



Linking Education and Training to Employment

Project
Recommendations



Introduction

This project focussed on the experiences of unemployed people and those distant from the labour market in undertaking education and training courses and their links to employment. This project analysed:

- Unemployed people's experiences of education and training courses;
- The range of options made available and potential links to employment or further education and training;
- Whether participants believed that it was their choice to participate in training and education courses and whether they determined which course they participated in;
- Whether participants believed that these education and training options were being delivered as part of a systematic approach e.g. National Employment Action Plan (NEAP);
- If participants had initiated searches for education and training themselves, and if so:
 - Had they been able to find a course they liked?
 - Could they access good information and or advice on their options?
 - Were they happy with the outcome?
- The extent to which employers are consulted and / or involved in decisions relating to the planning and delivery of state training services for unemployed people;
- Employers' perceptions of the effectiveness of training and education services.

This project was timely, as the Department of Social and Family Affairs had begun the rollout of a new Active Case Management approach as part of their new Social and Economic Participation Programme. At the same time, the Expert Working Group on Future Skills Needs had highlighted the challenges facing Ireland and its goal of building a knowledge based economy. They also noted then that existing education and training policies would give rise to a growing skills gap between the Irish workforce and the sectors where job creation was actively being pursued. While the project began at a time of unprecedented employment in Ireland, the pace and extent of the recession serves to further underline the imperative of linking education and training to employment.

Methodology

The three main components of this project consisted of a questionnaire, focus groups and a national seminar.

A questionnaire was sent out to all individual members of the INOU to ascertain their experiences of education and training courses and how they accessed those options. This was accompanied by a publicity campaign to raise awareness of the project amongst INOU affiliated organisations and other key stakeholders. The INOU newsletter, Bulletin, and other key elements of the organisation's work were used to inform as wide a range of people as possible of the project and to seek their active support.


Focus Group meetings were held with unemployed people in Limerick, New Ross, Tallaght and Tullamore. INOU staff visited the social welfare office in each of these four locations on at least two signing-on days and spoke with unemployed people about their experiences and invited them to attend focus groups held at a later date in their area. This proved to be very useful as the meetings were well attended.

The national seminar "Getting it Right: Linking Education and Training to Employment" was held in December 2008. The seminar brought together a wide ranging audience including Government Departments, INOU affiliated organisations, employers' organisations, training providers, and state agencies with specific remits for education and training provision. The round table aspect of the seminar provided an opportunity for those in attendance to discuss a range of issues including improving the linkages of education and training to employment. The seminar report of the event was published on the INOU website and is available to download at:

http://www.inou.ie/download/pdf/getting_it_right_seminar_report.pdf

The following project recommendations result from the questionnaire findings, the outcomes from the focus group meetings and the learning from the seminar.

KEY PROJECT RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Provide a broad range of quality training and education options.
 2. People's participation on training and education courses must be voluntary.
 3. Greater emphasis should be placed on assisting unemployed people in identifying pathways to progression.
 4. Greater integration of employment, education, training and social welfare services.
 5. Ensure that existing employment related services meet the needs of unemployed people.
 6. That there is a greater emphasis on the employers' role in education and training.
 7. Implementation of the National Skills Strategy.
 8. Remove existing barriers that prevent the smooth transition of unemployed people from Social Welfare in to education, training and work.
 9. Urgent collective action is required to address the unemployment crisis.
 10. Mainstream successful pilot initiatives.
 11. Improve responsiveness and flexibility of training, education and employment services to more effectively link training and education to work in a rapidly changing labour market.
 12. A plan for the development of Distance and E-learning is required and its accreditation.
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PROJECT RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Provide a broad range of quality training and education options.**
 - A wide range of attractive quality education and training options need to be available. It is important that we make the best use of our resources so that training and education courses are run as effectively as possible.
2. **People's participation on training and education courses must be voluntary.**
 - Providing a broad range of options enables the individual to make good choices. If it is mandatory for people to take-up specific options or lose their welfare payment, then there is a real danger that the person will be forced to take any course rather than the ones they are interested in and which may provide career opportunities.
 - People will take-up options if they are quality ones.
3. **Greater emphasis should be placed on assisting unemployed people in identifying pathways to progression.**
 - Assisting unemployed people in choosing a career or training path is essential. This highlights the importance of service providers assisting people to map out a route to further training, education and work.
 - People should have the option of a range of courses that they are interested in and that are linked to clear progression routes, rather than being encouraged or in some cases compelled to take-up available and unfilled courses in which they have no interest.
 - Improving the transition between higher FETAC and lower HETAC courses would greatly assist people's ability to progress through the education and training systems.
 - The individual's skills and employers' needs should be matched more closely.
 - Financial incentives are important in assisting people to move from education or training to work e.g. the recently discontinued 'Back To Work Allowance' or retaining some secondary benefits such as the Medical Card.
4. **Greater integration of employment, education, training and social welfare services.**
 - Increase communication at all levels between agencies to ensure individuals have access to the best possible service.
 - Ensure that services that jobseekers and unemployed people require are located, where possible, under the same roof.
 - An integrated approach involving trainers, employers, employment services and unemployed people is very important.

5. Ensure that existing employment related services meet the needs of unemployed people.

- Improve the employment services capabilities to match unemployed people with jobs and the person's interests and career goals.
- Job adverts and training / education course notices should be taken down from offices (and off systems) as soon as they are filled.
- Greater provision of training for people who are on reduced working hours. The pilot scheme announced in the April Budget where 277 places were allocated to provide training for people on reduced working hours is welcome but this should be mainstreamed quickly.
- Encourage school buildings to remain open later to make the most of these spaces so that a range of community and statutory education and training courses can be run in the evening or at night.
- Run high demand courses more often.
- Employability skills e.g. communications, problem solving and critical thinking need to be better integrated in to courses.
- Further develop the Job Club structure to reflect the different needs of different unemployed.
- The application of Genuinely Seeking Work (GSW) should be reviewed in the context of fewer jobs and rapidly rising unemployment.

6. A greater emphasis on the employers' role in education and training is needed

- Employers have a vital role to play by better integrating on the job training in to work. Employers need to work with FÁS and others as the involvement of employers in the process for both the creation of the content of courses as well as work placements are essential.
- Work experience is important and provides a valuable reference for people seeking employment. Where funds are available for this purpose, work experience should be a paid activity.
- The value of staff development, including out of work training, needs to be recognised to a greater extent by employers.
- Replies to job applications are very important for the Job Seeker, not only to be acknowledged in their efforts even if they are unsuccessful but also to prove that they are Genuinely Seeking Work.
- Everything must be done to prevent redundancies, such as retraining of staff and redeployment to other areas of a company.

7. Implementation of the National Skills Strategy.

- It is crucial that we know where the jobs are most likely to be created in the future and so ensure people have the necessary skills to attain them. The Expert Working Group on Future Skills Needs was established in 2005 to do just this: the National Skills Strategy was launched in 2007 but its Implementation Plan has not even been published.

8. Remove existing barriers that prevent the smooth transition of unemployed people from Social Welfare into education, training and work.

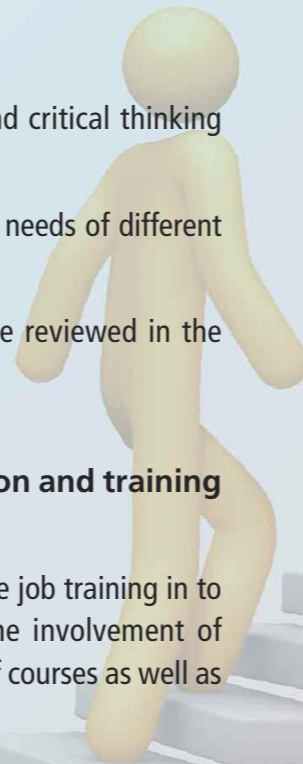
- It is important that when an unemployed person takes up a training course that they are able to make a seamless transition back on to the Live Register if they have not secured employment, rather than being treated as a new claimant.
- Significant investment is needed in retraining, upskilling and education.
- The lack of affordable childcare is a substantial barrier to undertaking education.
- Timely payment of maintenance grants is vital – some were paid as late as August 2008 for 2007.
- Ensure that places are available for people with little or no qualifications on technical FÁS courses where the interests and previous skills of the applicant are relevant.
- Build literacy supports into specific skills training programmes.
- Tackling ageism should be a priority. Mature students find it harder to find employment despite having the same or higher qualifications than younger graduates.

9. Urgent collective action is required to address the unemployment crisis.

- The need for collective action is paramount given the seriousness of the current economic situation. The Social Partners (Employers, Unions, Community Sector and the Government) must be involved in the collective decision-making required to meet these huge challenges.

10. Mainstream successful pilot initiatives.

- Ensure that successful initiatives are replicated.
- Link training to employment opportunities when jobs are announced. As soon as a decision is made on creating jobs, training for these jobs on a partnership basis with employers, FÁS, other relevant agencies and the local community should start as quickly as possible.



11. Improve responsiveness and flexibility of training, education and employment services to more effectively link training and education to work in a rapidly changing labour market.

- Courses that are targeted to meet specific labour market needs should be more responsive to variations in labour market conditions. To ensure that people are trained quickly to meet labour market shortages, but also wind up courses quickly when these shortages have been met. If provision of training persists long after the need for that skill has been filled there is a risk of wasting valuable resources and leaving the trainee in the position of having completed training with no employment outcome.

12. A plan for the development of Distance and E-learning is required and its accreditation.

- The opportunities created by and the importance of the provision of training and education through e-learning systems are very considerable.
- While broadening the numbers of people who can undertake training and education through the use of technology, there is a need to review how the state and its agencies can best support these technological developments.
- The roll out of the national broadband scheme will be paramount for such initiatives to succeed in secluded rural areas, while at the same time there must be recognition of the fact that for those whose income is derived from Social Welfare payments the cost of broadband may be prohibitive in them taking up such options.
- Furthermore the cost of computer equipment required to undertake e-learning courses is a considerable obstacle for those on minimum incomes. The state and its agencies have a vital role to play in finding innovative and cost effective schemes to promote e-learning as an affordable option for those on social welfare payments.
- It is important that e-learning does not become a cost saving substitute for more traditional methods where there is a clear need for training or education to be provided in person.
- It is also important that the accreditation people receive through Distance and e-Learning is compatible with the National Qualifications Award framework.



KEY ASPECTS OF SUCCESSFUL COURSES

- ❑ Publicise information widely and ensure information on courses are up-to-date.
- ❑ Be innovative and pro-active in advertising and promoting the courses.
- ❑ Improve access to longer courses with better outcomes.
- ❑ Run courses with greater demand more often.
- ❑ Provide after course support and follow-up.
- ❑ Integrate literacy and numeracy in courses where required.
- ❑ Local involvement in setting up locally based courses is invaluable in ensuring good participation and successful courses.
- ❑ Quality service and staff are vital in delivering successful courses as properly qualified and capable instructors greatly increase the possibility of a positive outcome for the participant.
- ❑ Flexible modular courses with start times that suit the participants and provide useful accreditation will ensure the best outcomes for the participants.
- ❑ Being creative and flexible are key requisites underpinning successful programmes.



**FUTURE
SKILLS
NEEDS**

LIFE-LONG LEARNING

ACTIVATION

