

Second chance – education of adults

Country: Ireland

Name of the Project: Vocational Training Opportunity Scheme (VTOS)

Total budget: 195 127 652.67 Euro

ESF support: 65 128 652.4 Euro (1994-1999)

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“Vocational Training Opportunity Scheme” is a constant support and individual approach to long-term unemployed persons as a result of insufficient education. The Scheme succeeded in its pilot edition. Now, it is implemented throughout Ireland.

Anna Carlin left school at the age of 15 without any profession. She worked first as a mechanic and then as a machinist. At the age of 25 she was married with three children. Her life condition became worse when her husband lost his job. One day as she walked the street she noticed a poster advertising the scheme which offered a chance to improve her family’s situation. After two years in the scheme, Anna graduated from the secondary school with good results. Now she says that “thanks to the scheme I enrolled in the school for accountancy technicians at Cavan College. I work and study to become a chartered accountant. You can always change your life and complete your studies!”

The scheme of “a second chance” to obtain vocational qualifications was created as a reaction to a very low level of general and vocational education of long-term unemployed persons in Ireland. 80% of persons living on unemployment benefit does not have even a “Leaving certificate” – a certificate which enables taking most kinds of work. The scheme promotes social integration of the unemployed and their families through providing an opportunity to take state vocational examinations which guarantee reemployment. Another part of the scheme focuses on self-confidence of the supportees in certain everyday situations from which they were excluded as the unemployed.

The scheme, originally called “Education Opportunity Scheme”, was established in 1986 and forty persons have benefited from it. It was innovative, because it provided an opportunity for the unemployed to return education in a regular full-time system without losing the right to the benefit and other allowances due to the unemployed. In 1989, the Scheme received the support from the European Social Fund and changed its name to Vocational Training Opportunity Scheme. Thanks to the financing from ESF, the scheme managed to expand to 12 centres and take care of 289 persons.

Today, the scheme covers 94 centres throughout Ireland and offers opportunities to 5 thousand persons each year. Centres offer their supportees a wide range of trainings. The training takes two years or up to three years in the case of persons of particularly low qualifications. Persons applying for assistance must be 21+ and receive an unemployment benefit for at least six months. The assistance is available to persons receiving benefits for single parents, for disabled or for dependant persons. Trainings are free of charge, their participants receive a scholarship equal to their benefit, they also receive money for commuting and meals during training. They are also provided with all training materials.

The offered trainings start with a basic upgrading of school skills and end with specialist IT courses prepared in co-operation with such companies as Microsoft, IBM or Dell. Graduates may take further courses in such areas, *inter alia*, as business, industrial design, children care,

media and communication, graphics. 79% of persons who completed their participation in the Scheme in the summer of 1999 found employment or continue education. Ms Helen Keogh, National scheme Coordinator, says “Before we started to implement the scheme, Ireland lacked a tool providing for a developed, based on relevant technologies and flexible training for adults. Such training service improves very much chances for persons who have been so far excluded from normal social life for economic reasons. The graduates’ successes show what sacrifices and determination the unemployed are capable of when given a significant and available opportunity.”