



Learning @ Work

Evaluation of the Pilot Programme Linking Education and the Workplace

by Fiona Joyce, Olwen Delaney and Dr. Orna Duggan, MAZARS

A joint initiative of the Dublin Employment Pact, FÁS and the Department of Education and Science on educational progression in the workplace.

In association with Tallaght, Northside and Clondalkin Partnerships.



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This evaluation was carried out by Mazars Consulting. Part of Mazars, a leading Business Advisory, Accounting and Consulting firm based in Dublin, Mazars Consulting are highly experienced in carrying out evaluations of publicly funded projects similar to *Linking Education and the Workplace*. Mazars dedicated team of consultants bring a range of skills which allow comprehensive evaluation of social, economic, financial and administrative considerations within the project framework. The Mazars team responsible for this evaluation was Fiona Joyce (Project Manager) Olwen Delaney and Dr Orna Duggan (Project Consultants).

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Mazars, Dublin, July 2004.

Preface

In 2001 the Education and Employment Working Group of the Dublin Employment Pact (DEP) identified as a priority issue the learning needs of young adults who had left school with a Junior Certificate only and were now in full time employment. The broad-based membership of the working group includes the Department of Education and Science and FÁS, and both organisations agreed with enthusiasm to collaborate and co-fund the project with the DEP.

The clear link between educational qualifications and improved job and career prospects is well documented. While quality employment and further in-work learning opportunities for those with optimum educational levels are considerable in the current economic situation, this is not the case for the low skilled or those with only pre-Leaving Certificate qualifications.

A continuing source of concern in the Dublin region is the school retention rate to Leaving Certificate and the participation rate at third level, both of which are below the national average. The long-term consequences of minimal qualifications among relatively large numbers of young adults are a serious issue for society, particularly in the era of the knowledge economy.

The project proposed to provide education and training opportunities with the active co-operation of employers and with the aim of improving the skills and education levels of young adults. Three areas in Dublin were selected, and the Clondalkin, Tallaght and Northside Partnerships were contracted as lead partners to bring together and work with a variety of local agencies and interests in developing and delivering the project. In agreement with employers. Young adults were released from the workplace on a part-time basis to undertake a range of personal development and educational and training modules.

The report highlights that the greatest challenge facing the project in the set-up phase was the recruitment of employer partners. However, the commitment, interest and enthusiasm of the employers who ultimately became involved proved to be among the main successes of the project. This reflected the eagerness and sense of fulfilment achieved by the young people who also committed their own time to take part in the learning modules developed through the project. Involvement in the project led to the development of alternative career pathways, based on the recognition of innate ability and accreditation of new learning, thus opening up new progression paths in work through education for those with few formal qualifications.

The support expressed in the Partnership agreement *Sustaining Progress* for the model developed in Linking Education and the Workplace brings a new and important dimension to the process, representing a formal commitment by the social partners and government to its further development. We are confident that the lessons learned and identified in this Evaluation Report will contribute greatly to the success of the new round of the initiative.

The Dublin Employment Pact would like to thank the authors of the report, Fiona Joyce, Olwen Delaney and Dr. Orna Duggan of MAZARS Consulting, for their excellent work in completing this important evaluation.



Catherine Durkin, Chairperson, DEP Education and Employment Working Group

Comment from FÁS

FÁS is particularly pleased to be directly involved as a partner and co-funder of this pilot project that explored how best to investigate, promote and provide for the development of young workers.

FÁS has a long tradition in work based learning. Every FÁS course includes modules with practical hands on experience situated in the real world and held on the employer's premises. The current Linking Education and the Workplace pilot project builds on this rich experience but reverses the process. This project gave young workers "time out" from the working day to attend training and education modules that linked their current job, their previous education and training and their personal career plans and aspirations. It gives expression to the concept of life long learning in a very real way.

Progression for young workers within the workplace is one of the keys to both career fulfilment and to ensuring a skilled and adaptable workforce in the future. Traditionally, the individual has addressed this need. In today's rapidly changing labour market, it is critical that both the worker and the employer work co-operatively to their mutual benefit, both medium and long term.

The wide and diverse representation on this pilot has shown that there is both a need and a willingness to engage in structured workplace learning to the benefit of young workers. Many of these young adults could otherwise be left behind due to their lack of general qualifications on which they could build their working careers. Linking Education and the Workplace, or Accrediting Young Workers, is a joint pilot involving young workers, employers, FÁS, the Department of Education and Science, Area Partnerships and other development agencies and schools, under the aegis of the education and employment group of the Dublin Employment Pact.

FÁS looks forward with anticipation to the next phase of Linking Education and the Workplace, in the context of the contribution it can make to developing models of good practice for the accreditation of young workers, and in the promotion of cooperation between and better utilisation of, both the training and educational systems. We look forward to the eventual mainstreaming of the learning outcomes across both rural and urban settings.

We hope that its placement within the Sustaining Progress Agreement will allow for the expansion of the next phase of the project beyond the existing three areas of Dublin to other locations within the Dublin region.

Guss O'Connell, Manager, Community Based Training Support Unit, FÁS

Comment from Department of Education and Science

The Dublin Employment Pact (DEP) has been to the fore in collating and disseminating research and best practice in tackling educational disadvantage, particularly in terms of tackling early school leaving and the effects of early school leaving.

Innovative strategies have been found to address educational disadvantage through the various Area Partnerships, School Completion Programmes and other measures.

The objectives of the Early School Leaver Work/Education Pilot Project are:

- to test models of quality second chance education and training which meet the needs of young people who have left school early to enter the workplace (the specific target group of this project were young adults who left with a Junior Certificate only),
- to promote responsiveness and flexibility within the education and training system to meet workplace needs,
- to encourage the development of partnerships and integrated working between education, business, training, community and employment services.

The White Paper on Adult Education: Learning for Life set out lifelong learning as a guiding principle of educational policy. This is a challenge not easily achieved. Education systems throughout the world are faced with the task of broadening provision from early childhood through to and throughout adulthood, catering for a more diverse population than ever before.

It means that dialogue with stakeholders, policy development, planning, funding, entry, assessment, curricular, teaching and learning, staff training and research and development all have to be considered in the context of a continuum, and with a focus on developing seamless interfaces between the different levels and sectors. Additionally greater coherence in national approaches is required, with strategic planning, institutional policies, funding mechanisms and admission, delivery and assessment systems all focused on achieving wider participation and a systemic approach.

This is an exciting time in education, and much has changed in recent years. It is now an accepted part of policy that we must have integrated approaches to education, training, taxation, labour market, competitiveness and welfare policies, as evidenced through the Programmes for Government, National Development Plans and National Social Partnership programmes.

At sub-regional and local level, we can see a concentrated focus on area based co-operation through the work of the DEP, Area Based Partnerships, the Local Drugs Task Forces, Rapid and the County and City Development Boards, and through the Department's decision to establish a network of Regional Education Offices.

The Dublin Employment Pact has undertaken pioneering work. Its reports and recommendations are an important part in the continued evolution of measures and strategies to combat educational disadvantage.

For 2004, the Department of Education and Science will continue to provide assistance towards the operating costs of pilot initiatives for early school leavers in the Dublin area.

Peter Kelly, Assistant Principal Officer, Department of Education and Science

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Executive Summary

In 2001, when the Irish economy was at its most vibrant and unemployment at an all-time low, the Education Working Group of the Dublin Employment Pact identified as a major issue the numbers of young people who had left school early without completing their Leaving Certificate to take up employment. The risks inherent in this situation for the young people concerned include poor prospects of progressing within a chosen career as well as a danger of falling into long-term unemployment in the event of an economic downturn.

A pilot project entitled *Linking Education and the Workplace* was devised by the Pact to develop an innovative response to the lack of structured work-based training/education opportunities especially for unskilled young people in this situation. The core aim of the project was the education and upskilling of young early school-leavers between the ages of 17 and 21 who were already in employment, and the development of a pilot programme to be implemented without the young people concerned leaving that employment.

The design of the project was carried out by the Education and Employment Working Group of the Pact working closely with the Department of Education and Science and FÁS. Following a tendering process three local consortia – formed by Clondalkin, Tallaght and Northside Partnerships – were contracted to implement the pilots within their areas. In each case the tender required the creation of strong local consortia involving the community, the education system and local employers.

The projects were identified as being of such importance that they were named in the national partnership agreement *Sustaining Progress* as worthy of continued support by Government. Following completion of the projects in 2002 it was decided to commission an evaluation report.

The evaluation of the three projects was carried out with the following objectives:

- to describe the approach taken to project development and roll-out by each of the partnerships
- to understand and describe the perspectives of both employers and participants in terms of motivation, barriers to participation and benefits derived
- to assess and analyse how each project succeeded in meeting its objectives and overcoming obstacles presented
- to draft recommendations for the improvement of policy and practice from learning from the projects, with particular reference to mainstreaming the effective elements of the projects.

To encourage innovation, a degree of flexibility around the broad terms of reference was granted to each of the three partnerships. As a result each of the three projects varied in structure and approach.

In all three cases a management committee was established within the Partnership to define the approach, resolve issues that might arise and oversee the roll-out of the project. A co-ordinator was appointed to implement the decisions of the management committee and to act as a conduit in matters affecting both participants and employers. In each case the Partnership Education “Co-ordinator” played the key role in mobilising local key interests and overseeing the development and implementation of the project.

Key Aspects in the Structure and Approach of each Project

Clondalkin

The Clondalkin project took a holistic approach to the process of learning by incorporating within the programme a strong focus on aspects of personal development. Participants – who were ultimately of varying ages, but who had all left school early with no more than Junior Certificate or its equivalent - were placed on an induction programme entitled STEPS prior to undertaking formal FETAC training. Clondalkin used a variety of approaches to attracting employers who might be interested in participating. What proved most successful was mobilising local Chamber of Commerce connections and direct contact with employers. Through these means the interest and involvement of three employers were secured, namely Musgrave, Sercom and Ster Century.

Tallaght

The Tallaght project focussed on 16-18 year olds. It devoted a considerable amount of time and effort to tracking young people who were not necessarily currently in employment, but were outside the education system and in the labour market, and who could benefit from participation. Focussing on employers seeking specifically to employ young school leavers who did not necessarily have academic qualifications, the Tallaght project attracted the interest of three employers and the eventual participation of two, namely Kwik-Fit and the Plaza Hotel.

Northside

The Northside project involved employers from the earliest possible stage. The use of personal contacts (through the Northside Employers Network) ultimately proved the most effective means of engaging the interest and involvement of Tesco (Artane and Kilbarrack), McGann PLM and Bewleys. These employers had a strong input into the development of the training programme. This resulted in a decision to expand the project target age group beyond the specified age category, employer involvement in recommending the participation of certain staff and the identification of certain additional work-relevant courses for inclusion in the project programme. A qualified guidance counsellor was appointed as project co-ordinator. Having liaised with employers to advertise the project extensively to their employees, the project was oversubscribed and participants were selected through a process of interview.

Structure and Delivery of Training

Northside and Clondalkin Partnerships both provided Level I and II FETAC training courses in a range of subjects, including Mathematics, English, Spanish, Communications, Customer Care and Work Experience. ECDL was also offered

Tallaght provided FETAC level training in English and Mathematics to all participants, but a structured work-based training programme comprised a significant proportion of the training. Qualified teachers/tutors were engaged to provide FETAC training in all of the projects. For Northside and Clondalkin projects, schools were a key partner in the delivery of training courses, although Clondalkin used a number of external trainers to ensure the project was managed on budget. In Tallaght, Youthreach acted as a key partner in the provision of training.

Key Obstacles and How They Were Overcome:

Two obstacles were encountered in a similar way by all three projects. These were:

-
- difficulties in recruiting private sector employers to become involved in the projects;
 - difficulties in identifying and recruiting participants of the target age profile and circumstances to participate in the projects.

Clondalkin and Northside Partnerships employed wide-ranging and intensive methods in attempting to engage the interest and participation of employers. Once employers were on board they worked in partnership with the project “co-ordinator” to attract employees to participate. Tallaght focussed on attracting employers and participants in tandem, but from different sources (the targeted young people being out of work but transient in the labour market). Participants were then matched with employers’ training vacancies through a process of interview.

Success of the Projects in Meeting the Objectives of Linking Education and The Workplace

- The aim of attracting participants solely within the target age group 17-21 who had left school before completion and were now in employment proved unrealistic for a variety of reasons. These included difficulties in securing a sufficient number of willing participants fitting the profile (even though they are known to exist in large numbers) and also the wish of some employers not to exclude employees who did not fit the profile in terms of age but who had expressed a desire to participate in the planned training. Young people from the target group had largely recently left school and almost by definition were little disposed to consider returning, while older people who had left school to take up unskilled employment were considerably more receptive and enthusiastic to seeking means to redress their low-skill / low-education status.
All participants felt that they had benefited from taking part and many said that they would like to undergo further training at some stage in the future. But there were indications that many of the participants had entered the programme with unrealistic expectations, particularly in relation to immediate impact on prospects for career progression. However, all projects were able to report participants for whom the training had produced concrete and visible changes to their working lives and prospects.
- All employers who took part in the assignment reported a noticeable improvement in the confidence and motivation of the employees who took part. This improvement was significant enough for the employers concerned to express a commitment to participate again in a similar project.
- Although no project reported full retention of participants, the majority of participants received at least one FETAC qualification. The participants’ perception of the quality of tutors was a key factor in their retention and overall view of the training received. However, the value of a FETAC qualification as being at least equivalent to a Leaving Certificate qualification was not fully appreciated by many participants.
- The partnership aspect of the project did not initially realise its full potential earlier. In particular, balancing the social and community focus of the project against the commercial imperative for employers needed full clarification before issues of partnership could be addressed. In any future programme, the partnership element would need to be clarified, with employers being better informed from the start of the benefits that might be gained and becoming more proactive in the development of the training courses. The fact that employers became more enthusiastic as the project progressed would indicate that employers’ positive experiences with the project should be communicated to employers becoming involved for the first time in a future initiative.

Each project reported the involvement of employers as presenting the greatest challenge. But the actual overcoming of this difficulty also represents their greatest success. Having completed this pilot project, much has been learned about both the benefits derived by participating employers as well as the barriers to employer participation. This understanding is a key lesson which should be harnessed for future projects of this nature.

Key Recommendations Arising from the Evaluation

The participation of employers, their investment in the education of their employees and the provision of a structure to enable the delivery of the training were the key successes of the *Linking Education and The Workplace* pilot projects. To harness these successes, a second pilot project should be implemented to further develop the initiative and deliver a value-for-money means of providing education and training for young early-school-leavers. The second pilot should include the following key aspects:

- Target early school leavers of any age who possess a Junior Certificate and are currently in employment. No restrictions should be made on the age profile or gender of participants, but the programme nevertheless should seek to focus as far as possible on young people between the ages of 17 and 21.
- Retain the partnership model including top level collaboration of the Department of Education and Science and FÁS together with the Dublin Employment Pact. The structure should be expanded to include Trade Unions.
- A central “co-ordinator” with responsibility for liaison with employers and key partners should be appointed. He/she would also be a key pivot for liaison between each of the pilot projects.
- Local co-ordinators would be responsible for local management of the projects with significant ongoing liaison with the central co-ordinator.
- The local schools/VECs should have a greater input into and involvement in the educational content and programme, and also in the provision of experienced tutors.
- The financial structuring of each project, particularly in terms of facilitating employer participation, is an important consideration and should be agreed and arranged between all partners at the design stage of the project.
- In promoting the pilot project, the value of FETAC qualifications as being equal to or exceeding the Leaving Certificate should be stressed.
- Participating employers should develop structures within their companies which allows for internal progression and promotion.

The *Linking Education and The Workplace* pilot project was critical in identifying and overcoming key barriers to participating in work-based training by both employers and employees. A second pilot project will be important in developing and rolling out a full structured approach to work-based training and education for young people for whom the school system has not worked but nonetheless desire and deserve an opportunity to complete their education and embark on a challenging and rewarding career.

1 Introduction

The Dublin Employment Pact is a strategic alliance of social partners who work together to address the problems of long-term unemployment in the Dublin region. The Pact has had considerable success in aspects of policy development, research and pilot projects, having undertaken and published a number of seminal research reports on the causes, sources and consequences of long-term unemployment. The Dublin Employment Pact operates through four working groups, each of which are active in a specific policy area. These groups are as follows:

- Social and Economic Policy Working Group
- Education and Employment Working Group
- Labour Market Policy Working Group
- Local Enterprise and Social Economy Working Group

This pilot project was undertaken by the Education and Employment Working Group of the Dublin Employment Pact, in partnership with FÁS and the Department of Education and Science, (both of whom are represented on this Education Group).

The *Linking Education and the Workplace* project commenced at a time when unemployment was at its lowest-ever level and the job market was particularly vibrant. While more young people than ever were completing school and progressing to further and higher education, many were attracted by the prospect of a regular wage and took up employment after completing the Junior Certificate.

However, it was recognised by the Dublin Employment Pact that in the event of an economic downturn, these early-school leavers would be particularly vulnerable to the risk of long-term unemployment. Three pilot projects were commissioned which were in the Partnership Areas of Clondalkin, Tallaght and Northside.

The overall aim of the project was to increase education levels, offer training and upskilling to early school-leavers between the ages of 17 and 21 who had left after the Junior Certificate.

Other project aims are summarised below:

- To pilot a system for the promotion and upgrading of the skill levels and the educational attainments of young adults while in employment.
- To provide a model for a schools-work-community partnership which would represent a mutually beneficial situation for all partners, particularly young adults, schools and the education system and employers.
- To develop an integrated model for a schools-work partnership addressing education and training requirements as well as labour shortage issues.

Each of the three pilot projects have now reached completion and this evaluation comprises an assessment of the success of the projects in achieving the overarching aims of the project.

2 Approach to the Evaluation of Linking Education and The Workplace Projects

2.1 Evaluation – Terms of Reference

Mazars were engaged by the Dublin Employment Pact in June 2003 to carry out an evaluation of the outcome of the three pilot projects with a view to identifying key aspects of good practice and possible gaps in provision.

Terms of reference of Pilot projects

The terms of reference that formed the basis of the pilot projects was used to guide the evaluation process. The main objective of the project was to target young adults (17+) who left school before completion and were in employment. The project was based on a partnership model, involving schools, employers and community with resultant benefits as follows:

- young adults would benefit by acquiring skills while in employment which would enable them to achieve a qualification, access sustainable employment and progress within that employment
- the schools and education system would benefit by developing an innovative and adaptable role in the education of young, under-skilled adults already in employment
- employers would benefit from the up-skilling of young employees and commencement of career paths for these employees as a result of gaining a qualification.

A number of framework conditions were identified in the terms of reference for the pilot projects as summarised below. Effectively, each of the projects would:

- be innovative and demonstrably add value to existing practice
- not duplicate existing activities
- have region-wide applicability in terms of transfer of learning and/or policy development
- build on existing good practice at a local level
- include a strong input from project partners.
- relate to one or more of the objectives of the Dublin Employment Pact

Terms of Reference of Evaluation

The objectives of the evaluation were clearly stated as follows:

- to describe each of the three projects under the following criteria: innovation, course content and development, course delivery, age and profile of participants, employer input, obstacles encountered
- to understand and describe the experiences of participants and employers in each of the three projects
- to develop an understanding of the extent to which the projects met the objectives of *Linking Education and The Workplace*.
- to make recommendations for the improvement of current policy with particular reference to the full roll out of the project.

The aim of this evaluation was to identify aspects from each project that were innovative or that worked particularly well with a view to developing a model for the successful mainstreaming of *Linking Education and the Workplace*. However, it should be noted that the economic environment has changed and changed again since the commencement of the project.

2.2 Mazars' Approach to the Evaluation

Prior to commencing the evaluation, an initial meeting was held with the project steering group to identify the scope, key contacts and best approach to the evaluation. It was agreed that the evaluation process should be undertaken in the following way:

- Assess each of the three pilot projects under their own merit, particularly in light of the different approaches that were taken by the three consortia.
- Incorporate the views of key players in each of the projects. Therefore, this included not just participants and employers but also tutors and co-ordinators.
- Focus on identifying aspects of each project that were particularly innovative.
- Focus on identifying aspects of each project where difficulties or particular issues arose.

The evaluation methodology comprised:

- Interviews with participants, employers, project co-ordinators and tutors.
- Development and circulation of questionnaires to identify the motivation of, benefits to and issues encountered by employers, participants, co-ordinators and tutors.
- Meetings with key policy makers from FÁS, and the Department of Education and Science
- Review of key policy and review documents

The consultants met with and reported to the project steering group on an interim basis, immediately after the initial fact-finding had been completed. Based on the feedback obtained at this interim meeting and following further consultation with representatives from FÁS and The Department of Education, this report was drafted.

3 Description of the Projects

3.1 Background to the Three Pilot Projects

In practice, the Dublin Employment Pact granted each of the three partnerships a degree of flexibility (within the broad objectives of the programme) in the development and delivery of the pilot projects. The approach, key aspects, issues arising and overall outcomes of each of the projects are summarised in this chapter.

3.1.1 Background - Clondalkin

The Clondalkin Partnership has long been interested in the area of educating young adults who for various reasons missed out on formal education at an earlier age. In 1999 the Partnership commissioned an external consultant to carry out a study on 'Second Chance Education'. This showed that there were a significant number of young adults who had left school early and gained employment without receiving further qualifications.

A lack of funding prevented the Partnership from commencing a training and education programme for this group.

The *Linking Education and the Workplace* pilot scheme was an opportunity for the Partnership to further pursue the idea of providing education for young adults. The aim of the project was to upgrade skills, enhance the career prospects and promote the education progression of young adults in the workplace. A committee was set up and a co-ordinator was hired to manage the programme.

The Education Co-ordinator of the Clondalkin Partnership played a pivotal role in structuring the project, co-ordinating the approaches and sharing experience and knowledge of the local environment. The co-ordinator of the pilot project gained guidance and insight from working closely with the education co-ordinator.

3.1.2 Background - Tallaght

The Tallaght Partnership identified the development of a Jobslink programme to support work-based training and education for early school leavers as a priority for 2000-2006. The Partnership, in conjunction with local partners such as the Tallaght Chamber of Commerce were particularly conscious of the provisions of the Education Welfare Act, 2000¹ and the responsibilities of organisations who employ young people in 16-18 year age range.

The 'Jobslink' project had been initiated by the Tallaght Partnership to provide for the development of an education and training programme for young people who had left school early to take up employment. This

¹ The Education Welfare Act (2000) provides for the right of every child in the State to receive a certain minimum level of education where the child had not yet reached 16 years of age or had not completed a minimum of three years of post-primary education.

project was receiving a significant level of support from the local Chamber of Commerce. On this basis the *Linking Education and the Workplace* pilot project was an appropriate fit to existing plans within the partnership.

An Advisory Group, involving a wide number of local stakeholders, was established to provide support and guidance to the project. Membership included a Schools Attendance Officer who wished to support the project in order to inform future policy development. A Management Committee was appointed to oversee project delivery. A Project Co-ordinator was appointed to co-ordinate the delivery of the programme and provide ongoing support to the participants. Three key project objectives were identified as follows:

- To link education and the workplace
- To attract early school leavers back to education
- To provide opportunities to young adults who might otherwise miss out on these opportunities.

3.1.3 Background - The Northside Partnership Project

The Northside Partnership notes that the following groups are within their key target areas:

- Young people at risk of long-term unemployment
- People with low levels of education or skills

These target groups have some overlap and include:

- individuals whose capacity to access employment suited to their needs is reduced by their low levels of education or training; and
- Individuals in employment whose potential to progress in their situation is reduced by low levels of education or skill, and who are consequently at increased risk of unemployment in the future.

These groups had been the focus of several tailor-made training initiatives in previous Partnership programmes. The Northside Partnership's strategy provided for the continuation and refinement of existing programme actions directed at the needs of these groups, and for the development of new initiatives in response to changing circumstances.

On this basis, the needs of young adults with low educational achievements was recognised as a key issue by the Northside Partnership. *Linking Education and the Workplace* was identified as a suitable platform for the provision, of education and training for this group.

An existing employee, a guidance counsellor by profession, was appointed as co-ordinator. Her experience was invaluable in providing advice, guidance and direction to participants.

3.2 Start-up Phase by each Project Co-ordinator

Each of the pilot projects received finance to fund the project including contributions to the salary of a project co-ordinator who would carry out the tasks required to get the projects off the ground and look after the daily management of the project. In each of the projects, a management committee was appointed. In addition, the education co-ordinators of the respective Area Partnerships had varied levels of involvement in the development and rollout of each project.

Start-up Phase

The start up phase of the project proved challenging for all three projects on a number of fronts. These included:

- identifying and attracting suitable participants
- attracting and retaining employers
- retaining and motivating participants
- involving key partners throughout the life of the project.

The specific issues encountered and approaches taken in each project are summarised below.

3.2.1 Setting Up the Clondalkin Project

The initial set up involved deciding on what courses should be offered whilst considering the needs of participants and employers. This was negotiated with the Management Committee which included representatives from local schools, Youthreach and outreach programmes, local employers and members of the Clondalkin Partnership.

A number of initiatives were undertaken to attract employers. The use of local resources such as the Kompass database of employers and the local Chamber of Commerce proved more effective than mailshots, e-mails and other such strategies.

Once recruited, employers did not have significant involvement in the development or rollout of the project. Their key role was in facilitating participation through a flexible work schedule.

3.2.2 Setting Up the Tallaght Project

In setting up the training scheme, the Partnership encountered significant difficulties in finding 16-18 year-olds already in formal employment. Therefore, unlike the Clondalkin and Northside Partnership projects, the Tallaght Foundation Training Scheme focussed on finding suitable work/training placements for participants who were not in any ongoing form of employment.

Extensive consultation was carried out to identify the key aspects of best practice, legal and regulatory requirements in training schemes. Based on this advice the broad parameters of the scheme were defined. These are summarised as follows:

- As the participants were not already in employment, the payment of a wage was required. The Management Committee agreed a weekly wage of € 130 to be paid to trainees for the first six months to be raised to € 150 per week for the second six months. This was in compliance with the provisions of The National Minimum Wage Act (2000)².
- Potential trainees were identified through various tracking means (as described below), and entry to the training scheme was on the basis of a selection interview.
- Successful applicants received formal offers of placement which included a letter of offer, conditions of employment and a training schedule. For most, if not all of the trainees, this would have been the first time they would have undertaken work in this formal environment.
- Candidates not immediately selected were placed on a panel, for reconsideration at a later stage.

² This legislation sets out criteria for payment of a training wage that is less than minimum wage.

-
- For successful applicants, attendance at training would be an essential requirement and non-attendance would result in a deduction of € 15 from the weekly allowance. This is consistent with Youthreach practice.
 - Participants who wished to leave the programme were required to participate in an exit interview and complete a letter of resignation.

A part-time training scheme was also offered in conjunction with Youthreach. However, this differs from the overall project as it does not involve active support or participation by the employers.

3.2.3 Setting up the Northside Project

Employers were attracted on board at an early stage through a variety of methods including:

- Northside Partnership Business Network
- A general information and marketing campaign
- By personal contacts

The information campaign, consisting of distribution of posters and information leaflets and personal contact, was used to raise awareness of the programme. Both the advertising and information campaigns succeeded in attracting strong interest. 40 applications were received.

An initial process of consultation was carried out with all partners to define the details and focus of the project. Interested employers were:

- invited to participate in the steering group
- involved in the development of course content
- the marketing of the concept to their own employees, by, for example, including information leaflets in all payslips.

The project co-ordinator delivered on-site information sessions regarding the project to ensure that employees would receive sufficient information. Interested employees were required to apply formally to the project and go through an interview process prior to selection.

Local community schools, Greendale and The Donahies provided course tutors and premises for the delivery of courses. Course focus and content was agreed following input from employers, school principals and participants. The project was run for two four-hour sessions per week, six hours of employer time (of which 50% was refunded to the employer by the Northside Partnership) and two hours of the student's time.

3.3 Targeting Employers

It is a worthwhile exercise to describe in some detail the efforts of each project to target employers. ***All of the employers who took part provided very positive feedback regarding their experiences. All would take part again and would also recommend participation to other organisations.*** Clondalkin succeeded in attracting the interest of four companies with three eventually taking part. The Tallaght project gained the interest of three organisations, but only two organisations became fully involved. In the Northside, four companies expressed initial interest with three subsequently participating.

3.3.1. The Clondalkin Project

- Ster Century
- Sercom
- Musgrave

Initially it was decided to focus on obtaining support from employers in the Liffey Valley Centre as it was considered more effective to have all employers in one area. Despite a significant amount of time and marketing spent in trying to recruit, no employers in the Liffey Valley Centre elected to participate in the programme.

The recruitment was then extended to other areas of Clondalkin - The Mill, Cloverhill Industrial Estate, Kompass Database of Employers, and the Chamber of Commerce. Potential companies were targeted through telephone calls, mailshots, emails, posters. Leaflets were distributed so they could be put on notice boards.

- Four employers elected to participate and 3 put forward participants when the programme commenced.

Ster Century

Ster Century advertised the programme in their staff room and attached a letter to all payslips. It was agreed that staff would do the course in their own time but shifts would be re-arranged where necessary. One staff member responded and was offered a place on the programme. This participant was over the defined age group. However it was felt that she would benefit greatly from the programme and was given the opportunity to participate.

Sercom

One employee participated from Sercom. The employee herself was keen to go on the course and her manager felt that she had the motivation and ability to do well on the course.

Musgrave

Musgrave responded very positively. They were undergoing expansion and management saw the training programme as a way to show commitment to staff during the expansion and to encourage them to take part in progressing within the company.

Given that Musgrave have a very large number of young staff they did not wish to exclude staff on the basis of qualifications so they requested that staff, in the defined age group, with a Leaving Certificate could be included.

Contact with Employers

Before the programme commenced a questionnaire was sent out to employers asking them to identify training needs and any suggested modules they felt would be of benefit to their staff. Interviews were also carried out with employers and the following needs were identified:

- Ethics
- Personal appearance and presentation
- Personal effectiveness
- Communications
- Customer care
- Computing

3.3.2. The Tallaght Project

- Kwik-Fit
 - The Plaza Hotel
- Once the overall approach was agreed, informing employers and securing their involvement became a priority. The Chamber of Commerce acted as a critical medium between the Partnership and suitable employers. A series of promotional events were carried out. These events included a breakfast meeting, mailshot, and direct contact aimed at over 600 employers and the approach focused on employer's obligations to young employees in relation to the Education Welfare Act (2000).

However, despite the reluctance of many employers to become involved, a number of organisations expressed interest in supporting the project in a variety of innovative ways consistent with the partnership ethos of the Programme.

- Mr. Nick Byrne and Mr. Arwel Buckland from Kwik-Fit and Bank of Ireland respectively were appointed to the Management Committee to provide employers views.
- Bank of Ireland offered to provide training in the basic aspects of personal financial management to participants.
- The Plaza Hotel offered their premises as a venue for project meetings and events.
- Kwik-Fit and The Plaza Hotel became actively involved in the project, providing work placements for employees.
- Bank of Ireland have shown keen interest in participating in the programme as it rolls out and Kwik Fit would like to raise their participation across the Dublin area, should the project be fully rolled out.

3.3.3. The Northside Project

- Tesco (Branches in Artane and Kilbarrick)
- Bewleys
- McGann PLM

The Northside Partnership Business Network was a key medium through which employers were identified. Four employers, namely Tesco (Branches in Artane and Kilbarrack), Bewleys, McGann PLM and Cadburys expressed initial interest and became involved in subsequent project development. Cadburys did not proceed with the project due to scheduling difficulties. Some of the organisations who participated already had a very strong prior record of community involvement.

Although the three participating companies operate in different sectors, they each have a high proportion of employees who are either unskilled or have a relatively low level of qualifications. All of the participating companies already operate in-house training programmes which deal with work-specific issues or regulatory requirements such as health and safety training.

The employers expressed a keen interest in the communications aspects of training and were satisfied that the training placed a heavy emphasis on both the areas of communications and customer care.

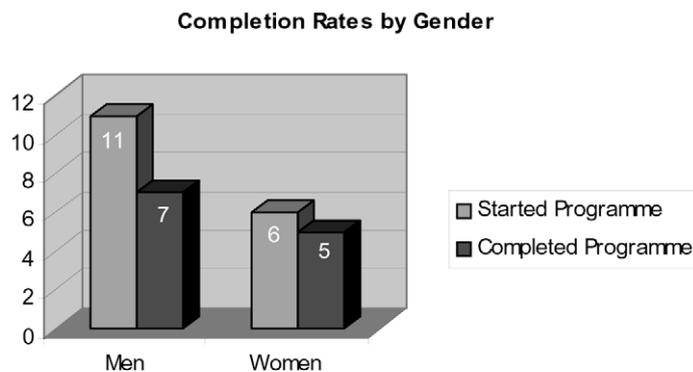
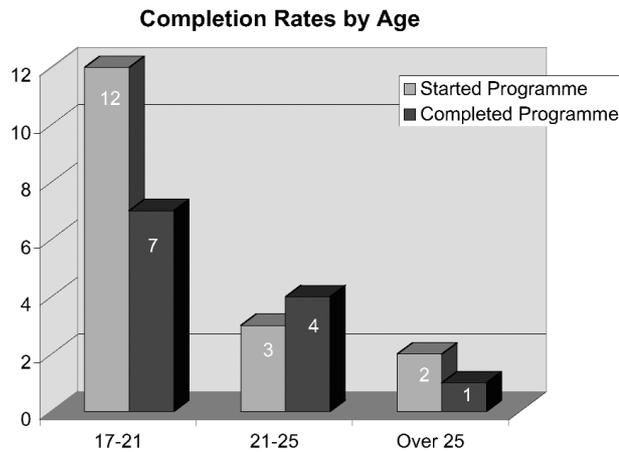
Employers were then given the opportunity to recommend preferred staff to participate in the project. This enabled the company to target those staff who they had already identified as showing potential. However, this also meant that not all participants fell within the age range outlined in the Terms of Reference.

3.4 Age Cohorts Targeted (and other selection criteria)

3.4.1 Clondalkin

The final group of participants comprised 17 employees. No one that applied to participate in the programme was turned down. As noted above, negotiations took place with employers to include a wider range of employees than specified in the original terms of reference.

The breakdown of participants is outlined below and it should be noted that “completed” refers to the completion of one or more of the modules:



The primary drivers in the selection of participants included age, educational status and employment – gender was not a specific driver and was not a selection criteria. The above graph illustrates commencement and completion rates by gender but it should be noted that this information is presented for information only and no conclusions have been drawn from it.

Once the project was completed, employers stated that they would see value in allowing employees over the age of 30 to participate in the project.

3.4.2 Tallaght

The Tallaght target participant was typically a young person aged between 16-18 (not exceeding 19 years of age) who had left school without qualifications at some stage between the ages of 12 and 16.

In keeping with the partnership approach, young people who might possibly participate in the project were

identified through the following media:

- The Schools Completion Programme – (A Department of Education and Science programme) and local schools and school personnel, including home/school/community liaison teachers - this was a key means of identifying young people no longer attending school or at high risk of leaving.
- The Tallaght Community Training Workshop - this workshop has since closed down, but was a source of participants until Spring 2003.

Leaflets and posters were placed in centres such as Youthreach, Schools, Youth Service and Jobsclub which led to a numbers of referrals.

Key characteristics of the group included the following:

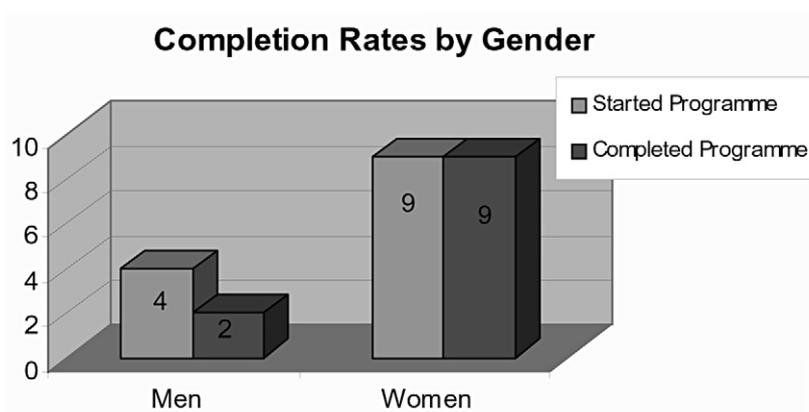
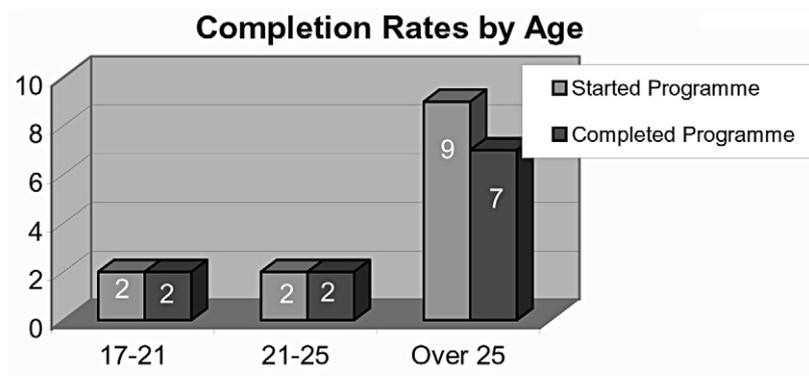
- While some participants had left school, enticed by the prospect of earning money, others had unhappy experiences at school and a return to a school-like environment was undesirable and unlikely to be successful.
- They had no qualifications and varying levels of basic literacy and numeracy.
- While they did want to work, they had low levels of motivation, having a history of non-completion and tended not to believe themselves capable of having skills.
- They required high levels of support and continuous 'second chances'.
- They did not have an understanding of the requirements of the world of work. This included interview skills, timekeeping, dress code, or the concept of progression and promotion at work.

Over 40 early school leavers were identified through these efforts. Four young people were placed in full-time work/training schemes and eight young people took up part-time placements. However, a relatively high level of turnover was experienced and the exact number of participants was difficult to calculate since the project was carried out on a 'rolling basis'.

Many of the young people tracked as part of the project were found to have emotional or behavioural problems that prevented them from taking up places on the scheme. Through other agencies such as 'Jobsclub' and Youthreach counselling, these young people are receiving the support necessary to prepare them to take up a work/training placement in the future.

3.4.3 Northside

Over 40 employees from the participating employers applied to take part in the project. Selection of participants was carried out by a process of interview. While the selection process was weighted in favour of applicants who were closest to the target age cohort, it did not exclude applicants outside this age group. On consultation with employers, it was agreed the project would be flexible regarding the age group of participants and was extended to include trainees over the age of 21. As the graphs illustrate, 13 trainees commenced the project with 11 reaching completion.



The Northside Partnership had the greatest range in age but also the highest retention/completion rates. The issue of gender did not arise in the selection of any candidate and although the above graph illustrates commencement and completion rates by gender, this information is presented for information only and no conclusions have been drawn from it.

3.5 Innovation

The following describes the innovative aspects of each project . This innovation came about primarily as a result of the freedom and flexibility of project design which was granted by the Dublin Employment Pact to each of the projects.

3.5.1 Innovation - Clondalkin

■ Programme Design

The Clondalkin Project used a number of innovative tools specifically to prepare the trainees for a return to learning and allow them to have a more positive experience both of themselves and their learning. These included:

- the delivery of the STEPS programme as an induction tool
- the use of outside facilitators to allow the group to gain a better understanding of themselves
- how they interacted with others
- a number of FETAC Certified Courses were offered.

STEPS Programme

As indicated, the Clondalkin Project approach included an induction programme focussing on personal development and growth known as the STEPS Programme. The programme ran for the first 8 weeks of the course. STEPS is offered by the Pacific Institute³ and used by organisations worldwide to develop employees. It is a personal development programme specifically designed for people who face challenges in their life and are looking for tools to help conquer them. The programme works on the premise that raising a person's self esteem and self confidence can bring about changes in attitude and behaviour and enable individuals to realise their potential. The programme successfully addresses a number of issues and challenges that people face:

- | | |
|--|------------------------|
| ■ Employment and career choices | ■ decision making |
| ■ peer group pressure | ■ self esteem |
| ■ education | ■ personal development |
| ■ personal conflicts (family and work) | ■ accountability |
| ■ leadership responsibilities | ■ education |

The specific issues which the Clondalkin Partnership programme wished to address included:

- Bringing awareness to the “self talk” (what they say to themselves about themselves) of participants.
- Identifying negative self talk, and replacing it with more positive self talk.
- Bringing awareness around issues such as self-esteem, self-confidence, comfort zones and goal setting.

STEPS was delivered by the programme co-ordinator who also continued to provide ongoing support throughout the project in the form of study skills, literacy support, career guidance and goal setting.

Use of External Facilitators and Trips

Prior to the commencement of academic training the Clondalkin Project utilised external facilitators to encourage participants gain a better understanding and awareness of themselves specifically in some of the following areas:

- How they interacted in groups
- The type of behaviour they engaged in
- Overall view of personality styles, particularly their own

A number of facilitators worked with the group covering different communication styles and personality types. In addition, further awareness and team building was developed by working through art. This involved creating a group collage and images of how they saw various other participants. The art element of the programme met with mixed reactions although most understood the importance of how to express themselves in various forms.

In addition, participants took part in a weekend away in Eastcoast Adventure Park in which they participated in outdoor pursuits and team building exercises.

Attracting Private Sector Employers

The Clondalkin Project put a great amount of effort into attracting private sector employers. This included:

- direct telephone contact
- a mailshot campaign to companies in the area with in excess of 50 employees

³ www.pacificinstitute.com.au

-
- a mailshot to South Dublin Chamber of Commerce contacts
 - letters to employers in Liffey Valley
 - the design and distribution of leaflets
 - an article in the DEP news.

As a result of this extensive campaign the project succeeded in attracting a number of employers including Musgrave and Ster Century. Musgrave merit a particular mention - they have a large number of employees and specifically employees that fall into the category focused on in this pilot. They were extremely willing participants and demonstrated this by encouraging and facilitating their employees. It should be noted that none of the employers sought compensation for the release of their employees. Musgrave have stated that they would be interested in continuing with this programme.

3.5.2 Innovation - Tallaght

■ Focus on Early School Leavers

The approach to *Linking Education and the Workplace* taken by the Tallaght Partnership focussed on delivering suitable training to 16-18 year olds through mainstream training agencies such as Youthreach and/or FÁS. It was recognised at an early stage that given the special needs of the target group, it would be essential that the project should meet the following criteria:

- the project would facilitate employers to comply with their requirements as set out in Section 29 of the Education Welfare Act (2000)⁴.
- the range and level of training would be geared towards specific needs of the individual, including literacy, numeracy, computer training, customer relations and pre-apprenticeships.
- training would be flexible in its delivery to the trainee and not interfere with earning opportunities for the young participant.
- training would be developed and delivered by qualified trainers who had specialised experience in training young adults who had not flourished in a traditional school environment.

Recruitment

Identifying suitable individuals to participate in the project was difficult as a result of the often transitory nature of their employment. In order to overcome this, the Partnership devoted a significant effort to identifying and tracking suitable young people who may or may not have been in employment. Over forty such young people were identified and while not all of them participated in the programme, their situation and support needs are now recognised. Many are now receiving some form of support to take them towards participation in training and education for employment.

The Tallaght project worked extensively with local partners in the sourcing of potential employees and in fact, their project may have been more related to a Youthreach programme than this particular initiative. Nonetheless, this pilot was innovative in that it took young people into potential employment opportunities including training, to which they would not otherwise have been exposed.

■ Attracting Private Sector Employers

After a number of approaches, Tallaght did manage to recruit employers, specifically Kwik-Fit who already operate an in-house training programme for young adult employees. In essence, the Jobslink Programme

⁴ Section 29 of the Act states that The National Education Welfare Board will maintain a register of young persons in employment, issue a certificate of registration to such young people and prepare a Plan to assist a child or young person avail of education and training opportunities. Employers who hire such a young person are required to inform the Board and facilitate completion of the Plan.

(the project name for the *Linking Education and the Workplace* Initiative), added to the existing training programme of the new employer and provided them with a number of potential employees with a high degree of interest at a trainee level. In the case of Tallaght, the recruits were all interested in cars and thus being employed by Kwik-Fit provided motivation. The related training was interesting and car related. There is a possibility that this type of model could be expanded to, for example, hairdressing.

Whilst this approach did not exactly adhere to the original terms of reference, there may be lessons to be learnt and built upon particularly as a possible approach to working hand in hand with employers and encouraging them to recruit early school leavers with a keen interest in a particular sector

3.5.3 Innovation - Northside

■ Attracting Private Sector Employees

As with each of the pilot projects, the attraction of possible private sector employers created one of the greatest challenges to succeeding in the programme. Northside, similar to the other pilot projects, marketed the project through a wide range of techniques and also used local contacts.

Once recruited the Northside Partnership took a slightly different approach by involving employers at an early stage and encouraging them towards a high level of involvement in project development. The employers were highly active in encouraging employees to participate which resulted in an over subscription of applicants for the training programme. It is likely that this had the effect of raising the project's status and making participation more desirable.

Participant Profile

The Northside Partnership's participants spanned the widest range in age and whilst they were all early school leavers they were at different stages of their work life. It was felt that this age range improved the dynamics of the group and aided participant retention.

Employer and Employee Contribution

Each participant received a total of eight hour's training per week. This included two hours of their own time and employers agreed to release participants for six hours per week training in two blocks. The cost of releasing the employees was shared equally between the employer and the Partnership. The requirement for participants to give up some of their personal time was effective in that this commitment helped them derive a greater sense of value from the training course and resultant qualifications.

This approach ensured that the participants demonstrated commitment to the project yet were not too severely penalised from a financial perspective. The compromise demonstrated in this structuring allowed for all parties to feel that they were committed and giving something to the process without suffering excessive financial penalties. This innovative aspect of the pilot should be reviewed in future rollouts.

■ Appointment of a Guidance Counsellor to the Role of Co-ordinator

The Northside Partnership engaged a qualified Guidance Counsellor to the role of co-ordinator. The personal situation of many participants in all of the projects may have been such that a return to education was particularly challenging. Thus the expertise of the Guidance Counsellor was invaluable in helping the participants recognise the long-term value of continuing with training despite personal difficulties. In addition, the Education Co-ordinator in the Northside Partnership placed particular focus on "expectation management" and whilst there was a clear link between education and progression there was a level of realism instilled in the participants regarding timeframes. While there is no doubt that all of the co-ordinators provided support

that exceeded the normal requirements of any position, specific qualifications in Career Guidance is recognised as being particularly innovative and effective.

3.6 Course Modules / Delivery of Programmes

In all of the projects, a balance between the training needs of employers and the preferences of the participants was considered. Some tutors made a significant effort to make the content of the training course relevant to the trainee's job. This was considered an effective means of establishing a link between learning and work in the participant's mindset.

In developing and delivering courses, all the projects focussed on delivering flexible, accredited training that would facilitate the personal circumstances of participants and also allow them to build up a series of qualifications.

3.6.1 Clondalkin

Due to the large number of participants from Musgrave (14) it was difficult for the company to release all 14 to attend the course on one given day. It was decided to divide the group and run the programme over 2 afternoons, Wednesday and Friday, between 2 – 5 pm. Musgrave kindly supplied their in-house training room to be used for programme delivery.

- The STEPS programme was delivered over the first 8 weeks of the programme by the project co-ordinator. It was considered that this would help build relationships between the co-ordinator and the trainees. Musgrave's training facilities were used for much of the training.
- NCVA modules were provided in Level II in Customer Services, Communications and Work Experience in the Musgrave training room.
- Computer training was offered one evening a week for 3 hours in Áras Rualach. Basic training lasted for 12 weeks and ECDL 24 weeks.
- A career guidance counsellor was available to work with the participants on a one to one basis throughout the duration of the course. A number of outside facilitators were also engaged to deliver once off training programmes.

Course	Details (All courses unless specified run in Musgrave Training Room)
STEPS to Excellence	A Pacific Institute course that focuses on personal success given by the programme Co-ordinator
Team Building	This was a weekend programme – all participants were brought to Eastcoast Adventures by the Co-ordinator
Communications	FETAC Level II course taught by a tutor experienced in working with young adults in similar programmes
Customer Care	FETAC Level II course taught by experienced tutor
Work Experience	FETAC Level II course taught as part of the communications module
ECDL	This class was run for 3 hours once a week in the evening for 24 weeks in total in Áras Rualach

A local community college was contacted with a view to selecting a tutor for the FETAC modules. However costing proved very high so contact was made with a tutor who had experience teaching young adults and working with community groups.

3.6.2 The Tallaght Project: Off-site Training

The training provided was a combination of formal accredited training delivered by tutors provided by Youthreach and work-based training delivered by the employer. Training was provided to all participants on a day-release basis, one day per fortnight equating to 17 days off-site per year.

The off-site training was primarily focussed on the development of numeric and literacy skills of the participants. Spanish and ECDL were also offered but were not generally taken up by the participants.

Training

The training comprised a selection of FETAC accredited subjects, including Mathematics, English, Spanish, Personal Development and Communication and ECDL. Mathematics and English were the primary form of training provided. Given the bad experience of many participants at school, the flexibility and approach to training and quality of tutors was considered extremely important. Key aspects of the approach included the following:

- Youthreach acted as a partner in the delivery of training. The tutors engaged were therefore highly skilled in dealing with young people in a supportive, yet adult training environment.
- Developing a sense of achievement through the learning process was considered a key success factor for most participants. Towards this end, the tutors continually linked subject matter to work-based activities, emphasising the practical application of subjects being taught.
- Establishing links between training and employment was an extremely helpful tool in supporting learning.

The work-based training provided by Kwik-Fit was based on the organisation's corporate training scheme and technical career ladder.

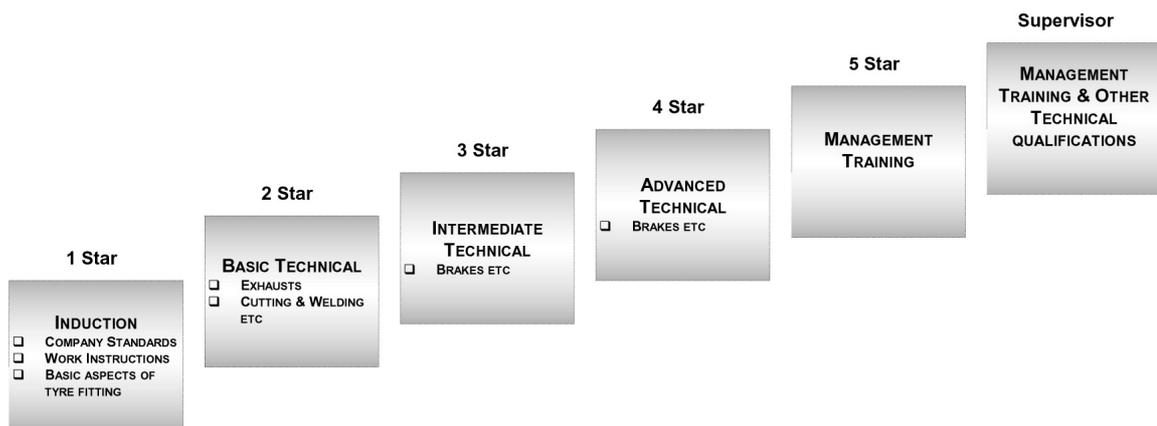


Figure 3.1 Illustration of the Kwik-Fit technical career ladder

Key aspects of this training scheme included the following:

- Although not accredited in Ireland, the training programme has received UK accreditation.
- The trainees each had the opportunity to progress within the organisation, potentially to supervisor level.

- The trainees received a high level of mentoring and also benefited from working with colleagues who may also have left school early and yet have progressed to a challenging and rewarding career with Kwik-Fit.
- Kwik-fit are currently working with FÁS to develop an Irish-accredited Fast fitting course.

The in-house training provided by the Plaza was less structured but focussed on key aspects of hospitality training such as customer service.

3.6.3 The Northside Project

The course offered in the Northside Project was similar in structure and content to Clondalkin as illustrated in the table below.

Course	Details
Mathematics	Level I FETAC course
Spanish	Level I FETAC course
Personal and Interpersonal Skills	Level I FETAC course
Word Processing	FETAC Level II course
Communications	FETAC Level II course with experience teaching young adults
Work Experience	FETAC Level II course taught as part of the Communications module

Courses were delivered over four hour classes twice a week, delivered in The Donahies on Tuesday afternoons, and in Greendale Community school on Thursday evenings. The tutors were all teachers at the two schools.

3.7 Obstacles to Project Development and How They Were Overcome

As in any pilot programme, difficulties were encountered in implementing each of the projects. All found it necessary to deviate in some way from the original terms of reference. These were carried out after consultation with the Dublin Employment Pact. However, once each project had defined its own structure and approach, some further difficulties were encountered. The examples that follow illustrate the types of obstacles which were encountered. None were of a level significant enough to result in project derailment.

3.7.1 Clondalkin

- **Difficulty in Recruiting Employers:** This problem was overcome by relaxing the criteria regarding the selection of participants within the target age group.
- **Fear and/or difficulties of participants:** Half way through the course a number of issues were raised by the participants regarding confidence and fears around doing video presentations, assessments and examinations. As a response to this and in order to ensure no one withdrew, it was decided that the Education Co-ordinator of the Clondalkin Partnership would address the group to discuss the challenges

that lay ahead and to stress the nature and value of the programme. She raised the question of commitment and the consequences to not committing themselves and each other to complete the programme. Each participant was asked if they felt prepared to re-commit to the programme and all agreed to do so. This intervention gave the participants the confidence and skills to complete the course and to manage and deal with their concerns.

- **Employers Scheduling Issues:** As there were so many participating from Musgrave, the course had to be run over 2 days. Small class numbers led to irregular attendance. This impacted on group dynamics and learning.

3.7.2 Tallaght

- **Deviation from Programme Terms of Reference:** Tallaght's determination to remain strictly within an age-profile 16-18 years increased the difficulty of recruiting participants. For this reason, the project deviated from the terms of reference in the following aspects:
 - for the most part, participants were not already in current employment, although a number of them had been in and out of employment
 - a training stipend was paid to all of the trainees from the partnership budget
 - in some aspects, the project was similar to Youthreach training courses.
- **Possible Exploitation of Participants:** The Tallaght Partnership was particularly conscious of the risk of exploitation associated with placing very young people in employment. A highly consultative approach was therefore taken to developing programme content. A strong emphasis was placed on ensuring that legislative aspects were taken into consideration.
- **Participants Motivational and/or Behavioural Issues:** Key characteristics of participants included unhappy experiences at school, motivational and possible behavioural issues and a general expectation of failure. While serious behavioural problems were unacceptable where they presented any physical risk, the project aimed to be as flexible and supportive as possible. The use of formal methods such as the letter of offer and contracts, and the requirement for those who wished to leave the programme to formally resign helped in developing their sense of responsibility for their decisions and a sense of ownership of the project. Efforts were also made to match participants with a form of work in which they were interested. This was a key factor in creating a positive attitude towards work among participants.
- **Lack of Interest in Training:** A key characteristic of many of the participants was a general desire not to undertake academic training and a belief that such training is not 'relevant' to their needs. As a result of this, there was a high risk of absenteeism. To overcome this, a combination of measures were taken to ensure that the training would be interesting and relevant:
 - The tutors engaged were all VEC qualified and highly skilled in providing training to young adults.
 - Tutors worked to ensure that numeracy and literacy problems would be linked to the participants' work.
 - Time was allocated during the training course to enable participants to complete assignments.
 - Each participant was assessed to ensure that the training would be pitched at the right level.
 - Finally, a penalty of € 15 deduction from the participants wage was applied for non-attendance by participants.

3.7.3 The Northside Project

- **Identifying Suitable Participants:** This was achieved by encouraging employers to recommend suitable participants and to encourage those employees to participate.
- **Deviation from the Proposed Participant Profile:** Once agreement was reached on the involvement of key employers, there was some difficulty in recruiting employees who were within the desired age group

and also early school leavers. This issue was resolved through agreeing to accept older participants who still fell within the category of early school leavers.

- **Completion of Assignments:** A number of the participants experienced difficulties in completing assignments outside of class time. This was overcome by some of the tutors by providing time during the classes to complete assignments and by a very high level of co-ordinator support.
- **Problems with Scheduling:** A number of Northside Partnership employers operated in seasonal annual cycles whereby, for example, Christmas would be an extremely busy period. This resulted in difficulties in releasing staff at this time. The issue was resolved through liaison with the employer and classes were suspended at these busy times.

Absenteeism

It should be noted that in all three projects, the co-ordinators were extremely proactive in ensuring that potential issues such as absenteeism would be dealt with promptly and providing the very high level of support, encouragement and advice required by some of the participants to sustain their ongoing participation. Also, all the co-ordinators put significant effort into ensuring that employers were not drawn into any of these issues.

4 Perceptions of Employers and Participants

4.1 Perceptions of Employers

The employers participating in the project operate across a number of sectors including retail, manufacturing and service. Each of the companies employ a significant proportion of their workforce with no or low level second level qualifications. Most of the employers currently undertake some form of in-house training for their employees. However the nature and scope of these training courses varied.

The views of employers from all of the projects were gathered through interview and distribution of questionnaires. In evaluating the projects from their perspectives, the following considerations were taken into account:

- motivations for becoming involved in the project
- benefits derived from participation
- barriers to participation
- retention rates, and
- subsequent progression of participants.

The findings of all three projects under each of these headings are outlined below:

4.1.1 Employer Motivation for Participation

For many of the employers, investment in workplace training is an ongoing feature of their company culture with progression from basic induction level to management, a not unusual occurrence. A number of reasons were offered by employers as to why they chose to participate in the pilot project. Many of the respondents stated that reasons included the fact that employees would gain new skills which could be applied to the workplace and that participation can help improve industrial and community relations. In addition, the target/age profile was typical of all company profiles and the training that would be provided were also factors in encouraging participation.

While all three projects took broadly similar approaches to attracting employers, the Tallaght project differed from both Northside and Clondalkin in that it allowed trainees to work in the participating companies for a training wage.

Conversely, the Northside and Clondalkin projects requested companies to release employees to participate in training. For this reason, employers had somewhat different motivations depending on the project they became involved in.

The major employer to become involved in the Tallaght project considered the *Linking Education and the Workplace* project as being an excellent source of potentially good employees. The employer operates in the 'FastFit' industry and as a result candidates were chosen for their general interest in cars. Other aspects that motivated this employer to become involved were that the project:

- provided a source of suitable young people to become trainees

-
- provided the academic, numeric and literacy training that the employer considers essential to support progression within their organisation
 - enabled the employer to assess the potential of the trainees to become fully qualified fitters without undertaking any long-term commitment at the start
 - dealt with absenteeism or any other problems that may exist with a very young trainee.

Possibly, because they were required to release employees for training, employers who participated in the Clondalkin and Northside projects had less defined motivations for becoming involved in the projects but the potential benefits that are generally agreed can be derived from investment in training were key factors for all of them. These include the following:

- Acquisition of new skills
- Improvement in industrial relations
- Staff retention
- Improvements in morale
- Increase in productivity
- Improvement in community relations

In all cases, the provision of training that would be relevant to the participants' role within the company was a key motivational factor.

4.1.2 Benefits derived by Employers

In selecting staff members to participate, different approaches were taken by the various employers:

- Some invited their employees to participate on the basis of age and qualifications (in keeping with the programme terms of reference) rather than motivation, ability or interest.
- Other employers selected participants based on age, ability, willingness to learn and position within the company. The Tallaght partnership selected trainees on the basis of their age and interest in cars.

However, regardless of the means by which participants were selected and without exception, all employers stated that the benefits derived from becoming involved in the project outweighed the difficulties or investment. The positive outcomes of participating included:

- A visible improvement in the quality of work by participants
- A positive improvement in attitude and motivation by the participating employees
- A general increase in productivity and noticeable improvement in staff morale as a result of training
- For some employers, the development of personnel who would remain and progress within the organisation
- For one employer, actual progression by the participant within the organisation.

Some employers felt that they had no input into the content and level of training to be provided to participants, but they were for the most part very satisfied by the type, quality and relevance of training provided to participants although those that had no input would have liked more participation in the programme and its content. One employer would also have liked a higher level of ongoing communication with the project co-ordinator. This can be a difficult issue to resolve as other employers liked the fact that the project co-ordinator looked after the administrative aspects and any issues associated with the project. Overall, the employers were very happy with the level of support given to participants from tutors and co-ordinators who made every effort to support and encourage the participants.

4.1.3 Barriers to Participation by Employers with Respect to Workplace Learning and Life-Long Learning

All projects gained some feedback from employers who were contacted and expressed some interest but elected not to become involved in the pilot project.

Barriers to participation were diverse and were identified as follows:

- Facilitating the release of valuable staff was cited as a significant barrier by a number of employers.
- Absenteeism was identified as a key issue which was also potentially damaging to both the employers' and employees' willingness to participate.
- Some employers carry out their own tailored work – place training, and had employees already involved in apprenticeships, or sponsored adult training.
- During the roll-out phase of the project, there was a degree of economic downturn and as a result training budgets were under threat. Some companies also considered the training period was too long.
- In some instances, there was a lack of interest among staff, or no staff met the profile.
- Staff may have viewed the workload as too heavy.
- There was a danger of division among staff if older staff were excluded from training.
- There was insufficient time for employers to consider all the implications of participation.
- The new legal obligations to facilitate training for 16-18 year olds who left school early served as a disincentive to some employers to hire such young people on a formal basis.

Finally, a number of potential employers, whilst interested in the programme discussions, felt that employee groups and/or unions would be required before they could become involved.

4.1.4 Retention Rates:

Clondalkin

Of the 17 employees to sign up for the Clondalkin project, 12 received some form of certification. Three of the participants who decided to discontinue the training came to this decision at an early stage of the training. Not all of the 12 participants who remained with the project completed all of their training courses, but each person received some form of qualification.

Northside

Of the 13 trainees to commence the Northside training programme, 11 completed the programme. The mixture of age groups participating in this project is credited as being a key factor in supporting retention of participants.

Tallaght

At the time of interviewing, four participants were continuing in full-time training with the Tallaght project from an initial group of seven. As participants were selected on the basis of their willingness to work and interest in cars, it was felt by the employer that the four remaining participants had the potential to remain within the organisation. The knowledge that they may progress and begin to earn more was a key factor in encouraging the participants to persevere with the training programme

The high level of support provided by all three project co-ordinators was a key factor in the retention of participants and this was acknowledged by all stakeholders in the project.

4.1.5 Progression of Participants:

All the companies who participated in the project noted that some of the participants who took part showed the potential to progress within the workplace. Some employers stated that a number of participants were immediately displaying an interest and ability to undertake further education/training and progress within the organisation. Although it was noted by one employer that they would have liked to receive more updates regarding the progress of their participants, most were happy with the level of information they received regarding the progress of their employees.

While all employers who participated in the projects should be applauded for their support of the project, Kwik-fit and Tesco were notable in that their internal organisation is structured such that the opportunity for progression exists, regardless of employee entry level. Thus, although none of the participants received a promotion (and it would be unrealistic to expect that a short training course might yield such results), the presence of fellow employees who had progressed within the workplace would be a key incentive to undertake further training.

4.2 Perceptions of Participants

The participants profile varied between each of the three projects, therefore perceptions of the courses were varied. As an overall comment, all employers, tutors and project co-ordinators noted that as the training programme progressed, a marked improvement in the self-confidence, attitudes and motivation of trainees could be observed.

The views of participants from each project were gathered through a combination of interview and questionnaires. As with employers, the participants' viewpoints were assessed according to the following criteria:

- motivation to become involved
- benefits derived from participating
- barriers to participation
- retention rates
- progression of participants.

In some of the projects, participants were of different age groups and came from different personal circumstances. These differences impacted on their views of the project. Therefore, while the overall views of each project are presented below, we have attempted as far as possible to demonstrate where different views arose.

4.2.1 Participants' Motivations

Clondalkin

The Clondalkin project consisted of a mixture of employees who expressed an interest in participating and those who were requested to participate by their employer. Outlined below are the top five reasons for participation by these employees:

- Time off work
- Course seemed interesting
- Would help me improve at my job
- Encouraged by employer
- Offered free.

One trainee, employed by Ster Century actively sought to participate in the project for the purpose of her own personal development.

Tallaght

For the most part, those that participated in the Tallaght project had drifted from school into a series of low-paid unrewarding jobs or no job at all. For this reason, most of the participants felt they had little reason not to participate. The prospect of receiving a training wage held some attraction. For some of the participants, parental support was highly visible and those parents had actively sought out the training programme. However, despite their young age, some of the trainees had little or no support from home and were self-motivated into undertaking the project.

Northside

Participants in the Northside project received a high level of encouragement from their employers to take part and this was a key motivational factor in their participation. Of the three projects, Northside had the broadest age-profile. This was considered a particular advantage, given the high level of support given by more mature trainees to their younger colleagues.

4.2.2 Benefits for Participants with Respect to Workplace Learning and Life-Long Learning

Personal Development

All of the participants who responded through the questionnaire or who were met as part of the evaluation process felt that they had benefited considerably from their participation in the project. Specifically, almost all the participants noted that they had:

- more self confidence
- learned more about themselves
- got to know new people.

The personal development and communications training courses were identified almost unanimously by participants in Clondalkin and Northside projects as being the most rewarding aspect of the project and amongst the most beneficial and worthwhile aspects of the training. They viewed the communications module as being relevant to the workplace while personal development was something more internal to the individual.

Benefits in the Workplace

From the perspective of workplace and lifelong learning the participants found it more difficult to quantify the benefits. Whilst the majority of learners noted that they had acquired a new skill, they were unsure as to how the learning that they had undertaken would benefit them in their job progression or careers. Some felt that the wide focus of the programme meant that whilst they were pleased with what had been learnt and taught, they did not feel they were qualified for anything in particular and could not see the link between the programme and enhanced chances in their career or how they could go on to further training.

Participants in the Tallaght project found it easier to recognise the benefits of the work-based training rather than the more academic training provided. They found it difficult to recognise the importance of basic numeric and literacy skills to support progression in the workplace. However, the participants interviewed did acknowledge the efforts of tutors to establish the link between learning and work by referring to aspects of work (e.g. study of tyre measurements in mathematics classes and developing the technical vocabulary of participants in literacy classes).

4.2.3 Barriers to Participation

As only participants who completed the project were interviewed, they did not note any issues that presented obvious or insurmountable barriers to participating in the training course. Therefore, we have presented their issues and/or negative comments as potential barriers to participation.

The key barrier to participation by trainees in the Tallaght project was their perception that they could 'earn more' in another job rather than as trainee. One participant was due an increase in salary (on completion of six months training) but had not yet received it. He felt that if this increase was not forthcoming, he would be tempted to drop out.

Participants in the Clondalkin and Northside projects were vocal about the aspects of the project that they were disappointed with or that they felt caused potential risks of failing to complete. These included:

- It was perceived that the participants were not provided with accurate information before the course commenced. This apparent failure to manage expectations was considered a potential cause of participants failing to complete.
- Classes were sometimes not stimulating enough. One particular class spent a large proportion of the time watching videos and in some cases, there was overlap between courses.
- Some participants encountered difficulties in juggling heavy assignment workload and pressures from work. For others, gaining access to computers or getting to the ECDL classes presented problems.
- The attitude of some (but not all) tutors was considered negative. Some tutors were perceived to present an attitude of "I am getting paid whether you turn up or not".
- It was felt that employers would never consider the qualification as adequate grounds for promotion.
- For some participants, the time spent on the Work Experience module was perceived to be repetitious and not beneficial.

Some participants felt that they were relatively ill-informed regarding the requirements and workload required prior to commencing the course. For some the challenge of attending classes and completing assignments created difficulty and presented a barrier which had to be overcome in order to complete the course.

While participants gained enormous personal benefit from some of the courses, there was a feeling among some of the them that the qualifications would not support them in gaining a promotion at work, nor would it improve chances of improving or changing their career prospects.

4.2.4 Retention Rates and Progression

Issues surrounding retention rates were discussed in section 4.1.4. The participant's views on their opportunities for progression were outlined in section 4.2.3 above.

5 Success of Projects in Meeting the Aims of Linking Education and The Workplace

A key requirement of this evaluation was to assess how successful each of the projects were in meeting the objectives of *Linking Education and the Workplace*. Based on the original terms of reference for the projects, there are five interrelated objectives.

These were:

- Target young adults (17+) who left school before completion and who are now in employment.
- Upgrade the skills, enhance the career prospects and promote the educational progression of young adults while in employment.
- Acquisition of a recognised accreditation on a modular basis, ideally involving NCVA and/or elements of the Leaving Certificate programme and acquisition of skills of relevance to the job market.
- Provide a model for schools-work-community partnership which represents a win-win situation for young adults, the school and education system and employers alike.
 - Young adults will benefit by acquiring skills while in employment which enable them to achieve educational qualification, sustainable employment and progress in their employment
 - The school system will benefit by raising the educational level of former school leavers and develop an innovative and adaptable role in the education of young under-skilled adults
 - Employers will benefit from the upskilling of young under-skilled adults and the commencement of young employees on a career path within their employment.
 - Develop an integrated model for schools-work partnership addressing both educational attainment problems and labour shortage in a linked and integrated fashion.

While each of the projects yielded tangible benefits to their participants, the success of each project in meeting key project objectives may be less visible. The table on the following pages outlines the relative success of each project in meeting each of the project objectives.

Project Aim	Success of Tallaght Project	Success of Clondalkin Project	Success of Northside Project	Overall Outcome
<p>Target young adults (17+) who left school before completion and who are now in employment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Focussed specifically on young early school leaver's aged 16-19. ■ Unable to find young people in this age group already in employment. ■ In liaison with schools and other agencies such as Youthreach, located several young people who had left school early but were not in any form of continual training or employment. ■ Succeeded in finding employers willing to take on unemployed, early school-leavers on a training scheme. ■ Matched trainees with employers on the basis of interest and aptitude for specific type of training. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Focussed on attracting 17-21 year-olds already in employment. ■ In order to identify suitable participants, initial focus was on finding companies who are significant employers of young early school-leavers. ■ Following negotiations with the three participating employers, candidates outside of the required age brackets and with a leaving certificate were accepted onto the project. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Focussed on attracting 17-21 year-olds already in employment. ■ In order to identify suitable participants, initial focus was on finding companies who are significant employers of young early school-leavers. ■ All candidates were interviewed and some were accepted because of age, educational attainment, interest in the course, or recommendation by employers ■ On request of employers, some participants who were older than the age requirement were accepted onto the training course. This was found to be a definite advantage in terms of classroom dynamics. 	<p>None of the projects were completely successful in adhering exactly to this project aim, in fact, a significant level of resources was invested by each of the partnerships in identifying both participants and employers who fitted in with this term of reference.</p>

Project Aim	Success of Tallaght Project	Success of Clondalkin Project	Success of Northside Project	Overall Outcome
<p>Upgrade the skills, enhance the career prospects & promote the educational progression of young adults while in employment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Tutors worked to make the academic training relevant to the work-based training being undertaken by the participants. ■ Training will lead to enhancement of career prospects of participants, provided that they complete the formal training programme provided by the employer. ■ Participants felt that they would drop-out if progression at work did not become apparent with time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ While none of the participants completed all of the courses, most reported that they benefited from participation. ■ One employee progressed to a better job following participation in training. ■ There was a feeling among most participants that the qualifications received may not be sufficient to gain progression at work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The quality of some tutors was considered to be poor by some of the participants and this impacted their perception of the effectiveness of training. ■ Some participants felt that while the training was worthwhile, it would not realistically enhance their chances of progressing at work. ■ The Northside Partnership showed the highest retention and completion level with 11 early school leavers gaining certification in relevant subjects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Majority of the participants derived benefit from participating in the course. ■ Employers all reported a noticeable improvement in attitudes, self-confidence and motivation of participants. ■ However, it appears that the immediate benefits of training was overstated to some participants which led to disappointment on completion of the training courses.

Project Aim	Success of Tallaght Project	Success of Clondalkin Project	Success of Northside Project	Overall Outcome
<p>Acquisition of a recognised accreditation on a modular basis, ideally involving NCVA and/or elements of the Leaving Cert programme and acquisition of skills of relevance to the job market.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Format of the training course combined FETAC literacy / numeric training with focussed technical training provided by the employer. ■ The FETAC training complemented the in-house training and provided for the long-term educational progression of participants. ■ Training was a combination of in-house training course and FETAC training. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Training was provided mainly through FETAC accredited courses. ■ The personal development requirements of participants were addressed through the STEPS programme and through a team – building weekend. ■ FETAC courses in communications, work experience, customer care and an ECDL course were all offered. ■ The partnership organised a group get-together to mark completion of the training programme. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Training was provided off-site from work, and was a combination of education and work-oriented training. ■ FETAC accredited courses in Maths, Spanish, Personal & interpersonal skills, word processing, communications and work experience were offered. ■ The success of participants in receiving a qualification was recognised in a closing out graduation meal and get-together & the Partnership plans a more formal ceremony when certificates come out. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Much of the of the training was FETAC accredited and delivered in modules. ■ The quality and relevance of work-based training varied. Some of the participants felt it repetitive and boring. ■ The training was most successful where it particularly appealed to the interests of participants.

Project Aim	Success of Tallaght Project	Success of Clondalkin Project	Success of Northside Project	Overall Outcome
<p>Provide a model for schools-work-community partnership which represents a win-win situation for young adults, the school and education system and employers alike.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The young adults benefited as they previously had no regular form of employment or income prior to this. ■ A possible benefit for schools and the education system is that the project could serve as an alternative destination for a small number of early-school leavers. ■ The benefit for the community is the provision education and of enhanced career prospects for a small number of local young adults. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The young adults benefited personally from the provision of a range of training courses during work hours and from being given time to reflect on their work and re-evaluate their goals ■ Schools participated through the provision of premises for training courses. However, a direct tangible benefit was difficult to identify. ■ The benefit to the community is the provision of training opportunities to young people who left school early but who may not wish to return to education and the secondary promotion of the services of the local Community Centre. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The young adults benefited personally from the provision of a range of training courses during work hours. ■ Schools participated through the provision of premises, computer facilities and catering for training courses and also provided suitably qualified tutors. While the benefit gained by the Partnership by the schools active participation is clear, the benefit derived by the schools themselves is difficult to identify. ■ The benefit to the community is the provision of training opportunities to young people who left school early but who may not wish to return to education. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ While employers benefited from the improved self-confidence of participants, the investment by participating employers in releasing staff for training was significant and should be acknowledged. ■ Therefore the success of the partnership depends on the goodwill of participating employers. ■ The role of schools in the partnership was difficult to determine, particularly as many of the target group had recent, unhappy memories of school.

Project Aim	Success of Tallaght Project	Success of Clondalkin Project	Success of Northside Project	Overall Outcome
<p>Young adults will benefit by acquiring skills while in employment which enable them to achieve educational qualification, sustainable employment and progress in their employment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ All of the young adults who participated in the training course are receiving specialised training which will give them a particular skill and enable them to progress in their employment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Participants who completed FETAC accredited courses or the ECDL achieved a recognised educational qualification. ■ One participant progressed to a new job having completed the training course. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Participants who completed FETAC accredited courses or the ECDL achieved a recognised educational qualification. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Many of the participants received a recognised educational qualification as a result of participating. ■ Although no participants received a promotion as a direct result of training, all employers recognised potential for advancement in a number of employees.

Project Aim	Success of Tallaght Project	Success of Clondalkin Project	Success of Northside Project	Overall Outcome
<p>The school system will benefit by raising the educational level of former school leavers and develop an innovative and adaptable role in the education of young under-skilled adults</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ As very few were recent school leavers, the school still retained an interest in the welfare of participants. ■ The training course provides a possible destination for school leavers who would like to leave school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Schools participated through the provision of premises and their participation in the FETAC accreditation process ■ While the benefit gained by the Partnership by the schools active participation is clear, the benefit derived by the schools themselves is difficult to identify. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Schools participated through the provision of premises, computer facilities and catering for training courses and also provided suitably qualified tutors. While the benefit gained by the Partnership by the schools active participation is clear, the benefit derived by the schools themselves is difficult to identify. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The scheme provides some opportunity for further training and education of young adults who leave school early. ■ The schools systems provided some premises and tutors, but did not play a major role in the partnership.

Project Aim	<p>Employers will benefit from the upskilling of young under-skilled adults and the commencement of young employees on a career path within their employment.</p>
Success of Tallaght Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Employers benefited as they were specifically seeking to employ young school leavers who had a greater aptitude for manual work than for academic work.
Success of Clondalkin Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Employers benefited from the improved self confidence and attitude of participants.
Success of Northside Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Employers benefited from the improved self confidence and attitude of participants.
Overall Outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Employers observed a general improvement in the attitudes and focus of their employees.

Project Aim	Success of Tallaght Project	Success of Clondalkin Project	Success of Northside Project	Overall Outcome
<p>Develop an integrated model for schools-work partnership addressing both educational attainment problems and labour shortage in a linked and integrated fashion.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The project succeeded in providing a training scheme for young adults who had previously achieved a low level of educational attainment. ■ The training scheme is a useful source of young trainees for participating employers. ■ A key limiting factor for this project is the capacity of employers to offer a place that can lead to genuine career progression opportunities. ■ Tutors who provided off-site training were successful in linking the course content with the nature of the trainee's job. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The project succeeded in providing return to education opportunities to young adults. ■ The project succeeded in providing training that would be of direct relevance to the current employment for participants. ■ The issue of labour shortage is not as relevant to participating employers in the current market. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The project succeeded in providing return to education opportunities to young adults. ■ The project succeeded in providing training that would be of direct relevance to the current employment for participants. ■ The work-focussed training was not considered relevant or successful by participants. ■ The issue of labour shortage is not as relevant to participating employers in the current market. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ All of the projects provided a means of work-based education and training for participants. ■ Clondalkin and Northside projects succeeded in providing training opportunities to participants while they retained their current levels of employment. ■ The labour shortage is no longer an issue for employers. ■ How an effective, integrated model can best be achieved is discussed in the next chapter of this report.

6 Conclusion

Overall, the *Linking Education and the Workplace project* was considered to have been relatively successful, although some elements were undoubtedly more beneficial and innovative than others. The dedication of each of the three co-ordinators and the level of co-operation and sharing of information between each of the three projects were key factors in supporting the delivery of three successful projects.

Outlined below are our conclusions on key elements of the pilot and an overall recommendation on how the programme should be continued into the future. There are a number of core elements of the pilot projects which require some mention:

Structure of the Projects

Partnership Approach – Local, Regional, National

The projects involved a partnership approach and were run locally. Local schools, Youthreach centres, Chambers of Commerce, businesses and the relevant Area Partnerships were variously involved. In addition, FÁS, the Department of Education and Science and other relevant parties were involved at a co-ordination and funding level, with the central co-ordination under the aegis of the Dublin Employment Pact. This structure added value and greatly assisted the local Partnership approach. This structure is innovative for this type of project and resulted in some highly successful elements, particularly the involvement of the private sector.

Recruitment

However, from a time and momentum perspective, the localised nature of the pilots did create problems, specifically for the co-ordinators. A large proportion of the time spent in the project set-up phase was spent attempting to attract both employers and participants.

Each of the pilot project co-ordinators struggled extensively with this task and went to great lengths including cold calling, mailshots, advertising, to attract relevant employers. In some cases (particularly with the Northside Partnership), despite the extensive efforts made, the main bulk of the employers were garnered through the personal contacts of staff in the Partnership. Whilst it worked in this case, it is not sustainable and cannot be part of a major roll-out of the pilots.

Staff Support

In all cases, the success of the pilots and the retention of participants, relied extensively on the commitment of the co-ordinators. Whilst it is recognised that there is an element of outreach in these programmes, the co-ordinators exhibited commitment above and beyond the call of duty which could not be reasonably expected in a roll-out of the project.

On this basis it may be more effective to restructure the organisation of future pilots:

Recommendation

- A centralised co-ordinator/manager should be responsible for the attraction of employers and participants in the various local areas. This co-ordinator could work closely with FÁS, relevant Chambers of Commerce and the local Area Partnerships and could create an effective marketing campaign which would be transferable across a number of regions.

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- A local co-ordinator should have responsibility for the running of the programmes, selection and liaising with the tutors and participants and troubleshooting. Such a structure would allow for the more efficient use of resources at local levels, allow a specialist focus on key but separate areas of the project roll-out and yet still maintain the important aspects of partnership at a national and local level that worked well in the pilots.

- **Age Profile**

Responding to the needs of early school leavers forms a key part of national policy on tackling educational disadvantage. The Education Welfare Act of 2000 provides for the responsibilities of employers in relation to young employees who left school early and also provided for the establishment of the Education Welfare Board. This policy of tackling the problem of early school leavers has been carried forward to Sustaining Progress which identified co-operative action between The Department of Education and Science, FÁS and employer representative bodies on the issue of young early school leavers as a priority for 2003-2005.

Whilst it was recognised by all the pilot projects that the needs of 17-21 year old early school leavers are probably not well met under current structures, all projects found it extremely difficult to attract relevant numbers of participants who met the profile required of the project. This particular age group presents specific problems, given that their experiences of school may have been negative and, given that this young age group is still relatively fresh. This issue should be addressed in future pilots – perhaps by focussing on 20 to 30 year olds who are at a different life stage and willing to respond to education in a positive way.

The Northside and Clondalkin pilots involved a wider age mix of participants and noted that the involvement of older participants was considered to be a major plus for the balance of classes and the motivation of all trainees.

Tallaght, the only project to focus exclusively on the under 19 year olds, found that they could not find or attract participants within the age group who were in employment and interested in participating. They developed an entirely different programme placing 7 unemployed or early school leavers who were in and out of employment training programmes and paying them to attend classes. Whilst this was no doubt an excellent and successful programme, it did not meet fully with the terms of reference of this pilot and in fact was much more closely related to the already funded Youthreach programme. The success of the Tallaght project in this regard provides key lessons in innovation for Youthreach and steps should be taken to ensure that they are not lost.

On this basis, it has to be assumed that either the proposition was not an attractive one for the age group or that it was not marketed properly to potential participants. Either way, the conclusion to be drawn must be that the pilots, as currently structured, and despite the involvement of local partners and the excellence of the co-ordinators, may not be best suited to the age group and profile originally envisaged.

However, the successful elements in each of the pilots should be built upon through, in the cases of Northside Partnership and Clondalkin, a second pilot phase of this project, and in the case of Tallaght through perhaps another more relevant programme, for example Youthreach. These elements would include a mix of ages and specifically, pertaining to Tallaght, a focus on the creation of training programmes for early school leavers who are not employed, who have a specific interest in particular careers, for example car related careers, hairdressing.

Research has shown that a majority of early school leavers are boys, but also that a higher proportion of girls within this group are counted as being 'unavailable for work' for various reasons. However, despite the relevance of these statistics to overall policy in relation to early school leaving – the issue of gender breakdown was not considered in this evaluation as none of the projects either selected or rejected their participants on the basis of gender.

■ **Course Content and Delivery**

The Northside and Clondalkin Partnerships offered similar course content and structure and offered FETAC certified courses with core content as agreed with the employers. In addition, both pilots and the relevant employers recognised the importance of a personal development content in the training courses.

In Clondalkin, the STEPS course, which was delivered by the co-ordinator, helped the participants to prepare for the more academic elements of the course content and allowed the co-ordinator to spend an amount of important time with the participants. Similarly, the Northside Partnership project included a FETAC certified personal and interpersonal skills module.

The employers for both pilots considered that personal development was of significant importance in the project and it was noted by several interested parties that part of this element of the programme should include some development of "motivation" leading to an understanding by participants that they had some control and influence over their own work life.

Other modules taught in these two pilots included communications, customer care, word processing and the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) all of which were relatively well received. In the Northside Partnership, Spanish was a core subject and was perhaps not considered to be the most practical of subjects by either the participants or, in hindsight, the co-ordinator. Again, the Tallaght Pilot took a different route and focussed mainly on numeric and literacy skill, although they did offer a range of subjects and the approach of tutors recognised the personal development needs.

Accreditation

The original terms of reference of the project stated that the course content should involve the "acquisition of a recognised accreditation on a modular basis, ideally involving NCVA and/or elements of the Leaving Certificate". Whilst most participants received some degree of FETAC certification, progress towards the Leaving Certificate through modular certification may be a qualification which both employers and employees better appreciate and understand.

The most important aspect of the uptake in learning on these pilots was in fact in the delivery. All participants rated the experience and attitude of the tutors as the key element of enjoying and thus succeeding in various modules. In some cases, where tutors scored badly, either by not appearing interested, or by operating as if in a school classroom/using videos, participants felt that the subject was not worthwhile or at best not interesting. In this aspect, the Partnership model did not work to full capacity and in some cases the schools were involved only in providing "outsourced labour" to the pilots, something which should be addressed in future pilot projects.

Tutors

The importance of selecting the correct tutors for the delivery of this programme cannot be overstated. Most of the participants in these programmes left school early and had negative emotions towards their school days and teachers. Tutors who "taught" the participants further perpetuated these negative emotions and did not assist the group. It is imperative that in the future, all tutors selected for these type of programmes have experience and expertise in working with young adults and early school leavers. A key appeal for participants was that the project should not mirror their school experience. A tutor induction process outlining the aims and objectives of the programme may be a beneficial exercise in the future roll-out of the programme. In general the level of tutors was exemplary however there were a number of exceptions which may have soured the experience for some participants

Experience and Benefits to Employers and Participants

■ Employers

The most successful aspect of all the pilot projects was the attraction and retention of private sector employers, a difficult task. This success cannot be underrated and should be built on and developed. In order to guarantee the future involvement of existing and future private sector employers:

There must be a clear understanding of the benefits to be gained from participation in these programmes which must be clearly demonstrable to the employers.

Initially, in the Tallaght project, employers were asked to consider their responsibility to young employees with a particular emphasis placed on the Education Welfare Act 2000 – unfortunately, whilst the soon to be implemented register for early school leavers in employment is an important development, in this case, it simply served to cause employers to reconsider hiring people who fall into this category. The experience was that the use of a "stick" to beat employers was not a successful tool of persuasion and future marketing should be based on the "carrot" concept.

In general, whilst local managers of the employer companies were behind the involvement, the ultimate responsibility for making the decision as to whether to become involved rested with the centralised HR manager in the employer organisations. In addition, those employers that worked the best in the pilot projects had the support of the central HR manager and the local managers.

Employers should clearly understand at the start of the process what their roles and responsibilities are, what they can expect from their employees, and the benefits of involvement with the project.

A centralised co-ordinator/manager will have responsibility in this regard.

Benefits to employers would include:

- Better motivated and productive staff
- A formal and concrete 'local' contribution
- For the future, a part at local level in a project linked to the National Agreement Sustaining Progress.

Roles and Responsibilities would include:

- Significant input into the course content for their employees
- Involvement in the revaluation processor through the monitoring of qualitative and quantitative data on the progress of the project
- Acknowledgement/rewarding of employees who successfully complete the programme i.e. at a minimum that their position is enhanced within the organisation.

The success of each project in overcoming initial difficulties in attracting private sector employers should not be underestimated. Also, considering the very positive experience reported by employers who participated in this pilot project, it is likely that the testimony of these employers could be used to facilitate an easier development and roll-out of future projects.

There should be clear information provided to the company involved. In the future a centralised co-ordinator/manager should be responsible for the development of a clear list of benefits to employers allowing them to be sure about their involvement. This would include better motivated and productive staff. The positive aspect of a 'local' contribution by employers should be emphasised. This should include better motivated

staff who are better trained to the specific requirements of their employers and who are thus more productive. Additionally, employers value the positive aspects of becoming involved in a community and the "local" elements of this project should be emphasised. Part of a second pilot project should include the monitoring of qualitative and quantitative indicators to illustrate the benefits to employers of their involvement in the project – these indicators should be agreed in advance by the management committee and co-ordinated through the centralised manager. Employers should clearly understand at the start of their process what their roles and responsibilities are and what they can expect from their employees.

Employers should have significant input into the course content for their employees but equally that employees who successfully complete the programme should be rewarded, or at a minimum, clearly understand that they have enhanced their position in the company through completing the programme.

■ **Participants**

Key studies into educational disadvantage⁵ indicate the existence of significant numbers of young people in disadvantaged areas of Dublin who left school early. The difficulties in attracting young people of the correct age group which was experienced by all of the projects, may be an indication that the type of employment (if any) available to such young people is not perhaps with larger companies who are likely to offer in-house training programmes, possible opportunities for progression. It may be that these young people gain employment with smaller, less-regulated organisations where long-term opportunities are not available.

Whilst the majority of participants who completed the programme felt that they had benefited from doing so, they were, in general, unclear how it had helped them. A number of steps could be taken to ensure that participants clearly understand the benefits of undertaking these programmes and should include:

- Potential participants should be interviewed, "selected" and asked to sign a "contract of attendance" demonstrating a certain level of commitment.
- All courses and programmes should be certified with a specific focus on modularised Leaving Certificate.
- On completion of the programme a "graduation" ceremony should take place where certificates are presented and should be attended by parents, employers and any other relevant parties (as was undertaken by some of the pilots).
- Where possible, the participants should be able to see a clear link between their achievement and their reward progression in their jobs. Ideally, they would be paid a small bonus by their employers for completion of the programme and/or achievement of key "on-the-job" performance indicators (agreed in advance).

As a conclusion to this section, it should once again be noted that the attraction of private sector employees in the three pilot projects was the single most successful element of the project.

The Future Development of The Linking Education and The Workplace Initiative

A second pilot project should be implemented to further develop the concept behind the Linking Education and the Workplace initiative. This second pilot should include the following key aspects:

Policy Recommendations

- The project should target early school leavers of any age who possess a Junior Certificate and are cur-

⁵ Squaring the Circle – an analysis of programmes in Dublin to prevent early school leaving (Ted Fleming and Mark Murphy for the Dublin Employment Pact, 2000 Youthreach 2000 a consultative process – A report on the outcomes (The National Coordinators of Youthreach, 2000) The Return to Learning Initiative – Evaluation Report & Implementation Guidelines (Patricia Conboy for NALA, LANPAG & Department of Education & Science, 2002).

rently in employment. No restrictions should be made on the age profile or gender of participants, but the programme should focus, where possible, on young people between the ages of 17 and 21.

- The planning, structuring and consultation processes of the second pilot scheme should include the learning and experiences assimilated in the first three pilot projects.
- The pilot projects should be clearly positioned as an innovative approach to the issue of early school leavers and there should be no confusion between this initiative and other projects such as Youthreach or The Back to Education Initiative. Whilst both of these projects are successful and relevant they do not specifically address the issues of the target group here and do not relate specifically to the clear sentiments expressed toward this group in *Sustaining Progress*. On this basis it is imperative that the unique aspects of this initiative are clearly understood by all.
- From a policy perspective, the work undertaken by the Tallaght pilot should be reviewed and considered as a possible addition to the current work of the Youthreach programme.
- The pilot project should be run over a 9 month period (including 3 month for project set-up) and should be re-evaluated on completion.
- The project should be structured in such a way as to provide incentives for employers to take part. This includes the provision of training that has a direct relevance to the employers' needs, inclusion of a broader range of staff, scheduling of training to fit with employers shift schedules.
- The course content for the programme should involve FETAC certified modules, and in promoting the pilot project, the value of the FETAC qualification as being equal to or exceeding the Leaving Certificate should be stressed.
- Local co-ordinators should focus on career guidance counselling and where relevant seek external expertise in the area, in order to support the idea of developing a career path for participating employees.

Partnership

- The partnership model currently in place should remain an inherent part of the pilot schemes. This should include the top level collaboration of the Department of Education and Science and FÁS together with the Dublin Employment Pact, whereby all work together not simply as funding agencies, but as stakeholders and participants in the project.
- The central and local co-ordinators, together with the Management Committee (as currently structured and co-ordinated by the Dublin Employment Pact), would meet prior to commencement of the pilot, at least twice throughout the course of the project and on completion for review and evaluation. The co-ordinators would have ongoing access to personnel in the Dublin Employment Pact should any issues arise.
- The partnership approach should ideally seek to include trade unions. Their involvement would broaden the partnership approach and may act as a key support in encouraging young employees and early school leavers to participate.

Structure

- The pilot projects and their co-ordination should be structured as illustrated in diagram 6.1 on the next page:

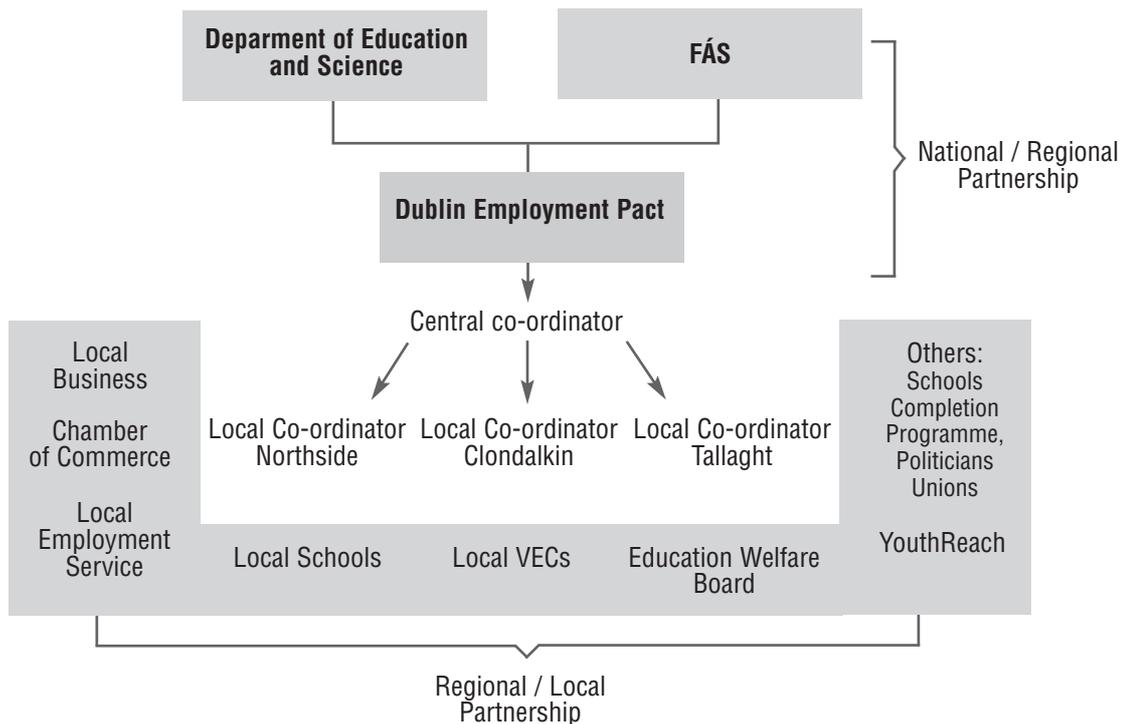


Figure 6.1 Proposed Structure of Project

- A single centralised co-ordinator is responsible for the attraction of relevant employers, and will liaise and co-operate with each of the local co-ordinators to ensure that maximum benefit is derived from his/her work.
- The central co-ordinator would be responsible for:
 - outlining to the employers the benefits to their involvement and marketing the concept to them in a positive way.
 - liaising with Chambers of Commerce, Local Employment Schemes, local Area Partnerships, FÁS and the Dublin Employment Pact as relevant, for the attraction of employers.
 - agreeing the course content with these employers which should be tailored to their requirements (but remaining a certified module).
 - in liaison with the local co-ordinator, developing and delivering a structured induction process for tutors on the programmes to ensure that all tutors are aware of the specific requirements of early school leavers.

Individual Pilots

- The pilot schemes should run in two or three locations, preferably within relative proximity of each other.
- The local co-ordinator would be responsible for "interviewing" potential candidates, liaising with local participating employers, local schools and tutors on the delivery of the course, ensuring that the location and timing of delivery is as simple as possible for both the employers and the employees and the general implementation of the education programme.
- The local co-ordinator and centralised co-ordinator will liaise to arrange the centralised "graduation" ceremony.
- The local co-ordinator is responsible for liaising with participants and trouble shooting any issues.
- The local schools VECs should have a greater input and involvement into the educational content and programme and the provision of experienced tutors. This should be managed through the local co-ordinator.
- The financial structuring of each project, particularly in terms of facilitating employer participation, is an important consideration and should be agreed and arranged between all partners at the design stage of

the project.

- Other incentives that would encourage employer participation should be agreed between the partners and employers of each project.
- The projects should emphasise the value of FETAC qualifications to all participants and recognise this value through a graduation or passing out ceremony. However, to balance this, the co-ordinators should continually work to manage the expectations of all participants. These dual requirements could be achieved by providing a full explanation to all participants and employers of the structure of the FETAC system, of qualifications and providing time for all participants to discuss their views and expectations. It is in this regard that the career guidance skills of the local co-ordinators will be particularly important.

Employers

- Ideally, the employers should be operational in all areas where a pilot is running e.g. Tescos or other supermarkets/retailers.
- These employers should have a structure which allows for internal progression and promotion (e.g. it is not unusual in Tesco for a store manager to have started as a bag packer/trolley collector).
- The manager would be responsible for outlining the responsibilities of the employers and be the visible link between course completion and employee reward (in this case, all participants, no matter where they are employed, should have some similarity in their reward)
- The manager clearly explains to employers and the local co-ordinator their responsibility for providing key indicators and information on key statistics on a frequent basis. (These indicators should be agreed between the Department of Education and Science, FÁS, the Dublin Employment Pact and the employers).
- The employers are asked for feedback throughout the process and can feel free as required to liaise with the local co-ordinator or central manager.

Appendix 1

Documents reviewed for this Evaluation

- Department of the Taoiseach, Dublin (February 2003), *Sustaining Progress – Social Partnership Agreement 2003-2005*
- Conboy, P, (2002), *The Return to Learning Initiative – Evaluation Report and Implementation Guidelines* by NALA (National Adult Literacy Agency), Dublin
- Fitzgerald, E., Ingolsby, B and Daly, F, Department of Social Policy, University College Dublin, (April 2000), *Solving Long-term Unemployment in Dublin – The lessons from policy innovation – Policy Pager No. 2* by Dublin Employment Pact, Dublin
- Fleming, T and Murphy, M, National University of Ireland Maynooth, (2000), *Squaring the Circle – an analysis of programmes in Dublin Schools to prevent early school leaving, with recommendations for a model for best practice – Policy Paper No. 3* by Dublin Employment Pact, Dublin
- Morgan, M, St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin (May 2000), *School and Part-time Work in Dublin The Facts - Survey, Analysis and Recommendations (Patterns of part-time employment among post-primary students with particular reference to schools in disadvantaged communities) – Policy Pager No. 4* by Dublin Employment Pact, Dublin
- McCoy, C, Doyle, D and Williams, J, (December 1999), *1998 Annual School Leavers Survey of 1996/1997 Leavers - Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Department of Education and Science and ESRI (Economic and Social Research Institute), Dublin*
- Youthreach (National Co-ordinators), Dublin, (2000), *Youthreach 2000 - A Consultative Process – a report on the outcomes*
- Morgenroth, E.L.W., ESRI Dublin, (2001) *Analysis of The Economic, Employment and Social Profile of The Greater Dublin Region – prepared for Dublin Employment Pact in partnership with the Dublin and Mid-East Regional Authorities*

The pilot programme *Linking Education and the Workplace* focused on educating and upskilling young people who had left school early and were now in employment. Its strategy was to develop work-based education modules to equip these young people with knowledge and skills to progress within the labour market. This evaluation, carried out by MAZARS, establishes the strength of the approach piloted in this project. What is new is the combining of work and learning and the enabling of educational qualification in a context of continued employment.

The project which was implemented in association with Clondalkin, Tallaght and Northside Partnerships was singled out for support under the Partnership agreement *Sustaining Progress*. The lessons learned from the pilot projects will contribute greatly to the success of the planned new round of the initiative.

A Report commissioned by The Dublin Employment Pact

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