



Irish employee training and skills survey

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A new working conditions survey assessing employee skills and training levels in Ireland was published by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) in February 2009. The survey reveals that 45.5% of all enterprises provided internal and/or external training courses for their employees. Course attendees spent an average of 3.2 days on courses, while employers spent an average of €254 per employee on training. The study points to considerable differences in training provision and skills shortages by sector and company size. A particularly significant finding is the high percentage of enterprises that have acute shortages of managerial skills.

Ireland's [Central Statistics Office \(CSO\)](#) published findings from a new [working conditions survey](#) – the [Employee skills, training and job vacancies survey \(172Kb PDF\)](#) – in February 2009. The survey focuses on the level of training and skills development in Ireland and is based on data collected as part of the CSO's [National Employment Survey \(NES\)](#), conducted in October 2006. A total of 4,209 enterprises and 51,252 employees responded to the survey. The main findings are outlined in this report and relate to the level of training provision, the duration and cost of training, areas of skills shortages as well as the reasons for such deficiencies, and the main ways of addressing skills shortages.

Training provision

In relation to training provision, the survey findings reveal that some 45.5% of all enterprises in 2006 provided internal and/or external training courses for their employees (Table 1). This ranged from 25% of enterprises in the hotels and restaurants sector to 93.2% in public administration and defence. In terms of company size, based on the number of employees, 100% of large enterprises (250 or more employees) provided such courses, while only 43% of small enterprises (3–49 employees) did so.

Table 1: Enterprises providing training courses in 2006 (%)

NACE sector	Internal training	External training	All training courses
Manufacturing, mining and quarrying, electricity, gas and water supply	36.3	39.7	52.3
Construction	16.1	36.8	46.4
Wholesale and retail	18.4	31.6	40.0
Hotels and restaurants	15.1	17.9	25.0
Transport, storage and communication	19.0	25.5	35.5
Financial intermediation	49.5	55.7	73.7
Business services	24.8	47.5	56.5
Public administration and defence	80.2	86.5	93.2
Education	40.2	45.9	65.2
Health	32.9	57.1	65.5
Other services	26.9	40.8	49.6
Total	22.3	36.2	45.5

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Size of enterprise (number of employees)			
3–49 employees	19.4	34.0	43.0
50–249 employees	64.1	70.8	85.7
250+ employees	93.8	88.6	100.0
Total	22.3	36.2	45.5

Note: NACE refers to the Statistical Classification of Economic Activities in the European Community (Nomenclature statistique des activités économiques dans la Communauté européenne, [NACE](#)).

Figures shown refer to the proportion of enterprises providing training courses in 2006 as a percentage of all enterprises.

Source: CSO, 2009

A total of 45.1% of all employees attended such courses in 2006 (Table 2). Regarding the gender breakdown of training provision, there was almost an equal split between men and women in this respect: 45.2% of all male employees participated in training courses, compared with 45% of all female employees.

Table 2: Employees participating in training courses in 2006, by gender (%)

NACE sector	Men	Women	All
Manufacturing, mining and quarrying, electricity, gas and water supply	50.8	46.9	49.5
Construction	34.3	21.8	33.0
Wholesale and retail	34.3	25.4	29.8
Hotels and restaurants	27.1	30.4	28.9
Transport, storage and communication	49.8	38.3	46.1
Financial intermediation	69.2	57.3	62.0
Business services	41.6	36.2	39.1
Public administration and defence	69.2	69.4	69.2
Education	62.8	68.8	67.0
Health	53.8	57.8	57.1
Other services	32.0	37.9	35.3
Total	45.2	45.0	45.1
Size of enterprise (number of employees)			
3–49 employees	25.7	24.7	25.3
50–249 employees	46.1	44.7	45.5
250+ employees	60.9	56.3	58.5
Total	45.2	45.0	45.1

Note: Figures shown refer to the proportion of employees participating in training courses in 2006 as a percentage of all employees.

Source: CSO, 2009

Duration of training

Regarding the duration of training, course attendees spent an average of 3.2 days on training courses in 2006 (Table 3). Course attendees in large enterprises spent longer on training courses (3.6 days) than those in small enterprises (2.4 days).

Table 3: Average number of paid working days spent on training courses in 2006, by course attendee and by employee

NACE sector	Per course attendee	Per employee
Manufacturing, mining and quarrying, electricity, gas and water supply	3.3	1.6
Construction	1.7	0.6
Wholesale and retail	1.9	0.6
Hotels and restaurants	1.6	0.5
Transport, storage and communication	3.9	1.8
Financial intermediation	2.5	1.5
Business services	3.9	1.5
Public administration and defence	7.9	5.5
Education	2.2	1.5
Health	2.0	1.1
Other services	3.0	1.1
Total	3.2	1.4
Size of enterprise (number of employees)		
3–49 employees	2.4	0.6
50–249 employees	2.5	1.1
250+ employees	3.6	2.1
Total	3.2	1.4

Source: CSO, 2009

Cost of training

The estimated total cost of training courses in 2006 was €113,665,000 (Table 4). This figure comprised €36,782,000 for course fees, €47,249,000 for travel and subsistence for course attendees, and €29,634,000 for the cost of premises used for the training courses. Employers spent an average of €254 per employee on training in 2006. The average cost of training per

employee in small enterprises was €19 compared with €345 in large enterprises. The average cost per course attendee was €564.

Table 4: Estimated training costs of enterprises in 2006, by cost type and per employee and attendee

NACE sector	Fees (in 000s of €)	Travel (in 000s of €)	Premises (in 000s of €)	Total (in 000s of €)	Per employee (in €)	Per attendee (in €)
Manufacturing, mining and quarrying, electricity, gas and water supply	53,862	4,760	1,781	60,403	253	543
Construction	14,554	739	431	15,725	115	347
Wholesale and retail	27,186	3,094	2,614	32,895	115	387
Hotels and restaurants	4,476	690	566	5,731	42	145
Transport, storage and communication	14,932	1,584	1,676	18,192	215	465
Financial intermediation	38,766	3,497	10,680	52,942	656	1,059
Business services	62,423	7,306	3,738	73,467	381	974
Public administration and defence	60,900	9,686	3,391	73,976	603	871
Education	15,902	12,208	1,253	29,363	258	385
Health	34,442	2,735	1,714	38,890	230	404
Other services	9,340	951	1,791	12,081	188	532
Total	336,782	47,249	29,634	413,665	254	564
Size of enterprise (number of employees)						
3–49 employees	55,072	7,203	3,367	65,642	119	473
50–249 employees	62,097	6,131	3,196	71,423	260	573
250+ employees	219,614	33,915	23,071	276,601	345	589
Total	336,782	47,249	29,634	413,665	254	564

Source: CSO, 2009

Skills shortages

The survey findings also pointed to significant shortages of skills in the enterprises assessed. Overall, some 12.6% of enterprises reported acute shortages of English language skills among at least some of their employees (Table 5). In the hotels and restaurants sector, this figure rose to 26.7%. Moreover, a substantial percentage of enterprises reported an acute shortage of

management and supervisory skills, with 12.6% of all enterprises reporting acute shortages in this respect. The same applied in relation to technical and practical skills, with 10.8% of all enterprises recording acute shortages of such skills. On the other hand, only 2.5% and 3% respectively of enterprises reported an acute shortage of numeracy and literacy skills. Overall, 46.6% of all enterprises reported having at least some acute shortage of particular skills.

Table 5: Enterprises with acute skills shortages, by skills type (%)

NACE sector	English language skills	Literacy skills	Management skills	Numeracy skills	Technical/practical skills	Any acute skills shortage
Manufacturing, mining and quarrying, electricity, gas and water supply	18.1	2.3	12.9	4.9	14.8	51.8
Construction	12.6	2.6	9.8	0.7	14.7	42.1
Wholesale and retail	11.2	2.6	14.1	2.9	7.6	44.1
Hotels and restaurants	26.7	2.4	12.9	2.4	7.0	50.1
Transport, storage and communication	11.4	1.9	7.1	0.3	7.0	50.2
Financial intermediation	1.1	2.7	9.8	3.8	12.3	43.9
Business services	6.8	4.3	13.8	2.8	11.6	46.7
Public administration and defence	n.a.	3.1	16.7	9.9	11.5	52.6
Education	12.9	5.8	24	1.9	7.5	65.2
Health	13.1	5.6	13.9	1.9	9.5	50.2
Other services	4.7	3.1	10.2	2.7	16.3	49
Total	12.6	3	12.6	2.5	10.8	46.6
Size of enterprise (number of employees)						
3–49 employees	12.2	3.0	11.8	2.3	10.4	45.8
50–249 employees	21.3	3.3	23.9	4.4	17.3	62.0
250+ employees	15.4	3.7	29.2	3.2	17.9	58.9
Total	12.6	3.0	12.6	2.5	10.8	46.6

Note: n.a. = not applicable because too small for estimate

Source: CSO, 2009

Reasons for skills shortages

A number of reasons were put forward to explain the shortage of skills. A total of 15.8% of enterprises cited a lack of experience or the recent recruitment of staff as being the most common reason for the acute shortage of particular skills (Table 6). A further 10.3% of enterprises attributed the skills shortage, at least partially, to the poor quality of candidates, while 4.4% linked it to a failure to train and develop staff. In terms of company size, medium-sized enterprises (50–249 employees) seem to have the most skills development problems on the basis of the various reasons given for skills shortages.

Table 6: Reasons cited by enterprises for skills shortages (%)

NACE sector	Recruitment problems	Poor quality of candidates	Lack of experience	High staff turnover	Staff not motivated to acquire skills	Failure to train and develop staff
Manufacturing, mining and quarrying, electricity, gas and water supply	7.9	8.8	16.9	3.4	8.6	4.2
Construction	3.3	8.1	11.7	2.4	7.7	2.5
Wholesale and retail	5.3	11.0	15.7	5.2	6.8	5.6
Hotels and restaurants	7.6	14.3	18.7	12.6	10.4	3.5
Transport, storage and communication	5.1	15.9	13.9	5.7	5.0	3.7
Financial intermediation	7.4	7.3	20.7	4.6	3.0	3.2
Business services	6.9	8.6	15.6	4.3	6.3	4.5
Public administration and defence	7.8	n.a.	13.5	6.3	1.6	7.3
Education	2.2	12.4	21.5	1.9	12.2	10.0
Health	5.2	11.4	20.7	5.4	13.0	4.1
Other services	3.7	8.8	16.8	3.8	8.3	6.3
Total	5.6	10.3	15.8	5.2	7.7	4.4
Size of enterprise (number of employees)						
3–49 employees	5.2	10.0	15.3	4.6	7.7	4.3
50–249 employees	12.2	15.7	23.0	15.8	8.4	7.0

250+ employees	10.1	14.1	22.9	13.0	5.7	6.9
Total	5.6	10.3	15.8	5.2	7.7	4.4

Note: n.a. = not applicable because too small for estimate

Source: CSO, 2009

Skills in need of upgrading

This section examines the various skills areas that need upgrading among the different occupational groups, namely: management, professional and associate professional staff; clerical, sales and service employees; and production, transport, craft, manual and other employees. The distinction is made between occupational groups to highlight the specific groups where skills are deficient. Some interesting differences also emerge in relation to sector and organisational size.

Regarding the category of management, professional and associate professional employees, some 22.8% of all enterprises reported that employees in this group required an upgrading of information technology (IT) skills (Table 7). In terms of company size, this requirement varied from 34.3% and 32.8% of medium-sized and large enterprises respectively to 22.2% of small enterprises. It is highly significant, and indeed quite striking, that over a fifth (21.2%) of enterprises reported the need for employees in these occupations to improve their management skills. Moreover, a further 12.1% of enterprises reported that their management, professional and associate professional employees needed to upgrade their technical and practical skills.

Table 7: Enterprises reporting a need for skills upgrading among management, professionals and associate professionals, by skills type (%)

NACE sector	Communications/ customer service skills	IT skills	Language skills	Management skills	Numeracy/ literacy skills	Technical/ practical skills
Manufacturing, mining and quarrying, electricity, gas and water supply	11.0	27.7	5.8	25.3	2.4	11.1
Construction	5.0	14.1	2.3	12.4	2.1	7.7
Wholesale and retail	8.8	24.2	4.3	20.2	2.3	8.3
Hotels and restaurants	9.4	14.4	7.3	14.8	4.3	7.0
Transport, storage and communication	6.7	25.3	7.3	17.7	0.1	9.3
Financial intermediation	13.8	32.8	8.9	33.2	2.8	17.7
Business services	16.0	30.9	6.3	29.9	4.1	24.0
Public administration and defence	17.7	43.8	9.4	46.9	4.7	23.4
Education	23.9	24.2	10.5	27.2	4.3	9.2
Health	19.4	30.5	10.8	28.4	4.1	19.8

Other services	17.8	21.3	9.7	26.8	2.1	15.5
Total	10.8	22.8	5.7	21.2	2.8	12.1
Size of enterprise (number of employees)						
3–49 employees	10.1	22.2	5.6	19.7	2.7	11.4
50–249 employees	21.9	34.3	7.7	44.5	4.7	22.6
250+ employees	29.3	32.8	6.0	54.3	2.5	30.1
Total	10.8	22.8	5.7	21.2	2.8	12.1

Note: Figures show the proportion of enterprises reporting a need for skills upgrading as a percentage of all enterprises.

Source: CSO, 2009

In relation to the category of clerical, sales and service employees, some 19.5% of enterprises reported that employees required an upgrading of IT skills (Table 8). This figure rose to 32.8% for employees in large enterprises. A further 18.3% of enterprises cited a need to upgrade communications and customer service skills among clerical, sales and service employees.

Table 8: Enterprises reporting a need for skills upgrading among clerical, sales and service employees, by skills type (%)

NACE sector	Communications/ customer service skills	IT skills	Language skills	Management skills	Numeracy/literacy skills	Technical/practical skills
Manufacturing, mining and quarrying, electricity, gas and water supply	14.8	25.7	3.8	5.3	1.8	10.5
Construction	4.6	11.4	1.1	4.5	2.7	3.8
Wholesale and retail	30.7	25.4	7.4	9.1	4.2	11.5
Hotels and restaurants	19.4	10.5	17.6	5.3	3.6	6.1
Transport, storage and communication	19.0	22.1	5.9	5.4	2.2	11.2
Financial intermediation	29.2	29.6	6.3	7.5	8.6	27.2
Business services	13.3	19.7	3.6	7.5	3.4	8.1
Public administration and defence	31.3	39.1	10.4	6.3	8.9	14.6
Education	15.5	21.9	6.9	2.8	1.7	10.4
Health	21.4	27.7	6.7	7.6	5.5	10.4
Other services	15.8	17.4	7.0	7.2	3.8	10.2

Total	18.3	19.5	6.5	6.8	3.5	8.9
Size of enterprise (number of employees)						
3–49 employees	17.3	18.7	6.2	6.7	3.3	8.4
50–249 employees	34.7	31.3	10.9	7.7	7.1	17.4
250+ employees	36.2	36.1	8.8	7.8	5.9	16.3
Total	18.3	19.5	6.5	6.8	3.5	8.9

Note: Figures show the proportion of enterprises reporting a need for skills upgrading as a percentage of all enterprises.

Source: CSO, 2009

Finally, with respect to employees working in production, transport, craft and other manual occupations, some 12.3% of all enterprises reported that employees in this category needed to upgrade their technical and practical skills (Table 9). A higher proportion of large enterprises (21%) than small enterprises (11.9%) cited the need for upgrading of technical/practical skills among employees in this category. Just over one in 10 enterprises (10.1%) indicated that these employees' communications and customer service skills also required upgrading.

Table 9: Enterprises reporting a need for skills upgrading among production, transport, craft and other manual employees, by skills type (%)

NACE sector	Communications/ customer service skills	IT skills	Language skills	Management skills	Numeracy/ literacy skills	Technical/ practical skills
Manufacturing, mining and quarrying, electricity, gas and water supply	12.7	12.1	16.8	3.9	4.1	24.8
Construction	11.8	6.4	11.6	4.9	4.5	27.9
Wholesale and retail	6.9	5.9	5.3	1.5	1.9	7.6
Hotels and restaurants	19.4	3.4	14.9	2.7	2.3	5.4
Transport, storage and communication	21.6	7.1	12.0	4.2	2.8	8.0
Financial intermediation	2.2	0	0	0.1	2.0	0.1
Business services	4.4	3.1	4.4	1.7	2.0	5.7
Public administration and defence	19.3	18.8	6.3	5.2	7.3	17.2
Education	3.2	1.8	4.5	2.2	1.1	2.5
Health	6.3	2.9	4.6	0.6	1.9	7.7
Other services	10.2	3.9	3.6	2.8	3.4	13.7

Total	10.1	5.4	8.4	2.7	2.8	12.3
Size of enterprise (number of employees)						
3–49 employees	9.8	5.1	8.1	2.6	2.7	11.9
50–249 employees	13.9	8.4	14.1	4.3	4.0	18.9
250+ employees	15.1	15.5	13.8	2.8	6.5	21.0
Total	10.1	5.4	8.4	2.7	2.8	12.3

Note: Figures show the proportion of enterprises reporting a need for skills upgrading as a percentage of all enterprises.

Source: CSO, 2009

In comparing the findings for all three major occupational groups (Tables 7–9), it emerges that the management and professional groups have the highest percentage of acute skills shortages overall – particularly in relation to management and IT skills (Table 7). The need for skills upgrading seems to be lower among occupational groups that are perceived to be less qualified. However, this may simply imply that the skills requirements for some of these occupations are lower anyway and that the lower skill levels required for these jobs are in greater supply.

In relation to company size, the findings in Tables 7–9 clearly show that the larger companies in particular have acute shortages of management skills. For instance, some 54.3% of enterprises with 250 or more employees have acute shortages of management skills among management and professional occupations (Table 7). This compares with 19.7% of enterprises with 3–49 employees for the same occupational group.

Some interesting differences also emerge between the different sectors shown in Tables 7–9. For example, a considerably higher proportion of public administration and defence employees seem to need to upgrade their IT, management and technical/practical skills. In fact, high levels of IT skills deficiencies are identified in many sectors. The financial intermediation sector is also identified as having serious skills deficiencies in areas such as IT, management and technical/practical skills.

Preferred means of tackling skills gap

The results in Tables 10–12 below identify the preferred ways of tackling the skills gaps for each occupational group. For instance, almost 23% of enterprises cited on-the-job training as one of their preferred methods of addressing the skills gaps among management, professional and associate professional staff (Table 10). The use of training courses or hiring of experienced staff were also cited as popular means of counteracting the skills gap in this occupational group, at 19.3% and 15.3% respectively.

Table 10: Enterprises' preferred means of addressing skills gap among management, professional and associate professional staff (%)

NACE sector	Hiring experienced staff	Training courses	On-the-job training	Self- directed learning
Manufacturing, mining and quarrying,	17.2	26.5	25.7	7.3

electricity, gas and water supply				
Construction	8.5	10.4	12.2	4.5
Wholesale and retail	14.9	16.8	21.6	6.5
Hotels and restaurants	13.6	8.4	19.4	6.1
Transport, storage and communication	14.8	16.4	13.2	10.0
Financial intermediation	15.8	33.4	34.7	11.1
Business services	20.4	30.6	32.5	8.6
Public administration and defence	30.2	53.6	47.4	24.5
Education	19.5	33.6	36.2	15.0
Health	22.8	32.5	36.5	12.4
Other services	18.4	22.6	26.8	9.2
Total	15.3	19.3	22.9	7.3
Size of enterprise (number of employees)				
3–49 employees	14.0	17.3	21.6	7.0
50–249 employees	36.1	50.5	42.5	9.8
250+ employees	40.2	59.1	47.2	21.3
Total	15.3	19.3	22.9	7.3

Note: Figures show the proportion of enterprises citing their preferred means as a percentage of all enterprises.

Source: CSO, 2009

On-the-job training also proved to be the most popular means of tackling the skills gap among clerical, sales and service employees, with 25.9% of enterprises citing this option (Table 11). The use of training courses was also a popular option (14%), particularly among the largest enterprises (47.4%) to a greater extent than the smallest enterprises (12.4%).

Table 11: Enterprises' preferred means of addressing skills gap among clerical, sales and services employees (%)

NACE sector	Hiring experienced staff	Training courses	On-the-job training	Self-directed learning
Manufacturing, mining and quarrying, electricity, gas and water supply	10.9	18.8	26.1	5.2
Construction	5.7	7.7	9.0	1.6

Wholesale and retail	14.5	16.6	37.2	5.6
Hotels and restaurants	14.9	6.0	28.2	1.5
Transport, storage and communication	14.7	13.5	16.2	9.6
Financial intermediation	16.1	30.8	47.5	8.0
Business services	9.6	14.9	21.7	4.1
Public administration and defence	25.0	50.0	49.5	20.3
Education	9.2	18.1	18.7	7.8
Health	13.9	20.0	34.1	5.5
Other services	12.1	17.1	29.1	3.6
Total	11.6	14.0	25.9	4.2
Size of enterprise (number of employees)				
3–49 employees	10.9	12.4	24.5	4.0
50–249 employees	23.4	38.9	48.5	6.4
250+ employees	29.3	47.4	46.5	12.8
Total	11.6	14.0	25.9	4.2

Note: Figures show the proportion of enterprises citing their preferred means as a percentage of all enterprises.

Source: CSO, 2009

In relation to production, transport, craft and other manual employees, on-the-job training was once again the most preferred means of tackling the skills shortage, with 18.7% of enterprises citing this option (Table 12). The hiring of experienced staff was also a popular method for this occupational group (8.2%), although it should be noted that the percentages for all preferred means were relatively lower for this group compared with the other occupational categories.

Table 12: Enterprises' preferred means of addressing skills gap among production, transport, craft and other manual employees (%)

NACE sector	Hiring experienced staff	Training courses	On-the-job training	Self-directed learning
Manufacturing, mining and quarrying, electricity, gas and water supply	11.7	18.9	38.1	5.0
Construction	11.7	10.8	30.7	5.4
Wholesale and retail	5.8	5.6	13.3	2.2

Hotels and restaurants	11.5	4.9	23.7	2.9
Transport, storage and communication	16.8	6.4	14.4	6.4
Financial intermediation	0.2	1.4	2.2	1.0
Business services	3.1	2.8	8	1.9
Public administration and defence	13.5	24.5	29.7	14.1
Education	5.3	3.9	3.1	1.2
Health	4.2	8.2	11.8	1.6
Other services	9.9	9.5	16.4	1.5
Total	8.2	7.4	18.7	3.1
Size of enterprise (number of employees)				
3–49 employees	7.7	6.3	17.9	3.0
50–249 employees	15.0	23.9	32.9	4.5
250+ employees	16.1	28.9	35.5	7.3
Total	8.2	7.4	18.7	3.1

Note: Figures show the proportion of enterprises citing their preferred means as a percentage of all enterprises.

Source: CSO, 2009

Overall, self-directed learning is a much less common means of tackling skills gaps among all occupational groupings, and among the three categories it was highest for the management and professional grades at 7.3% (Table 10).

In terms of company size, larger enterprises were much more likely to use all of the various methods to address skills gaps than small enterprises, and this applied across all of the occupational groups (Tables 10–12). Regarding the different economic sectors, public administration and defence had a high incidence of all of the various methods of addressing skills gaps, and this was generally the case across the three occupational categories.

Employee methods of acquiring skills

As part of the survey, employees were asked how they acquired their skills for their current job. In response, 48% stated that they acquired their skills through on-the-job training (Table 13). A further 41.9% reported that they were hired as an experienced worker who had already acquired sufficient skills, while just under a quarter (24.5%) stated that they had attended training courses in relation to acquiring skills in their current job. An additional 16.1% of employees reported using self-directed learning. There was little difference between employees in enterprises of different sizes, except in relation to the fact that a significantly higher proportion of employees (30.2%) in large enterprises had acquired at least some skills through training courses compared with the corresponding proportion of employees in small enterprises (15.6%).

Table 13: Employee methods of acquiring skills in current job (%)

NACE sector	Hired as experienced worker	Training courses	On-the-job training	Self-directed learning
Manufacturing, mining and quarrying, electricity, gas and water supply	38.1	29.3	57.6	14.8
Construction	42.1	20.3	39.4	12.5
Wholesale and retail	38.4	17.8	48.7	12.5
Hotels and restaurants	46.0	13.4	43.0	10.4
Transport, storage and communication	32.0	36.5	53.8	14.3
Financial intermediation	32.2	43.9	69.7	25.9
Business services	46.5	26.2	46.3	18.9
Public administration and defence	23.3	40.7	66.2	21.3
Education	68.0	11.5	17.7	19.6
Health	50.3	21.6	39.8	19.5
Other services	40.8	22.8	47.7	14.4
Total	41.9	24.5	48.0	16.1
Size of enterprises (number of employees)				
3–49 employees	42.6	15.6	41.1	14.2
50–249 employees	44.1	25.5	49.9	15.4
250+ employees	40.7	30.2	52.1	17.8
Total	41.9	24.5	48.0	16.1

Note: Figures show the proportion of employees citing methods of acquiring skills as a percentage of all employees.

Source: CSO, 2009

Methodology

As mentioned, the data outlined in this report was collected as part of the NES, conducted in October 2006. The NES is a major workplace survey conducted by Ireland's CSO. The purpose of the survey is to provide more detailed structural information on workplace issues, including skills and training, earnings and factors influencing earnings. The NES is carried out annually and has been designed as an integrated survey that addresses issues of national interest. The data presented in this specific national survey data report relates to continuing **vocational training (CVT)** and job skills.

The data was collected by the CSO in accordance with the European Communities (Statistics) (National Employment Survey) Regulations 2007 and Statistics (National Employment Survey) Order 2007. Prior to the launch of the survey, the CSO consulted with various interest organisations and fine-tuned the questions after conducting a pilot survey in late 2006.

A sample of employers was selected initially and then, in a second stage, a sample of employees was selected from within the chosen enterprises. Employers facilitated this approach by selecting a systematic sample of employees from their payrolls, based on the number of employees in October 2006, and forwarding the selection to the CSO. This two-stage strategy was used for practical purposes to optimise the quality of the information collected.

The NES sample of employers was selected from the CSO Central Business Register (CBR). An enterprise is defined as the smallest legally independent unit. The NACE code of each enterprise included in the survey was determined from the predominant activity of the enterprise, based on information provided in this or other CSO inquiries. The size class of each enterprise was determined by the number of employees and therefore excluded other persons engaged in work – such as people who worked for the enterprise but were not paid a definite wage or salary.

The employer sample was selected based on the proportion of companies in each economic sector and size class cell. The sample was also checked to make sure that there were at least five employers in each cell; if there were less than five employers in a cell, then all were included in the sample. Only employers with more than three employees were surveyed and the data was collected at enterprise level. Employers were required to have been trading in the reference month of October 2006.

No imputation was carried out in relation to unit non-response – that is, the weighting of the survey results allowed for the inclusion of these enterprises in the final results. Item non-response – that is, non-respondent questions in a particular return – was dealt with by imputing values based on a weighted average of the relevant respondents. However, item non-response was very small.

There were 8,383 relevant enterprises in the NES October 2006 survey, of which 4,209 responded – therefore, constituting a response rate of 50.2%. There was an effective sample of 68,427 employees, of whom 51,252 responded – thus, representing a response rate of almost 75%. After the fieldwork for the survey was completed, the respondent enterprises were then weighted up to the full register of 61,200 enterprises and 1,626,000 employees. The survey results relate to all enterprises with three or more employees in 2006. Information was collected separately for nine occupation groups, but these were grouped together for publication purposes. The three groups are as follows: managers, administrators, professionals and associate professionals; clerical, sales and service workers; production, transport, craft and tradespersons, and other manual workers. A brief employee questionnaire was circulated in paper format to each employee.

The survey is conducted by post. However, all organisations are encouraged to make electronic returns to reduce their burden. All large organisations do make electronic returns and a significant percentage of the smaller ones make electronic returns. The employee questionnaires are posted out with a stamped addressed envelope to ensure confidentiality of their returns, as they may not wish their employer to know certain personal details..

Commentary

This comprehensive training and skills survey by the CSO is a welcome addition to research on working conditions in Ireland. The survey clearly illustrates that significant differences are evident in training and skills development between small and large enterprises, and across different sectors.

Clearly, more work needs to be done in Ireland to enhance training and skills development – particularly in certain sectors. This is a vital policy issue. There is consensus among the government and social partners in Ireland – as encapsulated in national social partnership agreements – that improvements in the area of lifelong learning and training opportunities for all, especially for those with lower skills, are vital in order to enhance the Irish economy’s progress along a high value-added knowledge trajectory. In this context, upskilling has been framed as vital to boost Ireland’s competitiveness. However, it seems clear that any major improvement in upskilling of low-skilled employees would require that the government adopts a more interventionist and statutory role in training policy – along the lines of certain other European countries. Vocational training has not yet acquired the status of an individual statutory right in Ireland – for instance, through provisions for statutory leave periods for further training and education. Take-up of vocational training is still voluntarist – in other words, negotiated between employers and employees and/or their representatives. Furthermore, government and employer funding dedicated specifically to training and upskilling remains quite low, although there were some signs – until the onset of Ireland’s serious recession – that training was attracting more targeted attention and resourcing, albeit from a low base. Nonetheless, investment in training might be expected to be one of the casualties of a deep recession.

If Ireland is to move further towards becoming a knowledge economy, the existing ‘opportunities divide’ needs to be tackled in the workplace and society. For instance, inequalities exist in access to opportunities for training between high and low-skilled workers, between older and younger workers, and between men and women. To a large extent, these inequalities reflect societal inequalities and the fact that two different economies are operating side by side: the growth of highly-skilled knowledge work has coincided with the parallel growth of the low-paid service sector and contract jobs. In this context, the CSO training and skills survey findings could be extremely useful for guiding those with responsibility for national skills policy in identifying areas where skills gaps are most acute in relation to particular occupations and sectors. The CSO survey identifies deficiencies in management skills as one crucial policy area that clearly needs to be tackled if Ireland is to realise its policy goal of becoming a competitive knowledge economy.

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