

ISSUES
IN THE EMPLOYMENT
OF
EARLY SCHOOL
LEAVERS

CIARA O'SHEA
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James Williams (Head of Survey Unit) is a Senior Research Officer and Ciara O'Shea was a Surveys Executive with The Economic and Social Research Institute. The paper has been accepted for publication by the Institute, which is not responsible for either the content or the views expressed therein.

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Pathways

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FOREWORD

This National Survey of Employers Attitudes to Early School Leavers was carried out by The Economic and Social Research Institute. It was commissioned by the Pathways Tracking Project to inform the development of responses to early school leavers in employment and funded by FÁS, the National Support Structure for Youthstart and the Irish Youth Foundation.

The Pathways Tracking Project is an EMPLOYMENT-Youthstart funded inter-agency project made up of statutory and voluntary organisations who provide a range of services to early school leavers.

In spite of the remarkable advances made in the development of formal education in Ireland over the last thirty years, both in terms of provision and retention, one in five young people continues to leave the formal system before completion of the Leaving Certificate. The majority of these young people are absorbed into the rapidly expanding economy, generally into low pay, low skill and frequently temporary employment. The level of youth unemployment has also dropped dramatically over the last decade from 43,000 in 1993 to 28,500 in 1999 and indications are that it is continuing to drop. However there is increasing evidence that these figures disguise continuing entrenched pockets of youth and long-term unemployment. Furthermore, it is becoming increasingly obvious that many young people who are entering the labour market do not have the skills or resources to maintain any long-term position in it and that the solution to this marginalised position of a significant number of early school leavers will not be found in the demand or supply side of current employment practices alone.

The economic prosperity of the last few years has had a positive impact on all school leavers in terms of unemployment rates but relatively less so on early leavers, especially for those with no qualifications. For those early school leavers who do obtain employment, there are significant differentials in rates of pay between those who leave school with a Leaving Certificate and those who do not.

The Government and its agencies have come to recognise the relative disadvantage of this group and significant developments have taken place in the early school leaving sector both in terms of policy development and operational programmes in recent years. For example, the Education Welfare Act and the White Paper on Lifelong Learning will result in lasting impacts on early school leaving and the transition from education into further education and employment, when they become operational.

Apart from the actions developed as part of formal systems school retention programmes, the most significant development regarding out-of-school responses to early school leaving is the report of the YOUTHREACH 2000 Consultation Process. This review of YOUTHREACH has taken on board the changing environment in which the programme operates as well as the learning and best practice developed through the ESF EMPLOYMENT-Youthstart Initiative and proposes a radical reshaping of responses to early school leaving.

This National Survey – Issues in the Employment of Early School Leavers – was carried out to explore the willingness of employers to participate in the training – education loop. Eighty seven per cent of employers stated their willingness to participate in work based learning initiatives in the form of work experience and day release to state funded training courses for early school leavers. When asked why they do not participate in such programmes currently, many employers say it is simply that they have not been asked.

That said, only one in five companies have actually employed early school leavers in the two years 1998 and 1999. However, they report generally positive experiences, particularly in relation to personal skills such as honesty, ability to fit in, and team-work. They are also quite positive in relation to “basic ability to be worked on”. On the other hand, of those who have not employed early school leavers 58 per cent are of the opinion that “nothing could be done to make them more employable”.

These findings indicate some prejudice on the part of employers towards early school leavers and a very low-level awareness of work based learning and the potential role of business in providing early school leavers with developmental opportunities for participation in the labour force.

This survey indicates that the links between employers and early school leavers are weak, that there is little awareness of existing programmes and that employers have some prejudice against early school leavers. It also shows that, notwithstanding this prejudice, employers are by and large willing to participate in programmes. This willingness is largely untested, given the low rates of participation, but does provide a base on which to build employer participation in the work education loop.

National policy documents such as the National Development Plan, the White Paper on Lifelong Learning and the YOUTHREACH 2000 report already envisage measures to target unqualified young workers. A broad range of models has been developed, both by Youthstart projects such as Pathways and mainstream actions such as the FÁS Advocates projects and YOUTHREACH progression options. Urgent consideration should be given as to how these models can be mainstreamed to develop and capitalise on the willingness of employers. In addition,

consideration should be given to developing local information awareness programmes targeting the business community on the benefits and supports available for those employing early school leavers. Above all, however, there is a compelling need to establish a broader sense of common purpose between education, training and employment services on one hand and employers and trades unions on the other, to make the workplace an engine of social and economic inclusion for young people. Developing and supporting the necessary national and local mechanisms will be one of the most significant challenges facing both the supply and demand sides throughout the next decade.

Billy Murphy
Co-ordinator
Pathways Tracking Project

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The results, their interpretation and any remaining errors or omissions are, of course, the responsibility of the authors.

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1. BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Objectives

Much work has been undertaken in Ireland on the characteristics of young, early school leavers; on the determinants of early drop-out rates and on the factors which contribute to the success or failure of the early leaver in the transition from school to the wider world of work and beyond. The factors contributing to early school leaving in Ireland have been extensively researched (see, for example, Craft (1974); Breen (1984, 1986); Drudy and Lynch (1993); Hannan (1986, 1987, 1995, 1998); Clancy (1995); Smyth (1999)).

A number of recurring themes emerge from this work as potentially contributing to early school leaving. These themes can be characterised as falling into at least two main explanatory groups. First one has a set of variables relating to the child, to his/her family circumstances and community. These include the personal and family characteristics of the child, social class and level of educational attainment of the parents; the orientation of parental attitudes towards education and their views on its role in the development of their children etc. A key aspect of this group of theories on the extent and correlates of early school leaving involves issues of poverty and exclusion and the intergenerational transmission and perpetuation of same through the education system.

The second main group of theories which contribute to the understanding of the process of early exits from the education system relates to the institutional or structural context of the school itself. Issues focused on in this regard include the extent of streaming within the school; availability of teaching and other resources to the school; the disciplinary regime within the school; the extent of an inclusive or integrative atmosphere in the school between staff, pupils and parents, etc. These institutional/structuralist theories on school drop-out rates focus on the selection and socialisation role of education.

In reality, the ultimate determinants of early school drop-outs is undoubtedly a complex, multi-dimensional mix of numerous aspects of both the individualist and structuralist theories alluded to above. Much of the research to date in this area would suggest that this is the case and it is this which has informed a substantial part of the current policy prescriptions on early school leaving.

All of this research on early leaving and its determinants is very clearly focused on what one could describe as the “supply-side” of the problem. It attempts to enhance our understanding of where, why and in what quantities early leavers emerge from the mainstream system – its focus is on the supply of leavers. Much less work has been undertaken to attempt to understand the so-called demand side of early leaving or the reaction of employers and potential employers to the annual flow of early leavers into the labour force.

It was with a view to addressing this gap in our understanding that the current research was commissioned. The main results of the report are based on a dedicated survey of employers to quantify some of the key issues on the demand for young early school leavers in the non-agricultural private sector in Ireland today. A number of key issues were focused on in this survey of firms. First, we attempted to quantify the incidence of the employment of early school leavers and the characteristics of the jobs which they held. Second, we considered the employers’ perceptions of young early leavers, focusing on their personal and skill attributes with a view to assessing the

relative impact each set might have on the employers' willingness or otherwise to recruit the early leaver. A particularly important aspect of this area was the identification of obstacles or barriers to the employment of early leavers as perceived by the firm. Third, we considered firms' stated willingness to participate in training and re-training programmes with a view to assessing the extent to which they would be willing to engage with life-long learning schemes for early leavers in the workplace. The detailed issues contained in the questionnaire used in the firm survey to address these main themes included the following:

- The incidence of employment of young leavers by industrial sector;
- the types of job held by the early school leaver;
- perceived barriers (if any) to their employment;
- the level of induction training given to the early leavers in the workplace as well as support offered to them after the initial induction training;
- the opportunity for young early school leavers to progress and advance their initial position in the workplace;
- firms' perceptions of the personal and work skills of early school leavers;
- firms stated willingness to participate in personal development and work-related training for young early school leavers;
- firms experience of previously having offered work experience to pre-leavers as an indicator of their potential willingness to enter the loop of progressive training/re-training and education-for-life schemes;
- firms' views on factors which would make early leavers more employable.

For the purposes of the survey of firms we had to provide a working definition to respondents of whom to include as an "early leaver". It was agreed in our terms of reference that we would define a young, early school leaver as someone who was aged 21 years or less and who had left mainstream second-level education on completion of the Junior Certificate or earlier.¹ This meant that the respondent was asked to focus on those who left school with either no qualifications or on completion of the Junior Certificate. The authors appreciate that this is a somewhat generic and inclusive definition. We do not assume that, for example, all those who leave school on completion of the Junior Certificate have the same characteristics on leaving school. Neither do we assume that they all have the same subsequent labour market outcomes. Ideally, one would like to have differentiated within the Junior Certificate cycle according to grade obtained. This was not operationally feasible, however, as employers, in the main, do not know their staff sufficiently well as to allow them to classify them to this level of detail.² This is particularly so in larger enterprises.

In addition to the dedicated survey of firms on the demand side of the labour market, the authors also undertook to contextualise these demand side issues with an overview of some of the main issues and characteristics of the supply side. This involved considering the number of early school leavers who come onto the labour market each year along with a brief consideration of a few key performance indicators of their early labour market experience. These indicators include participation and unemployment rates; wages levels; participation in and perceptions of post-school training.

1.2 The Survey of Firms

A dedicated survey of firms was conducted between January-March 2000 to explore the various aspects of the demand side of the employment of young early school

¹ The reader is advised that although early school leaving is principally a phenomenon of second level and is characterised as children leaving before completion of the Leaving Certificate there are some children who do not, in fact, transfer from primary to post-primary levels. The ESF Evaluation Unit Report on early school leaving estimated that approximately 1,000 pupils exit the primary level system annually (ESF, 1996). These early drop-outs from the Primary system should, of course be captured as having no qualifications in the survey of firms.

² As noted below in our discussion of the experience of the pilot survey, we found that employers had some difficulty in classifying their employees even to the more aggregated levels of attainment such as No Qualifications, Junior Certificate, Leaving Certificate etc.

leavers as outlined in the previous section. The conduct of the survey is discussed below.

1.2.1 THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The questionnaire was drawn up in consultation with the Steering Committee and contained a total of 24 questions (with appropriate subsections etc.). The purpose of the instrument was to allow the firm to record, on a self-completion basis, the sort of details outlined in Section 1.1 above on the views and perceptions of the employer to their recruitment of young, early school leavers. As noted in Section 1.2.2 below we carried out a pilot test in December 1999 and January 2000 and found that our initial questionnaire was somewhat too complex for the respondent to complete with ease. Substantial proportions of respondents simply could not provide some of the more detailed breakdowns requested by level of educational attainment etc. It became obvious from the pilot that many firms were either unwilling or unable to provide the level of detail on the background characteristics of their employees.

On the basis of the pilot experience it was also felt that we had to abandon attempts in this survey to measure the sensitivity of employers' willingness to pay for the training in which they said they would be willing to participate. The questioning in this area simply proved too onerous for the respondent and adversely impacted on response rates.

1.2.2 SURVEY IMPLEMENTATION

The survey was implemented on a so-called mixed mode postal/telephone basis. This involved initially sending the questionnaire to the respondent in the post, followed by a postal reminder two weeks later. There then followed an extended period of very intensive phone follow-up in which all respondents were repeatedly contacted by an interviewer with a view to securing a completed questionnaire or other definitive outcome. This phase of the fieldwork involved re-posting and faxing questionnaires to a very substantial proportion of respondents on request.

A pilot test was carried out in December 1999 and January 2000. On the basis of this we changed the content of the questionnaire but not the methodology for implementing the survey itself.

1.2.3 SAMPLE DESIGN, RESPONSE RATES AND REWEIGHTING THE DATA

The objective of the survey was to provide a representative picture of the issues relating to the employment of early school leavers among private sector employing entities. A random stratified sample of non-agricultural private sector businesses was selected from lists of firms which are maintained in The Economic and Social Research Institute. Prior to selection these firms were stratified according to sector, size (number of employees) and region. A total of nine sectors was used for stratification prior to sample selection as follows: Traditional Manufacturing; Hi-Tech Manufacturing; Construction; Wholesale/Retail; Property/Renting/Business Services; Finance/Insurance/Banking; Computer Services; Transport/Storage/Communications; Hotels/Restaurants/Other Personal Services.

A disproportionate systematic sample was selected with a view to ensuring that each size/sector stratum would be reasonably represented in terms of absolute number of cases in the final effective sample for analysis.

A total valid sample of 2,526 enterprises was selected. The response outcomes are as outlined in Table 1.1 below. From this one can see that a total of 934 firms successfully completed the questionnaire and the report is based on the analysis of their responses. This means that the effective sample response rate is 37 per cent. This is in line with what one would expect from a general national random sample of firms on a topic of this nature.

Table 1.1: Summary of Firms-Based Survey Outcomes

Outcomes	Number	Percentage
Completed	934	37
Refused	50	2
Non-Response	1,542	61
Total	2,526	100

Prior to re-weighting, the 934 questionnaires from responding firms were statistically adjusted in order to ensure that the structure and composition of the completed sample was in line with the structure and composition of the relevant population. To derive the sample weights one has to establish the structure from which the sample has been drawn. The structure used for sample selection was based on size and sector. A total of eight sectors and two size categories was used. The size categories were 0-99 and 100+ employees from traditional and Hi-Tech Manufacturing; and 0-9 and 10+ employees in the Service Sector and Construction. This provides a total of 18 strata or size/sector categories. Using a number of published sources (such as the Census of Industrial Production, the annual Services Enquiries etc.) as well as several special tabulations provided by the Central Statistics Office we were able to derive the overall structure of the population of private sector non-agricultural employing entities according to the 18 size/sector strata used in the re-weighting schema. Using a standard ratio weighing procedure a weight is derived for each firm in the sample. The weight assigned to each firm is given by:

$$W_i = P_i/S_i$$

where the i 's refer to the size/sector cells or strata referred to above. The P_i is the total number of firms in the population of each cell and S_i refers to the number in the corresponding cell.

1.3 The School Leavers' Surveys

As noted in Section 1.1 above, in addition to reporting on the dedicated survey of firms we also agreed to include in the report a brief description of the incidence, principal characteristics and initial labour market outcomes of early school leavers. The information presented in this section of the report is based on a re-analysis of the so-called School Leavers' Surveys which have been conducted over several years by the ESRI on behalf of the Departments of Education and Science and also Enterprise, Trade and Employment. The survey records details from a representative sample of each year's school-leaving cohort approximately twelve months after they have left the second-level system. The main purpose of the survey is to monitor trends in the economic outturns of the leavers one year after they have left school with a view to identifying bottlenecks or problems in their transition period from school to working life, higher education etc.

1.4 The Structure of the Report

The remainder of this report contains four subsequent chapters. In Chapter 2 we provide details on the outflows of early school leavers each year from the second-level system, focusing on their numbers and characteristics as well as their performance in the labour market.

In Chapter 3 we discuss the findings from the employer survey including their perceptions and views on the employment and employability of young, early leavers. This includes a consideration of the incidence of employment by sector; perceived barriers to employment (if any); engagement in the training and mentoring of early leavers etc.

In Chapter 4 we progress to discuss general views among firms regarding the personal and work skills of early leavers as well as the firms' views on their (the firms') engagement with personal and skills-related training courses.

Finally, Chapter 5 provides a summary of our main findings throughout the report.

2. CHARACTERISTICS OF EARLY SCHOOL LEAVERS

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter we contextualise the demand-side aspects of the employment of early school leavers by presenting details on their early labour market experience, focusing in particular on the variation in their experience according to level of attainment on leaving the full-time education system. In this respect the current chapter concentrates on the supply side of the early school-leaver market. In the next two chapters we progress to consider the demand side – from the perspective of the employer as recorded in the dedicated survey of firms and their experience and perceptions of employing young early leavers.

The information in the current chapter is drawn from a number of surveys undertaken annually for the Department of Education and Science and also the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. These surveys (known as the Annual School Leavers' Surveys) have been carried out for over twenty years in Ireland and record a wealth of detail on a variety of areas surrounding the labour market experience of school children in their first year after leaving the full-time education system. The sort of information recorded includes economic status (focusing in particular on the experience of unemployment); the type of job undertaken; wage levels; training experience; satisfaction with current employment situation, etc. As noted, an important emphasis throughout the surveys in question is the variation in these indicators of the early labour market fortunes of school leavers according to their level of attainment on leaving school. The School Leavers' Surveys record information from a representative sample of those who leave the second-level system each year. Former pupils are interviewed in person approximately one year after they leave the full-time second-level system. The data are statistically re-weighted or adjusted so as to ensure that it is representative of the totality of all leavers in a given year.³

The current chapter is divided into five subsequent sections. First, we consider long-term trends in the economic status of School Leavers over the last twenty years. Second, we examine differentials in wage levels by levels of educational attainment. Third, we discuss the students' perceptions of the usefulness of the education which they received in school. Fourth, we consider the extent of Vocational Training undertaken since leaving school. Finally, we present a summary of our main findings.

2.2 Long-Term Trends in the Economic Status of School Leavers

In this section we consider long-term trends in the economic status of leavers one year after they have left the full-time education system. We begin with Table 2.1 by considering the percentage of children leaving the second-level system each year since 1980 with different levels of educational attainment. From the table one can see, for example, that in 1980 a total of 9 per cent of second-level school children left the education system with No Qualifications; a further 31 per cent left with the Junior Certificate and just under 60 per cent left on completion of the Leaving Certificate. It is clear from the table that retention rates have been increasing substantially over the 1980s and 1990s so that by 1998 the percentage who left school with the Leaving

³ For a full discussion of the content and conduct of a recent School Leavers' Survey see, for example, McCoy, Doyle and Williams (1999).

Certificate stood at 81 per cent. Notwithstanding these substantial improvements, it is clear that in the order of 19 per cent of second-level children are currently leaving the system each year prior to completion of the Leaving Certificate. It is further noteworthy that this level has remained relatively stable throughout the 1990s. In absolute terms this implies that approximately 13,000 children come on to the labour market each year without having completed a Leaving Certificate. A total of 2,400 of these leave with no formal qualifications while the remaining 10,600 leave on completion of the Junior Certificate.

Table 2.1: Long-term Trends in Levels of Educational Attainments, 1980-1998

Level of Attainment	1980	1982	1984	1986	1988	1990	1992	1994	1996	1998
	(Per Cent)									
No Qualifications	9.0	7.8	7.5	7.1	7.2	6.4	5.5	4.9	4.0	3.5
Junior Certificate	31.1	25.8	25.6	22.9	23.3	18.0	15.1	15.9	15.2	15.5
Leaving Certificate	59.9	66.4	66.9	70.0	69.5	75.6	79.4	79.0	80.8	81.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 2.2 shows the breakdown of leavers of the three most recent rounds of the Annual School Leavers' Surveys broken down by gender. From this one can see that early exit from the second-level system is currently a more frequently occurring phenomenon among boys than girls. In the most recent year for which figures are available (1998) one can see that 19 per cent of boys leave on completion of the Junior Certificate compared with 11 per cent of girls. Part of the explanation for this lies in the greater tendency among boys to leave on completion of the Junior Certificate to take up an apprenticeship. In aggregate terms one can see that in 1998 a total of 23.7 per cent of boys compared with 13.8 per cent of girls left school with No Qualifications or the Junior Certificate.

Table 2.2: Qualifications on Leaving Second-Level School Classified by Gender, 1995-1998

	Boys			Girls			Persons		
	1996	1997 (Per Cent)	1998	1996	1997 (Per Cent)	1998	1996	1997 (Per Cent)	1998
No Qualifications	4.7	4.7	4.4	3.0	2.8	2.6	4.0	3.7	3.5
Junior Certificate	18.9	20.8	19.3	11.5	11.7	11.2	15.2	16.3	15.5
Leaving Certificate	76.4	74.5	76.2	85.5	85.5	86.2	80.8	80.0	81.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 2.3 presents details on long-term trends in labour force participation rates as well as related unemployment rates among those who join the labour force. The data relate to the situation of leavers one year after they have left the second-level system. From this one can see, for example, that in 1980 just over three-quarters of both boys and girls who left school entered the labour force. The participation rate for boys and girls at that time was largely the same. One can further see from the table that the unemployment rate⁴ among boys was 11 per cent while that for girls was marginally lower at just under 10 per cent.

The figures show that male participation rates declined steadily from their 1980 level of 76.5 per cent to 55.5 per cent in 1994 after which they began to rise to stand at just under 62 per cent in 1996. It is clear that, over the same period, unemployment rates increased sharply to reach almost 33 per cent in 1986. After experiencing a slight downturn in the latter part of the 1980s they began to rise again in the early 1990s rising to almost 39 per cent in 1994. Since then they have fallen sharply to stand at just under 11 per cent in 1998.

Table 2.3: Labour Force Participation and Unemployment Rates Among Male and Female School Leavers, 1980-1998

⁴ This includes those who were unemployed having lost or given up a previous job as well as those who were seeking first regular job.

Level of Attainment	1980	1982	1984	1986	1988	1990	1992	1994	1996	1998
	(Per Cent)									
Male School Leavers:										
Participation Rate	76.5	73.8	73.2	69.8	67.8	62.3	58.9	55.5	61.6	61.9
Unemployment Rate	11.0	22.2	36.7	32.7	31.0	24.7	38.2	38.9	22.2	10.8
Female School Leavers:										
Participation Rate	76.6	69.1	72.8	70.8	66.6	58.1	60.0	53.4	51.7	47.3
Unemployment Rate	9.7	24.2	34.5	33.1	27.2	20.8	33.5	34.5	22.4	17.2

In general, the long-term trends in female participation rates mirrored those of their male counterparts throughout the 1980s and 1990s. In line with the male rates, female participation fell to just over 53 per cent in 1994. One can see from Table 2.3, however, that, unlike the situation of the boys, female participation rates after 1994 continued to decline until they stood at 47.3 per cent in 1998 for the 1997 leaver cohort.

The divergence of trends between male and female participation in the latter half of the 1990s can most likely be ascribed to the effects of general economic and labour market growth impacting differentially on male and female leavers. The increasingly buoyant economic circumstances of the second half of the 1990s appears to have resulted in relatively lower retention rates in post second-level education among boys than girls. Given the greater ease with which employment could be secured in the second half of the 1990s it would appear that a higher percentage of boys than girls decided to take up the resulting employment opportunities. The effect of this differential impact of the improved labour market situation between boys and girls results in a 15 percentage point difference in participation rates between boys and girls by the latter half of the 1990s.

The extent of variations, according to level of attainment, in unemployment rates among leavers one year after they quit the education system is outlined in Table 2.4. From the figures one can see, for example, that in 1980 a total of 22 per cent of leavers who exit the second level system with No Qualifications were unemployed one year later. This compares with a rate of 11 per cent among those who leave on completion of the Junior Certificate and just under 8 per cent for those who completed the Leaving Certificate. The clear long-term trend from the table indicates that unemployment rates one year after leaving school rose sharply throughout the 1980s for all levels of educational attainment, peaking out in 1988. In that year almost two-thirds of those who left school with No Qualifications and who entered the labour market were unemployed one year later. Approximately one-third of those who left on completion of the Junior Certificate were unemployed compared with just under 20 per cent of those who left on completion of the Leaving Certificate. There was a pick-up in unemployment rates among the early leavers from 1991 to 1994, after which they began to fall in line with the economic buoyancy of the latter half of the 1990s.

It is clear from Table 2.4 that unemployment rates among all those leaving school at different levels of educational attainment followed the same *general* trends over the 1980s and 1990s. A particularly pertinent consideration, however, is the *degree* to which the rate of change in unemployment rates varied according to level of attainment over the twenty years in question. For a consideration of the extent of variations in the rate of change in unemployment rates one can, for example, assess whether or not the *relative* employment/unemployment status of school leavers with different levels of educational attainment has changed over the relevant period.

Table 2.4: Long-term Trends in Unemployment Rates According to Level of Educational Attainment, 1980-1998

Level of Attainment	1980	1982	1984	1986	1988	1990	1992	1994	1996	1998
	(Per Cent)									
Section A:										
No Qualifications	21.9	41.3	49.3	48.9	65.6	46.5	61.7	77.8	61.0	47.5
Junior Certificate	10.6	23.3	38.3	39.3	34.9	25.6	45.0	46.2	26.0	20.4
Leaving Certificate	7.7	20.0	31.6	27.1	19.0	17.6	29.0	28.7	8.0	8.4
Section B:	Percentage Point Difference Between Leaving Certificate and No Qualifications									

No Qualifications	14.2	21.3	17.7	21.8	46.5	28.9	32.6	49.1	53.0	39.1
Junior Certificate	2.9	3.3	6.7	12.2	15.6	8.0	15.9	17.5	18.0	16.0
Ratio of Unemployment Rates Among Those With No Qualifications and Junior Certificate to Rates Among Those With a Leaving Certificate										
Section C:										
No Qualifications	2.8	2.1	1.6	1.8	3.4	2.6	2.1	2.7	7.6	5.6
Junior Certificate	1.4	1.2	1.2	1.4	1.8	1.4	1.5	1.6	3.2	2.4

From Section B of Table 2.4 one can begin to get a feel for the *relative* improvements or otherwise of the three attainment levels in terms of unemployment rates one year after leaving school. One can see that in 1980 there was a 14.2 percentage point differential between the unemployment rate among those who left with No Qualifications and those who left with a Leaving Certificate. This differential increased somewhat throughout the 1980s to stand at 46.5 percentage points in 1988. After that period it fell somewhat until 1994 when the percentage point difference in unemployment rates between those leaving with No Qualifications and those who exit school with a Leaving Certificate once again began to increase. By 1996 the difference is 53 percentage points.

Similarly, one can see that the percentage point differential in unemployment rates between those who complete second level schooling with a Junior Certificate and those who complete with a Leaving Certificate increased fairly steadily over the 1980s dipping slightly in the early 1990s and then increasing again in the latter years of the decade.

The same information is presented in ratio form in Section C of Table 2.4. These figures show the ratio of unemployment rates among, respectively, those who left with No Qualifications and those who left with the Junior Certificate cycle relative to their counterparts who left school having completed a Leaving Certificate. One can see from this section of the table that, for example, in 1980 the unemployment rate among those who left full-time second level with No Qualifications was 2.8 times that of those who left on completion of the Leaving Certificate. Unemployment rates among those who left having completed the Junior Certificate are 1.4 times the rate for their counterparts who completed second level with the Leaving Certificate. One can see that the ratios remained relatively stable throughout the 1980s with an increase being apparent in 1988 before falling back slightly until 1992. Of particular concern, however, is the fairly substantial increase in the ratios from 1994, onwards. This is particularly obvious with the No Qualifications category. One can see from the table that the ratio of unemployment rates between the No Qualification and the Leaving Certificate groups was 2.7 per cent in 1994 rising sharply to 7.6 per cent in 1996 and 5.6 per cent in 1998. The comparable ratio for the Junior Certificate also showed evidence of increasing in the latter years of the 1990s.

The trends highlighted by Table 2.4 would seem to suggest that in terms of unemployment experience those who leave second level with No Qualifications are substantially disadvantaged as compared to those who complete the senior cycle. Perhaps even more disconcerting, however, is the evidence to suggest that although the economic expansion which has been experienced over the last five years has positively impacted on the unemployment experience of all leavers, it would seem to have benefited those with higher levels of attainment *to a greater degree* than those with No Qualifications or who leave after the first cycle. Consequently, although the rising tide of economic prosperity would seem to have lifted all boats, it would appear to have raised the boats of the better qualified to a greater degree than those with lower levels of attainment. This differential effect of the recent economic expansion once again focuses the spotlight on the early school leaver and the need to implement proactive training/re-training programmes to enhance his/her success in the labour market.

2.3 Wages and Levels of Educational Attainment

In the course of the Annual School Leavers' Surveys details are recorded on current wage levels among those in employment. Table 2.5 outlines variations in some summary data on income levels. The table presents information in respect of mean

gross and net hourly income levels for males, females and all persons classified according to level of attainment on leaving the second-level system.

From the table one can see that the early school leavers (the No Qualifications and those who leave on completion of the Junior Certificate) have substantially lower average hourly wages than their counterparts who leave on completion of the Senior Cycle. One can see that the latter category have an average hourly gross of IR£4.19. This compares with a figure of IR£3.40 for those who leave second level with a Junior Certificate and IR£3.19 for those who leave with No Qualifications. This means that those in the latter category who are in employment one year after leaving second level earn a gross income, on average, of £1 per hour less than their counterparts who have left on completion of the Leaving Certificate.⁵ One can also see that there would appear to be a slight difference in the average rates of hourly income between males and females with the latter receiving, on average, IR£0.10 less per hour than their male counterparts. It is clear from the table that the gender differential holds across all attainment levels. Although the male/female differences are clearly identifiable, these are not as pronounced as those according to level of attainment.

Table 2.5: Mean Gross and Net Income Classified by Gender and Level of Attainment on Leaving Second-Level Education

Level of Attainment	Average IR£ Gross/Hour			Average IR£ Net/Hour		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
No Qualifications	3.24	3.07	3.19	2.89	2.69	2.83
Junior Certificate	3.37	3.28	3.34	2.86	2.82	2.85
Leaving Certificate	4.28	4.05	4.19	3.54	6.46	3.51
Total	3.97	3.87	3.93	3.31	3.31	3.31

2.4 Perceived Usefulness of Education Received

A heavy emphasis is often placed on employers' perceptions of the relevance and appropriateness of the education and training received by school children in the second-level system. Indeed, in the following two chapters we consider these issues in detail. We feel it is instructive, therefore, to balance the employers' views on the usefulness of education and training with the perceptions of the school leaver on the usefulness of his/her education to a number of areas of work and life in general. Clearly the perceptions and views expressed are extremely subjective (for both employer and employee). Nonetheless, we consider that a discussion of such perceptions is useful if only to highlight the extent of agreement or otherwise between the demand and supply sides as to the relevance and appropriateness of the education received by the early leaver on leaving mainstream education. It would seem to the authors that if both employer and employee feel that there are deficiencies in the nature and/or content of the education received then this would clearly point the way towards the need for a revision of the services provided. Two aspects of the perceived usefulness or otherwise of the mainstream education received are considered below. First we look at the perceived importance and relevance of the education received in actually *securing* the current or most recent job and second, we consider the former students' perceptions of the usefulness of their education in *carrying out* their current or most recent job.

Table 2.6 provides details on the perceived usefulness of education in *securing* the current or most recently held job. The table shows that there are clear differences between early school leavers and those who complete the Senior Cycle of second level in terms of the perceived importance of the role played by education in securing a job. One can see, for example, that a total of 58 per cent of those who complete the Leaving Certificate before leaving second level felt that their education was of importance in securing their current or most recent job. Comparable figures for those who left school with the Junior Certificate or No Qualifications were 51 per cent and

⁵ The reader is advised that this relationship between average wage/salary and level of attainment holds up, in general, when broken down according to grade obtained within level, i.e. when broken down according to grade obtained at the Junior and Leaving Certificate levels. See, for example, McCoy, Doyle and Williams (1999).

27 per cent respectively. Almost three-quarters of this latter category felt that their education was “Not Very Important” or “Of No Importance” in securing a job.

Table 2.6: Perceived Usefulness of Education in Securing Current or Most Recent Job, Classified by Level of Education Achieved and Gender

Level of Attainment	Importance of Education in Securing Current/Most Recent Job:				Total	(N)
	Very Important	Quite Important	Not Very Important	Of No Importance		
	Males (Per cent)					
No Qualifications	4.3	19.7	42.1	33.9	100.0	(1,000)
Junior Certificate	19.3	32.9	32.8	15.0	100.0	(5,300)
Leaving Certificate	27.4	30.5	27.1	15.0	100.0	(15,400)
Total	24.4	30.6	29.1	15.8	100.0	(21,600)
	Females (Per Cent)					
No Qualifications	4.3	29.1	44.9	21.7	100.0	(300)
Junior Certificate	9.6	39.5	34.6	16.4	100.0	(2,300)
Leaving Certificate	30.1	28.0	26.8	15.1	100.0	(15,100)
Total	27.0	29.5	28.1	15.4	100.0	(17,600)
	All Persons (Per Cent)					
No Qualifications	4.3	22.3	42.9	30.5	100.0	(1,300)
Junior Certificate	16.5	34.8	33.3	15.4	100.0	(7,500)
Leaving Certificate	28.7	29.3	26.9	15.1	100.0	(30,400)
Total	25.6	30.1	28.7	15.6	100.0	(39,200)

One can see from the figures that there is virtually no gender differences in the perceived importance of education in securing a job among those who leave the second-level system on completion of the Leaving Certificate. A total of 58 per cent of both males and females who complete the Senior Cycle feel their education is of importance in securing a job. It would appear from the table, however, that female early school leavers have a slightly more positive view of the role of their education in securing a job than do their male counterparts.

For example, a total of 24 per cent of males who left school with No Qualifications felt that their education was of importance in securing a job compared with just over 33 per cent of their female counterparts. The differential between males and females who leave on completion of the Junior Certificate and who feel that their education was of importance in securing their job is fairly limited (49 per cent of females compared with 52 per cent of males).

In addition to considering the perceived usefulness of education in *securing* a job one can also consider perceived usefulness of education in helping to *carry out* the job undertaken by young school leavers. The figures are presented in Table 2.7. From this one can see, for example, that a total of 73 per cent of those who had completed the Leaving Certificate feel that their education was “Very” or “Quite” important in carrying out their current job. This contrasts strongly with the experience of early leavers without formal qualifications. Only 37 per cent of this category feels that their education was of importance in executing their job. The comparable figure for those who leave the second-level system on completion of the Junior Certificate is 74 per cent. It is noteworthy that, in contrast to the situation regarding perceptions of the importance of education in securing their job, there is very little difference in the perceptions of males and females at all levels of attainment in their perceptions of the usefulness of education to the execution of their job.

Table 2.7: Perceived Usefulness of Education in Executing Current or Most Recent Job, Classified by Level of Education Achieved and Gender

Level of Attainment	Importance of Education in Securing Current/Most Recent Job:				Total	(N)
	Very Important	Quite Important	Not Very Important	Of No Importance		
	Males (Per Cent)					
No Qualifications	4.9	31.3	32.4	31.3	100.0	(1,000)
Junior Certificate	21.8	43.1	21.7	13.4	100.0	(5,300)
Leaving Certificate	31.6	43.6	17.9	6.9	100.0	(15,400)
Total	28.1	43.0	19.4	9.5	100.0	(21,600)
	Females (Per Cent)					
No Qualifications	7.1	30.6	42.0	20.3	100.0	(300)
Junior Certificate	14.1	50.4	23.7	11.8	100.0	(2,300)

Leaving Certificate	31.8	39.9	18.5	9.8	100.0	(15,100)
Total	29.1	41.0	19.6	10.3	100.0	(17,600)
All Persons (Per Cent)						
No Qualifications	5.6	31.1	35.1	28.2	100.0	(1,300)
Junior Certificate	19.5	54.2	22.3	12.9	100.0	(7,500)
Leaving Certificate	31.7	41.8	18.2	8.3	100.0	(30,400)
Total	28.5	42.1	19.5	9.9	100.0	(39,200)

The final aspect of school leavers' perceptions of the usefulness of aspects of their education to working life is the perceived value of work experience undertaken before leaving school. Table 2.8 presents the results. From this table one can see that just under 58 per cent of school leavers who had left school having completed the Leaving Certificate and who were working one year later felt that the work experience which their education provided prior to leaving school was "Very Useful" or "Useful" to them in their work. Comparable figures for those who leave on completion of the Junior Certificate or with No Qualifications are 51 per cent and 26 per cent respectively.

Table 2.8: Perceived Usefulness of Work Experience Received While in Second-Level Education Classified According to Level of Attainment

Level of Attainment	Work Experience Before Leaving School Was:				Total
	Very Useful	Useful	Not Very Useful (Per Cent)	No Use At All	
No Qualifications	3.0	23.2	39.6	34.2	100.0
Junior Certificate	16.7	34.5	26.1	22.8	100.0
Leaving Certificate	26.5	31.3	21.6	20.7	100.0
Total	23.9	31.6	23.0	21.5	100.0

It seems clear, therefore, that there are differences in the perceptions of young school leavers in terms of the usefulness of their education in securing their job and also in executing that job. In general, lower percentages of early leavers feel that their education is of importance to them in their subsequent working life. This is particularly so among those who leave with No Qualifications.

2.5 Training Undertaken Since Leaving School

In this section we consider the incidence of training undertaken by school leavers within the first year of their leaving the education system along with the type of that training and the general levels of satisfaction recorded by trainees.

Table 2.9 presents details on the percentage of school leavers who record that they have undertaken any training (apart from apprenticeships) in the first year on leaving second-level education. From the table one can see that just under 8 per cent⁶ of all leavers do so. The training in question is of a vocational nature and excludes any further educational courses *per se*.

Table 2.9: Incidence of Training Among School Leavers Within First Year of Leaving the Second Level System Classified According to Level of Attainment and Gender

Level of Attainment	Males	Females (Per Cent Undertaking Training)	Total
No Qualifications	25.6	28.9	26.8
Junior Certificate	12.0	14.0	12.7

⁶ A small percentage of school leavers undertake more than one training course within the first year of leaving school. The percentage involved is small, however, of the order of only 0.5 per cent.

Leaving Certificate	5.9	6.0	6.0
Total	7.9	7.5	7.7

One can see from Table 2.9 that the incidence rate for this training within the first year of school is substantially higher among early leavers. For example, only 6 per cent of those who leave the second-level system having completed the Leaving Certificate say that they have undertaken post-school training. The comparable figures for those who leave on completion of the Junior Certificate is 13 per cent while the incidence among those who leave with No Qualifications is 27 per cent. It is clear from the table that the incidence of post-school training did not vary substantially as between boys and girls.⁷

The type of vocational training undertaken varies somewhat according to level of attainment on leaving school. The figures in Table 2.10 show, for example, that over 80 per cent of school leavers who quit the second-level system with No Qualifications undertook either a Youthreach (51 per cent) or Community Youth Training/Community Training Workshop (30 per cent). The most frequently occurring course undertaken by those who leave on completion of the Leaving Certificate is a CERT course (26 per cent); followed by a FÁS Skills Foundation (24 per cent) and Other (20 per cent).

Table 2.10: Type of Training Undertaken Within One Year of Leaving School, Classified by Level of Attainment

	All Persons										Total (n)
	Team-work	Enter-prise Scheme	Teagasc	Skills Foundation	FÁS Adult Training (Per Cent)	CYT/CTW	Youth Reach	CERT	BIM	Other	
No Qualifications	0.0	2.3	0.0	12.8	0.8	29.7	50.7	1.8	0.0	2.0	657
Junior Certificate	1.7	4.8	4.9	24.6	1.2	18.3	32.6	6.6	1.2	4.3	1,364
Leaving Certificate	2.5	2.8	7.5	24.2	7.8	7.3	1.4	26.4	0.0	20.3	(3,359)
Total	2.0	3.2	5.9	22.9	5.2	12.8	15.3	18.4	0.3	14.0	5,380

Those who undertook training courses in the year after they left school were asked about their level of satisfaction with the course in question. The results are presented in Table 2.11. From this one can see that satisfaction levels are generally very high. In aggregate, a total of 89 per cent of those who undertake a training course said that they were “Very Satisfied” or “Satisfied” with it.

It is clear from the table that there is some variation in levels of satisfaction according to level of attainment. One can see that just over 92 per cent of those who had undertaken a training programme and who had completed the Leaving Certificate recorded that they were satisfied with the course. This compares with 87 per cent among those who left school on completion of the Junior Certificate and 77 per cent among those who left with No Qualifications.

Finally, Table 2.11 indicates that there are reasonably substantial gender differences in levels of satisfaction within the training undertaken. In general terms, 86 per cent of males compared with 92 per cent females are satisfied with the training courses undertaken among those who left school on completion of Junior Certificate. The gender difference is also evident among those who leave with No Qualifications. From the table one can see that 71 per cent of males in this category who undertook some form of vocational training said they were satisfied. The comparable figure for females is 89 per cent.

⁷ If one were to include any form of post second-level education with training the incidence rate of training/further education would be substantially above the 7.7 per cent cited in the table. One would also find that the incidence of combined training/education within one year of leaving school would be positively correlated with attainment.

In interpreting these figures on incidence of vocational training within the first year on leaving school it is important to recognise that, for example, the 27 per cent of those who leave school with No Qualifications and who undertake a training course represent no more than a minority of school leavers in this category. If 27 per cent of this group participate in training courses one must ask about the situation of the 73 per cent who do not. Similarly, what of the circumstances of the 87 per cent of those who leave school on completion of the Junior Certificate but who do not participate in some form of post school vocational training course. One must remember that these are the early leavers who are the main targets of the courses in question.

Table 2.11: Satisfaction Levels Recorded by Those Who Undertook a Course in the First Year of Leaving School

	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	Total
	(Per Cent)				
Males					
No Qualifications	39.6	31.1	22.3	6.9	100
Junior Certificate	48.9	37.3	10.6	3.2	100
Leaving Certificate	67.6	22.6	6.7	3.2	100
Total	57.1	28.7	10.4	3.8	100
Females					
No Qualifications	50.2	38.6	9.0	2.2	100
Junior Certificate	55.4	31.9	8.0	4.6	100
Leaving Certificate	56.6	37.5	5.8	0.2	100
Total	55.7	36.4	6.6	1.3	100
All Persons					
No Qualifications	43.5	33.8	17.5	5.2	100
Junior Certificate	51.4	35.2	9.6	3.7	100
Leaving Certificate	61.4	30.9	6.1	1.5	100
Total	56.4	32.5	8.5	2.6	100

The authors feel that they must also advise caution in the interpretation of the figures on satisfaction levels with the courses undertaken. Clearly, a level of almost 90 per cent satisfaction must be interpreted as high. In interpreting the relatively lower percentages of males with No Qualifications who recorded satisfaction with their training courses (71 per cent) it is important to remember that the figures presented here do not purport to represent a rigorous assessment of the efficacy or efficiency of the schemes in question. Underlying the answers to direct questions on levels of satisfaction with training courses or other schemes are a myriad of traits and characteristics of the respondent. Issues of social class; broad life experiences; family circumstances; sense of social and/or community cohesion etc. must all be taken into account in the interpretation of answers to such questions.

2.6 Summary

In this chapter we have attempted to provide the reader with a broad-brush overview of some of the main trends and characteristics of school leavers over recent years. In particular, we have compared the relative positions of early school leavers with those who have completed the full cycle of second level. Clearly, to talk in terms of a simplistic threefold typology of leavers based on those with No Qualifications; Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate masks a great degree of variation within each of these levels of attainment. The authors would point out that leavers within each of the three groups are not identical. There is clearly substantial intra-group variations in the characteristics and performance outcomes of the children in question. As noted above, one could graduate all of the performance measures referred to in the chapter in terms of grade score within the three broad attainment categories. The purpose of the chapter, however, was to broadly contextualise as many as possible of the issues surrounding early school leavers without purporting to be an exhaustive analysis of all

variations within the three general categories of attainment used for ease of presentation of results.

As noted in Section 2.1, the data used in this chapter were derived from various Annual School Leavers' Surveys carried out over the last twenty years for the Department of Education and Science and also the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

We saw in our review of these data that there has been a very substantial increase in retention levels in the second-level system over the last two decades. In 1980, a total of 9 per cent of children left school with No Qualifications. This has now reduced to 3.5 per cent. Similarly, in 1980 as many as 31 per cent left on completion of the Junior Certificate. This now stands at just over 15 per cent. Notwithstanding these substantial improvements in retention levels, a total of 19 per cent of young persons still leave the second-level system each year before completion of the senior cycle. This means that 13,000 young persons are leaving second-level school with either No Qualifications (2,400) or on completion of the Junior Cycle (10,600). This level of early school leaving has remained very constant since 1992. Whether or not the introduction of new Leaving Certificate Programmes (the Vocational and Applied courses) will substantially impact on these outflows of early school leavers remains to be seen.

We found that labour force participation levels remained fairly steady until 1994 after which they began to rise – especially for boys. This clearly reflects the economic prosperity and relative ease with which jobs could be secured by the group of early leavers in question. The nature of the jobs, their related wage levels, level of long-term stability of employment offered by them etc. is far from clear. It certainly seems reasonable to say that although some of these jobs will offer short-term opportunities their long-term prospects are less easily determined.

We saw that those who leave school with No Qualifications or having completed only the Junior Certificate were substantially disadvantaged relative to their counterparts who completed the Leaving Certificate in terms of unemployment rates. The unemployment situation among those with No Qualifications deteriorated substantially over the 1980s and early 1990s. By 1988 unemployment among this group had reached a height of 65 per cent.

Of much greater concern than the absolute level of disadvantage as measured by unemployment rate etc. is the level of *relative* disadvantage of the early leaver as compared to his/her counterpart who completed the Leaving Certificate. There is clearly strong evidence from the School Leavers' Surveys to suggest that the economic prosperity of the last few years has positively impacted on all school leavers, regardless of their level of attainment on quitting the education system. It would appear, however, that the *relative* rates or ratio of unemployment rates between those with a Leaving Certificate and other leavers are increasing – not decreasing. This would suggest that, relatively speaking, those with No Qualifications have not benefited from the economic prosperity of recent years to the same degree as others in terms of improving their labour market position.

Variations in wage levels according to level of attainment were also considered. We saw that, on average, those who completed the Leaving Certificate earned £1 per hour more (in gross terms) than those who leave with No Qualifications and £0.85 more than those who leave with the Junior Certificate.

In looking at the leavers' perceptions of the usefulness of their education for actually *securing* employment we found that it was perceived by a higher percentage of early leavers to be of less use in getting a job. For example, a total of 58 per cent of those who had completed the Leaving Certificate felt it was of importance. This compares with 51 per cent of those who completed the Junior Certificate and 27 per cent of those who left with No Qualifications.

Similarly, the usefulness of their education in *executing* their job was also considered. We saw that there was substantial variation in its perceived usefulness as between those with No Qualifications and other school leavers. A total of 73 per cent who had completed the Leaving Certificate felt it was of importance compared with only 37 per cent who leave with No Qualifications. Obviously, the authors would caution that these views must be interpreted within a broader context of the early leavers' outlook

on issues in general. Given the strength of the relationship between early leaving and social class it may, for example, be driven by a strong underlying class component rather than by an objective assessment of the substantive content or otherwise of the education received *per se*. In this regard it is, of course, worth noting that perceptions (however driven) do become reality for those who hold them.

In terms of post-school training we found that just under 8 per cent of school leavers undertook some form of such training. Participation in different types of training varied somewhat by level of attainment. Those who left the education system with No Qualifications most frequently participated in Youthreach and Community Youth Training/Community Training Workshop programmes.

In general, we saw that there were very high levels of aggregate satisfaction with the training received – almost 90 per cent of participants were satisfied with their programmes, although there were some variations according to both level of attainment and also gender. Satisfaction levels with the training received were slightly lower for those who did not complete the Leaving Certificate e.g., 77 per cent of those with No Qualifications recorded that they were satisfied with the training received. The comparable figure for those who left on completion of the Junior Certificate was 87 per cent while 92 per cent of those who completed the Leaving Certificate were satisfied with the training in question. Satisfaction levels were higher amongst girls than boys.

3. INCIDENCE OF EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING OF EARLY SCHOOL LEAVERS

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter we address the demand-side issues related to the employment of young early school leavers. As noted in Section 1.2 above, this chapter is based on a dedicated survey of employers which was undertaken for the project between January – March 2000.

For the purposes of the survey we defined a young early school leaver as someone who was aged 20 years or less and who had left mainstream second-level education before completing the Leaving Certificate i.e., those who left either on completion of the Junior Certificate or with No Qualifications.

We consider a number of aspects of the employment/non-employment of young early leavers in this chapter. First, we discuss the incidence of their employment, concentrating on variations by sector and size of company. Second, we consider the types of jobs offered to young leavers by the firms which do, in fact, employ them. In addition, we consider the type of training and mentoring given to young early leavers in the workplace and the potential for the young early leaver to develop and expand in his/her initial position. Third, we discuss the reasons given by firms for not employing early leavers as well as the perceived barriers to their employment. In that section we also consider factors which would make the young early leaver more employable to the firms. Finally, we present a brief summary of our findings.

3.2 The Incidence of Employment of Young Early School Leavers

In the course of the survey respondents were asked whether or not they had recruited anyone aged 20 years or less in the previous two years who had not completed their Leaving Certificate i.e., someone who held a Junior Certificate or who had left school with no formal qualifications. The results are presented in Table 3.1. From this one can see that just under 21 per cent of firms recorded that they had employed young early leavers in the two years prior to the survey. Highest incidence levels were in Manufacturing – especially the Traditional Manufacturing sector. Just over 43 per cent of firms in that sector had employed young early leavers in the relevant period while 40 per cent of firms in Hi-Tech Manufacturing had done so. Employment of young leavers was also high in the Hotel/Restaurant/Personal Services sector (37 per cent of firms) and also in the Construction sector (31 per cent). Rates were lowest in Financial/Insurance and Business Services (10 per cent).

Table 3.1: Employment of Young Early School Leavers in the Two Years Preceding the Survey Classified by Industrial Sector

Traditional	Hi-Tech	Construc-	Distributive	Financial/	Hotels/	Transport/	Total
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	Manufacturing	Manufacturing	Construction	Services	Insurance/Business Services	Restaurants/Personal Services	Storage/Communications	
Employed Young Early Leavers	43.5	39.9	31.4	21.4	10.2	37.4	12.1	20.7
Did Not Employ Young Early Leavers	56.5	60.1	68.7	78.6	89.8	62.6	87.9	79.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 3.2 provides comparable information on employment incidence levels classified according to size of company. From this one can see that there is a clear and positive relationship between size of firm and propensity to employ young early leavers. In other words, as size of company increases so too does the percentage of firms which say that they have employed young early leavers in the previous two years. One can see, for example, that only 13 per cent of firms with 1-5 employees have employed early leavers in the two years preceding the survey. This increases progressively with size of company until the figure stands at just over 51 per cent for those employing 100 or more.

Table 3.2: Employment of Young Early School Leavers in the Two Years Preceding the Survey Classified According to Size of Company

	1 – 5	6 - 15	16 - 30	31 - 100	100+	Total
Employed Young Early Leavers	13.0	23.5	39.6	44.1	51.4	20.7
Did Not Employ Young Early Leavers	87.0	76.5	60.4	55.9	48.6	79.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Two main points should be made in interpreting these figures on incidence of employment by size of firm. First, the larger the firm the more opportunities there exist in it for employment of a young early school leaver at some level in the organisation. Quite simply, the more employment “slots” to be filled in a company the greater is the likelihood that at least some of these will be filled by someone whom one could describe as a young early leaver. Second, there is obviously a strong relationship between the size of firm and industrial sector. Larger companies, in excess of 100 employees are predominately in the Manufacturing sector. Service sector activity is usually characterised by smaller scale operations. Exceptions to this are large group enterprises in distribution, some financial services such as banking etc. Nonetheless, a substantial portion of the larger firms will, in fact, be in the manufacturing sector. In Table 3.2, therefore, size of company may, at least to some degree, be acting as a proxy for sector.

Overall, therefore, one can say from the figures in Tables 3.1 and 3.2 that the highest incidence of employment of early leavers is in Manufacturing; Hotels/Restaurants/Personal Services and Construction. On balance, there are higher employment incidence levels among larger than smaller companies.

The 80 per cent of firms which did not employ a young early leaver in the last two years were asked whether or not they had ever done so in the past. The results are shown in Table 3.3a classified according to sector. From this one can see that only 12 per cent of firms which had not recruited young early leavers in the two years preceding the survey had ever done so. From Table 3.3a one can see that the pattern of longer term past experience of employing young early school leavers among those who have not employed them in the two years preceding the survey is, in fact, very similar to that displayed by their counterparts who did recruit from the relevant group in question in the more recent past. The longer-term historic trend would suggest that the manufacturing sectors have the highest recruitment propensities among early leavers.

This is followed by Distributive Services; Hotels/Restaurants/Personal Services and Construction.

Table 3.3a: Firms Which Had Not Employed Young Early School Leavers in the Two Years Preceding the Survey Classified According to Whether or Not They Had Ever Recruited Them

	Traditional Manufacturing	Hi-Tech Manufacturing	Construction	Distributive Services	Financial/Insurance/Business Services	Hotels/Restaurants/Personal Services	Transport/Storage/Communications	Total
Yes	15.3	40.3	9.8	13.3	8.8	12.9	8.7	11.8
No	84.7	59.7	90.2	86.7	91.2	87.1	91.3	88.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

The 12 per cent of firms in Table 3.3a obviously relates only to the 79.3 per cent in Table 3.1 who had not recruited young early leavers in the two years preceding the survey. This means that one can break down the prior early school leaver employment experience of firms by sector as set out in Table 3.3b.

Table 3.3b: Prior Employment Experience of Young Early Leavers Among Firms, Classified According to Industrial Sector

	Traditional Manufacturing	Hi-Tech Manufacturing	Construction	Distributive Services	Financial/Insurance/Business Services	Hotels/Restaurants/Personal Services	Transport/Storage/Communications	Total
Employed Young Early Leavers:								
In Last Two Years	43.5	39.9	31.4	21.4	10.2	37.4	12.1	20.7
At Some Point but Not in Last Two Years	8.6	24.2	6.7	10.4	7.9	8.1	7.6	9.3
Never	47.9	35.9	61.9	68.2	81.9	54.5	80.3	70.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

From the table one can see that 70 per cent of firms say that they have never employed a young early school leaver. This level of non-employment is highest in the Financial/Insurance/Business Services (82 per cent) followed by Transport/Storage/Communications (80 per cent). When presented in this way it seems clear from Table 3.3b that the levels of non-employment of young early leavers in the Construction and Distributive Services sectors seems surprisingly high given that these are sectors which are typically characterised as providing major job opportunities for the early leavers in question.

3.3 Job Type and Training Given to Early School Leavers

In this section we consider a number of aspects of the employment of the young early school leaver. First, we discuss the type of jobs into which they are employed. Second, we consider the level of training provided to them by their employers. Finally, we discuss the opportunities for the early leaver to develop or expand his/her responsibilities within the workplace. By definition, the results presented in this section are based only on the responses given by firms which employed young early leavers in the two years preceding the survey.

3.3.1 TYPE OF JOB

Employers who had employed young early leavers in the two years prior to interview were asked to identify up to five main job types in which the young early school leavers

were employed in their company. The results are presented in Table 3.4 below.⁸ From the table one can see that, in aggregate terms, areas such as Sales/Retail/Shop Assistants (26.1 per cent), Warehouse/Yard/Driving and Despatch (24.6 per cent) and Clerical/Administrative work (21.6 per cent) are cited by the largest percentage of firms as the areas in which young early school leavers are employed. It is clear from the table that, in general, the majority of the job types are in unskilled or semi-skilled areas (general labourer, sales or clerical assistant; general factory operative; bar/restaurant work etc.). At most, only 14 per cent of firms recorded that they employed young early leavers into some form of apprenticeship training, with only a further 4 per cent having some other form of explicit reference to training in the job title. The additional 4 per cent in question appear to be jobs associated with some form of pre-apprenticeship training. Many of the other categories of job type may, of course, ultimately mature into some form of skilled occupation. It is of some concern, however, that the percentages of firms which are employing young early school leavers into jobs or apprenticeships which have that explicit potential is so relatively low.

Table 3.4: Types of Jobs Undertaken by Young Early School Leavers

Type of Job	Traditional Manufacturing	Hi-Tech Manufacturing	Construction	Distributive Services	Financial/Insurance/Business Services	Hotels/Restaurants/Personal Services	Transport/Storage/Communications	Total
Trainee (non apprentice)	11.4	11.3	1.5	5.1	0.6	0.0	0.0	4.0
General Operative/Factory Worker	58.5	45.6	32.4	12.1	7.9	0.9	0.0	17.1
General Labourer/Unskilled	18.7	13.8	18.5	6.5	24.7	3.5	0.0	10.4
Apprentice (manual)	9.7	21.5	48.4	9.4	0.3	0.0	10.3	13.9
Skilled Manual	9.8	2.8	0.4	0.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.2
Semi-Skilled Manual	4.1	8.2	0.0	3.8	5.6	0.9	0.0	3.1
Sales/Retail/Shop Assistant	1.6	0.0	0.0	48.0	32.3	1.8	0.0	26.1
Clerical/Administrative	7.3	7.3	1.5	11.6	54.0	31.3	89.7	21.6
Warehouse/Yard/Driving/Despatch	6.4	17.8	1.5	45.1	3.1	0.0	20.6	24.6
Cleaning	4.1	5.7	0.4	9.4	5.1	15.6	0.0	7.0
General Bar/Restaurant/Catering	0.8	0.0	0.0	0.5	0.0	53.1	0.0	5.4
Other	0.0	9.4	15.3	0.5	0.0	18.8	0.0	4.8

There are some fairly well defined variations in job types being reported by firms according to industrial sector. For example, 58.5 per cent of firms in the Traditional Manufacturing sector reported employing young early leavers as General Operatives or Machine Operatives while a further 9.7 per cent of firms in that sector report employing early leavers as Apprentices. Within the Construction sector, 32.4 per cent of firms reported employing young early leavers into General Operative/Machine Operative positions; 48.4 per cent into Manual Apprenticeships and 18.5 per cent into General Labouring jobs.

3.3.2 TRAINING FOR YOUNG EARLY SCHOOL LEAVERS

Of clear relevance to the development of young early school leavers in the workplace is the extent to which they receive training from their employer. In the course of the survey firms were asked about what type of training, if any, was offered to young early school leavers. Three main types of initial training were presented to respondents on the questionnaire. First, they were asked whether or not the young early leaver was

⁸ Because respondents were able to identify more than one job type the column totals sum to more than 100 per cent.

Table 3.7 pursues the issue of initial training provided to young early school leavers by considering the type of training offered. From this one can see that a total 75 per cent of firms record that they offer On-the-Job Training. The incidence of this type of training is highest in the Manufacturing sectors and Hotel/Restaurants/Personal Services.

One can see that the percentage of firms providing In-House but Off-the-Job Training is very substantially lower. Only 17 per cent of employers in aggregate say that they undertake this type of training activity among their young early school leavers. Levels appear to be highest in the Transport/Storage/Communications sector followed by Traditional Manufacturing and Financial/Insurance/Business Services.

Table 3.7: Incidence of Different Types of Training Classified by Sector

	Traditional Manufacturing	Hi-Tech Manufacturing	Construction	Distributive Services	Financial/Insurance/Business Services	Hotels/Restaurants/Personal Services	Transport/Storage/Communications	Total
On-the-Job Training								
Yes	87.5	93.8	59.5	76.3	69.7	82.2	74.3	75.1
No	12.5	6.3	40.5	23.7	30.3	17.8	25.7	24.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
In-House, Not On-the-Job Training								
Yes	28.2	19.0	13.4	12.7	28.6	11.1	33.3	17.2
No	71.8	81.0	86.6	87.3	71.4	88.9	66.7	82.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Out of Company Training								
Yes	13.7	19.7	28.0	12.7	4.7	6.0	33.3	15.8
No	86.3	80.3	72.0	87.3	95.3	94.0	66.7	84.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Finally, the provision of Out-of-Company training is even lower with only 16 per cent of firms saying that they provide this to young early school leavers.

Clearly firms offer a combination of the three types of initial training considered – or none at all. The figures in Table 3.8 provide an indication of the combinations of training types provided. Firms are classified in terms of whether or not they say they provide On-the-Job; Other in-house; Out-of-Company training. From the figures one can see that just over 21 per cent of employers say that they provide none of the three training types to young early school leavers. Almost 50 per cent of employers say that they provided on-the-job training and only that type of training to young early leavers; a further 11 per cent provided on-the-job as well as some other form of in-house training and so on. One can see that only 4 per cent of firms provided all three types of initial training to young early leavers.

Table 3.8: Summary Breakdown of All Firms According to Combinations of Training Types Initially Provided to Young Early School Leavers

On-the-Job	In-house, not On-the-Job	Out of Company	Per Cent of All Firms
No	No	No	21.4
Yes	No	No	49.6
Yes	Yes	No	10.7

Yes	No	Yes	10.8
No	Yes	No	2.5
No	No	Yes	1.0
Yes	Yes	Yes	4.0
Total			100.0

3.3.3 INITIAL AND ON-GOING SUPPORT

3.3.3.1 *Initial Support for Young Early Leavers*

In addition to being asked about job-related training provided to young early school leavers firms were also asked to record whether or not they provided any form of non-training induction or initial support. The results are presented in Table 3.9. From these we can see that a total of 56 per cent of firms which employ young early leavers offer some type of induction or initial support other than job-oriented training. Highest incidence levels for this sort of support are in the Financial/Insurance/Business Services sector and also in Hotels/Restaurants/Personal Services. Just over 70 per cent of firms in each of these sectors say that they offer this type of support to their young recruits.

Table 3.9: Firms Classified by (a) Sector and (b) Whether or Not They Offer Any Initial Induction or Support in Addition to or In Place of Initial Training

Offer Induction or Support	Traditional Manufacturing	Hi-Tech Manufacturing	Construction	Distributive Services	Financial/Insurance/Business Services	Hotels/Restaurants/Personal Services	Transport/Storage/Communications	Total
Yes	54.8	53.2	65.6	55.7	71.2	70.5	0.0	55.8
No	45.2	46.8	34.4	44.3	28.8	29.5	100.0	44.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 3.10 presents comparable data on provision of *initial* induction and/or support classified according to size of firm. The importance of this table is to show that there is really no clearly defined general or systematic trends in provision of this type of support according to size. One can see that incidence levels are highest in the smallest firms (68 per cent) and lowest in the middle-sized category (34 per cent). This may well reflect the closer working relationship in smaller companies between the employer and his/her staff (including recruits).

Table 3.10: Firms Classified by (a) Size and (b) Whether or Not They Offer Any Initial Induction or Support in Addition to or in Place of Initial Training

Offer Induction or Support	1 - 5	6 - 15	16 - 30	31 - 100	100+	Total
(Per Cent of Firms)						
Yes	67.7	49.4	33.6	58.5	59.1	55.8
No	32.3	50.6	66.4	41.5	40.9	44.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

3.3.3.2 *On-going Support to Young Early Leavers*

As a further development of the question of *initial* support or induction firms were asked whether or not anyone in the company had responsibility for providing *on-going* support to young early leavers. The results are presented in Table 3.11. From this one can see that just over 29 per cent of companies said that they had someone who was responsible for providing this type of support on an *on-going* basis. One can see that the highest incidence levels are in the Hotel/Restaurant/Personal Services sector (63 per cent). Levels are low in Traditional Manufacturing; Financial/Insurance/Business Services and Transport/Storage/Communications.

Table 3.11: Firms Classified by (a) Sector and (b) Whether or Not Anyone in the Company has Responsibility for Providing Support to Young Early School Leavers

Anyone Responsible for Providing Support	Traditional Manufacturing	Hi-Tech Manufacturing	Construction	Distributive Services	Financial/Insurance/Business Services	Hotels/Restaurants/Personal Services	Transport/Storage/Communications	Total
Yes	12.1	31.4	19.6	35.5	11.3	63.4	0.0	29.3
No	87.9	68.6	80.4	64.5	88.7	36.6	100.0	70.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

The same type of information is presented in Table 3.12 according to size of firm. As was the case with levels of *initial* induction or support, one can see from the table that there is no simple systematic relationship between firm size and provision of *on-going* support to young early leavers. It is certainly not the case that such support is provided in a higher percentage of the larger than smaller firms. A priori, one could hypothesise that larger organisations would have a better developed personnel function which could provide the type of on-going support in question. This, however, does not appear to be the case, with the highest percentage of any size category claiming to provide such support being among the smallest companies (37 per cent). Approximately one-quarter of firms in each of the other four size categories recorded that they provided this type of *on-going* support to young early school leaver recruits.

Table 3.12: Firms Classified by (a) Size and (b) Whether or Not Anyone in the Company has Responsibility for Providing Support to Young Early School Leavers

Anyone Responsible for Providing Support	1 - 5	6 - 15	16 - 30	31 - 100	100+	Total
	(Per Cent of Firms)					
Yes	36.7	25.5	26.5	23.6	24.4	29.3
No	63.3	74.5	73.5	76.4	75.6	70.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Finally, firms which said that they did not provide on-going support to young early leavers were asked whether or not they considered that it would be practical for a company of their size and activity to provide such on-going assistance to the young early school leavers whom they recruit. From Table 3.13 one can see that only 12 per cent of relevant firms said that they thought it would be practical to do so. One can see from these figures that there is some variation in response according to sector with higher percentages in the Manufacturing and Construction sectors feeling it would be practical to provide such support on an on-going basis.

Table 3.13: Firms Classified by (a) Sector and (b) Whether or Not they Feel it Would be Practical to Provide Such On-Going Structured Support to Young Early Leavers

Practical to Provide On-Going Support	Traditional Manufacturing	Hi-Tech Manufacturing	Construction	Distributive Services	Financial/Insurance/Business Services	Hotels/Restaurants/Personal Services	Transport/Storage/Communications	Total
Yes	20.4	15.3	19.5	10.7	6.8	4.9	10.3	12.3
No	79.6	84.7	80.5	89.3	93.2	95.1	89.7	87.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

3.4 Potential for Career Development

Firms were asked to record whether or not the young early school leavers whom they had recruited had the opportunity to expand their responsibilities within their job. The responses are summarised in Table 3.14. From this one can see that a total of 89 per cent of firms recorded that the young early leaver did, in fact, have the opportunity to develop their responsibilities and to expand their potential within the job. Very

substantial percentages of firms in all sectors replied to the question in the affirmative with the exception of those in Financial/Insurance/Business Services. Only 50 per cent of firms in that sector said that the young early school leaver could develop their role, responsibilities and potential within the job.

Table 3.14: Firms which Recruit Young Early School Leavers Classified According to (a) Sector and (b) Whether Or Not They Feel the Young Early Leavers have the Opportunity to Expand their Responsibilities with the Company

Opportunity to Expand their Responsibilities?	Traditional Manufacturing	Hi-Tech Manufacturing	Construction	Distributive Services	Financial/Insurance/Business Services	Hotels/Restaurants/Personal Services	Transport/Storage/Communications	Total
Yes	86.2	96.1	100.0	90.2	50.6	99.1	100.0	89.0
No	13.8	3.9	0.0	9.8	49.4	0.9	0.0	11.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

From Table 3.15 one can see that there appears to be a relationship between the size of the firm and its perception of the opportunity for the young early leaver to develop his/her responsibilities within the company. Although the relationship is not very strong, the figures in the table would seem to indicate that a slightly lower percentage of small rather than large companies felt that the young early school leavers could develop their potential within the company.

Table 3.15: Firms which Recruit Young Early School Leavers Classified According to (a) Size and (b) Whether Or Not They Feel the Young Early Leavers have the Opportunity to Expand their Responsibilities with the Company

Opportunity to Expand their Responsibilities?	1 - 5	6 - 15	16 - 30	31 - 100	100+	Total
	(Per Cent of Firms)					
Yes	85.0	87.8	94.3	96.7	95.9	89.0
No	15.0	12.2	5.7	3.3	4.1	11.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

3.5 The Non- Employment of Young Early School Leavers

So far in this chapter we have considered aspects of the employment of young early school leavers such as the incidence of their employment, training provided etc. We now turn to consider the view and attitudes expressed by companies which do *not* employ from this cohort with a view to understanding their main reasons for not doing so.

3.5.1 REASONS FOR THE NON-EMPLOYMENT OF YOUNG EARLY SCHOOL LEAVERS

Table 3.16 provides details on the reasons given by firms for not employing early school leavers. From the table one can see that the reason given by the largest percentage of firms for not employing young early school leavers is that they are quite simply not recruiting. This response was given by just over 31 per cent of respondents. The next most frequently occurring reason is that young early leavers are not applying to the firms who are recruiting (given by 14 per cent of firms which do not currently employ young early school leavers). This is consistent with the findings described in Chapter 2 above on the principal method of job-search technique. We saw in that chapter that early leavers relied to a much greater degree on informal job-search methods than their more highly qualified counterparts. It is clearly of interest that a relatively large percentage of employers seem to be suggesting that their main reason for not employing young early school leavers is quite simply that the early leavers are not applying to them in answer to their recruitment drives. It is, of course possible, that job advertisements (from firms) may contain some minimum level of educational requirements which would deter the young early leaver from answering the advertisement.

Perhaps the most disconcerting feature of the table is the relatively large 12 per cent of firms which say that young early leavers do not have the level of educational attainment necessary for the relevant jobs within their company. A further 8 per cent

of firms which do not employ early leavers explicitly said that they do not recruit anyone without a Leaving Certificate. Just over 7 per cent of firms felt that the young early leaver did not have relevant work experience or skills necessary for the job in question. This group of reasons seems to reflect different facets of the use of educational qualifications by employers as an initial screening of applicants.

Table 3.16: Reasons for Non-Employment of Early School Leavers by Industrial Sector

Opportunity to Expand their Responsibilities?	Traditional Manufacturing	Hi-Tech Manufacturing	Construction	Distributive Services	Financial/Insurance/Business Services	Hotels/Restaurants/Personal Services	Transport/Storage/Communications	Total
Firm Policy for Minimum Education Level	4.6	28.7	9.6	6.6	9.6	0.0	10.8	8.4
Lack of Education for Jobs Within the Firms	4.6	19.0	10.7	2.4	28.6	13.3	2.6	12.2
No Relevant Vacancies	3.7	4.2	0.2	2.1	7.7	0.8	0.0	2.9
Lack of Maturity/Too Young	3.7	1.2	0.0	10.0	0.5	13.3	0.0	4.9
Lack of Relevant Work Experience/Skills	25.7	5.5	10.4	3.5	10.2	16.4	6.9	7.1
Lack of Ability Generally	3.7	4.2	0.0	1.4	7.6	0.8	0.0	2.5
Too Young to Get Insurance	0.0	0.0	0.2	1.6	0.0	0.0	32.9	7.2
Not Recruiting	30.2	20.8	29.3	48.1	13.0	27.3	18.6	31.2
No Applications from ESL	8.2	9.5	9.7	12.7	12.3	28.1	19.9	14.3
No Specific Reason	7.4	5.5	19.9	4.4	0.0	0.0	2.6	4.0
Other	8.2	1.2	9.9	7.3	0.6	0.0	5.6	5.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

A further significant set of reasons for the non-employment of young early school leavers relates to the employers' perceptions of their lack of maturity for the job in question (5 per cent) as well as general lack of ability to undertake the work in a satisfactory manner (2.5 per cent).

There are clearly some variations in reasons given according to industrial sector. For example, the view that lack of education is a barrier is held much more pervasively by firms in the Financial/Insurance/Business sector than in other sectors. Lack of relevant work experience is clearly a more important issue for Traditional Manufacturing than for other sectors. Finally, it is noteworthy that larger percentages of firms in the Hotel/Restaurant/Personal Services sector feel that young early leavers are simply not applying to them for the jobs which are available.

3.5.2 MAKING EARLY SCHOOL LEAVERS MORE EMPLOYABLE

Firms which have never recruited young early school leavers were asked to record if anything could be done to make early leavers more employable. The results are presented in Table 3.17. From this we can see that 41 per cent of firms felt that something could be done to make them more employable. This view was held by a higher percentage of firms in the Hi-Tech Manufacturing and Hotel/Restaurant/Personal Services sectors (64 per cent) than in other sectors. It is clear from Table 3.17 that the Construction and Financial/Insurance/Business Services sector were most negative in this regard with only approximately one-third of firms in both sectors feeling that anything could be done to make the young early school leavers in question more employable.

Table 3.17: Employability of Early School Leavers by Industrial Sector

Opportunity to Expand Their Responsibilities?	Traditional Manufacturing	Hi-Tech Manufacturing	Construction	Distributive Services	Financial/Insurance/Business Services	Hotels/Restaurants/Personal Services	Transport/Storage/Communications	Total
Something Can	53.9	64.0	31.7	41.9	33.9	63.8	45.5	41.5

Be Done to Make ESLs More Employable								
Nothing Can be Done to Make ESLs More Employable	46.1	36.0	68.3	58.1	66.1	36.2	54.5	58.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Those firms which felt that something could be done to make young early school leavers more employable were asked to specify what they thought could be done. Table 3.18 outlines the responses given. Due to small cell size in each of the sectoral breakdowns only aggregate figures are presented.

The most frequently recurring theme among the firms' responses to factors which would make young early school leavers more employable relate to the young leaver undertaking training which would be specific to the firms' needs. This was cited by almost 20 per cent of employers. This response must be interpreted judiciously. Firm-specific training (in contrast to general training) can, in fact, only be given by the firm in question. A reasonable inference from this response may be, therefore, that the firms in question would like someone else (the State or otherwise) to provide the training which, in the normal course of events, would have to be provided by the firm itself. A further 13 per cent of firms called for more *general* training among young early leavers to make them more employable. The Catch-22 situation of gaining work experience is mentioned by almost 13 per cent of respondents. Almost 10 per cent of firms indicated that early school leavers should improve their attitudes and personal presentation to make themselves more employable. The following statements from respondents illustrate their views on the issue:

- Early leavers need assertiveness training/personal development courses;
- Should be taught how to improve their appearance in dress and attitude;
- Have a good attitude and willingness to learn;
- Instil a sense of responsibility;
- Take a grooming and assertiveness course;
- Training in skills and attitudes;
- Appearance and time-keeping.

One can further see from the table that almost 5 per cent of firms said that early school leavers should be encouraged to stay on and continue their education and 3.8 per cent said that more practical subjects should be provided in school. Almost 8 per cent felt that the State or Government Agencies should provide schemes or support employers in some way to assist them in employing early school leavers. Suggestions under this heading included:

- Grant-aid should be available to small companies;
- Provision of State aided in-house training;
- More grant-aid;
- Job placements partly funded by State Agencies and other bodies;
- Put in place a recognised placement scheme;
- Develop an agency geared towards the placement of Junior Certificate candidates;
- Establish a vocational training scheme in our sector.

Table 3.18: Making Early School Leavers More Employable

How to Make Early School Leavers More Employable	Distribution of Firms Across Suggestions
Undertake More Training	13.3
Improve/Gain IT/Computer Skills	7.5
Gain More Work Experience	12.7
Undertake Training Specific to Firm's Needs	19.5
Improve Basic Education Levels/Literacy & Numeracy	1.4
Improve Personal Presentation and Attitudes	9.7
Accept Cheaper Wages	4.1

Encourage ESLs to Continue in Education	4.5
Provide State/Agency Supported Schemes	7.9
Provide More Practical Subjects in School	3.8
Other	15.5
Total	100.0

3.5.3 BARRIERS TO EMPLOYING YOUNG EARLY SCHOOL LEAVERS

The 58 per cent of firms which said that nothing could be done to make young early leavers more employable were asked what were the barriers in their company to the recruiting of the young leavers. Summary results on firm's perceptions of the barriers to their employment are presented in Table 3.19. Perhaps the most disconcerting aspect of the information contained in the table is that just over 18 per cent of firms which do not employ young early school leavers and who also feel that nothing could be done to make them more employable say that there are no specific barriers as such to their employment – the jobs on offer are simply not appropriate to them. A further 10 per cent of relevant firms say that they are not recruiting. However, for the plurality of firms, barriers to employing young early school leavers refer to their lack of education, skill or experience. A total of 17 per cent of relevant firms indicated that they felt that the young early school leavers had a lack of appropriate education for the specific jobs in question.⁹ A further 6.4 per cent of firms said the young early school leavers did not have the necessary experience for their specific vacancies while a further 4 per cent recorded that young early leavers had a general lack of required skills and/or education. In the case of just over 4 per cent of firms the company had an explicit policy of *not* employing below a specified minimum level of education. The personal attributes of young early school leavers was flagged in terms of their attitudes (mentioned by just over 9 per cent of firms) and immaturity (3 per cent of firms).

Table 3.19: Barriers to Employing Early School Leavers

Barriers to Employing Early School Leavers	Distribution of Firms Across Suggestions
Lack of Education for Job	16.7
Lack of Experience or Skill for Job	6.4
General Lack of Skills/Education	4.0
Company Policy	4.5
More Qualified Workers Available	2.5
Lack of Maturity/Too Young	3.2
Lack of Ability or Attitude to be Suitable Employee	9.4
Too Young for Driving Insurance	7.7
Not Suitable Vacancies	4.8
Not Recruiting	9.6
No Specific Barriers, Jobs Not Appropriate to Early Leaver	18.4
Other	12.6
Total	100.0

In general, therefore, it would appear that very large proportions of firms which do not employ early school leavers and who feel that nothing can be done to make them more employable cite their almost definitional lack of education and skills as the major barrier to their employment.

3.6 Summary

In this chapter we considered a number of aspects related to the incidence of employment and training among early school leavers. We discussed the proportion of firms which actually employ early leavers; the types of jobs offered to young leavers; the extent to which the young school leaver is given initial training by the employer on starting their job as well as being provided with on-going support and mentoring by the

⁹ In some respects these respondents are very similar to the 18 per cent for firms which say the jobs on offer are simply not appropriate rather than a barrier *per se*.

firm; the degree to which the early leaver can progress within the company and, finally, the employers' perceptions of barriers to the employment of young early school leavers by firms which do not currently employ them.

We say that as many as 70 per cent of employers record that they had never actually employed early school leavers while a further 9 per cent had done so at some time in the past but not in the two years preceding the survey. The remaining 21 per cent of firms had employed young leavers at some time in the relevant two-year reference period. The highest incidence of employment in terms of industrial sectors was in the Manufacturing sector (especially in Traditional Manufacturing) as well as in the Hotel/Restaurant/Personal Services sector. Although slightly lower than in these sectors, the incidence of employment in the Construction and Distributive Services sectors was also high. In general, larger firms had a higher propensity to employ from the young cohort in question than did their smaller counterparts. We noted, however, that this may simply reflect the greater employment opportunities which exist for employment in larger organisations. The greater the number of employees in an organisation the greater is the likelihood that at least some of them will be young early leavers.

It is perhaps somewhat worrying that we found that the majority of jobs secured by young early leavers were in unskilled or semi-skilled areas (general labourers; sales; clerical assistants; general operatives; bar/restaurant work etc.).

On a more encouraging note we found that as many as 79 per cent of those who had employed early school leavers said that they gave them some form of initial training on taking up their job. The vast majority of this training was in the form of on-the-job training with only relatively small proportions being undertaken either in-house but not on-the-job or out of the company. A total of 56 per cent of companies said that they also offered initial induction or support to their early leavers in addition to the initial training offered.

In terms of career advancement or development we found that as many as 89 per cent of firms which employed early leavers said that the workers in question were able to develop their position within the organisation and to expand their responsibilities.

The principal barriers to the employment of early school leavers were identified by respondents as being centred around education and skill levels. Much of the response from employers seemed to point to the need for early intervention in an effort to increase school retention levels and also to provide early personal and job-oriented skills training for the young workers in question.

4. EMPLOYERS' PERCEPTIONS OF EARLY SCHOOL LEAVERS

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter we consider several aspects of employers' perceptions of young early school leavers. First, we begin by discussing employers' views on the adequacy or otherwise of the personal skills of early leavers before moving on to consider their views on the work skills of the young workers in question. Second, we examine the extent to which employers would be willing to participate in training programs aimed at young leavers. Third, we consider the incidence of involvement by firms in work experience schemes specifically oriented at young people. Fourth, we discuss the relative importance assigned by firms to a number of factors which might encourage them to give greater consideration to the recruitment of early leavers. Finally, we present a brief summary of our findings in the chapter.

4.2 Employers' Views on the Adequacy of Early Leavers' Personal Skills

In the course of the survey respondents were presented with a set of 11 pre-coded skills and asked to record how they rated early leavers on each. This set of skills contained 6 items which could be broadly described as relating to the *personal* characteristics of the early leaver whilst the other 5 items related to *work oriented* skills. The set of personal characteristics included the following:

- Honesty;
- Reliability;
- Time-keeping;
- Initiative;
- General Ability to Fit In/Personal Skills;
- Teamwork.

The respondent was asked to think, in general, about recruiting young early leavers and to rate such recruits as being "good", "adequate" or "poor" in terms of each of the items in question. The results are presented in Table 4.1.

The information is presented separately for those who employed early leavers in the two years preceding the survey and those who did not. Clearly, the rating of early leavers by those firms which employed such leavers will be based on their actual experience of recent years. The responses of the firms which did not employ early leavers in the two years preceding the survey will reflect more generally held perceptions of this group of potential employees. We consider each of the characteristics in turn.

HONESTY

From the figures in the table one can see that a total of just over 70 per cent of firms which had employed early leavers in the two years preceding the survey felt that in terms of general honesty such employees were "good" while a further 23 per cent felt them to be "adequate" and 7 per cent felt that they were "poor". There is some limited evidence from the table to suggest

Table 4.1: Firms' Attitudes Towards Early School Leavers' Personal Skills Classified According to (a) Number of Employees and (b) Whether or Not the Firm Employed any Early School Leaver in the Last Two Years

	1-5 Employees	6-15 Employees	16-30 Employees	31-100 Employees	100+ Employees	Total
Employed Early School Leavers						
Honesty						
G	79.5	69.1	57.0	61.9	66.3	70.3
A	10.9	23.0	43.0	34.9	33.7	23.1
P	9.7	8.0	0.0	3.1	0.0	6.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Reliability						
G	57.4	39.5	33.8	36.3	30.3	43.7
A	20.7	52.3	50.6	43.8	56.8	41.5
P	21.9	8.2	15.6	19.9	12.9	14.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Time Keeping						
G	55.6	31.1	41.8	38.0	32.5	40.8
A	29.3	49.9	43.9	45.4	48.4	42.2
P	15.1	19.0	14.3	16.6	19.1	17.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Initiative						
G	44.7	24.0	21.9	13.0	8.8	28.0
A	39.8	45.0	51.2	61.5	70.0	47.5
P	15.4	31.0	26.8	25.5	21.2	24.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Ability to Fit in/General Personal Skills						
G	53.2	54.7	40.6	33.8	23.6	48.8
A	42.8	40.9	53.5	59.3	69.8	46.4
P	4.0	4.3	5.9	6.9	6.6	4.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Teamwork						
G	48.0	44.6	47.9	36.8	28.6	44.0
A	37.8	49.7	50.5	59.1	59.1	47.7
P	14.2	5.8	1.6	4.1	12.3	8.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Did NOT Employ Early School Leavers						
Honesty						
G	63.4	69.7	68.0	68.6	74.0	66.3
A	32.7	30.0	30.4	30.9	24.0	31.4
P	4.0	0.3	1.6	0.5	2.0	2.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Reliability						
G	46.7	50.5	41.7	59.2	49.7	48.3
A	35.5	36.6	45.1	35.0	44.1	36.6
P	17.8	12.9	13.2	5.8	6.1	15.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Time-keeping						
G	39.7	47.5	35.0	52.5	49.1	43.0
A	42.3	38.3	52.2	41.6	44.7	41.3
P	18.0	14.2	12.8	5.9	6.3	15.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Initiative						
G	30.9	38.7	35.3	31.9	43.8	34.4
A	51.5	42.7	51.5	50.6	43.0	48.0
P	17.6	18.6	13.2	17.6	13.3	17.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Ability to Fit In/General Personal Skills						
G	30.1	35.5	36.6	46.1	62.6	33.7
A	57.1	57.7	60.3	45.0	34.6	56.7
P	12.7	6.8	3.1	8.9	2.8	9.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Teamwork						
G	32.8	42.0	41.7	41.4	60.8	37.6
A	58.1	50.3	43.2	51.2	36.0	53.6
P	9.2	7.7	15.1	7.5	3.2	8.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

G = Good, A = Adequate, P = Poor.

that smaller firms had slightly more clearly defined views on early leavers than their larger counterparts. One can see, for example, that a substantially lower percentage of firms employing 15 persons or less adopted the relatively neutral middle ranking of "adequate" for honesty than did those firms employing 16 or more people.

If one compares the figures in the bottom section of the table with those in the upper section it would appear that a marginally lower percentage of firms which did not employ early leavers considered that they would be rated as "good" in terms of honesty and a higher percentage rated them as "adequate". In general, however, the differences between respondents who had employed young early leavers and those who had not were very limited. Overall, one can see that only very small percentages of respondents considered honesty among young early leavers to be "poor".

RELIABILITY

From the upper section of Table 4.1 one can see that 44 per cent of firms which had employed early leavers considered them to be "good" in terms of reliability. There would appear to be a relatively strong relationship between size of firm and rating in terms of reliability, with higher percentages of the smaller firms considering early leavers to be reliable. For example, 57 per cent of the smallest category of firms scored early leavers as being "good" in terms of reliability whereas only 30 per cent of the largest firms did so.

A total of 15 per cent of firms which had experienced early leavers at first hand in the two years preceding the survey described such recruits as "poor" in terms of reliability. As many as 30 per cent of the smallest category of firms felt that their reliability was "poor". Among larger firms (16 employees or more) the percentage of respondents which felt that early leavers' reliability was "poor" ranged from 13 to 20 per cent.

If one considers the comparable figures for firms which had not employed early leavers in the two years preceding the survey one can see that a total of 48 per cent of such firms felt the early leavers were "good" in terms of reliability while 37 per cent felt they were "adequate" and 15 per cent rated them as being "poor". One can see that, with the exception of the smallest group of companies, a higher percentage of firms in each size category among firms which had *not* employed young early leavers in the two years preceding the survey (as compared with those which had) rated them as "good" in terms of reliability. Although the evidence is reasonably weak, it would seem to imply that the experience of having employed early leavers to some degree tempers the employers' perceptions of them in terms of their reliability.

TIME-KEEPING

Just under 41 per cent of firms which had employed early leavers described their time-keeping as "good"; 42 per cent as "adequate" and 17 per cent as being "poor". As was the case with the previous two characteristics, a much higher percentage of the smallest category of firms rated early leavers as being "good" in terms of their time-keeping.

One can see from the table that, in aggregate terms, there does not appear to be any substantial systematic differences in terms of perceptions of early leavers' time-keeping as between those firms which had employed and those which had not in the two years preceding the survey.

INITIATIVE

One can see from Table 4.1 that a total of 28 per cent of firms which had employed young early leavers in the two years preceding the survey felt them to be "good" in terms of their initiative. A further 47 per cent are felt to be "adequate" and the remaining 24 per cent to be "poor". It is clear from the table that smaller firms had a slightly more positive perception of young early leavers in terms of their initiative than did those in the larger size categories. This may, at least in part, reflect a closer relationship with the young leaver in smaller firms. One aspect of this closer relationship could be the intensity of supervision of the early leaver. In situations in

which the young school leaver is working within this framework of closer supervision and monitoring, the respondent may feel that the young employee in question is performing well in terms of his/her own initiative. In larger companies, where the same level of close monitoring and supervision is not available (perhaps not possible), one may find that employers feel that the same degree of initiative is not forthcoming.

From the bottom half of the table one can see that a total of 18 per cent of firms which had not employed young early leavers in the two years preceding the survey felt that they would be "poor" in terms of their initiative. The comparable figure among respondents who had employed young early leavers was 24 per cent. This would seem to indicate a slightly higher expectation in regard to initiative among those who had less experience of employing early leavers. It is clear from the table that among firms which had employed young early leavers in the two years preceding the survey a higher percentage in all size categories (with the exception of those in the smallest group) felt that the young employees in question were "poor" in terms of initiative than did their counterparts who had no direct recent experience of employing early leavers.

ABILITY TO FIT IN

The figures in Table 4.1 indicate that just under half (49 per cent) of respondents who had employed early leavers in the two years before the survey felt that their "ability to fit in/their general personal skills etc." was "good". A further 46 per cent felt that it was "adequate" whilst the remaining 5 per cent felt that it was "poor". In general, the percentage of firms which rate early school leavers' ability to fit in as being "good" declines with size of firm.

It is noteworthy that a higher percentage of firms which had experience of having employed early leavers in the two years preceding the survey had a more positive perception of the ability of young early leavers to fit in within the workplace than did their counterparts who had no recent experience of employing them.

TEAMWORK

One can see that, in aggregate terms, 44 per cent of firms which had recent experience of having employed young early leavers assessed their abilities in terms of teamwork to be "good". A further 48 per cent felt they were "adequate" whilst the remaining 8 per cent felt them to be "poor" on this personal skills criterion. One can see from the table that a higher percentage of firms which had recent employment experience of young early leavers felt that their teamwork abilities were "good". This was particularly so among firms in the three smallest size categories.

Topics Raised

In general, the figures in Table 4.1 would seem to indicate that firms which have had recent experience of employing young early school leavers can be characterised as having a positive view of the personal skills of this group of young workers in terms of their honesty, ability to fit in/general personal skills and teamwork. Only very small percentages of firms rate young early leavers' abilities in these areas as being "poor". Slightly, though not substantially, more negative perceptions are held in respect of reliability, timekeeping and initiative. It is somewhat disconcerting that only 28 per cent of firms which have had recent experience of having employed young early leavers felt them to be "good" in terms of their initiative with as many as 24 per cent rating them to be "poor" on this personal skills criterion.

Overall, there is clear evidence to suggest that smaller firms often have a more clearly identified view of young early leavers and are often more positively disposed towards them than are their larger counterparts. This may be due, at least in part, to the smaller firms having a closer, more "hands-on" role with the early leavers in question. This closer relationship may make it possible for the early leaver to develop his/her potential to a greater degree in the workplace than would otherwise be the case.

At an aggregate level, there are only small differences in the perceptions of the personal skills of early leavers as held by firms which had recent experience of

employing them and those which had not. The biggest difference between the two groups of companies is in regard to their views on the level of initiative shown by early leavers. As noted above, those firms which had recent experience of early leavers had a somewhat more negative view of their personal initiative levels than had their counterparts who had not employed them in the two years preceding the survey.

4.3 Employers' Views on the Adequacy of Early Leavers' Work Skills

In addition to views on the six items of *personal* skills outlined in Table 4.1, firms were also asked to rate young early school leavers in terms of five *work-related* skills. These skill items were:

- Basic ability that can be built upon;
- Ability to follow instructions;
- Basic literacy/numeracy;
- General IT skills/computer literacy;
- Pre-employment training.

The results are presented in Table 4.2 below.

BASIC ABILITY THAT CAN BE BUILT UPON

From the table one can see that a total of 57 per cent of firms which had recent experience of employing young early school leavers felt that their basic ability which could be built upon was "good". A further 37 per cent felt it was "adequate" while the remaining 6 per cent felt that it was "poor".

One can see a clear relationship between size of firm and percentage which score the young school leavers as being "good" in terms of their basic ability. Substantially higher percentages of smaller companies rating the young employees as being "good" on this indicator.

In overall terms, firms which have not had recent experience of young early school leavers have a slightly more negative view of their basic ability which can be built upon. One can see from the table that a lower percentage of firms which had not employed young early leavers rated them as "good" on "basic ability" and a commensurately higher percentage rated them as being "adequate" as compared to their counterparts who had had recent experience of employing the young leavers in question. This trend is being largely driven by smaller firms.

FOLLOWING INSTRUCTIONS

The figures in Table 4.2 show that 41 per cent of firms which had recent experience of employing young early leavers felt that they were "good" in terms of their ability to follow instructions; 54 per cent felt that they were "adequate" and 4 per cent that they were "poor". Although there is some relationship between firms' perceptions of young early leavers on this criterion and size of firm it is not as pronounced as in respect of some of the other skills outlined in the table. In general, there is really very little difference in perceptions on this characteristic of early school leavers as between those who had recent experience of employing the young workers in question and those who had not.

Table 4.2: Firms' Attitudes Towards Early School Leavers' Work Skills Classified According to (a) Number of Employees and (b) Whether or Not the Firm Employed any Early School Leaver in the Last Two Years

	1-5 Employees	6-15 Employees	16-30 Employees	31-100 Employees	100+ Employees	Total
Employed Early School Leavers						
Basic Ability that Can be Built On						
G	73.8	58.6	33.5	35.0	33.9	56.7
A	15.9	36.6	64.3	56.7	66.1	37.1
P	10.3	4.8	2.2	8.2	0.0	6.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Following Instructions						
G	45.2	41.4	39.2	35.8	37.7	41.5
A	54.8	51.3	56.1	58.7	57.8	54.1

P	0.0	7.3	4.7	5.5	4.5	4.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Literacy/Numeracy						
G	31.4	25.1	19.9	17.2	13.7	24.9
A	64.6	45.3	53.3	66.1	59.6	55.4
P	4.0	29.6	26.8	16.7	26.7	19.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
General IT Skills/ Computer Literacy						
G	22.3	9.4	5.7	8.2	6.4	12.7
A	47.2	29.0	30.6	34.4	36.8	36.0
P	30.5	61.6	63.8	57.4	56.8	51.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Pre-employment Training						
G	26.3	0.9	6.5	6.7	2.8	9.6
A	39.8	38.2	35.2	30.7	41.9	37.7
P	33.9	60.9	58.2	62.6	55.3	52.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Did NOT Employ Early School Leavers						
Basic Ability that Can be Built On						
G	33.1	35.6	37.6	38.1	38.8	34.6
A	61.3	59.6	47.0	59.9	52.5	59.7
P	5.6	4.7	15.4	2.1	8.7	5.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Following Instructions						
G	39.2	36.8	44.9	45.7	50.9	39.1
A	48.4	55.9	44.2	51.7	42.0	50.9
P	12.4	7.4	10.8	2.6	7.1	9.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Literacy/Numeracy						
G	28.2	24.7	33.9	23.7	42.1	27.3
A	50.1	47.5	24.8	42.1	47.6	48.0
P	21.7	27.8	31.3	34.2	10.3	24.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
General IT Skills/ Computer Literacy						
G	4.4	24.7	14.6	8.2	31.3	13.1
A	50.4	33.1	45.8	47.0	32.1	43.3
P	45.1	42.2	39.6	44.8	36.6	43.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Pre-employment Training						
G	4.6	11.8	5.3	9.6	26.0	7.9
A	52.3	44.2	57.5	34.1	33.2	48.5
P	43.1	44.0	37.2	56.3	40.7	43.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

G = Good, A = Adequate, P = Poor.

BASIC LITERACY AND NUMERACY

Table 4.2 shows that employers' perceptions of the basic literacy and numeracy abilities of young early leavers is relatively negative. Only 25 per cent of all firms which have had recent experience of employing early leavers describe their abilities in this area as being "good". A total of 55 per cent feel they are "adequate" and the remaining 20 per cent say they are "poor". As was the case with most of the other skill characteristics considered, there is clearly a relatively strong relationship between size of firm and perception of literacy/numeracy skills.

GENERAL IT SKILLS/COMPUTER LITERACY

The figures in the table clearly show that firms' perceptions of young early school leavers' computer skills are very negative. Only 13 per cent of firms feel that they are "good" while over 50 per cent of those who had employed young leavers in the two years preceding the survey described their IT and basic computer literacy skills as being "poor". It is noteworthy that substantially higher percentages of firms which had experience of employing young early leavers in all size categories (except for the

smallest group) rated their IT skills as being "poor". This would seem to suggest that the experience of having employed young early leavers re-enforces or strengthens employers' negative views on their skill levels in this area.

PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRAINING

The final aspect of work-oriented skills considered was pre-employment training. One can see as many as 53 per cent of employers who had recent experience of young early school leavers rated their pre-employment training as "poor". A further 38 per cent described it as being "adequate" and less than 10 per cent of relevant respondents described it as being "good". It is perhaps most disconcerting to note that, with the exception of firms in the smallest size category, respondents who had recent experience of employing young early leavers held an even more negative view of the young workers in question in terms of their pre-employment training than did their counterparts who had not employed young leavers in the two years preceding the survey. In overall terms, a total of 44 per cent of those who had *not* had recent experience of young early leavers described their pre-employment training as "poor". The comparable figure for those who had employed young leavers in the two years preceding the survey was 53 per cent. The differential between those who had and those who had not recently employed early leavers was substantially larger in each of the four larger size categories of firms.

Topics Raised

Overall, therefore, a number of general observations can be made regarding firms' perceptions of the skills of young early school leavers. We saw that employers had a fairly positive view of young early leaver's basic ability which could be built upon and also their ability to follow instructions. We found that, especially in regard to the former, the views of those who had recent experience of employing the young leavers in question were more positive than their counterparts who had not employed them in the two years preceding the survey.

In terms of both general literacy/numeracy and also general IT skills/computer literacy we saw that firms had a relatively poor view of young early leavers. This was especially true in regard to IT skills/computer literacy. The fact that only in the order of one-quarter of young early school leavers are perceived by employers as being "good" in terms of their basic literacy/numeracy skills is clearly a cause for some concern.

Finally, firms had a most negative view of young early leavers' pre-employment training. Less than 10 per cent of those who had employed early leavers in the two years preceding the survey and just under 8 per cent of their counterparts who had not, described their pre-employment training as being "good". It is also worrying that higher percentages of firms which have had recent experience of employing young early leavers have a more negative view of their pre-employment training than do their counterparts who did not employ this group of workers in the two years preceding the survey.

4.4 State-Sponsored Training for Early School Leavers

In the course of the questionnaire, firms were asked about their hypothetical willingness to release young early school leavers on State-sponsored training programmes of, for example, one day a week for the first six months of working with the firm. The survey presented firms with two hypothetical scenarios. The first referred to training that covered *general* issues such as *personal* development. The second scenario considered training which covered *technical* or *work related* issues.

Table 4.3: Firms Classified (a) by Industrial Sector, (b) Whether They Had Recruited Early School Leavers in the Past Two Years Or Not and (c) Whether Or Not They Would Be Willing to Allow their Early School Leaver to Participate in State-Sponsored Personal Development Skills Training Courses in the First Six Months of Employment

Traditional	Hi-Tech	Construc-	Distribut-	Financial/	Hotels/	Transport/	Total
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Did NOT Employ ESLs in Past Two Years								
Yes	89.2	88.8	75.5	85.3	74.5	88.5	74.8	80.7
No	10.8	11.2	24.5	14.7	25.5	11.5	25.2	19.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
All Firms								
Yes	92.9	88.9	83.9	86.5	74.4	87.1	74.7	82.5
No	7.1	11.1	16.1	13.5	25.6	12.9	25.3	17.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Expressed willingness to participate in this type of training is particularly high in the Construction and Traditional Manufacturing Sectors (99 and 97 per cent respectively). It is also very high in the Distributive Services; Hi-Tech Manufacturing and Hotel/Restaurant/Personal Services sectors (85 – 90 per cent in each).

The reader is, of course, cautioned in the interpretation of these figures. The expressed levels of willingness to participate in the training in question are very high and encouraging. They would certainly suggest that firms are willing to engage with the training support agencies in providing the sort of *personal* and *work-related* training in question. One can, of course, only surmise as to the extent to which their willingness to participate in training programmes, as expressed in the survey, would, in fact, be translated into actual participation. Notwithstanding this caveat, however, their positive response to the questions on the survey is encouraging.¹⁰

4.5 Participation by Firms in Work Experience

In the course of the survey firms were asked whether or not they had offered work experience to anyone at any time in the preceding five years. This might have been, for example, as part of a Transition Year programme in secondary school, a Youthreach programme etc. The results are presented in Table 4.5 below. From this one can see that, overall, 55 per cent of firms record that they had, in the last five years, offered some form of work experience to a young person. In aggregate terms, the incidence is highest in the two Manufacturing sectors followed by the Hotel/Restaurant/Personal Service Sector.

Table 4.5: Firms Classified (a) by Industrial Sector, (b) Whether They Had Recruited Early School Leavers in the Past Two Years Or Not and (c) Whether Or Not They Had Offered Work Experience to Anyone (e.g. in Transition Year or on a Youthreach Programme)

	Traditional Manufacturing	Hi-Tech Manufacturing	Construction	Distributive Services	Financial/ Insurance/ Business	Hotels/ Restaurants/ Personal Services	Transport/ Storage/ Communications	Total
Employed ESLs in Past Two Years								
Yes	88.9	86.0	72.6	77.1	72.3	82.9	92.3	79.0
No	11.1	14.0	27.4	22.9	27.7	17.1	7.7	21.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Did NOT Employ ESLs in Past Two Years								
Yes	61.8	70.9	53.7	44.0	57.3	56.6	42.5	48.8
No	38.2	29.1	46.3	56.0	42.7	43.4	57.5	51.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
All Firms								
Yes	74.3	76.8	60.1	51.5	59.0	67.5	48.6	55.4
No	25.7	23.2	39.9	48.5	41.0	32.5	51.4	44.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

It is very clear from the table that the incidence of work experience among firms which employed early school leavers in the two years preceding the survey was substantially higher than among those who had not (79 per cent and 49 per cent respectively). There were also some substantial variations as between one sector and another in terms of the difference in incidence levels between firms which had employed young early leavers and those which had not. For example, one can see that there was a 50 percentage point difference in incidence rates between firms which had employed early leavers and those which had not in the

¹⁰ In the course of the pilot for the survey of employers an attempt was made to differentiate between training schemes which involved a shared cost with the employer and those which did not. This approach proved to be very onerous for the respondent in a postal survey and was, accordingly, dropped from the main survey.

Extent	53.9	46.5	55.2	60.8	53.9	53.6	35.6	54.1
Not at All	9.4	18.8	14.4	11.1	18.4	3.0	35.3	16.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

One can see from the detail of the table that there is relatively little difference in terms of the views expressed by those who had recently employed early school leavers and those who had not. A total of 85 per cent of firms which had not recently employed early leavers recorded that recent work experience would have “some” or a “considerable” effect on their recruitment prospects. The comparable figure among firms which had recently employed early leavers in the last two years was 80 per cent.

One can see from the table that there is some variation by sectors in terms of the perceived impact of recent work experience on the recruitment prospects of young leavers. For example, in aggregate terms, 97 per cent of firms in the Hotel/Restaurant/Personal Services sector said that recent work experience would encourage them to recruit young early school leavers to a considerable extent or to some extent. On the other hand, within the Transport/Storage/Communications sector a total of 59 per cent of firms indicated that recent work experience among young early school leavers would not have any influence at all on the decision to recruit the young employees in question.

Table 4.7: Firms Classified (a) by Industrial Sector, (b) Whether They Had Recruited Early School Leavers in the Past Two Years Or Not and (c) the Extent to Which Recent Job Training Would Encourage Them to Give Greater Consideration to Recruitment of Early School Leavers

	Traditional Manufact- uring	Hi-Tech Manufact- uring	Construct- ion	Distribut- ive Services	Financial/ Insurance/ Business	Hotels/ Restaurants/ Personal Services	Transport/ Storage/ Commun- ications	Total
Job Training								
Employed ESLs in Past Two Years								
Considerable								
Extent	36.6	36.7	30.3	21.5	4.6	50.4	25.7	26.2
To Some								
Extent	53.0	44.8	56.6	65.9	91.2	35.1	48.6	60.3
Not at All	10.3	18.5	13.1	12.6	4.2	14.5	25.7	13.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Did NOT Employ ESLs in Past Two Years								
Considerable								
Extent	46.0	44.5	31.5	34.0	37.5	50.0	35.7	36.0
To Some								
Extent	40.3	43.7	46.1	51.9	43.3	47.3	41.4	47.1
Not at All	13.7	11.7	22.4	14.1	19.2	2.7	22.9	16.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
All Firms								
Considerable								
Extent	41.4	44.5	31.5	34.0	37.5	50.0	35.7	36.0
To Some								
Extent	46.5	44.2	50.0	55.6	48.0	41.9	42.5	50.3
Not at All	12.1	14.4	18.9	13.7	17.7	7.9	23.3	16.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 4.7 considers the perceived impact of recent job training on the recruitment prospects of young school early leavers. The majority of all firms (84 per cent) said that it would influence them to “some” or a “considerable extent”. In general, at a broad aggregate level, there is some limited variation in the perceived impact of recent job training according to whether or not the firm had recently employed young leavers. For example, one can see that 86 per cent of firms which had recently employed early leavers felt that recent job training would have “considerable” or “some” influence on their decision to recruit early leavers. The comparable figure for those who did not recently employ early leavers is 83 per cent. When one considers differences according to industrial sector, however, one can see that there is a higher level of variation. For example, just over 4 per cent of firms in the Financial/Insurance/Business Services sector which had recently employed young early school

leavers recorded that recent job training would not encourage them to recruit from the cohort. The comparable figure for those firms in that sector which had not recently employed early leavers was just over 19 per cent. In contrast, almost 15 per cent of firms in the Hotel/Restaurant/Personal Services sector which had recently employed early school leavers said that recent job training would not have any influence on their propensity to recruit these young workers. The comparable figure among their counterparts who had not recently employed early leavers was only 3 per cent.

The influence of improvements in *general job applications* on firm's attitudes towards the recruitment of early school leavers is considered in Table 4.8. One can see from the figures for all firms that well over half of companies feel that an improvement in the general job application skills of young early leavers would improve their recruitment prospects with employers to a "considerable extent" while a further third of companies feel it would do so "to some extent". There is very little variation at an overall or aggregate level between firms which have recently employed young early leavers and those which have not. One can see that only 9 per cent of the former and 10 per cent of the latter feel that a general improvement in job application skills would not affect the recruitment prospects of the young leavers in question.

There is clearly some variation according to industrial sector. Among firms which have recently employed young early school leavers a total of 41 per cent in the Transport/Storage/Communications sector said that an improvement in job application skills would encourage employers to recruit early leavers to a "considerable extent". This compares, for example, with 77 per cent of relevant firms in the Hi-Tech Manufacturing sector.

Table 4.8: Firms Classified (a) by Industrial Sector, (b) Whether They Had Recruited Early School Leavers in the Past Two Years Or Not and (c) the Extent to Which Improved General Job Application Skills Would Encourage Them to Give Greater Consideration to Recruitment of Early School Leavers

	Traditional Manufact- uring	Hi-Tech Manufact- uring	Construct- ion	Distribut- ive Services	Financial/ Insurance/ Business	Hotels/ Restaurants/ Personal Services	Transport/ Storage/ Commun- ications	Total
Improvement of General Job Application Skills								
Employed ESLs in Past Two Years								
Considerable								
Extent	59.1	76.6	68.7	51.3	44.0	77.7	41.0	56.5
To Some								
Extent	38.1	16.2	17.5	41.4	22.4	21.4	59.0	34.7
Not at All	2.8	7.3	13.8	7.3	33.6	0.9	0.0	8.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Did NOT Employ ESLs in Past Two Years								
Considerable								
Extent	69.5	52.0	53.9	56.0	42.1	51.4	64.3	54.2
To Some								
Extent	22.1	35.2	38.5	35.6	41.2	46.6	27.3	35.8
Not at All	8.4	12.8	7.6	8.4	16.8	2.0	8.3	10.1
Total								
All Firms								
Considerable								
Extent	64.5	61.7	59.4	54.8	42.3	63.0	60.9	54.8
To Some								
Extent	29.8	27.7	30.7	37.1	39.3	35.5	32.0	35.5
Not at All	5.7	10.6	9.9	8.1	18.4	1.5	7.1	9.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Given the currently tight labour market it is clearly of interest to consider whether or not the lack of more highly qualified applicants would encourage employers to give greater consideration to the recruitment of early leavers. The results are presented in Table 4.9.

One can see that as many as 25 per cent of all firms in aggregate said that the lack of more suitably qualified applicants would have a "considerable" effect on

recruitment prospects while a further 44 per cent said it would affect prospects “to some extent”. It is clear that there is quite a degree of differentiation between those who have recently employed young early school leavers and those who have not in terms of the perceived impact of labour market shortages on the employers’ propensity to recruit early leavers. For example, the table shows that only 22 per cent of those who have had recent experience of recruiting young leavers say that the tightness of the labour market would have “no effect at all” on their recruitment practices regarding young leavers. The comparable figure for those who had not recently recruited young leavers is 33 per cent. This differentiation is perhaps not surprising in the light of our findings in Chapter 3 regarding the reasons given by firms for not employing early leavers in the two years preceding the survey. We saw in that chapter that relatively substantial proportions of firms which were not employing young early school leavers cited as their reason that the young leavers in question simply did not have the level of educational attainment necessary for the jobs on offer. Other reasons given with relative frequency were that firms did not employ leavers without a Leaving Certificate while still others said that the leavers in question did not have relevant work experience or skills necessary for the jobs on offer. If these reasons are being given spontaneously by relatively substantial proportions of relevant firms it is clear that labour shortages or labour market tightness is unlikely, of itself, to be sufficient to change the firms’ opinions regarding recruitment of young early school leavers.

Table 4.9: Firms Classified (a) by Industrial Sector, (b) Whether They Had Recruited Early School Leavers in the Past Two Years Or Not and (c) the Extent to Which the Lack of More Highly Qualified Applicants Would Encourage Them to Give Greater Consideration to Recruitment of Early School Leavers

	Traditional Manufacturing	Hi-Tech Manufacturing	Construction	Distributive Services	Financial/ Insurance/ Business	Hotels/ Restaurants/ Personal Services	Transport/ Storage/ Communications	Total
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Lack of More Highly Qualified Applicants for Jobs as Unemployment Rates Fall								
Employed ESLs in Past Two Years								
Considerable								
Extent	36.9	30.6	61.5	41.0	39.3	33.3	15.3	39.8
To Some								
Extent	45.8	52.8	22.1	35.1	53.5	35.9	59.0	38.6
Not at All	17.3	16.6	16.4	23.8	7.2	30.7	25.7	21.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Did NOT Employ ESLs in Past Two Years								
Considerable								
Extent	26.8	16.7	8.4	25.7	17.1	28.4	17.2	20.8
To Some								
Extent	43.0	58.8	53.4	46.7	46.8	37.1	42.7	46.5
Not at All	30.2	24.6	38.2	27.5	36.1	34.4	40.1	32.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
All Firms								
Considerable								
Extent	31.7	22.3	26.5	29.8	19.3	30.6	16.9	25.4
To Some								
Extent	44.4	56.3	42.7	43.7	47.5	36.6	45.1	44.5
Not at All	23.8	21.4	30.8	26.5	33.2	32.8	38.0	30.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

The final table in this section, Table 4.10, summarises responses from all firms across the four factors. This allows one to assess the perceived relative importance of each of the factors in affecting firms’ decisions to recruit young early leavers.

From the table it would appear that the factor which would most encourage firms to recruit young early school leavers is an improvement in their job application skills, presentation, attitudes, motivation etc. Almost 55 per cent of all firms indicated that an improvement in this area would encourage them “to a considerable extent” to recruit early leavers. Only 10 per cent of firms said that it would not encourage them at all.

Table 4.10: Summary Responses by All Firms Across the Four Factors Which Might Encourage Them to Recruit Young Early School Leavers

	Work Experience	Job Training	Improved Job Applications Skills	Shortage of More Highly Qualified Applicants
Employed ESLs in Past Two Years				
Considerable Extent	25.8	26.2	56.5	39.8
To Some Extent	54.7	60.3	34.7	38.6
Not at All	19.5	13.5	8.7	21.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Did NOT Employ ESLs in Past Two Years				
Considerable Extent	30.8	36.0	54.2	20.8
To Some Extent	54.0	47.1	35.8	46.5
Not at All	15.2	16.9	10.1	32.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
All Firms				
Considerable Extent	29.6	33.6	54.8	25.4
To Some Extent	54.1	50.3	35.5	44.5
Not at All	16.2	16.1	9.7	30.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Recent job training and work experience would seem to be the next most important factors in enhancing the recruitment prospects of young early leavers. Approximately one-third of all firms said that each of these factors would impact to a “considerable extent” on their decision to recruit young school leavers while a further 50 per cent said that it would encourage them to do so “to some extent”. It is clear from the detail of the table that the positive influence of both these factors is slightly higher in respect of firms which did not recently employ early leavers as compared with those which did.

The factor which would seem to have the least impact on a firm’s recruitment of young early school leavers is the lack of more highly qualified applicants for vacant positions. Almost one-third of all firms said that this factor would not encourage them at all to recruit young early school leavers. The impact of this factor is slightly greater for firms which employed early leavers in the two years preceding the survey than for their counterparts who did not. Overall, therefore, an improvement in personal skills followed by work experience and job training would seem, relatively speaking, to be the most important of the issues presented to respondents in influencing the firms’ decision as to whether or not to recruit young early school leavers.

4.7 Summary

This chapter considered several aspects of employers’ perceptions of young early leavers. In particular, we discussed their views on the personal and work-related characteristics of the workers in question as well as the employers’ willingness to participate in training programmes targeted at young recruits. In addition, we considered the extent to which firms provided work experience for young people as well as the importance assigned by firms to a number of factors in relation to the recruitment of young leavers.

We began by considering firms’ perceptions of the adequacy or otherwise of young early leavers’ *personal* skills or characteristics. In general, we found that firms had a fairly positive view of their personal skills and their ability to participate in the workplace as part of a team. Respondents also had a positive opinion of young early school leavers in terms of their reliability and time-keeping. Only in terms of initiative did relatively larger proportions of firms hold a negative view of young early school leavers. Approximately 25 per cent of firms which had recent experience of employing young

leavers felt that they rated “poorly” in terms of their initiative. The comparable figure for firms which did not employ early leavers in the two years preceding the survey was 18 per cent.

We saw that, overall, smaller firms had a more clearly articulated or defined view of young early school leavers and their personal skills than did larger companies. This may, at least in part, reflect the potential for a closer supervisory relationship between the employer and the employee in the smaller firms. In a situation in which the young leaver is more closely supervised and monitored, the respondent may well feel that he/she is performing well in terms of his/her own initiative. In larger firms where the employee does not receive the same level of supervision the employer may well feel that the same level of initiative is not forthcoming.

We also saw that employers had a relatively positive view of some – though not all – of the *work oriented* skills of young employees. Positive views were generally expressed regarding young early leavers’ basic ability which would be built upon and also their ability to follow instructions. We found that, especially in regard to young leavers’ basic ability which could be built upon, firms which had recent experience of employing this group of workers were more positive than their counterparts who had not employed them. Clearly, direct causality regarding these views cannot be identified. In other words, some employers may have been more inclined to employ the young early leavers in the first instance because they held a more positive view of their basic ability than did their counterparts who did not recently employ them. Alternatively, it may have been the experience of having employed the young leavers which left the employers in question with the more positive view of the young workers in question. Either way, the important consideration is that the group of firms which have had the most recent direct employment experience of the cohort have a more positive view of their basic abilities than have other employers.

Early leavers did not rate well in terms of both general literacy/numeracy and general IT skills/computer literacy. This was particularly so in regard to the latter.

Perhaps one of the most disconcerting aspects of employers’ views on the young leavers work-oriented skills is their very negative opinion of their pre-employment training. Over 50 per cent of firms which had employed early leavers in the two years preceding the survey said that they felt that their pre-employment training was “poor”. A total of 44 per cent of other employers who had not recently employed them also held a similarly negative view regarding the early leavers’ pre-employment training. Only 9 per cent of employers described this training as “good”.

When we addressed the issue of employers’ expressed willingness to participate in State-sponsored training for early leavers we found that the response was extremely encouraging. Almost three-quarters of all firms said they would be willing to allow their young early school leavers to participate in State-sponsored *personal* development skills training programmes in the first six months of their employment. In aggregate terms, willingness among employers to participate was highest in the Hotel/Restaurant/Personal Services; Distributive Services and Traditional Manufacturing sectors.

Similarly, we found a very high level of willingness among firms to engage in some form of *work-related* State-sponsored training programmes. As many as 82 per cent of firms said that they would be willing to allow young early school leavers to participate in this type of training programme in the first six months of their employment. As noted in the course of the chapter, the authors would point out that although the recorded levels of willingness to participate in the type of training in question are very high and encouraging we have no way of gauging the extent to which this would, in fact, be translated into actual participation by firms. Nevertheless, the very positive response to this set of questions on the survey is extremely encouraging.

In general, we found that just over half of all firms recorded that they had offered work experience to a young person – for example as part of Transition Year or a Youthreach programme. It would appear that the main reason given by firms for not offering work experience was simply that they had never been asked to do so.

In the final section of the chapter we looked at employers’ views on the factors which might encourage them to recruit young early school leavers. Four pre-coded

factors were presented to respondents. From the responses, it would appear that the tightening labour market would have least impact on the employers' propensities to recruit young early school leavers. Evidence of recent work experience and job-training would appear to have a fairly substantial impact while improved job applications skills were felt by employers to be the most important of the four factors presented to them in the questionnaire.

5. SUMMARY

Quite a substantial body of research has developed around what one might describe as the “supply-side” of early school leaving. This considers the extent and underlying causes of early school leaving by focusing on the child him/herself with a view to understanding where, why and in what quantities early school leavers emerged from for the mainstream education system. It has tracked early leavers in their transition from the school to life beyond school. The research in question often focuses on the comparative experience of the early leaver who quits the education system with, at most, only minimal qualifications and those who leave with much higher levels of formal qualifications. Much of the theoretical context of this work falls into either the individualist or structuralist model. The former interprets early school leaving as being principally rooted in the characteristics of the child and his/her personal or family circumstances. These characteristics include the personal and family situation of the child, his/her social class; level of educational attainment of parents; the orientation of parental attitudes towards education and their views on its role in the development of their children, etc. The latter school of thought – the structuralist model – interprets the process of early school leaving within the institutional or structural context of the school itself and focuses on issues such as streaming; availability of teaching and other resources; disciplinary regime etc.

Whilst a substantial amount of theory and empirical research has been developed on this “supply-side” of early school leaving, considerably less is known about the reactions to and perceptions of employers to the issues associated with early school leavers, their employment and integration into the workplace. In other words, less is known about what one could describe as the “demand-side” of early school leavers and their employability *from the perspective of the employer*.

It was with a view to bridging this gap that the current report was commissioned. The main results of the report are based on a dedicated survey of employers aimed at quantifying some of the key issues on the demand for young early school leavers in private sector employment in Ireland today. We contextualised the dedicated survey of employers with some background details drawn from the so-called Annual School Leavers’ Surveys with a view to providing an overview of the scale of the in-flow of early leavers to the labour market each year. These latter surveys have been carried out over some considerable period on behalf of the Departments of Education and Science and also Enterprise, Trade and Employment. This means that we have attempted in the report to provide a reasonably rounded picture of the demand and supply sides of the early school leaver market including the experience, views and perceptions of both parties involved – i.e., the early leaver as well as the employer.

Chapter 2 reported on some of the main characteristics of early school leavers from the Annual School Leavers’ Surveys of the last twenty years. These data examine the situation of school leavers one year after they have left the post-primary education system. Looking at the Annual School Leavers’ data provides a benchmark for the initial labour market experience of young *early* school leavers. It also allows one to carry out a comparative analysis of the labour market experience of young early school leavers with those who exit the education system with much higher levels of educational attainment. This comparative analysis allows one to quantify the extent to which the early leaver is disadvantaged in the labour market.

We saw that there has been a very substantial increase in retention levels in the second level system over the last twenty years. In 1980, a total of 9 per cent of children left school with no formal qualification. This has now been reduced to 3.5 per cent.

Similarly, in 1980 as many as 31 per cent left on completion of the Junior Certificate. This now stands at just over 15 per cent. Despite these substantial improvements in retention levels a total of 19 per cent of young persons still leave the second level system each year before completion of the senior cycle. This represents approximately 13,000 young persons who leave school with either no qualifications (2,400) or on completion of the Junior Cycle only (10,600).

We found that early school leavers were substantially disadvantaged in terms of unemployment rates relative to those who left on completion of the Leaving Certificate. Of even greater concern than the absolute levels, however, is trends in the relative rates of unemployment between those who leave on completion of the Leaving Certificate and early school leavers. It would appear that the *relative* rate or ratio of unemployment between those leaving school with the Leaving Certificate and the remainder of school leavers is, in fact, increasing. This suggests that although the economic buoyancy of recent years has benefited all school leavers it has not benefited the early leaver to the same degree as his/her more highly qualified counterpart. The rising tide has, therefore, certainly raised all boats but the boat belonging to the better qualified school leaver has been raised to a greater degree than that of their less qualified counterparts.

We also saw that the early leaver was disadvantaged in terms of average hourly wage rates. In gross terms, one year after leaving school those who leave on completion of the Leaving Certificate earn £1 per hour more than those who leave with no qualifications.

Perceptions by early leavers of the usefulness of their education in *securing* employment was lower than among their more highly qualified counterparts. For example, 58 per cent of those who left school having completed the Leaving Certificate felt that their education was of some use to them in securing employment. The comparable figure for early school leavers was only 27 per cent.

Similarly, the perceived usefulness of the education received in terms of the *execution* of their job was much lower among early leavers than among those who left school with a Leaving Certificate. Only 37 per cent of early leavers felt it was important compared with 73 per cent of those who left on completion of the Leaving Certificate.

Chapters 3 and 4 examined data from the National Survey of Employers. The aim of the survey was to elicit the views, attitudes and employment practices of employers towards young early school leavers. In particular, issues which were explored include the following:

- the extent of employment of young leavers by companies;
- reasons for the non-employment and barriers to employment of early school leavers;
- an examination of the industrial sectors into which early school leavers were employed;
- the types of jobs in which they are employed;
- the support and training usually given to early school leavers within the workplace by their employer;
- the opportunities for early school leavers to develop and progress within their jobs;
- employers' view on the personal and work-related skills of early school leavers;
- employers' willingness to engage with the support services in allowing young early school leavers to participate in *personal* and *work-oriented* skill development programmes;
- factors which would encourage employers to recruit early school leavers.

In Chapter 3 we found that as many as 70 per cent of employers had never employed young early school leavers while a further 9 per cent had done so at some time in the past but not in the two years preceding the survey. The remaining 21 per cent of firms had employed young early school leavers at some time in the relevant two-year reference period. The highest incidence of employment in terms of industrial sector was in the Manufacturing sector (especially in Traditional Manufacturing) and also in the Hotel/Restaurant/Personal Services sector. Although slightly lower than in

these areas, the incidence of employment in the Construction and Distributive Services sectors are also high.

In general, we found that the incidence of employment of early school leavers was higher in larger companies. One must remember, however, that the larger the firm the more opportunities exist for employment of young leavers at some level in the organisation. In other words, the more employment “slots” which are to be filled in a company the more likely it is that at least some of these will be filled by young early school leavers.

In terms of the types of jobs secured by young early school leavers we found that the majority of firms are employing this cohort into jobs in unskilled or semi-skilled areas (general labourers; sales; clerical assistants, general operatives; bar/restaurant work etc.). At most, only 14 per cent of firms recorded that they were employing young early school leavers into some form of apprenticeship training with only a further 4 per cent having some other form of explicit reference to training in the job title.

It was encouraging to note that as many as 79 per cent of firms recorded that they gave young early school leavers some form of initial training on commencement of employment. The intensity and scale of this training may, of course, vary greatly from one firm to the next. The incidence of initial training was highest in the Manufacturing and Financial/Insurance/Business Service sectors. It also increased directly with size of company. It was noteworthy that the majority of the training in question was on-the-job or in productive mode. Only relatively small proportions were undertaken either in-house but not on-the-job or out of the company.

A total of 56 per cent of companies recorded that they offered initial induction or support to young early school leavers in addition to, or in place of, initial training *per se* while 29 per cent of firms which employed early leavers said “that they had someone who was responsible for providing support to recruits who were young early leavers.”

It was extremely encouraging to note that as many as 89 per cent of firms which employed young early school leavers felt that the young recruits in question had the opportunity to expand their responsibilities and develop their role within the company. This view was held by larger percentages of the bigger companies.

The barriers to employing early school leavers which were identified by respondents as being centred around education and skill levels. The single largest barrier was, almost definitionally, the lack of appropriate education for the jobs which were on offer. Other reasons given for not employing young early leavers referred to the lack of experience, lack of skills and lack of training of early leavers. Much of this reaction by employers points to the need for early intervention in an attempt to increase school retention levels and also to provide early personal and job-oriented skills training for early leavers.

When asked what could be done to make early school leavers more employable, respondents who do not currently employ from this cohort made suggestions related to increasing the training provided to this group of young workers. As many as one-fifth of firms recorded some form of training specific to the needs of the respondent. The question must be asked, however, as to who should provide this type of job-specific (in contrast to general skills) training? In many respects the answers given by the firms would indicate that a substantial proportion of them feel that it should be taken out of their hands and responsibility for job-specific training be given to the training support agencies. One should perhaps give serious consideration as to the appropriateness of this approach and ask whether or not the firm is itself not best placed to give the type of job-specific training in question.

In Chapter 4 we explored employers’ views towards early school leavers. This included employers’ attitudes toward the early leavers’ *personal* and *work-related* skills; their attitudes to engaging with the support agencies in provided training for young leavers; and their views on a set of factors which would encourage them to employ early school leavers.

In general, we found that employers had a positive view of young early leavers’ personal skills. Characteristics such as honesty, reliability, time-keeping; ability to fit in; teamwork etc. were all rated highly by employers. The young leavers were not rated so

positively in terms of initiative. Approximately 25 per cent of firms which had recently employed young leavers felt that they rated poorly in terms of their initiative while 18 per cent of companies which had no recent experience of employing young leavers felt that they would be “poor” in terms of this personal characteristic.

We also saw that employers had a relatively positive view of some – though not all – *work-related* skills of young early leavers. Positive views were generally expressed on young leavers’ basic ability which could be built upon and also their ability to follow instructions. They were not rated highly in terms of both general literacy/numeracy and also IT skills or computer literacy. We found, however, that one of the most disconcerting aspects of employers’ views on young early leavers was their very negative opinion of the pre-employment training received by the cohort in question. Over 50 per cent of firms which had employed early school leavers in the two years preceding the survey said that they felt that the pre-employment training of the young workers in question was “poor”. A total of 44 per cent of other employers who had not recently employed them also held a similarly negative view regarding the early leavers’ pre-employment training. Only 9 per cent of employers described this training as “good”.

In terms of employers’ willingness to provide some form of work experience for young people we found that just over half of all firms recorded that they had offered work experience to young persons. The main reasons given by those who did not offer work experience was, quite simply, that they had not been asked to do so.

Finally, it was extremely encouraging to note that employers recorded very positive responses to their potential engagement with State-sponsored *personal* development and *work-oriented* skills programmes. Almost three-quarters of all firms said that they would be willing to allow their young early school leavers to engage with State-sponsored *personal* development skills programmes in the first six months of their employment. Even higher percentages (82 per cent) responded in similar vein in terms of participation in *work-oriented* programmes. We noted in Chapter 4, however, that we can only surmise at the extent to which these very high recorded levels of willingness to engage with the training services would translate into actual participation. Notwithstanding this caveat, it would, nonetheless, seem that the very positive response by firms to this set of questions is extremely encouraging. To test the extent to which this willingness on the part of the employer would actually be translated into participation in training programmes one would need to set up pilot schemes. These might include the development of some prototype programmes – possibly with larger multiples as it was clear from the employers’ survey that the probability of employment of young school early leavers was much higher in larger than smaller companies. If the *expressed* levels of engagement with the prototype schemes mature into full, active participation the schemes in questions could be progressively expanded to cover most topics and extended to firms of all sizes etc.

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Appendix A

The Questionnaire from the Employers' Survey

National Survey of Employment Practices in Ireland

The Economic and Social Research Institute has been commissioned to examine issues related to the employment and integration of early school leavers into the workforce. The research has been commissioned by a consortium made up of FÁS; the Department of Education & Science; the Irish Youth Foundation; the National Youth Federation; the City of Dublin Youth Service Board; The School Attendance Service and Youthreach and is funded by employment Youthstart.

Your firm was selected at random for inclusion in this survey. The information which you provide will be treated in the strictest confidence. The report which we will prepare will contain only aggregate details, percentages etc. It will not be possible to identify individual firms or their responses from this report.

It is *your* views and *your* experience that we want to record in this survey. Your assistance in completing the questionnaire and returning it in the pre-paid envelope would be greatly appreciated.

SECTION A: GENERAL BACKGROUND

Q.1 Name of Company _____

Q.2 Name of person completing the questionnaire _____

Q.3 What is your own position within the company? _____

Q.4 Please describe as fully as possible the nature of your business _____

Q.5a Is your company Irish owned or foreign owned? Irish owned.....₁ Foreign owned.....₂

Q.5b In which year was your company established in Ireland? 19 _____

Q.6 How many people currently work in your organisation in all its branches throughout the Republic of Ireland? Please give the total of all persons who work in your company, including managers, owners proprietors etc.

_____persons engaged

Q.7a We would like you to think of the total number of persons you outlined at Q.6 above
In the table below we would like you to record how these are broken down in terms of broad category of employment (i.e. in terms of Professional Managerial Workers; Administrative/Clerical Workers; Other Non-Manual Workers; Skilled Manual Workers; Semi-Skilled Manual and Unskilled Manual Workers).

Category of Employment	Total No. of Workers	Category of Employment	Total No. of Workers
1. Professional/Managerial		4. Skilled Manual	
2. Administrative/Clerical		5. Semi-Skilled Manual	
3. Other Non-Manual		6. Unskilled Manual	
		<i>Total</i>	
<i>[Note: Should sum to total figure in Q.6]</i>			

Q7b Again, thinking of the total number of people working in your company (as recorded at Q6 and Q7(a)) how would these be broken down in terms of broad age category?

Age category	Total number of workers
20 years or less	
21-24 years	
25-29 years	
30-44 years	
45+ years	
TOTAL	

SECTION B: RECRUITMENT OF ALL YOUNG PERSONS AGED 20 YEARS OR LESS IN THE LAST TWO YEARS

Q.8 In total, how many persons aged 20 years or less has your company employed in the last two years in all its branches throughout the Republic of Ireland? Please include all recruits, aged 20 years or less, both those who have left the company over that period as well as those who are still employed by you.

_____ persons aged 20 years or less

Q9 We would now like you to think only of these recruits aged 20 years or less whom you have employed over the last two years – i.e. the number of people recorded at Q.8 above.

(a) In Column A of the table below we would like you to record how these young recruits of the last two years are broken down in terms of the 6 broad categories of employment as listed in the table below.

(b) In Column B of the table, please break down the number of recruits aged 20 years or less of the last two years in each of the 6 categories of employment into the four relevant levels of education. For example, how many of your young recruits of the last two years in the Professional/Managerial group had Third level qualifications or higher; how many had Leaving Certificate or equivalent; how many had a Junior Certificate or equivalent; and how many had no formal educational qualifications.

Category of Employment	Column A	Column B			
	Total number of recruits aged 20 years or less employed in last 2 years	Third Level or Above	Leaving Certificate	Junior Certificate	No Formal Qualifications
1. Professional/Managerial					
2. Administrative/Clerical					
3. Other Non-Manual					
4. Skilled Manual					
5. Semi-Skilled Manual					
6. Unskilled Manual					
Total					

[Note: Should sum to total figure in Q.8]

Q.10 I would like you to continue to think of the new recruits of the last two years aged 20 years or less. Please record in Column A of the table below the total number of recruits aged 20 years or less of the last 2 years who are still employed in your company. In column B break this total number down according to how many are in each level of educational attainment.

Number of recruits aged 20 years or less who are still employed in the company	A	B			
	TOTAL NUMBER	Third Level Or Above	Leaving Certificate	Junior Certificate	No Formal Qualifications

SECTION C: RECRUITMENT IN THE LAST TWO YEARS OF PERSONS AGED 20 YEARS OR LESS WHO HAD NO LEAVING CERTIFICATE – i.e. HELD A JUNIOR CERTIFICATE OR HAD NO FORMAL QUALIFICATIONS.

Q.11 Did your company recruit anyone aged 20 years or less in the last two years who had not completed a Leaving Certificate i.e. those who held a Junior Certificate or who had no formal qualifications

Yes, recruited someone aged 20 yrs or less with Junior Certificate or no formal qualifications..... ₁ Go to Q.15

No, did not recruit someone aged 20 yrs or less with Junior Certificate or no formal qualifications ₂ Go to Q.12

Q.12 Did your company ever recruit anyone aged 20 years or less who had not completed a Leaving Certificate i.e. those who held a Junior Certificate or who had no formal qualifications?

Yes..... ₁ Go to Q.14a No..... ₂ Go to Q.13

Q.13 What would you say are the reasons for your company not recruiting anyone aged 20 years or less who had not completed a Leaving Certificate over the last two years? Please describe your reasons as fully as possible.

Q.14a In your opinion, could anything be done to make young persons aged 20 years or less who have not completed a Leaving Certificate i.e. those who held a Junior Certificate or who had no formal qualifications more employable by you company?

Yes..... ₁ Go to Q.14b No..... ₂ Go to Q.14c

Q.14b What should be done to make them more employable for your company?

[Now please skip to Q.19]

Q.14c What would you say are the main barriers for your company to employing someone aged 20 years or less who had not completed a Leaving Certificate i.e. those who held a Junior Certificate or who had no formal qualifications?

[Now please skip to Q.19]

Qs 15-18 ARE FOR RESPONDENTS WHO HAVE, IN THE LAST TWO YEARS, EMPLOYED ANYONE AGED 20 YEARS OR LESS WHO HAS NOT COMPLETED A LEAVING CERTIFICATE i.e. THOSE WHO HELD A JUNIOR CERTIFICATE OR WHO HAD NO FORMAL QUALIFICATIONS.

Q.15 I would like you to think of young persons aged 20 years or less employed by your company in the last two years who have not completed a Leaving Certificate i.e. those who hold a Junior Certificate or who have no formal qualifications. Please record the five main types of work undertaken (the nature of work undertaken) by these young recruits and the approximate number of recruits of the last two years in each type of work listed.

Nature or type of work undertaken by young persons aged 20 years or less employed by your company in the last two years who have not completed a Leaving Certificate i.e. those who held a Junior Certificate or who had no formal qualifications.	Number of young recruits of last two years involved in this type of work
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
<i>[Note: Should sum to total figure in Q.8]</i>	

Q.16 Did your company offer any initial training to recruits employed in the last two years who were aged 20 years or less and who had not completed a Leaving Certificate i.e. those who held a Junior Certificate or who had no formal qualifications? Did you offer (i) on-the-job training while the young recruits were continuing with their job: (ii) in-house on the company's premises but not on-the-job: (iii) out of the company?

- (i) On-the-job Yes.....₁ No.....₂
- (ii) In house but not on-the-job Yes.....₁ No.....₂
- (iii) Out of the company Yes.....₁ No.....₂

Q17 a) In addition to any job-related training which is given to recruits aged 20 years or less who have not completed a Leaving Certificate, do they receive any initial induction or support from anyone when they join the company? The sort of thing we are referring to would involve helping them make the transition from school to working life and to cope with life in the workplace.

Yes.....₁ No.....₂

Q17b). Is there anyone in your company who has responsibility for providing on-going structured support to young recruits aged 20 years or less who have not completed a Leaving Certificate?

Yes.....₁ ^ Go to Q.17c No.....₂ ^ Go to Q.17d

<p>Q17c) What position does this person have in the company? Please describe as fully as possible.</p> <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin-top: 10px;"/>

Q17d) Do you think it would be practical for a company like yours, given its size and what it does etc., to have someone whose responsibility it would be to provide on-going structured support to young recruits aged 20 years or less who have not completed a Leaving Certificate?

Yes.....₁ ^ Go to Q.18 No.....₂ ^ Go to Q.18

Q.18 As a general rule, would you say that recruits aged 20 years or less who have not completed a Leaving Certificate have an opportunity to expand their responsibilities within the company and to use their individual initiative within their job, provided they show that they are capable of the increased responsibility?

Yes.....₁ ^ Go to Q.19A No.....₂ ^ Go to Q.19A

SECTION D: TRAINING AND GENERAL VIEWS ON RECRUITMENT

Q.19 Suppose that some form of State-sponsored programme of work-based education and training for young employees aged 20 years or less who have not completed a Leaving Certificate (i.e. those who hold a Junior Certificate or who had no formal qualifications) was to be introduced. Suppose this training were to be provided on the basis of, say, 1 day release per week for the first 6 months of working with you. The training could cover general issues or personal development skills or it could cover job-related issues such as technical skills.

A. Would you be willing to allow your young employees to participate in such training if it covered general issues such as **PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT SKILLS**

Yes.... ₁ Go to Q.19B No .. ₂ Go to Q.19B

B. Would you be willing to allow your young employees to participate in such training if it covered **TECHNICAL, WORK-RELATED** issues

Yes.... ₁ Go to Q.20 No .. ₂ Go to Q.20

Q.20 I would like you to think in general about recruiting young persons aged 20 years or less who have not completed a Leaving Certificate i.e. those who hold a Junior Certificate or who have no formal qualifications.

(i) How would you rate such recruits in terms of the following 11 characteristics. [Please circle one letter on each line: G=Good; A=Adequate; P=Poor] and

(ii) If you rate any of the 11 characteristics as 'Poor' would you say this adversely affects the chances of promotion or advancement in the company for the young recruits in question?

If characteristic is rated as 'Poor' does this adversely affect promotion/advancement prospects?

	<i>Good</i>	<i>Adequate</i>	<i>Poor</i>		<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
1. Honesty.....	G.....	A.....	P.....	<i>If Poor</i> ∧.....	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂
2. Reliability	G.....	A.....	P.....	<i>If Poor</i> ∧.....	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂
3. Time Keeping	G.....	A.....	P.....	<i>If Poor</i> ∧.....	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂
4. Basic ability that can be built upon.....	G.....	A.....	P.....	<i>If Poor</i> ∧.....	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂
5. Initiative.....	G.....	A.....	P.....	<i>If Poor</i> ∧.....	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂
6. Ability to follow instructions	G.....	A.....	P.....	<i>If Poor</i> ∧.....	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂
7. General ability to fit in/ personal skills etc.....	G.....	A.....	P.....	<i>If Poor</i> ∧.....	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂
8. Teamwork.....	G.....	A.....	P.....	<i>If Poor</i> ∧.....	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂
9. Basic literacy/numeracy.....	G.....	A.....	P.....	<i>If Poor</i> ∧.....	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂
10.General IT skills/Computer Literacy.....	G.....	A.....	P.....	<i>If Poor</i> ∧.....	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂
11. Pre employment training.....	G.....	A.....	P.....	<i>If Poor</i> ∧.....	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂

Q.21 In the last five years have you offered Work Experience to anyone, for example, someone in Secondary School in a Transition year or someone on Youthreach etc?

Yes..... ₁ Go to Q.24 No..... ₂ Go to Q.22

Q.22 Why not? Please describe in your own words as fully as possible.

Q.23 Were you asked to but decided not to? Yes.... ₁ Go to Q.24 No ₂ Go to Q.24

Q.24 To what extent would the following factors encourage your company to give greater consideration to recruitment of early school leavers (i.e. those who left school with a Junior Certificate or no formal qualifications) under 20 years of age. Please tick (✓) one box on each line.

	<i>To a considerable extent</i>	<i>To some extent</i>	<i>Not at all</i>
1. Evidence that young early school leavers had recent work experience	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃
2. Evidence that young early school leavers had recently received some job training	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃
3. Improvement of general job application skills, presentation, attitude, motivation etc. of young early school leavers.....	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃
4. Lack of more highly qualified applicants for jobs as unemployment rates fall.....	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃
5. Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃

