A Learning for Jobs
Review of Ireland
2010

Viktória Kis
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Summary: strengths, challenges and recommendations

This review of vocational education and training (VET) in Ireland is part of “Learning for Jobs”, the OECD policy study of VET, a programme of analytical work and individual country reviews designed to help countries make their VET systems more responsive to labour market needs. The review of Ireland assesses the main challenges faced by the VET system and presents an interconnected package of six policy recommendations. Each recommendation is described in terms of the challenge, the recommendation itself, supporting arguments, and issues of implementation.

Strengths

The Irish VET system has a number of strengths:

- There is a good range of provision of different types of VET at post-secondary level, targeted at a wide range of different client groups, including those in and out of work and with second chance opportunities.
- The national qualifications framework is comprehensive, integrating both vocational and general qualifications and includes a strong commitment to the avoidance of dead-ends and pathways of progression.
- Collaboration with social partners is well-established and takes place at most relevant levels.
- The apprenticeship system is well-structured with a systematic blend of on and off-the-job elements.
- At high level there is good co-operation between the two lead departments, with little sense of rivalry. The National Skills Strategy1 provides for common objectives.
- There are some innovative ways of engaging employers in a bottom-up approach to provision, such as Skillnets – an initiative widely supported by employers.

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1. www.skillsstrategy.ie
Challenges

At the same time the system faces a number of challenges:

- The current economic crisis is making intense demands on the system to provide education and training for a sharply increasing number of people and poses serious challenges in particular to the apprenticeship system.
- Apprenticeships are limited to a narrow set of occupations. Workplace training is insufficiently used in many VET programmes.
- Many of those looking after VET students, in particular those in companies, lack pedagogical training.
- Weak literacy and numeracy are serious problems among many learners but problems are often not identified in time or adequately addressed.
- FÁS (Foras Áiseanna Saothair), the Irish National Training and Employment Authority, is a large body with multiple missions. Evaluations and data to assess its efficiency and effectiveness are lacking.
- Data on labour market outcomes are fragmented and research on VET is scarce. The wide range of VET programmes has not been systematically evaluated.
- Career guidance services are fragmented and weakly underpinned by information on labour market opportunities.

Recommendations

1. Review the apprenticeship system to improve its efficiency and fairness in addressing the skills needs of the labour market. Make extensive use of workplace training in all VET programmes building on the existing types of provision and the experience with apprenticeship.

2. Respond to the crisis, both modifying and reinforcing existing measures.

   - Offer differentiated support to redundant apprentices, depending on their occupation and how far they have already progressed in their apprenticeship.
   - Review, immediately, the Employer Based Redundant Apprentice Rotation Scheme with a view to shifting the resources involved to more cost-effective across-the-board measures in support of redundant apprentices.
   - Consider measures to retain young people in education and training where the benefits outweigh the costs.
   - Carefully target education and training programmes for adult learners at their particular skills needs as well as the needs of the labour market.

3. Conduct a review of FÁS training services to enhance mechanisms for accountability and quality improvement. This would involve an improvement in the quality of data and evaluation, and consultation with employers.
4. Systematically identify the literacy and numeracy problems of those who come into contact with training services and provide basic skills support to those in need.

5. As a means of enhancing the competences of the VET workforce ensure that all teachers, trainers and instructors have some pedagogical training, and as a longer term goal offer pedagogical training to supervisors of VET students (e.g. apprentices, trainees) in companies. Encourage convergence in the qualification requirements for teaching in different sectors of the VET system.

6. Create an instrument to track progression through the education and training system, undertake routine evaluation of programmes and pursue economic analysis such as cost-benefit studies of apprenticeships. Encourage more research on VET. Create a comprehensive website with career guidance information.
Chapter 1

Introduction

This chapter describes the OECD policy study of VET, the review of Ireland, summarises the main features of the Irish VET system and sets out an assessment of its strengths and challenges.
1.1 The OECD policy review of Ireland

This is one of a series of reviews of vocational education and training (VET) in OECD countries (see Box 1.1). Its terms of reference are in Annex A.

Box 1.1 Learning for Jobs, the OECD policy review of vocational education and training

For OECD member countries, a well-skilled workforce is one of the main supports for prosperity and growth. Some skills come from general education, but specific occupational skills are also needed. Typically initial vocational education and training systems have a big part to play in supplying these skills. These systems are now under scrutiny to determine if they can deliver the skills required. Launched in 2007, Learning for Jobs, the OECD policy review of vocational education and training is designed to help countries with this task. The key policy messages are:

To meet labour market needs

- Provide a mix of VET programmes that reflect both student preferences and employer needs, and beyond secondary level, share the costs between government, employers and individual students according to the benefits obtained.
- Engage employers and unions in curriculum development, providing young people with the transferable skills to support occupational mobility, and the specific skills to meet employers’ immediate needs.

To sustain the workforce of teachers and trainers

- In VET institutions, promote partnerships with industry; encourage part-time working and promote flexible pathways of recruitment for the workforce.
- Provide appropriate pedagogical preparation for trainers of trainees and apprentices in workplaces.
- Adopt standardised national assessment frameworks.

To promote workplace training

- Ensure there are sufficient incentives to participate in workplace training for both employers and students, and that the training is of good quality, backed by contractual frameworks for apprentices and effective quality assurance.
- Devise effective responses to the current economic crisis, to sustain workplace training, and cope with increased demand for full-time VET.

Develop tools for policy

- Construct effective mechanisms to engage employers and unions in VET policy and provision.
- Collect good data on the labour market outcomes of VET, and enhance the capacity to analyse that data.
- Provide careers guidance accessible to all, informed by knowledge of labour market outcomes.
Methods and outcomes

The OECD is conducting individual policy reviews in Australia, Austria, Belgium (Flanders), the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Korea, Mexico, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom (England and Wales), and the United States (South Carolina and Texas). A first report on Chile has been published and a short report on the Peoples Republic of China is also to be prepared. Canada, Denmark, Finland and the Netherlands also provided voluntary financial contributions.

All reviews and working papers are published on the website. Working papers include reviews of previous literature, PISA data on VET, and a study of the effect of the economic crisis. The initial report (Field et al. 2009) of the policy review is available on the OECD website. The final comparative report will be published as a book in September 2010.

For further information, publications and contacts www.oecd.org/edu/learningforjobs

The review follows the standard methodology established for the OECD policy review of VET. At the outset, two members of the OECD Secretariat visited Ireland on 9-13 February 2009 for an initial preparatory visit to assemble information on the characteristics of VET in Ireland and, within the terms of reference, to identify the main policy challenges. Then the Irish authorities were invited to complete a detailed questionnaire focusing on these challenges. Equipped with the responses and other background information, three members of the Secretariat returned on 5-8 May 2009 for a policy visit to conduct further interviews in order to develop policy recommendations (see Annex A for the programme of visits). This review presents the OECD recommendations, with supporting analysis and data. An earlier draft of this report was submitted to the Irish authorities for verification of factual information.

This is not a comprehensive review and many vocational programmes are not addressed (e.g. Back to Education Initiative, continuing VET programmes, training for the unemployed), although some recommendations apply to the entire VET system. The review deals with a deliberately limited set of issues on which it could draw on international experience or could otherwise usefully add value to the domestic policy debate. The review concentrates on VET in second level education and on further education and training, including apprenticeships.

1.2 The structure of the report

This first chapter places the Irish review of VET in the context of the OECD policy study of VET, presents the structure of the report, describes the main features of Irish VET system, and examines its strengths and challenges. The second chapter proposes policy recommendations.

Each policy recommendation is set out as:

- **The challenge** – the problem that gives rise to the recommendation.
- **The recommendation** – the text of the recommendation.
- **The supporting arguments** – the evidence that supports the recommendation.
- **Implementation** – a discussion of how the recommendation might be implemented.
1.3 A snapshot of the system

In Ireland schooling is compulsory from age six to 16. Primary education (in Ireland commonly referred to as “first level” education) enrolls children from age four to six to age 12 or 13. Secondary (“second level”) education includes a junior and a senior cycle. The junior cycle takes three years to complete and leads to the Junior Certificate, obtained upon examination typically at age 15 or 16. This is followed by an optional “transition year”, aiming to provide students with an opportunity to receive a wide range of educational inputs, soft skills and work experience. The senior cycle takes two years to complete and leads to the Leaving Certificate, typically at age 17 or 18.

There are three types of Leaving Certificate programme:

- Leaving Certificate Established. Students completing this academic programme must complete at least five subjects, one of which must be Irish. Syllabi are available in 34 subjects. Results in the Leaving Certificate tend to determine access to tertiary education.

- Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). In this programme students have to take five Leaving Certificate subjects, including two subjects from a specified set of vocational subjects, a course in a modern European language and three Link Modules – Enterprise Education, Preparation for Work and Work Experience. It is recognised for direct entry to tertiary education.

- Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA). This programme aims to prepare students for adult and working life, using a cross-curricular approach rather than a subject-based structure. It uses modules in three areas: general education, vocational education and vocational preparation. Certification in the LCA is not recognised for direct entry to tertiary education, but students who complete this programme can proceed to Post-Leaving Certificate courses.

VET is provided by various types of institution: Vocational Education Committee (VEC) schools; secondary, community and comprehensive schools; local vocational education and training centres; FÁS training centres; Further Education Colleges; Institutes of Technology, universities and dedicated sectoral training centres.

After obtaining the Leaving Certificate students may continue in tertiary (“third level”) education or in further education and training. Tertiary education includes programmes of general education (ISCED 5A) provided at universities and colleges, and vocational education (ISCED 5B), provided in institutes of technology. Further education and training refers to education and training after second level education, but not as part of the third level system.

Full-time further education programmes include Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses (level 5 and 6); Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) providing second chance education for the unemployed who are over 21 years old; Youthreach catering for early school leavers aged 15-20; and Senior Traveller Training Centres for travellers over the age of 18. The largest of the full-time further education programmes is the PLC programme offering over 1000 courses in over 60 disciplines (e.g. childcare, hairdressing, construction and business). PLC courses are delivered in 213 centres in both schools and colleges, with 92% of the provision provided in VEC colleges. The courses combine general education, vocational training and a limited amount of work experience, and last one or two years.
Further training is provided under the aegis of the Department of Employment, Trade and Enterprise, through FÁS, an agency of the Department. FÁS is divided into eight regions, managed by 10 regional directors (three regional directors in Dublin, one in each other region). It operates through 66 offices and 20 training centres. About one third of FÁS funded training is provided in FÁS training centres (for apprentices and job-seekers/unemployed), while the remainder is provided by for-profit and non-profit organisations (e.g. Community Training Centres and specialist training providers) (FÁS, 2009a). Training in some sectors is provided by other state-sponsored bodies (e.g. Fáilte Ireland for the hospitality and catering sector, Teagasc for the agricultural sector and An Bord Iascaigh Mhara for the fisheries sector).

Source: DES (2009, personal communication)
Qualifications are situated within a ten-level National Framework of Qualifications, created in 2003. Certification is provided by two councils – the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) for levels 1-6 and the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) for levels 6-10 (so that both bodies deal with Level 6).

A major element of the further training is the apprenticeship system. Apprenticeships are organised by FÁS, the National Training and Employment Authority, in co-operation with the Department of Education and Science, employers and unions. Apprentices are required to hold a Junior Certificate, but the majority of apprentices have a Leaving Certificate (FÁS, 2009b). The apprenticeship system is standards-based (it used to be time-served), and typically lasts for four years. It involves seven phases, three off-the-job (totalling 40 weeks in all) and four on-the-job. During on-the-job phases the employer pays an apprentice wage (a percentage of the agreed industry wage rate, agreed by social partners), while during off-the-job phases FÁS pays an allowance (equivalent to that wage) to apprentices. Standards-based apprenticeships are available in a limited number of occupations, in traditional craft sectors (construction, electrical, motor, engineering and printing sector). Apprentices receive a National Craft Certificate (Level 6) on successful completion of the programme.

**Figure 1.3 “Live” apprenticeship population by sector**

![Bar chart showing live apprenticeship population by sector for December 2008.](source: FÁS (2009, personal communication))

The National Training Fund (NTF) was established in 2000 to support the training of those in employment and those who wish to take up employment. In the 1990s Ireland received substantial support from the EU Structural Funds, which also supported spending on VET. After 2000, funding from the Structural Funds declined, and at the same time the NTF developed its present role as a funding source. It is resourced by a levy on employers of 0.7% of reckonable earnings of employees in class A and H

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2. Agricultural Mechanics; Aircraft Mechanics; Brick and Stonelaying; Cabinetmaking; Carpentry and Joinery; Construction Plant Fitting; Electrical; Electrical Instrumentation; Electronic Security Systems; Farriery; Fitting; Floor and Wall Tiling; Heavy Vehicle Mechanics; Industrial Insulation; Instrumentation; Metal Fabrication; Motor Mechanics; Painting and Decorating; Plastering; Plumbing; Print Media; Refrigeration and Air Conditioning; Sheet Metalworking; Toolmaking; Vehicle Body Repairs; Wood Machining.
employments\(^3\) (approximately 75\% of all insurable employees). The fund is allocated to schemes intended to raise the skills of those in employment, those who wish to acquire skills to take up employment and to provide information on future skills needs (FÁS, 2009a).

1.4 Strengths and challenges

**Strengths**

- The Irish VET system has a number of strengths:
- There is a good range of provision of different types of VET at post-secondary level, targeted at a wide range of different client groups, including those in and out of work and with second chance opportunities.
- The national qualifications framework is comprehensive, integrating both vocational and general qualifications and includes a strong commitment to the avoidance of dead-ends and pathways of progression.
- Collaboration with social partners is well-established and takes place at most relevant levels.
- The apprenticeship system is well-structured with a systematic blend of on and off-the-job elements.
- At high level there is good co-operation between the two lead departments, with little sense of rivalry. The Skills Strategy provides for common objectives.
- There are some innovative ways of engaging employers in a bottom-up approach to provision, such as Skillnets – an initiative widely supported by employers.

**Challenges**

At the same time the system faces a number of challenges:

- The current economic crisis is making intense demands on the system to provide education and training for a sharply increasing number of people and poses serious challenges in particular to the apprenticeship system.
- Apprenticeships are limited to a narrow set of occupations. Workplace training is insufficiently used in many VET programmes.
- Many of those looking after VET students, in particular those in companies, lack pedagogical training.
- Weak literacy and numeracy are serious problems among many learners but problems are often not identified in time or adequately addressed.

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• FÁS (the Irish National Training and Employment Authority) is a large body with multiple missions. Evaluations and data to assess its efficiency and effectiveness are lacking.

• Data on labour market outcomes are fragmented and research on VET is scarce. The wide range of VET programmes has not been systematically evaluated.

• Career guidance services are fragmented and weakly underpinned by information on labour market opportunities.
Chapter 2

Policy recommendations

The economic crisis is making intense demands on the Irish VET system. The apprenticeship system is particularly affected – it is limited to a narrow set of occupations, many of which have been hit by the crisis. In addition, those looking after VET students may sometimes lack appropriate pedagogical training and there are literacy and numeracy problems among VET students. The lack of data and limited use of evaluation evidence also remains a challenge. To address these issues a set of six interconnected recommendations is proposed.

First, the Irish VET system would benefit from more widespread use of workplace training generally. Second, as a response to the demands created by the economic crisis, we propose a number of measures – offer differentiated support to redundant apprentices and review the current Rotation Scheme; consider measures to retain young people in education and training where benefits outweigh the costs; and carefully target VET programmes to adult learners’ needs. Third, data, evaluation and consultation mechanisms are important to underpin effective quality assurance mechanisms in FÁS training services. We recommend a review of FÁS training services with a view to enhancing mechanisms for accountability and quality improvement. Fourth, modern workplaces require good numeracy and literacy skills, and supporting those with basic skill problems improves the outcomes of VET programmes. We propose systematic identification of basic skill problems among those who come into contact with training services and support to those in need. Fifth, to enhance the competences of the VET workforce, it should be ensured that all teachers, trainers and instructors have pedagogical training. We would also encourage convergence in qualification requirements for teaching in different sectors of the VET system. Finally, we recommend better data and evaluation of VET programmes, and the creation of a comprehensive website for career guidance.
2.1 Broadening the base of programmes with workplace training

**Challenge**

*Limited coverage of occupations by programmes with workplace training*

In Ireland workplace training is a substantial part of the curriculum in programmes such as apprenticeship, traineeship, specific skills training and some programmes available at the institutes of technology. However, workplace training is not part of all VET programmes. In programmes such as PLC, VTOS, Youthreach and STTC’s only limited work experience is provided (DES, 2009).

PLC, the biggest VET programme in terms of participation (see Table 1.1 and 1.2) combines general education, vocational training and a limited amount of work experience. PLC courses were established to enhance the prospects of young people who complete the senior cycle and who wished to gain employment. They are available in a wide range of fields, such as childcare, sport and leisure, hairdressing, construction, business. Despite their clearly vocational orientation during a one year course, students typically spend no more than three weeks on training in company. This lack of practical preparation on PLC courses was pointed out by some employers to the visiting team as a weakness in the programme.

Among programmes including a substantial element of workplace training apprenticeship is by far the largest in terms of the number of participants (see Table 1.2). But apprenticeships are available in a limited number of occupations, mainly traditional trades, with the construction sector accounting for more than half of all apprentices (FÁS, 2007). By contrast in other countries (e.g. Austria, Germany and Switzerland) apprenticeship covers, for example, retailing jobs, commerce, public administration and some aspects of health care).

In Ireland the apprenticeship trades are traditionally “male” occupations and the participation of women in apprenticeship is negligible. In 2004 less than 0.5% of registered apprentices in the first phase of apprenticeship were women. Conversely, in 2003/2004 women accounted for 72% of participants in Post Leaving Certificate courses, which cover many traditionally “female” occupations such as hairdressers and beauticians (Watson, McCoy and Gorby, 2006).

The current economic crisis has hit all industrial sectors, and particularly construction, creating a serious and urgent requirement for the government to help redundant apprentices. Section 2.2 looks at how best to respond immediately to the crisis. This section reviews the apprenticeship scheme and more broadly looks at how to increase the provision of workplace training in the VET system.

*Relatively high cost of apprenticeship*

Table 2.1 compares the public cost of apprenticeship programme completion per student with some other countries for which data are available. These costs include the cost of off-the-job education and training, provided in VET institutions. In countries

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4. In some countries, there might be a fee for the school based component that is paid by an individual or is covered by an employer.
such as Denmark and Switzerland this will represent the main public cost. In other countries, as in Norway and Austria, government also grants a subsidy to employers providing training to students and this cost is also included in the figures. In Switzerland and the Netherlands training companies can benefit from a tax deduction, but the cost of these indirect financial incentives is excluded from the figures, as they are difficult to estimate, total costs for Switzerland and the Netherlands may therefore be underestimated. In Ireland, public expenditure covers education and training in VET institutions (instructor salaries, premises, equipment) and the allowances paid to apprentices.

The public cost of apprenticeship in Ireland is high if one takes into account the nature of skills developed in apprenticeships. The off-the-job component in Ireland is relatively short in comparison to the total duration of the programme (Table 2.1, column 4). In addition, the skills developed during the off-the-job phases may be more occupation-specific than in other countries. This might be because in Ireland apprenticeship is provided in post-secondary education, while in other countries it is part of formal schooling at upper secondary level. Off-the-job training in Ireland provides apprentices with full-time skills training and related education (Buck and McGinn, 2005), focusing on practical skills, rather than general education and cross-curricular skills. During the visit the review team was told that the cost of off-the-job training, in particular in Institutes of Technology, is high. This could be because off-the-job training focuses too much on job specific skills and simulations, which often require specialised and expensive equipment. All these might explain the high cost of off-the-job phases based on full-time equivalents (column 2).

Table 2.1 Estimated public expenditure on apprenticeship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Average total cost of the programme, per participant</th>
<th>Cost of one year off-the-job apprenticeship, based on full-time equivalents</th>
<th>Programme duration (in years)</th>
<th>On-the-job training (% of the programme)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austria (2006)</td>
<td>15300 - 15900</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>2-4 (depending on the programme)</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark (2008)</td>
<td>19400 - 29000</td>
<td>12101</td>
<td>3.5-4 (typical duration)</td>
<td>40 – 60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland (2008)</td>
<td>19000</td>
<td>16300 (phase 4 and 6)</td>
<td>4 (typical duration)</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands (2006)</td>
<td>7100-14100</td>
<td>7841</td>
<td>2-4 (depending on the programme)</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway (2006)</td>
<td>36216</td>
<td>12912</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland (2007)</td>
<td>11614-23628</td>
<td>14297</td>
<td>2-4 (depending on the programme)</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. For Ireland, the average and full time equivalent costs include the cost of the three off-the-job phases of the programme, including staff costs and overheads, allowances for apprentices, registration exams and student service charges. These were calculated as follows (in Euros except where indicated):

Cost of an apprentice in phase 2: 3595+4200 = 7795
Low flexibility of the apprenticeship structure

The clear structure of the Irish apprenticeship system is easy to follow for both students and employers since the entry requirements and duration of apprenticeships in all occupations are the same. The social partners participate in the design and delivery of apprenticeships, which ensures their support for the programme and develops their sense of ownership. These are undeniably strong points of the apprenticeship scheme in Ireland. However, the downside of this arrangement is that it may be inflexible and difficult to amend in response to emerging demands or to the varying requirements of different occupations. The review team was told that the procedure to create an apprenticeship in a new trade is extremely lengthy and difficult as it requires the agreement of all relevant stakeholders.

Recommendation 1

Review the apprenticeship system to improve its efficiency and fairness in addressing the skills needs of the labour market. Make extensive use of workplace training in all VET programmes building on the existing types of provision and the experience with apprenticeship.

Supporting arguments

There are five arguments for this recommendation. First, employers and students would benefit from extensive use of workplace training in VET programmes, second more extensive use of workplace training will increase efficiency and equity in the system, third, broadening the scheme with workplace training would help to remedy gender imbalance in apprenticeship provision, fourth, a reform of the apprenticeship structure would increase its cost-effectiveness, fifth, a more flexible training scheme might better meet apprentice and employer needs.
Employers and students would benefit from extensive use of workplace training in all VET programmes

Many employers complain that graduates of VET courses without substantial workplace training (e.g. PLC courses) are often weakly prepared for their job. Employers identified the lack of relevant work experience as a major cause of difficulties in filling vacancies (Central Statistics Office, 2009a). The growing number of apprentices in recent years – there was an increase of 59% between 1998 and 2006 (Convey, 2007) – indicates that for many companies apprenticeship was a convenient means of recruiting skilled labour. The positive labour market results of apprenticeship are welcome, although they may have been inflated by the construction boom during that period.

As argued in the OECD review of VET (Field et al., 2009), there is abundant international evidence to show that workplace training in VET programmes is beneficial to students and employers.

- Soft skills such as teamwork and communication are better learned in an authentic work environment (Aarkrog, 2005). For example, dealing with an angry customer cannot easily be simulated in a school workshop.

- Under most circumstances providing training in a company is more cost-effective than training in a school workshop (for more details see the section below).

- Training allows employers to learn about trainees’ ability and skills and recruit the most able ones. Hiring through training is also less costly than external recruitment (Dohmen, 2007). The benefits achieved from screening potential employees’ productivity increase in some labour markets, e.g. in markets in which employer can pay salaries below individuals’ productivity due to imperfect information flows or high mobility costs (see for example Brunello and De Paola, 2004).

- Companies may also benefit from students’ work during training, recognising that strong quality regulations are needed to avoid trainees being used as cheap unskilled labour. The Swiss example shows that an apprenticeship with high standards and a rigorous quality control can still be beneficial to employers (see for example Dionisius et al., 2009).

- Workplace training may also smooth the transition to the labour market, although empirical evidence on the labour market outcomes of VET with workplace training is admittedly somewhat mixed. In Germany, economic activity was higher among apprentice graduates than among graduates from tertiary education or school-based VET (who typically lack workplace experience) although the duration of unemployment was longer for apprentice graduates than for other groups (Winkelmann, 1996). In Austria, Hofer and Lietz (2004) found that apprentice graduates (upper secondary level) have less risk of unemployment and higher earnings than unskilled workers, although their labour market performance is weaker than that of other upper secondary graduates.6

The current apprenticeship system has been heavily driven by demand from the construction sector, but this will not be sustainable in the short and medium term, as

5. Based on data for the 1984-90 sample.
6. The study does not control for students’ ability and selection mechanisms.
demand for labour in this sector has fallen sharply and is forecast to remain subdued for some years. Among new registrants on the Live Register in September 2008 one third identified themselves with construction (FÁS, 2008a). An employer survey showed that the construction sector anticipates a decrease of 32% in employment by the end of 2009, a sharper fall than in other sectors (Manpower, 2009). International experience with house-building booms shows that “the correction in house-building is usually short-lived with a sharp fall in the first years, followed by a couple of years of stagnation” (OECD, 2008a).

**Extending provision in programmes with workplace training in a wide range of sectors will increase efficiency and equity in the system**

It can be argued that the Irish apprenticeship system has effectively met labour market demand, as many apprenticeship places in construction and related trades were created in response to the sharply rising demand for labour in these sectors. On the other hand, the boom in construction was stimulated by public policies such as favourable tax treatments for housing that distorted the housing market. As a result, employment was shifted away from high-tech manufacturing towards the relatively low-productivity construction and non-market service sectors. The OECD economic survey of Ireland estimates that this has reduced measured productivity growth by nearly one percentage point per year (OECD, 2008a). Given this wider economic context, the apprenticeship scheme may have had the unfortunate effect of reinforcing distortions that favoured construction development, given substantial public spending on an apprenticeship system with a very large construction component. It can be argued that balanced provision of VET programmes with workplace training across a wide range of sectors would have supported the productivity growth more effectively.

On the face of it, the contribution of the construction sector (accounting for 12% of employment in 2008) to the National Training Fund (NTF) was low in comparison to the benefits received through support for apprenticeship training. In 2007 spending on apprenticeship, highly concentrated in construction, represented 15% of the overall FÁS programme budget and 70% of FÁS expenditure on programmes for the employed. Spending on other programmes aimed at improving workforce skills, such as traineeships and specific skills training in sectors where apprenticeships are not available, was modest in comparison – 0.02% of the FÁS programmes budget was spent on traineeships and 0.04% on specific skills training (FÁS, 2007). During the visit some employers (e.g. in the retail sector) complained about the lack of appropriate training provision. It is unclear whether employers in trades not participating in apprenticeship are able to benefit adequately and fairly from training funded by the NTF. The lack of data on the contributions of each sector to the NTF makes it difficult to assess with certainty the net costs and benefits for each sector in terms of NTF-funded training.

In 2005 enterprise expenditure on training in the construction sector was the lowest of all sectors (Figure 2.1), even though employment in construction rose sharply during the reference period (OECD, 2006). One possible explanation is that other sectors spend...
more on training to offset less preferential access to public training (particularly apprenticeships) if compared to construction and construction-related sectors. In this case, more equally distributed provision of publicly funded programmes with workplace training across different sectors would better reflect companies’ contribution to the training fund.

Figure 2.1 Enterprise spending on training, by sector

Total training costs as a percentage of total labour costs in 2005


Broadening the schemes with workplace training would help to remedy gender imbalance

An extreme gender imbalance is another aspect of the current apprenticeship arrangement. While Ireland is not unusual in the concentration of males in the traditional manual trades, it is unusual in having a relatively generously funded apprenticeship scheme whose beneficiaries are almost entirely male. Women benefit, sometimes disproportionately, from other educational programmes (such as the PLC programmes), but no other programme is so overwhelmingly segregated by gender as apprenticeships. Current arrangements may therefore not be consistent with gender equity. This in itself is a strong argument for ensuring that there is enough provision in programmes with workplace training to cover occupations with higher female participation, such as retailing, office work, and childcare.
The review of apprenticeship structure would help to improve its cost-effectiveness

In the course of this review we did not examine in detail the content, or the costs and benefits of apprenticeships, but, particularly in the current context of intense pressure on public spending, the relatively high costs of the off-the-job phases suggest that there is room for a review of the apprenticeship structure (see Table 2.1). A review could look at the match between the content of apprenticeships and funding arrangements, and consider a readjustment of the allowance received by apprentices while off-the-job. These findings may be helpfully used to redesign the VET system with better use of workplace training in VET courses as an objective.

According to classical economic arguments the government covers the cost of training that develops general and transferable skills, which can be applied in many work environments – this is typically the case of off-the-job periods. For the same reasons these costs may also be borne by individuals. Conversely, if the training is company-specific, there is an argument to shift financial responsibility to companies, or if it is sector-specific, to the sector.

In many continental European countries apprenticeships are provided at upper secondary level, where typically during the off-the-job component of an apprenticeship students learn not only vocational theory and basic vocational skills but receive also some general education (e.g. maths, literacy skills). In Ireland, apprenticeship is part of post secondary provision and enrols many young adults who seek occupational training after completing upper secondary education (around 65% of participants have a Leaving Certificate). The programme is therefore highly occupation-specific, with little emphasis on general competences. But apprenticeships are also open to those holding only a Junior Certificate – most apprentices in the “wet trades” hold only a Junior Certificate (FÁS, 2008b). The review team was told that many of these students have weak general competences (for a discussion on literacy and numeracy skills see section 2.4). A better match between the nature of the skills provided and funding arrangements might be achieved in two ways: substantial public funding for off-the-job training might support more general education in the curriculum (in particular to enhance literacy and numeracy skills among those in need). Alternatively, apprenticeships could maintain a limited general content, require that apprentices hold a Leaving Certificate, and shift some of the costs of more practical training from the public budget to companies.

On the same grounds, there are arguments to move practical training on specialised and expensive equipment from VET institutions to companies, as this type of training develops specific skills. In addition, it is usually more cost-effective to provide practical training in a company, where up-to-date technology is available together with the personnel able to handle it, while most VET institutions cannot afford up-to-date equipment. It is therefore reasonable to offer basic skills and theoretical training in VET institutions and move training in more advanced and large scale tasks to companies. This point might be particularly relevant in Ireland given the high costs of training in VET institutions (see Table 2.1, column 2).

In international comparison, Ireland is unusual in providing an allowance to all apprentices in off-the-job phases. For example, in Australia, like Ireland, apprenticeship is provided outside the formal school system to those who have the status of employees. But apprentices receive a wage/salary from the employer during on-the-job training, not during the time spent off-the-job. Apprentices may be eligible for financial support but only according to specific criteria (e.g. income). Both fairness and efficiency
considerations argue that the beneficiaries of apprenticeship schemes should contribute to the costs according to the benefits received. A systematic analysis of the costs and benefits of apprenticeship training for different stakeholders, along the lines of studies conducted in Switzerland and Germany (Dionisius et al., 2009; Muehlemann et al., 2007; Wolter, Muehlemann and Schweri, 2006) would help to evaluate the impact of the allowance and to adjust it if necessary. We would encourage the government to conduct the relevant analysis.

**A more flexible training scheme might better meet students and employer needs**

Different occupations require different types and levels of preparation. In some jobs, the learning process is fast and students/apprentices can be placed into productive tasks after a short period of training. In others, a longer period of initial training is necessary. The right mix of on and off-the-job training may also vary across occupations. A survey of apprentices (FÁS, 2007) found that those in the construction and motor sectors thought their theoretical training was too long, while apprentices in engineering were the most satisfied.

When the duration of apprenticeship is the same in all occupations, the net costs of training to employers will vary according to occupation. For example, in occupations requiring less initial training apprentices will be able to move into productive work faster and the benefits of training to employers will be higher. Over-long training will imply opportunity costs for apprentices, as they will spend more time in training than necessary. Rigid apprenticeship periods therefore generate potential inefficiencies. In addition, employers from sectors that do not participate in apprenticeship complained about the rigid structure of apprenticeship which excluded their sectors and did not respond to their needs.

While greater flexibility is needed in the Irish apprenticeship structure, it needs to be kept sufficiently simple to be clear to stakeholders, and straightforward to manage. If at the one end of the spectrum there is a system with just one fixed training arrangement and the same rules applying to all sectors and students, and at the other end a system where every individual company/student can set its own rules, the right model would lie somewhere in the middle. It would offer a few different arrangements that better match the needs of different sectors and individual students and at the same time be comprehensible to its users and clients. The Swiss apprenticeship system provides a good example of a well structured and transparent apprenticeship system. Different apprenticeship options are proposed to students, and depending on the occupation and the complexity of the skills involved, apprenticeship can last two to four years. For example apprentices in metal construction and hotel studies pursue a two-year apprenticeship, car mechanics three years, and engineers in automation and industrial design four years (Hoeckel, Field and Grubb, 2009).

**Implementation**

**Better use of workplace training**

There are different ways of extending programmes with workplace training to a wide range of occupations sectors. It could be achieved through a broadening of the current apprenticeship schemes or through the development of workplace training in other programmes within the current structure, such as traineeship training or PLC.
In favour of the apprenticeship route, it is clearly structured and well recognised by students and employers. The downside is that the procedure of designating new apprenticeship trades is lengthy and not always successful. The visiting team was told that this obstacle can be attributed not only to the complexity of the procedure but also to the lack of understanding and trust between employers and FÁS, despite the engagement of employers and unions in the management board of FÁS. A successful apprenticeship system, open to reform, needs support from all relevant stakeholders, including employers, trade unions and students. Obtaining such support is often difficult and takes time. Also, differentiation in the apprenticeship structure, e.g. in programme duration may not be welcome by some sectors, as it may damage their status or cost them money.

The alternative approach, of increasing the workplace training element in other types of programmes would circumvent the rigid rules of apprenticeship and allow more flexibility. At the same time, the creation of various “apprenticeship-like” schemes could lead to a system that is less clear to its users, with greater overlap between programmes.

The two options are not mutually exclusive and we would encourage consideration of both. This approach will call for some rationale for the use of the apprenticeship scheme in some contexts, and PLC courses (for example) in others. Such a rationale should permit a structured expansion of workplace training across the range of provision of initial vocational education and training. Such a structured expansion will also require effective co-ordination and co-operation between the different ministries and stakeholder bodies involved in planning the provision of vocational education and training.

2.2 The economic crisis and immediate responses

Challenge

Apprentice redundancies

As indicated in section 2.1, the apprenticeship system faces particular difficulties in the economic downturn, as many apprentices have been or are at risk of being made redundant. Between the end of 2008 and April 2009 the number of redundant apprentices increased from 3,100 to 4,500 (FÁS, 2009b). This is in line with international experience, which shows that the willingness of employers to offer apprenticeships follows the business cycle – it is higher in good economic times and lower in downturns (for a review of international evidence see Brunello, 2009). In Ireland the economic downturn has been more severe than in many OECD countries (see Figure 2.2 and B.4) and it has particularly affected the construction sector, which included 22% of total male employment and 50% of apprentices in 2008. In response to this, the government introduced the Employer Based Redundant Apprentice Rotation Scheme (see Box 2.1).

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8. The stock of apprentices and the flow into apprenticeships typically move together. What may differentiate between countries is the contract security for apprentices: if apprentices have high contract security, the flow of apprentices will be more responsive to the business cycle than the stock of apprentices, as employers cannot easily lay off existing apprentices.
Box 2.1 The Employer Based Redundant Apprentice Rotation Scheme

The scheme was created by FÁS with the support of the social partners to help redundant apprentices complete the on-the-job phase of their training. The trades covered by the scheme are in the construction industry: brick and stonelaying, carpentry and joinery, electrical, plastering and plumbing. It places a redundant apprentice with an eligible employer, to replace an existing apprentice who has been released for off-the-job training. The employer receives EUR 340 per week, and is required to pay the agreed industry wage rate to the apprentice. To be eligible for the scheme, employers must be approved by FÁS for training apprentices, must not have made an apprentice redundant since 1 January 2007 and newly hired apprentices must not displace an existing apprentice. The scheme will run until December 2009.


At present apprentices only receive a certificate recognising their competences once they complete all phases of their training. But currently some apprentices may not be able to complete all seven phases, because they have been made redundant, and want to enter the labour market or pursue another education or training programme. To address this challenge, at least partially, FETAC has validated two level five awards (Certificate in Construction Technology, Certificate in Engineering Technology) for redundant apprentices who have completed phase four of their training. The award may be achieved through a programme that will be offered as of September 2009 in Institutes of Technology. This initiative creates a pathway from a half-completed apprenticeship into another educational programme. As a special measure, Institutes of Technology have also agreed to accept the successful completion of phase six of the apprenticeship programme to meet the minimum eligibility criteria for entry to certain third level programmes. These initiatives are useful, but only create an entry option into some IoT programmes and do not provide a solution for redundant apprentices who wish to pursue other programmes or wish to enter the labour market.

10. The certification and duration spent on this programme will not be accredited towards the Advanced Craft Certificate, but participants will receive credits towards access and progression for other education and training programmes.
Increased demand for education and training

Demand for education and training has increased with the economic downturn, as many school leavers postpone entry into the labour market and continue in education and training, and redundant workers seek retraining. For example, in one school the review team was told that the number of applicants to PLC courses had doubled compared to 2008, while the number of unemployed in the county had also doubled. Responding to the sharp increase in demand is a major challenge, as public expenditure, including expenditure on education and training, is being cut back sharply in order to reduce the budget deficit, which has been sharply inflated by the current economic crisis.

Recommendation 2

Respond to the crisis, both modifying and reinforcing existing measures:

- Offer differentiated support to redundant apprentices, depending on their occupation and how far they have already progressed in their apprenticeship.
- Review, immediately, the Employer Based Redundant Apprentice Rotation Scheme with a view to shifting the resources involved to more cost-effective across-the-board measures in support of redundant apprentices.
- Consider measures to retain young people in education and training where the benefits outweigh the costs.
- Carefully target education and training programmes for adult learners at their particular skills needs as well as the needs of the labour market.

Supporting arguments

There are four arguments for this recommendation. First, a cost-effective response to apprentice redundancy needs to be differentiated according to the target group; second, as
a general rule subsidies for apprenticeship completion should be used cautiously; third, the current Rotation Scheme has weaknesses and requires immediate review; fourth, targeted measures to increase participation in education and training can improve competences and avoid negative experiences on the labour market.

Evidence in this chapter draws upon a recent OECD review of the literature on the effect of economic downturns on initial workplace training (Brunello, 2009).

A cost-effective response to apprentice redundancy needs to be differentiated according to the target group

There are two broad policy options for assisting redundant apprentices: helping them to complete their apprenticeships, or encouraging them to move into a different career path. The choice of option depends on at least two factors:

- Employment prospects in the occupation. If the drop in demand for labour in a given occupation is cyclical and temporary, it makes sense for apprentices to complete their training. Conversely, if longer term employment prospects are weak, it would be better for apprentices to move to another occupation or type of training, rather than completing their apprenticeship and not being able to find a job. At the end of 2008, 67% of redundant apprentices were in the construction sector, 26% in the electrical sector, while the other sectors accounted for less than 8% of redundant apprentices (FÁS, 2009). As discussed in section 2.1, employment in construction is not expected to return to levels experienced during the construction boom in Ireland. International experience shows that puncturing a construction bubble usually involves sharp falls in activity in the sector during the first two years, followed by a couple of years of stagnation. In the long-term, the share of the workforce employed in the construction sector in Ireland is likely to converge to the level (7%) in comparable European economies (EGFSN, 2008). This figure for Ireland was 11.4% at the end of 2008, down from 14% in 2006 (Central Statistics Office, 2009b). This suggests that, although the change in career path may be painful, many apprentices in construction may be best advised to pursue a career outside the construction industry. Existing employment forecasts in Ireland (e.g. by the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs) might be helpful in identifying occupations in which apprentices are most likely to find employment.

- Time already spent in apprenticeship. The substantial time and money invested by apprentice, employer and government are ‘sunk’ costs at the point where the apprentice is made redundant and therefore irrelevant. The issue is whether further investment would be cost-effective relative to alternative options. But the time already spent in apprenticeship determines for how long an apprentice might need support to complete their training. An apprentice who is made redundant at an early stage of the training might need support for some years – with obvious implications for public spending if this support is provided in the form of subsidies to employers. The share of redundant apprentices in different phases of apprenticeship is illustrated in Figure 2.3. At the end of 2008 most redundant apprentices were in phases three and five and in construction, phases three and five contained 80% of redundant apprentices.
These two factors argue for the differentiation of support measures to redundant apprentices. Apprentices in an early phase in a sector with poor employment prospects might be encouraged to move onto another type of education and training. Those in the final phases of apprenticeship or in a sector with good longer term employment prospects might be better assisted by providing support to complete their training.

**Subsidies for apprenticeship completion should be used cautiously**

One way of encouraging employers to hold on to their apprentices is to reduce employer costs. This may be done, for example, by subsidising employers who keep their apprentices or hire redundant apprentices, or by paying apprentices below the agreed industry rate. Both of these things are happening in Ireland – the Employer Based Rotation Scheme (Box 2.1) offers EUR 340 per week to employers who hire a redundant apprentice in the construction sector; and during the review visit the team was told that there are already some cases of informal wage reduction agreements between apprentices and their employers. This has at least two potential immediate benefits. First, apprentices may be able to complete their training and achieve a qualification. Second, the state may save on the unemployment benefits which would otherwise be incurred.

But these benefits need to be weighed against some risks. First, there is a risk of deadweight – the cost reduction might benefit only employers, without reducing apprentice lay-offs. In the case of wage reduction, employers may use the opportunity to break wage agreements covering apprentices to increase their profits rather than to avoid apprentice lay-offs. In the case of subsidies, the subsidy might go to employers who would have kept or hired apprentices anyway. Research on the impact of subsidies on apprenticeship provision shows that their effect is limited to certain industries and types of companies (Box 2.2).
Box 2.2 The impact of subsidies on apprenticeship provision

Denmark – impact only in some industries

A study using longitudinal data from Denmark, between 1980 and 1991 (Westergaard-Nielsen and Rasmussen 1999) found that the supply of apprenticeship places was mainly driven by the business cycle. Other factors, such as the size of the workplace, the number of skilled workers and the entry rate of new hires to the workplace, were also important determinants.

The study found that subsidies only had a positive effect in manufacturing, office and trade (and even there the effect was relatively minor), while they had no effect in construction, restaurants and other industries. This suggests that the efficiency of the subsidy could have been improved if it had been limited to industries where it had a significant impact.

Switzerland – impact only on non-training companies

An analysis of companies in Switzerland (Muehlemann et al., 2007) found that the net costs of training have a significant impact on whether a company offers apprenticeships or not, but they do not influence the number of apprentices, once the company decided to train, so subsidies given to firms that already train apprentices would not have any effect.

Second, there is a risk that the lower cost of apprentices will encourage employers to substitute apprentices for skilled employees. In the current recession, for example, employers may choose to lay off non-apprentice employees and keep apprentices who, towards the end of their apprenticeship, can perform many skilled tasks. A study of the British engineering industry (Hart, 2005) found that during the Depression in the 1930s older apprentices were substituted for skilled workers. Substitution is more likely to occur if regular and temporary (but non-apprentice) employees are weakly protected by employment legislation. In Ireland, employment protection legislation is weaker than many other OECD countries (see Figure B.2 and B.3), which means that the risk of apprentices being substituted for non-apprentice employees may be higher.

The current Rotation Scheme requires immediate review

Bearing in mind the broader points made above, the Rotation Scheme has a number of risks:

- It distorts apprenticeship provision and consequently the supply of skilled workers, as the subsidy is provided only to the construction sector. This comes on top of other supports for the construction sector noted in section 2.1, where the collective effect has been to damage the Irish economy. This is particularly unfortunate, as employment prospects for qualified apprentices in the construction sector are limited both in the short and longer term.

- There is a considerable risk of substitution, as the subsidy is generous – it covers over half of the apprentice allowance even for fourth year apprentices, whose productivity is likely to approach that of fully skilled employees.
Table 2.2 Apprentice Training Allowances in the construction and electrical sectors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Gross Wage Norm [EUR]</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>Electrical</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>241.80</td>
<td>242.58</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 4</td>
<td>362.70</td>
<td>348.37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 6</td>
<td>544.05</td>
<td>459.24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th year</td>
<td>652.86</td>
<td>547.78</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Training allowances for apprentices are calculated with reference to gross wage norms payable in industry for each particular sector.

Source: www.fas.ie/en/Allowances+and+Grants/Apprentice+Wages.htm

- The subsidy is higher than the allowance of an apprentice in the first year of training. This creates a strong incentive for employers to hire such apprentices. But as argued above, it is in the interest of apprentices in an early stage of training and in a sector with limited employment prospects to quit their apprenticeship and pursue another training programme which is more likely to lead to sustainable employment. A subsidy creating an incentive that encourages young people who have just started their training to stay in the construction sector is unlikely to benefit them in the medium and long term.

An alternative or complementary measure may be to accept that redundancies will occur but limiting the cost, ensuring that apprentices receive a certificate on the phases they have completed before being made redundant. This would not entitle them to perform part of the tasks in a licensed occupation (e.g. electricians), but rather certify the competences they have acquired. This would allow, for example, for an apprentice electrician who decides to move on to a tertiary programme in electrical engineering, to receive credit for the physics learned during the apprenticeship.

In conclusion, redundant apprentices in the construction sector are clearly in a very difficult position and need government help. The question is how best to do so. For the reasons given, it is questionable whether the Rotation Scheme will benefit the young people involved in the medium and long term. The proposed review of the Rotation Scheme should establish whether the resources currently dedicated to the Rotation Scheme might be better be used to directly support redundant apprentices, rather than employers. For example, in the case of apprentices who move on to another education or training programme, public funding might contribute to the cost of education or training normally covered by students.

Targeted measures to increase participation in education and training can improve competences and avoid negative experiences on the labour market

In response to the economic crisis, the government has already increased the number of places available in education and training programmes 11 (mainly by running shorter

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11. The Higher Education Authority, in conjunction with the Institutes of Technology and the universities, has developed and delivered a number of specific initiatives for unemployed people. These include specific short courses, preparatory courses for entry to third-level, accelerated programmes, and some 1 500 places in part-time undergraduate programmes.
courses), both for recent school leavers and adults (FÁS, 2009a). These measures are welcome and, to be effective, need to be carefully tailored to the needs of learners – a target group that has become more heterogeneous because of the crisis (see the discussion on implementation issues below).

In economic downturns, young people are disproportionately affected by unemployment (OECD, 2009a; Figure B.1). Evidence suggests that individuals who enter the labour market during a recession suffer persistent damage to their employment outcomes. A Canadian study of college graduates who entered the labour market during a recession found that initial earning losses were significant and only faded after eight to ten years (Oreopoulos, von Wachter and Heisz, 2006). In the United States Kahn (2006) found significant wage losses for those who graduated during the 1980s recession, with those involved finding it difficult to obtain better jobs even when the economy recovered. In Japan many young people who entered the labour market during the 1990s recession remained trapped in a sequence of temporary jobs, even when the economy picked up (Genda and Rebick, 2000).

A number of factors explain these observed patterns. Those who enter the labour market in a recession will have fewer jobs to choose from and will spend more time in jobs that do not match their skills and jobs less responsibility (Jovanovic, 1979; Gibbons and Waldman, 2004). They will receive less early training if they are initially unemployed, or receive irrelevant or weak training because they are in a job which does not match their skills. Even if they do eventually shift to better jobs, they may receive less training as they will be older and employers will see fewer long term benefits in providing them with training (Kahn, 2006).

These long-term consequences of labour market entry during the recession are both an equity and efficiency problem. It is an equity problem, as a particular unfortunate cohort will suffer during a considerable part of their career. It is a problem of efficiency, as workers will not be able to make full use of their capacities because of limited labour market and training opportunities. The characteristics of the labour market determine whether the effects of a difficult early labour market experience will be long lasting. For example, catching up will be easier if training opportunities are not restricted to the primary labour market, if it is easy to move from the secondary to the primary labour market, or if wage structures are compressed.

In the circumstances of an economic downturn, retaining young people in education and training has some potential benefits, even though delaying entry into the labour market is no long-term solution to unemployment. Retaining young people in education and training can, however, cushion the impact of a sharp downturn on the labour market, and therefore has some short-term benefits. In particular, it might mitigate the negative effects of early labour market experience in the recession. In addition, the extra time spent in education and training can equip young people with additional skills. To do this, the additional education and training provided should be carefully targeted.

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12. FÁS has increased the number of persons trained in 2009 by over 50 000, it increased evening courses for the unemployed and is developing “blended learning” courses for up to 25 000 persons (FÁS, 2009a). The government’s emergency budget of April 2009 allocated 1500 additional places to PLC courses, and the pupil-teacher ratio on PLC courses will be loosened from 16:1 to 17:1 from September 2009.
Implementation

Apprentice redundancies

Those redundant apprentices who decide to quit their apprenticeship and pursue another education or training programme, should receive career guidance targeted at their needs. FÁS could identify which education and training programmes, as an alternative to the two level 5 courses recently created in IoT-s, might be a suitable option for apprentices in different occupations and phases of training. This might require co-operation between FÁS and relevant stakeholders from the education sector (e.g. VEC-s, IoT-s, universities).

The current Rotation Scheme is due to expire at the end of 2009. As indicated an immediate review would help to decide how to replace that scheme from that date.

Targeting programmes at learners’ needs

Ensuring that training programmes yield the desired outcomes is also crucial for adult training programmes. To do this, provision should avoid being supply-driven (i.e. offering training based on the VET institution’s capacity in terms of readily available curricula, trainers and equipment) and follow the competence-needs of learners. This is particularly challenging for services offering training for the unemployed, as the characteristics of recently unemployed adults are likely to be different from those of unemployed adults in the past. Although data are not available on the educational background of unemployed people in Ireland, it is likely that the number of highly skilled unemployed persons has increased with the crisis. This means that training courses have to meet the needs of a more heterogeneous target group. Spending on training programmes should be carefully targeted at identified skills needs, using evaluations when available, and conducting evaluations when these do not exist yet. As argued in section 2.6, in times of constrained public spending it is particularly important to ensure that money is well-spent.

Promoting participation in education and training

Ireland might encourage participation in the transition year to delay entry into the labour market. Increased participation in the transition year will have an impact in terms of labour market entry a couple of years later, and can help equip students with useful skills. The evaluation of the transition year programme (Smyth, Byrne and Hannan, 2005) suggests that it can develop personal and social skills. At the same time, this study also found that principals in disadvantaged schools, smaller schools and vocational schools were less likely to perceive the programme as effective. This suggests that if participation in the transition year is promoted, particular attention should be paid to factors that were identified by the evaluation as essential to its success, such as whole-school commitment to the programme, time for co-ordination activities, varied programme content, structured work experience, on-going evaluation and redesign of the programme within the school.

Other ways of increasing participation in education and training at minimum cost include temporarily allowing student/teacher ratios to increase (as it has been done in the case of PLC courses); establishing and promoting participation in part-time PLC courses, or supplementing short-time working (i.e. three to four days spent at work) with one to two days a week spent in training. Such arrangements, when carefully targeted, can
benefit several stakeholders – workers can stay in employment while gaining relevant training, employers can reduce staffing costs without laying off their employees. The relative costs and benefits of such measures need to be carefully assessed to ensure that they are advantageous. The successful operation of such schemes may depend on a very pragmatic approach to such matters as rules for eligibility for benefits.

Any measures taken to retain young people in education and training should be part of a broader skills development strategy in Ireland. Fundamentally, a careful distinction needs to be drawn between temporary crisis measures, designed to cushion the impact on vulnerable groups – particularly young people – and long term developments of the education and training system.

Enhanced co-operation across departments allows a more efficient use of resources

The crisis has sharply increased demand for some courses (e.g. PLC, training for the unemployed, IoT programmes). At the same time demand for others (e.g. apprenticeships) has dropped. Following the decline in apprentice numbers FÁS Training Centres have some spare capacity, in terms of both physical capacity and teaching staff (FÁS, 2009a), while some other institutions cannot increase the student intake because of their limited facilities. Enhancing co-operation at local level and redeploying resources between institutions belonging to different government departments (i.e. DETE, DES) allows a more efficient use of resources. For example, VET institutions belonging to DETE and DES might use each others’ libraries, buildings, and there may be room to redeploy staff across departments.

2.3 FÁS training services

This section looks at FÁS training services. It does not examine the employment and placement functions of the organisation.

Challenge

FÁS is a large organisation with both national and regional presences, and plays an important role in developing the skills of both the employed and those not employed. At the same time FÁS training services are subject to a number of challenges. In particular some of the tools underpinning effective quality assurance mechanisms are missing in the case of FÁS funded training.

- Data on labour market outcomes are an important performance indicator, but they seem weak in some cases of FÁS-funded training. FÁS officials informed us that, as part of their quality assurance procedure, data are collected on labour market outcomes. The results of the follow-up, including placement rates from FÁS programmes are publicly available. But the review team was told that it is difficult to draw meaningful conclusions from the data, as response rates are low, potentially distorting the samples.
- The review team was told that regulations regarding input requirements are not always effectively enforced. For example, according to FÁS regulations, training providers must be registered on the National Register of Trainers and tutors must hold certain technical and training qualifications. But we were told that in some
registered providers those who deliver training were not registered as approved
trainers (see also section 2.5).

- FÁS training services have not as a whole been subject to an independent
evaluation, although some FÁS funded programmes have been evaluated
(e.g. apprenticeship, traineeship, National Employment Services, FÁS Provision
for Members of the Travelling Community, FÁS Provision for Early School
Leavers, follow-up surveys of FÁS participants). There are limited data to assess
whether the resources involved are yielding valuable outcomes. Given the large
amount of public resources involved in FÁS operations and current constraints on
public expenditure, some more global evaluation would be desirable.

- Stakeholder (in particular employer) involvement in the regional governance of
FÁS is insufficient. There are few elements of local democracy in the governance
of FÁS (e.g. through a regional governing board involving local employers). The
review team was told by FÁS that efforts in the past to establish consultation
mechanisms with local employers were not successful because of limited
employer interest. Some employers told us that there is too much arbitrary
discretion across regional FÁS offices in terms of the type of training they will
fund, and that this variation, and more broadly FÁS training services, are not
responsive enough to their needs. For their part, FÁS told us that they allow some
room for regional variation to respond to diverse local needs.

**Recommendation 3**

Conduct a review of FÁS training services to enhance mechanisms for
accountability and quality improvement. This would involve an improvement in the
quality of data and evaluation, and consultation with employers.

**Supporting arguments**

There are two arguments for this recommendation. First, it would help improve the
quality of training provision. Second, it would increase accountability to stakeholders.

**Improved quality of provision**

Systematic dialogue with local employers allows a VET system to identify labour
market needs and receive feedback on the performance of VET graduates on the labour
market. This establishes whether sufficient general skills have been developed in the
graduates, and whether training is targeting skills shortages in an effective manner.
Similarly, data on labour market outcomes provide a signal whether VET graduates are
equipped with the appropriate set of skills. Without effective feedback mechanisms
indicating whether VET provision meets labour market needs there is a risk that training
provision will be driven by the kind of training which is easiest to supply, or which has
been supplied in the past, rather than required by the labour market.

In a more strategic and longer term perspective, an independent evaluation of FÁS
training services might help orientate FÁS' mission towards activities in which it proves
to be particularly efficient and effective. This might involve leaving some activities to
other players, if these exist or can emerge. Currently FÁS has multiple missions. In
addition to its placement function, FÁS has a training function involving several elements
– it acts as a provider of training in the case of apprenticeships and training for the
unemployed, and as a funding agency in the case of training contracted out to third providers. This approach has both potential benefits (e.g. a small country may benefit from fewer and larger institutions (Grubb, Singh and Tergeist, 2009) and drawbacks (e.g. a large centralised bureaucracy).

**Increased accountability to stakeholders**

The “challenges” above noted a number of factors necessary to underpin accountability mechanisms. On the one hand, data and evaluation can increase accountability to students, parents and those funding VET by “providing information on what is being done, why, with what resources and with what results” (OECD, 2009b). For example, in the case of a VET provider this would include information on staff numbers and qualifications, spending, and whether graduates are able to find good jobs. On the other hand, consultation and some form of local democracy enhance accountability – consultation mechanisms create dialogue between VET providers and stakeholders, and unsatisfactory results might reduce the re-election chances of the person in charge.

Better accountability mechanisms can also increase trust between employers and the VET system (and its relevant authorities). Achieving employer trust is important, as it will facilitate the engagement of employers in VET policy development at all relevant levels – local, regional and national. Employer engagement in policy development, in turn, is essential to link VET provision to labour market needs. A review of FÁS and improved accountability procedures would send a signal to employers, and more broadly all stakeholders, of a commitment to the promotion of transparency and continuous improvement in FÁS, which in turn should promote employer engagement and trust in FÁS training services.

**Implementation**

At the time of writing, Ireland is experiencing an economic downturn and demand for FÁS funded training (in particular training for the unemployed) has sharply increased. While recognising that this imposes many immediate pressures on FÁS, there is no reason why these pressures should delay a review of FÁS training services. At the same time it would be necessary to handle such a review carefully, so as not to impose an unreasonable additional burden on FÁS at a difficult time.

### 2.4 Improving literacy and numeracy

**Challenge**

*Weaknesses in the basic skills* of some VET students

In the late 1990s, more than half of working age adults in Ireland lacked the minimum literacy skills to cope with the demands of everyday life and work in a complex, advanced society (see Table 2.3; in IALS the suitable minimum to cope with such demands is considered Level 3. For international comparison see Figures B.5, B.6 and B.7).

**13.** In this chapter the term “basic skills” will refer to literacy and numeracy skills.
Table 2.3 Literacy levels in Ireland

Percentage of population aged 16-65 (1994-1998)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literacy</th>
<th>Level 1</th>
<th>Level 2</th>
<th>Level 3</th>
<th>Level 4/5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prose</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>34.1</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>31.7</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>24.8 (1.5)</td>
<td>28.3 (0.8)</td>
<td>30.7 (1.0)</td>
<td>16.2 (1.6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The values in parentheses are the standard errors of the estimates.


More recent data on adult literacy levels are not available. There have been various government interventions to improve literacy among adults (e.g. the National Adult Literacy Programme and the National Action Plan on Social Inclusion) and younger people are much better educated now than a generation ago. Denny et al. (1999) argue that the low levels of literacy in Ireland relative to other countries reflect the fact that older age groups did not benefit from free second-level education – they left school early with poor literacy skills. But many young people also have literacy difficulties. In the late 1990s almost 20% of those aged 16-25 scored at level 1. In particular, persons with less than upper secondary education in Ireland performed poorly on IALS (OECD and Statistics Canada, 2000), with a mean of level 2 (this was true both for those aged 20-25 and 16-65), and in 2008 one-third of persons aged 15-64 in Ireland were still without upper secondary education (Central Statistics Office, 2008). This suggests that there may remain a substantial numeracy and literacy problem among adults including young adults. During the visit the OECD team was told that literacy and numeracy problems were common among those undertaking VET courses.

Lack of systematic screening to identify literacy and numeracy problems

Currently people who come into contact with training services are not systematically screened for potential literacy and numeracy problems, although they complete a form in which they can declare any such difficulties – a weak screening mechanism (see discussion below). This means that some people may start their training despite literacy and numeracy problems, and as they are not identified for targeted support, they may not be able to complete their course. Some employers reported to the review team that certain apprentices are unable to complete the final (more sophisticated and academic) phases of their training because of their weak literacy or numeracy skills, and it is very difficult to help apprentices at such a late stage. In the case of training for the unemployed, the lack of systematic screening means that some people may not receive the type of training they would need, i.e. literacy and numeracy support rather than, or in addition to, job-specific skills.

Recommendation 4

Systematically identify the literacy and numeracy problems of those who come into contact with training services and provide basic skills support to those in need.

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14. See Annex C for IALS domains and levels of literacy.
Supporting arguments

There are three arguments for this recommendation. First, modern workplaces require good literacy and numeracy skills, second, literacy and numeracy support improves learning outcomes in VET programmes, third, relying on self-declaration of literacy and numeracy skills is insufficient.

Modern workplaces require good literacy and numeracy skills

Demand for higher levels of skills for all types of job has increased in OECD countries given globalisation, rapid technological changes and increasingly knowledge-based economies. A study from the United States (Autor, Levy and Murnane, 2003) argues that an increasing number of jobs, including blue-collar jobs, require problem-solving skills (i.e. the ability to solve problems that cannot be solved by simply applying rules) and complex communication skills (i.e. the ability not only to extract and transmit information, but also to communicate a particular interpretation of it). It is argued that literacy and numeracy skills support the development of more advanced problem-solving and communication skills (Levy and Murnane, 2004). More generally, learning – both in initial VET and in lifelong learning – is difficult without strong basic skills. In a study of workplace literacy requirements in Central and Eastern Europe, Köllő (2006) argues that most marketable competences are developed through basic skills closely tied to literacy.

Strong literacy and numeracy skills are associated with better performance on the labour market. Data from IALS show that people with weak literacy skills are more likely to be unemployed, even if other background variables (educational attainment, age, gender) are taken into account (Figure 2.4). An Australian study (Chiswick, Lee and Miller, 2002) found that about half of the total effect of education on labour market outcomes (labour force participation, unemployment) can be attributed to literacy and numeracy.  

Figure 2.4 Probability of unemployment and literacy proficiency

Probability of being unemployed according to prose literacy score, for men aged 16-25 with less than upper secondary education, 1994-1998


Adding literacy and numeracy to a regression of labour market status on schooling increases the explanatory power of the model.
During the long economic boom in Ireland many people found jobs despite weak literacy and numeracy competences. These same people have now become highly vulnerable to unemployment. Some sectors are likely to be particularly affected. For example, in the construction sector employment fell sharply during 2008, almost 70% of the fall in male employment between the end of 2007 and the end of 2008 is attributable to the construction sector (Central Statistics Office, 2009b). This sector employed a large number of people with less than upper secondary education (see Table B.3) and, as set out above, many people with less than upper secondary education in Ireland had weak literacy levels when measured by IALS in the 1990s.

**Literacy and numeracy support improves learning outcomes in VET programmes**

A study of 18 further education (FE) colleges in the United Kingdom (Basic Skills Agency, 1997) found that offering basic skills support to students in FE colleges dramatically reduced drop-out (and improved completion rates, see Box 2.3).

### Box 2.3 Basic skills support and successful VET completion

A study from the United Kingdom (Basic Skills Agency, 1997) explored the relationship between basic skills support and drop-out, retention and completion rates in further education colleges.

Over 15 000 students were assessed and over 4 400 were identified as in need of basic skills support, 90% of who in a vocational course. The study followed up these students – less than half of them received literacy and numeracy support, while the majority did not get any additional support with basic skills.

**Reasons for not taking up support.** Some students were not told the results of the basic skills assessment or did not understand what the results meant. Others could not take up support because of their timetable. In fact take-up was higher where support was offered as part of the course rather than as an optional extra. But the most important barrier was attitude – young adults in particular were reluctant to take up support because of the stigma attached to poor basic skills. Also many were not aware of the need to improve their basic skills to get through their course.

**Forms of basic skills support.** Basic skills support was available through workshops offering drop-in and timetables support for individuals and groups. Some colleges developed partnership-teaching, in which basic skills specialists and course tutors worked together to offer support as part of a course. This approach had two advantages: it allowed to support those who were reluctant to attend targeted workshops, and it related basic skills development to the student’s course.

**Did basic skills support make a difference?** Those who received basic skills support were three times less likely to drop out. They also had better completion (those on a two-year course) and qualification rates (those on a one-year course) than those who did not receive support.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drop-out</th>
<th>Completed the year / achieved a qualification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Withdrawal rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No support</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Literacy and numeracy skills may be enhanced by integrating the teaching of these skills into the vocational curriculum. A programme in the United States (Box 2.4) found that integrating maths into vocational subjects improved numeracy skills, without any detrimental effect on the learning of specific occupational knowledge.
Box 2.4 Integrating mathematics teaching into vocational subjects

The Math-in-CTE\(^1\) approach was developed from the idea that maths is present in all areas of CTE but is often implicit to both teachers and students. This approach aims to make maths more explicit as a necessary tool for solving workplace problems and help improve students’ understanding of maths both in and out of context. It was developed by the National Research Center for Career and Technical Education and consists of teacher professional development and a pedagogical framework.

A research study (Stone et al., 2006) tested this model in five occupational areas (agriculture, auto technology, business/marketing, health, and information technology). In the experimental group, each CTE teacher was partnered with a maths teacher to develop CTE activities that would enhance the teaching of maths skills for use in context. They built a curriculum that intersected maths concepts with CTE curricula, identified opportunities to emphasise maths in the curriculum, and developed lessons for implementing these based on a specific pedagogical framework. This framework makes explicit maths concepts in CTE courses by gradually moving from fully CTE contextualised examples to more abstract examples. For instance, learning about the T-square in a carpentry class is an opportunity to teach the Pythagorean theorem.

After one year of maths-enhanced lessons, the students in the experimental group performed better on standardised tests of maths ability. This was not detrimental to the learning of the vocational content – at the end of the year there were no differences between the experimental and control group in terms of occupational or technical knowledge.

\(^1\) CTE (Career and Technical Education) is commonly used in the United States to refer to vocational education and training.

Source: Stone et al. (2006)

Relying on self-declaration of literacy and numeracy skills is insufficient

A number of studies show that many people cannot adequately assess their own literacy and numeracy weaknesses. Data from various British cohort studies (National Child Development Study, 1970 British Cohort Study) show that many people with weak basic skills do not recognise that they have difficulties, particularly in respect of numeracy (Bynner and Parsons, 2006). A Canadian literacy survey found that the average correlation between self-assessed scores and test scores (both on a scale of one to five) was only 0.42 (Finnie and Meng, 2005). This study also suggests that individuals assess their literacy skills relative to a sort of “local norm”, e.g. school mates, friends or colleagues, so individuals with literacy problems are likely to be unaware of it if those in their environment have similar levels of literacy. This study also shows that learning disadvantages (e.g. having learned the language of the test after the age of five, or having experienced learning difficulties as a child) have a greater effect on individuals’ perceptions of their skills than on their actual literacy levels. In other words, people with learning disadvantages are more likely to report difficulties, while those who did not are more likely to overestimate their skills.

Greater awareness of literacy and numeracy problems encourages people to seek help. An analysis from British cohort studies (Bynner and Parsons, 2006) found that once people were aware of weaknesses in their basic skills, they tended to be interested in improving these. This is in line with an earlier study of FE students (Basic Skills Agency, 1997), which found that a major barrier to taking up basic skills support was that many
people did not know that basic skills were essential to the successful completion of their course. But the same study also showed that those who do know that they have literacy and numeracy problems may be reluctant to admit it to others and this may become a deterrent to taking up basic skills support.

**Implementation**

Systematic screening for literacy and numeracy difficulties should be used to identify people in need of support. Such a screening test needs to be implemented tactfully, so that it is not seen as a barrier for those seeking entry to VET courses – perhaps after a few weeks of the course, so that it is not seen as a selective test or barrier to entry. In Ireland there are already literacy and numeracy courses specifically created to improve basic skills. Separately, but additionally, “basic skills support”, *i.e.* additional help for students who struggle with their courses because of weak basic skills (Basic Skills Agency, 1997) would also be desirable. A study of basic skills support in FE colleges in the United Kingdom (see Box 2.3) argues that support measures should be designed in a way that encourage take up: support should be easily available, adapted to the needs of different course groups and individual students, it should suit the needs of students with low motivation and limited independent learning skills, and marketed in a positive way to avoid stigma.

**2.5 Teachers, trainers and instructors**

This section looks at four target groups – VET teachers (teachers of vocational subjects) in courses under DES provision (*e.g.* PLC, VTOS); FÁS instructors (mainly training apprentices off-the-job); trainers, working for FÁS indirectly through contracted-out providers offering other courses; and those supervising VET students during workplace training.

**Challenge**

*Weaknesses in the pedagogical preparation of some trainers, instructors and workplace training supervisors*

Training organisations (*e.g.* individuals, limited companies, organisations) delivering FÁS funded training have to be registered on the FÁS Register of Trainers. But there are weaknesses in the approval procedure and the quality control of training delivered by registered providers. When a training organisation applies for registration, persons within the organisation who wish to be registered as approved trainers are required to have a training qualification. Some people can be approved without a training qualification: they must have at least ten years of training experience and be approved through a competency-based assessment involving an interview and observation, but some interviews conducted during the review visit suggest that this assessment of pedagogical skills is not systematic and rigorous enough. Also, some interviewees reported that there

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16. One of the following or its FÁS/EI approved equivalent: Foundation Course in Training and Continuing Education; Foundation Course in Essential Trainer Skills; Certificate in Training and Development; Certificate in Training and Education; Diploma in Training and Education; Higher Diploma in Education; Degree in Training and Education; Degree in Education.
have been cases where, within a registered training organisation, the tutors who were delivering FÁS funded training were not approved as trainers (see also section 2.3).

FÁS has paid increasing attention to the pedagogical development of its instructors, aiming to ensure that they hold at least a Foundation diploma in Education and Training (or higher levels, e.g. certificate or diploma). While new instructors are required to hold a Certificate in Training or equivalent, currently more than one third of FÁS instructors do not have a recognised pedagogical qualification. Holding a pedagogical qualification is not compulsory for existing instructors, and there are limited incentives for them to acquire one (some staff may qualify for an increment if they are awarded a qualification, but those on the top of the salary scale do not) (FÁS, personal communication, 9 June 2009).

Those delivering training in work placements linked to the formal education and training system are not required to have any pedagogical preparation (FÁS, 2009a). This means that supervisors of apprentices and trainees, and those looking after students during the work-experience component of PLC courses do not receive targeted training, which would provide them with the skills needed to support the learning of students.

Qualification requirements are different for instructors, trainers and VET teachers

There are two broad qualification routes for those who teach vocational skills to young people. In the “vocational training” sector (i.e. VET provided under DETE), trainers and instructors may acquire pedagogical training through a variety of courses in training and/or education (see footnote). In the “vocational education” sector (i.e. VET provided under DES) VET teachers typically have to be registered with the Teaching Council as post-primary teachers. According to Teaching Council requirements, VET teachers are required to complete a “Postgraduate Diploma in Education or equivalent.” Although there is some overlap in qualification requirements (e.g. Higher Diploma in Education), a number of qualifications recognised by DETE and similar in terms of objectives (i.e. learning to transmit vocational skills to young people) and length (i.e. one year) are not recognised by the Teaching Council as equivalent. This inhibits staff mobility between the two sectors.

**Recommendation 5**

As a means of enhancing the competences of the VET workforce ensure that all teachers, trainers and instructors have some pedagogical training, and as a longer term goal offer pedagogical training to supervisors of VET students.

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17. Those delivering programmes in Youthreach do not have to be registered with the Teaching Council.

18. A suitable teacher-education qualification is a qualification from a State recognised university or similar third level college directed towards the 12 to 18 age range. The duration of such a programme must be at least one year of full-time study or equivalent. The most common teacher-training qualification in Ireland is the Postgraduate Diploma in Education (previously the Higher Diploma in Education) and is awarded on successful completion of a one–year full-time course.

(e.g. apprentices, trainees) in companies. Encourage convergence in the qualification requirements for teaching in different sectors of the VET system.

Supporting arguments

There are three arguments for this recommendation. First, those teaching VET students need a balance of technical-vocational and pedagogical skills, second, different qualification requirements for the different VET sectors are difficult to justify in principle and inhibit staff mobility, and third, training for in-company supervisors has a positive impact on the quality of workplace training.

Those teaching VET students need a balance of technical-vocational and pedagogical skills

Effective VET teaching requires both vocational and pedagogical skills. Vocational skills include skills exercised in specific occupations in industry or business requiring a combination of relevant technical training and work experience. It is widely accepted by VET teachers and employers that work experience is important to ensure familiarity with the competence needs and working methods of real workplaces. Although empirical evidence on this issue is scarce, a review of existing evidence in the United States (Lynch, 1998) suggests that having relevant work experience is helpful to VET teachers, since it provides them with a context and increases their confidence in teaching for their occupation. However, beyond a threshold level more work experience does not further improve teaching effectiveness.

Pedagogical skills are necessary to transmit knowledge and skills effectively. Although the existing literature on VET trainers and instructors who start teaching without any pedagogical training in Ireland is scarce, there is a substantial literature on “alternatively certified VET teachers” (i.e. those entering the teaching profession with workplace experience but without a traditional teaching qualification) in the United States. A literature review on alternatively certified teachers (Lynch, 1998) suggests that exclusive reliance on relevant work experience should be avoided and some pedagogical training should be provided to all VET teachers and trainers.

Different qualification requirements for the different VET sectors are difficult to justify in principle and inhibit staff mobility

The competences required to teach vocational skills are the same, whether VET is provided by institutions managed under DES or DETE. This means that differentiation in terms of requirements in terms of pedagogical training and workplace experience between different categories of the VET workforce (VET teachers, trainers, instructors) cannot readily be justified.

One potential justification for the difference in pedagogical requirements could be that the two sectors (vocational education vs. training) have different target groups in terms of age, but this is not the case. PLC courses are managed as part of post-primary provision and pedagogical requirements for VET teachers in PLC courses are the same as for second level teachers (i.e. pedagogical training directed towards the 12 to 18 age range). However, the age profile of PLC has radically changed over the past 15 years (Figure 2.5) – in 2005/06 almost half of PLC participants were 21 and over, while 74% were 19 and over (DES, 2007). The rest of the vocational programmes provided under
DES (with the exception of Youthreach, which involves only 2.6% of all participants in further education), are targeted at adult learners.

**Figure 2.5 Trends in PLC participation by age group**

1994/95-2003/04

![Chart showing trends in PLC participation by age group from 1994/95 to 2003/04](chart)

*Source: DES in Watson, McCoy and Gorby (2006)*

Converging pedagogical qualifications would facilitate a more efficient use of resources, as it would allow easier redeployment of staff across the two sectors. It would also broaden the range of career options for staff.

*Training for in-company supervisors has a positive impact on the quality of workplace training*

Employees who supervise VET students in workplaces need a particular set of skills, including pedagogical skills, to provide high quality training. Studies from Australia suggest that apprentices highly value the social skills of their supervisors, such as communication skills, the ability to deal with conflicts and unexpected mistakes (Harris *et al.*, 1998). But providing good supervision is demanding, since potential supervisors often lack the skills to provide support and have to juggle supervising tasks with other work responsibilities (Harris, Simons and Bone, 2000).

Research evidence suggests that when workplace training supervisors receive targeted training, they do a better job at developing the skills of VET students. In Germany, the suspension of formal training for supervisors seems to have had a negative impact. Until 2003, employees who wanted to work with apprentices had to pass a national examination, preceded by optional training offered by chambers of commerce. This requirement was suspended for five years because some firms considered it burdensome. Evaluation showed that drop-out rates were higher in firms that have no qualified supervisors and the same firms complained more frequently about the performance of their apprentices. A survey of chambers of commerce revealed that many stakeholders associated the suspension of formal qualifications for trainers with deterioration in the
quality and image of VET (BIBB, 2008). The requirement of formal training for supervisors has now been reintroduced.

**Implementation**

**Training trainers and instructors**

Suitable courses (e.g. courses in Training and Education) have already been developed and attended by many trainers and instructors. Creating incentives (e.g. wage increment) might help enhance the pedagogical skills of existing instructors. Also there needs to be assurance that people are not approved as instructors or trainers unless they have an appropriate qualification and the competency-based assessment should be conducted rigorously.

**Training workplace training supervisors**

Given the sharp economic downturn in Ireland employers are not likely to be keen to bear the increased costs of training their supervisors. With this in mind the provision of targeted training to workplace training supervisors should be a longer term strategic goal.

Even in a better economic context, training for workplace training supervisors costs money, which may discourage employers from offering workplace training to students. Although requiring formal pedagogical qualifications for workplace training supervisors has appeal and is compulsory in some countries, a more gradual approach may be more appropriate in Ireland to ensure that both key policy objectives regarding workplace training (i.e. expansion and high quality) are achieved. This may mean introducing targeted training initially as an option and making it compulsory later on (see examples in Box 2.5). Also, targeted training may be first introduced in programmes with a substantial on-the-job component (e.g. apprenticeship, traineeship), as in these programmes the pedagogical skills of supervisors are crucial in determining learning outcomes.

Some existing courses (e.g. courses in Training in Education) may constitute a useful basis for developing training for workplace training supervisors.
Box 2.5 Training apprentice supervisors

Optional training in Norway

In Norway optional training is offered by counties to employees involved in supervising apprentices. Some counties provide the training themselves, others ask schools or training offices to ensure its provision. The courses are free to participants, since counties provide for the course, learning material, subsistence and travel expenses. However, the firm is responsible for the supervisor’s pay during the course.

Typically the duration of the training is two days (or four half days) per year. Often there is a time interval between each training session, so that supervisors may practice what they have learnt and prepare a report, which is then presented at the next session.

National guidelines, developed in co-operation with VET teacher training institutions, are available on the internet and can be adapted to local needs. The form of training typically includes role-play and practice. Supervisors learn to cover the curriculum, complete evaluation procedures and administrative forms, prepare a training plan for apprentices and follow through the plan.

The OECD Review of VET policies in Norway (Kuczera et al., 2008) recommended that training for apprentice supervisors be compulsory.


Compulsory training in Switzerland

In Switzerland, firms need to meet quality standards to be licensed to take apprentices. For those who supervise apprentices, there is a required course of 100 learning hours covering pedagogy, law, the education system, problems with drugs and alcohol etc. Supervisors cannot look after more than two apprentices and must have a certain level of education. Cantonal inspectors visit companies to check the quality of training. If there are weaknesses in the training provided, cantonal staff provide some coaching to the company. Companies consider this an advantage, since if they can provide better training to their apprentices, apprentices will do better work for them.

Source: Hoeckel, Field and Grubb (2009).

Converging the qualification requirements of the VET workforce

In the future, registration with the Teaching Council will require a primary degree in the taught subject, in addition to an appropriate pedagogical qualification. This would create problems for VET teachers whose subject (e.g. hairdressing) may not be taught at primary degree level. As a result there are plans to introduce a new category of VET teachers – “tutors”. Establishing this new category for those teaching in the DES sector could be an opportunity to facilitate the convergence of qualifications for the VET workforce. To achieve this, the new category should acknowledge that the competences required for teaching VET subjects are different from those involved in general second level teaching, but are similar to those involved in providing VET on FÁS-funded courses. Reflecting this, the pedagogical qualification required for “tutors” should be the same (or recognised as equivalent) as the one required for trainers and instructors.
One way of converging pedagogical qualifications is to establish equivalence between qualifications providing the same competences (i.e. establishing equivalence between one level of the “Training and Education” qualifications and the Postgraduate Diploma in Education). This may require some adjustment in the content of one or both qualifications. The structure containing several levels could be maintained, so that people can progress through the system and acquire different levels of competences in education and training.

Towards an integrated system of vocational education and training

Converging qualification requirements should be an element of a broader strategy to create an integrated VET system, reducing duplication and segmentation across government bodies (in particular between DETE and DES). A recent OECD review of public services (OECD, 2008b) highlighted the need for a more integrated public service in the country. In a small country like Ireland, multiple public agencies responsible for the same activity (in this case delivering VET) are unlikely to be cost-effective. In the longer term Ireland could consider whether a different institutional arrangement would better suit the country’s needs. But in the short run it should be at least be possible for staff to move from one public institution to another, in the interests of both efficient provision and the staff concerned.

2.6 Evidence, data and career guidance

Challenge

Information about VET programmes and their outcomes is a key tool in any VET system, allowing programmes to be monitored, evaluated, and aligned with labour market needs, and guiding students in their choice of VET programmes.

Weaknesses in progression data and analysis

In Ireland the ESRI School Leavers Survey follows up students leaving second level education, including PLC courses, and some other VET programmes also have follow-up surveys (e.g. providers of FÁS funded courses are required to collect progression data). But data sources are fragmented and do not permit the tracking of progression across the education and training system. For example, it is not possible to know that a person who according to the follow-up survey is in “further education or training” is taking a course at the same level, or has progressed to a higher level. Little is known about the extent to which the pathways of progression created by the National Qualifications Framework are used. Also, it is difficult to know whether students succeed in their subsequent programme. Several respondents during the review visit referred to anecdotal evidence that many graduates of PLC courses struggle if they enter tertiary education. But existing data do not allow for the identification of tertiary education completion rates of students coming from different programmes.
There is a wide range of VET programmes in Ireland. While some have been evaluated, other major programmes have not — e.g. apprenticeships and PLC programmes. In particular, there is no analysis of the costs and benefits of apprenticeships, which involve a large amount of public resources. Similarly, while PLC courses involve a large number of students, there are no detailed data and analysis of their outcomes. The ESRI School Leavers Survey provides data on progression and labour market outcomes for leavers from the PLC sector, but the results are not broken down by programme or even occupational field. This means that it is not possible to identify which programmes have stronger and which ones have weaker outcomes.

Research on VET is scarce. For example, little is known about the quality of apprenticeships according to students and employers, or the factors that influence learning outcomes and employer willingness to offer apprenticeships.

Weaknesses in career guidance

Career counselling is provided in all second level schools – each school has at least one guidance and counselling professional and in more than half of the school career guidance is scheduled into students’ time at school (Figure B.8). In third level education the provision of guidance varies across institutions. In the labour market sector FÁS has statutory responsibility for providing guidance services. The Adult Education Guidance Initiative, funded by the DES and operated by VECs provides guidance to further education participants. But some weaknesses remain in career guidance, particularly in the availability of “career information” (on the distinction between career counselling, education and information see Box 2.6).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 2.6 Three aspects of career guidance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Career counselling</strong> is conducted on a one-to-one basis or in small groups, in which attention is focused on the distinctive career issues faced by individuals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Career education</strong> is part of the curriculum, in which attention is paid to helping groups of individuals to develop the competences for managing their career development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Career information</strong> can be provided in various formats (increasingly, web-based). It is concerned with information on courses, occupations and career paths, including labour market information.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Watts (2009).

Awareness and use of labour market information — about where the employment opportunities are and are likely to emerge — is insufficient. During the visit the team formed the impression that many career guidance professionals in second level schools make less use of labour market data in their work than they ideally should. We were also told that the training of career guidance professionals has traditionally been focused on psychological aspects of the student’s development, with little consideration of labour market factors. A study on the use of career information in Ireland (Phillips, Clarke and Classon, 2006) found that guidance professionals are generally aware of the existence of

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19. Vocational Training for People with a Disability; Review of FÁS Provision for Members of the Travelling Community; Review of FÁS Provision for Early School Leavers; Review of the Traineeship Programme (FÁS, 2009a).
formal labour market information, but they rarely use it because they find the information not adapted to the guidance context. The study also found that guidance professionals are interested in using labour market information as background material for students’ own choices. But they are reluctant to promote any particular areas on the basis of forecasts, as they perceive guiding within the person’s preferences as their professional responsibility and they have concerns about the accuracy of the forecasts. The same study also reveals that many potential students do not know about the availability of labour market information and very few use it (see Figure 2.6).

**Figure 2.6 Awareness and use of formal labour market information (EGFSN)**

By user groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Used</th>
<th>Heard of and never used</th>
<th>Never heard of it</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School students</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third level</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: EGFSN: Expert Group on Future Skills Needs


Sources of online career information are fragmented, which makes their use more difficult. In Ireland prospective students can access a number of websites created for career guidance purposes (e.g. Career Directions, Qualifax), but these each cover only some elements of the range of VET programmes available. Although the websites contain links to each other, it is more complicated for users to find the relevant information on disparate websites. The survey on the use of career information mentioned above shows that many students are unfamiliar with careers databases – about 60% of respondents never heard of Qualifax and Careers World, and almost 40% never heard of Career Directions and www.skool.ie. Many found it hard to identify the relevant site with high quality information, as a simple search online gave various and separate sources of information.

**Recommendation 6**

Create an instrument to track progression through the education and training system, undertake routine evaluation of programmes and pursue economic analysis such as cost-benefit studies of apprenticeships. Encourage more research on VET. Create a comprehensive website with career guidance information.

**Supporting arguments**

This recommendation is supported by three arguments. First, evidence-based policy making requires data and analysis. Second, progression data are needed to inform student
choice. Third, data have to be made available for career guidance purposes in an easily accessible form.

**Evidence-based policy making requires better data and analysis**

Data collection and analysis are necessary to inform VET policy makers – to identify key challenges, and assess the effectiveness, costs and feasibility of different policy options. For example, in some cases there are alternative qualification routes to the same occupation. Evaluations help assess the costs and benefits of different programmes and identify the most cost-effective alternative. This has been done, for example, for the Traineeship Review (comparing Specific Skills Training and Traineeships).

It is crucial to ensure that the large amount of public resources dedicated to VET yield appropriate outcomes, and even more so in times of severe budget constraints. The profile and needs of VET students and skill needs in the labour market change over time and provision has to be adapted accordingly. Rigorous monitoring of progression in the education and training system, and of labour market outcomes reveal whether VET programmes provide people with an appropriate set of skills. In one school we were told that some PLC programmes continue to be offered despite weak labour market outcomes, as they are considered to offer students a year in which to develop broader social competences. It is important to assess whether these programmes effectively develop useful skills, or whether other more cost-effective programmes should replace them.

The crisis creates particular challenges in terms of adapting VET provision to labour market needs. For example, as unemployment increases FÁS will provide more training for the unemployed – 50,000 additional places in 2009 (FÁS, 2009a). At the same time the profile of the unemployed has probably become more heterogeneous (e.g. including more highly skilled people), meaning that their skills needs are different from the typical target group of FÁS training for the unemployed over the past years. In the context of the recession, data on labour market outcomes need to be carefully interpreted, taking into account the fact that good employment outcomes are harder to achieve during a recession.

More data and analysis can also help improve the cost-effectiveness of VET programmes. Some people interviewed during the review visit referred to the Irish apprenticeship system as “good but expensive”. As discussed in section 2.1, the public cost of the Irish apprenticeship system is high by international standards. A cost-benefit analysis would be necessary, especially in the light of the large amount of public resources involved and pressures on public spending, to identify aspects of the apprenticeship system that may be reformed to improve cost-effectiveness (see section 2.1). As argued in section 2.1, the proportion of the cost of apprenticeships covered by the public budget is high in Ireland compared to other countries. A cost-benefit analysis would indicate whether current cost-sharing arrangements between the government and employers reflect the costs and benefits of training to different stakeholders, or whether these may be revised.

**Data on labour market outcomes inform student choice and help adapt VET provision**

Informed student choice can improve the match between VET provision and labour market needs – programmes with good outcomes will attract more students and encourage schools to offer these, and reduce those with poor outcomes. But the attractiveness of VET programmes cannot be influenced by their outcomes if these are
not known. There is a higher risk that some programmes remain popular among students, even though their labour market outcomes may be poor, and schools will have few incentives to close them down. Unless other external incentives (e.g., targeted funding for certain programmes) intervene, there is a risk that VET provision will reflect supply considerations (e.g., the availability of teachers, trainers and equipment) and poorly informed student choice rather than labour market needs.

Data have to be easily accessible to be effectively used in career guidance

Career information needs not only to be available but also accessible. Career information, which should include data on labour market outcomes and prospects, is an essential complement of both career counselling and career education (see Box 2.6). Counsellors need information on labour market needs on the basis of which to advise. Similarly, while students learn to manage their own career development through career education, they also need up-to-date career information to make informed choices – this should include high quality information on the content of VET programmes and the labour market prospects they offer.

Creating a single comprehensive website of career information would help improve awareness and usage of existing career information, including data on the labour market outcomes and prospects of different programmes. It could directly inform those who do not come into contact with a career counsellor but seek information on their own. For them it is particularly important that career information is presented in a form that is easy to identify and understand. Access to a high quality information source outside the student’s school is particularly important in the case of second level schools that offer PLC programmes as well. These schools have an incentive to direct their students towards programmes offered at their own institution, even if this is not in the students’ interest. In the United Kingdom, there is evidence that guidance within schools that offer post-16 provision tends to favour their own provision at the expense of other options (Foskett, Dyke and Maringe, 2008). Such pressures are particularly marked in systems that link school funding to student recruitment (OECD, 2004).

At the same time, easily accessible and high quality career information would support the work of career counsellors. Making information sources more easily accessible could encourage career guidance professionals, both in second level education and in further education and training, to make more use of data on educational and labour market outcomes. This could usefully be complemented by an emphasis on the use of labour market information in the training of career guidance professionals. As reported by Watts (2009), in the United Kingdom recent reforms to integrate career guidance into more personally-based services has had the unfortunate effect of reducing attention to labour market expertise among career guidance professionals and less liaison work with employers (Colley, Lewin and Mazzei, 2008).

Implementation

Progression data

Ireland already has some good instruments for data collection, such as the Quarterly National Household Survey, the ESRI School Leavers Survey and various follow-up surveys for VET programmes. Improving existing data may include adding new data to the Quarterly National Household Survey, e.g., on the occupational orientation of a
person’s initial education or training. Identifying the educational background of those on the live unemployment register would also be useful. The School Leavers Survey was stopped recently because of budgetary cutbacks. Given that school leavers face very difficult and fast-changing labour market challenges, at the moment the timing of this decision is very unfortunate. While it may not be necessary to conduct such a survey every year, we would encourage Ireland to conduct the survey at least every couple of years.

One way of tracking progression is through a personal identifier, which tracks people through the education and training system and into the labour market. Such a system is in place in Sweden, and Switzerland is planning to introduce it in 2010. But implementing a system using personal identifiers may be difficult because of data protection laws in Ireland. Another option is to conduct a survey. The School Leavers Survey provides good data, but it does not allow the tracking of progression at later stages of the education and training system. A cohort survey, such as the Youth Cohort Study in the United Kingdom, would provide data needed to assess the effectiveness of programmes. The next stage of the Post-Primary Longitudinal Study, which began in 2002, is scheduled to be conducted in 2010 and might provide useful data on progression and labour market outcomes. To evaluate VET programmes that are not targeted at young people (e.g. FÁS training for the unemployed) it would be necessary to ensure that the follow-up survey of those who complete these courses has an appropriate response rate and that the results are not distorted by selective attrition in the sample.

To inform student choice, schools and policy makers, progression data need to be broken down by programme. In the case of PLC courses, for example, disaggregated data on school leavers on a programme by programme basis would allow prospective students to know which programmes offer better employment or further education prospects. It would also help schools and policy makers to adjust the mix of VET provision to constantly changing labour market needs. Account should be taken of the strong role of migration factors in Ireland. In the current downturn, return migration out of Ireland may be changing the labour force significantly.

**Research on VET**

One way of strengthening the research base on VET is to establish a specialised research institute, responsible for analysing VET data and disseminating research findings (e.g. NCVER in Australia, BIBB in Germany). Another approach is the establishment of a network of researchers (see examples in Box 2.7). The choice of institutional form depends on the national context and the functions assigned to the institution. One advantage of creating a researcher network would be that VET research would be integrated in a wider researcher community, rather than being conducted in isolation. Creating a network, rather than simply funding research in different institutions, also reduces the risk of dispersion and duplication of knowledge. In Ireland, a small country with a relatively weak research base on VET, this may be more appropriate than creating a separate institute.
Box 2.7 Research networks

The **Swiss Leading Houses** are a network of government-funded, long-term research projects, which are attached to one or more higher education institutions. They aim to fill the gaps in the Swiss VET evidence base and to build up a VET research community. International advisory boards prevent a too narrow research focus and Leading Houses are required to open up parts of the projects for public tendering to foster competition. Since 2004, six Leading Houses have been commissioned by the Federal Office for Professional Education and Technology, which also assures the quality of research. Examples of topics addressed by these research networks include the quality of VET, economics of education, firm behaviour and training policies, and social competences.

The **UK Centre for the Economics of Education** (CEE) was established in March 2000 and receives core funding from the government (Department for Children, Schools and Families and Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills). The CEE is a multidisciplinary research centre with three partners: the Centre for Economic Performance at London School of Economics and Political Science, the Institute for Fiscal Studies and the Institute of Education. All three partners provide research in the field of the economics of education and training, and issues relating to education, training and the labour market. The research is heavily orientated towards doing empirical work with the aim of informing policy by making use of data and research results.

*Source: OECD (2009c); [http://cee.lse.ac.uk/](http://cee.lse.ac.uk/).*

A comprehensive website for career guidance

Creating a single, comprehensive website on all education and training programmes available (*e.g.* [www.berufsberatung.ch](http://www.berufsberatung.ch) in Switzerland, [www.infoabsolvent.cz](http://www.infoabsolvent.cz) in the Czech Republic) is a cheaper and more easily implemented option, than the creation of a national career guidance services (*e.g.* Berufsinformationszentren in Switzerland). The creation of a single comprehensive electronic product was also recommended by the OECD review of career guidance in Ireland (OECD, 2002).
Acronyms

BIBB  Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung (Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training)
DES   Department of Education and Science
DETE  Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment
ESRI  Economic and Social Research Institute
FAS   Irish National Training and Employment Authority
FETAC Further Education and Training Awards Council
HETAC Higher Education and Training Awards Council
IoT   Institute of Technology
NCVER National Centre for Vocational Education Research
NTF   National Training Fund
NUI   National University of Ireland
PLC   Post Leaving Certificate
VET   Vocational education and training
VTOS  Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme
References


Buck S. and K. McGinn (2005), “Initial Vocational Education and Training in Ireland”. Draft report prepared by FÁS on behalf of Cedefop in accordance with Cedefop guidelines, p. 34, FÁS


REFERENCES


FÁS (2009b), “Standards-Based Apprenticeship System Description”, report provided by FÁS.


OECD (2009c), *Systemic Innovation in the Swiss VET System, Country Case Study Report.* www.oecd.org/LongAbstract/0,3425,en_33873108_33873838_42397686_1_1_1_1,00.html


Annex A

Background information

1. Terms of reference for Ireland

The terms of reference set out the sectoral focus of the policy review of VET in Ireland and identify some key policy issues that will receive particular attention during the review.

The review will be positioned in a period 2013 and will be informed by the economic and social forecasts and expectations nationally, as well as in a wider European Union and global context.

The review of Ireland will advance policy recommendations within the frame of the following areas of the Vocational Education and Training Scheme:

- To assess the effectiveness of existing mechanisms to ensure that VET policies and systems are progressively informed by and respond to the changing dynamics of the national and wider labour markets and, if appropriate, to propose adaptations.

- Consistent with existing and projected public funding constraints and according priority to the more educationally and socially disadvantaged, to propose how best to incentivise individuals to improve their education and vocational training levels within the VET system and to encourage them to commit to life-long learning and so benefit from access to rewarding jobs with developmental and progression possibilities.

- In examining existing vocational education and training options to consider the duration of course provision and the extent and utility value of related certification and, if appropriate, to make recommendations for change.

- To assess the system in place for the training of apprentices, the number of occupations that now require the serving of formal apprenticeships, the cost of operating the apprenticeship system, the exposure that can result for apprentices from sudden change in labour market demand and, if appropriate, provide examples drawn from international experience, which suggest effective responses.

- To consider how excellence in instruction is promoted in the VET system, the selection procedures and standards required of externally contracted personnel, the relevant monitoring and review mechanisms in place in this respect and to make recommendations for change if appropriate.

- In responding to the policy objective to provide the most effective and convenient learning options and outcomes for students and trainees, to review the geographic spread and diversity of the VET system and, if appropriate, to make change recommendations.

- To assess the approaches to determining the impact of expenditure on VET programmes and to make related recommendations if appropriate.
2. Programme of the review visit

Preparatory visit, 9-13 February 2009

Monday 9 February, Dublin

Meeting with officials from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Department of Education and Science and Further Ed National Co-ordinators
Meeting with officials from the Department of Finance

Tuesday 10 February, Dublin

Meeting with officials from FÁS
Meeting with officials from FETAC and HETAC
Meeting with employer and trade union representatives
Meeting with experts from Forfás and EGFSN
Meeting with IVEA
Meeting with officials from Skillnets
Meeting with representatives of Aontas
Meeting with representatives of NALA

Wednesday 11 February, Cavan

Visit to Cavan Institute
Meeting with employers

Thursday 12 February, Dublin

Meeting with employers
Meeting with academics
Meeting with representatives of County and City Enterprise Boards, IDA Ireland
Visit to FÁS Ballyfermot training centre

Friday 13 February, Dublin

Meeting with officials from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Department of Education and Science
Policy visit, 5-8 May 2009

Tuesday 5 May, Galway
Visit to NUI Galway
Visit to FÁS Galway

Wednesday 6 May, Dublin
Meeting with officials from FÁS
Meeting with officials involved in apprenticeship provision: FÁS, TEEU, CIF, DES
Meeting with employer and trade union representatives
Meeting with officials from Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Department of Education and Science

Thursday 7 May, Dublin
Meeting with academics
Meeting with representatives of teachers and trainers
Meeting with officials involved in career guidance
Meeting with officials from the National Training Fund

Friday 8 May, Dublin
Meeting with officials from Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Department of Education and Science
Annex B

International and national statistics

Table B.1 Enrolment rates, by age

Full-time and part-time students in public and private institutions (2008)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Ending age of compulsory education</th>
<th>Number of years at which over 90% of the population are enrolled</th>
<th>Age range at which over 90% of the population are enrolled</th>
<th>Students aged</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5 to 14 as a percentage of the population aged 5 to 14</td>
<td>15 to 19 as a percentage of the population aged 15 to 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5 - 16</td>
<td>99.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5 - 17</td>
<td>98.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3 - 18</td>
<td>99.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>16-18</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>80.2</td>
</tr>
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<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5 - 17</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>3 - 16</td>
<td>97.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6 - 18</td>
<td>95.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3 - 17</td>
<td>101.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4 - 17</td>
<td>98.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6 - 19</td>
<td>98.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4 - 17</td>
<td>100.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iceland</td>
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<td>3 - 16</td>
<td>98.8</td>
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<tr>
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<td>12</td>
<td>5 - 16</td>
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<td>3 - 15</td>
<td>100.7</td>
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<td>6 - 17</td>
<td>94.9</td>
</tr>
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<td>Luxembourg</td>
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<td>Mexico</td>
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<td>OECD average</td>
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<td>EU19 average</td>
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<td>Partner countries</td>
<td>Ending age of compulsory education</td>
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<td>Age range at which over 90% of the population are enrolled</td>
<td>Students aged</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil²</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>7 - 16</td>
<td>93.1</td>
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<td>Chile</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6 - 17</td>
<td>96.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Ending age of compulsory education is the age at which compulsory schooling ends. For example, an ending age of 18 indicates that all students under 18 are legally obliged to participate in education. Mismatches between the coverage of the population data and the student/graduate data mean that the participation/graduation rates may be underestimated for countries such as Luxembourg that are net exporters of students and may be overestimated for those that are net importers.

1. The rates “4 and under as a percentage of the population of 3-to-4-year-olds” are overestimated. A significant number of students are younger than 3 years old. The net rates between 3 and 5 are around 100%.
3. Underestimated because many resident students go to school in the neighbourhood countries.
4. Excludes programmes for children younger than 3 years old, resulting in substantially lower figures than in previous years.

m: missing

Source: OECD (2008a).
Table B.2 Performance of 15-year-olds in science, reading and mathematics

Mean score and variation in student performance on PISA science, reading and mathematics scale (2006)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Science scale</th>
<th>Reading scale</th>
<th>Mathematics scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean (S.E.)</td>
<td>Mean (S.E.)</td>
<td>Mean (S.E.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S.D. (S.E.)</td>
<td>S.D. (S.E.)</td>
<td>S.D. (S.E.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>527 (2.3)</td>
<td>513 (2.1)</td>
<td>503 (2.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>511 (3.9)</td>
<td>490 (4.1)</td>
<td>505 (3.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>510 (2.5)</td>
<td>501 (3.0)</td>
<td>520 (3.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>534 (2.0)</td>
<td>527 (2.4)</td>
<td>527 (2.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>513 (3.5)</td>
<td>483 (4.2)</td>
<td>510 (3.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>496 (3.1)</td>
<td>494 (3.2)</td>
<td>513 (3.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>563 (2.0)</td>
<td>547 (2.1)</td>
<td>548 (2.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>495 (3.4)</td>
<td>488 (4.1)</td>
<td>496 (3.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>516 (3.8)</td>
<td>495 (4.4)</td>
<td>504 (3.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>473 (3.2)</td>
<td>460 (4.0)</td>
<td>459 (3.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>504 (2.7)</td>
<td>482 (3.3)</td>
<td>491 (2.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iceland</td>
<td>491 (1.6)</td>
<td>484 (1.9)</td>
<td>506 (1.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>508 (3.2)</td>
<td>517 (3.5)</td>
<td>501 (2.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>454 (3.7)</td>
<td>439 (4.6)</td>
<td>442 (4.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>475 (2.0)</td>
<td>469 (2.4)</td>
<td>462 (2.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>531 (3.4)</td>
<td>498 (3.6)</td>
<td>523 (3.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>522 (3.4)</td>
<td>556 (3.8)</td>
<td>547 (3.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luxembourg</td>
<td>486 (1.1)</td>
<td>479 (1.3)</td>
<td>490 (1.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>410 (2.7)</td>
<td>410 (3.1)</td>
<td>406 (2.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>525 (2.7)</td>
<td>507 (2.9)</td>
<td>531 (2.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>530 (2.7)</td>
<td>521 (3.0)</td>
<td>522 (2.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>487 (3.1)</td>
<td>484 (3.2)</td>
<td>490 (2.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>498 (2.3)</td>
<td>508 (2.8)</td>
<td>495 (2.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>474 (3.0)</td>
<td>472 (3.6)</td>
<td>466 (3.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovak Republic</td>
<td>488 (2.6)</td>
<td>466 (3.1)</td>
<td>492 (2.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>488 (2.6)</td>
<td>461 (2.2)</td>
<td>480 (2.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>503 (2.4)</td>
<td>507 (3.4)</td>
<td>502 (2.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>512 (3.2)</td>
<td>499 (3.1)</td>
<td>530 (3.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>424 (3.8)</td>
<td>447 (4.2)</td>
<td>424 (4.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>515 (2.3)</td>
<td>495 (2.3)</td>
<td>495 (2.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>489 (4.2)</td>
<td>106 (1.7)</td>
<td>474 (4.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD total</td>
<td>491 (1.2)</td>
<td>484 (1.0)</td>
<td>484 (1.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD average</td>
<td>500 (0.5)</td>
<td>492 (0.6)</td>
<td>498 (0.5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. S.E. – standard error; S.D. – standard deviation

Source: PISA 2006 dataset.
Table B.3 Education profile of construction craft occupations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Lower secondary or less</th>
<th>Upper secondary or further education and training</th>
<th>Third level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bricklayers, masons</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Builders, building contractors</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpenters and joiners</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Floorers, floor coverers, carpet fitters, tilers</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other construction trades n.e.c.</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Painters and decorators</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plasterers</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plumbers, heating and related trades</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roofers, slaters, tillers, sheeters, cladders</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scaffolders, riggers, steeplejacks</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Analysis by FÁS (SLMRU) based on CSO data in EGFSN (2008) p.64

Figure B.1 Changes in youth unemployment rates

Difference in youth unemployment rate compared to previous year

Source: Eurostat database.
Figure B.2 Protection of regular workers against individual dismissal
2003, Index scale of 0-6 from least to most restrictive


Figure B.3 Regulation on temporary forms of employment
2003, Index scale of 0-6 from least to most restrictive

**Figure B.4 General government cyclically-adjusted balances**

Surplus or deficit as a percentage of potential GDP

![Graph showing general government cyclically-adjusted balances](image)

*Source: OECD Economic Outlook 85 database.*

**Figure B.5 Comparative distribution of prose literacy levels**

Percentage of population aged 16-65 at each prose literacy level, 1994-1998

![Graph showing comparative distribution of prose literacy levels](image)

*Source: OECD and Statistics Canada (2000, p.17)*
Figure B.6 Comparative distribution of document literacy levels
Percentage of population aged 16-65 at each document literacy level, 1994-1998

Source: OECD and Statistics Canada (2000, p.17)

Figure B.7 Comparative distribution of quantitative literacy levels
Percentage of population aged 16-65 at each quantitative literacy level, 1994-1998

Source: OECD and Statistics Canada (2000, p.18)
Figure B.8 Students with career guidance scheduled into their time at school

Based on principals' answers, 2006

Source: OECD PISA Database
Annex C

IALS domains and levels

Three domains of literacy skills

Prose literacy – the knowledge and skills needed to understand and use information from texts including editorials, news stories, brochures and instruction manuals.

Document literacy – the knowledge and skills required to locate and use information contained in various formats, including job applications, payroll forms, transportation schedules, maps, tables and charts.

Quantitative literacy – the knowledge and skills required to apply arithmetic operations, either alone or sequentially, to numbers embedded in printed materials, such as balancing a cheque book, figuring out a tip, completing an order form or determining the amount of interest on a loan from an advertisement.

Five levels of literacy

Level 1 indicates persons with very poor skills, where the individual may, for example, be unable to determine the correct amount of medicine to give a child from information printed on the package.

Level 2 respondents can deal only with material that is simple, clearly laid out, and in which the tasks involved are not too complex. It denotes a weak level of skill, but more hidden than Level 1. It identifies people who can read, but test poorly. They may have developed coping skills to manage everyday literacy demands, but their low level of proficiency makes it difficult for them to face novel demands, such as learning new job skills.

Level 3 is considered a suitable minimum for coping with the demands of everyday life and work in a complex, advanced society. It denotes roughly the skill level required for successful secondary school completion and college entry. Like higher levels, it requires the ability to integrate several sources of information and solve more complex problems.

Levels 4 and 5 describe respondents who demonstrate command of higher-order information processing skills.

ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT

The OECD is a unique forum where governments work together to address the economic, social and environmental challenges of globalisation. The OECD is also at the forefront of efforts to understand and to help governments respond to new developments and concerns, such as corporate governance, the information economy and the challenges of an ageing population. The Organisation provides a setting where governments can compare policy experiences, seek answers to common problems, identify good practice and work to co-ordinate domestic and international policies.

The OECD member countries are: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Chile, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Luxembourg, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States. The European Union takes part in the work of the OECD.

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OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training
A Learning for Jobs Review

IRELAND

For OECD member countries, high-level workplace skills are considered a key means of supporting economic growth. Systems of vocational education and training (VET) are now under intensive scrutiny to determine if they can deliver the skills required.

Learning for Jobs is an OECD study of vocational education and training designed to help countries make their VET systems more responsive to labour market needs. It will expand the evidence base, identify a set of policy options and develop tools to appraise VET policy initiatives.

Ireland has a wide range of VET provision targeted at different client groups. The national qualifications framework is comprehensive and includes a strong commitment to the avoidance of dead-ends and pathways of progression. At the same time, the economic crisis is making intense demands on the Irish VET system, particularly on the apprenticeship system, which focuses on a narrow set of occupations. Weak literacy and numeracy are serious problems for many learners, and many of those looking after VET students, in particular those in companies, lack pedagogical training.

Among the review’s recommendations:

- Review the apprenticeship system to improve its efficiency and fairness and make extensive use of workplace training in all VET programmes.
- Respond to the crisis, both modifying and reinforcing existing measures.
- Conduct a review of FÁS training services to enhance mechanisms for accountability and quality improvement.
- Systematically identify the literacy and numeracy problems of those who come into contact with training services and provide basic skills support to those in need.
- Ensure that all teachers, trainers and instructors have some pedagogical training.
- Provide better data and evaluation of VET programmes, and create a comprehensive website for career guidance.

OECD is conducting country VET policy reviews in Australia, Austria, Belgium (Flanders), the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Korea, Mexico, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom (England and Wales), and the United States (South Carolina and Texas). A report on Chile has been published and report on the People’s Republic of China is in preparation. The initial report of Learning for Jobs is available on the OECD website. The final report on the study’s findings will be published in 2010.

Background information and documents are available at www.oecd.org/edu/learningforjobs.