

Country Report IRELAND

Lorna Unwin

Institute of Education, University of London

1. Background and country context

During the 1990s and first half of 2000, Ireland's economy doubled in size, resulting in the fastest economic growth of any country in the OECD, despite being affected to some extent by the global slump in the information and communication technologies (ICT) sector (OECD 2006). This led to Ireland being referred to as the 'Celtic Tiger'. Ireland's population, which stood at 4.2 million in 2006, has also been witnessing growth with an expansion of 8.1% between 2002 and 2006 (CSO Ireland 2007). This has been partly due to increasing numbers of migrant workers from the European Union (EU) due to Ireland's 'open door' policy, and to the numbers of Irish people returning to the country after living overseas attracted by the economic success and improved living standards. In the past decade, the per-capita income in Ireland has caught up with and overtaken the EU average. Ireland has the second highest fertility rate (1.99%) in Europe (after Iceland) and has the highest proportion of people under the age of 30 and under the age of 5 in Europe. Its school population will increase by 19% between 2005 and 2015, exceeding that of any other EU country.

The OECD (2006) describes Ireland as one of the world's more 'open economies' with foreign investors attracted to the country due to its:

- Business friendly regulatory environment
- Flexible labour market
- Moderate tax rates
- Sound fiscal policy

Ireland is second only to Luxembourg in terms of the amount of direct foreign investment in the country and it is estimated that some 49.2% of employees in manufacturing are based in companies that are under foreign ownership (see Heraty and Collings 2006).

The government department responsible for matters related to in-company training is the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE) and it delegates this to Forfás, the National Policy and Advisory Board for Enterprise, Trade, Science, Technology and Innovation (see Forfás 2006). Forfás oversees three 'sister' agencies, one of whom, *Enterprise Ireland*, has the mission to: "...accelerate the development of world-class Irish companies to achieve strong positions in global markets resulting in increased national and regional prosperity". (www.enterprise-ireland.com/AboutUs) The agency operates a Productivity and Improvement Fund, which gives grants of up to 150,000 euros for training initiatives in companies and across sectors. A key part of the agency's training mission is to improve management and leadership capacity in which it invested 11.5 million euros in 2006.

Despite Ireland's economic success over the past few years, the OECD has warned that the country faces some considerable challenges if it is to maintain its growth rates. These challenges include: increasing the number of women in the labour market (Ireland is below the OECD average, except for women under the age of 30); making significant improvements in childcare services; transport infrastructure; the competitiveness of nation-

alized industries such as electricity supply; and the participation of young people in pre-school learning and in education beyond the school leaving age of 16.

The Irish education system, overseen by the Department of Education and Science, has been going through a number of changes in recent years, partly in response to demands to improve post-compulsory participation rates. Secondary level education (from age 12 to 18) is provided in different types of schools: secondary; vocational; community; and comprehensive. At ages 15/16, young people sit a national examination (set by the State Examinations Committee) for the Junior Certificate and at 17/18 for one of three types of Leaving Certificate. The general education Leaving Certificate (which includes a range of academic subjects) gives access to further and higher education, but the numbers taking this have been in decline since 2002 (see FÁS 2007). The Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme, whose numbers are showing a slight increase, also operates as an access route to further and higher education, and for apprenticeships. The Leaving Certificate Applied is designed for young people who are assessed as not having the ability to progress to third level study. Young people can also enter a Transition Year at 16 in which they can participate in a range of educational and work-based experiences designed to develop their social awareness and life skills.

Third level education provision in Ireland is provided by universities and Institutes of Technology. The Further and Adult Education sector in Ireland, which comprises colleges of further education and community education centres, is regarded as being separate from the third level education provision and is responsible for a range of programmes including post-school certificates, second chance education for the unemployed, basic skills education, and programmes such as Youthreach for early school leavers. There is also a relatively small private sector operating at third level. This comprises colleges and institutes offering courses in banking, accountancy, insurance, management and law.

Government-funded vocational education and training in Ireland is organized by the National Training and Employment Authority, known as Foras Áiseanna Saothair (FÁS), which was set up in 1988 following the 1987 Labour Services Act. FÁS is governed by a Board, appointed by the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment and comprising representatives from the trade unions, employers, social welfare organisations, education and youth groups, together with representatives from Government Departments (Ministries of Finance; Education and Science; Social, Community and Family Affairs; and Enterprise, Trade and Employment), along with FÁS employee representatives. Its budget in 2006 was 999.7 million euros.

FÁS has 66 offices and 20 training spread across Ireland and is responsible for:

- Training and employment programmes
- Recruitment services for jobseekers and employers
- Advisory services for industry
- Support for community-based enterprises

Apprenticeships in Ireland are defined as programmes to develop the skills of 'craftspeople' and are available in 23 crafts as follows:

- Agricultural Mechanics
- Aircraft Mechanics
- Brick and Stonelaying
- Cabinetmaking
- Carpentry and Joinery
- Construction Plant Fitting
- Electrical

- Electrical Instrumentation
- Fitting
- Floor and Wall Tiling
- Heavy Vehicle Mechanics
- Instrumentation
- Metal Fabrication
- Motor Mechanics
- Painting and Decorating
- Plastering
- Plumbing
- Print Media
- Refrigeration and Air Conditioning
- Sheet Metalworking
- Tool Making
- Vehicle Body Repairs
- Wood Machinery

The occupational nature of these apprenticeships means that apprentices are almost entirely male and, hence, so are the instructors, trainers and vocational teachers who deliver the training. The restriction of apprenticeships to traditional crafts and trades continues despite the prediction that three out of four Irish workers will be employed in the service sectors by 2010. Apprenticeships generally last four years and are divided into seven phases: 3 phases of off-the-job and 4 of on-the-job training. Training takes place in the workplace, in FÁS training centres, Institutes of Technology and in other approved centres, some of which are in the private sector. Apprentices work towards an Advanced Certificate awarded by the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC), which was set up in 2001 as a statutory body. FÁS also administers Traineeships which last from 24 to 40 weeks and which also lead to FETAC qualification.

2. Organisation

Ireland shares the same characteristics in terms of the history and prevailing culture of workforce development (both at formation and post-formation stages) as the United Kingdom (UK). The labour market is largely unregulated and skills' training takes place mainly in the workplace. Surveys in 2005 estimated that less than half of Irish employees (48%) had participated in employer-sponsored training (NCP, 2005). A survey in 2007 of members of the Small Firms Association revealed that one third of owner-managers had not undergone training in the last 12 months and that the average spending on training had been less than 5,000 euros (see SFA 2007). In addition, 20% of companies reported they had spent nothing on training. A survey of employers' use of FÁS services in 2007 found that six out of ten had never used the agency's services and this rose to two out of three for companies with 100 or more employees. The most popular services related to recruitment and apprenticeship (Conway and Fox, 2007). A report drawing on data from the Irish Quarterly National Household Survey in 2006 found that 12% of employed people had received some form of training in the previous four weeks to being interviewed for the survey (Fox, 2007). The report also showed that access to training was, however, determined by certain characteristics:

- Females were more likely to receive training
- Younger employees (aged 25-34) were more likely to receive training than older employees (aged 55-64)
- Graduates were far more likely to receive training than employees with a Junior Certificate

- Associate professionals and professionals were more likely to receive training than production operatives and craft workers
- Employees in the public sector and financial services sector were more likely to receive training and employees in agriculture or manufacturing

Just as in the UK, the Irish government has been focusing attention on the need for Ireland to become a 'knowledge economy' in order to meet the challenges of globalisation. The National Development Plan for 2007-2013 states that 7.7 billion euros will be invested in the up-skilling of the employed workforce and 2.8 billion euros in measures to train and engage groups outside the workforce (see www.ndp.ie). Targets have been set to increase the qualification levels of the workforce: 48% to have a third level qualification or higher; 45% to have a Leaving Certificate; and 7% to have a Junior Certificate. These targets are similar to those set by the recent Leitch Report for the UK (see Leitch, 2006).

In 2003, the National Centre for Partnership and Performance (NCP) was asked by government to convene a 'Forum on the Workplace of the Future'. This examined a range of issues including the nature of employee involvement in workplace decisions (see NCP, 2005). The Forum led to the development of a 'National Workplace Strategy', which was launched in 2005. The strategy has five priority areas:

- Commitment to workplace innovation
- Capacity for change
- Developing future skills
- Access to opportunities
- Quality of working life

In addition, four aspects of 'workplace attitudes and practices' have been identified as in need of attention:

1. **Leadership and capacity of change** (capability of managers, employers and trade unions to proactively champion and manage change)
2. **Up-skilling and workplace learning** (removal of barriers to work-related learning and training – especially in the case of workers in lower-skilled jobs and those with narrow skill sets in vulnerable areas of the economy)
3. **Promoting diversity and work-life balance** (need to be promoted as an integral part of every organisation's culture and management)
4. **Practical approaches to partnership and employee involvement** (seen as best mechanism for tackling the challenges facing workplaces)

In a survey of 1,491 employers in the private sector and 392 public sector organizations in Ireland in 2003, Williams et al (2004) found that the majority of employers (66%) thought that training and development was important in terms of the future of their organizations and helping them overcome increasing external pressures. For public sector employers, training and development was particularly important. The report also noted that, in terms of reacting to external pressures, relatively large percentages of private sector employers had assigned a high importance to progressive employment policies and a third were introducing new work-practices.

As in the UK, in-company trainers in Ireland come from a wide range of occupational backgrounds and will have entered the profession at different stages and for different reasons.

3. Economy

The vast majority of investment in in-company training in Ireland, amounting to 1 billion euros, comes from employers and a relatively small amount, 49 million euros, comes from the public purse (see Forfás 2006). In 2001, it was estimated that the average annual expenditure (for companies employing more than 50 people) was 3.85 per cent of the payroll, but that this had dropped slightly to 3.55 per cent in 2003 (Heraty and Collings 2006)

In 2000, Ireland abandoned its system of sector-based training levies and replaced it with a National Training Fund (NTF) which is made up of the income generated from taking 0.7% of every employee's Pay-Related Social Insurance (PRSI) contribution. Some 75% of the Irish workforce is covered by PRSI. In 2005, the NTF amounted to 312 million euros of which 100 million was spent on apprenticeships, 23 million on continuing vocational education and training for people in employment, 180 million for the training of unemployed people, and one million for infrastructure to support advice and guidance services. A further 8 million was allocated to Skillnets, which are networks of enterprises, who come together on a geographical or sectoral basis, to share resources and ideas (including in relation to training) to help their businesses grow. A report for Skillnets in 2005 stated that there were still shortcomings in the quality and organisation of employer-based training in Ireland and that many trainers failed to adequately evaluate the courses they ran and the impact they were having within enterprises (see Impact Measurement Centre 2005).

4. Selection and Allocation

There is very little up-to-date literature and no detailed statistics on the HRD and training community in Ireland. The Central Statistics Office in Ireland publishes figures for the numbers of people employed under the same Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) codes as used in the UK (see www.cso.ie). Three SOC codes cover people employed in some form of training role. The figures only show the total numbers and are not broken down according to type of employment or by gender.

SOC code 124	Personnel, Training and IER Managers in Ireland	6,500
SOC code 363	Personnel, Industrial Training Officers	1,600
SOC code 391	Vocational and Industrial Trainers and Instructors	5,600

In October, 2007, the Irish Institute for Training and Development announced that it was starting a project to identify the skill and education level of people working in the fields of Human Resource Development (HRD) and training and to assess their needs for professional development in order to improve the stock of qualified training consultants working in companies and as external consultants. The findings will be used to inform the work of the Institute in designing, developing and piloting programmes and initiatives to meet the needs of professionals and businesses. This initiative is important in that it will provide up-to-date information on the HRD and training community in Ireland.

5. Qualification

There is no statutory requirement in Ireland for trainers to be qualified, though mandatory certification will occur in certain sectors, particularly where health and safety regulations are prominent. In-company trainers in Ireland have access to a similar range of qualifications as in the UK, though there is far less post-graduate provision in universities in terms of Master's level qualifications.

Trainers in Ireland who seek qualifications can apply to two bodies: the IITD; and the UK-based Chartered Institute of Training and Development (CIPD). The IITD is the Irish representative on the European Training and Development Federation and the International Federation of Training and Development Organisations. It was formed in 1960 and now has 2,000 professional and student members. It runs its events through a network of regional 'chapters', which organize evening seminars and meetings, and it also publishes a quarterly magazine called *HRD Ireland*. It also organizes a network for trainers in micro organizations (less than 5 employees). The CIPD, however, claims on its website to have 6,000 members in Ireland located in seven regional 'branches'. These two organizations are, therefore, in competition with each other both for members and for the right to 'represent' the trainer community. A new BA in Training and Development has been launched in the autumn of 2007 by the IITD in partnership with the National College of Ireland in Dublin. Study will be part-time and organized around a series of modules.

The IITD has a similar membership structure to the CIPD:

- FELLOW (post-graduate qualification and significant senior experience and evidence of continued professional development)
- MEMBER (first degree and/or diploma plus significant senior experience and evidence of continued professional development)
- ASSOCIATE (first degree or diploma plus experience at a junior level and evidence of continued professional development)
- GRADUATE (IITD diploma or relevant qualification at diploma/degree level)
- AFFILIATE/STUDENT (for people who want to have an association with the IITD, perhaps whilst studying)

The IITD's qualifications are as follows:
Certificate in Training and Development

Aim: to enable participants to develop the necessary knowledge, skills and confidence to undertake training activities. These include the development of planning, delivery and evaluation of skills in the area of training and development.

Participants attend 75 hours of training divided across three modules: systematic training; interpersonal skills development and delivering training; and training strategies and training administration. Assessment is through written assignments, tasks in the classroom, a project, and presentations.

Trainer Skills Certificate

This is designed to help companies develop a 'pool' of people who can undertake training functions and, hence, help to improve business performance. The course lasts four days and covers four modules: adult learning; analyzing training needs; designing training activities; and delivering training.

6. Conclusions

The Irish National Development Plan for 2007-2013 states that more money will be invested in the training of trainers, though much of this appears to be focused on trainers in educational institutions. There is specific reference to in-company trainers. This reflects the continued marginality of in-company trainers in a country where public policy is heavily concentrated on general education and on initial vocational education.

References

- Conway, S. and Fox, R. (2007) *Survey of Employers' Use of FÁS Services-2007*, Dublin: FÁS.
- CSO Ireland (2007) *Census, 2006*, Dublin, Stationery Office.
- FÁS (2007) *Monitoring Ireland's Skills Supply*, Dublin: FÁS.
- Forfás (2006) *Forfás Annual Report*, Dublin: Forfás.
- Fox, R. (2007) *Participation of Employed in Education/Training 2006*, Dublin: FÁS.
- Heraty, N. and D.G. Collings (2006) International briefing 16: training and development in the Republic of Ireland, *International Journal of Training and Development*, 10(2): 164-174.
- Impact Measurement Centre (2005) *Measuring the Impact of Training and Development in the Workforce*, Dublin: Forfás.
- NCPP (2005) *Forum on the Workplace of the Future: Final Report*, Dublin: NCPP.
- OECD (2006) *Economic Survey of Ireland, 2006, Policy Brief*, Paris: OECD.
- SFA (2007) *SFA Training Survey*, Dublin: Small Firms Association.
- Williams, J., Blackwell, S., Gorby, S., O'Connell, P. and Russell, H. (2004) *The Changing Workplace: A Survey of Employers' Views*, Dublin: NCPP.