

Press Release

Skills Opportunities Identified by Expert Group

(Friday, 3 July 2009) The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) today published its annual review of employment and skills in Ireland. The *National Skills Bulletin 2009* confirms that while the Irish labour market took a sharp negative turn in 2008, with all labour market indicators disimproving, there are still some areas of job opportunity.

Labour Market Overview

The report outlines that job losses were concentrated in four sectors - construction, manufacturing, hospitality and transport. Construction suffered the largest decline.

This year's report outlines for the first time regional employment trends. All regions except the South East experienced a decline in employment. The greatest net job losses were recorded in Dublin and Border regions. However, at greatest risk of unemployment are those living in the Midlands and West.

The report identifies that the groups at higher risk of unemployment are males, the under 25s, those with lower levels of education, non-Irish nationals, residents of the BMW (Border Midlands and West) region, those employed in construction and services sectors and those employed as crafts persons (especially, carpenters, bricklayers and plasterers) and labourers.

The *National Skills Strategy*, published by the Expert Group in 2007, set out the need to increase the educational profile of the Irish labour force if we are to achieve a successful, high value-added economy. The *National Skills Bulletin 2009* finds that progress has been made towards this goal over the last three years with the percentage of those with below Leaving Certificate qualifications shrinking (from 29% in 2005 to 24% in 2008) and the share with honours degree or above increasing (from 20% in 2005 to 25% in 2008).

Skills Shortages

The extent of skills and labour shortages in Ireland has fallen with many occupations now in surplus. There are no labour shortages in Ireland at present. However, despite rising unemployment, skill shortages have been identified in the specialised high skill areas of IT, science, sales/marketing, health, accountancy, engineering and management. Demand is confined to those with third level qualifications and with specific expertise and experience. For example, companies are still finding it difficult to source advanced IT system management skills, experienced engineers for the development and implementation of lean manufacturing processes and scientific technicians for development and prototyping of specific medical devices.

Commenting on the launch of the National Skills Bulletin, the Minister for Lifelong Learning, Sean Haughey TD, said:

“The National Skills Bulletin provides a comprehensive overview of recent developments in the Irish labour market. It is an invaluable source of information for policy makers, career guidance advisers and job seekers. It monitors recent trends in employment and highlights those areas of the economy that have the potential for significant job creation in future years. The Government is currently developing a strategy designed to create more employment opportunities in the specialised areas associated with research, IT and the green economy. In pursuance of this strategy, the Government is introducing a number of

measures to facilitate the upskilling of the labour force, with a particular emphasis on the lower skilled.

“I wish to thank the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs for this excellent report.”

Una Halligan, Chair of the Expert Group, commented “This report provides valuable insights into key labour market trends and highlights specific skills shortages. It is those with third level qualifications and with specific experience that are in demand. Initiatives such as the recently announced Work Placement Programmes for graduates in identified strategic areas of focus for the economy, which enhance work experience, are very welcome. The Expert Group will examine areas of skills shortage to see what actions can be taken to help meet employers’ recruitment needs,” concluded Halligan.

The National Skills Bulletin 2009 is the fifth annual report by the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs on skills and occupational trends in Ireland. The Bulletin provides statistical analysis of the employment data for all the main occupations in the economy and draws on this data, and other qualitative information, to identify imbalances in the Irish labour market at occupational level. The Bulletin is produced by FÁS on behalf of the Expert Skills Group and draws on the data in the National Skills Database maintained by FÁS.

A copy of the report can be downloaded from www.skillsireland.ie or www.fas.ie.

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