

Challenges of Workplace Learning

An Evaluation of the Second Round of Learning@Work –
a pilot programme on learning opportunities
for people with low skills

by Finbar McDonnell
Hibernian Consulting





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**An initiative of Dublin Employment Pact,
FÁS and the Department of Education and Science
in collaboration with Wicklow Rural Partnership Ltd.**

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Foreword



The *Learning @ Work* project was developed through the Education and Employment Group of the Dublin Employment Pact. It arose from research which highlighted the growing numbers of young workers who had left school early and were now in employment. As these young people are already limited in their career development and life choices by their lack of formal education, they have few options to return to or continue their education and training in a work context.

The upskilling of low-skilled workers is also crucial to the Irish economy in the context of global competition. This has been emphasised in many reports, including that of the Enterprise Strategy Group, and is now central to the national life long learning strategy. But the rate of early school leaving in Ireland remains very high by international standards and there are now more than 100,000 people aged under 30 in the Irish labour force who left school without a Leaving Certificate. Currently further training options are widely available in the workplace but are rarely practically accessible to the low skilled. The Learning @ Work initiative sets out to develop mechanisms to address this issue, particularly through the role of intermediaries in assisting employers and developing training paths for young low skilled workers.

Following an initial *Learning @ Work* pilot action in 2001/02, the social partners agreed through the *Sustaining Progress* agreement that this work be continued and supported. In this context, the Department of Education and Science and FÁS provided funding for a further pilot initiative involving five projects in the Dublin region. These were delivered largely through local consortia organised by the Area Partnerships. In this round they were joined by a further three pilot actions in Wicklow and Kildare organised through the Wicklow Rural Partnership.

The Dublin Employment Pact would like to thank all those involved with this initiative, especially the Department of Education and Science and FÁS who have remained actively committed to the programme, to the organisations that delivered the pilot actions and to the co-ordinators for their ongoing enthusiasm for the initiative. We would also like to thank the employers who came forward to participate in the initiative and most particularly the 100 participants approx. on the current round of *Learning @ Work* pilot actions.

We would like to thank Finbar McDonnell of Hibernian Consulting for this objective and incisive evaluation report. It sets out clearly and analyses comprehensively the work undertaken by the *Learning @ Work* initiative. Chapter 5 of the Report points to a range of lessons arising from the project. We hope that these will play a key role in shaping the responses to be taken at national level to address the issues highlighted here.

Philip O'Connor

Director, Dublin Employment Pact
December 2006



Executive Summary



Learning @ Work operated as a pilot initiative during 2005 and 2006. It targeted low-skilled young people in employment, mainly those who had left school early, and aimed to provide them with education and training in a work context. The initiative had cash funding of €560,000, primarily from FÁS and the Department of Education and Science, with local match funding.

The initiative arose from the fact that 18% of young people in the Irish education system leave second level education before reaching the Leaving Certificate. In the economic climate of recent years, most of these young people have entered employment. However, their lack of education and training subsequently makes it very hard for them to progress in employment. This has been recognised by a range of policy reports as a national strategic issue for the Irish economy. In recent years, there have been some efforts by mainstream agencies to target this cohort of workers.

Under *Learning @ Work*, pilot actions were implemented in three parts of Dublin (Blanchardstown, Clondalkin and Tallaght) and in Wicklow and Kildare. In some cases, training was provided to young people in their place of work, with the company providing facilities, e.g. for a certain number of hours per week. In other cases, young people from different companies were released by their employers for perhaps a half-day per week to come together at a local centre to receive education and training.

Key aspects of the actions related to: outreach to employers to recruit them into the programme; outreach to young workers to persuade them of the value of further education/training; development of appropriate training modules to attract participants and increase their confidence and skills; delivery of accredited modules; and provision of 'flanking' supports to ensure participants remained with the training courses.

In each of the above areas, the pilot actions faced challenges. The actions demonstrated a range of approaches in overcoming these challenges (as outlined in Chapter 4 of the report). They showed that, if the correct approaches and 'sales arguments' are adopted, at least a proportion of employers and participants are happy to opt into a programme of education and training for young workers.

The *Learning @ Work* pilot actions are innovative and distinct from other programmes being operated either by FÁS or by the Department of Education and Science. As such, they have generated interesting potential lessons, many relating to 'technical' aspects of the different dimensions of implementation listed above.

The challenge now is to identify how these lessons can be integrated into, and used to enhance, mainstream programmes. Key learning would appear to arise for: FÁS; the Department of Education and Science; organisations such as Area Partnerships and Rural Development Companies which can reach and support young workers at local level; and the social partners, in disseminating the message that the upskilling of young workers with low skills is a national labour market priority.



Chapter 1:

Introduction



1.1 The Learning @ Work initiative

Learning @ Work is a pilot initiative of the Dublin Employment Pact that ran from late-2004 to late-2006. Its objective was to work with young people who had left school early and were in low-skilled employment, in order to upgrade their levels of education and skills.

This sizeable cohort of workers was identified by the Dublin Employment Pact as one which is of strategic importance to the Irish economy but which has tended not to be addressed by existing labour market interventions. While there are a number of programmes successfully targeting people who have left school early and who are out of work, or who have not yet entered the workplace, similar schemes have not existed for those who are in jobs. Developing interventions that successfully reach this group could therefore target a key group in terms of the upskilling of the Irish economy and could support individual low-skilled workers in building their careers and in avoiding future low pay or unemployment (e.g. in the event of an economic downturn).

The initiative built on a smaller *Learning @ Work* pilot project undertaken in 2001/2 which was praised in the *Sustaining Progress – Social Partnership Agreement 2003-2005*. The *Sustaining Progress* agreement recommended that the initiative be continued, stating:

“Co-operative action will take place between the Department of Education and Science/FÁS and employer representative bodies to address the learning needs of young people who leave school early and have taken up employment, within available resources, and reflecting the experience of a recently initiated pilot scheme in the Dublin area”.

Funding of approximately €465,000 was provided by FÁS and the Department of Education and Science for *Learning @ Work* during 2005 and 2006. Implementation of the initiative was managed and co-ordinated by the Dublin Employment Pact¹ for three Dublin pilot actions and by Wicklow Rural Partnership Ltd² for three pilot actions in Kildare and Wicklow. The local implementing organisations supplemented the funding from FÁS and the Department of Education and Science with small amounts of local match funding.

1 The Dublin Employment Pact (DEP) Ltd was established in 1998 to tackle employment and labour market policy development issues in the Greater Dublin Area. The DEP operates as an extensive network bringing together practitioners, experts and policy makers to collaborate on broad ranging initiatives, pilot programmes and other activities. Between 2000 and 2006, the DEP received its core funding under the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme, part of the NDP.

2 Wicklow Rural Partnership (WRP) is a community based rural development company working in Co. Wicklow. Its principal responsibility is the delivery of the LEADER + and National Rural Development Programme and it also delivers a range of social inclusion programmes.

This report is an evaluation of the work of the *Learning @ Work* initiative undertaken during 2005 and 2006, and of potential learning arising.

1.2 Partners in the Learning @ Work Initiative

Funding for *Learning @ Work* was provided by the *Community Services* division of FÁS and by the *Further Education* section of the Department of Education and Science. The *Community Services* division of FÁS has experience of interacting with early school leavers through schemes such as Community Employment, Job Clubs and Community Training Workshops. The *Further Education* section of the Department of Education and Science is responsible for a range of adult education and literacy programmes, including Post-Leaving Certificate programmes and second chance programmes (such as Youthreach and the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme). As such, it has extensive experience of working with early school leavers who engage in further education and training outside of a work context.

The Dublin pilot actions were funded by both FÁS and the Department of Education and Science. The Kildare and Wicklow pilot actions were funded by FÁS with the support of the local VECs.

In the Dublin region, the Education and Employment Group of the Dublin Employment Pact was the source of the idea of the *Learning @ Work* initiative in 2001. Having received funding approval from FÁS and the Department of Education and Science in late-2004 for a second round, Dublin Employment Pact issued a call for suitable on-the-ground projects for a second round of *Learning @ Work* projects. Pilot actions were implemented in Blanchardstown, Clondalkin and Tallaght.

In Wicklow and Kildare, Wicklow Rural Partnership (WRP) had, through contacts with employers, identified a need to encourage young people currently in employment to engage in training and education. In May 2005 WRP received a contract from FÁS to develop and test a programme to promote soft skills training for young early school leavers (17 yrs +) employed by companies/sectors in Counties Wicklow and Kildare. This process was managed by Wicklow Rural Partnership, in association with Kildare European LEADER Teo (KELT). Pilot actions were implemented in Shillelagh (Wicklow) and in Kildare.

Progress from the individual projects was reported back to a steering group established for the initiative. The steering group consisted of the project co-ordinators, education co-ordinators of the local area partnerships, FÁS, the Department of Education and Science and the Dublin Employment Pact. When the Wicklow Kildare *Learning @ Work* programme started in May 2005, the programme manager joined the steering group.

1.3 Evaluation Research and Report Structure

Hibernian Consulting was appointed as a formative evaluator to the *Learning @ Work* initiative in February 2006 and worked with the initiative during 2006. As evaluator, the role of Hibernian Consulting was to support the pilot actions in capturing the





learning from their work after that point (e.g. in ensuring outputs arising were captured) and to support the steering group in its work. A set of initial findings were presented to the steering group in Spring 2006 and a draft evaluation report was circulated in October 2006, before this report was finalised.

In preparing this evaluation of the *Learning @ Work* initiative, Hibernian Consulting held discussions with all of the organisations involved in the initiative, as well as with a selection of the employers and employees who participated in pilot actions³.

The following paragraphs set out the content of the remaining chapters:

Learning @ Work exists in the context of the situation as regards early school leavers (ESLs) in Ireland. Data relating to ESLs and to the current situation as regards policy interventions to support this target group is presented in **Chapter 2**. The policy framework helps to set the context in which learning arising from *Learning @ Work* can potentially be channelled.

Chapter 3 presents further information on the context of *Learning @ Work* which includes key learning points from the previous, smaller *Learning @ Work* pilot project and the criteria for choosing the pilot actions in the current initiative.

Information on the pilot actions under *Learning @ Work*, their interactions with employers and employees, their outcomes and the views of the stakeholders directly involved in the pilot actions are set out in **Chapter 4**.

Chapter 5 contains conclusions and learning points arising from the evaluation. It reviews how the work of the initiative fits with national policy requirements; how the initiative was designed and how the projects operated on the ground. It presents learning arising from the outreach work with employers and participants; from the training modules chosen and from the 'flanking supports' that needed to be provided to participants. It also discusses how the work of the initiative might be taken forward in the context of the mainstream policy landscape, in particular by FÁS and the Department of Education and Science.

Annex 1 presents a relatively detailed description of the individual pilot actions. As there have been few initiatives to date in Ireland that have attempted to reach low-skilled workers in employment, the work of the individual pilot actions may be of interest to groups attempting to reach this target group in the future. These descriptions were prepared by the co-ordinators who managed the local *Learning @ Work* pilot actions during 2005 and 2006. **Annex 2** contains a May 2006 article from *The Irish Times* on the Kildare pilot action under *Learning @ Work*.

³ Hibernian Consulting would particularly like to thank Mary Folan, who worked as the central co-ordinator for *Learning @ Work* for most of its life, for her support in preparing the evaluation.



Chapter 2:

Policy Context for Learning @ Work



2.1 Extent of Early School Leaving in Ireland

The *Learning @ Work* initiative targeted young people who have left school early and moved into employment. In response to the question: “How many such people are there in Ireland?”, Table 2.1 shows the latest available data on the educational qualifications of people leaving secondary school in Ireland.

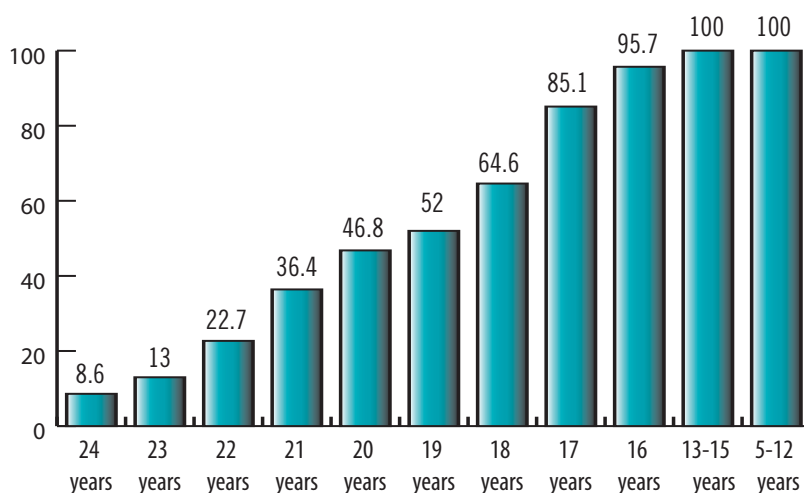
Table 2.1: Breakdown of School Leavers in 2002/3 by Level of Education		
	Number	% of School Leavers
No Qualifications	2,475	3.7%
Junior Certificate	9,738	14.4%
Leaving Certificate VPT	9,151	13.6%
Leaving Certificate No VPT	46,016	68.3%
Total	67,379	100.00%

VPT refers to Vocational Preparation and Training Programmes, which provides integrated educational, training and work experiences for secondary school students in the senior cycle.

Source: ESRI (2005), 2004 Annual School Leavers' Survey of 2002/2003 Leavers, data taken from Table 2

Table 2.1 shows that, in 2002/3, 18.1% of young people (over 12,200 people) who left secondary school did so before Leaving Certificate level, i.e. with no qualifications or with only a Junior Certificate.

Figure 2.1: Proportion of Irish people in full-time education, by age, 2003/2004



Source: Department of Education and Science, Key Education Statistics: 1993/94 – 2003/04

Table 2.1 is reinforced by Figure 2.1 (on previous page), which shows that 15% of 17-year olds have already left full-time education, with this figure rising to 36% of 18-year olds.

The Programme for Government for 2002-07, and the 2006 *Towards 2016* social partnership agreement both reaffirm an intention to reduce the proportion of young people leaving school early in Ireland. The Programme for Government states that reducing early school leaving is a 'core priority' for the government.

While the issue of early school leaving *per se* is outside the scope of *Learning @ Work*, successful efforts to reduce the number of early school leavers would mean a lower need for later interventions to upgrade their education and skills levels.

2.2 Early School Leavers and the Jobs Market

Census Data on Employment Status of Young People

Young people who leave school before completing a Leaving Certificate do so for various reasons. However, the Census data from 2002 shows that most people aged 15-19 who were not in education were in employment.

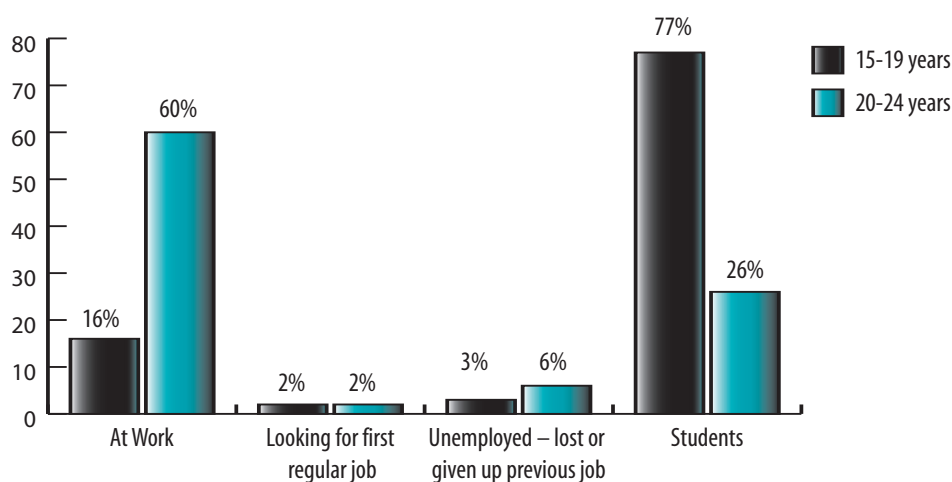


Figure 2.2: Principal Economic Status of 15-19 year olds and 20-24 year olds, 2002

Source: Census 2002, Volume 5, Table 3A

Figure 2.2 shows that, of 313,000 15-19 year olds in the state, some 23% were no longer studying. Some two-thirds of this 23% (i.e. 16%) were working with a further 5% either seeking employment or registered as unemployed. (A final 2% were either not available for work or not classified.)

Figure 2.2 indicates that, in the context of the strong economic buoyancy experienced in Ireland in recent years, most young people aged 15-19 who are no longer in education are able to find a job and enter employment.



ESRI Data on 2002/2003 School Leavers

The annual School Leavers Survey for 2004 was commissioned by the Department of Education and Science and undertaken by the ESRI. The survey provides data on school leavers approximately one year after they complete second level education. For the 2004 study, school leavers who exited the second-level system between September 2002 and end-August 2003 provided the cohort for the study. Table 2.2 shows the economic status of these school leavers in May/June 2004.

Table 2.2: Economic Status of 2002/03 School Leavers in May/June 2004					
	No Quals	Junior Cert	L Cert VPT	L Cert No VPT	Total
Employed	23.6%	59.1%	60.2%	31.3%	39.0%
Unemployed – After Losing Job	14.8%	8.3%	4.3%	2.7%	4.2%
Unemployed – Seeking first Job	35.7%	15.9%	2.9%	3.5%	6.4%
Student	7.4%	10.6%	25.9%	58.1%	45.0%
Unavailable for Work	15.2%	5.3%	3.6%	2.8%	3.7%
Emigrated	3.4%	0.9%	3.1%	1.6%	1.8%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Total Number	2,475	9,738	9,151	46,016	67,379
% of all School Leavers	3.7%	14.5%	13.6%	68.3%	100%

For explanation of VPT, see Table 2.1

Source: ESRI (2005), 2004 Annual School Leavers' Survey of 2002/2003 School Leavers, data taken from Table 2

The right-hand column of Table 2.2 shows that 39% of school leavers were in employment one year after leaving school, with 11% unemployed, 45% in further studies and 5% either unavailable for work or having emigrated. While this implies a higher unemployment rate than for the wider labour force, it confirms the picture from the census that most young people entering the jobs market from school gain employment.

However, Table 2.2 shows that differences exist in terms of performance in the jobs market depending on the level of qualifications obtained in school. Of the four levels of qualifications shown in Table 2.2, the level of unemployment is considerably higher for the relatively small proportion leaving school with no qualifications; falls to about one-quarter for those with a Junior Certificate qualification and is under 10% for those with a Leaving Certificate.

On a gender basis, female school leavers were more likely to have progressed to further studies than male school leavers (49% versus 40%) one year after leaving school. By contrast, males were more likely than females to be in employment (44% versus 34%).

Sectors where Early School Leavers Work

The ESRI survey of school leavers shows that people with low educational qualifications are likely to work in specific economic sectors. It comments: *“Entry into Distribution, Banking and Professional Services is more prevalent among those with the Leaving Certificate. Those without the Leaving Certificate are more highly represented in the Industrial sector, accounting for more than 40% of those with no qualifications and just over*

half of those with the Junior Certificate only. In terms of occupational distribution, those without the Leaving Certificate are most likely to take up jobs in Services and skilled/semi-skilled manual occupations”.

For those sectors, i.e. industrial and services, where young people without a Leaving Certificate are more likely to work, a gender related pattern is evident:

“Males are over represented in the Industry sector where half of male leavers enter jobs as opposed to only 9% of females. Females tend to dominate entry into Services occupations representing 74% relative to 28% of males. Males continue to be over-represented in manual occupations (59%)”.

Earnings and Level of Education

Information on the earnings of the general labour force given their educational qualifications is available from the OECD, and information on earnings of the 2002/3 cohort of Irish school leavers is available from the ESRI survey.

The OECD data⁴ shows that, for those people aged 25-64 in the workforce, if the earnings level of those people having completed a Leaving Certificate being set equal to 100, those with third-level education can expect to earn between half and two-thirds more again than those with a Leaving Certificate only, and those without a Leaving Certificate can expect to earn about 13% less. In other words, and not surprisingly, earnings are closely related to educational qualifications.

This holds for both males and females but, for females, the link between education and earnings is stronger.

The link between educational qualifications and earnings is also seen for recent school leavers. Table 2.3 shows data from the 2004 Annual School Leavers' Survey.

Table 2.3: Average Gross Weekly Earnings of 2002/3 School Leavers in Employment (2004)			
	Male	Female	Total
No qualifications	€261	€289	€271
Junior Certificate	€308	€247	€287
Leaving Certificate only	€313	€284	€302
Leaving Certificate + VPT	€352	€333	€339
Mean	€315	€294	€306

Source: ESRI (2005), 2004 Annual School Leavers' Survey of 2002/2003 School Leavers, data taken from Table 12

The ESRI comments: *“A strong relationship is apparent between educational attainment and earnings, with earnings increasing steadily as educational attainment increases”.* The low levels of weekly wages are confirmed by data on the hourly rates, with rates for all categories below €10 per hour (in 2004) and being as low as €6.70 for male school leavers with no educational qualifications.

4 Taken from OECD Education at a Glance 2005, Table A9.1a





Early School Leavers (ESLs) and Wider Labour Force

Early school leaving is not a new phenomenon in Ireland. The longer-term effect of this is seen in the fact that the wider Irish labour force has a lower skill profile than in other countries. This is shown in Table 2.4 below.

Table 2.4: Skill Composition of Working Population in Selected EU Countries, 2003			
	Low-Skilled	Medium-Skilled	High-Skilled
Germany	16%	58%	26%
Denmark	20%	50%	30%
Finland	22%	46%	32%
UK	13%	56%	31%
Ireland	30%	40%	30%

Source: Annex 6.5, Employment in Europe Report, 2004 – as quoted by NESF (2006), NESF Report No. 33, Table 7.3

Commenting on the above table, the NESF notes: *“We (Ireland) have a high percentage of low-skilled workers (below upper secondary education) – although we also have a high percentage of high-skilled workers”*.

2.3 National Policy Perspective on Early School Leavers (ESLs)

17

The issue of early school leavers in a labour market context has been discussed in a number of recent Irish policy studies. It is now seen as an important national policy issue, in the context of rising national wage levels and the need for the economy to upskill in order to remain competitive in a global economic context.

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

Published in July 2000, this White Paper contained chapters on: Second Chance and Further Education; Community Education; Workplace Education; new approaches to Higher Education; and Supports Required for all of these. In general, the White Paper broke new ground in relation to adult education in Ireland, which it described as *“systematic learning undertaken by adults who return to learning having concluded initial education and training”*. It noted that adult education remained the last area of mass education to be developed in Ireland.

Some of the comments of the White Paper in relation to workplace education are shown in Box 2.1 on the following page.

BOX 2.1: LEARNING FOR LIFE, SECTION 6.9, NEW ENTRANTS TO THE WORKFORCE

“The government is concerned that new entrants may be joining the workforce at the low skill end, poorly prepared for sectoral or economic downturn or for progressing their own careers. They are, therefore, vulnerable to unemployment and are limited in their career building prospects by a poor foundation in education and skill. It is desirable that those in such situations should not have to make a choice between work and education/training, but that there should be active education and training support for them in the work context. This will be a particular priority of the Task Force on Lifelong Learning in consultation with employers and trade unions.

“The Trade Union Movement has a particular role to play in this area. Traditionally, the Trade Union Movement has been a major player in the education of workers.

... “Emerging developments, following the Educational Welfare Act 2000, will play an important role in this area. Under the Act, young people aged 16-18 who intend to leave school will be required to register with the Educational Welfare Board ... (which) will draw up a plan for the further education and training of the individual concerned, and will require that person to make all reasonable efforts to carry out the plan. It is on this basis that the Board will issue a certificate entitling the young person to work ...”

In relation to workplace education, the White Paper envisaged partnerships/consortia of education/training and industry interests to deliver programmes, with a focus on overcoming barriers to participation and on flexible delivery. The White Paper also raised the possibility of tax relief on all fees paid by employees for such learning and argued that the ‘learning organisation’ was the workplace model of the future.

Enterprise Strategy Group (2004)

The *Enterprise Strategy Group* reported to the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment in July 2004. In the context of recommending the positioning of Ireland as a knowledge economy, its report, *Ahead of the Curve*, made a number of comments in relation to Irish labour force development and extracts are presented in Box 2.2.

BOX 2.2: ENTERPRISE STRATEGY GROUP (2004), Section 4.4 – Skills, Education and Training

“Upskilling of the existing workforce and raising education levels is essential in an environment of constant change. To foster the continual acquisition of knowledge, skills and competencies, formalised approaches to lifelong learning must be introduced and corresponding delivery structures put in place. As a particular priority, policy interventions will be required to ensure the low-skilled are not left behind in the move towards a knowledge society”.

This led to the following specific recommendation:

“Establish a national ‘One Step Up’ initiative, facilitated by the National Framework of Qualifications. While this initiative seeks to engage with the workforce as a whole, it should pay particular attention to the people with low levels of qualification and in low-level occupations, who are least likely to receive sufficient access to learning opportunities”.





The foregoing recommendation of the Enterprise Strategy Group was largely accepted by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and a 2005 update on progress in implementing the recommendation provided by the Department ⁵ stated that progress was being made on its implementation through an Inter-Departmental Group on Lifelong Learning; through increased investment (of €48m) by FÁS in this area in 2005 mostly directed through in-company training; and through a Workplace Education Fund, established with funding of €2m to target employees with the lowest skill levels and particularly those with difficulties with literacy and numeracy.

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

A major *NESC* Report on the Irish economy, published in December 2005, addressed the issue of training for those with low skills – an extract is provided in Box 2.3 below.

BOX 2.3: Extract from NESC (2005), Section 3.3.5 – ‘Public Investment in Training and Education for Those with Low Qualifications or Low Incomes’

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

- Experience shows that those with low initial qualifications are least likely to benefit from employer provided training and are most vulnerable to economic change;
- Those on low incomes have the least scope to invest in training and education from their own resources;
- From an equity perspective, there is a case for assisting investment in education and training for those who derived limited benefit from the initial education and training system;
- Researchers at the University of Ottawa found evidence that reducing the number of people with very low skills in the labour force shows up clearly as an influence on economic growth;
- A focus on those with limited educational qualifications is of particular relevance in Ireland in view of the relatively high share of the adult population that has not completed second level education (38% in 2003, as per the OECD).

Following the *One Step Up* proposal of the Enterprise Strategy Group, FÁS (2005) has proposed paid training leave for low qualified workers, funded by the state. This would be paid at the minimum wage rate and could be topped up by employers.”

The NESC report cites the *Skillnets* programme, the *Back to Education Initiative* (BTEI) and the *One Step Up* initiative as positive developments in recent years and praises an initiative undertaken by Dublin Port (in partnership with the relevant unions) where re-training, upskilling and individual development programmes have been delivered to employees.

⁵ Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (2005), *Enterprise Strategy Group Action Plan*, available at www.entemp.ie

National Workplace Strategy (2005)

The Forum on the Workplace of the Future, a high-level Taskforce established in late-2003, launched its National Workplace Strategy in March 2005.

Box 2.4: Extract from National Workplace Strategy, Section 5.3, Developing Future Skills

“The challenge of developing and maintaining a highly skilled workforce must be tackled on a number of levels. At individual level, engaging in career planning and developing a Personal Learning Plan will become increasingly important. At organisational level, employers must encourage learning that will add value to the workplace, and facilitate employers to achieve their potential. At national level, the identification, provision and assessment of the skills necessary for Ireland’s competitiveness, the development of closer ties between the workplace and education sector, and support for individuals and organisations wishing to develop their skills must become priorities.”

Selection of ‘Key Findings’ in this section:

- “Employers have a key role in providing training for employees, and encouraging employees to avail of further training and education through the provision of flexible working arrangements.
- Significant problems exist for smaller businesses in terms of the affordability of training and its integration with work scheduling.
- Attention must be given to changing skills needs in the middle and lower end of the labour market. Significant proportions of employees in lower skilled jobs do not have adequate access to training, and policy mechanisms and initiatives need to be repositioned to ensure that these employees have access to training and further education throughout their working lives.
- A more integrated approach is required among the various government departments, state agencies and educational establishments, which are responsible for policy development, co-ordination, funding and delivery. Specifically, urgent measures are required to significantly increase the take-up of lifelong learning by adults in the workplace. Particular attention must be paid to sectors and employee groups where take-up levels are lowest. Workplace training initiatives, including successful pilot initiatives, need to be further developed and promoted.”

Following publication of the National Workplace Strategy, the government established a High Level Implementation Group. This group, under the Chairmanship of the Minister for Labour Affairs, is established to oversee implementation of the recommendations made by the report.

NESF (2006) – Creating a More Inclusive Labour Market

This *NESF* report, under the heading *Case for Investing in Low-skilled Workers*, links the training needs of ESLs to those of other groups of workers, and places the issue in the context of the recent strong Irish economic growth.





Box 2.5: Extract from NESF (2006), Section 7 – Progression of Low Skilled Workers, Paragraphs 3 and 4

“OECD studies indicate that, for less educated workers, training can raise productivity in line with market wages, thereby helping to sustain their employment prospects. The need for a ‘One Step Up’ initiative aimed particularly at workers with low levels of qualification has been outlined in the recent Enterprise Strategy Group Report. Several groups may be identified within the category ‘vulnerable and low-skilled’ including those young people who have left school early and taken up jobs; older people whose skills have become obsolete and more generally people at work who receive little training and are in jobs with little prospect of advancement.

“A main current concern is the emergence of a significant number of young, low-skilled workers in low-paid employment, given the continuum that exists between poorly paid low-skill jobs and unemployment. A downside of the recent rapid growth of the economy is that, given easier access to employment, many young people particularly those from low-income backgrounds are eager to leave school early and seize the opportunity to work, irrespective of the fact that jobs may offer limited opportunity for career advancement and long-term security of work.”

Social Partnership Agreement 2006 – Towards 2016

The widespread policy recognition reflected in the above paragraphs in relation to the need for greater levels of training and education provision for workers with low levels of skills and qualifications was echoed in the 2006 national Partnership Agreement.

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Box 2.6: Towards 2016, Section on People of Working Age, Priority Action 1

“The Government and social partners agree to work together to deliver policies that are focussed on ensuring that Ireland has a fully-trained, well-educated workforce in order to achieve the vision of a socially cohesive, knowledge-based innovation-driven economy whilst significantly increasing the skills levels of those in employment and consequently reducing the number of low skilled in the workforce...

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

2.4 Current Interventions for Target Group

Learning @ Work was developed by the Dublin Employment Pact due to a perceived gap in the provision of education and training for early school leavers and low-skilled workers in employment. However, a number of training programmes target related groups and, in recent years, some provision has started for low-skilled people in work.

Relevant programmes funded by the Department of Education’s Further Education section are shown in Table 2.5 (overleaf).

Table 2.5: Department of Education and Science Programmes Relevant to Target Group***Youthreach***

The Youthreach Programme is an Inter-Departmental initiative which provides two years integrated education, training and work experience to young people aged 16-20 years who are at least six months in the labour market and who have left school early without any qualifications or vocational training.

The programme funded by the Department of Education and Science is delivered in out of school centres and is managed by Vocational Education Committees (VECs). There are a total of ninety Youthreach Centres managed by the VEC sector throughout the country. Overall, there are about 6,500 places available nationally at present, 3,200 of which are in the VEC sector and the remainder in Community Training Centres under the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

Basic skills training, practical work training and general education are features of the programme, and the application of new technology is integrated into all aspects of programme content. The programme provides a strong emphasis on personal development, on the core skills of literacy/numeracy, communications and IT, along with a choice of vocational options such as Catering, Hairdressing, Computers, Woodwork, Photography, Video, Sports, Art and Craft and a work experience programme.

Expenditure on the programme in 2005 was nearly €47 million. In addition, the Department of Education and Science provides funding to VECs annually to assist towards the childcare expenses of participants in Youthreach.

Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme

The Vocational Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) provides full-time second chance education and training opportunities for unemployed adults who are at least 21 years of age and in receipt of specified social welfare payments for at least six months. The scheme is funded by the Department and operated through the 33 Vocational Educational Committees (VECs)

Students on VTOS are offered a wide range of vocational options.

Participants may also pursue subjects in the Junior and Leaving Certificate or acquire a portfolio of qualifications in line with their needs and interests. The scheme has proved to be successful in opening up learning and progression opportunities for people marginalised by unemployment. The Department provides funding to VECs annually to assist with childcare expenses of VTOS participants.

Back to Education Initiative (part-time)

The Back to Education Initiative (part-time) comprises two strands: 1. Formal Strand (VECs and Secondary, Special and Community and Comprehensive Schools). 2. Community Strand (There is a commitment to reserve 10% of all places approved annually for course provision in community groups and organisations).

The overall aim of the BTEI is to increase the participation of young people and adults with less than upper second level education in a range of flexible learning opportunities. Part-time programmes under the BTEI provide young people and adults with an opportunity to return to learning, a re-entry route for those in the workplace who wish to upgrade their skills in line with emerging needs and a chance to combine education and training with family, work and other responsibilities.

In total, there are approximately 22,000 participants in courses under the BTEI part time.

Post Leaving Certificate Programmes

There are over 30,000 approved place annually on Post Leaving Certificate Courses. Post Leaving Certificate Programmes were introduced in 1985 to provide integrated general education, vocational training and work experience mainly for young people who had completed upper second level education, to enhance their prospects of gaining employment. Since their inception PLC courses have developed into a wide range of disciplines supporting industry and community needs, and have significantly widened the scope of educational provision.

Over time the programme has developed a second important role that is as a route to further education. Latest research shows that approximately 40% of PLC leavers progress to further education or training. The links scheme with Institutes of Technology and Universities also greatly assists PLC students progressing to further education. PLCs are also now becoming more important as a re-entry route for older adults wishing to return to learning. Latest figures highlight that approximately 50% of PLC students are over 21 years of age.





At present, some 213 centres are providing PLC courses throughout the country. The number of participants has steadily increased over the years. The overall number of approved places now stands at over 30,000 representing a growth of 60% over the last decade since 1997.

PLC colleges form an important source of supply of people with skills to serve the Irish economy. Courses are aimed at preparing students both for employment and for progression into areas of education and training. The PLC sector continues to pioneer education in such areas as childcare, community care, equestrian studies, sport and leisure, tourism and multi-media, in addition to the more traditional areas such as business studies, art and craft, information technology, construction and electronics

Adult Literacy Programme

Approximately 35,000 people are involved in dedicated adult literacy courses. These courses encompass personal development modules and IT skills as well as literacy/numeracy work.

Table 2.5 indicates a range of options for people who have left school without a Leaving Certificate and who wish to upgrade their level of education. However, almost all of these (with the exception of a small part of the *Back to Education Initiative*) are not related to work. As such, an individual would need to make provision to follow such courses in their own time.

Despite the fact that most early school leavers in Ireland are male, the Department of Education and Science reports that women are relatively over-represented on all of the above programmes funded through its Further Education section.

As the national training authority, FÁS also offers a number of programmes relevant to early-school leavers and low-skilled workers, as seen in Table 2.6.

Table 2.6: FÁS Programmes Relevant to Target Group

Youthreach	See Table 2.5 on previous page for description.
School Leaver Programmes	Some early school leavers will enter courses aimed at those who already have a Leaving Certificate, such as the Community Youth Training Programme or FÁS mainstream courses.
Pathways Programme	This targets early school leavers aged 16-20 in pilot projects in Rathangan (Co. Kildare), Tralee and Waterford city. Established in the late-1990s, the programme devised a model of tracking, mentoring and support for early school leavers or potential early school leavers.
Competency Development Programme	This aims to upgrade skill levels in specific sectors and is open to private companies with under 250 employees. Some 12 sectors are identified, including business-related services, traditional manufacturing sectors and retail/wholesale. Funding priority is given to employees who fall into the 'General Operative' category.
One Step Up Initiative	<p>Launched in September 2005 as part of the government's response to the Enterprise Strategy Group report. Focused on people in the workforce but particularly those with low skill levels. The FÁS brochure states: "One Step Up promotes life long learning by providing easy access to a range of learning initiatives such as tutor led training and e-learning amongst other options. It will assist employees to obtain a recognised qualification within the National Framework of Qualifications."</p> <p>In 2006, FÁS had developed a 'Skills for Work' programme, a subset of the overall <i>One Step Up</i> Initiative that is focused on literacy, numeracy and basic IT skills but with the option of progression to other training modules. It included a Workplace Communications Course (working towards a FETAC Level 3 Certificate and perhaps leading to other FETAC modules) as well as a shorter 24-30 hour taster course. It stated: "The training time is flexible. Ideally, employees are released from work to attend."</p>

Table 2.6 indicates that, as with the courses offered by the Department of Education and Science, most of the relevant FÁS courses for the target group are aimed at people not in employment, especially at early school leavers looking for initial training.

Table 2.6 shows that this situation has changed somewhat since late-2005 with the introduction of the *One Step Up* programme and its 'Skills for Work' module and Workplace Communications Course. Training is also provided through the Competency Development Programme in specific sectors.

Young people who leave school early and are in employment may also receive education or training from other sources. Specific other sources could include the following.


- Skillnets is supported by IBEC, ICTU, Chambers Ireland, Small Firms Association and the Construction Industry Federation. Funded through the National Training Fund, Skillnets encourages groups of firms to come together and devise training and development initiatives to meet their collective skills needs. Networks receive grant aid and other forms of assistance from Skillnets. These networks encompass a wide variety of sectors and regions in Ireland, with a particular focus on the needs of small and micro-enterprises. Some 54 'learning networks' are being funded in the 2006-2008 period.
- Training for early school leavers may be provided by sectoral specific statutory agencies such as Fáilte Ireland, Teagasc or BIM;
- Most workers will obtain some level of on-the-job training, including initial induction and ongoing development of competencies and skills;
- Workers may be sent on training courses with private sector training providers as part of their career development. However, data for Ireland shows that the lower the initial level of education and skills of an employee, the less likely they are to receive such training.

2.5 Issues Arising from Review of Policy Framework

A number of points arise from the overview provided in Chapter 2 in relation to early school leavers and the labour market:

- Some 18% of young people leaving secondary education (almost one-in-five) do so before reaching the Leaving Certificate;
- This amounts to over 12,000 young people per year. As the average age of leaving without a Leaving Certificate would be age 16 or 17, there are up to 150,000 people aged between 16 and 30 years old who left school without a Leaving Certificate. Some of these will have subsequently undertaken education and training, including Leaving Certificate modules, but there would still be well over 100,000 people aged under 30 who have completed their education and did not complete the second level education cycle;
- This is not a new phenomenon and is reflected in the proportion of the wider Irish labour force with a low level of skills being much higher than the equivalent proportion in other developed economies;



- 
- Most young people who leave school early move into jobs, although this is much easier for those with a Junior Certificate than for those without one;
 - Many of the people who leave school early and move into employment do so on low wages and into low-skilled industrial and service sector jobs. While some companies and organisations have good in-house training programmes, many of these workers have limited scope for subsequent career progression

In relation to national policy on early school leavers and low-skilled workers in employment, the issue has been the subject of comment in several recent policy reports:

- There is a consensus that, in the context of wider industrial policy and the intention to move towards a 'knowledge-based economy', there is a requirement to upgrade the skills of all workers, especially those in low-skill employment;
- There is a fear that, in the event of an economic downturn, many of the young people who entered the job market in the past decade will lose their jobs and will find their lack of skills a major barrier to taking up subsequent employment. For example, in launching the *One Step Up* programme in September 2005, Minister Micheál Martin stated: "Those with low skill levels are particularly vulnerable to changes in economic conditions and we must safeguard their position going forward".
- The challenge of upskilling the cohort of younger workers with low skill levels has been linked by the NESF to the challenge of reaching other cohorts of workers with low skills, including older workers.

Chapter 2 shows that a number of programmes exist targeted at early school leavers. However, most of these target young people who have left school early and have not yet entered the job market (or have become unemployed). There has traditionally been a low level of targeting of young people in employment. This has begun to change in recent years and the FÁS *One Step Up* programme aims to reach this target group in the context of their employment. The *Back to Education Initiative* (BTEI) also makes some limited provision for this target group, although it is tailored for people seeking education outside work hours and normally does not target young people seeking education or training in the workplace or during work hours. Moreover, these initiatives are relatively new and are still developing approaches to the target group.

This is the policy framework in which the pilot actions under the *Learning @ Work* initiative operated during 2005 and 2006.



Chapter 3:

Development of Learning @ Work Initiative



3.1 Learning @ Work Project in 2001/02

Background to Learning @ Work Project in 2001/2

The Dublin Employment Pact, through its Employment and Education Group, has had an interest in this area from the end of the 1990s. Its report, *Study on School and Part-Time Work in Dublin*, was published in 2000. One of the recommendations of this report related to 'Developing further options for combining work with school completion'. It stated: "*While priority must be given to achieving national targets for school completion, it must be recognised that a significant number of young people will continue to work during school term, and especially that students from disadvantaged backgrounds will work even during examination years... Substantial supports must be provided to programmes aimed at retaining disadvantaged young people within the system – including innovative combined school-work initiatives. In addition, future policy must consider providing for joint education/work options and seek to secure the commitment of the social partners to facilitate young people in the workplace completing Leaving Certificate qualifications*".

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Operation of Learning @ Work Project in 2001/02

The Department of Education and Science and FÁS were represented at senior level on the Education Group of the Dublin Employment Pact and, following from the above report, a first *Learning @ Work* project was piloted during 2001 and 2002 by three Area Partnerships in Dublin – Clondalkin, Tallaght and Northside Partnerships. The broad outline of the projects was as follows:

- The **Clondalkin project** recruited three companies for its programme – Musgrave, Sercom and Ster Century – and provided a series of personal development modules, customer care and IT skills to 17 employees from these companies.
- The **Tallaght project** recruited two companies – Kwik Fit and the Plaza Hotel – and worked with 12 young people. A mix of workplace, work-related training and off-site FETAC modules were offered, with the latter focusing on literacy and numeracy skills (with Spanish and IT skills also offered).
- The **Northside project** worked with three companies in four locations – Tesco in its Artane and Kilbarrick branches, Bewleys and McGann PLM. It involved 13 young people who undertook personal development, literacy, numeracy and general work skills training.

Evaluation of 2001/02 Learning @ Work Project

Following completion of the 2001/02 *Learning @ Work* project, an evaluation of the pilot project was undertaken by Mazars Consulting. This found that the three pilot actions had encountered obstacles, both in recruiting private sector employees and in recruiting participants in the target age profile (17-21 years old), with the required characteristics (i.e. no Leaving Certificate). This was despite “wide-ranging and intensive methods” to engage the interest and participation of employers.

The evaluation reported a number of successes in the pilot project:

- Eight relatively large employers, and 42 young people, were recruited to the projects;
- These employers reported “a noticeable improvement in the confidence and motivation of the employees who took part” and said that they would participate in such a programme again;
- Almost all participants completed at least one module of the education or training and the training was generally FETAC accredited.

The evaluation recommended that the 2001/02 pilot project be repeated and extended and made a series of recommendations in relation to any follow-on initiative, of which eight were highlighted in its Executive Summary – these are listed in Box 3.1.

Box 3.1: Extract from Executive Summary of 2004 Evaluation of Learning @ Work Programme of 2001/02 – Key Recommendations Arising from the Evaluation

“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 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 ongoing 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 allow for internal progression and promotion.”





Discussions in relation to the 2003-05 *Sustaining Progress* national social partnership agreement also acknowledged the work of the 2001/02 *Learning @ Work* project. Section 2.7.3 of the agreement was entitled 'Addressing the needs of low-skilled workers' and directed (as one of four points):

"Co-operative action will take place between the Department of Education and Science/FÁS and employer representative bodies to address the learning needs of young people who leave school early and have taken up employment, within available resources, and reflecting the experience of a recently initiated pilot scheme in the Dublin area".

3.2 Development of Learning @ Work 2 Initiative in 2004/05

Following completion of the first evaluation by Mazars Consulting, and the support for *Learning @ Work* provided in *Sustaining Progress*, the Department of Education and Science and FÁS held discussions with the Dublin Employment Pact as regards an expanded *Learning @ Work* initiative during 2005 and 2006.

Following agreement on funding parameters, discussion on the design of the initiative passed to the Education and Employment Group of the Dublin Employment Pact (on which both the Department of Education and Science and FÁS sit). In October 2004, a document prepared by this Group stated that pilot projects would be selected by public tender and set out a series of 'required elements' of individual projects. A number of these criteria are presented below.

Box 3.2 Key Criteria for *Learning @ Work* Individual Pilot Projects

- Projects must not duplicate work properly located in another existing programme. It is imperative that the unique aspects of this initiative are understood by all.
- Projects are to target young people, especially young adults aged 17-21 years (later amended to 17-25 years by steering group), who left education after Junior Certificate but before completion, and are now active in the labour force and preferably in actual employment. The project must aim to upgrade the skills, enhance the career prospects and promote the educational progression of these young adults.
- Course content will centrally involve FETAC certified or Leaving Certificate modules, though other work-based learning and soft skills will be included.
- To support the idea of developing a career path for participating employees, projects will include a clear focus on career guidance counselling.
- Projects should include a substantial outreach element.
- Projects at local level must involve a partnership from employer interests, education providers including schools, local Partnership companies, the VEC and FÁS, as well as, where required, Youthreach, community training centres, trade unions, chambers of commerce, the Educational Welfare Service, community organisations and other agencies.
- The project should build on existing supports to employers, and provide adequate supports for participants to avail of additional off-the-job training.
- The number of project participants is to be minimum 15 and maximum 20, possibly spread over a number of places of employment.
- Each project should have a part-time co-ordinator.

These criteria therefore provided guidance as to the kind of pilot projects the initiative hoped to fund. Following a tendering process, individual actions were chosen for funding (see next chapter).

The pilot actions in Kildare and Wicklow emerged from a different process. Wicklow Rural Partnership (WRP) had implemented an EQUAL project over 2002-05 under Round 1 of the EU EQUAL Initiative. This project had piloted the delivery of training in different rural contexts in Kildare and Wicklow to a number of target groups outside the workforce. This led to the development of a model of training delivery combining soft skills and more vocational skills. The project had involved contacts with local employers and a number of such contacts were in place.

During the EQUAL programme WRP identified a need for “soft-skills” training to help young employees remain in and progress within their employment and to help employers decrease absenteeism and staff turnover among their employees. The EQUAL experience indicated that a programme which allows progression through personal development and lifestyle planning modules and on to FETAC certification is most likely to lead to participants continuing in education and employment.

As a result, WRP proposed to FÁS that it would manage a programme to develop and test a course model to improve the “soft-skills” of young employees and encourage them to return to education. The projects would be run during working hours with the co-operation of employers. This programme would develop a system to identify and monitor the real benefits of the project to participants and their companies. At the same time WRP made contact with the Dublin Employment Pact in relation to *Learning @ Work*.

In May 2005 WRP received a contract from FÁS to develop and test such a programme, to be known as the Wicklow Kildare *Learning @ Work* Programme. The contract provided for WRP to develop and run four projects – two in County Wicklow and two in County Kildare, in co-operation with KELT. The manager of the programme became a member of the *Learning @ Work* steering group.

3.3 Structure of Learning @ Work Initiative

Funding

The Dublin Employment Pact received funding for *Learning @ Work* of €140,000 from FÁS and the same amount from the Department of Education and Science. Of this, some €50,000 was given to each of the three Dublin pilot actions and this was supplemented by approximately €14,500 from Blanchardstown Area Partnership; by approx. €13,500 from Clondalkin Partnership and by approx. €36,000 from Tallaght Partnership. These amounts exclude non-cash match funding (such as use of facilities) by the three Area Partnerships involved and the support of key partnership personnel.

Wicklow Rural Partnership received funding of €185,000 from FÁS under *Learning @ Work* and this was used for the actions in Wicklow and Kildare. It was supplemented



by approximately €30,000 in match funding from the Rural Development companies in Wicklow and Kildare and by support from the VECs.

Including all cash match funding, the €465,000 supplied by FÁS and the Department of Education and Science increased to approximately €560,000. As well as funding the pilot actions, this funding covered all other aspects of the initiative's work including management, administration, publicity and evaluation.

Structure of *Learning @ Work*

The pilot actions being implemented in Dublin, Kildare and Wicklow each had local steering groups and co-ordinators. These operated on a full-time basis on the Tallaght and Kildare/Wickow projects and on a part-time basis on the Blanchardstown and Clondalkin actions.

The co-ordinators for the three Dublin pilot actions that proceeded to implementation phase (see next chapter) were members of the steering group which came together every six to eight weeks. The other members of the steering group were the Director of the Dublin Employment Pact, a central part-time co-ordinator (for part of the initiative), representatives of FÁS and the Department of Education and Science, the Education Co-ordinator of Blanchardstown Partnership, the Manager of the Wicklow Kildare Programme, and the evaluator (once appointed).

While the evaluation of the previous *Learning @ Work* programme had recommended the involvement of trade unions in a further pilot, and *Sustaining Progress* had talked of the need to involve employer representative bodies, neither of these social partners were members of the Steering Group (although both partners supported the *Learning @ Work* programme and had involvement at a local level).

The core work of implementation was undertaken by the local co-ordinators and it was their ongoing focus through 2005 and 2006 that ensured the pilot actions were rolled out successfully (with the consequent successes and failures to be expected from pilot projects).



Chapter 4:

Work Undertaken under the Pilot Actions

4.1 Overview of Pilot Projects

Chapter 4 presents key aspects of the different *Learning @ Work* actions undertaken in Dublin, Kildare and Wicklow. More detailed descriptions of the individual actions are contained in Annex 1. The chapter presents the projects under a number of generic headings which cover the different dimensions of their work.

Table 4.1 presents an overview of the five *Learning @ Work* actions undertaken (while there were different phases or 'rounds' within some of the actions, these are not split out separately).

Table 4.1: Overview of Pilot Actions under *Learning @ Work*

Blanchardstown <i>Learning @ Work</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Operated in two phases■ Phase 1 delivered IT skills training to 9 people from different companies■ Phase 2 (started Sept. 2006) was delivering IT training to 18 people and Leaving Certificate English classes to 10 people (9 of whom were also doing the IT training) from a range of companies■ Both phases operated mainly during work hours, with the exception of the Leaving Certificate English classes
Clondalkin <i>Learning @ Work</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Delivered four sequential training modules relating to IT and accounts to people from multiple local companies■ Training delivered after normal work hours■ 21 people received training, to different levels
Kildare <i>Learning @ Work</i> Stable Staff Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Focus on the racehorse training sector■ Phase 1 (Spring 2006) delivered training to 9 people. Emphasis on Personal Effectiveness and confidence building to encourage progression to FETAC certification■ Phase 2 (started October 2006) progression from Phase 1. 12 people – scheduled to run for 24 weeks leading to FETAC certification in communications and work experience■ Training delivered during work hours. After Stage 1 all participants also enrolled for extra FETAC courses in their own time
Tallaght <i>Learning @ Work</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ First round – 4 people from 4 organisations provided with training – 1 person during work hours and 3 people outside work hours■ Second round – training delivered for 8 workers at Jacob Fruitfield plant – one day per week during work hours
Wicklow <i>Learning @ Work</i> Kerry Foods Project No 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Training in Kerry Foods company at Shillelagh, County Wicklow■ Modules included personal development, communications, mathematics and computer skills. Courses ran for one half-day per week during work hours for seven months■ Course was delivered to 12 workers – 11 subsequently continued adult education in their own time
Wicklow <i>Learning @ Work</i> Kerry Foods Project No 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Following success of the first project the company agreed to run a second course during work hours with same content. 15 participants started course No 2 in October 2006

Based on the brief overview descriptions in Table 4.1, the pilots can be seen to have operated a number of models of engagement:

- Model 1: Working with one relatively large company to deliver training to workers on the company site, during work hours. This model is applicable to the Jacob Fruitfield and Kerry Foods training.
- Model 2: Taking employees from a range of companies or organisations and delivering training for up to half-day per week, during work hours (i.e. employer must release them). This model is applicable to the Blanchardstown and (partly) the Tallaght projects.
- Model 3: A variation of Model 2, the Kildare action focused on different employers in the same sector.
- Model 4: Employees undertake training with the knowledge of their employer but outside work hours. This was the case in the Clondalkin action, as well as partly in the Blanchardstown and Tallaght actions. In some instances, employees, while not released for classes, were allowed time for examinations.

In different ways, all of the above models piloted under *Learning @ Work* were successful and, in all five areas, considerable efforts were put in by the local co-ordinators to support the actions.

As well as the five actions mentioned above, it had initially been the intention to run actions in two further areas – the Northside Partnership area of Dublin (around the Coolock area) and the inner-city area of Dublin. However, despite considerable efforts in both cases, it was not possible in these areas to generate sufficient interest from employers and/or employees to participate in a programme. This is discussed further on and highlights the fact that recruiting companies and workers to a programme such as *Learning @ Work* is not automatic.

As regards the organisation of the *Learning @ Work* actions, the main implementing bodies were Area Partnerships (in the case of the three Dublin actions) and Rural Development Companies in the cases of Kildare and Wicklow. This gave the actions access to the expertise of the organisations represented on the Boards of these Partnerships and Rural Development groups and, in some cases, local steering groups were established to manage the actions. However, in general, the lead local organisations got on with running the actions and reported back or involved other organisations if useful for implementation.

The following sections review the work of the *Learning @ Work* pilot actions under a number of headings:

- Outreach work undertaken in relation to employers;
- Engagement with participants;
- Course content and delivery of the training;
- Outcomes arising from the training;
- Views of participants and employers involved in the actions.





4.2 Outreach Work to Involve Employers

A key criterion for *Learning @ Work* was that it would engage with employers. It would have been easier to deliver training to people who were unemployed but there is already a range of training options for this cohort. As *Learning @ Work* aimed to provide training to people in employment, preferably in agreement with employers and during work hours, then the process of outreach to employers was important.

Methods used by the *Learning @ Work* pilot actions are summarised in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Methods Used by Pilot Actions to Engage with Employers

Blanchardstown <i>Learning @ Work</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ First phase used a range of methods including mail shot, sending faxes to 900 local companies, e-mail flyers, cold calling (telesales) and general publicity. Organisations were visited if interested.■ Second phase of action focused on visits to local businesses of all types and talking directly to potential participants and employers. This occurred through approaching in person a large number of businesses and shops in the main streets and centres in the area. Again supported by general local publicity (through Partnership newsletter etc.).■ Message to employers combined 'business reasons' with appeal to employers' responsibility to young people; noting of local issues of labour market disadvantage and point that <i>Learning @ Work</i> was supported by the Department of Education and Science and FÁS.
Clondalkin <i>Learning @ Work</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Co-ordinator spoke to CE supervisors and local community groups.■ Local posters and information leaflet were circulated.■ Contact with employers with whom Clondalkin Partnership has links.■ Spoke to all retail outlets in Liffey Valley Shopping Centre and a number of other local businesses.
Kildare <i>Learning @ Work</i> Stable Staff Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Promoted Kildare <i>Learning @ Work</i> among a range of companies throughout County Kildare.■ Engaged with Irish Racehorse Trainers Association (IRTA) to attract employers – presented 'business case' for training.■ IRTA sent letters to members in Kildare including brochure on Kildare <i>Learning @ Work</i> and recommending they support the initiative.■ Co-ordinator met major racehorse trainers and others in the industry.
Tallaght <i>Learning @ Work</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Distribution of brochure.■ Cold-calling, with support from Chamber of Commerce.■ Advertising in local publications.
Wicklow <i>Learning @ Work</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Promoted Wicklow <i>Learning @ Work</i> among a range of companies throughout County Wicklow.■ Used contacts from board of Wicklow Rural Partnership and previous employer contacts from EQUAL project to identify companies that may be interested.■ Presented business case for "softskills" training to HR Department of Kerry Foods. Agreed content of course with Kerry Foods.

The actions that did not proceed also attempted to link with employers, as follows:

- The Dublin inner-city action was co-ordinated by the National College of Ireland and used its network to contact companies. It used targeted flyers and phone calls to certain sectors and approached a number of companies directly.
- The Northside Partnership action made telephone contact with companies on its database and sent information to those interested, following up with site visits to

those companies that requested them. The Partnership employed a local company to send faxes to 2,200 companies in Dublin 5, 13 and 17 in relation to *Learning @ Work*.

Table 4.2 (on previous page) shows that the *Learning @ Work* pilot actions employed a range of methods to reach employers, including: face-to-face meetings; use of existing contacts; cold calling in person; e-mail, fax and mail shots; telephone calls and local publicity.

The general view of the projects was that face-to-face contact is needed, even to get an employer to consider the programme. In other words, a learning point is that the 'cold' sending of faxes, e-mails or flyers, or even cold telephone calling is generally not effective and takes a lot of effort for little reward. However, it does help to build background awareness of the issues involved and can help if subsequently followed up by the face-to-face approach.

Blanchardstown reported that, in its second round of training, when the personnel called in person to local companies, the response was much better. This followed, and built on, the first round approach of mailshots, telephoning etc. The second round approach provided a chance to explain directly to both the young people and the employer what was involved and to generate the possibility of engagement.

The Kildare and Wicklow actions reported that, while it was not easy to engage employers, it was possible. The co-ordinator for these actions said that the approach of meeting with employers first and presenting a business case for the training, using 'business language' was a good approach. He said he was confident that companies will engage with a programme such as *Learning @ Work* if the business benefits are explained, e.g. a reduction in absenteeism among young employees, a reduction in employee turnover and a greater commitment by young workers to the company and their work.

While the experience of the five actions shows that it is possible to engage with employers, the effort involved was considerable. The experience of Dublin inner-city and Northside Partnership, as well as the large amount of time spent by the other actions (with associated levels of frustration) shows that this can be a tough part of the process. Despite the perceived need *at a general level* in the economy for upskilling to occur for the *Learning @ Work* target groups, many employers do not see the need for this in their own case. Common attitudes expressed by employers (especially to the Dublin actions) included the following:

- "We don't need to train our people at that level, i.e. they are already able to do what we want them to do"
- "If we train them, then they are likely to leave"
- "We don't have promotional prospects for them"
- "They come and they go. We don't see them as long-term employees in whom we would make an investment"
- "We can't afford to have them training during work hours (either financial cost or time cost or hassle of re-arranging shifts)"
- "We might be interested in training for older workers, or in terms of teaching our foreign workers English, but not for this cohort".

The actions reported that a clear sales message (or 'business case') is needed for employers. For many employers of low-skilled workers, there may not be obvious





promotion prospects for these workers and they may feel that providing an employee with new accredited skills may just mean that person is more likely to leave. In this situation, the employer may not perceive it as in the interest of the company that such training be provided to low-skill workers. It requires a clear case, backed up with evidence, and good sales/communications skills, to persuade employers in this regard.

A linked point is that the person doing the 'selling' to the employer should be able to speak to the company in a language that makes sense for it. While there was evidence of social responsibility on the part of some of the employers that engaged, many are not interested in arguments on these lines (at least as the primary arguments, although such arguments may supplement the 'business case') and want to hear about how such training can directly impact positively on their business, and to hear this message from somebody whose 'language' they share. The co-ordinators reported that the sales training they received (two-day training course funded by FÁS and delivered by Irish Times Training) was very helpful to them, although it fell quite late in terms of these pilot actions.

For the minority of employers who engaged with *Learning @ Work*, the motivations appeared to vary from an altruistic view of the programme (i.e. they believed in investing in their employees) to practical reasons (there was a need for people to be promoted internally and the programme provided relatively inexpensive training) to perhaps cynical reasons (i.e. where it was felt that staff may need to be let go in the future and this might support people to leave of their own accord).

Box 4.1: Wider Publicity relating to *Learning @ Work* Programme

As well as the work undertaken by the five pilot actions in relation to approaching employers directly, one of the objectives of *Learning @ Work* was to heighten awareness of the general issue of the lack of workplace training available to low-skill workers who have left school early.

Key actions by the Programme in this regard were as follows:

- Coverage by *RTE main evening news* on the Tallaght Partnership pilot action with Jacob Fruitfield, which included an interview with the Education Co-ordinator of Blanchardstown Partnership (who also sits on the Dublin Employment Pact Education and Employment Group) on the issue of young people who have left school early and are now in low-skilled employment. The projects reported a high degree of viewing of this news report, showing the power of such national publicity in supporting this kind of initiative, if such publicity can be obtained;
- Feature article in *The Irish Times* on the Kildare pilot action relating to the racehorse training sector on 19th May 2005 – see Annex 2;
- Interview on *Newstalk 106* in relation to *Learning @ Work* in general, focusing in particular on the pilot actions in Blanchardstown and Tallaght;
- Local newspaper coverage or coverage through the publications of the organisations running the pilot actions, e.g. newsletters of the Area Partnerships or Rural Development groups involved;
- For the Kildare action, coverage in magazines and on relevant websites targeted at people working in the racehorse training sector;
- Organisation of a policy seminar to publicise the outcomes and learning arising from the Programme (hosted by the Dublin Employment Pact in December 2006).

4.3 Outreach Work to Engage Participants

The second key part of the equation in implementing the *Learning @ Work* projects was to engage with young people (if possible aged under 25) who had left school early and who were now in employment. This fitted with the philosophy of *Learning @ Work*, which was not just about meeting the 'human resources needs' of employers but which was also about providing education to the young people involved in order to support them in progressing their future careers, and lives, to their own best advantage. As with the employers, while the five actions did manage to do this, it took time and effort, with consequent learning.

Table 4.3: Methods Used by Pilot Actions to Engage with Employees

Blanchardstown <i>Learning @ Work</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Advertised in a range of local publications ■ Visits to sites (e.g. shops, hairdressing salons, pubs etc.) to talk directly to potential participants
Clondalkin <i>Learning @ Work</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Spoke to CE supervisors, local community groups ■ Local posters and information leaflet circulated ■ Received data from local training initiative on ESLs who had completed training and contacted them ■ Local co-ordinator had nine years experience in similar roles and used her experience and contacts
Kildare <i>Learning @ Work</i> Stable Staff Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Support enlisted from Irish Stable Staff Association (ISSA) ■ Attendance at ISSA AGM and publicity through their website and newsletter ■ Visits to stables to talk directly to potential participants ■ Revision of schedule of training to create a short first phase of training to attract participants and build their confidence for further modules
Tallaght <i>Learning @ Work</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Primary interaction was with employers – once they were interested, co-ordinator talked to interested employees ■ With Jacob Fruitfield Food Group, HR Department undertook internal recruitment for training once company had agreed to take part in programme
Wicklow <i>Learning @ Work</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Approach was to engage with employer. Once Kerry Foods came on board, the company's HR Department advertised the training internally using posters and brochures supplied. HR Department chose the participants, supported by <i>Learning @ Work</i> co-ordinator ■ Within Kerry Foods the section managers and union representatives were briefed and encouraged participation

The actions that did not proceed also attempted to link with employees, as follows:

- The Dublin inner-city action spoke to local community organisations and also contacted schools to see if they could provide information on students who had left school early in recent years.
- The Northside Partnership action set up information stands in the Tesco Clarehall and Northside Shopping Centres. It also advertised the programme in three local libraries and in three credit unions.

The projects found it quite difficult to attract participants, although the five actions that proceeded did so in the end. In most cases, there was some relaxation of the criteria desired at the start, e.g. in some cases, people who did have a Leaving Certificate but who felt they would benefit from the training were allowed to participate.





In the case of Jacob Fruitfield and Kerry Foods, once the company had been recruited to the programme, the company's HR Department then took the lead role in recruiting participants. This is an advantage of the model of recruiting sizeable employers – it reduces the work of the co-ordinator in this regard (although it may not be a model suitable for most employers). For the actions that were talking directly to participants, the co-ordinators said that many young people did not show an interest. Common reasons cited were:

- "I left school just a couple of years ago – don't want to go back to formal learning"
- "Don't see the need for it – am happy with my job and don't need any more training to do it"
- "I probably won't stay here too long so I don't want to do any training"
- "I live with my parents and have an income from my job – I don't see the need to return to education"

Some of the above arguments suggest an 'information gap'. Chapter 2 showed clearly that it is in the long-term material interest of young people to gain as much training as possible. However, many young workers don't see this, and this is compounded if they have had bad previous experiences of education. As with the employers, the above potential 'objections' from workers in this age cohort mean that a sales case, backed up by evidence and well communicated, is required.

The co-ordinators felt that, while it was possible to get people in the 17-21 age group (as shown by several actions, such as the second phase in Blanchardstown), people in their mid-20s and late-20s tended to be more interested as the limitations they faced in their careers to progression, without formal qualifications, became more obvious. People in the older age groups were also more likely to be facing issues such as getting married, having children or buying property and therefore were more likely to take a longer-term view on the training offered.

An issue that arose in attracting employees to the *Learning @ Work* training programmes was that the strong economic growth experienced in Ireland since the mid-1990s, and the associated low level of unemployment, means that it has been possible to achieve progression in the workplace without formal qualifications. This can lead to some young workers under-valuing the benefits of such education and training.

A further issue mentioned by several co-ordinators was the difficulty in finding young workers who met the criteria of *Learning @ Work*. This may seem surprising as Chapter 2 shows that almost 20% of young people do not stay in second level education to the point of obtaining their Leaving Certificate and most of these proceed into employment. However, the pilot actions under *Learning @ Work* suggest that this cohort has a higher than average likelihood to move jobs and many people go through phases of work and unemployment in the years after they leave school.

The co-ordinators noted that there is no record of young people who leave school and of where they go. This was a source of extra work in preparing the pilot actions. One of the co-ordinators commented that these people "tend to disappear" after they leave school. This is despite the intention of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 to establish a register of people who leave school early and are in employment. Indeed, the National Educational Welfare Board (established in 2002) lists one of its 'Specific Duties' (in its Strategic Plan for 2005-07) as: "Registration of young people under 18

who are in employment, and preparation of education and training plans with those young people”. However, this provision has not been implemented to date.

While the above challenges in accessing young people in low-skilled employment were noted, the co-ordinators said that it was possible to find such people. They also said that: word-of-mouth operating at local level; a reputation that a particular course is working well; local publicity campaigns, combined with ongoing outreach work, can bring people from the target cohort into training actions.

4.4 Content of Training and Informal Supports Provided

With both employers and employees signed up for participation in *Learning @ Work*, the next step was the design of the training courses to be provided. Informal supports were also offered to participants to support their ongoing attendance at the training.

Table 4.4 shows the training modules delivered by the five actions.

Table 4.4: Learning @ Work Actions – Training Modules Delivered

Blanchardstown <i>Learning @ Work</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Round 1 offered IT training (ECDL and MOS as appropriate) and Personal Development FETAC Level 1 Round 2 offered First Aid/Fire Safety; ECDL; Personal Development and Communication Skills; Leaving Certificate English and conversational Spanish and Irish classes
Clondalkin <i>Learning @ Work</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Four sequential modules delivered - on Advanced Excel; Book-keeping; STEPS Programme; and Advanced Payroll STEPS Programme has own accreditation – others were FETAC accredited ECDL training provided to one person
Kildare <i>Learning @ Work</i> Stable Staff Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phase 1 offered FETAC Personal Effectiveness; Media Training module; Introduction to Computers and parts of the FETAC Communications module. Also included “participant led” days where MABS and the VEC Adult Education co-ordinator spoke to course Phase 2 offered FETAC modules on communications, computers, and work experience In their own time, facilitated by <i>Learning @ Work</i>, Phase 2 participants did FETAC courses. Of 12 participants, 8 completed Business Administration and Business Calculating modules and 4 completed Equine Anatomy and Physiology and Stable and Yard Practice modules Through this training it is the intention of all participants to secure the 8 FETAC credits necessary for FETAC Level 5 award
Tallaght <i>Learning @ Work</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phase 1 provided FETAC Mathematics to 1 person and FETAC Accounting to 3 people The Jacob Fruitfield work delivered the FETAC Level 4 General Vocational Certificate to 3 people and the FETAC Level 5 Business Studies Certificate to 5 people
Wicklow <i>Learning @ Work</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> STEPS Personal Development module FETAC Communications (offered at Level 3 or Level 4) FETAC Mathematics (offered at Level 3 or Level 4) ‘Equal Skills’ Introduction to Computers – facilitated by <i>Learning @ Work</i> and undertaken by participants in their own time Also included “participant led” days where MABS and the VEC Adult Education Organiser spoke to course





Table 4.4 shows that the general mix of training offered included some 'soft skills' (e.g. Personal Development, Communications, or STEPS) combined with IT skills (using a standard training programme, normally ECDL) and in some cases applied general skills (such as book-keeping).

The Blanchardstown action was the only one to offer a Leaving Certificate subject (English), placing its project in an 'education' as well as a 'training' context. This was based on a view by that action that *Learning @ Work* should be about the holistic development of the young people involved and not just about their development in a labour market context.

The same training model was applied in the three Wicklow and Kildare projects. Each project was to be run for one half day per week (during working hours) over 24 weeks to develop employees "soft skills" and introduce them to learning as adults. The training was not based on skills needed for any particular employment but to improve the person's general employability. While the course content was decided in consultation with employers, the courses normally covered personal development, communications, numeracy and an introduction to computers.

The progression to vocational equine-related courses in their own time, with *Learning @ Work* support, shows how the model of having a training programme catering for one sector can combine both 'standard' modules (such as personal development and IT) with sector specific modules to benefit both employees and employers.

Support by employers can increase the modules available to participants after the *Learning @ Work* programme. In the case of the Kerry Foods project completed in June 2006, all participants applied for further computer training, in their own time, to be funded by their employer.

Almost all of the training courses offered under *Learning @ Work* led to accredited outcomes – the widespread use of approved FETAC courses shows that there is a good menu of course options now available from FETAC in these subject areas.

Linked to the previous point is the fact that local courses can now apply a good amount of flexibility in meeting local needs as a tailored mix of courses, all FETAC approved, can be brought together in a local programme. This involves work for the local co-ordinator who needs to investigate the options and find suitable trainers to deliver the courses.

The local co-ordinators had flexibility in choosing trainers. For the three Dublin-based actions, which operated through Area Partnerships, they generally employed freelance trainers who would have been known to the Partnerships. In Kildare and Wicklow, there was a greater involvement from the VEC, again based on previous contacts. As regards delivery of training, there was no direct involvement by FÁS tutors or by the third-level institutions.

A number of the co-ordinators emphasised the importance of having a mix of personal development and vocational modules. As these young people had generally left school early, many had a low confidence level as regards their capacity for learning, finishing courses or passing exams. It was important to build this confidence and, if this was done properly, the young people would then be sufficiently motivated to overcome any obstacles in further courses. The Kildare/Wicklow co-ordinator said that this had been a strong finding of a previous

project in Kildare and Wicklow (funded under the EU EQUAL Initiative) and that he now included personal development /communications type modules in all training courses at an early stage. As regards this kind of module, the STEPS programme, which was used by three of the five actions, received very positive feedback.

As most of the participants had full-time jobs, it was difficult to build in social events around the training. However, the co-ordinators felt that such events were important to build up relationships between the participants, which would lead to mutual support in the training. In one case (Clondalkin), a weekend away was organised for the STEPS programme. In the Tallaght action, breakfasts were provided for participants before training in order to provide a 'social space' to build friendships and confidence.

A crucial point emphasised by the co-ordinators was that, as well as delivering the formal training, a key aspect of the intervention was the provision of *a range of informal supports* to participants. The Tallaght co-ordinator said that this was critical to the success of the work and she listed supports provided in Tallaght as:

- Development of individualised training plans;
- Basic literacy support (where required, this was provided by a National Adult Literacy Association tutor);
- Provision of course materials free of charge;
- Provision of some extra tuition if somebody was falling behind;
- Support on dyslexia – the project noted that it is extremely difficult to source dyslexia support for people outside the full-time education system;
- Ongoing contact with all participants to ensure no problems arose, including through phone and text on a regular basis;
- Guidance as to further options in terms of education;
- Guidance as regards further options in terms of career (including support on CAO forms).

Some or all of the above supports were provided by all of the pilot actions. It was normal for the co-ordinators to give their mobile phone numbers to the participants and to have contact with them if there was a problem of any kind. In Blanchardstown, the co-ordinator called each participant every week in advance of the classes, officially to check if they were attending but unofficially to give the participant a chance to talk and make sure that he/she remained happy with the course. The co-ordinators emphasised the need to have a genuine *rapprochement* with the young people involved so that the enthusiasm of the co-ordinator could transfer to the participants.

The provision of these 'flanking supports' (tailored by individuals) is a factor that distinguishes the *Learning @ Work* training courses from most mainstream courses. The co-ordinators said that these supports were very important for the group being targeted by *Learning @ Work*.

The issue of guidance as regards career options was a somewhat delicate one as the co-ordinators had relationships with both the participants and the employers. Some of the actions saw their projects as supporting people towards progression in their organisations (including through further training) but did not discuss other career options. For example, the Wicklow/Kildare actions did not do so, although they did





provide wider work experience and personal development through the STEPS programme, which may have led some individual participants to think about their careers in more detail. Other actions did provide such advice if requested. At least one Dublin-based employer was aware of this and was happy to support the employees towards further education, even if that meant that there was a good chance they would leave the company. This situation could lead to tensions and therefore needs to be dealt with sensitively by project co-ordinators.

4.5 Participant Training Outcomes

As a pilot programme, the primary objective of *Learning @ Work* was not to produce large numbers of accredited outcomes. However, each of the actions had participants and the numbers are shown below.

Table 4.5: Outcomes from *Learning @ Work* Pilot Actions

Blanchardstown <i>Learning @ Work</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Some level of training provided to 9 people in phase 1. ■ 5 of the first 9 participants completed some accredited modules – 1 completing all ECDL modules. 4 people did not complete any modules due to work commitments. ■ Training was being provided to 19 people in phase 2 which commenced in September 2006. ■ 9 of the 19 successfully completed their first ECDL module in Oct 2006.
Clondalkin <i>Learning @ Work</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Some level of training provided to 21 people. ■ These people started 40 training modules between them, with 26 of these completed successfully, by 12 people. ■ 10 people completed Advanced Excel; 7 people completed STEPS and Book-keeping and 6 people completed Payroll modules.
Kildare <i>Learning @ Work</i> Stable Staff Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ All 9 participants completed FETAC Personal Effectiveness, a Media Training module, Introduction to Computers and aspects of FETAC Communications module under Phase 1. ■ All 9 progressed to Stage 2, to May 2007. The 12 weeks planned for Stage 2 was increased to 28 weeks due to participant demand. ■ 8 of the original participants, with the confidence gained on Stage 1, progressed to extra courses in their own time. ■ It was planned that by May 2007 all would have gained the 8 FETAC credits necessary for an award at Leaving Certificate equivalent level.
Tallaght <i>Learning @ Work</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 1 person completed FETAC Mathematics Level 3. ■ 3 people completed FETAC Accounting Level 5. ■ 3 people achieved FETAC Level 4 General Vocational Certificate (8 credits were: Mathematics, Data Entry, Communications, IT Skills, Personal Effectiveness, Computer Applications, Work Experience - 2 credits). ■ 5 people achieved FETAC level 5 Business Studies Cert (8 credits were: Communications, IT Skills (0.5), Computer Applications (0.5), Work Experience, Text Production, Information and Administration, Reception, Accounting, Personal Effectiveness in the Workplace).
Wicklow <i>Learning @ Work</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Of 12 people who started, 11 completed STEPS Personal Development module; FETAC Communications (Level 3 or 4), FETAC Mathematics (Level 3 or 4) and Equal Skills Introduction to Computers module. ■ 15 further participants started a similar programme in October 2006.

Table 4.5 indicates that:

- 98 people received training under the *Learning @ Work* actions;
- Of these, 58 had achieved accredited outcomes by November 2006, with at least 20 further people expected to achieve accredited outcomes.

While it was too early to track progression outcomes, there was anecdotal evidence that participants were using their new qualifications to help them to achieve progression within their organisations. A small number (perhaps 5 of the 98 participants) had used the outcomes achieved to move jobs.

Table 4.5 indicates a somewhat higher level of drop-out for courses made up of people coming from multiple companies. This may reflect both a lack of pressure from employers to attend (compared with training being delivered in-company) and perhaps, if the employer is busy, pressure not to attend the off-site training.

4.6 Views of Participants and Employers in Pilot Actions

In relation to both the participants and the employers involved with *Learning @ Work*, reactions were generally very positive on both sides. The employees who got involved thought the training was well delivered and useful to them, and thought the co-ordinators had been helpful and supportive. The employers generally saw an improvement in the performance of the workers and praised the idea of flexible training for young low-skilled workers.

These views must be seen in the wider context that many employers and employees who were approached did not wish to become involved in a *Learning @ Work* action. They did not see the benefits for their company or for themselves (as discussed earlier). As such, while the views in this section are positive, it should not be assumed that employers and employees in general have similar views. However, it is encouraging that those employers and employees that did participate found the programme beneficial.

Participants

This evaluator met some of the ECDL participants in Blanchardstown and saw first-hand their enthusiasm for the course. They explained how they felt the need for IT skills in their work and that the course would be very useful for them. One person said that he planned to go back to college eventually and that he hoped to follow the Leaving Certificate English course with a Leaving Certificate Mathematics course. All of the participants met praised the organisation of the training and its delivery.

A structured discussion was organised by the *Clondalkin* pilot action between a local evaluator and six participants on the training programme. This found a positive reaction to the courses delivered, although some training was seen as too fast paced and some classes too long. This may reflect the fact that most of the participants were also working. The STEPS Programme was particularly praised. Participants said they felt more confident and motivated after the training and praised the accredited





nature of the qualifications. Participants felt that even when their employers knew they were taking the training modules, the employers' engagement had been relatively superficial and generally did not mean that employers linked the training to a participant's day-to-day work.

Questionnaires were completed by participants on both the Kildare and Wicklow actions. In both cases, the participants indicated strongly positive attitudes to the training, e.g. the content was relevant; the atmosphere and delivery were good; the course improved their confidence and the course led to them feeling more enthusiastic about their work. A minority of people thought the pace of the courses had been too fast, indicating the reason why 'flanking supports' are important to support participants who may have difficulty with one or other aspects of the training.

A local evaluation of the Tallaght action again reflected worries that participants had had at various stages about the pace of the training but also reflected satisfaction with the course content and with the fact that, by completing the courses, confidence levels increased and the idea of further training was being actively considered.

Employers

The Irish Stable Staff Association (ISSA) said it was very happy with the training delivered in the equine sector (Kildare action) and that the stable yards were also happy. They said that the lack of pressure on the participants early on had been good as it had made them feel comfortable with being back in a training environment. Many had left school even before Junior Certificate as the tradition has been to do this and to learn the skills of working with horses as a teenager. The ISSA praised the Kildare co-ordinator and said that word of mouth would mean there would now be another cohort of young people available for training if further funding was available.

As part of a local evaluation of the action in Tallaght, the action talked to the local employers who had participants on the courses. It found that they were happy with the modules chosen and that these matched their business needs. Employers felt that the enthusiasm and motivation of those workers who participated had increased as a result. One said that there had even been a knock-on effect for non-participating workers in terms of their general view of the company. The one concern expressed was in terms of losing staff during work hours, while paying them. The employers said this had not been a problem during this programme but it could be at other times.

The Wicklow action received structured feedback from the line managers of the participants on the Kerry Foods training. It found that about half of the managers saw a range of improvements in the participants' work performances (measured under a number of headings) with the other half saying they did not see much change. Some 50% said that the worker was more likely to be considered for a higher grade in Kerry Foods as a result of engagement with the course. The figures for Wicklow indicate that the participants were even more positive about the outcomes than their managers – this may be a lag effect (it may take the managers some time to see the difference) or it may be that some of the new skills cannot be easily used in the workplace.

Blanchardstown maintained a good rapport with employers during phase 1 and 2. One manager commented that he himself left school prior to the Leaving Certificate and appreciated the lack of opportunity this situation presents in the labour force. Another employer commented that while he was aware that his employees might leave the company at some stage, the training was worth investing time in. Feedback in general was that the *Learning @ Work* project offered a great opportunity to engage young workers in upskilling.

Considering that none of the Blanchardstown employers made it compulsory to sign up for the project, the response from employees was positive. Overall, the balance during both phases tilted in favour of the training taking place during work time, for example 12 employers released staff during working time and 7 employers facilitated the employee's day off to be on the same day as training, at their request. Employers were also regularly informed of the progress of their employees.



Chapter 5:

Conclusions and Mainstreaming Potential



5.1 Conclusions

This section contains conclusions and points of learning arising from the evaluation of the *Learning @ Work* programme. It outlines: the general policy context for the programme; the design of the programme; an analysis of the outreach element in relation to both employers and young workers; the choice of education and training modules; and some general overall conclusions. These lead to a discussion in the final section on the mainstreaming potential arising from the programme.

Fit with National Policy Requirements

- The proportion of young people not remaining in second level education until the Leaving Certificate remains at about 18%. Given the buoyant economy of recent years, many of these take up employment but ESRI data shows that these people tend to work in low-skill jobs and receive lower incomes than other workers.
- *Learning @ Work* was developed in 2001 by the Dublin Employment Pact as an innovative policy intervention for young workers, as there was no mainstream focus on the training and up-skilling needs of young people who had left school early and were now in employment.
- Since 2001, this issue has begun to move onto the national policy agenda. In late-2005, Minister Micheál Martin stated: “Those with low skill levels are particularly vulnerable to changes in economic conditions and we must safeguard their position going forward”.
- To address this cohort of people, the FÁS *One Step Up* programme was expanded significantly in September 2005 with the aim, in part, of targeting workers with low skill levels. A sub-set of the *One Step Up* programme, entitled *Skills for Work* is focused on workers with literacy or numeracy needs and allows those workers to then proceed to other modules.
- Recent years have also seen an expansion of the work of the Department of Education and Science in relation to adult education. However, with the exception of the part-time Back to Education Initiative (BTEI), which can be taken by workers outside of work hours (and is therefore quite distinct in its focus to *Learning @ Work*), these are generally not aimed at people in work. There has also been an expansion of literacy programmes.
- Despite these advances, the *Learning @ Work* programme remains highly innovative in a national policy context. Indeed, because the national policy agenda is now starting to address the issue of education and training for low-skilled workers, this may make learning arising from *Learning @ Work* more timely. Also, most early school leavers in work still receive no education or training under existing schemes.

- The experience of the *Learning @ Work* pilot actions on the ground is that there is still a considerable need to get out the message to employers and employees about the benefits of lifelong learning.

Design of Initiative and Pilot Actions

- A strict set of criteria were set out at the start for participants on *Learning @ Work* pilot actions. In the main, these were kept, i.e. most participants were aged under 25 and had left the Irish education system without a Leaving Certificate.
- There was evidence from the work of recruiting participants that young people aged 17-21 are harder to recruit than those aged between 21-25 and even older than that. There is less of a negative reaction in the older age group to education and training and more of an appreciation of the benefits it can generate.
- While *Learning @ Work* had some involvement from the social partners at local level, involvement from the employers and unions would have been useful at steering group level. This could have supported the actions in engaging employers and participants on the ground and supported strategic thinking about the learning arising from the programme. To some extent, this latter input was to be obtained through the December 2006 *Learning @ Work* seminar.
- In general, the programme was well managed. The main management occurred at the level of the pilot actions and the co-ordinators for all of the actions were dedicated to their success and worked hard to achieve this success. The co-ordinators were supported by a steering group, which met every six to eight weeks over the two year period of the programme.

Implementation of Pilot Actions

Overview of Pilot Projects

Chapter 4 presented information on the pilot actions in the Dublin region (in Blanchardstown, Clondalkin and Tallaght) and in Kildare and Wicklow. Different models emerged across the actions, as summarised in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1: Generic Models of Intervention from *Learning @ Work* Actions

Model 1 (Jacob Fruitfield and Kerry Foods)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Working with one (relatively large) company ■ Training on company site during work hours ■ 'Sales point' is company HR Department which then recruits participants ■ Low drop-out rate during training
Model 2 (Most of Blanchardstown action and part of Tallaght action)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Employees from multiple companies or organisations ■ Training off site with consent of employers, e.g. 3 hours/week ■ Has to be sold to individual companies and participants ■ Somewhat higher drop-out rate, although this varied
Model 3 (Kildare racehorse training sector)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Variation of Model 2 involving multiple employers but from the same sector. ■ Delivered off site during working hours with consent of employers ■ Allows for delivery of sector specific training modules in addition to soft skills training
Model 4 (Clondalkin, part of Tallaght, Blanchardstown)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Employees from multiple companies or organisations ■ Training delivered after work hours





All of the models in Table 5.1 worked within their own frames of reference. However, they generated somewhat different issues in implementation and also have different potential implications as regards mainstreaming.

Besides the five actions that proceeded to implementation phase, two further actions (in the northside and in the inner-city of Dublin) were approved for funding but found it difficult to attract sufficient numbers of employers and employees. These actions did not proceed and this demonstrates the challenge that exists in attracting employers and workers from this target group for such training.

Outreach Work to Involve Employers

- The three Dublin projects, which were implemented by Area Partnerships, found the work of involving employers in their *Learning @ Work* actions to be difficult, particularly in the earlier stages. This part of the work was not as problematic in Kildare and Wicklow, partly because it built on previous work under an EQUAL project.
- In the early stages, the Dublin projects spent a considerable amount of effort approaching large numbers of companies to identify interest, e.g. through sending of faxes to all identified local companies, through cold calling etc. However, this approach (when used on its own) led to a poor return, perhaps because the idea of *Learning @ Work* is new and needed more explanation.
- Based on their experience, site visits and a face-to-face discussion with the employer or manager with clear, well presented documentation regarding the programme, represent the best use of time. The Blanchardstown action, for example, showed how such an approach, building on a general publicity campaign, can lead to good numbers of young people being attracted into education and training.
- Doing this requires the advance preparation of a 'business case', i.e. the sales reasons as to why the company should sign up for the training. These arguments evolved further during the project. There is scope for a national programme to promote this business case (backed up by evidence) on a national basis.
- Talking to businesses in this way generally requires the 'sales person' to talk the language of the business, i.e. to explain the benefits to the company of the training. Most companies (with exceptions) were not interested in altruistic motivations, at least as the primary motivation, although such motivations can supplement the overall 'business case'.
- Blanchardstown deployed a dual approach particularly in phase 2 where during outreach visits they mentioned the business advantages but also how this was a DES and FÁS action, that the Government wanted to upskill young workers and that such young workers were disadvantaged in the labour market. This received a good and sympathetic response. Many smaller employers noted that they appreciated the visits and the interest. This approach was combined with extensive local publicity and the provision of some courses (e.g. First Aid) of active interest to employers.
- The professional sales training provided to the co-ordinators was considered as very useful. This implies that 'sales skills' are needed with employers. In general, workers for Area Partnerships would not have developed these skills in the course of their work.
- The Kildare and Wicklow approach had been honed during a previous EQUAL project and the 'selling' of the idea to Kerry Foods and then to the Irish Racehorse

Trainers Association and the Irish Stable Staff Association proved to be breakthrough points on these two actions.

- The reluctance of many employers to get involved emphasises the need for a national campaign of education. This will need to address the issue that, while the upskilling of low-skilled workers is in the interests of the economy as a whole, it is not necessarily perceived as being in their own company's interest by many employers.

Outreach Work to Engage Participants

- In Model 1 (as described in Table 5.1 on page 48), once the company was persuaded to cooperate, this work was facilitated by the HR departments of the companies, supported by the co-ordinators. This obviously reduces the work of the outside co-ordinator but may be limited to larger companies interested in having such training on-site.
- For the other models, the co-ordinators had to recruit employees through outreach methods. As with the employers, the conclusion is that face-to-face meetings are required. Outreach to participants is not secondary to meeting the company's needs but is important in itself in establishing the kind of education and training inputs required or desired by young workers to further their careers and their lives.
- The projects established that there is a cohort of young Irish workers who wish to return to education and training.
- Many of the young people have left school early (perhaps after negative experiences) and the presentation of the training on offer is important. It must be seen as a positive route to career and personal development. (For example, the projects found modules such as communications, computers and personal effectiveness to be popular.)
- Based on the interaction of the co-ordinators, many young people do not appreciate that their lifetime earnings are directly correlated with educational achievement and that returning to training should translate into increased earnings in the medium term.
- Paradoxically, the strong economic growth may make it harder to get workers to take up training – employers cannot release people and employees may not see the need if progression is possible with on-the-job training only.
- Despite a commitment under the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, there is still no register of people who leave school early and are in employment. The aim had been to develop education and training plans for these people.
- A further conclusion arising from this outreach work is that, in so far as is possible, all young people should be retained in school for the full second level cycle. This project demonstrates how hard it can be to attract those people who have left school early back into education and training. The outreach work also emphasises the importance of 'exit plans' for young people who do leave school early, linked to the government's lifelong learning agenda.

Content of Training and Informal Supports Provided

- The formula that emerged in all of the pilot actions combined personal development, confidence building and communication skills with more vocational modules around IT (normally ECDL) and perhaps applied modules such as book-keeping.





- The Kildare/Wicklow co-ordinator said that it is important to front-load the personal development modules as the increased confidence levels that are created then help to 'carry' the participants through difficulties in the more vocational modules and encourage people to proceed to adult education in their own time. The provision of additional tutors allowed each participant in Kerry Foods to complete modules at an appropriate level.
- Most of the modules delivered were more 'training' than 'education' although Blanchardstown is delivering a Leaving Certificate English course and the Tallaght action offered full FETAC Level 4 General Vocational Certificates and Level 5 Business Studies Certificates. The Wicklow Kerry Foods Projects offered FETAC certification in Communications and Mathematics. The Kildare Stable Staff project offered FETAC Level 5 awards in a selection of modules facilitating 8 credits for each participant.
- There is a question as to whether career guidance should be provided as part of training courses to this cohort as companies may not be happy if their employees move on after taking the training. In fact, this occurred in very few cases on the pilots.
- The provision of informal 'flanking' supports to participants was very important in ensuring they stayed on the courses. This ranged from personal support to extra classes as required. This is an important issue for consideration in a mainstreaming context.
- Two specific issues arose during implementation. One related to a perceived lack of support for adults in a learning situation who have dyslexia. The second related to the issue of workers being required to pay for part-time educational courses under the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI), which was felt to be contrary to the government's stated policies on lifelong learning.

Participant Training Outcomes

- While the aim of *Learning @ Work* was to pilot new approaches, training was provided to 98 people, of whom 58 had achieved accredited outcomes by November 2006 with a further 20 expected to do so.
- Almost all outcomes were FETAC accredited indicating that FETAC now has a wide range of courses available that can be tailored to local needs.
- As stated, there was a somewhat higher level of drop-out when the training was outside the company, as perhaps would be expected.

Views of Stakeholders Involved

- Those employers and participants who took part in the programme were very happy with it. This is a positive finding in terms of mainstreaming.
- It should be noted that most employers and workers approached about *Learning @ Work* chose not to become part of the pilots, reflecting the wider challenge of reaching these companies and workers.

Overall Comment on Initiative

The *Learning @ Work* initiative built on a smaller *Learning @ Work* pilot project undertaken in 2001/2 which was praised in the *Sustaining Progress* social partnership agreement. The *Sustaining Progress* agreement recommended that the initiative be continued, stating:

“Co-operative action will take place between the Department of Education and Science/FÁS and employer representative bodies to address the learning needs of young people who leave school early and have taken up employment, within available resources, and reflecting the experience of a recently initiated pilot scheme in the Dublin area”.

This commitment led to FÁS and the Department of Education and Science funding this second round of *Learning @ Work*. While the ongoing involvement of the Department of Education and Science, and the social partners, was limited, the commitment in *Sustaining Progress* to progressing from the first pilot programme has been met. In this regard, credit is due to the Dublin Employment Pact and to Wicklow Rural Partnership who oversaw this initiative. Credit is also due to the local projects and their co-ordinators for their work in implementing the actions.

Not all of the proposed pilot actions proceeded to implementation stage and not all of those that did were successful in every regard. However, the diversity of work, and of outcomes, is to be expected (and encouraged) in a pilot initiative and is a sign that the projects took some risks. The preceding pages indicate that a considerable amount of potential learning (on what worked and what did not work) has arisen for mainstream organisations responsible for delivering education and training to low-skilled people in employment in Ireland, from a relatively small pilot programme. As the programme addressed an issue that is now moving onto the national policy agenda, the challenge is now for the mainstream to take this learning on board.

5.2 Moving towards Mainstreaming the Lessons of Learning @ Work

This evaluation of *Learning @ Work* has led to a range of conclusions and learning points, some relating to policy and many relating to the different technical dimensions of designing and delivering interventions for young low-skilled workers. These have been grouped under multiple headings in the previous section.

It is not straightforward for an evaluation such as this to move from this learning to being specific about mainstreaming potential. This is because the view from the pilot actions, or from the *Learning @ Work* programme, of where learning might feed into the mainstream may not accord with the view of mainstream organisations as to where new ideas are needed or what is to be prioritised.

The *Learning @ Work* pilot actions have been innovative and distinct from existing programmes being operated either by FÁS or by the Department of Education and Science. As such, they have interesting potential lessons for both of these organisations and for others. Many of these relate to ‘technical’ aspects of learning e.g. specific points emerging as regards successful techniques to undertake outreach work to employers and young employees; learning on the kind of training modules likely to be most effective in encouraging education and training linked to employment; and the kinds of ‘flanking’ aspects required by the target group.

As co-funders of the *Learning @ Work* initiative, FÁS and the Department of Education and Science have already demonstrated a willingness to fund innovative actions targeting young low-skilled employees. The challenge now is to review the





set of lessons arising from the pilot actions funded and to identify how these can be integrated into, and used to enhance, existing mainstream programmes. In this regard, key actors would appear to be:

- FÁS (through its different actions targeting young people);
- The Department of Education and Science (in particular through the VECs and through its Further Education division);
- Organisations such as Area Partnerships and Rural Development Companies that can support FÁS and the Department of Education and Science in reaching companies and employees and that can potentially provide some of the 'flanking supports' discussed in the previous section;
- The social partners, especially employer organisations and trade unions, in terms of disseminating the message that upskilling of people with low skills and, in particular, young people who did not obtain a Leaving Certificate, is an important national labour market priority.
- The Dublin Employment Pact, through its Education and Employment Working Group, and its wider contact with all relevant stakeholders.

While lessons therefore arise for multiple organisations at a national level, a challenge is to tailor the services and supports from these different organisations so that the needs of the target group, young low-skilled employees, are central, and 'joined-up' integrated interventions are designed and delivered.

Besides national mainstreaming, Pobal, the Area Partnerships and the Rural Development Companies may be interested in placing an increased emphasis on the target group of young early school leavers now in employment. The *Learning @ Work* programme has already been 'mainstreamed' at a local level by Tallaght Partnership.

Finally, notwithstanding the wider mainstreaming issues, the work under the pilot actions has put in place structures and courses in a number of locations in Dublin, Kildare and Wicklow. Further potential trainees were coming forward in late-2006 to see if further local courses would be offered. If the funding of such local initiatives can be placed in a wider mainstreaming context, then there may well be merit in continuing these local courses (subject to the wishes of the local sponsoring organisations), at least during 2007.

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Annex 1:

Learning @ Work Pilot Actions

The following pages describe in more detail the pilot actions of the *Learning @ Work* initiative that were implemented during 2005 and 2006. These descriptions were prepared by the co-ordinators of the individual actions to give a sense of the work involved 'on-the-ground' in implementing the *Learning @ Work* pilot actions.

Blanchardstown Learning @ Work

Background to Blanchardstown Action

The Education Co-ordinator of Blanchardstown Area Partnership (BAP) was involved at Dublin Employment Pact level in the initial development of the *Learning @ Work* concept, with her partners in the education group, and in negotiations with the Department of Education and Science and FÁS. She was involved (representing BAP) from 2001 as regards development of *Learning @ Work* criteria, selection of projects, terms of reference for evaluation and negotiations of second round. This led to an application by Blanchardstown Area Partnership under this current *Learning @ Work* set of pilot projects to run a project in its area.

The need for a project was seen from the national statistics on early school leaving, showing a poor relative performance in the Dublin region relative to most parts of the country as regards retention to Leaving Certificate. The situation in Dublin 15 reflects this situation. While completion rates to the Junior Certificate are greatly improved, too many students leave after the Junior Certificate or in 5th and even 6th year – with a large number of these people employed locally. Anecdotal evidence locally (since confirmed by the ESRI) is that young people who left before completing the Leaving Certificate were more likely to become unemployed in their twenties.

A local co-ordinator was recruited in June 2005. This position was twenty hours per week.

A local steering group was set up comprising members from the local Chambers of Commerce, Blanchardstown Youth Service, other Youth Projects, the VEC and Youthreach. There was some difficulty in explaining the concept of the project. The Blanchardstown *Learning @ Work* action was run in two phases:

- The first ran from autumn 2005 to mid-2006;
- The second started from October 2006.

A considerable amount of learning from the first phase of the local project was used to inform the work in the second phase.

How Action Engaged with Employers

A large amount of time was spent designing information leaflets for the project. A picture had to be purchased for the leaflet which required looking through 2,500 photos to select a suitable one. A lot of comments were made by young women about the guy most prominent in the photo because of his looks which helped start conversation!

Methods used in Round 1	Methods used in Round 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Fax flyers ■ Leaflets posted ■ E-mail flyers ■ Telesales ■ TV appearance on RTE ■ Radio interview 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ New leaflet delivered by hand and by post ■ Calling to employers in person including blanket coverage of businesses and local shopping districts ■ Telesales ■ E-mail and fax flyers ■ Advertisements and publicity/articles in local papers ■ Ongoing support to and follow up with participants who joined project





What worked?

Awareness raising – All methods over time and over the two phases of the project created awareness among employers, agencies, local politicians, local groups etc. Thus one of the aims of the project – to increase awareness of the issues concerning young adults leaving before school completion – was fulfilled. There is now a greater awareness of the issue even among employers who did not have workers who met the criteria. The same holds for agency personnel and local community leaders. While it did seem that the first phase of the project yielded relatively low numbers compared to expectations it was clear that in the second round awareness around the issues was significantly enhanced.

Recruitment of participants/outreach approach — The most successful method for recruiting clients was by calling in person to the employers. This was particularly useful in the second phase where there had been extensive local publicity and advertising and targeted mail shots to hairdressers, bookies and public houses, followed by visits.

Employers from First Phase of Training in Blanchardstown

In the first round, we were successful in engaging eight employers: Atlantic Homecare, Tesco, Independent Express Cargo, Sam Hire, Medical Supply Company, McEntee Kitchens, the Fixing Company and TK Maxx. In total we recruited 10 employees.

A huge amount of work had to be done to achieve this. This took place in spite of complications which rendered the work very difficult, including relocation of the Partnership to Coolmine Industrial Estate. A company called Prism Faxes sent approximately 900 fax flyers to companies in the Blanchardstown area. Following the fax we then contacted the companies by phone. This proved a very slow way of recruitment for the project. Only one company contacted us, which was the Medical Supply Company. The most common comment was they did not receive the fax. The fax would very rarely end up on the desk of the person who needed to see it!

We then set out to contact employers by phone to obtain the name of the person in either personnel or the manager or owner. Following this we sent on the information and followed up with a sales phone call. To achieve this, we employed a person to help with telesales and administration for 14 weeks. We also engaged the help of Blanchardstown Chamber of Commerce which provided us with a list of their members.

Also in the first round we held meetings with the Blanchardstown Employer's Group through Blanchardstown Area Partnership. We also did a mail shot to employers on the Local Employment Service database.

To speed up the information getting to the employer we engaged Inside Business to design an e-mail flyer in colour which proved to be much more efficient.

The success in gaining the support of the above employers was down to a combination of methods. The hardest thing to achieve was getting to speak to decision makers. The training course which FÁS provided for project co-ordinators

in the Irish Times training centre was very helpful for tips to address this problem in the second phase. It was very convenient for a company to say it did not receive the letter/fax which would be enough to get you off the phone and gave them another couple of days before they had to talk to you again. With the e-mail this could be done at the press of a button! The only problem then was some people did not have e-mail set up. What generally clinched the deal (with the exception of Independent Express Cargo and Medical Supply Company) was sitting with the employer face to face.

The employers we engaged with in the first phase were mainly in Sales or Supply. The common denominator was a genuine interest in their employees and their future. In some cases, the manager had left school early and had a perception that this was important and therefore supported an employee wishing to undertake the training. In other cases, the company was looking for ways to improve staff morale or to train specific individuals in specific skill areas. Companies recruited in this phase of training included Tesco, Atlantic Homecare, Independent Express Cargo and TK Maxx.

Reasons for not engaging:

The following are some of the reasons provided, as recorded at the time:

"No one in the age group" "Too busy to release staff" "Want to send staff but they have no interest" "Can't get staff to show up for work never mind send them for training" "Have our own in house training don't need more" "Only have foreign nationals in the age group" "Don't believe any of the training would help increase business" "No interest" "Too busy" "Staff over qualified for programme" "Company policy to only hire staff who have Leaving Certificate" "Don't employ any staff" "Against Company policy to release staff for any type of training unless on their own time" "Yes, but only want English classes" "Doing FÁS in-company training instead" "Fulltime staff out of age range but would like the training, part-time staff still in education".

In addition, some full-time staff who were interested in engaging were outside the age range. In many businesses part-time staff were attending college.

Lessons learned

Benefits of outreach

The main lesson learnt was the benefit of an outreach methodology when recruiting and supporting participants. This entailed days spent visiting local businesses, speaking to either employers or prospective participants, follow up, then encouraging young adults to participate and supporting them in their decision.

Invisibility of target group

Another lesson in this earlier phase of the Blanchardstown project was that this target group was there but to a degree invisible and not taken sufficiently into account by services. They were in employment so not on the live register. It was regarded as difficult to engage them. It was perceived that they wanted a social life but not education and training.





Nobody seemed to know for certain where they were employed. We consistently had to say to service providers that they were there, based on local data re early school leaving. It was through direct contact – walking into businesses and shops that we recruited clients, particularly in the second phase.

Benefits of direct contact

One of the main lessons learned was to talk to the staff directly. For instance, one employer said they thought it was a great idea. They had three people in the company but they would not join up. The co-ordinator visited the company to meet the employees to discover that they all wanted to join the programme. Contact was then made with the HR Manager who said there was no way she could release the staff but that maybe one could join up. Different days were offered but then the co-ordinator was informed that she had different plans for the employees to do a management course. The one participant they did release attended two classes and stopped. When the HR Manager was contacted she said the employee did not get anything from the course. The view of the co-ordinator was that it was too early to determine the value of the programme. The company did not seem to have any interest in releasing the employee for training. The lesson is not always to believe the employers' view and to meet potential participants first!

Voluntary ethos

Another important aspect of the ethos of the project was the voluntary engagement by employees and participants. Interested employers were encouraged to offer it to staff not to make it compulsory. Where possible staff were spoken to directly. In the second phase, it was emphasised to both employers and the young people, that the DES and FÁS were supporting this project under the umbrella of the DEP. This impressed people. In particular, many small businesses were appreciative of the visit, and welcoming and supportive of doing something for young workers.

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Prevalence of negative view of target group

Another lesson is that one can overstate the alienation of such young workers and stereotype their responses. The Phase 2 Wednesday group asked to do not only English at Leaving Certificate level but also Mathematics. We had to advise that to do ECDL, English and Mathematics and hold down a job might be over ambitious!

Engaging with participants

Firstly, participants were met on a one-to-one basis to alleviate any fears they might have in coming along to the classes and to explain what the training involved. Meetings were set up with the tutors and participants on a group basis. The co-ordinator did not attend all classes, as she needed to spend time recruiting. Each person was contacted before a class to check if they were going to attend and had a general chat to build relations.

The difficulty with Phase 1 group was the different levels of training needs. In the computer class, six participants were starting from scratch on the ECDL Certificate, two participants had the ECDL Certificate but wanted to do the MOS (Microsoft Office Specialist) Word Certification and another had part of the ECDL completed but

had to do four more modules to get the complete Certification and also he wanted to do the MOS Certification. This combination made it very difficult for the tutor.

A tutor was contracted from a local computer school. The tutor then decided it was too difficult to manage in the class with so many different levels and people coming on at different times etc. Another tutor was hired on a temporary basis until we found a tutor to run the course on a full-time basis.

Breakdown of Participants in Round 1 Training in Blanchardstown

- All participants in age range of 17-25 years
- *In computer class – 7 males and 2 females*
- One participant obtained a full ECDL Certificate
- One participant only needed to complete 4 modules to obtain a full ECDL Certificate.
- One participant has completed 4 modules on the ECDL programme and will complete the 3 remaining modules during phase two.
- Three participants completed the MOS Word Certification.
- Two participants to take MOS Excel Certification examination in November 2006.
- For four people, other aspects of their lives (work or personal) meant that they did not complete any module.

The training in Phase 1 covered ECDL Certification; MOS Word Certification; MOS Excel Certification and Personal Development FETAC Level 1.

Learning @ Work – Second Phase in Blanchardstown:

In the second round a considerable amount of work went into preparation of a new leaflet, which was simpler, more direct and offered a range of courses, some of which were of particular interest to employers as follows:

- Introduction to Fire Safety Awareness
- Basic First Aid
- Occupational First Aid
- ECDL
- Communications Skills Foundation Level
- Personal and Interpersonal Skills Level 1
- Leaving Certificate Subjects
- Conversation Spanish

A letter and leaflet was sent in the summer of 2006 to local agencies, including youth projects, community development projects, CIC, local politicians, Blanchardstown Chamber of Commerce, local drugs task force, founders and sub groups of the Board of the Partnership, clergy and religious groups. This was followed by a letter and leaflet to local hair salons, betting shops, public houses, hotels and stud farms.





In July and August the co-ordinator of the project and project manager visited a great range of local businesses. This included businesses who had been sent information and also all businesses and shops on the Clonsilla road, on Main Street Blanchardstown, Roselawn Shopping Centre, Rosemount Business Park, and Coolmine Industrial Estate. Particular attention was made to call to local shops in the RAPID estates.

This yielded a high level of interest and a good number of participants for the second round. It was obvious that the local publicity had created awareness. The focus on young workers and upskilling those disadvantaged in the labour force went down well and received a response.

We also contacted the MANDATE trade union who were aware of unionised businesses in the retail trade who had participants in the age range and some of whom would have left school early.

Content of Phase 2 Training

We decided to offer a definite date for the start up of the first ECDL course and have a staggered approach to the roll out of the other courses. The only exception was the Basic First Aid Course which we offered from mid-September. This served as an incentive to employers.

The Wednesday ECDL course filled up rapidly. A good rapport developed among participants and between the tutor and participants. Eight of the ten who had booked the First Aid class, which was a full day course, turned up. Nine participants joined the Leaving Certificate English class which was being held between 7pm and 9pm on Tuesday evenings.

A single conversation Spanish class was held on 1st November 2006.

In this way we are combining education and training in a creative way with the young workers and responding to their requests. (*They asked for conversational Spanish and Irish*).

Participants from Phase 2 of Blanchardstown Learning @ Work

- Age range between 17 and 25 years;
- 19 participants in total across the classes;
- For Tuesday ECDL class, 9 females;
- For Wednesday ECDL class, 2 males and 8 females;
- For English Leaving Certificate class, 3 males and 7 females;
- On First Aid Course, 2 males and 6 females.

Participating employers included: Hair Creation; Sundale Stores; MsDonalds; XL Stop and Shop; Sean Graham; Virgin Megastore; Remax.3; Celtic; Little Scholars' Creche; Paddy Power Bookmaker; Eurospar.

Co-ordinator's Comments

Initially, I felt the task of identifying the target group was very difficult, as they were practically invisible to agencies, community groups, social welfare departments etc! Therefore the most frustrating part of the project was creating awareness of *Learning @ Work*, its aims and objectives. This was a first attempt in Blanchardstown but what a worthwhile exercise it proved to be! It is hard to believe the hunger for knowledge these participants have, their enthusiasm, courage and value for training and education. Like all projects, teamwork is the key to success and the common dominator with our team is that we all believe in the *Learning @ Work* project and are enthusiastic in delivering its message. Our tutors have great experience in engaging with the targeted age group.

I have witnessed participants shaking with nerves on arrival at their first class, the anticipation and the fear of their conceived idea that they “don’t know anything” or “don’t know if I will be able for it” and watched them develop into confident people, engaging in class discussions on poetry, and enjoying every second of their class! I feel it is very important to be available to attend classes and engage with the participants on arrival, departure and break times to alleviate any fears, to give encouragement, etc.

I would have no hesitation in running the action again. Changes I would like to see at the foundation stage of the project include more advertising and press coverage on the part of the DEP and at local level, more sales training and of course more funding.

Catherine Durkin
Project Manager

and

Sandra Dunne
Project Co-ordinator
Blanchardstown Learning @ Work



Clondalkin Learning @ Work



Introduction

How Delivery Organisation became involved

In recent years, the Education Working Group of Clondalkin Partnership has identified as an issue young people leaving school early to take up employment. The Partnership was involved in the first *Learning @ Work* project and its evaluation. The Clondalkin Centre for the Unemployed, where the Learning @ Work project was based, is a FETAC accredited, ECDL & MOUS accredited centre. It has over five years experience of delivering training to local people who are distanced from the labour market and who are underemployed. Full-time training is provided for FÁS in the centre and links exist with many employers, community based services and agencies.

Appointment of part-time Co-ordinator

The Clondalkin *Learning @ Work* project co-ordinator commenced employment in March 2005. She was supported during her work by a local steering group/management committee which included:

- Education & Youth Co-ordinator, Clondalkin Partnership
- Economic Development Officer, Clondalkin Partnership (early meetings)
- Ronanstown Community Training & Education Centre (lower involvement)
- LES (Local Employment Service) Co-ordinator
- Local Community Representative (early meetings)
- Representative of CCU (Clondalkin Centre for the Unemployed) Centre Manager

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Timeframe for action from start of planning to end

The Clondalkin *Learning @ Work* project was scheduled to run over 14 months from March 2005 to May 2006. The co-ordinator worked for 20 hours per week for the first 13 months and, as the project was extended towards the end, worked for 12 hours per week to end-July 2006.

How Action Engaged with Employers and other Agencies

Different Methods Used

Various local community programmes/agencies were contacted e.g. Clondalkin Travellers Group, Ronanstown Youth Service/Childcare Centre, Rowlagh Women's Group, Ronanstown Women's Group, Youthreach, LES, FÁS, Local Training Initiative Programme, CCU, Clondalkin VEC, Lucan VEC, Local Schools & Colleges, Clondalkin Social Welfare Office – Training & Development Officer, Clonbuild Project, Neilstown & Rowlagh Community Centre, Getahead Club, CASP, The Bush Centre, Rowlagh & Neilstown Credit Union. Past trainees from the Local Training Initiative were also contacted and informed of the project.

The School Liaison Officer from St. Peter Apostle, Neilstown School sent letters to working parents informing them of the programme. The Liaison Officer from St. Mary's Rowlagh School also informed parents of the programme.

The Centre Manager of Liffey Valley was contacted and information was distributed to shops in the centre. The new SuperValu store adjacent to Áras Rualach was given information to leave in the staff canteen and the co-ordinator met the HR Manager to discuss training needs. Various other local companies participated including Medivent, Basil Conroy & Co., Dunnes Stores, JJB Sports Tallaght, Lu Lu Fashion Retailers, Sweet Factory, Office of Public Works, the Eastern Health Services and AXA Insurance.

Companies/employers were contacted by phone and advertisements and information packs for the *Learning @ Work* project sent on to the companies encouraging them to notify staff of the training opportunities on offer. Follow-up calls were made but no employers came forward with potential participants for the *Learning @ Work* project. Many of the employers contacted said that staff were not interested in further training, that they offered in-house training tailored to job requirements and that other training would not be relevant to job requirements.

In April 2005, two registration/information mornings were held and we registered 40 local individuals. Following this 14 *Learning @ Work* participants were selected. The 14 individuals who were successful in their application for the *Learning @ Work* project had all completed and achieved the ECDL – European Computer Driving Licence.

Content of the Training and Education Delivered

On the registration morning, all individuals were asked to include what kind of further training they would like. Most of the 14 selected individuals identified a need to improve their accountancy skills and personal development. It was decided to run an Advanced Excel (Spreadsheets) course and then move on to Book-keeping Manual & Computerised FETAC Level 5.

The wider initiative steering committee clarified in September 2005 that people on CE (Community Employment) would no longer be eligible on the programme (deemed as double funding). As the Book-keeping course had started, those on CE completed the training. The *Learning @ Work* co-ordinator met with CE supervisors involved to discuss if a training plan could be put in place for these 3 individuals on completion of the book-keeping training.

Courses delivered

Course	Accreditation	No. of Participants	No. Completed
Advanced Excel	FETAC Level 4	14	10
Book-keeping	FETAC Level 5	11	7
ECDL	European Computer Driving Licence	1	0
STEPS	Certificate from Pacific Institute	7	7
Payroll	FETAC Level 5	7	6

Advanced Excel (Spreadsheets) FETAC Level (4) training ran successfully for 10 weeks from May to July 2005 from 6.30pm to 9.30pm every Wednesday evening (30 hours training)





Advanced Excel Trainee Profile x 14

Full-time	Part-time	CE	Unemployed	Woman Returner
3	0	8	2	1

Bookkeeping Manual & Computerised Accounts B20137 FETAC (Level 5). Training ran for 12 weeks from September to November 2005 from 7.30pm to 9.30pm every Monday and Wednesday evening (48hrs training). We started with 11 participants and 3 dropped out, overall attendance was good. Everyone did really well and all achieved the Book-keeping Manual & Computerised Level 5. Ten of the twelve participants were aged under 25.

Learning @ Work Participant Profile x 12

Full-time	Part-time	Flexi-time	Unemployed	CE Scheme
5	1	1 (ECDL)	2	3

STEPS Motivational & Personal Development Training. Funding covered the STEPS induction packs and additional funding was sourced from the Innovative Adult Education Programme of Clondalkin Partnership to run the STEPS Motivational & Personal Development training programme over a weekend in January 2006. Sorrell House in Blessington was kindly offered by the Clondalkin Addiction Support Project (CASP) at a nominal cost.

Employers were notified well in advance and informed about the planned weekend away to ensure that they could organise staff cover. The weekend was a huge success. Everyone involved really enjoyed the STEPS training and it was a great way for individuals to get to know each other and ensure their full commitment to the *Learning @ Work* project.

Payroll – Manual & Computerised B20138 FETAC (Level 5). This training started in March 2006 and ran for 14 weeks from 6.30pm to 9.30pm every Monday evening (42 hours) and finished in June 2006. Six of the seven participants were aged under 25.

Learning @ Work Participant Profile x 7

Full-time	Part-time	Flexi-time	Unemployed	CE Scheme
4	1	1 (ECDL)	1	0

The six *Learning @ Work* participants who remained until September 2006 were offered individualised training if they wished to progress further.

Issues that arose in relation to accreditation

There were difficulties assessing what level the Advanced Excel was on the FETAC framework and, after a delay, the ECDL Training Institute held negotiations with FETAC qualifications/recognition unit. They placed the Advanced Excel at level 4 as a comparable level on the National Framework of Qualifications for Ireland (NFQ).

Additional specific supports for Participants

In the early stages of the Advanced Excel training some individuals experienced difficulties and three 2.5 hour training morning preparation classes were held to offer support at no cost to the *Learning @ Work* programme. This proved extremely beneficial. Initially six out of the ten participants passed the examination. One pre-exam class was arranged in preparation for the re-sit exam for two *Learning @ Work*

participants and as a result of this they both successfully went on to pass the examination. Unfortunately, the other two participants declined to re-sit the examination.

On completion of the Advanced Excel and as additional support to the participants, it was agreed that the co-ordinator would be present during all training times to act as a support person to both the tutor and the participants, and to really get to know the trainees and be aware of any issues arising. This was important to build up a strong link/relationship with the *Learning @ Work* participants.

Participant Outcomes

Some 21 people completed training on this pilot action, spread across different modules. Of these, 10 people completed one module of training with the others receiving up to four modules in some cases. The different modules and numbers completing were:

- STEPS – 8 people
- Advanced Excel Level 4 – 4 people
- Advanced Excel – 10 people
- Book-keeping Level 5 – 8 People
- Payroll Level – 5 - 7 people
- ECDL (7 modules) – 1 person

Publicity Achieved

Initially, an article was published in the Clondalkin Echo in April 2005 outlining the *Learning @ Work* programme and welcoming local businesses to put forward ideas about training needs for their staff and ideas from individuals in employment.

Additionally, the Clondalkin Centre for the Unemployed included *Learning @ Work* in the centre's information leaflet which outlined all relevant information about the project with contact names and numbers which encouraged individuals to apply. This leaflet was distributed to every household in North Clondalkin.

Views of Stakeholders

Employer Feedback

All employers were contacted on completion of the final stage of the Payroll training and were individually asked to meet up with the co-ordinator for lunch. However, there was no uptake. Telephone contact was made with two of the employers involved. One (part of the Eastern Health Services) said that she was very happy with the progress made by the relevant employee. However, she said that she saw the matter as essentially being a private one for the employee, i.e. the basic training required for her work was provided by the employer and training undertaken by an employee in their own time was their own business. A second employer (SuperValu) said that they too were happy with the progress made and saw the training as helping the future progression of the employee in the company.

Participant Feedback

An evaluation was undertaken in June 2006 by an independent facilitator under the following headings: training; personal development; employers' interest; further





training; and overall thoughts on the *Learning @ Work* programme. The evaluation was undertaken with six of the participants. While the participants had some issues of detail about the training modules, they were generally very positive about the training received, and particularly praised the STEPS course. However, the participants interviewed said that, while their employers knew about their training, they did not feel the employers appreciated the work they were putting in or how it could benefit their work organisations. The trainees said that employer bodies and trade unions at national level should play a greater role in raising awareness of the issues of upskilling in the workplace.

Comments by Co-ordinator of Action

The Clondalkin *Learning @ Work* programme has been successful in delivering training and in offering support to the participants and this has resulted in good progression. In relation to contact with employers, it has been very difficult. Employers say they think the training was great but most feel that internal training received by employees is sufficient. I feel employers don't see the relevance of further training and may even see it as a threat as further training could mean potentially losing a valuable member of staff.

The Clondalkin project began in March 2005 ahead of the other projects and started immediately to advertise the *Learning @ Work* programme to local businesses and the local area. At this stage there was very little contact with the other actions or the DEP and the first steering committee meeting wasn't held until September 2005, almost 7 months after the Clondalkin programme had started. There was a feeling that the Clondalkin programme was a little detached from the other programmes as it had started according to plan and was at a more advanced stage. As a result, there was a feeling of isolation and an uncertainty if the programme was running to the requirements of the funders and the DEP.

The Irish Times Field Sales Training was fantastic but came a little late. Although appreciative of the training, I feel this training should have been held at the start up stages of the programme when it could have been more beneficial for everyone.

There were discussions in relation to advertising the *Learning @ Work* programme and holding a breakfast information morning with prominent businesses but again I felt it was too late for the Clondalkin programme.

Looking at the progression and personal development achieved over the last year for all of the participants that I have had the privilege to work with, this has far outweighed the negative elements of the programme. The only challenge throughout the *Learning @ Work* programme has been the lack of interest and support from employers and this has proved extremely frustrating to deal with.

There are not many changes I would make in relation to the training because I feel this was of a high standard, which I know will benefit the *Learning @ Work* participants within their employment and in future employment.

Angelaine Tiernan
Co-ordinator
Clondalkin *Learning @ Work*

Tallaght Learning @ Work

Introduction

Tallaght is a community of some 76,000 persons (Census 2002) in South West Dublin. Three of its DEDs (encompassing four communities) are designated disadvantaged areas (RAPID). Tallaght has considerably higher than the national average rates of unemployment, particularly youth unemployment, as well as higher rates of early school leaving.

With a high youth population (25.5% of the live register under 25 years in July 2006) and high rates of early school leaving there is serious concern that young people will have no opportunity to participate in lifelong learning which would build the skills and knowledge necessary to secure, retain and progress in quality and meaningful employment. The vulnerability of these young people in relation to economic and social exclusion is widely acknowledged. There is an urgent need for initiatives which will enhance the skills of these young people and enable them to receive education and training on a part time basis while at work.

Tallaght Partnership is a local development and social inclusion company established in 1991. It contributes in a variety of ways to the social and economic development of Tallaght, including supporting and developing initiatives to target young people at risk. The Partnership identified the need for a programme to support work based education and training of early school leavers as a 2000-06 priority. The Partnership, in conjunction with local partners such as the South Dublin Chamber of Commerce, were mindful of the provisions of the Education Welfare Act 2000 and the responsibilities that would ensue on employers of young early school leavers. The 'Jobslink' project was initiated by the Tallaght Partnership to provide for development of an education and training programme for young people who had left school early to take up employment. This first pilot ran between 2002 and 2004 with funding and support from the Dublin Employment Pact and Tallaght Partnership. Further funding was received for the Partnership's *Mór: Learning @ Work* programme.

A co-ordinator worked full time on the project. The local steering committee consisted of FÁS (Services to Business), County Dublin VEC (Youthreach), Chamber of Commerce and Tallaght Partnership.

The Mor project began a development stage in June 2004, with implementation starting in January 2005. Review and evaluation occurred alongside implementation. The project was completed in August 2006.

How Action Engaged with Employers

The co-ordinator used three key methods to engage employers namely: distribution of a brochure; cold calling; advertising in local publications. Cold calling, while time consuming and sometimes awkward, yielded the more positive results as, besides engaging employers, it also provided an opportunity to talk to businesses and get a reaction on the concept of the programme.





Key reasons for employers not engaging were given as:

- Recruitment policy – Leaving Certificate was their minimum recruitment policy. Possibly they had a few workers without Leaving Certificate but they were generally over 30. The people were therefore outside the target group for *Learning @ Work*.
- Potential participants were already involved in workplace training.
- Company was pursuing training using FÁS *One Step Up* programme.

Employers that did engage generally had a training and staff development policy as part of their business strategy, seeing it as an integral part of business development. They also had very low staff turnover.

Employers were supported throughout the courses, receiving updates on participants, giving input to modules, and where necessary, wage subsidies were paid.

Content of the Education and Training Delivered

	Learning Programme 1	Learning Programme 2	Learning Programme 3a	Learning Programme 3b
Dates	Feb 05 - May 05	April 05 - August 05	Sept 05 - May 06	Sept 05 - May 06
Participants	1 male participant	3 female participants	1 male and 2 female participants	1 male and 4 female participants
Course of Study	Module: FETAC Maths L3	Module: FETAC Accounting L5	Certificate: FETAC L4 General Vocational Certificate*	Certificate: FETAC L5 Business Studies Certificate**
Employer(s)	Control Equipment Ltd, Citywest	GD Recruitment, Carrig Creations, Social Welfare Office	Jacob Fruitfield Food Group	Jacob Fruitfield Food Group
Description	One afternoon per week during normal working hours paid by employer. Wage subsidy paid to employer.	One evening per week after normal working hours.	One day per week during normal working hours paid by employer.	One day per week during normal working hours paid by employer

* 8 credits achieved at Level 4 for certificate were: Communications, Mathematics, IT Skills, Personal Effectiveness, Computer Applications, Data Entry, Work Experience (2 credits)

**8 credits achieved at Level 5 for certificate were: Communications, IT Skills (.5 credit), Computer Applications (.5 credit), Work Experience, Text Production, Information and Administration, Reception, Accounting, Personal Effectiveness in the Workplace

Publicity

The co-ordinator worked with a professional design company to create an image for the project which would appeal to business. A pack was developed which was delivered to all local businesses. Also, a number of advertisements for the programme were placed in Chamber of Commerce publications, and the co-ordinator attended a number of events (eg. member meets member) organised by the Chamber to publicise the programme.

Additional publicity arranged by the Dublin Employment Pact was gained through an RTÉ television news feature of participants of the Jacobs Fruitfield training course, and a radio interview on Newstalk 106FM with a participant.

The co-ordinator gave a workshop on the learning from the programme at a Pobal national conference which enabled her to share experiences and promote debate on the future of the programme and potential mainstreaming opportunities.

Views of Stakeholders in Action

Employers

Feedback was gathered by the co-ordinator through interviews with, and a survey of, all employers:

On *rationale for participation* – the businesses involved felt the training modules matched their business needs in terms of staff development, retention of staff and motivation within the workplace. The main attractions were to help people in the business better themselves and reach their potential. This has obvious business benefits because the business can move people up, and can motivate staff.

One employer said that any of the participants from the programme would be given serious consideration should they apply for an office position off the factory floor, or for a supervisory position on the factory floor. A knock-on effect was that even those not participating were more motivated and happier in their jobs as they felt they were working for a company that offered learning opportunities and cared about staff.

On *employer concerns and costs* – the only real concern was making a commitment to giving employees the agreed time off. It potentially could have caused problems to the business, in terms of line managers and supervisors irritated when workers were missing.

There was an obvious cost of losing staff for a day a week, while still paying them. But additional costs might have occurred due to lines having to be stopped due to not having enough staff to work them. While this is something that happens on occasion during the year anyway, it is likely to have happened once or twice due to line workers being on the course.

On *course content* – the key skills the businesses were looking for were IT skills, communication skills (i.e. confidence to speak) and mathematics. In the case of





mathematics, this course was considered compulsory for the employee to retain his/her employment and progress to a trade apprenticeship. In terms of those working on a production line, it is difficult to say what actual skills are needed, but the key was to develop skills which would enable people to learn how to learn and adapt.

As regards *changes in participants* – all employers commented on the improvement in commitment and enthusiasm to work. While some participants noted that a number of their employees were already highly motivated and would have been rated as excellent workers, there was a definite improvement overall. Additional positive changes noted were:

- Increased confidence in speaking to senior management
- Improved attendance
- An appreciation of the opportunity given to them by the company
- Interest in undertaking more courses

One employer commented that one participant has left their business, but they are happy that she has gone on to better herself and she probably would have left anyway at some stage.

As regards *benefits to the businesses involved* – employers noted the following benefits of participation in the programme

1. Positive media coverage
2. Very motivated employees which has spin off effects on staff morale throughout the business
3. Staff members now well equipped to move on within the business when opportunities present themselves.

Finally, as regards *recommendations for future development* – employers felt the programme had lived up to everything they expected and they would not recommend changes. In terms of rolling it out and gaining more interest, they advised that companies with a low staff turnover would be a better target as they are more interested in retaining and educating staff.

The employers involved said they would be happy to run the programme again, as they have other bright staff who they feel would benefit.

Participants

Some comments from participant feedback were as follows:

- Very nervous at beginning but grateful for an opportunity to get more qualifications
- Motivated by fact of gaining a Leaving Certificate equivalent qualification
- Supports were very important
- Adult learning environment – wasn't like school at all.
- Very hard work but felt so brilliant afterwards – felt I could do anything
- Tutors and co-ordinator brilliant – felt could ask them anything and they would help.

Trainers

Comments from trainers included the following:

- Excellent idea and very worthwhile.
- Very fulfilling, although at times challenging. Definitely worth it though when you see the changes in people.
- Would have no hesitation in getting involved again
- Great support, organisation and assistance from co-ordinator.

Comment by Co-ordinator of Action

- This has been a very successful programme on a number of levels. It has provided all the learners on the programme with an opportunity to return to meaningful education, all of them achieving nationally recognised certificates. Many of the young people have used these certificates as a 'springboard' to other courses or promotions in work. In this way the action has met one of its key objectives of raising the qualifications and access to life long learning for early school leavers. Additionally, it has developed a model of supports that ensure meaningful participation in education. This is an important piece of work that can be replicated in work with any vulnerable worker. It has also provided an opportunity to support employers to develop their staff.
- I would run this action again, however with a number of changes. There needs to be more of a strategy in the actions. It should not be about 'getting the young people onto any course' but thinking long term about how, why and who should sustain the work.
 - A more formal link into FÁS Services to Business where the project could provide a space for trying new small innovative actions that link directly back to Services to Business.
 - The biggest area for development is the supports that surround the course. There are a multitude of courses available and there is no need to replicate them. However further development should focus on the support system that surrounds the learning experience.
 - There needs to be a focus on the 'vulnerable worker' in general, not just the young worker.

Jennifer Murphy
Co-ordinator
Tallaght Learning @ Work



Wicklow/Kildare Learning @ Work – Stable Staff Project



Introduction

This project was one of three managed and co-ordinated by Wicklow Rural Partnership Ltd. in the Wicklow/Kildare area (the other two being with the Kerry Foods company). This particular project for stable staff was run in co-operation with Kildare European LEADER Teo. (KELT) in Clane. The action was an innovative one and delivered a programme to people who had left school early and were working as stable staff in racehorse training yards in the Kildare equine sector. The action began in Spring 2006 and will run until Spring 2007 (see below).

In May 2005 Wicklow Rural Partnership Ltd (WRP) received a contract from FÁS to develop and test training courses to promote soft skills training for young early school leavers employed by companies/sectors in Counties Wicklow and Kildare. The programme, known as the Wicklow Kildare *Learning @ Work* programme is managed by WRP's Employment & Social Inclusion Unit.

The project was planned to develop “soft skills” among young stable staff in the racehorse training sector and introduce them to learning as adults. It has its basis in the Kildare Wicklow EQUAL programme where WRP identified a need for such training to help employees remain in, and progress, within their employment and a need for employers to decrease absenteeism and staff turnover among their employees.

The background to this particular action was that, traditionally, young people enter the racehorse training sector as stable staff before completing second level education and are unlikely to return to education and training as adults. This can create long term issues both for the workers, who can find it hard to progress in their work, and for the employers, who may not have people with recognised certification for specific work areas with horses.

The actions in Kildare and Wicklow were largely funded by FÁS, with support also from the local VECs and WRP itself. A programme manager was responsible for promoting the programme and attracting employers and participants in the local areas selected for projects. He worked closely with FÁS, the VEC and the industry bodies relevant to the racehorse training sector on this action. He also liaised with the Dublin Employment Pact and with the three Dublin-based projects being overseen by the DEP. The programme manager was assisted by a project co-ordinator.

How Action Engaged with Employers and Participants

This action was timely in that there is a move within the racehorse training sector to develop further training for people within the sector and to develop Human Resource Management within the sector. In starting this action, the co-ordinator began by approaching the Irish Racehorse Trainers Association (IRTA) and did not find it difficult to persuade them of the benefits of training for the stable staff. The

IRTA wrote to trainers in the Kildare area recommending that their members co-operate with the programme and enclosing brochures on the Wicklow/Kildare *Learning @ Work* Programme. The stables of a number of major trainers, including John Oxx, Dermot Weld, John Quinn and Michael Halford agreed to participate in the programme.

The co-ordinator approached the Irish Stable Staff Association (ISSA) who supported the programme fully and recommended it to their members and promoted it on their website and in their newsletter. The ISSA also distributed brochures and posters prepared by the co-ordinator specifically for the stable staff course.

A course was developed to address the “soft skills” requirements of stable staff in the racehorse training industry, and to introduce them to education as adults.

The course was based on six months duration with participants attending for one half day per week during employer’s time. Following consultation with the Irish Racehorse Trainers Association, the Irish Stable Staff Association and the Racing Academy & Centre of Education, modules were selected for the course. It was planned that the course would run for six months from November 2005 and finish before the flat racing season got busy in order to facilitate the release of stable staff.

However it proved hard to persuade stable staff to sign up for the training. The main reason for this was that there has been no culture traditionally of ongoing training for stable staff and many felt they did not need any further training to do their job. Some also felt that their yards would find it hard to do without them for the half-day per week required.

For this reason, the original intention of running the training for six months was modified and it was decided to run the course in two stages, with an introductory stage over 12 weeks from March to June 2006. The aim of this first stage (which became a Communications and Media course) was to provide training in a way that would entice the participants back to education and training and would build their confidence and interest in further training. To this end, the modules for this first stage were chosen carefully (see below).

Efforts to attract individuals to the training included the following:

- With the support of the Irish Stable Staff Association speaking to the head lads as well as potential participants themselves;
- Attending the AGM of the Irish Stable Staff Association and having a stand there where people could talk one-to-one with the project co-ordinator;
- Placing an article in the newsletter of the Irish Stable Staff Association and posting details of the training on the association’s website;
- Having an article published in the Irish Field magazine.

Following these efforts, nine participants were recruited for the March 2006 training. These were mainly in the 17-25 age group but there were a couple of people in their 30s. This was important in that they acted as role models for the younger workers and encouraged them to attend.





Content of the Education and Training Received

In line with the approach of the Wicklow/Kildare *Learning @ Work* programme the full course content was agreed following consultation with the employers, in this case represented by the Irish Racehorse Trainers Association, and the workers, represented by the Irish Stable Staff Association.

The decision to run the course in two stages served two purposes:

- It allowed employees to be recruited for a 12 Week course with an offer of a second stage later in the year - if they wanted to proceed to it!
- it allowed the course to break during the busiest flat season

To make the Introductory 12 weeks more attractive to young stable staff, a “Media Training” module covering preparation for media interviews was included. It is not unusual for stable staff travelling with horses to be interviewed by the media.

Stage 1 (Communications and Media Course) ran for 12 weeks from March to June 2006 for one half day each week. Subjects included:

- FETAC Personal Effectiveness programme: This was run as the first module, to encourage individuals to take a fresh look at their lives and to see how much they are capable of achieving. With the self-confidence gained during this module participants approached the other modules with enthusiasm and commitment and bought in fully to the course.
- Media Training: Gareth O’Brien from the Sky TV Racing channel “At the Races” agreed to conduct mock interviews with participants as part of the media course and this proved to be an effective enticement to employees.
- Introduction to computers: The final hour of each afternoon’s training was devoted to providing participants with an introduction to computers. Most had no previous experience so the tutor concentrated on practical applications such as the internet and setting up and using e-mail addresses.
- Some aspects of the FETAC Communications module were included during Stage 1 as an extension of the Personal Effectiveness module. The purpose of this was to improve communication skills but also to give participants confidence to complete the module during Stage 2.

In addition to these accredited modules, provision was made for guest speakers to address the course based on needs identified by participants. The Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) spoke to the course about personal financial and budgeting matters and the Back to Education Initiative co-ordinator from County Kildare VEC spoke about further adult education opportunities for participants.

All nine participants agreed to enrol for Stage 2 of the programme. Stage 2 is running from October 2006 to May 2007. Following discussion with the participants at the end of Stage 1, their enthusiasm for further training/education meant that Stage 2 was extended from 12 weeks to 24 weeks, during working hours.

Modules to be completed at FETAC Level 5 during the afternoons on Stage 2 from October 2006 to May 2007 are:

- Communications
- Computers
- Work Experience

Following discussions with the co-ordinator three new participants enrolled on Stage 2 bringing the numbers on Stage 2 to twelve participants.

Participants have also enrolled for evening courses, in their own time supported by Kildare *Learning @ Work*, at the Racing Academy & Centre of Education:

- Eight participants have started on the FETAC Business Administration course and also on the Business Calculation course on Wednesday nights.
- Four have started on the FETAC Equine Anatomy and Physiology Course and also on the Stable and Yard Practice course on Thursday nights.

Views of Stakeholders in the Programme

A review of participant attitudes to the Stage 1 training course was undertaken at the end of the course. This found that:

- All participants found that the training was focused in areas where they wanted to learn and had been well delivered;
- 78% felt that they are more positive towards work as a result of engagement on this course and that their attitude to work has changed through engagement on this course.
- All felt that their self confidence has improved as a result of the course.
- All were satisfied with the course and would recommend it to a friend.

The Racehorse Trainers were also happy with the training outcomes and gave the go-ahead for Stage 2 of the course to proceed in October 2006.

There was also interest in 2006 from some other parts of the country in the training programme (perhaps due to publicity in *The Irish Field* and an *Irish Times* article – see Annex 2) and it is possible that the programme will be replicated in other areas of the country with a strong racehorse training sector.

Comment by Co-ordinator of Action

The action demonstrates a number of learning points:

- Training modules must be rooted in the real needs of employers and employees. The training offered should have a clear objective for both employer and employee – it is not just about getting people on to courses of any kind.
- The project reinforces WRP's experience in other areas that training for low-skilled workers who left school early should begin with modules designed to build their self-confidence around learning.





- The emphasis on personal development and confidence building at the start of the course was an important element in participants completing Stage 1 and continuing to Stage 2. During Stage 2 participants enrolled for extra FETAC modules in their own time.
- Every sector is different and it is important to engage with the specifics of a sector. While “soft skills” training such as personal effectiveness and communications, is relevant across all sectors, the progression by participants to modules specifically tailored to the sector is an important element in continuing employer support, especially in a sector with a large number of relatively small employers.
- The pilot action shows that it can be sometimes very hard to engage with participants. In this case, it took a number of types of approaches before people were attracted on to the course.
- There should be some flexibility in the training modules offered and in the course structure as these may need to change to attract the relevant participants. The flexibility to offer an attractive starter course was important in this case.
- It can be difficult to persuade employers in small businesses of the benefits of employee training at a basic level. The support of the employers’ organisation is very important in getting across the benefits.

Michael O'Brien
Manager
Wicklow/Kildare Learning @ Work

Wicklow/Kildare Learning @ Work – Kerry Foods Project

Introduction

Two of the three *Learning @ Work* projects managed and co-ordinated by Wicklow Rural Partnership Ltd. in the Wicklow/Kildare area were with the Kerry Foods plant in Shillelagh. This write-up concentrates on the first of these, which involved delivery of a training programme at the Kerry Foods plant at Shillelagh, County Wicklow during 2005 and 2006. A second programme began in autumn 2006 and is referred to briefly in this write-up. The actions in Kildare and Wicklow were largely funded by FÁS, with support also from the local VECs and WRP itself.

In May 2005 Wicklow Rural Partnership Ltd. (WRP) received a contract from FÁS to develop and test training courses to promote soft skills training for young early school leavers employed by companies/sectors in Counties Wicklow and Kildare. The programme, known as the Wicklow Kildare *Learning @ Work* programme is managed by WRP's Employment & Social Inclusion Unit.

The project was planned to develop “soft skills” among young employees in Kerry Foods and to introduce them to learning as adults. It has its basis in the Kildare Wicklow EQUAL programme undertaken from 2002 to 2005 where WRP identified a need for such training to help employees remain in, and progress within their employment, and a need for employers to decrease absenteeism and staff turnover among their employees.

Consultations with employers indicated an awareness of a substantial cost to them of employing people, particularly young people, with little or no educational qualifications.

These costs were particularly identified as:

- a. Reduced productivity through lack of the necessary “soft skills” such as communications, interpersonal skills, problem solving, basic computer skills and other skills that are not specific to any particular occupation.
- b. Lack of opportunity to promote from within the workforce when more senior vacancies occur.
- c. Recurring recruitment costs to replace employees who leave or have to be let go after a short period of employment.

WRP had also identified that there were a substantial number of young early school leavers in low skilled employment who were not getting the type of personal development and communications training that they were providing to young unemployed people under EQUAL and other initiatives.

The EU EQUAL project had also helped WRP to identify a model of “soft skills” training that works with target groups with low levels of education. Key to this approach was to start with modules focused on personal development and confidence building. The idea is to attract the young people back into a safe learning environment and build up their self-confidence after which their own desire to learn and develop will ensure they become committed to the learning process.

WRP therefore came to the action with employer contacts, with an understanding of employer needs and with an approach to training for young early school leavers already piloted under the EQUAL programme.





A programme manager was responsible for promoting the programme and attracting employers and participants in the local areas selected for projects. He worked closely with FÁS, the VEC, and the relevant Chambers of Commerce, Employer Organisations and Trade Unions. He also liaised with the Dublin Employment Pact and with its three Dublin-based projects. The programme manager was assisted by a project co-ordinator in employer liaison, input into selection of participants, organisation of tuition etc.

How Action Engaged with Employers and Participants

Major employers are represented on the Board of WRP including Schering-Plough, Glanbia, the Tourism industry, National Parks and Wildlife Service, Coillte, the Private Agri-Business Sector and Wicklow County Council. The involvement of these employers, and the previous employer consultation, meant that the approach of the WRP from day one was rooted in employer needs. The project co-ordinator was able to highlight the business benefits of the programme.

Once it was identified that Kerry Foods were potentially interested in the project, the project co-ordinator made a presentation to the HR Manager in Shillelagh. This included: information on the training to be provided; the business benefits; some thoughts, based on the EQUAL experience, of what kinds of people might be encouraged to apply, e.g. people who might have the potential for future promotions or people in danger of leaving the company. The course was also suitable for a category of employee identified by many employers – young people who may have low productivity due to lack of an understanding of work and the responsibilities which go with employment.

Once the HR Department decided to go with the project, they in turn distributed brochures and posters printed by the project co-ordinator specifically for the Kerry Foods course. 12 participants aged between 17 and 25 were recruited from the production line within Kerry Foods. The project co-ordinator maintained ongoing contact with the HR Department as regards all aspects of the training.

The major benefits expected to result from participants' attendance on the course were:

- Improved communications with both their peers and their managers.
- Improved teamwork.
- Improved self-confidence.
- Improved ability to deal with problems at work.
- A better understanding of work and where it fits into life.
- Improved mathematical skills
- Improved computer skills
- Increased progression within Kerry Foods.
- Decreased absenteeism.
- Identification of employees suitable for increased responsibilities/progression within Kerry Foods.

Content of the Education and Training Received

The course content was agreed between WRP and the HR Department of Kerry Foods. This ensured it both met the needs of the *Learning @ Work* programme and the needs of the company.

The course included four modules:

- The STEPS Personal Development module
- FETAC Communications at either Level 3 or Level 4
- FETAC Mathematics at either Level 3 or Level 4
- ‘Equal Skills’ Introduction to Computers – night course in own time.

STEPS Programme

The first module on the course was the personal development STEPS Programme, designed for people who face different 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 module helped the 12 young workers to take a fresh look at their lives and see how much they could achieve. The self-confidence gained fed into enthusiasm and commitment for the following modules. This module also helped participants see “work” in the context of life in general and encouraged them to look at both their employer’s and their own responsibilities in the workplace. At the end of the course all participants said they were more positive towards work as a result of the training.

FETAC Communications and Mathematics

Due to a range of participant abilities within the course, it was decided to offer participants the opportunity to complete the Communications and Mathematics modules at either Level 3 or Level 4. While this increased the resources needed for the course it allowed each person achieve certification at an appropriate level during the programme.

“Equal Skills” Introduction to Computers

After the first 12 weeks of the course the participants were offered the opportunity to complete the “Equal Skills” Introduction to Computers module in their own time, after work. All agreed to do this and a course was organised and paid for by the *Learning @ Work* programme in a local IT Training Centre. All participants completed the module.

Before this module was offered, at the request of the *Learning @ Work* programme, Kerry Foods offered to fund additional computer training, in their own time, for any participants completing the module.

Participant led days

In addition to the other modules, based on discussion with the participants, there were a number of guest speakers invited to address the course. These included the





Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) of the Department of Social and Family Affairs and the Adult Education Organiser of County Wicklow VEC, who spoke about further education opportunities for participants.

Some 11 of the 12 workers completed the training programme and received accredited certification from the courses above. One person was unable to complete the training as a change in a night-time work shift did not allow him to attend the training classes.

In September 2006, 8 of the 11 workers involved were proceeding to ECDL training in their own time and the remaining three (who had already completed ECDL) were proceeding to Microsoft MOUS computer training courses, all with the support of Kerry Foods.

Within three months of the course finishing 3 of the 11 participants on the programme had already been given additional responsibilities and/or moved into new jobs at Kerry Foods.

Views of Stakeholders in the Programme

Detailed questionnaires were distributed to the participants at the end of the training. Responses were very positive with participants saying that the course material was relevant to them and that they were happy with the teaching.

Follow-on questions in relation to the impact of the training on attitudes revealed:

- All participants said that their self-confidence had improved;
- All believed that the training had improved their work productivity;
- All said they were more positive towards work as a result of the training;

The project also received structured feedback from the line managers of the participants. The findings were generally in line with the findings from the participants' questionnaire but at a lower level of positivity than expressed by the participants themselves. It found that about half of the managers saw a range of improvements in the participants' work performances (measured under a number of headings). Some 50% said that the worker was more likely to be considered for a higher grade in Kerry Foods as a result of engagement with the course.

Managers' comments included:

- The course was of benefit to participants;
- Participants demonstrated more confidence and enthusiasm after the training;
- Managers were impressed with the changes arising from the course.

Both the HR Manager in Kerry Foods and the programme manager are happy that the major benefits expected to result from participants' attendance on the course were achieved.

In October 2006, the Kerry Foods Shillelagh plant, at the request of Kerry Foods, started a second *Learning @ Work* course for a further 15 employees, using the same approach, and again supported by WRP and Learning @ Work (through FÁS funding). There were 30 applicants for the 16 places in September 2006.

Comment by Co-ordinator of Action

The following are the main learning points that I would take from the *Learning @ Work* training programme at the Kerry Foods Shillelagh plant:

- There is a need from both the employers' and employees' points of view for "soft skills" training for young early school leavers in employment.
- The model piloted by WRP to improve "soft skills" among low skilled employees was shown to work in Kerry Foods.
- The emphasis on personal development and confidence building at the start of the course was an important element in participants completing all modules and continuing with education after the programme. After twelve weeks all participants enrolled for computer training in their own time, in addition to the daytime training.
- Offering the employer a programme based on defined business needs as well as the needs of their employees is more likely to work. For example, many employers have identified a lack of understanding by young employees of the responsibilities involved in work and the difficulties caused to employers by this. Dealing with this during the personal development module is very important for the development of the employee and his/her progression or even their continuation in employment. It also benefits the employer who gets an employee prepared to accept greater responsibilities.
- The Wicklow Kildare *Learning @ Work* programme was based on offering "soft skills" training to employees. We found that approaching a company in a business-like manner and offering a clear training programme around "soft skills" for their employees is attractive to employers. It is important to show clearly that what is on offer is of benefit to the employer.
- The experience of this project suggests that companies can be persuaded of the benefit of the programme. Take-up will not necessarily be easy but it can be done if they can be shown that there are advantages for both employers and employees.
- For recruitment purposes, how the training is presented to employees is very important. By focusing on 'communications', 'life planning', computers etc. the training can be offered as a positive experience for participants with long-term benefits both at work and socially.
- A primary objective of the *Learning @ Work* programme is to encourage early school leavers to return to education in their own time. It has been very successful in this objective with all participants enrolling for night courses on completion of the *Learning @ Work* programme. However a problem has been identified in relation to courses funded under the Department of Education and Science Back to Education Initiative (BTEI). While courses under the BTEI are free to unemployed people, persons in employment are required, in all cases, to pay the full cost for any course, irrespective of earnings. This policy should be reviewed in respect of early school leavers in low paid employment. While participants on this course may see the benefits of continued education and pay, it is a major disincentive to early school leavers who have not gone through such a programme.

Michael O'Brien
Manager
Wicklow/Kildare *Learning @ Work*





Annex 2:

The Irish Times Article on Kildare Learning @ Work Action

On course for a better life plan

(THE IRISH TIMES, Friday, May 19, 2006)

On course for a better life plan

by Eileen Battersby

“The glamorous world of horse-racing is built on the hard slog of the stable staff. A new education project aims to help such workers progress in the industry ...”

From the breeding of the genetically engineered masterpiece known as the thoroughbred horse, to the training of some of them as potential champions, horse-racing is a lottery as well as one of Ireland's most romantic and glamorous sports.

But ironically, while the breeders, owners and trainers rank among the nation's wealthy, the labour base that sustains the racing industry is traditionally poorly paid with limited job prospects.

An estimated 16,000 people work in the racing and breeding industry, and an experienced stable employee aged over 18 can expect to earn a minimum wage of €339 for a 39-hour week. The thoroughbred horse industry is worth more than €330 million a year to the Irish economy, according to a report in 2004 by Indecon International Economic Consultants, commissioned by Horse Racing Ireland.

Many of the stable lads and lasses riding out the champions of the future are also involved in the daily tending of champions of the present, having joined racing yards as unskilled 15-year-olds with little to offer initially

other than low body weight and a love of horses. They have no educational qualifications and few job prospects, yet it is upon this invisible workforce that successful racing yards are established. Behind the triumphant jockey, trainers and owners on race day are the grooms who began work at 6am with the daily drudge of mucking-out and people such as the two Ukrainians and the Frenchman who recently died in a car crash at 4.30am, on their way to work in a Co Kildare yard.

It is undoubtedly an exciting job for a teenager or a twenty-something to be riding out great horses, but should an injury from a fall put an end to that, what happens then? The Wicklow/Kildare *Learning @ Work* programme, one of the pilot schemes initiated by Dublin Employment Pact and funded by Fás and the Department of Education, is looking to the needs of early school-leavers who are employed yet have limited opportunities in the very industry they sustain.

According to Michael O'Brien, a former Army officer involved in training, with an interest in adult education and now manager of Wicklow/Kildare *Learning @ Work*, it is important to persuade both employers and employees of the advantages of further education at





work. To date, the scheme has been implemented at Kerry Foods in Shillelagh, Co Wicklow and at Jacob Fruitfield Food Group in Dublin, where its potential was immediately grasped by staff and management.

"The development of 'soft skills', such as communications and knowing how to use a computer, are very important and often overlooked, particularly if you've left school at 15 to begin work," O'Brien says. While people working in factories are conscious of the various steps that lead towards management positions, in something like racing or horticulture – where demanding physical labour is essential – they are less obvious, he says, and many employees may feel they don't need to consider training courses.

Having been based at the Curragh for part of his Army career, O'Brien was conscious of the specific needs of the racing industry. "A teenager or a 20-year-old working in the racing industry may be quite happy," he says. "They love the job, the horses, and they are confident that they know what to do. They feel they have all the skills they need and don't need further skills because, at that age, people don't tend to look to the future. But as they get older, they begin to realise that additional training or education would be a benefit - and that's where we are in a position to offer something."

O'Brien, who seems a sympathetic, concerned individual, agrees that it is not always easy to encourage people to return to education at a later stage.

"Some of them may have had bad experiences at school," he says. "We are trying to introduce them to education as adults, which is a very different thing. It is a very different approach,

client-focused and in small groups." In other words, it is quite unlike the formal primary/secondary education system lodged in their memories.

"We want people to begin thinking about a life plan, and also the balance between work and life," says O'Brien.

The project also reflects a wider reality about a stressed modern society in which traditional social skills have become forgotten in the rush.

Racing trainers are aware of how important the behind-the-scenes employees are, and equally of the high turnover of workers. For all the appeal of horses, working with them is tough and physical, particularly during the dark winter months.

It took some persuasion, but four trainers did agree to release stable staff for three hours a week to take part in a pilot course, which began in March and continues until the end of this month, then resumes after the flat-racing season.

Wicklow/Kildare *Learning @ Work* not only approached the trainers through the Irish Racehorse Trainers Association, it also looked for support from the Irish Stable Staff Association and from the Racing Academy and Centre of Education (Race) at the Curragh, Co Kildare. Established in 1976, Race has contributed its share of top jockeys over the years, as well as a high proportion of trainees who have remained in the industry.

For Gillian Spencer (24), from Blanchardstown, Dublin, Wicklow/Kildare *Learning @ Work* is a chance to move up a step. "I left school when I was 15 and came to Kildare to do the course at Race," she says. Her family had no involvement with horses and "I

couldn't even ride when I started at Race. I'd never sat on a horse, but I loved the idea of working with horses".

After she finished the Race course, she drifted away and worked elsewhere, but then returned to racing – "I love horses, you can't stay away from them" – and has been riding out for the past four years. Spencer is unlikely to want to run a yard, but she is now seeing that there are further possibilities for her, and computers are no longer a mystery.

Her flatmate, Cathy Gannon, the 2004 Champion Apprentice Jockey (the first woman to hold that title), is also doing the course. She may be a trainer of the future.

Sitting around a table in the Race canteen are representatives of the elements that make up racing. One of them, Jim Kavanagh, of the Irish Racehorse Trainers Association, who has been a trainer for 25 years, says that, for him, a yard is as good as its staff and as the horses it has in training. It was Kavanagh who persuaded trainers to take the Wicklow/Kildare course seriously. He describes the way morale soars when a horse is doing well and slumps when fortune takes a bad turn. He also knows about the high turnover in staff.

"You need the staff, good staff," he says. "People have to be motivated, and when they're motivated, they work well."

He seems to have retained something of the old romance about racing.

"Every year, it's the same," he says. "Every trainer will say: 'They're the best two-year-olds I've ever seen.' "

The Irish stable Staff Association proved crucial in encouraging its members to attend the course. Dan Kirwan, chief executive of the association and himself from a racing family, campaigned for the course. O'Brien and Kirwan talked to about 30 people, before selecting nine – five women, four men – to participate in the pilot scheme. Although the plan is to concentrate on 17 to 24 year-olds, this initial course includes two older participants.

One of them is Co Meath man Philip Carey, who looks every inch the former jockey he is, with winners over the jumps before he moved to the flat. Now 35, a father of two and a bit stiff when he walks, he is looking down the line with a view to managing a yard and knows the value of his newly acquired computer skills.

Also older than the other course participants is Jeff Byrne (33), from Carlow town, who left school – and home – at 16 to come to Race. On completing his training "19 years ago now", he went to work for Dermot Weld and is still there, riding out and working in the yard as a stable lad. Lively and chatty, he says: "I love horses, they're amazing animals." Byrne, now a father of one, has travelled abroad with horses, as far as Australia.

"I've had to speak with the media about how horses are going and that," he says. "The course has helped build my confidence. I spend my evenings on the computer now." As for the future, "I'd like to be head stable lad – that's my aim".

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