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Project funded by:



Education and Culture DG

Lifelong Learning Programme

This project has been funded with support of the European Commission.

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Gearing
Adult Education
Towards
Occupational
Mobility

**Summary of the Irish
National Assessment
report**

Dublin, 2009

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Background

Traditionally, it was assumed that people within the labour market stayed in the same occupation from the time they entered until they retired. However, in recent years the prevalence of people changing to a **second occupation** — whether out of desire or necessity — has increased. Coupled with dynamic changes in the labour market, an increasing number of workforce participants are confronted with the challenge of successfully **mastering a change in occupation while still working in their current occupation**.

Research has indicated that occupational mobility generally requires some form of re-skilling and re-qualification. This raises the question **whether the vocational education training (VET)/adult education system meets the requirements of people wishing to change occupations**, particularly those already in employment who, consequently, have limited time resources to engage in re-training.

Against this background, the **GATOM [Gearing Adult Education Towards Occupational Mobility] project**, funded by the EU Lifelong Learning Programme and covering eight European countries (Austria, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Poland, Romania, Spain and Switzerland), aims to contrast the available adult education/VET training provision with the requirements of employees regarding re-skilling/re-qualification support measures in the context of an occupational change, and their potential employers.

This document summarises the **national assessment report** for Ireland which investigates the above research issue with particular focus on the challenges faced by labour market participants wishing to switch to three occupations (plumbers, chefs and healthcare assistants) and outlines recommendations for policy-makers and training providers. Additionally, individual **training inventories** giving good practice examples for training courses suitable for occupational changers intending to enter these professions have been developed. All of the reports and training inventories for the eight GATOM partner countries can be downloaded from the GATOM project web site:

www.mobility-training.eu

Main characteristics of available adult training and education measures

In spite of the heterogeneity of available training provision, two major forms of VET/adult education training provision are available for gaining professional expertise:

- ♦ **Comprehensive occupational training** is mainly available in the context of the initial vocational training system or targeted at the unemployed. In most cases, it is provided on a full-time basis over a relatively long duration (3–5 years) and is, thus, largely unsuitable for occupational changers who are already in the labour market;
- ♦ **Specialised occupational training** provision which focus on specific or in-depth qualifications that may be more easily combined with work commitments because they are provided in the evening, are of a short duration or have a modular format. However, in most of the cases they are targeted at people who already having a basic qualification in the occupation under consideration. Consequently, this form of training provision is not widely accessible to occupational changers who lack experience in that occupation.

In general, both forms are characterised by a **combination of theory and practice**. The importance of practical training in real life working conditions is also emphasised as a key requirement both by trainees and (future) employers and highlights the necessity for co-operation between training providers and the enterprise sector. Some of the training measures surveyed by the GATOM partners also have a specific focus on the development of **soft skills** (e.g. team-work, interacting with clients, etc). This is particularly evident in training provision for healthcare assistants, but is also considered important by employers in respect of the other two occupations.

The research by the GATOM partners has found that there is an absence of **career counselling** or **aptitude tests** to assess the suitability of the candidate for the occupation under consideration before they start the training programme. However, there are examples of good practice where there is scope for potential occupational changers to sample their desired occupation before committing themselves to training programme.

The training courses surveyed by the GATOM project partners differed considerably in relation to the trainer's qualifications, geographic availability, cost and certification. Occupational changers and employers interviewed by the project partners gave favourable rating to the training provision that was offered locally and at a reasonable price (or which was supported by public funds) and which resulted in an officially recognised certification. The respondents also gave favourable mention to training programmes that imparted substantial practical and up-to-date knowledge.

Prospective occupational changers often faced particular challenges in sourcing relevant and suitable training courses, and the extent of the challenge increased for those living outside major urban areas. As noted in Section 4 below, Fáilte Ireland, the National Tourism Development Authority, has developed a customised version of its four year National Apprenticeship in Professional Cookery to suit the needs of a wider variety of potential trainees including specifically career changers. The new Professional Cookery Nine Month Intensive Learning Programme which was initially offered in a few locations has now being extended nationally.

Though the vocational education training system emphasises the availability of recognition of prior learning, the experience of some of the Irish occupational changers would indicate that there is much rhetoric but little practical application. The situation is compounded because as many of the interviewees were returning to the vocational training system after many years' absence they were often unaware that their prior skills or qualifications could be used to gain course exemptions.



Recommendations

3.1 Recommendations for national government

- ♦ Initiation of **awareness raising campaigns** to inform training providers on the requirements of the mobile workforce in the context of re-qualification on the basis of standardised **data on occupational change** (extent, characteristics of the mobile workforce, etc.) and **occupation-specific investigations** to identify the “ideal” **characteristics of training provision** for occupational changers;
- ♦ Development of **common quality standards** for the adult education system and familiarise employers therewith;
- ♦ Development of structures and processes to facilitate the **recognition of informally gained skills/competences and prior experience**; this particularly important for occupational changers who are already participating in the labour market and who have limited time resources to engage in re-training;
- ♦ Support the matching of the **needs of occupational changers with the supply of training courses** by:
 - » Increasing the **level of transparency** in the training market e.g. by providing up-to-date registers of training providers and courses and verifying the type and level of qualification award of available training courses;
 - » Offering **information, advice and consultancy services** for people who are already in the workforce i.e. in employment, but who wish to gain the skills and qualifications necessary to effect a change in occupation;
 - » Supporting **work sampling opportunities or short-term internships** to give prospective occupational changers the opportunity of testing their aptitudes and skills in real work situations;
 - » Providing **occupation-specific online platforms** to provide more information about specific jobs and related tasks and working conditions;
- ♦ Provision of **financial support** for employees and employers (e.g. cost subsidies, tax incentives) to facilitate occupational change. Louth County Council is piloting an innovative scheme that allows employees to gain new vocational skills. Two Council employees have been able to train to become plumbers which they would not have been able to undertake on their own without significant personal and financial hardship;

- ✦ Provision of **childcare facilities** to occupational changers while participating in re-qualification measures for traditional female occupations;

3.2 Recommendations for training providers

- ✦ Improve the **provision of training outside of major urban centres** as exemplified by the wide geographical availability of Fáilte Ireland's **Professional Cookery Nine Month Intensive Learning Programme** (see Section 4 below) which is offered in locations such as Tralee and Letterkenny as well as Dublin and Cork;
- ✦ Provide occupational changers with career **guidance counselling and aptitude tests** to investigate whether or not they are really suited for the occupation they are considering; where possible, offer opportunities for job sampling. As an illustration, one chef training provider in Ireland offers prospective students an opportunity to sample work in a commercial kitchen prior to starting the course; this provides the trainee with an insight into the realities of professional cooking and into the hard and soft skills required. In the case of Fáilte Ireland's Professional Cookery Nine Month Intensive Learning Programme, training providers interview applicants with a view to assessing their level of maturity and commitment to the field of professional cookery;
- ✦ Offer personal **mentoring and coaching** to occupational changers, many of whom have been absent from the education and training sector for a long period of time, during the training course;
- ✦ Ensure that training courses are provided on a **modular basis** to facilitate occupational changers to focus on those skill areas where they are lacking;
- ✦ Give consideration to the **duration, timing and delivery** of education/training measures to suit the needs of occupational changers e.g. evening/weekend classes, distance learning, etc.;
- ✦ **Limit the number of course participants** (e.g. max. 20) so as to individualise the education/training provision and provide a homogeneous class (e.g. age, educational background or prior experiences of participants);
- ✦ Have regard for the **learning requirements of an ageing workforce**;
- ✦ Assure the **qualifications and long-standing practical experience of the trainers**;
- ✦ **Involve enterprises** in the design of training courses and, in particular, the development of practical or employer-based training;
- ✦ Ensure that there is **good balance between theoretical knowledge and practical skills** in the development of training courses;
- ✦ Develop courses that enable the enhancement of the trainees' **soft skills**;

- ♦ Offer **certification** that is recognised within the National Qualifications Framework or that is acceptable to employers.



Good practice examples

Increasing the transparency on the training market

Opintoluotsi¹ is a Finnish online portal providing information on education, courses and studies in various institutes and is provided by the Ministry of Education. Opintoluotsi has been a development project in 2000–2006, supported by the European Social Fund. The purpose of the service is to support people in finding education possibilities suitable for their individual situation. The services of Opintoluotsi are offered to all potential users of education and training provision regardless of their age or background. The services include information on all education and training courses available, on the diplomas and degrees and the courses leading to them, on the various forms of additional and further training and on courses related to hobbies and other interests. Opintoluotsi also offers information on schools and universities, their location, the terms of admission, financing of the studies and the arrangements related to the education and training provided. There are also articles and case studies about different occupations and people working in them. The portal gives users an opportunity to ask for more detailed information or career counselling from counsellors (questions are normally answered within five days).

Koulutusnetti² is another Finnish online portal which helps people to find suitable training routes, information about applying for courses, up-to-date knowledge about the supply of the education, contact information of the educational institutions and descriptions of different degrees and occupations. Koulutusnetti is managed by the National Board of Education. The Ministry of Employment and the Economy has also launched a portal for career planning for adults. It provides information about work, occupations and education and training opportunities. Primary, it offers a platform where an adult can plan his/her career and different opportunities in their current life situation. There are different exercises available which help the user to choose a suitable occupation. The portal, **A-URA**, is located at <http://www.avosto.net/a-ura/>.

People who are interested in the cooking profession in Germany but who lack relevant contacts within the industry can interact with professional cooks and find out more about individual course offers through **online forums** (Köchetreff, Das Köcheforum³). Ongoing discussions in these forums give authentic testimony of the current processes and of the acknowledgement of labour experiences and training outcomes. However, an overview of training measures and conditions for occupational changers is not available.

1. <http://www.opintoluotsi.fi>
2. <http://www.koulutusnetti.fi>
3. <http://www.koecheforum.de>

Career counselling for the mobile workforce

In Switzerland, career advice is available and covers all sectors of the economy (i.e. there are specialists counselling clients for individual occupations). The service is free of charge for persons aged 20 or younger; older clients pay a small fee.

In Finland, the selection of adult education measures is publicly supported by the elaboration of individual training plans for mature persons seeking (re-)qualification. As these also take into account competences that have been gained on an informal basis (e.g. learning on-the-job) these training plans may be assessed to be particularly suitable for uncovering competence development initiatives in the framework of an occupational change. The consideration of previously gained skills is realised by conducting competence-based exams that are jointly conducted by education providers, practitioners and the social partners.

The [Support Plan for the Textiles Industry](#) (Plan de Apoyo al Sector Textil y de la Confección) was implemented in 2006 by the Spanish Government to foster competitiveness in the sector and to alleviate the negative consequences on employment and workers.⁴ In this sense, even if the plan includes measures to keep as many workers as possible working in the sector, it also pays attention to initiatives intended to re-train and relocate surplus workers, and it also contains special measures to provide special help for older workers that can not be relocated. The specific initiatives to retrain workers include a previous “ad-hoc” research of the professional profile of the workers of the sector, followed by counselling activities to orientate the professional career of these workers, and specific support initiatives in order to provide training to these workers in growing activity sectors with a deficit of workers in certain detailed occupations. To this purpose, the plan also includes special incentives (reductions in payments to social security), addressed to those companies that hire workers coming from the textiles industry.

Recognition of informally gained expertise

The Spanish government recently (January 18, 2008) passed the Royal Decree 43/2008 to regulate the so-called certificates of professionalism (certificados de profesionalidad). These certificates certify the availability of competences and skills required for fulfilling a specific profession. They can be obtained through two main ways, i.e. either via an ad-hoc training activity or via the official validation of professional experience acquired on-the-job.

In Switzerland, a new vocational education and training law was passed in 2004, allowing the recognition and validation of prior vocational or general skills and practical experiences and thereby opening the opportunity for adults to gain federally recognised education and training certificates without having to attend formal education and training programmes. For this purpose, a validation system determining the minimum standards for the validation system has been developed at federal level, acting as a guideline for the cantonal validation system to assure quality and comparability across Switzerland. After an information and

4. The agreement reached by social partners (the Spanish government, the main two trade unions and the Intertextile Council), includes several measures to adapt the industry to the structural changes of the sector in world trade, and to limit the negative effects of this liberalisation. It is important to stress that the 12,000 companies of the sector employ about 140,000 workers.

counselling phase candidates have to do a self-assessment regarding their competences that is evaluated by experts. Afterwards, the validating body decides upon the recognition of prior skills and/or the necessity of (further) competence development initiatives. At the end, the candidate receives a certificate that is equal to the ones attained in formal education.

Financial support of (re-)qualification

In Finland, persons having a working history of at least 5 years and being in a valid public or private employment relationship which has lasted for at least one year are eligible for the adult education allowance if they have been accepted for a diploma, degree or a separate study course under the Finnish education system lasting at least 2 months during which the applicant must be on study leave. The length of the allowance is determined according to the employment history accumulated (0.8 days of grant for each full working month). The allowance comprises a basis part of €500 financed from the State budget and an earnings-related part based on the applicant's salary financed from the unemployment insurance contributions paid by employers and employees. In addition, the applicants can also be given a government guarantee for a student loan (€300 per month).

Provision of childcare facilities

In Finland, communal childcare is available to all children under the age of compulsory education (7 years) (Act 19.1.1973/36, Laki lasten päivähoidosta (Act on Childcare). The Act obligates the municipalities to organise childcare for all children in an appropriate scope and by appropriate methods defined by the demands of the inhabitants of the municipality. The day care services are mostly available only workdays between 6.30 a.m. and 5 p.m. However, there is also round-the-clock day care organised by every municipality for nights, evenings and weekends. This is targeted at the children whose parents or single parent need childcare services outside the "normal" hours due to shift work or occupational studies. The implementation of these principles varies, however, among the municipalities. The legislation gives relatively free hands to the municipalities to organise the supply of these services and to assess who is eligible to the service.

Favourable design of courses (e.g. duration, time schedule, eligibility)

CONAIF (Confederación Nacional de Asociaciones de Empresas de Fontanería, Gas, Calefacción, Protección contra Incendios, Electricidad y Afines), the national business

representative organisation of plumbing companies in Spain, has 16 training centres located all through Spain that are accredited to provide vocational training courses for unemployed people. These courses combine theoretical and practical contents and are focused on teaching the most basic tasks to carry out elementary plumbing activities. In this sense, no special requirement is needed to attend these courses. The characteristics of these courses may be quite different but, in general, they are appropriate for employed persons in terms of length (6 months) time-schedules (i.e., from 18.00 to 22.00 hours) and duration (about 80–100 hours each module, 600–800 hours in total).

In Germany, short-term training courses for the care sector are available. Most courses can be combined with a parallel employment and are open for newcomers in the field. The courses have an average duration of 6 weeks to 3 months. They are part-time-based and/or arranged as evening seminars or in weekend blocks. The courses combine theoretical education (e.g. basic care, body care, hygiene, prophylaxis, medication, medical terminology) with 2 to 3 weeks internships in which trainees gain hands-on practical experience working with patients in a real care setting. These are usually full-time based and taken in a care institution, an elderly home or a hospital. In some training measures the educational providers will organise the internships for the trainee and will connect the participant with a contact person from the care institution, in other measures the participants themselves select and organise the internship.

The Austrian training for home assistants (Heimhilfe) qualifies people to manage the household and the primary health care for old and ill persons at their home. It comprises a theoretical and practical part. The theoretical courses last for at least 200 hours focus on documentation, ethics and occupational knowledge, first aid, hygiene, basic care, basics in pharmacology, basic nutrition and diet science, basics in ergonomics and mobilisation,



gerontology, care of old and ill people, basics in communication, conflict resolution, social and development psychology, housekeeping, environmental protection, safety. The practical part includes 120 hours of practical training in ambulant working fields and 80 hours in (partly) stationary departments. The theoretical courses mainly concentrate on the evening or the weekend and the practical training may be blocked. The expenses vary between about €600 and nearly €1,500. After the participants have successfully passed the majority of the theoretical lessons and the practical training they have to take a final oral exam held by a commission of the training institute (composed of the (vice)director of this educational path, a representative of the supervisory body and three teachers).

The anticipated future demand for chefs led Fáilte Ireland, the National Tourism Development Authority, to develop a customised version of its National Apprenticeship in Professional Cookery to suit the needs of a wider variety of potential trainees including specifically career changers. The new [Professional Cookery Nine Month Intensive Learning Programme](#) is designed to be delivered as an intensive 9-month immersion programme, integrating theory and practice. Only candidates who demonstrate a level of maturity and a commitment to the field of professional cookery will be considered for entry into the programme. During the first 6 months the participants spend 3 days a week in college and 2 days working in industry with an employer of their choice. During the final 3 months, the participants receive intensive structured industry training with an employer of their choice.

Fáilte Ireland pays the college tuition fees and a weekly training allowance (currently €97.70) to students while in college. The employers pay students a wage for the days they work. Participants who successfully complete the programme receive a FETAC Major Award Advanced Certificate Level 6. The course is provided in a wide range of locations: Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway, Waterford, Letterkenny and Tralee.

In Austria, persons without completed apprenticeship training as a cook have the opportunity to get into the new occupational field by attending courses for kitchen workers. These courses impart theoretical and practical knowledge which is necessary for a job as kitchen worker in a restaurant (e.g. prepare cold, warm and dessert cuisine, information about products/ingredients, quality, safety and hygienic aspects). The courses are comparatively short (35 up to 80 training lessons). The lessons are blocked and focus only on five or ten days or have a longer duration and are held in the evening. The costs of such basic training courses range between €250 and €980. The participants receive a confirmation of participation.

In Germany, the Educational Centre for Tourism and Gastronomy (Bildungszentrum für Tourismus und Gastronomie, BTG) of the Wirtschaftsakademie Schleswig-Holstein as well as the Akademie Überlingen Verwaltungs-GmbH offer modular-based kitchen qualifications. These short-term adult training measures are explicitly addressed to newcomers in the sector as well as to job returnees. Participants of the course offered by the Educational Centre for Tourism and Gastronomy in Schleswig-Holstein can choose whether they would like to participate on a full-time basis or in part-time. The full-time course has a duration of 2 months, the part-time course takes 4 months. This qualification is a good example for validation in a wider context; the qualification will be recognised as part of a supplementary vocational education and training course taken later.



The “[Modular Further Training Cook](#)” offered by the DEKRA Academy in Germany is organised in a modular form. It offers individuals a flexible way to gain experience and competencies as a cook. Based on the particular occupational background and training needs of the participants they are free to decide on the starting date and overall duration of the qualification. The course qualifies them for various roles and areas as a cook (e.g. saucier, rotisseur, poissonier, entremetier, pâtisserie, catering, haute cuisine) and also encompasses an internship. The overall duration depends on the modules taken which usually last one month.

Contents, teaching methods

In a previous scheme of the Spanish Institute for Employment (INEM) trainees attended classes for nurses’ qualification every day during 12 months, and each day trainees had some time for theoretical contents at class (4 hours) and some time for practical experience in companies (4 hours). The INEM paid these individuals a part-time salary, and the experience was very positive for participants and for the company.

In Spain, there exist are long-distance learning courses (also involving theoretical and practical parts). Trainees can study at home without any time restriction. These courses prepare students to take the official exams for passing the Medium-Level Vocational Training Degree.

Appendix 1: GATOM Project Partners

Austria	Austrian Institute for SME Research (KMU FORSCHUNG Austria) http://www.kmuforschung.ac.at/
Finland	Small Business Institute, Turku School of Economics and Business Administration http://www.tse.fi
Germany	Berufsbildungswerk Gemeinnützige Bildungseinrichtung des DGB GmbH (bfw) – Competence Center EUROPA http://www.bfw.EU.com
Ireland	Tom Martin & Associates/TMA http://www.tma.ie
Poland	Entrepreneurship and Economic Development Research Institute (EEDRI) at the Academy of Management (Społeczna Wyższa Szkoła Przedsiębiorczości i Zarządzania w Łodzi) http://www.eedri.pl
Romania	Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Romania CCIR http://www.ccir.ro
Spain	ikei research & consultancy http://www.ikei.es
Switzerland (silent partner)	Schweizerischer Verband für Weiterbildung SVEB http://www.alice.ch