

# EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AND ACCESS TO SKILL TRAINING

Generally, in Ireland, we have tended to separate the education and training needs of individuals and have failed to recognise the important relationship between education and training. Even within educational policies, adult education, an important factor in terms of the needs of the unemployed, has never received the recognition or the resources it deserves. This is highlighted by the fact that less than 1% of educational expenditure is directed toward supporting adult education.

Given the high levels of unemployment there is a need to address how education levels relate to skill training provision. The examination of this relationship is necessary because often many unemployed individuals have both a low level of skills and educational attainment.

Within the labour market, educational qualifications have come to play an important role in determining access to both employment and training. Many skill training courses, both in the private and State sector have formal minimum entry requirements at Leaving Certificate level. Such entry standards are a major barrier to many older unemployed people who wish to access skills training.

With educational levels being used as an entry standard to many training provisions, entry to such provision for those unemployed who have a low formal education attainment is closed. Since they cannot access the training in the skills they need to compete for the employment that is available, their prospects of ever accessing employment is very small.

National data show that in comparison to those in employment and those who have been unemployed for less than one year the long-term unemployed have lower levels of educational qualifications. This is highlighted by an examination of data from the Labour Force Survey which indicates that 53% of the long-term

unemployed have no second level qualifications and that 86% had left school without a leaving Certificate.

The "Life on the Dole" research found that only 11% of the men interviewed in Tallaght had completed the Leaving Certificate. The level of educational disadvantages increases with age. For example, nationally it is estimated that 82% of the unemployed aged between 45-64 have no second level qualification. This compares with only 30% of those under 25.

Given such high numbers a number of issues need to be addressed in order to assist the unemployed overcome the formal educational barrier to skill training.

Firstly, greater linkages between second chance educational provision for the long-term unemployed such as the Vocational Training Opportunity Scheme (VTOS) and State and private sectors skill training needs to be developed. This would necessitate, for example, greater co-operation between the VECs who operate the VTOS and FAS who provide much of the States training. Even with a good linkage programme a possible drawback for the individual is the length of time such a process would take. Given the financial, social and personal circumstances of many unemployed people, they may not be in a position to commit themselves to a three year full-time process (two years VTOS, one year skill training) which has no guarantee of employment and which, at present, offers little in the way of financial rewards.

Secondly, measures could be developed which would help overcome the formal entry requirement without the need to obtain a formal Leaving Cert. For example, the development of a system for older unemployed people which would recognise and certify their work experience.

Such a system, would benefit the unemployed who would have undertaken some form of an apprenticeship or who may have worked in a skilled job but without obtaining formal training. There is no reason why there should not be a mature entry mechanism for skill training as is found in many Third level courses.

Because of the relationship between formal education and access to skill training, there is a need to develop policies which assist those unemployed who have low levels of formal education to access skill training. Failure to assist the unemployed overcome the formal educational barriers could have long-term consequences. Principal among these will be that any employment that is available will be permanently confined to low skilled, low paid and insecure opportunities.

At a broader level, if issues of equity are to be taken seriously then the relationship between educational attainment and access to skill training needs to be addressed so that people who are severely disadvantaged in the labour market can have opportunity of entry to high quality employment related skill training.

## Appointment of New Director

The Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice has a new Director. He is Bill Tonor S.J. who comes to the Centre from the National College of Industrial Relations.

Frank Samon has moved on. The Centre wishes to thank Frank for his hard work and to wish him every success in his new role.