in Computer Literacy was not required for any group on the programme. I know that repetition embeds learning, but I believe the course could be more than adequately covered in 35 hours. This would encourage more people to sign up (35 hours is less daunting than 49 hours) and, as funding would go further, more people could benefit and/or people could take a second module.

“The DEP and Northside Partnership have been key in making the courses happen and the Coordinators have taken a personal interest in the needs of both Cadbury and the learners, and provided a link to the VEC, which has been of great help. The Managing Director, Supply Chain Director and senior factory management are 100% behind this programme.”

**Comments from Learners in Cadbury:**

- “I enrolled in a computer course 3 months ago and it has changed my life”
- “It has given me the confidence to do anything”
- “I thought I would always be a factory operator but now I know I can do much more”
- “When is the next course?”
- “This course has opened up a world of opportunity for me”
- “The tutors are great and very patient”
- “I love coming to the class, it’s not what school used to be like, the tutor is totally looking after our needs”
- “It is great that the courses are accredited”

**Selected Comments from Detailed Remarks from Participants on FETAC Level 4 Communications course with Cadbury (all names supplied):**

“Our teacher took us to a debate one night. It was interesting and as the evening went on we all got involved and gave our opinions on some of the topics.”

“I would never have talked to a group but now it would not bother me.”

“I enjoyed it so much that it encouraged me to sign up for another evening course in the local school.”

It gave me the kick in the arse I needed to go on and do further courses!

I enjoyed the book review, the presentation, the group and team dynamics and the interaction between the group in the class. It is nice to feel that somebody can see that you have something. I also feel we were very lucky to get the chance to do these courses for free and the time after work was great as it is hard to get out of the house once you go home.

It was a long time since I had to write like that (book review) but it was very rewarding when it was completed.

**Comments from Mr. Bobby Borwick, Tutor, FETAC Level 4 Communications and Personal Effectiveness Courses, Cadbury**

Since 31<sup>st</sup> March 2009, I have been working with a group of 12 amazing adults from Cadbury's. Their enthusiasm from day one was amazing and made my job so much easier as I have been used to working with literacy students.

One of the highlights of the course was bringing them to the People's College to see how a debate worked. They could observe that everybody's opinion mattered. For some of them it was a life changing experience in terms of getting their point across and being listened to.

A very important part of the course was having someone from the VEC Guidance Service talk to them about further options regarding education/courses open to them as mature students. Because of this, a number of people from the class have decided to pursue further courses, in arts, computers (intermediate), health & safety, Irish language, literacy tutor training, Spanish and Social Care.

I have thoroughly enjoyed teaching on this course and would love to do so again in the future, should funding be available.

Box 4.5 contains feedback as provided by an employer and two participants from the Rathmines *Learning @ Work* programme.

**Box 4.5: Feedback from Rathmines Learning @ Work Programme**

**Comment from Ruth Rainsford, Construction Administrator, Accel Lifts Ltd.**

I have spoken to our Managing Director and he is very satisfied with the course. It was offered to employees because we are committed to maintaining the best possible health and safety standards. As our engineers and apprentices are often working on building sites, the occupational first aid at FETAC Level 3 will be very valuable to them. The fact that the course was at no cost to us was also significant in the current economic climate. Overall, therefore, we were very satisfied with the course and with the assistance provided.

**Quotes from Rathmines participants:**

I am really enjoying the course. I find it very informative and it moves at a good speed. I look forward to each week and am learning the computer with ease. The tutor is excellent.

Tonight is the sixth class of the course. The tutor is most helpful and attentive. I feel that, in my case, due to my lack of knowledge of computers, I need a more one-to-one approach to advance further at this stage. Part of my difficulty is in remembering terminology and names of various icons of the different functions – maybe this will follow as the course advances.



Box 4.6 shows feedback from the sixth *Learning @ Work* areas, Tallaght.

**Box 4.6: Feedback from Tallaght Learning @ Work**

**Comment from Dermot Richardson, Owner and Managing Director, Tallaght Adventure World**

öAs an employer, it was a good experience to have the staff on a training course. I enjoyed both courses, Communications and Occupational First Aid, and I think our staff, and the business, have gained from the courses.ö

**Comment from Jim Rea, HR Manager, Roadstone Dublin Ltd.**

öRoadstone Dublin Ltd initially collaborated with Co. Dublin VEC to set up a *Skills for Work* programme in early 2008, during which a basic computer course was put in place. We had found that öolderö employees were very interested as they often wished to be able to work and understand what their children were actually doing when using a computer!

öThe first course in 2008 had 8 students and was a tremendous success. As those students wanted to progress their skills, *Learning@Work* offered participation in IT Skills Level 4 and Office Procedures Level 3, which took place in 2009. It was a very positive experience for the employees who attended and its success was down to the use of outside instructors, with people given a reasonable pace to operate on and Roadstone, although not directly involved, facilitating the course. Benefits were not only cost but that it helped develop individuals and the external support encouraged employees to maintain the commitment.

öWe were in the fortunate position to have a computer training room and the course took place on a weekly basis from 5-7:30pm so it did not have a large effect on business operations.

“*Learning@Work* was an excellent programme, aimed at those who may have missed out over the years, and it helped to upskill many of our employees. This has led to individuals putting themselves forward for promotion and to improving confidence and work performance. I would strongly recommend this method to any employer who wishes to seek an alternative method to involve employees in upskilling.

öWe also acknowledge all of the help and enthusiasm of the instructors and co-ordinators.ö

**Feedback from Participants in Tallaght**

öI took part in the IT Skills Level 4 and Office Procedures Level 3 courses. I found them very good and useful and I want to progress to Computer Applications module. *Learning @ Work* benefited me in the sense that I am more confident and I communicate more, both at work and in private life. Thank you for all hard work!ö (Employee in Roadstone Dublin Ltd.)

öI just finished IT Skills Level 4 and Office Procedures Level 3 course. I enjoyed the people and the tutor, but mostly the typing and the work with the Internet. I hope to progress my IT skills.ö (Employee in Roadstone Dublin Ltd.)

öI participated in the Occupational First Aid course. I enjoyed learning new things; it was a small group so everyone got involved. The course made me capable to deal with an injured person. I really enjoyed this course and found it very interesting and am open-minded to any new courses.ö (Employee in Tallaght Adventure World)

öI took part in Communications Level 4. Things I liked most were the tutors, their teaching skills and their confidence. Now, I feel more confident myself, especially with English, and also life-wise. Iöve expanded my language knowledge and have a more professional approach at work. Iöm very happy about the course, and I would recommend it to everyone who wants to make a first step to a better future!ö (Employee in Irish Flapjack & Muffin Company)

öI completed IT Skills Level 4 course. I liked learning new skills and how to use a computer. Now, I am more able to use the computer at home. *Learning @ Work* gave me more confidence to learn and try different things and it was great to have a chance to take part in it!ö (Employee in UniPhar PLC)

öI finished IT Skills Level 4. I really enjoyed the presentations and the practical aspects that helped me in understanding the material covered. Now, I can confidently operate and use computers any time the opportunity arises. Thanks for the foresight of the organisers!ö (Employee in UniPhar PLC)

öI took part in IT Skills Level 4. The thing I liked most was that I learned in more detail MS Office, which I am very interested in. Also, the class environment was always welcoming and enjoyable. I now keep track of working hours in MS Excel at home, which is very handy and my letter writing is more structured, as I use MS Word. This is my first IT course Iöve done and hope to continue on learning. Loved it all. Thank you!ö (Employee in UniPhar PLC)

The above boxes, which reflect other feedback obtained, show a strong positive reaction to the *Learning @ Work* programme from participating employers and the cohort of low-skilled workers recruited to the programme.

As with *Skills for Work*, a benefit noted with courses in-company was improved internal communications between different departments. By contrast, one Coordinator noted that her cluster groups had noted the networking opportunities that arose from these courses. So spin-off benefits for participants and companies arose from both kinds of courses.

A Coordinator in an area with a significant amount of training with small companies noted that many sole traders in business for years have *never* undergone any training since they started their business. These are extremely vulnerable enterprises and basic training around IT skills was of particular benefit to this cohort.

One Coordinator noted the impact of the training, as cited by participants, on their families, e.g. with parents better able to support children with homework and to use a PC, if the family had one in the home.

## 4.7 Progress to October 2009 by Area

This section presents key points on implementation across the six areas, drawing on information from earlier sections.

### Ballymun Learning @ Work (Ballymun Job Centre)

- *Learning @ Work* rolled out relatively smoothly in Ballymun.

- Following contact with 70 local companies, partly using contacts of Ballymun Job Centre, two large companies (Boots and Capita) were signed up in 2008
- In both cases, there was good company involvement. Training was provided during work hours, on work premises. In some cases, agency personnel were brought in to cover for trainees. Laptops were provided for the use of trainees.
- By end-October 2009, the area had achieved 46 completed participants/modules, and 15 people were engaged in a Customer Service FETAC Level 5 course with Capita. This gave an expected total of 61 participants/modules, compared to an original target for the area of 65 person/modules.
- The Ballymun Job Centre expected all of those who completed the course modules to be awarded certification. (There was a very low level of drop-out from the courses given that they were held on company premises during work hours). All of the relevant portfolios were being (or had been) forwarded to FETAC and decisions on certification were awaited. Certification had been awarded to 32 people by October 2009.
- In terms of training hours, once its courses are completed, the area will have used its full allocation of hours (in fact it will have used slightly more and Capita were asked for a small contribution towards the final course to part-cover tuition). This is partly because there were three Computer Literacy courses in Boots for 21 people to facilitate different shifts and this used more hours than envisaged.
- The local Coordinator said that she could have obtained higher participant numbers if the training hours had been available. After beginning training with Boots and Capita, interest was expressed in *Learning @ Work* by other companies but it was decided to concentrate on rolling out comprehensive programmes with these two companies. This suggests good local interest from employers in upskilling low-skilled workers.
- In addition to the courses delivered, Ballymun Job Centre used the 'Guide' tool to take all course participants through a process of thinking about their work strengths and weaknesses and their wider careers.
- The Coordinator said that there was a considerable amount of work early on in recruiting companies, establishing courses etc. However, once the companies were recruited, a lower level of input was needed to manage the two companies and the different courses. She ended her work with the *Learning @ Work* programme at end-August 2009 and implementation of the final course was managed by the City of Dublin VEC.

### **Blanchardstown Learning @ Work (Blanchardstown Area Partnership)**

- Good links to the Blanchardstown Centre through its General Manager were critical to the programme in Blanchardstown ó a high-profile stand in the centre in 2008 and 2009 was the main source of participants for the cluster courses.
- There were also good links to local trade union officials and the Chamber of Commerce, in part through the establishment of a local Steering Group for the programme. The area therefore had a good infrastructure to support the initiative, reflecting its strong involvement in previous *Learning @ Work* programmes.
- The area had 65 participants/modules completed by mid-October 2009 with a further 7 due to be completed by 5<sup>th</sup> November 2009.
- In addition, 15 participants on a FETAC Level 5 Childcare course started in September 2009 and were due to finish March 2010, and there were plans for 10

- participants to take a FETAC Level 5 Manual & Computerised Accounts course (start date was being discussed with the VEC in October 2009 )
- The area should therefore achieve overall numbers of up to 97 participants/modules, compared to an original target of 65 participants/modules.
  - All of those completing courses were expected to get certification in the FETAC courses offered. In addition, some of those completing the computer courses had separately received ECDL certification.
  - The area offered mainly cluster programmes, although there was one course specifically for carers from Elm Green Nursing Home. Training was provided to workers from over 40 companies (one implication being a considerable workload for the local Coordinator to keep in contact with people and to track their progress or problems).
  - In relation to training hours, the area was close to, or slightly over, the total number of hours originally allocated. It received some of the surplus training hours made available by the Clondalkin area in autumn 2009.
  - Blanchardstown Area Partnership ran the 'Steps for Change' series of workshops for participants to support the 'official' modules: these were partly delivered by the local Coordinator
  - Three separate graduation ceremonies had been organised for local participants by October 2009 and it was expected that at least one more would be organised (by either the Area Partnership or the VEC)
  - Involvement from the multinational company Symantec under its CSR programme led to approximately €10,000 of local match funding for *Learning @ Work*, which allowed for the supplementary 'Steps for Change' workshops to be delivered and for the local Coordinator to continue supporting the programme to end-2009
  - In late-2009, Blanchardstown Area Partnership had organised a follow-on IT course outside *Learning @ Work* for participants, to be undertaken through the local BapTec centre.

### **Clondalkin Learning @ Work (CPLN Partnership)**

- Roll-out in Clondalkin was affected when the local Coordinator changed in October 2008, which disrupted the process of building relationships and recruiting participants.
- No large companies were recruited, despite significant efforts, so training groups were made up of clusters of workers from small local companies.
- There was close cooperation with the VEC and especially the Education Development Officer in coordinating the programme and in delivering the training (the VEC also helped to recruit participants).
- The area delivered a FETAC Level 5 course in Occupational First Aid which was not counted towards the *Learning @ Work* target numbers but which involved training for 23 people in the Roadstone company in November/December 2008.
- By end-October 2009, it was expected that 50-52 people would have completed modules. This represented 56-58% of the target number of 90 participants/modules.
- Of these, certification had been provided to the 8 forklift training participants and was expected to be awarded to all of the others who had completed courses in November 2009.

- The local Coordinator was to finish her work on the programme at end-October 2009 and any further courses were to be implemented by the County Dublin VEC, with discussions taking place between the Partnership and the VEC in this regard
- As it did not achieve its full target of participants, CPLN Area Partnership had surplus training hours available and discussions were held to see if the two other *Learning @ Work* areas with which the County Dublin VEC was working, i.e. Blanchardstown and Tallaght, could take these hours (as recommended by the interim evaluation report).
- CPLN Partnership said that, while the programme had been of great benefit to participants, it found the process of selling the programme to companies and participants difficult locally, for whatever reason. They also noted that they had been unable to recruit one or two large companies that might have had large training needs.

### **Northside Learning @ Work (Northside Partnership)**

- Cadbury was an anchor company for the local programme. Successfully developing courses here built on existing relationships between Northside Partnership and the company and a vigorous recruitment exercise. There was strong positive feedback from all levels of Cadbury about both *Learning @ Work* and *Skills for Work*, and in relation to the work of the Northside Partnership and the Dublin Employment Pact.
- A successful cluster developed around a FETAC Level 5 course for Special Needs Assistants in childcare companies ó an innovative action for workers who often have low scope for advancement
- A further cluster for 14 people at Coláiste Dhulaigh showed an ability both to manage large company relationships and recruit from small local companies.
- There was a good use of the existing Northside Partnership business network although this was just a starting point for recruitment.
- By end-May 2009, there were 93 participants/modules completed. This high number (original target was 60) was aided by providing supplementary courses in Personal Effectiveness at FETAC Levels 3 and 4.
- In addition, 49 people began Computer Applications and Communications FETAC Level 4 courses at end-October. These were workers from Cadbury, Aramark and Campbell Bewley and included some workers progressing from earlier Level 3 modules, thus creating at least the start of a life-long learning progression.
- In terms of training hours, Northside Partnership will have used almost all of the allocated training hours (with under 10 left over). Its output will be up to 140 participants trained, well in excess of the original target of 60 participants. This is notable as, on the previous (2005-06) *Learning @ Work* programme, Northside Partnership found it very difficult to recruit unskilled workers to the programme.
- A graduation event, or events, was planned for Cadbury to give credit to all of the workers from the company who undertook lifelong learning courses under the *Skills for Work* and *Learning @ Work* programmes.

### **Rathmines Learning @ Work (Rathmines Partnership)**

- The focus in this area was on small companies with training provided to trainees from well over 20 companies. The largest number of trainees from any one

- company was three people. This reflects employment in the area, with low industrial employment and more services and retail employment. The area was particularly successful in reaching owner-managed SMEs, which had never previously undertaken training programmes with employees.
- Recruitment was largely through visiting company premises and talking to potential participants and HR managers. This was supported by distributing flyers and pens with local *Learning @ Work* contact details.
  - By October 2009, 62 participants/modules had been completed and a further 10 people were in training. This compares to an original target of 60 participants/modules.
  - Two businesses released staff during work hours for training: Accel Lifts and Harvey Nursing Home.
  - In October 2009, one trainee who had left school early was exploring the option of returning to full-time education and completing her Leaving Certificate ó one example of how a positive workplace educational experience can lead to a return to lifelong learning.
  - As regards training hours, Rathmines will have used almost all of its allocated 385 hours after these courses are completed. As in the Northside Partnership area, it integrated Personal Effectiveness modules into a number of the IT courses delivered.
  - Given the emphasis on cluster courses and the relatively lack of training space in Rathmines, the provision of premises for courses was a challenge, but premises were found for all courses.

### **Tallaght Learning @ Work (Dodder Valley Partnership)**

- The area began with a survey of over 100 companies on life-long learning needs. Information packs were provided to all companies and contact with companies also occurred through the Chamber of Commerce and LES Coordinators.
- The training delivered in the area was largely focused on five companies, three large and two small. Most of the courses were delivered on the companies' own premises.
- By mid-October 2009, 34 participants/modules had been completed. This number would have been close to 50 but a relocation by Uniphar meant that a number of trainees were unable to finish their courses as planned (due to change of shifts, transport issues etc.)
- In addition, 8 people from Tallaght Adventure World and Uniphar completed a FETAC Level 5 Occupational First Aid course which did not count towards the overall programme target numbers
- 22 participants/modules began in October 2009 with workers from the Maldron Hotel and the Irish Flapjack and Muffin Company, on courses relating to reception and customer service (both FETAC Level 5)
- Dodder Valley Partnership was planning to run four further courses on the *Learning @ Work* programme ó three relating to FETAC Level 4 Computer Applications and one a FETAC Level 5 Health & Safety in the Workplace course. Recruitment for these courses was largely completed by October 2009 and it was expected that there would be 8 participants on each course. These were aided in part by the allocation to Tallaght of surplus hours from the Clondalkin programme.



- In total, if completed, this would give 88 participants/modules (plus 8) for the Tallaght Learning @ Work, compared to an original target of 60 participants/modules
- The local Coordinator, employed by the Dodder Valley Partnership, was central in the application of *Learning @ Work* into the Aontas Workplace Learning National Awards, leading to a highly commended national STAR award.
- The Coordinator also presented at a seminar organised by the National Centre for Partnership and Performance (NCPP) and the National College of Ireland entitled: How to make learning work ó A Seminar on Education and Skills for the Irish Workforce

## 4.8 Issues Arising in relation to Learning @ Work

### 4.8.1 Are Area Partnerships Companies Required?

Were there too many stakeholders (or, as described by one person, middlemen) in the *Learning @ Work* programme? Organisations involved were:

- The national funders, FÁS and the Department of Education and Science, which did not have day-to-day involvement with the programme;
- DEP, which coordinated the programme on a day-to-day basis, chaired the Steering Group, managed the programme financially, managed overall publicity for the programme, managed the programme evaluation and acted as a broker between the stakeholders;
- Six local organisations that implemented and part-funded the programme on the ground: five Area Partnership Companies and Ballymun Job Centre;
- The two relevant VECs that delivered the training to participants and companies.

The question raised in the research was whether the local organisations, and perhaps DEP, were needed. An alternative would be for FÁS to ask the organisation(s) contracted to deliver the training (in this case the VECs) to also recruit companies and participants.

Arguments for such an approach are that it might streamline the programme from an administrative perspective, making it less cumbersome with a reduced requirement for coordination and lower costs. The approach assumes that the VECs or other training companies would be able to access sufficient companies and low-skilled trainees, at a lower cost.

Arguments for *maintaining* local organisations rest on the added value that they bring to the programme. Based on discussions with the local Coordinators, this added value falls under a number of headings:

1. Tailored **local publicity** for the programme through advertisements in community publications, stands at local events etc.
2. Ability to use **existing employer networks** linked to Partnership companies



3. Ability to use **other Partnership contacts**, e.g. Board members of Partnership companies include representatives of trade unions, Chambers of Commerce or other business networks as well as FÁS and VEC representatives.
4. **Ability and flexibility to reach small companies**, including small local retail and service businesses, and perhaps marginalised workers, who are normally not reached by state training programmes. Many workers in small services and retail firms are currently vulnerable to unemployment.
5. **Facilities**, and relationships with organisations with further facilities. (This may be less important if the VECs are delivering training but would be important with a private training company.)
6. Partnershipsø community development principles and ongoing work, which helps in providing **mentoring to participants during courses**. Their other target groups give them an empathy with low-skilled workers, who may lack confidence in their ability to return to education and training.
7. Benefit of **bringing a new cohort of people into contact with a Partnership**, which may support participants for progression options or in relation to other matters in the future.

Not all of these benefits were achieved in all areas under *Learning @ Work* but they constitute potential benefits of using Area Partnership Companies. Partnerships also noted their involvement with the programme for almost a decade and the fact that this has generated considerable practical knowledge around its implementation.

To some extent, the question of whether or not local organisations should be in a programme such as *Learning @ Work* is a trade-off. It may be possible to achieve the same number of trainees at a somewhat lower cost, and with a less cumbersome structure, by FÁS working directly with the training providers but this could have a downside. In particular, it risks missing out on workers from smaller companies, as well as some of the other features listed above.

Whichever route is chosen, the following tasks would still need to be undertaken:

- Generation of publicity for the programme at local level so that it is seen by companies and potential participants;
- Getting in touch with companies (assuming it is not left to companies to contact the trainer) and explaining how such training can be of benefit to their organisation;
- Talking to potential participants and explaining the advantages of returning to education and training;
- Arrangement of training courses, venues, tutors etc.;
- Mentoring participants during the training courses and ensuring the courses meet the expectations of both participants and companies (especially when a considerable number of different companies are involved).

#### 4.8.2 Process of Tendering for Training Providers

The training providers for *Learning @ Work* were sourced through an open tendering process. It was noted that:

1. The tendering process in itself takes a considerable amount of effort for organisations tendering and may not be the most efficient way to organise such training.
2. The modules envisaged in the original tender documentation changed in most areas, with new modules being substituted for the original modules mentioned.

As mentioned earlier, the tendering process was a condition of the increased FÁS funding for this *Learning @ Work* programme. In relation to the modules having changed, the original tendering documentation did state that the research on demand for modules by the local areas was preliminary and that organisations tendering should have the flexibility to allow for changes in the courses delivered. However, further, or better, research might have been done in advance of the tendering process.

### 4.8.3 Number of Companies per Area and Work of Coordinators

In some areas, *Learning @ Work* was implemented in a small number of companies and this raises a question as to whether half-time Coordinators were required in all areas. This issue was not raised in designing *Learning @ Work* as the model in previous programmes had been largely to work with participants from multiple companies, and because the targets set for all areas seemed challenging.

The evaluation research suggests that, in areas where the target numbers were achieved through a relatively small numbers of companies, the main work of the Coordinator was early in the programme, around recruitment of these companies and course organisation. Thereafter, the workload fell although there remained an ongoing liaison role, as well as potential recruitment for further (follow-on) courses, mentoring for participants, graduation ceremonies etc.

In areas where the programme was delivered through a large number of companies, through æclusterøcourses, there were a number of extra Coordinator tasks:

- The Coordinator needed to wait until a full group was recruited and this meant that some people dropped off from the list while waiting for the course to start. Recruitment therefore tended to be a longer process;
- There was a need to organise a location for the training;
- If training occurred outside the workplace, it was harder to get people to go every week (hence an increased Coordinator role in contacting participants on an ongoing basis, to support attendance);
- Trainees were more likely to drop out if they were not with an in-company group, in which participants knew each other.

There is therefore a case for reducing the Coordinator time as the programme moves from its recruitment phase to the management of courses underway (assuming the course lasts for a fixed term). This is particularly true in areas with a small number of companies. (However, this raises a risk of incentivising Coordinators to focus only on small companies and to ignore real needs, or the organisation of follow-on courses, in larger companies.)

#### 4.8.4 Role of the Steering Group

A practical issue was that a number of stakeholders felt that the Steering Group, while useful, could have played an even more constructive role.

Two issues noted in relation to the composition of the group were:

- It would have been more appropriate to have personnel present from the Partnerships at the level of Education or Employment Coordinators rather than (in part) at the level of local Coordinator.
- The fact that not all six local areas were represented made it difficult for the group to take decisions on local areas, as an area may not have had a voice in the discussion. (This was despite the process of the Coordinators meeting collectively before Steering Group meetings so those attending could represent the wider group.)

#### 4.8.5 Engaging with Companies and Workers

While the economic recession made it was easier to recruit workers than in the previous *Learning @ Work* programme, the Coordinators said that it remained hard to persuade employers to engage in a life-long learning programme. (This was also true also for the *Skills for Work* programme.)

In relation to workers, this is a positive development. Given the clear need for this target group to upskill (see Chapter 2), the recession may actually have created an opportunity to reach these workers as they are more aware than ever of their low skills and the vulnerability this causes in their current job or if they lose their job.

In relation to companies, it is understandable that they have been distracted in 2008 and 2009 given the sharp economic downturn. However, there is also a case that upskilling has never been more important for firms in the context of the severe competitive pressures being experienced. The fact that the message is still not understood by many employers suggests the need for a national campaign, with support from both business organisations and trade unions, around the need for companies to engage more with life-long learning for their employees.

The challenge of recruiting both companies and workers emphasises the importance of people in the local areas operating on the ground. These people need an appropriate *mix of skills*, including sales skills and considerable enthusiasm for talking to companies and workers. The choice of suitable local Coordinators was a key determinant of success for the programme.

#### 4.8.6 On-the-Ground Coordination with VECs

Cooperation between local Coordinators and the VECs generally went well. However, there were some issues around the boundaries of the VECs' work and the Coordinators' work. For example, in some areas, the VEC became involved in

recruiting companies or participants, which was intended to be a function of the local Coordinator. This happened in cooperation with the local Coordinators. In other areas, Coordinators sought to influence the choice of tutor for a course (a VEC matter).

In relation to contact with participants during courses, the process varied between areas with both the local Coordinators and the VECs involved to different extents.

If the programme operates again, it should be possible to draft guidelines as regards respective responsibilities. However, some flexibility may be useful as the relative experience of different personnel, the nature of the local area, the personalities involved etc. influence optimal local relationships.

The boundaries would probably be clearer if a private sector training company was involved but the growing role of VECs in workplace training means that they have knowledge of the kind of work being undertaken by the Coordinators.

A separate relationship is that between FÁS and the VECs, a relationship of strategic importance at national level, given the combination of education and training elements in the life-long learning agenda. Both *Skills for Work* and *Learning @ Work* facilitated greater cooperation between these organisations, at least in Dublin, and this is a positive outcome of both programmes.

## Chapter 5: Key Findings and Conclusions

### 5.1 Context for Conclusions

This report documents and reviews the rationale for, and work of, the DEP *Skills for Work and Learning @ Work* programmes during 2008 and 2009. Conclusions in this regard are presented in Chapter 5, as are suggestions as regards possible continuation of the programmes. The latter are tentative in the context of the uncertainty in late-2009 around the available funding for both programmes, and (if they are funded) about their future organisation.

### 5.2 Underlying Rationale for Programmes

Chapter 2 shows a strong rationale for labour market programmes in Ireland targeted at upskilling low-skilled workers. Key points are as follows:

- Some 30% of Irish workers are low-skilled, including both older workers who left education after primary school or after the Junior/Intermediate Cert and younger people who left school before Leaving Cert level during the recent period of economic growth. Ireland also has a relatively high proportion of people with low literacy skills.
- Evidence from studies from both Ireland (FÁS and the ESRI) and abroad shows that training for existing workers tends to focus on workers who already have good levels of education and training, who are younger, who work in the public sector or in large organisations. As such, there is under-provision of education and training for low-skilled workers, especially older workers, in private sector companies.
- The justification for investing in the upskilling of these workers is spelt out clearly in a range of Irish policy reports, including from the Enterprise Strategy Group, the NESF, the NESF, the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs and others. It is also official policy of the Departments of Education and Science (through its lifelong learning work) and Enterprise, Trade and Employment (including through its 'smart economy' framework). While the 2009 'Report of the Special Group on Public Sector Numbers and Expenditure Programmes' does not recognise a market failure to justify state-funding for training for people in jobs, such a case (for low-skilled workers) has been set out by the NESF and accepted in the NDP.
- Investment in low-skilled workers fits with the EU's policy of 'flexicurity' with its objective of upskilling the EU workforce in the coming years and with programmes in other EU Member States.

Besides the general rationale for programmes providing education and training to low-skilled workers, labour force data shows that the majority of workers losing their jobs in the current recession have low skills. As such, the rationale for programmes such as *Skills at Work* and *Learning @ Work* is, if anything, strengthened in the current economic downturn, with the benefit/cost ratio of upskilling likely to have increased further.

As such, it would be positive if decision making at national level in relation to labour market policy was not framed as **either** training for unemployed people **or** training for low-skilled workers in employment. Both are needed and, while conscious of the tight public spending environment, there is a strong case that supports the maintenance and, if possible, strengthening of programmes such as *Skills for Work* and *Learning for Work* during the economic recession<sup>15</sup>.

### 5.3 Skills for Work

The following conclusions arise from Chapter 3 in relation to the DEP *Skills for Work* programme that ran from mid-2008 to mid-2009:

- The programme began slowly and there was a low pick-up in the number of companies and learners in the six months to end-2009. This was in part due to the time needed to generate contacts in companies, partly due to the two Coordinators settling into new jobs and partly due to the need to develop a system to organise recruitment. This period also coincided with a severe Irish economic downturn.
- After the start of 2009, activity picked up considerably and, when the programme concluded in June 2009, 356 trainees were either in training or were awaiting approval from FÁS to begin training. This number was achieved from a wide range of companies and the Coordinators developed a set of relationships and approaches which were generating a steady monthly inflow of participants. The Coordinators also worked closely with the *Learning @ Work* programme to the mutual benefit of both programmes.
- The figure of 356 participants represents 99.1% of the target set by FÁS for the DEP *Skills for Work* programme. In addition, the DEP Coordinators were in discussion with companies in relation to a further 142 potential learners. Contacts in this regard were passed to FÁS at the conclusion of the DEP programme.
- Data on learners showed that only 15% had a Leaving Certificate, implying that the DEP *Skills for Work* programme addressed the needs of the group targeted by the FÁS Workplace Basic Education Fund, i.e. the most low-skilled workers.
- Most (but not all) of the training provided under the programme related to FETAC Level 3 computer literacy. One possible reason for this may be the desire by workers, in an economic recession, to gain portable rather than employer- or sector-specific skills. It also suggests a widespread need among low-skilled workers in the Irish private sector for computer skills training.
- The monitoring system put in place by the Coordinators in late-2008 helped them to achieve their goals. The process of working with both the VECs and private sector training companies also helped to leverage existing relationships to access more companies and participants.
- As such, and especially given its slow start-up, the DEP *Skills for Work* programme appears to have worked well and to have met its objectives at both DEP and national level.

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<sup>15</sup> NALA (2009) recently called for increased funding for the Workplace Basic Education Fund to continue providing courses and to promote and to develop creative and innovative measures to increase participation rates such as employee-led learning and blending distance learning into workplace learning programmes. It also called for workers to have access to paid learning leave to develop basic literacy and numeracy skills.

The national *Skills for Work* programme was reorganised in mid-2009 and, for the second half of 2009, it was decided that FÁS would work directly with the VECs in relation to delivery of the programme. No decisions had been made by November 2009 in relation to programme delivery in 2010.

This evaluation did not relate to the national programme and it is not possible to comment on how best the national programme might work. However, it is clear from the experience of the DEP programme that demand exists from many low-skilled workers, with education levels of below Leaving Cert level, for courses which will address basic literacy and numeracy issues, including computer literacy.

If FÁS decides to implement the programme in partnership with the VECs, without other partners around the country, then a key challenge will be to ensure that these organisations have the on-the-ground capacity and reach to recruit low-skilled workers to courses, in both small and large private sector companies. This will include the ‘selling’ of the programme, and its rationale, to companies and workers who may be initially unsure about its benefits. The relationship with the VECs offers the possibility of further increasing the ‘education’ content of the programme (i.e. with courses aimed not just at workplace skills) and the opportunity for participants to progress over time to further education and training options.

## 5.4 Learning @ Work

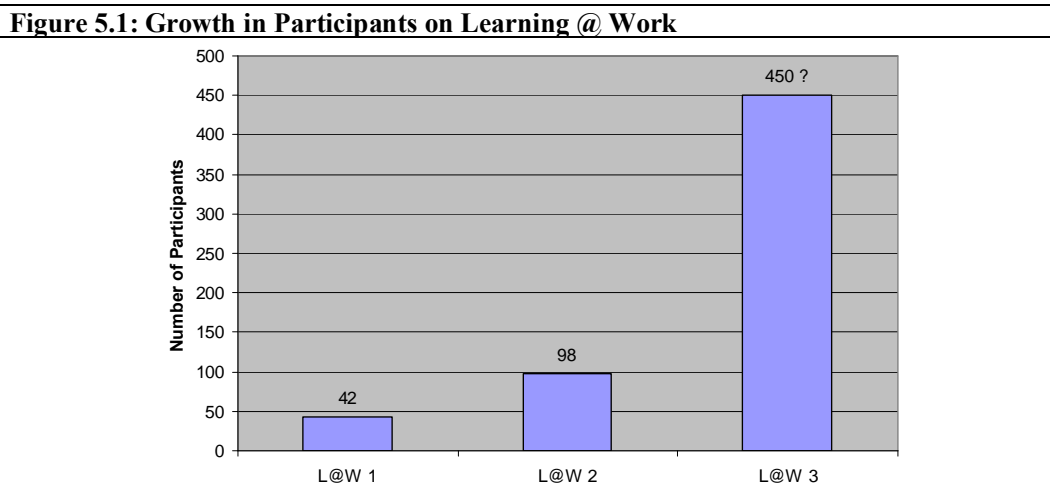
The following conclusions arise from Chapter 4 in relation to the *Learning @ Work* programme which started in spring 2008 and runs to March 2010.

- The key *Learning @ Work* performance indicator was ‘participant/modules’ and, as the programme has not yet ended, estimates of the number of participants/modules at this point is preliminary. However, based on discussions with the six area Coordinators in October 2009, it is possible that the final number of participants/modules will be greater than 500, which would be 125% of the original target, and it is probable that the number will be in the region of 480, which would be 120% of the original target. Almost all of these people will receive FETAC certification in the modules completed.
- Given that the targets adopted by FÁS, the Department of Education & Science, DEP and the six areas at the outset were seen as challenging, and given the very tough economic climate of 2008-10, this represents a very successful outcome for the third DEP *Learning @ Work* programme.
- In addition, over 30 people completed FETAC Level 5 Occupational First Aid training courses that were not counted towards the numbers on this programme. A further 50 or so participants partially completed FETAC modules.

A conservative figure for the likely number of participant/modules in *Learning @ Work* between 2008 and 2010, compared to the two previous *Learning @ Work* programmes, is shown in Figure 5.1. Figure 5.1 shows that the third DEP *Learning @ Work* programme moved the programme on considerably from the previous pilot programmes. Changes to the criteria for choosing participants, an increase from 5 to 6



in the number of areas, a more hands-on role from FÁS and higher funding succeeded in expanding the programme and delivering on the programme objectives.



An objective of this *Learning @ Work* programme was to move towards mainstreaming the programme, building on the two previous pilots. The fact that responsibility for the programme moved to the *Services to Business* division of FÁS, the significant VEC involvement, and the more than four-fold increase in the numbers trained, all represent significant steps in this regard. The debate on the appropriate level of involvement for local organisations should also be seen in this context.

Other observations in relation to how *Learning @ Work* operated are as follows:

- As in previous rounds, it was not easy to recruit companies and workers to the programme. However, the recruitment of some 500 workers shows that the demand does exist and, across the six parts of Dublin in which the programme operated, there were examples of both small and large companies that signed up for the programme.
- The Coordinators suggested that, while not easy, it was less difficult to recruit workers in the tough economic climate of 2008 and 2009 (compared to previous programmes) suggesting that workers are more open in a difficult economic climate to the idea of returning to education and training;
- There is still a gap in understanding among many companies, and workers, about the importance and benefits of lifelong learning for workers.
- The greatest level of demand was for courses relating to computers, suggesting (as with *Skills for Work*) that a gap exists in the provision of IT training to workers.
- A range of different modules were delivered across the six areas, showing both the flexibility of the *Learning @ Work* model and the menu of FETAC modules now available. The requirement that all modules delivered be FETAC accredited did not prove in any way an obstacle to programme delivery.
- While the structure of *Learning @ Work* involved a range of partners, delivery on the ground was relatively efficient, with good relationships formed between relevant VEC and Area Partnership personnel around course delivery.

- Feedback gathered from companies and participants was strongly positive and suggests that those companies that took part in the programme were very happy with it.

In light of the tighter public expenditure in 2009 and 2010, it is unclear if there will be funding available to extend or expand the *Learning @ Work* programme. However, points relating to a possible future *Learning @ Work* programme are as follows:

- *Learning @ Work* 2008-10 shows the appetite for learning among low-skilled workers if they are properly targeted. As such, there is clear evidence of demand for subsequent programmes.
- The education dimension has been important to *Learning @ Work* from its outset and can be acknowledged more, including through greater involvement with and from the Department of Education and Science.
- Greater national efforts are required to promote life-long learning for low-skilled workers. This needs to happen both with companies and with workers. It needs to involve both employer organisations and trade unions and should, if possible, link to wider labour market efforts being undertaken by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment in the context of the economic recession.
- The lack of understanding of the importance of lifelong learning by some employers suggests that the idea of paid learning leave for low-skilled workers, as advocated by NALA among others, should be explored.
- *Learning @ Work* had an envisaged cost at its outset of almost €1m. With a target for participants/modules of 400, this gave a unit cost of €2,500 per participant/module. Given that funding was reduced for the programme during 2009, and that the number of participants will be close to 500, the actual unit cost achieved will be under €2,000 (including administration, evaluation and other costs). As some central costs such as preparation of a website and production of materials have now been incurred, it should be possible to reduce unit costs to approximately €1,500 in subsequent programmes. As economies of scale apply in each area (given start-up costs), the bigger the programme, the lower will be the unit cost achieved.
- There is a trade off as regards the incorporation of local Partnership Companies or other local organisations in the programme. On the positive side, these have experience around labour market issues, they reach small companies that tend not to be reached by other programmes, they offer on-the-ground local networks and they have shown that they can support participants in returning to education. On the other hand, they add somewhat to the complexity of the programme (e.g. if the programme ran nationwide) and it may be possible for a training delivery organisation to do at least some of their work. They may also be subject to reorganisation in 2010. If programme funders proceed without such organisations, they need to be sure that they can replicate the tasks which have been undertaken well by the Partnership Companies in the current programme, at the same cost or a lower cost.
- Given the concern that the programme can focus too much on large companies, a set proportion of participants (e.g. at least 40%) in future programmes should be from companies with under 100 employees in total.
- As the time required for recruitment and arrangement of courses is highest early in the programme, this should be taken into account in the design of future programmes. If local Coordinators are used, then on a 24 month programme, it

might be reasonable to have the Coordinator work for 2.5 days per week in the first year and 1 day per week in the second year. Some flexibility will be needed in this regard.

## 5.5 DEP Role

The work of Dublin Employment Pact underpinned both the *Skills for Work* and *Learning @ Work* programmes. In particular, DEP was responsible for:

- The design of the programmes and, in particular, the detailed design of *Learning @ Work*;
- Recruitment of the *Skills for Work* Coordinators;
- Management of the tendering process for trainers on *Learning @ Work*;
- Financial management of both programmes;
- Management of the Steering Group for the programmes;
- Management of the evaluation process for the programmes;
- Interaction with national agencies through the ongoing work, and via the Board members, of DEP to publicise the work of the programmes and the learning arising from them;
- Provision of day-to-day support to Coordinators;
- Work as a neutral broker as between the different organisations involved in the programmes when issues arise between them.

Based on the views of the different organisations involved in the two programmes, DEP is generally seen to have played a positive role in coordinating the programmes. Advantages of its role are that:

- The relatively small size of DEP makes it easy to hold it accountable for the programmes, and means the programmes are important to DEP. This gave DEP an incentive to deliver on the agreed target numbers for both programmes.
- The small and neutral role of DEP vis-à-vis the different other organisations on the programmes means that it was accepted as an independent broker. This was especially important on *Learning @ Work* given the involvement of national and local organisations. For example, with the funding reductions in 2009, DEP mediated these changes to ensure they were implemented in ways least harmful to the programmes.
- The wider role of DEP around labour market innovation is important in the current economic environment and gives DEP an opportunity to mainstream learning from the programmes. For example, DEP was working in 2009 to prepare a Dublin regional employment strategy.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, an issue as to whether the composition of the Steering Group is optimal was raised during the research process.

The possible involvement of DEP on future *Skills for Work* or *Learning @ Work* programmes must await decisions on the programmes themselves. As discussed earlier, an alternative model would be to cut out DEP and the local organisations. However, if DEP does remain involved, then the following suggestions arise:

- There is scope for DEP to obtain more leverage off its Board members in relation to publicity for the life-long learning agenda and publicity for the learning arising from the programmes.
- As *Learning @ Work* has evolved in each of its three programmes, capturing ongoing learning and guiding this programme to a mainstream home in the future requires a hands-on focus which is well suited to DEP given its role with *Learning @ Work* since 2001.
- Rather than having one Steering Group, there may be scope to have two groups, one responsible for coordinating the on-the-ground activities of the programmes and one with a more policy making role. The former would contain all local Coordinators and the latter would contain either the Education or Employment Managers from the Area Partnership Companies.

Whatever its future involvement in programmes for low-skilled workers, DEP has a role in sharing the learning arising from its deep involvement with three *Learning @ Work* programmes to support lifelong learning for vulnerable workers in employment. Given the lack of such programmes in Ireland, the *Learning @ Work* programmes, and their evaluation reports, provide valuable information for mainstream education and training agencies.

## 5.6 Concluding Remarks

As this evaluation was being finalised in the final quarter of 2009, political debate was dominated by the continuing difficult national economic situation and the expectation of further reductions in public sector spending in the December 2009 budget.

Dublin Employment Pact's *Skills for Work* and *Learning @ Work* programmes were conceived and designed in a different climate in late-2007 and early-2008. The *Skills for Work* programme had been reorganised nationally in 2007 and was being implemented on a regional basis in 2008. The *Learning @ Work* programme, having being piloted on a relatively small scale on two occasions by DEP, was being expanded significantly, and taking a step towards being mainstreamed with funding provided under the national FÁS *One Step Up* programme. It represented an opportunity to develop a model to help to implement the recommendations of the National Skills Strategy in relation to upskilling the Irish workforce.

Judged by the programmes' criteria for success at the outset, both programmes have been successful.

*Skills for Work* took time to build momentum, which is understandable on a one-year programme with two new Coordinators. However, by the second half of the programme it was more than meeting its monthly participant targets and implementing literacy and numeracy courses for low-skilled workers in a wide range of companies. It hit over 99% of its target for participant numbers over its year of operation (despite the economic climate) and the Coordinators were confident that numbers could have increased in a subsequent year. Implementation proved that demand exists from workers for such training in private sector companies in Dublin, especially in relation to FETAC Level 3 modules on computers and in relation to

personal development (through modules such as Communications and Personal Effectiveness). Given the reorganisation of *Skills for Work* in mid-2009, implementation through DEP (and other regional organisations) was discontinued. However, should a regional structure be required in the future, the DEP model has shown that it can be a viable model.

*Learning @ Work* was implemented in the six areas envisaged in the project plan from early-2008 (unlike in the previous programme when it had to be discontinued in two areas due to a difficulty in recruiting participants). It surpassed expectations in four of the six areas, achieved an outcome of 120% of the original target, and is on track to deliver some 500 participants/modules. Credit is due to the implementing organisations in this regard. The programme proved that demand exists for FETAC Level 3-5 training courses among low-skilled workers in both large and small private sector companies in Dublin, if these workers are accessed and the benefits of such training communicated to them. The issue of whether local organisations are needed to implement the programme is an issue that one would expect as a programme moves from a pilot phase to being mainstreamed. However, the 2008-10 shows that, while cumbersome, Area Partnerships and other local organisations access local knowledge and energy and deliver participant throughput.

While the national economic context changed considerably from late-2007, Chapter 5 has argued that the case for public investment in the education and training of low-skilled workers is, if anything, stronger in the context of the economic recession. With the ESRI forecasting that the number of jobs in the economy will fall by 12% from start-2009 to end-2010, a key way to support levels of employment is to support vulnerable workers to up-skill, which will increase their productivity and the productivity of their firms. Such programmes also increase their employability if they lose their jobs and in the medium-term, will support the Irish economy in moving back towards growth.

There is therefore considerable merit in the continued funding of programmes to educate and train low-skilled workers, such as the DEP *Skills for Work and Learning @ Work* programmes.

## Appendix 1: Surveys on Life-Long Learning for Workers

Chapter 2 cites four studies on the training of workers in Ireland, undertaken by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2008); Philip O'Connell of the ESRI (2004); FÁS (2008); and the OECD (2008). As these studies employ somewhat different definitions, have somewhat different timescales, the different definitions and timescales used are outlined below, as are the relevant questions from the four studies.

<b>Table A-1: Further Information on Studies relating to Upskilling of Workers as cited in Chapter 2</b>		
<b>Report</b>	<b>Definition and Timescale Used in Report</b>	<b>Relevant Questions from Survey</b>
<p><b>European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound), 2008</b></p> <p>Who Needs Up-Skilling?</p> <p>Based on data from the Fourth European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS)</p>	<p>Participation in at least one of four types of training: training paid for or provided by employer, training paid for by oneself, on-the-job training, and other forms of on-site training and learning.</p> <p>Time scale: past 12 months</p>	<p>Over the past 12 months, have you undergone any of the following types of training to improve your skills or not?</p> <p>A - Training paid for or provided by your employer, or by yourself if you are self-employed</p> <p>B - Training paid for by yourself</p> <p>C - On-the-job training (co-workers, supervisors)</p> <p>D - Other forms of on-site training and learning (e.g. self-learning, on-line tutorials etc)</p> <p>E ó Other</p> <p>If yes to any of the above, indicate total number of days</p>
<p><b>O'Connell, P. (ESRI, 2004): Who Generally Trains? The Effects of Personal and Workplace Characteristics on Training at Work</b></p> <p>Based on data from the Survey of Employees' Attitudes and Experiences of the Workplace, ESRI, 2003</p>	<p>Participation in employer sponsored training.</p> <p>Timescale: past two years</p>	<p>Have you received any education or training paid for or provided by your present employer over the past two years?</p> <p>Do you feel that this education or training has been of use to you in carrying out your current job?</p> <p>Do you feel that the skills or knowledge which you have acquired in this education or training would be of any use to you in getting a job with another employer or was the education or training specific to your current job only?</p>
<p><b>(FÁS, 2008), Participation of the Employed in Education/Training 2007</b></p> <p>Based on data from the QNHS, 2007</p>	<p>Persons whose principal economic status was at work received education/training</p> <p>Timescale: past four weeks</p>	<p>Have you been a student or an apprentice during the last four weeks?</p> <p>Have you attended any courses, seminars, conferences or private lessons outside the regular education system during the past four weeks?</p>

<p><b>OECD, 2008, Education at a Glance</b></p> <p>Based on data from the Lifelong Learning of the 2003 EU Labour Force Survey Ad Hoc Module on Lifelong Learning</p>	<p>Non-formal job-related education and training ó expected number of hours over lifetime, and number of hours over the past 12 months.</p> <p>Job-related training is defined as follows: ðthe respondent takes part in this activity in order to obtain knowledge and/or learn new skills for a current or a future job, increase earnings, improve job-and/or career opportunities in a current or another field and generally improve his/her opportunities for advancement and promotionø</p>	<p>ðHow many, if any, courses, seminars, conferences or private lessons or instructions have you received outside the regular education system within the last 12 months?ø</p> <p>ðHow many hours did you spend at the most recent taught activity over the past 12 monthsø</p> <p>What were the main reasons for participating in this taught activity? [ðMainly job related reasonsøis one of the response options]</p> <p>Did any part of this taught activity take place during paid working hours?</p> <p>(Questions repeated for all taught activities participated in outside the regular education system over the previous 12 months)</p>
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