



Gearing Adult Education Towards Occupational Mobility (GATOM)

National Assessment Report Ireland

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1 Introduction

The typical professional career of the European workforce has traditionally been characterised by working in the initially learned occupation until the end of the professional life. During the last decades, however, the European labour markets have experienced dynamic developments, caused by economic, political, technological, social and demographic changes. These developments imply that a growing number of persons do not find an employment in their initial occupation and need to take on occupations that can be classified as a second career. Furthermore, today's rising skill shortages require companies to rely more on re-qualified workers. Hence, **occupational mobility** can increasingly be observed on labour markets and is also fostered to some extent by national governments and Public Employment Services. At European level, the European Commission designated the year 2006 as the European Year of Workers' Mobility, and Guideline No. 20 of the Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Employment (2005–2008) calls upon Member States to remove obstacles to mobility for workers.

As there does not exist, however, a standardised and/or commonly applied understanding of "**occupational mobility/change**", a working definition has been elaborated for the analyses of the study on hand. An occupational change is thereby characterised by the change into a new field of professional activity. This includes a substantial alteration of the work contents related to the job before and after the occupational change. In the context of an occupational change significantly different core competences are necessary to fulfil the new job-related tasks and it is not only an enlargement of activities/responsibility in terms of career development. The occupational change may be conducted with or without geographic mobility as well as within the same company or in conjunction with a new employer.

For successfully mastering an occupational change it will, among other issues, in most of the cases be necessary to **acquire new or at least update/strengthen existing knowledge**. Data for Germany, for example, show that about one fifth to one third of the workforce experiences an occupational change (*Seibert, 2007* or *Isaoglu, 2006*), and half of them cannot use their existing competences for their new job (*Hofbauer/König, 1973*). In Italy, the share of people (with apprenticeship training) changing occupation is estimated to be as high as 35 % - 41 %, and for Austria this percentage lies between 15 % and 68 % (depending on the time horizon considered) (*Klicpera et al.*, no date).

So, the question arises whether the existing VET/adult education systems provide effective (re-)qualification opportunities geared towards persons intending to change to a job not strictly corresponding to the occupation they have initially been trained for. National research studies have shown that there exist a wide range of (re-)qualification instruments for qualifying the workforce for a second career. However, these are rather targeted at unemployed and hardly ever suitable for persons preparing their occupational change while being employed (e.g. inflexible time schedules, no public support for training costs, no advice from the Public Employment Service concerning the most appropriate measures etc.). In terms of both, the intention to reduce unemployment/foster employment and increase the participation in lifelong learning – both pinpointed by the Lisbon strategy – actively supporting planned and strategic occupational changes to a higher extent would be advisable. This form of occupational change is on average more successful than those conducted out of unemployment (*Mandl et al., 2006*).

So far, little is known, however, about the specific needs and requirements of persons strategically planning and preparing an occupational change while being in upright employment. Furthermore, no assessment has yet been made regarding the coherence of available (re-)training measures with the demand of the mobile workforce and their potential employers. Against this background, the project “Gearing Adult Education Towards Occupational Mobility – GATOM” which has been conducted with the support of the European Commission¹ follows the **objectives** to

- identify the demand of employees and employers with regard to (re-)qualification measures in the context of an occupational change planned/prepared during an upright employment
- investigate on the availability of VET/adult education measures being suitable for the (re-)qualification requirements of the mobile workforce
- analyse in how far the available VET/adult education system corresponds to the needs of people changing occupation
- eventually propose suggestions to gear the available education/training instruments towards occupational mobility

The project covers **eight European countries**. Research is conducted at national level under the co-ordination of the Austrian Institute for SME Research by the following partners:

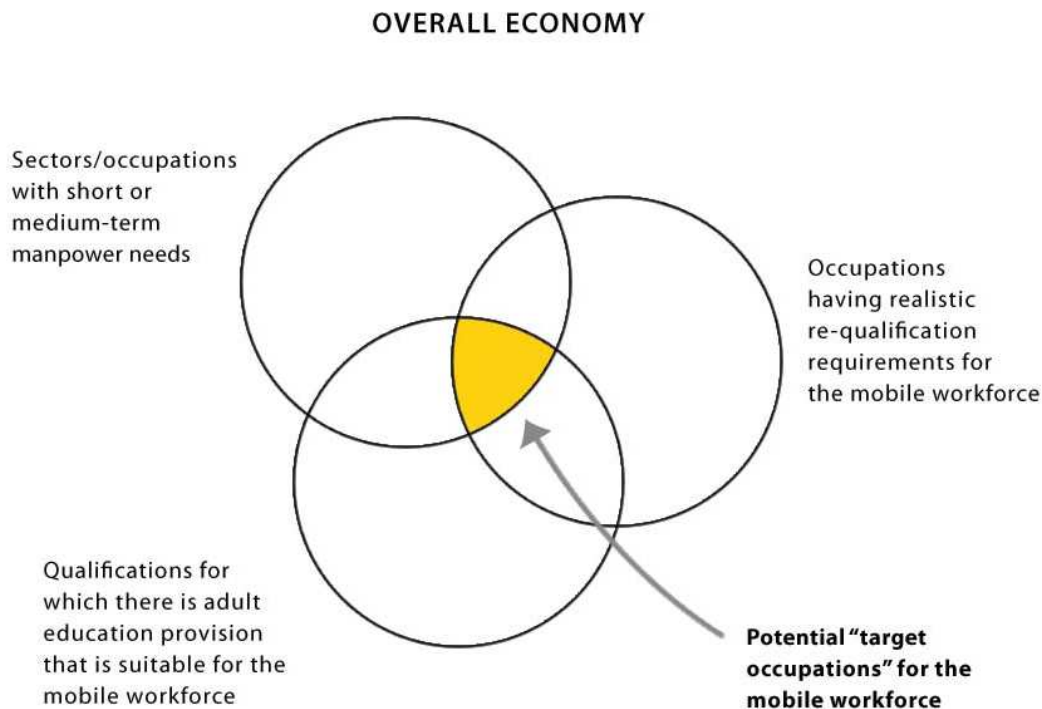
- Austria: Austrian Institute for SME Research
- Finland: Turku School of Economics (TSE)
- Germany: Berufsbildungswerk Gemeinnützige Bildungseinrichtung des DGB GmbH (bfw) – Competence Center EUROPA
- Ireland: Tom Martin & Associates (TMA)
- Poland: EEDRI Institute
- Romania: CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY OF ROMANIA (CCIR)
- Spain: Ikei Research and Consultancy
- Switzerland: Schweizerischer Verband für Weiterbildung (SVEB)

The report on hand constitutes the **National Assessment Report** for Ireland providing a comparison between demand (i.e. employees’ and employers’ requirements) and supply of VET/adult education dealing with (re-)qualification for occupational change. Thereby, a focus has been set on **three professions** (plumbers, cooks, assistant nurses²) as target occupations for mobile workers. These jobs are deemed to be characterised by good job opportunities in the future as well as realistic qualification levels (see Graph 1).

¹ Lifelong Learning Programme by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency

² ISCO Codes (International Standard Classification of Occupations) of the selected professions: plumbers – 7136, cooks – 5122, for assistant nurses: institution-based personal care workers – 5132 or nursing associate professionals – 3231

Graph 1 Selection Criteria for the “Target Occupations“ of the Mobile Workforce



Source: Austrian Institute for SME Research, Tom Martin & Associates/TMA

In Chapter 2, an overview of existing **VET/adult education measures** suitable for (re-) qualification in the framework of occupational change is given. The identification of respective education/training instruments in the investigated sectors was conducted on the basis of the following criteria:

- Location: decentralised offer or e-learning
- Duration: not more than approximately 1 year
- Time schedule: evening/weekend classes, few blocked seminars
- Costs: reasonable with respect to the average income in the target job
- Teaching method and contents covered: focus on practical orientation and no particular specialisation within an occupation (broad, basic qualification)
- Eligibility criteria: no or little previous subject-oriented knowledge/skills required and accessible for adults
- Status of the implementing organisation: private or public
- Preferably certification after the attendance of the training measure

The necessary information was gathered in the form of **desk research** in spring 2008, supplemented by **qualitative interviews** with representatives of the training providers.

To analyse whether the VET/adult education system is generally suitable for people changing occupation during an upright employment the requirements of the enterprises and the workforce have been investigated through **qualitative interviews with mobile workers and concerned enterprises**. On the basis of a semi-standardised questionnaire 15 enterprise interviews in Ireland were focussing on small and medium-sized enterprises in the construction sector, tourism and health/ elderly care and analysed their point of view on the qualification needs of the employees and the most suitable ways to acquire them. Similarly, 15 interviews with persons that have already experienced an occupational change (or were planning to do so in the near future) in Ireland focussed on their experiences with (re-)qualification courses in terms of fostering and hindering factors, beneficial methods and support as well as potential improvement possibilities. The results of these 30 interviews for Ireland (i.e. 15 with entrepreneurs, 15 with the workforce) are summarised in Chapter 3 of the report on hand.³

Chapter 4 derives **conclusions** regarding the suitability of the existing VET/adult education measures for strategically conducted occupational change. Corresponding **recommendations** for relevant stakeholders (i.e. governments, Public Employment Services, training providers, etc.) have been pinpointed to better gear adult education towards occupational mobility.

In discussing the GATOM project with stakeholders (policy-makers, employers and, especially, employees), it is necessary to recognise that there can often be widespread variation in how occupational terminology is used. For example, though the public (and some training providers) considers the occupation of a person skilled in culinary preparation as a “cook”, the hotel/catering industry prefers to use the term “chef”. Within the industry, a “cook” is a relatively unskilled person while a chef is a person with extensive qualifications and experience in culinary preparation. The research has indicated that within the “chef” occupation there is a defined hierarchy (starting from the bottom: trainee chef; commis chef (assistant); chef de partie (section leader); sous chef (deputy head) and chef de cuisine (head chef)).

Economic developments play a significant role in determining the mobility of people within the workforce. During the first years of the decade, the Irish economy grew strongly, particular the construction sector. However, the first six months of 2008 have seen a very rapid deterioration in Irish economic activity: GDP declined in the first two quarters of 2008 and unemployment is currently (September 2008) estimated at 6.3 % and is forecasted to increase to 8 % by the end of 2008. The construction sector has been hardest hit: employment fell by 26,200 during March-May 2008 compared to the same period in 2007.

The rapid growth of the Irish economy during the early years of the decade led to labour shortages and employers had to adopt a more flexible approach to seeking recruits. A major element of the approach adopted by employers was to use skilled immigrant labour, particularly from Eastern Europe, to fill gaps in their manpower and skills needs. However, other approaches used by employers included the re-training of existing staff in new occupational areas. A small number of the employees interviewed during the course of this report had been funded by their employer to train for a new

³ Thereby, it is to be considered that the research on hand was conducted in summer 2008, i.e. before the economic and financial crises affecting demand and supply on the labour market.

occupation; without this funding it was unlikely that the employee concerned would have considered changing occupations.

Next to the National Assessment Reports also a **European Assessment Report** has been elaborated, providing cross-national comparisons of the issues under consideration.

The main findings of both, the National and European Assessment Reports are summarised in **Policy Manuals** in the national languages of the countries covered by the project.

Furthermore, at national level **individual training inventories** for the three occupations under consideration have been elaborated in national language aiming to make the training markets more transparent for persons planning an occupational change.

All reports and outcomes of the project on hand may also be downloaded for free on **www.mobility-training.eu**.

2 Overview on available training and education measures suitable for supporting occupational change

2.1 Construction sector/Plumbers

There is only one training option available in Ireland for people who wish to change occupations to become a plumber. This training option is the FAS Plumbing Apprenticeship which has a minimum duration of four years during which the trainee must successfully complete seven modules. These modules involve a combination of on-the-job training with the employer and off-the-job training in a FAS training centre and Institute of Technology. The employer must be approved by FAS and the employer must register the employee as an apprentice with FAS within two weeks of recruitment.

The seven modules of the plumbing apprenticeship are as follows:

- Phase 1: On-the-job
- Phase 2: Off-the-job
- Phase 3: On-the-job
- Phase 4: Off-the-job
- Phase 5: On-the-job
- Phase 6: Off-the-job
- Phase 7: On-the-job

Phase 1, on-the-job, is an introduction to apprenticeship, safety, the world of work and an introduction to the basic skills of the occupation.

Phase 2, 4 and 6, off-the-job, give the apprentice full-time skills training and related education and provide time for practice of the skills.

Phases 3, 5 and 7, on-the-job, entail the practice and further development of the skills learned in the off-the-job phases.

2.1.1 Technical Training (off-the-job)

This form of training involves learning practical skills together with the theoretical elements including maths, science, technical drawing and personal development skills.

Apprentices are required to pass a series of Modular Assessments (tests) throughout this training. These consist of practical tests, short answer and/or multiple choice knowledge tests and coursework assessments. An examination fee is paid to Institutes during phase 4/6. Where attending off-the-job training necessitates living away from the trainee's home, FAS pays a contribution towards accommodation expenses.

2.1.2 Practical Training (on-the-job)

This form of training is with the employer where the apprentice gets practical training and experience of doing the job. In addition to the skills and knowledge gained, the apprentice is expected to develop competence, confidence and the ability to perform to industrial standards. The apprentice will be assessed on the ability to perform specified tasks to pre-set standards.

A key aspect of the Irish apprenticeship system is that the trainee must find an employer to employ him or her as an apprentice. The trainee is paid by the employer while he or she is in a module that involves on-the-job training. The trainee receives a training allowance while he or she is in a module that involves off-the-job training in a FAS training centre or Institute of Technology. There are agreed rates covering the four years of the plumbing apprenticeship.

Grants are available from FAS to encourage employers to recruit and register female apprentices.

The minimum educational entry requirements for the plumbing apprenticeship is that the prospective trainee must:

- Have obtained Grade D in five subjects in the Department of Education & Science Junior Certificate Examination or an approved equivalent, or
- Have successfully completed an approved Pre-Apprenticeship course, or
- Be over 18 years of age, have at least 3 years work experience approved by FAS.

Trainees are advised that during their apprenticeship they can be sent to a FAS training centre or Institute of Technology anywhere in the country depending on availability of places. This means that a trainee may be sent to a FAS training centre or Institute of Technology in any part of the country even though there may be a FAS training centre or Institute of Technology located geographically closer to them.

FAS state that applicants for the plumbing apprenticeship may be able to claim accreditation for prior learning for relevant parts of the programme.

On successful completion of the programme, the learner is awarded a FETAC (Further Education Training and Awards Council) Level 6 Advanced Certificate Craft – Plumbing.

2.2 Tourism /Cooks

There are a number of ways by which a career changer can gain the skills and competences to switch occupations to become a chef in Ireland.

From the outset it is important to clarify that the words chef and cooks have very different connotations within the hotel and catering industry than they do outside the industry. From the perspective of an industry outsider, the words “chef” and “cook” tend to be used inter-changeably. However, within the hotel and catering industry, a cook refers to a person at the initial rungs of the culinary arts ladder i.e. a person having little

experience and qualifications who is more likely to be involved in food preparation. A chef, on the other hand, is regarded as a more senior position within the kitchen and is likely to be a person with extensive experience and qualifications. A chef will be regarded as the decision-maker within the kitchen. This section of the report focuses on the training required for a career changer to become a chef.

The hotel and catering industry is a key sector in Ireland and apart from being a major employer it is also a significant earner of foreign revenues. The Irish market traditionally focused on the UK and US markets but since has diversified to attract visitors from other markets such as Continental Europe.

The industry has also benefitted from the rise in the Irish economy during the period 1995–2007, particularly in terms of increased expenditure on eating out.

The growth of the hotel and catering sector has resulted in increased employment opportunities. The national agency with responsibility for the development of the tourism sector, Fáilte Ireland, has played a key role in providing training programmes to support the human capital development of the sector.

In addition, a number of the third level colleges such as Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) and the network of Institutes of Technology have played a prominent role in the training of chefs. DIT offers a range of courses at times (e.g. in the evenings) that are suitable for career changers who wish to continue in their first occupation before seeking work as a chef. These courses are modular in nature and students who have acquired certification in a number of these will then be awarded a degree. The main challenge for career changers pursuing the DIT option is that it can take a number of years to gain certification in these modular options; a student can only sit two modules in an academic year.

Another difficulty with the DIT offering is that it is only available for students who live in the Dublin area; it is not available in other regions of the country. It is understood that these modules are mainly intended for people currently working in the hotel/catering sector.

There are also a number of private sector companies that provide training for people wishing to become chefs. The cost of these training programmes can be substantial. One of the prominent of these, the Ballymaloe Cookery School, offers a twelve week certificate course at a cost of €9,795.

One of the main training programmes for chefs is Fáilte Ireland's National Apprenticeship Programme in Professional Cookery which consists of a combination of work-based learning and periods of block release in college over 3 years. The Programme is suitable for people who prefer to "earn and learn".

In year 1, apprentices must complete 6 weeks of college-based training initially and then one day a week for the next 24 weeks. The other 4 days a week will be spent working in a recognised culinary establishment.

In year 2 and 3 apprentices attend an Institute of Technology for 4 weeks full-time, with 1 day a week for 26 weeks and work 4 days a week.

The apprentice's employer must have an on-site trainer, preferably a member of staff who has successfully completed a credited trainer programme.

Participants on the National Apprenticeship in Professional Cookery are paid a weekly rate when they are in college by Fáilte Ireland. Employers are responsible to pay the student while at work on the remaining days.

Participants who complete the National Apprenticeship in Professional Cookery gain certification at FETAC (Further Higher Education and Training Awards Council) Level 6 Major. Successful participants may progress to a culinary arts degree programme on a full or part-time basis.

The difficulty for career changers wishing to become a chef is that the National Apprenticeship in Professional Cookery is a three-year programme and during those three years they are paid apprenticeship rates. This may cause particular hardship for career changers who have family and other commitments.

The advantage, however, of this programme is that it facilitates people to work in a commercial kitchen without initially having a qualification as a chef. This route allows people to start at the bottom rung of the ladder e.g. in the area of food preparation, and then gradually build up their practical skills through their work and gain a recognised qualification by applying for the National Apprenticeship in Professional Cookery. Another advantage of this approach is that it enables a career changer without any qualifications as a chef to experience at first hand the pressures and physicality of working in a commercial kitchen. The chefs, employers and educators interviewed during the course of this study have highlighted the difference between an outsider's often glamorised perspective of a chef's work with the actual reality. Having the opportunity to experience the pressurised working environment of a commercial kitchen and then gaining a qualification may offer certain advantages to a career changer than the opposite approach i.e. first getting a chef's qualification and then seeking employment as a chef, particularly in terms of ascertaining his or her capacity to handle the pressures and physicality of the work.

The anticipated future demand for chefs in Ireland led Fáilte Ireland 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 demonstrate a commitment to the field of professional cookery will be considered for entry into the programme.

The programme as its name implies is nine months in duration. The programme is structured that during the first six months the participants spend three days a week in college and two days working in industry with an employer of their choice. During the final three months, the participants receive intensive structured industry training with an employer of their choice.

Fáilte Ireland pays the apprentice's college tuition fees in respect of the National Apprenticeship in Professional Cookery and pays a weekly training allowance (currently €97.70) to students while in college. The employer pays the apprentice his or her normal wages for the days they are at work.

Participants who successfully complete the Professional Cookery Nine Month Intensive Learning programme receive a FETAC Major Award Advanced Certificate Level 6.

It is also important to note that it is possible in Ireland — as in many other EU Member States — for a person to become a chef without any formal training qualifications. Many of the top Irish chefs started their careers at the bottom of the ladder (washing dishes, preparing vegetables) and then by moving to different restaurants were able to expand their skills and cooking repertoire under the guidance of the head chef. Using this informal apprenticeship system, some of these chefs have graduated to owning their own restaurant.

2.3 Health and elderly care/Assistant nurses

The orientation and growth of the role of healthcare assistants (HCA) in Ireland stems from a number of social, cultural and economic trends affecting healthcare delivery globally. It has been recognised that the recruitment, training and professional development of healthcare assistants has been ad-hoc and dependent upon individual hospitals and employers. The Department of Health and Children (DoHC) have defined the role of the HCA as:

“The role of the health care assistant is to assist nursing/midwifery staff in the delivery of patient care under the direction and supervision of the Clinical Nurse Manager 2/1, Staff Nurses/Midwives/Public Health Nurses and community Registered General Nurse as appropriate” (DoHC, 2001a, p25).

To date, healthcare assistants do not have standardised, multi-faceted job descriptions.

Public awareness of the role of healthcare assistants has increased in the context of the move towards the increased professionalisation of nurses (people training to become a nurse in Ireland now must obtain a university degree). The difference between the role of a nurse and a healthcare assistant has become more marked.

A range of public and private sector training organisations provide training for healthcare assistants. However, much of this training is directed at people who are not currently in the labour market such as school-leavers or at women returning to the labour market after rearing their families.

The main recognised qualification for healthcare assistants is the Healthcare Support Certificate awarded by the Further Education and Awards Council (FETAC) which is at Level 5 on the National Qualifications Framework. Learners must successfully complete eight modules of study, comprising five mandatory modules and three elective modules, to be eligible for the award of a FETAC Certificate in Healthcare Support. Learners who successfully complete between one and seven modules will be awarded a Component Certificate by FETAC.

The five mandatory or core modules are:

- Care skills;
- Care Support;
- Safety and Health at Work;
- Communications;
- Work experience.

The elective modules include the following:

- Anatomy and physiology;
- Care of People with Mental Illness;
- Care of the Older Person;
- Care for Children in Hospital;
- Care for Children (0–6 years);
- Child Development;
- Human Growth and Development;
- Intellectual Disability Studies;
- Introduction To Nursing;
- Palliative Care Support.

The FETAC Certificate in Healthcare Support is regarded as the key qualification for healthcare assistants employed by the Health Service Executive (HSE) which is the State organisation with responsibility for providing health and personal social services to everybody living in Ireland. All healthcare assistants employed by the HSE are obliged to have this qualification or be in the process of acquiring it. A similar situation exists in voluntary hospitals that are funded by the HSE.

The situation with regard to the minimum qualifications of healthcare assistants in the private sector is less clear-cut. The issue here is that training provision in the FETAC Certificate in Healthcare Support is not readily available throughout the country and as a consequence private sector employers do not insist that new recruits have this qualification. Additionally, private sector employers have been able to recruit nurses from other countries whose nursing qualifications are not recognised in Ireland or whose level of English is not yet sufficient to practice as a nurse to undertake a healthcare assistant role. Private sector employers are, however, likely to give preference to candidates that have completed some modules of the FETAC Certificate in Healthcare Support over those that have none. New national quality standards in relation to the provision of residential care settings for older people now specify that all newly recruited care staff and those in post less than one year commence training to FETAC Level 5 or equivalent within 2 years of taking up employment.

The network of Vocational Educational Committees (VECs) is responsible for the provision of adult education at a local level. The VECs have become active in the provision of the compulsory and elective modules for the FETAC Certificate in Healthcare Support. The VECs because of their remit in adult education provide training in these modules both during the day and during the evening. The provision of evening classes allows career changers who wish to hold onto their existing employment while training for their desired occupation of a healthcare assistant. The cost of VEC courses is often considerably lower than those offered by private sector training providers.

However, as each VEC operates at a local (county) level and is autonomous, there is often a lack of co-ordination in the provision of healthcare assistant courses. Additionally, those VECs that do may not offer all the modules necessary for a learner to acquire the FETAC Certificate in Healthcare Support qualification.

One private sector training provider of healthcare assistant training requires that participants obtain an Irish Heart Foundation Heartsaver (Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation) Certificate, or equivalent, to participate on its courses. Additionally, participants for some modules must complete a minimum of 6 weeks work experience in a care facility (the FETAC requirement is 240 hours). This training enterprise provides training at a number of locations throughout the country and the courses are generally held in the evening time though for some modules two Saturday workshops may be also required.

3 Requirements of training and education measures in the context of occupational change

3.1 Construction sector/Plumbers

The employees interviewed in the context of occupational change towards becoming a plumber have commented on the inflexibility of the Irish system in terms of acquiring the necessary skills and expertise. As has been pointed out in Section 2 above, there is only one training course available in Ireland for people to train to become a plumber. This course is an apprenticeship course, the FAS Plumbing Apprenticeship, which involves seven modules spread out over four years.

The plumbing apprenticeship system is open to all applicants provided they meet certain minimum educational requirements and they can find an employer to employ them as an apprentice. This latter requirement is quite onerous for career changers, particularly those who have a family and/or a house. The main difficulty that arises is that although there are agreed wage rates for plumbing apprentices these assume that the apprentice is a young person in the 17–19 year old category — which is the case in relation to the vast majority of plumbing apprentices. For example, the agreed wage rate for phase 2 of the plumbing apprenticeship is €241.80 a week — this rises to €544 in phase 6; as a reference point, the average industrial wage is €627 a week. Therefore, if a career changer who is married and perhaps has his/her own house wishes to change occupations to become a plumber, he or she must face a potentially very significant fall in household income during the four years of the plumbing apprenticeship. Additionally, there is no guarantee that the apprenticeship will be completed in four years as the lack of availability of places within the higher education colleges which are responsible for delivering a number of the apprenticeship modules can negatively impact on this time-scale. The potential drop in household income means that very few career changers are in a financial position to afford a change in occupations to become a plumber.

A number of the employees interviewed have been able to make the transition because their spouses were also working and this helped to maintain household income at a reasonable level while they were apprentices. In one case, the employee was able to draw on social security payments when his wife lost her job and this helped to sustain the level of income coming into the household.

Two of the other career change employees interviewed were more fortunate. Both worked for State-funded organisations (one is a local authority and the second is a port authority) and their employers were funding them to become plumbers. In the case of the first, the employer is continuing to pay him the wage of his previous position, a general operative, while he was training to become a plumber and has guaranteed that if he was successful in gaining certification as a plumber it would pay him the higher rates associated with plumbers. This employee is very fortunate in that he can maintain his current level of wages which are considerably higher than the wage rates for a plumbing apprentice. He has stated that because he is married with children and has his own house, he would not have been able to become a plumber without his employer's support as he would not have been able to afford the drop in household income.

A number of the employees interviewed have commented that the plumbing apprenticeship is very inflexible in terms of recognising their prior experience or qualifications. One of the interviewees had worked as a welder for sixteen years yet he received no course credits or exemptions from FAS for this. Other interviewees had a variety of skills and experience that were potentially relevant to the plumbing apprenticeship but they too were unable to obtain any recognition from FAS for these and they were obliged to participate in all seven modules — just like their younger colleagues who in the majority of cases had just finished secondary school. The interviewees believed that FAS administers the plumbing apprenticeship in a rigid manner and makes no allowance for any previous qualifications or past experience that they may have acquired.

The interviewees also believe that the structure of the plumbing apprenticeship is weighed in favour of younger people and assumes that all apprenticeships are secondary school leavers and single. They point to the fact that apprentices can be sent to any FAS training centre or Institute of Technology around the country even though there may be a training centre or Institute of Technology closer to them. The location of the FAS training centre or Institute of Technology that an apprentice attends is largely determined by throughput and the capacity of the FAS training centre/Institute of Technology. Thus, an apprentice might be required to attend a training centre/Institute of Technology in another part of the country because even though there is a training centre/Institute of Technology closer to him/her it may have availability constraints and therefore cannot accommodate him/her.

Another criticism that the employees interviewed have with the current plumbing apprenticeship is that it is very broad and provides training to address the skill needs of the two main branches of plumbing, residential plumbing and commercial/industrial plumbing. The employees interviewed who are mainly interested in pursuing residential plumbing must study the skills required for commercial/industrial plumbing and vice versa. They have suggested that one option for reducing the time commitment to become either a residential or commercial/industrial plumber is to separate the apprenticeship course in two i.e. have a common basic course and then allow trainees to either specialise in residential or commercial/industrial plumbing. This would greatly facilitate career changes as it would reduce the time taken to complete the apprenticeship programme and shorten the period in which their wages are lower than what they would have received if they had stayed in their previous occupation.

The employees also expressed dissatisfaction with FAS in terms of the information provided on the plumbing apprenticeship programme. FAS operates a nation-wide structure of public information offices in which people can obtain data on courses and training programmes. However, the experience of the interviewees was that these offices provided little relevant information apart from brochures on the plumbing apprenticeship programme. They found that the most useful sources of information about the programme were the trainers who lectured on the course.

The employers interviewed also echo the call made by employees for changes in the plumbing apprenticeship system. They advocated for an overhaul of the skill sets covered in the existing apprenticeship to reflect updated plumbing practices e.g. welding techniques.

The employers also recognise that the current plumbing apprenticeship structure deters mature career changers, particularly those with family and/or house commitments. They indicated that the wage rate for apprentices is suited for a young person leaving

secondary education and would result in financial hardship for a mature person transferring from another occupation. They are also aware of the potential difficulties posed for mature career changers in an apprenticeship training structure that might require them to travel to another part of the country to attend a FAS training centre or Institute of Technology for one of the seven modules. This potentially could mean that the trainee could be away from his/her family for up to 11 weeks. The employers called for greater flexibility in the apprenticeship training structure for mature apprentices with family commitments.

During the recent construction boom, employers stated that they had been more open to considering employing career changers as plumbing apprentices. Older people training as apprentices had many advantages over school leavers. Firstly, they were more mature in terms of their approach to work and often being home-owners themselves they had a greater appreciation of the standards of work that would be acceptable to customers. Additionally, they often had better personal and communication skills in terms of interacting with customers.

One employer interviewed (who himself had been a career changer) noted that mature apprentices had other vocational and personal skills that were valuable to his business. He instanced that the employee who had previously trained in another occupation had driving skills that his younger apprentice colleagues lacked. Furthermore, this employee being a home-owner himself was more conscious of the quality of work that a customer would expect.

Despite the many advantages that career changers could bring to his plumbing business, this employer recognised the pay rates for plumbing apprentices were a major deterrent for potential career changers. Employers were not aware of any funding scheme to help career changers to mitigate the financial hardship of moving from their normal wage rate to apprenticeship level pay rates. One employer provided a small weekly bonus to a mature apprentice who had trained in another occupation because he recognised the financial difficulties that this move entailed.

One employer said that not only had his mature apprentice to suffer a drop in wages from his previous job but he also experienced delays in progressing to the next module of his apprenticeship due to the lack of availability of places within the FAS training centres and the Institute of Technologies. As he could not progress to the next stage, his wage rates were tied at their existing level (the pay rates for plumbing apprentices increase as they progress through the seven modules).

In summary, career changers wishing to change occupations to become a plumber in Ireland face major obstacles. The main difficulty is that there is only one training course for plumbers and that is the four-year FAS Plumbing Apprenticeship programme. This requires the career changer to find an employer who is willing to employ him/her as an apprentice and participate on a seven-module apprenticeship programme which takes over four years to complete. Additionally, there is often a severe financial penalty for people who had obtained a good wage in their previous employment as wage rates for apprentices are significantly below the average industrial wage.

Another obstacle facing career changers is that the plumbing apprenticeship system appears to take little or no account of their previous qualifications or work experience in terms of allowing them course exemptions.

Career changers with family commitments may also be discommoded by the requirement to travel to training centres or higher education colleges in other parts of the country.

3.2 Tourism /Cooks

The Irish tourism industry — which includes the hotels and catering sector — has experienced rapid growth in recent years and this has created increased employment opportunities for new labour market entrants and for career changers.

There are a number of training programmes for people who wish to become a chef i.e. to have the role of a key decision-maker in a kitchen (e.g. deciding on menus, etc.). It is important that this distinction is made because there are a number of training courses provided by further/adult education providers that could provide the necessary skills to assist people to attain the status of a cook — which within the tourism industry is regarded as an entry-level position for whom food preparation is a key task.

A number of the chef training courses have been developed and funded by Fáilte Ireland, the national agency with responsibility for the development of the tourism sector. One of the agency's key offering in this area is the National Apprenticeship Programme in Professional Cookery which involves a combination of on and off-the-job training.

A number of the career changers interviewed had considered the apprenticeship programme and one had actually enrolled on it before deciding on an alternative route. The main drawback of the programme to the interviewees was its duration: the apprenticeship programme takes three years to complete and during this time period the apprentices are paid at wage rates significantly below the average industrial wage. This latter fact was a particular deterrent to the career changers who had successfully developed their careers in their first occupational path.

A second disadvantage of the National Apprenticeship Programme in Professional Cookery from the career changers' perspective was that its course content and, especially, its delivery structure was considered as being mostly suitable for people leaving secondary school. The interviewees believed the pacing of the course delivery was designed to provide school-leavers with a graduated introduction into the work of a chef, some of whom may have been unsure about their true vocational calling.

Some of the career changers interviewed had also considered the range of evening courses available from Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT), which is Ireland's largest third level institution. DIT offers a number of modular chef courses which are provided during the evening time and are particularly suitable for those who wish to retain their existing job while training to become a chef. The entry modules do not require the applicant to have any previous experience; advanced modules may have pre-requisite modules or/and relevant industry experience requirements. Applications for exemptions are considered on a case-by-case basis.

Though the DIT modular courses have many benefits for career changers they are only suitable for those residing in the Dublin region.

A new training programme for chefs, the Professional Cookery Nine Month Intensive Learning Programme, has been devised by Fáilte Ireland to address the anticipated shortage of chefs in Ireland. The new programme which is directed at a range of potential target groups has a number of advantages that makes it attractive for people who want to change occupations to become a chef.

Firstly, the course is much shorter than the National Apprenticeship Programme (NAP) in that it takes nine months to complete compared with three years to the NAP. This means that it is very attractive for people wishing to become a chef because they can acquire the relevant training in a relatively short time-scale.

The new course has been structured to suit a more mature student and while school leavers are permitted the emphasis is on attracting older trainees. The pace of the course is intensive and there is a significant amount of skills and knowledge to be acquired in a relatively short period.

The Professional Cookery Nine Month Intensive Learning Programme is delivered through both on and off-the-job training. The off-the-job training takes place within a selected number of Institutes of Technology and the on-the-job training takes place within catering establishments that are vetted by Fáilte Ireland to ensure that they have the structures and personnel to provide guidance to the trainees.

Applicants to the programme were also vetted and they have to demonstrate that they had an interest in cookery and, while not essential, a knowledge of the food sector. The promotional literature for the 9-month course indicates that while prior professional cookery experience is not a requirement, a passion for food and a mature attitude is essential. Additionally, candidates must show a level of maturity and demonstrate a commitment to the field of professional cookery.

Financially, the programme is structured so that the students receive a training allowance from Fáilte Ireland while they are attending college and they receive a wage while they are undertaking the on-the-job element of the course. The timing of the on-the-job element coincided with the summer holiday season and this afforded the trainees to obtain additional work over and above their training days from their employer and this greatly assisted them to gain additional income.

The on-the-job element provided the career changers with a very direct and rapid entry into their chosen occupation. They work in a professional kitchen such as a hotel or restaurant where they are supervised by an experienced chef. This is a beneficial aspect of the programme for the career changers as other course offerings either do not provide on-the-job training or only as part of a much longer training course. This rapid immersion into the occupation along with the advantage of being able to earn wages over and above what is available as a course participant is regarded by the career changers interviewed as being highly beneficial to them.

The on-the-job component of the 9-month course gave the participants the opportunity to immerse themselves into the intensive nature of commercial kitchens which would provide them with valuable experience when seeking permanent employment.

The career changers who had participated on the course indicated that another benefit of the course is that it provides them with a Major Award Advanced Certificate Level 6 from the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC). This certification award provides them with the platform to gain additional culinary arts qualifications such as those offered by the Institutes of Technology.

Another advantage of the new course was that it is available in seven locations including Dublin so career changers outside the capital have an opportunity to participate in a training programme that could lead them to a new occupation. There are plans to provide the course in additional locations.

The interviewees also indicated that information on the Fáilte Ireland's new 9-month course was readily available. The main sources of information utilised were newspaper advertising and the Institutes of Technology offering the course. It appears that college lecturers played an important role in disseminating information about the course to prospective students and had been pro-active in contacting students on related courses to identify if they would be interested in participating in the professional cookery programme.

The employers of people who had participated on the 9 month course said they had initially been sceptical that the participants would be able to obtain the skills necessary to work in a commercial kitchen within a short timeframe, but said they had been impressed by their dedication and maturity. Some employers highlighted, however, the need for careful vetting of applicants so that people with an idealised or misguided perception of a chef would not be allowed to join the programme.

As with the plumbing employers, the employers in the tourism sector believed that mature career changers had the potential to offer their enterprises the benefits of their qualifications and skills acquired during their careers.

Some employers noted that it was not always a requirement that career changers needed to have a chef's qualification to enter the industry. Examples were given of well-known chefs who had entered the occupation at the lowest ranks (washing dishes, preparing vegetables) without any qualifications as a chef and had developed their skills under the guidance of experienced chefs. Some of these chefs owned highly rated restaurants even though they themselves did not have any formal qualifications as a chef.

One employer had herself been a graduate of this informal apprenticeship system and in turn had employed career changers as chefs and who had no prior formal training as chefs. She recognised the difficulties faced by career changers who wanted to become a chef but were unable for financial or personal reasons to give up their existing occupations to commit to formal chef training courses. She on a number of occasions had provided short (4-5 hour) unpaid work experience opportunities to career changers so that they could sample life in a busy kitchen. This had been helpful to the career changers as they could now appreciate the physicality and intensity of a commercial kitchen and it also allowed her to gauge their suitability for employment in her restaurant. She often found that while career changers might have good cooking skills there were other necessary skills such as the ability to work as a part of a team and to be able to multi-task (e.g. to serve as well as cook). If the career changer was ill-suited for working as a chef in a busy restaurant, there were other less pressurised career options such as working in contract catering or in a delicatessen.

People who wanted to change occupations to become a chef have, therefore, the option of following this informal apprenticeship route. The main advantage of this approach is that it offers them immediate access to their chosen occupation without having to gain a qualification. The drawbacks are that they start at the bottom of the kitchen hierarchy in terms of pay (some may even work for no remuneration while they are sampling the work of a chef) which may cause temporary financial hardship to people with house and/or family commitments and they have no qualifications to show future employers. This approach is not widely known and therefore may not even be considered by occupation changers. Another disadvantage is that while some employers said it was possible for career changers to become a chef using this route i.e. without having any formal qualifications as a chef, occupation changers in the 50+ age group might experience difficulties finding employment because of the often intensely physical nature of the work.

3.3 Health and elderly care/Assistant nurses

The public profile of healthcare assistant has risen in recent times because the increasing professionalisation of the nursing profession and the focus on increased quality service provision within the healthcare sector and, particularly, among providers of residential care for older people.

The demand for nursing and care assistants within the Irish healthcare sector has resulted in private and public health institutions recruiting personnel from abroad, particularly from outside the EU. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many of the healthcare assistants recruited from abroad are qualified nurses and are working in this capacity while they wait for their nursing qualifications to be recognised by the Irish Nursing Board; once this has happened they then seek employment as a nurse. In other cases, their nursing qualification may be recognised but their level of English is not at a level where they can work as a nurse. A number of the employers interviewed have stated that in many cases the qualifications of their overseas healthcare assistant employees are higher than what are required to carry out their job. The employers also report that university students who are attending nursing degree programmes are regularly employed as healthcare assistants, albeit on a part-time basis.

Though the main qualification for healthcare assistants is the Healthcare Support Certificate awarded by the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) which is positioned at level 5 on the National Framework of Qualifications, there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that many employers in the private sector do not require employees to have it. There is a proposal that providers of residential care for older people should ensure that all new employees commit to undertake appropriate training to FETAC level 5 or equivalent within 1 year of taking up employment. This proposal is contained in a document setting out proposed national quality standards for the residential care sector; however, these guidelines have not been adopted by the Government and even when they are there is a concern that there will be no economic sanction against employers who do not facilitate new healthcare assistants to undertake the appropriate training.

The healthcare assistants interviewed during the course of this study have indicated that an important criteria used by employers in recruiting is their past experience of providing personal care in either a personal or professional capacity. The majority of the interviewees did not have a healthcare assistant qualification at the time they were recruited. They have subsequently become aware that promotion in their current job or a move to another employer would depend on having acquired the Healthcare Support Certificate or equivalent. The interviews with employers who indicated that while a healthcare assistant qualification was important, prior experience was often a more critical selection factor.

The structure of the healthcare sector with its 24/7 service provision means that healthcare assistants frequently work rostered shifts. The interviewees have pointed out that the nature of their shift work means that attending courses — even those held in the evenings — can be problematic. Additionally, a number of the interviewees often had long shifts which coupled with the physical nature of the work meant that they had little energy to attend evening classes.

The interviewees who had come to Ireland from other countries and for whom English was not their first language experienced difficulties with the academic nature of the course. A number of the employers also commented that the course was overly academic in nature and they were aware that this perception was widespread among non-national care assistants with the consequence that they were reluctant to participate on the course.

The Work Experience requirement of the Healthcare Assistant course, on the other hand, was not a difficulty for the interviewees because they were already employed as healthcare assistants. This stipulation would, however, pose a challenge for people working outside the healthcare sector because not only would they have to find a suitable healthcare services provider but they would also have to commit their own personal time e.g. their holiday time from their current employment, etc., to undertake the Work Experience module.

The interviewees also commented on the difficulty of obtaining information on courses for healthcare assistants. This was especially true of respondents in rural parts of Ireland where often the sole providers of training are the Vocational Education Committees (VECs). There was a perception among the interviewees that the VECs had only recently started to provide courses for healthcare assistants. They perceived that the VECs had adopted a chicken-and-egg approach to the provision of healthcare assistant courses; some modules within the National Certificate in Healthcare were provided but the provision of other modules were dependent on demand for places. The interviewees experienced frustration with the availability of information as to whether the other modules were proceeding or not. Others were not aware that these other modules were under consideration as they had not been publicly disseminated by the VECs either in hard copy format or on their web site.

The interviewees highlighted the importance of personal contacts as a potential source of information on courses. One interviewee said that she had only become aware of a healthcare assistant training course when a trainer whom she had known from a different training programme alerted her to its existence.

The study found that in addition to the VECs, training courses for healthcare assistants were also provided by a range of public and private sector organisations. One interviewee said that the course she attended had been provided by a local development agency while others said they had become aware of courses provided by an association representing carers.

The national qualifications framework is a relatively new and there was limited understanding amongst the employees and some of the employers regarding not only of the various levels within the framework but also of the difference between major and minor awards within the individual levels. Some of the healthcare assistants were confused by the often misleading claims of some training providers who stated that studying one module of the Healthcare Assistant course entitled participants to a major award at Level 5 on the national qualifications framework whereas the correct interpretation is that successfully completing one module leads to a minor award.

4 Conclusions and recommendations

4.1 Assessment on the suitability of the available VET/adult education measures for supporting occupational change

A common theme in the interviews with occupation changers and employers is that the VET/adult education system and training provision is primarily oriented towards labour market entrants (i.e. those joining from the education system) and those who are returning to the labour market either because they have lost their jobs or they are resuming their careers after a break (e.g. to rear their family). This perception is reinforced by the results of the review of the literature which indicate that policy statements such as the National Skills Strategy, *Tomorrow's Skills: Towards a National Skills Strategy*, are relatively silent on the needs of people already in the workforce who wish to change occupation and focus instead on up-skilling of people in their current occupations.

Another finding of the literature review was that there was no available data on the extent to which people within the labour market change occupations in Ireland; the absence of data may have contributed to the lack of policies focusing on the needs of occupational changers. The programme of interviews with employees, employers and relevant stakeholders found that there was anecdotal evidence of considerable occupational movement within the labour market.

Occupational change was often a liberating experience for the employees interviewed as in many cases they had long held a desire to change to their desired occupation and had given considerable thought as to how they would achieve their career move. It should also be said that in other cases, the employee had drifted into the new occupation in an unplanned way.

Employers generally regarded occupation changers in a positive light because they had shown a determination to change occupations and often had done so at great personal sacrifice. The employers interviewed perceived that the occupation changers had a greater range of skills and often demonstrated a higher level of maturity in the performance of their duties.

The interviews with employees who are in the process of changing occupations or who have already done so indicate that much of the available training provision is tailored to the needs of labour market entrants, particularly school-leavers. The occupation changers believe that the content, structure, duration and delivery mechanisms of relevant training programmes are heavily influenced by the learning needs of a younger age cohort.

Additionally, the career changers also confirmed what had been apparent in the development of inventory of courses to allow them to gain a qualification to change to their desired occupation while continuing to work in their existing occupation until they could make the transition i.e. that there was very little training provision that allowed them to do so. They indicated that much of the relevant training was provided at times e.g. during working hours, or in locations that did not suit them.

The interviews with occupation changers also found that obtaining information on relevant courses was problematic. This was particularly true of training courses for healthcare assistants; in some areas of the country, training providers deliver just one or two of the eight modules making up the recognised FETAC Level 5 qualification. The problem for the interviewees was that they were often unaware that the training provider had the capacity to deliver the remaining modules provided there was sufficient demand for places. The interviewees assumed because there was no published information on these modules that they then could not acquire the full qualification.

Despite the intensive publicity campaigns undertaken to inform people about the new national qualifications framework (incorporating FETAC and HETAC), many occupation changers in the healthcare assistant category were unaware of the award status (what level e.g. 1–9 and whether it was major/minor) of the courses on offer. As a consequence, they were often unable to evaluate the different training offers open to them. The process of collecting data for the inventory of relevant training courses found that some providers had mistakenly advertised the achievement of individual modules as being equivalent to the full award.

Some training provision does, however, take into account the needs of people who are already within the labour force and who wish to change occupations. In particular, there are courses for chefs and healthcare assistants that are provided during the evenings and at weekends that make them suitable for people who need to continue working in their existing occupation while they make the transition to their desired occupation.

Such provision tends to be the exception rather than the rule. Interviews with employees who aspire to become chefs has found that virtually all of the evening courses are only to be found in Dublin — and thus are not an option to people living outside the capital.

It is important to point out that in the case of two of the occupations studied in Ireland, chef and healthcare assistant, it is possible for a person in another occupation to change to these occupations without first having a qualification. While it is imperative that people applying for healthcare assistant positions in the public healthcare sector to have the FETAC Level 5 healthcare assistant qualification or equivalent, many private sector employers will recruit people without a qualification provided they can show that they have had prior personal or professional caring experience. This is likely to change in the future as new regulations concerning the supervision of care provision in nursing homes for older people will require that healthcare assistants hold a qualification equivalent to the FETAC Healthcare Support Certificate.

Similarly in relation to chefs, the interviews with employers has indicated that smaller enterprises often recruited unqualified people to train as chefs, using what might be termed an unofficial apprenticeship in which all the training takes place within the enterprise and involves the transfer of skills and knowledge to the new employee from an experienced colleague. Many of the employers pointed out that the top chefs in Ireland, the UK and Continental Europe had come through this route and had no qualifications. One of the employers interviewed had herself come through this route; she owned a successful restaurant even though she did not have any qualifications as a chef.

The orientation of the existing VET/adult education presents a number of difficulties to career changers who wish to change occupations. The research has found that there are particular obstacles facing people who aspire to change occupations to become a plumber. The main difficulty here is that there is only one training programme, a seven module plumbing apprenticeship that takes a minimum of four years to complete, which provides the necessary qualifications to practice as a plumber. In theory, however, it is possible for a person without a recognised plumbing qualification to trade as a plumber; however, obtaining public liability insurance may prove a major stumbling block.

FAS, the national training and employment organisation has responsibility, in consultation with industry and higher education representatives, for the development and implementation of the plumbing apprenticeship. The apprenticeship system in Ireland has undergone a major reorganisation in the last thirty years. A major change has been the transformation from a time-served to a standards-based approach to apprenticeship training. Under the previous time-served system the attainment of pre-determined standards of competence and knowledge was not mandatory; an apprentice underwent four to five years of training to achieve the status of a qualified tradesperson, regardless of actual competency. In 1991, a new standards-based apprenticeship system was introduced under which a person would have to obtain a National Craft Certificate as a compulsory requirement.

The research has identified that people wishing to become a plumber may experience financial hardship because the wage rates for first and second year apprentices are substantially lower than the average industrial wage. This fact alone represents a major deterrent to those who would otherwise like to change occupations to become a plumber.

The interviews with employees and employers also indicate that there have been issues in relation to the lack of recognition by the plumbing apprenticeship system of previous qualifications and work experience i.e. they have not been able to get exemptions from aspects of the course even though they may have previously obtained a qualification in the particular skill area.

Additionally, there have been situations where the plumbing apprenticeship system has not taken account of the personal needs of older apprentices — particularly those with family commitments — in terms of the geographic allocation of training places.

Employers have queried the relevance of some of the course content of the plumbing apprenticeship which they perceived unduly lengthened the duration of the course. Additionally, they believe that the current training provision could be re-structured to allow trainees to specialise in either residential plumbing or commercial/industrial plumbing — and not both as is the case with the current apprenticeship system. Such a proposal, if implemented, would have the effect of reducing the time to complete the apprenticeship and make it, therefore, more attractive to career changers.

The interviews with employees who have changed or are in the process of changing occupations to become a chef indicate that they too face a similar situation to plumbers. The majority of training courses for chefs are full-time and are mainly provided during working hours. The exception to this is the part-time evening courses for chefs provided by the Dublin Institute of Technology.

Thus the options then for occupation changers who wish to gain a qualification to become a chef are quite limited. In practice it means that they must leave their current occupation and either do a 2 year full-time course in a college or find an employer to take them on as an apprentice chef and complete the three year part-time National Apprenticeship in Professional Cookery. This latter option has a number of disadvantages for career changers, one of which is its duration and another is the low level of wages provided to apprentice chefs.

The research found that there are examples of good practice in terms of developing training programmes suitable for career changers. The anticipated increase in demand for chefs has led Fáilte Ireland, the national agency with responsibility for developing the skill base in the tourism industry, to develop a concentrated training programme, the Professional Cookery Nine Month Intensive Learning Programme, which essentially provides the same level of skill training as the National Apprenticeship in Professional Cookery but over a shorter time period (nine months). The new programme was designed to attract a number of target groups including career changers. It is specifically targeted at candidates who demonstrate a level of maturity and a commitment to the field of professional cookery.

The experience of interviewees on this new course has been positive. It allows them to gain a recognised qualification to become a chef in a short time-frame. The interviewees received a training allowance while they participated on the off-the-job element of the programme and they receive a wage from their employers while they participated on the on-the-job element. Additionally, a number of the interviewees reported that they had the opportunity to earn supplementary income from their employers by working additional days in the kitchen outside of the programme.

The research has also found that there are indications that the Vocational Education Committees (VECs) which have a major role in the provision of adult education throughout the country are becoming more active in area of providing training for healthcare assistants. However, much of the VEC training provision is as of yet uncoordinated as some regions have no healthcare assistant training at all while others only offer some of the modules required for trainees to obtain the major qualification for healthcare assistants, the FETAC Healthcare Support Certificate, which is at Level 5 on the National Qualifications Framework.

4.2 Recommendations

The following recommendations are tentatively put forward:

- Policy-makers in Ireland with responsibility for VET/adult education need to be aware of trends in other EU Member States with regard to occupational mobility with a view to identifying if similar trends in occupational mobility are also prevalent in Ireland. Existing policy documents are relatively silent on the issue of occupational mobility and there is a dearth of research on the extent to which Irish labour market participants change occupations. The GATOM project will help to raise the profile of occupational mobility among Irish policy-makers but there is a need for additional research to be carried out on this emerging policy field particularly in terms of gathering data on the number of occupation changers, the frequency with which they change occupations and the barriers they experience.

- Irish VET/adult education policy-makers should take cognisance of the benefits that career changers can bring to new employers in terms of their wider vocational skills and their life skills. The research for this report has revealed many instances where employers have gained from the skill sets that the often more mature career changers can bring to their enterprises. Policy-makers should recognise that occupational change can be motivated by a person's recognition that they made the wrong initial occupational choice but that equally the need for occupational change can be forced through technological obsolescence. It is recommended that policy makers with responsibility for VET/adult education should examine programmes and training provision to ensure that these cater for the particular needs of occupation changers where this is possible but at the very minimum that they do not impede the lateral movement of occupation changers.
- VET/adult education providers should review their course eligibility criteria, course content and delivery structures to ensure that they do not unduly restrict the entry of those labour market participants who wish to change occupations. The research undertaken for this national assessment report has found that in one of the occupations studied, plumbing, there are a number of difficulties facing people who aspire to change occupations to become a plumber that needs to be addressed:
 - Firstly, there needs to be recognition that not only is there only one training course for plumbers (e.g. the FAS plumbing apprenticeship) but also that it is very much oriented towards school-leavers and does not appear to take into consideration the past skills and knowledge of mature trainees. There appears to be no mechanism within the current plumbing apprenticeship system for accrediting prior learning or expertise that career changers may have acquired during their previous occupations. It is important that FAS facilitates career changers to have their previously acquired skills and qualifications recognised so that the time spent on the plumbing apprenticeship programme can be reduced as much as possible by not having them study skills/knowledge they have already acquired. It is incumbent on all VET/adult education providers that mechanisms for recognising prior learning are put in places so that career changers are not disadvantaged;
 - Additionally, the plumbing apprenticeship needs to be structured in such a way that career changers with family commitments are facilitated to attend FAS training centres and Institutes of Technology adjacent to where they live. All training and education providers should seek to minimise the disruption to more mature trainees;
 - The current plumbing apprenticeship programme involves completion of seven modules which take a minimum of four years. The skill sets provided by the programme caters for both residential and commercial/ industrial plumbing though apprentices will generally only work in one branch. This has led to calls from both career changers and employers for the development of a revised plumbing apprenticeship with the initial stages focusing on the skill sets common to both residential and commercial/industrial plumbing and then providing the apprentices with the opportunity to specialise in either residential or commercial/industrial plumbing. This would have the immediate effect of reducing the duration

of the apprenticeship and thus limiting the time period during which the career changer has to suffer a reduced wage;

- Consideration should be given to providing financial support to mature apprentices to alleviate the financial hardship associated with changing occupation to be a plumber.
- The introduction of Fáilte Ireland's Professional Cookery Nine Month Intensive Learning Programme represents an approach that takes account of the needs of occupation changers. The course is shorter and more concentrated than the traditional National Apprenticeship in Professional Cookery which takes three years to complete. While the latter course is primarily aimed at school-leavers the new Programme is more suited to the needs of occupation changers who having experienced one occupational path now exhibit a clear determination to become a chef. The Professional Cookery Nine Month Intensive Learning Programme represents an example of potential best practice in terms of developing VET/adult education programmes that suit the needs of career changes and should be replicated, where possible, by other education/training providers.
- VET/adult education policy-makers and providers need to ensure that career changers outside of Dublin have an opportunity to participate in courses that enable them to gain qualifications for their next occupational move. Additionally, and this is especially true of healthcare assistant training, there is a need by adult education providers such as the network of VECs to ensure that there is a co-ordinated approach to the delivery of modules leading to the award of the FETAC Healthcare Support Certificate.
- Providers of VET/adult education also need to have regard as to how they promote their course offering to occupation changers; this recommendation is particularly relevant to the providers of healthcare assistant courses. It is recommended that where they only provide a sub-set of the required number of modules making up the FETAC Healthcare Support Certificate that they advise occupation changers on alternative ways in which they can acquire the remaining modules.

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