MODULE 1:
IN THE WORKPLACE

INTRODUCTION:

The primary aim of this module is to assist students make the transition from school to the workplace and highlight the significance of education on their options. This is achieved by exploring work in all its forms and meanings, highlighting qualifications and career options. It also provides a brief introduction to the Irish economy with particular emphasis on the labour market.

AIMS:

This module aims to:

↘ examine the concept of work and highlight the difference between school and working life;

↘ explore developments in the workplace and assess the effect of changing working conditions, past and present, on workers;

↘ inform students of the importance of education, training and other factors which impact on future college and job opportunities;

↘ explore the structure of the Irish economy and labour market to help students make informed choices;

↘ outline acceptable workplace behaviour and explore workplace roles and responsibilities; and

↘ provide space for students to practice a range of applicable workplace skills.

MODULE LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

At the end of this module students will be able to:

↘ define work, outline its forms and explain work related concepts;

↘ outline the path and steps to their chosen career;

↘ compare different occupations, outline their options and assess their preferences; and

↘ conduct basic research to include data gathering, interviewing techniques, report writing and issue recommendations.

THE WORLD OF WORK

The workplace is a constantly changing environment where technological changes, consumer demands and globalisation impact directly on workers' lives and opportunities.

Ireland's economy has also changed dramatically over the last number of decades with employment of different types and sectors taking precedence over more traditional areas such as agriculture and manufacturing. Once a largely agricultural country, today Ireland relies on the service sectors made up of financial, health and retail businesses.

This change has implications for workers in terms of upskilling and retraining to take up new opportunities in a changed environment, and for students. For instance, the choice of continuing education or entering the labour market is dependent on the types of jobs available and the skills and educational requirements needed to do those jobs. It is of utmost importance that students and young people are equipped to avail of these new types of jobs in the economy and keep up with developments in the working world.

Defining work

Work can be explained in a number of ways using a number of definitions or explanations and is often described as an activity which involves mental or physical effort.

There are also a number of ways to describe the tasks associated with work, for instance the word "job" generally indicates a set of specific roles and responsibilities associated with a particular position.

Work…

- activity involving mental or physical effort in order to achieve a result;

- produces or accomplishes something by effort or skill;

- exertion or effort directed to produce or accomplish something; labour; toil;

- something on which exertion or labour is expended; a task or undertaking;

- productive or operative activity;

- employment, as in some form of industry, especially as a means of earning one's livelihood: enables workers to become financially independent and secure;

- one's place of employment;

- materials, things etc, on which one is working or is to work;

- the result of exertion, labour, or activity; a deed or performance;

- comes in many forms and is made up of a variety of different activities; and

- involves a trade or exchange. Workers sell their labour for a wage and employers or business buy the service of labour to operate business.

Working time…

This is the amount of time a worker is available for or at their place of employment and should be clearly specified in a worker's contract.

A job…

This term can refer to a position or a set of tasks. It can also indicate specific roles and responsibilities associated with a particular position. The following are some definitions:

- a piece of work especially a specific task done as part of the routine of one's occupation or for an agreed price;

- a post of employment; full-time or part-time position;

- anything a person is expected or obliged to do; duty; responsibility;

- an affair, matter, occurrence, or state of affairs;

- the material, project, assignment etc, being worked upon;

- the process or requirements, details etc, of working; and

- the execution or performance of a task.

An occupation…

- a person's usual or principal work or business, especially as a means of earning a living; vocation;

- any activity in which a person is engaged; and

- tenure or the holding of an office or official function.

Forms of work

Work is not a homogeneous concept and there are new and evolving ways of working. Listed below are some examples of different forms of work.

Full-time work: There is no actual legal definition of the hours that constitute full-time work as it varies among companies and within industry. The amount of hours which are considered full-time are generally outlined in an individual's contract with the legal maximum allowed of 48 hours per week.

Part-time work: There are no set hours that define part-time work, except that part-time work requires an individual to work less hours than someone working full-time.

Job-sharing: A job-sharing scheme is where workers decide to reduce their working hours for a variety of reasons. Job-sharing hours are generally half the hours of normal full-time hours. Where such a scheme operates, workers who opt for job-sharing will do so for a set period of time and have the option to return to full-time work after that period.

Fixed term or temporary working: This is where an individual is given a contract for either a set period of time or for a specific reason. Such a contract will have an end-date or the contract will expire on the completion of a specific task or project.

Casual/seasonal work: Generally refers to work which is irregular and the individual does not have their employment guaranteed. Sometimes the work is seasonal as it may only be available at certain times of the year and there is lowered expectation of ongoing work.

Piecework: This describes the type of employment where a worker is paid a fixed amount for the work they do and the "piece" produced. The number of physical items produced measures the output of a worker on piecework.

Self-employment: This describes the situation where individuals work for themselves, pay their own tax and PRSI and is responsible for all aspects of work. They are often referred to as a sole-trader.

Tele-working or e-working: This describes the type of employment where work is carried out at a distance from the location of either the company or client. The use of information and communications technology is generally vital to this type of working. In short it is work carried out at a distance.

Voluntary work: This describes work that an individual decides to undertake for no financial payment or reward. Individuals commit their time and energy for the benefit of others to organisations such as a non-governmental organisation, charity, a local community organisation or an environmental group. Volunteering can refer to a range of different activities and jobs from petition gathering, doing a sponsored walk or run, helping out at a community centre or a soup-run for homeless people.

Apprenticeship: An apprenticeship is a recognised method for training people for a particular profession, sometimes referred to as a craft. An apprentice attends college a few days a week to gain theoretical knowledge of their role and the rest of the week will be spent on the job putting what was learned into practice under supervision.

Consultancy: This is a business which provides expertise and specialist knowledge in a chosen area. Consultants are normally engaged by businesses for their professional guidance, advice and knowledge. A consultant can be employed by a consultancy firm as an employee or can offer their services as a self-employed individual.

DEVELOPMENTS IN THE WORLD OF WORK

The workplace is constantly evolving with continuous improvements in technology, new or changing work patterns and demand for increased flexibilities. The following sections outline briefly how these changes have impacted on the workplace and those within it.

Historical developments

Technology has been steadily changing and improving since the first industrial revolutions. The 1800s saw the beginnings of modern manufacturing methods, which utilised steam rather than animal labour. Manual labour was also being gradually replaced by new machinery and inventions. This period of development saw people embrace science and rational thought and was called "The Age of Enlightenment". This century also saw the occurrence of two other revolutions, the American and French, and the spread of printed materials and the idea of capitalism.

In the early part of the 19th century a number of objects were invented which we still use today and are listed on **Worksheet 2b.**

Technological developments

"The world is getting smaller?" It's a saying but is there any truth in it? Obviously not in a physical sense but in modern times it feels smaller due to leaps made in technology. Globalisation has provided quicker access to goods, services and people facilitated by the advance of new technologies, such as mass production and transport, communications and information technology.

The equipment we take for granted has made our home and working lives easier for us than previous generations. Consider our home life with no central heating, washing machines, tumble dryers or access to hot water. A significant amount of time would have to be devoted to carrying out menial domestic chores.

What about the workplace? Consider how business would be conducted without the telephone, fax or computer? How many more people would have to be employed to carry out work that a computer now

performs? How much time would be devoted to performing menial tasks? What occupations would exist and what are the promotional opportunities? What was manual labour like without adequate health and safety protections or lifting equipment? Were they the good old days in terms of working conditions and outlook?

New and improved technology has transformed many areas of our lives such as:

↘ household tasks;

↘ schoolwork and homework;

↘ services such as banking and shopping;

↘ the workplace and associated tasks;

↘ communications; and

↘ knowledge and information.

We are able to communicate much faster and better than we could in the past. Transport technology such as trains, ships and airplanes allow goods to be traded and transported across the world in a fraction of the time and cost than previously, making products from abroad more accessible to more people. It has also allowed travel to become more accessible to a wider range of people.

Computers and information technology

Nothing epitomises modern life like a computer and they have found their way into many different aspects of it. They no longer just compute but manage traffic signals, keep stock checks, dispense money from ATMs and provide internet communications.

Computer development has accelerated in the last number of decades and computers have become something that we "can't live without" and certainly which many aspects of daily life depend on. Although computers are a 20th century phenomenon, the first evidence of machines completing tasks for us can be seen as far back as the use of the abacus thousands of years ago.

There appears to have always been a desire to create machines to perform regular mundane or highly complex tasks that we feel we are unable to perform ourselves. In the 1800s Charles Babbage designed the "difference

engine" which ran on steam, was the size of a locomotive and computed differential equations. We have come a long way since then.

Computers have steadily developed, improved and shrank in the decades since the first machines, which could in no way be described as a computer, were created. With the onset of World War II, the allies invested money to create computers, mainly with the aim of assisting the war effort. Computers were developed to break codes or create Navy charts; they could be as large as a football field with miles and miles of wiring.

The 1950s saw the computer shrink and become a little more powerful. Not only was their size and sheer cost prohibitive for consumers but computers were the preserve of large corporations. They gradually became more available and accessible to businesses in the 1960s and, due to the creation of new computer programming languages, they also became more cost effective.

With the development of silicon from the quartz stone came the silicon chip, which allowed the size of computer to shrink and this was the period when computers began to resemble something a little more like what we have today. During this time manufacturers also decided to bring computers to consumers and development accelerated.

The 1980s saw the birth of the Personal Computer (PC), which exploded sales of computers in the early years of the decade. Nowadays the physical size of computers continues to decrease almost in direct proportion to the increase in their flexibility and computing power.

The advent of the internet has revolutionised not only telecommunications and the accessibility of information, but has also created endless possibilities that this technology may bring.

Workplace changes

The workplace today is unrecognisable to the workplace of 50, 20 or even 10 years ago. Advances in communications and information technology, changes to working hours, increased diversity and new working arrangements explain some of those differences. Workers too have changed and are now more highly educated, have raised expectations regarding their chosen career and no longer expect to have "a job for life" but are willing to move around to experience different career options.

Whilst change is often a good thing, it is important that the success of change is not measured only in profitability terms but also in terms of the advancement of workers' rights, whilst also ensuring that they benefit from genuinely decent standards and working conditions.

Working hours

For years from the mid-1800s and early 1900s workers fought hard to reduce their working week and Irish legislation now imposes a maximum working week (see **Module 3** for more information) of 48 hours. Outside of this however, there have been changes to business hours, which have had a significant impact on the hours which workers are expected to undertake both in volume and pattern. Some changes that have evolved over the past two decades include:

↘ extended opening hours through lunchtime, late nights and weekends. For instance, the retail industry sought and achieved opening on Sundays;

↘ increased usage of short contracted hours of work such as part-time, contract, seasonal etc; and

↘ changes to fixed hours liability in contracts, which in many industries now contain a lower and upper hourly limit, such as a minimum of eight hours per week to a maximum of 39 hours per week.

Increasing diversity

↘ More women are at work, particularly women with families, than previously.

↘ Ireland became an immigrant country for a period of time from the late 1990s into the early part of the millennium.

↘ In some industries the retirement age has increased for many different reasons.

↘ Longer commuting distances has meant that workers seek more balance between their working and family lives.

Working arrangements

The following provides some very basic information regarding the different terms and arrangements that are prevalent throughout all industries.

↘ Outsourcing: businesses consider some occupations or jobs as not their core business and tender to other businesses to complete such work.

↘ Off-shoring: this happens when a company decides to conduct its entire operations abroad. This effectively means that the company closes down in one country and re-opens in another country.

↘ Contracting out: work is no longer required to be conducted by employees of the particular business and can be given to contracted workers who may be employees of a contractor or who may receive a contract from the original employer for an agreed period.

↘ Enlargement of the services sector, such as financial services, hotels, restaurants and other service businesses.

↘ Increasing diversity amongst the workforce.

↘ Changes in working hours such as lunchtime, late night, Sunday and 24 hour opening (banking services, supermarkets etc).

↘ Increased use of and reliance on computers, technology and automated services.

THE IRISH ECONOMY

The section provides only a very brief overview of the Irish economy and labour market. Additional information, activities and worksheets are provided in Module 5: An Unequal Society.

Ireland is a small, open and trade-dependent economy. An open economy means that the economic activity of the world's major players has a significant impact on our own economy and labour market. According to the ESRI the openness of the Irish economy is reflected in the international mobility of its labour and capital. Migration, both inward and outward, has been a feature of this economy over the decades, although the trend reversed in the late 1990s towards inward migration. Capital mobility is evidenced by massive amounts of foreign direct investment, particularly in the technological and pharmaceutical sectors. Although it has been credited with assisting in the birth of the 'Celtic Tiger', over-reliance on external investment continues to make the Irish economy vulnerable.

During the 'Celtic Tiger' period (approx. mid-1990s to 2007) the economy grew at rates never before seen in this country. Economists have tried to pinpoint the reasons for this unprecedented growth, however no single cause can been credited for this success. Some of the reasons put forward as the cause of this successful period in Irish economic history are:

↘ highly educated and English speaking workforce;

↘ large population of working age;

↘ increased participation rates in the workforce (particularly women);

↘ low corporation tax;

↘ industrial relations stability;

↘ returning émigrés and reduced emigration;

↘ membership of the European Union and access to the single market;

↘ investment in education;

↘ improved public finance position; and

↘ high levels of direct external investment.

Since the early 1990s the economy has shifted from one primarily focused on agriculture and manufacturing to a growing focus on services, technology and internationally traded sectors. In 2007 the services sector accounted for 64 per cent of Irish Gross Domestic Product (GDP), 33 per cent for the industrial sector and just three per cent for agriculture. The workforce also grew during this time and rose from 1.2 million in 1990 to 2.1 million in 2007, an increase of 75 per cent, whilst unemployment dropped to lowest ever levels, averaging 4.5 per cent in 2007. Emigration also declined with net inward migration increasing during this period.

Unfortunately since 2008 the economic situation has worsened through a contraction in construction, the banking and financial crisis and the effects of a global recession. Unemployment is expected to soar by the end of 2009; this is in addition to the increase of 70 per cent in the numbers on the Live Register in 2008.

Industry and the labour force

The Central Statistics Office produces statistics on industry and employment on a regular basis. Business is classified according to the main economic sectors operating in the Irish economy, categorised by NACE code. This is a European-wide classification grouping organisations according to their principal business activities. Employment statistics are also produced according to these business sectors, which include:

↘ agriculture and fishing;

↘ construction;

↘ industry;

↘ services;

↘ transport;

↘ tourism and travel; and

↘ science and technology.

Each sector is composed of a range of smaller sectors and occupations. Further information on NACE code classifications can be found on the Central Statistics Office site at **www.cso.ie**

The Central Statistics Office (CSO) also produces statistics on a quarterly basis entitled the Quarterly National Household Survey. The purpose of which is to produce quarterly estimates of the labour force giving a breakdown of employment, unemployment and sectoral composition. The statistics are further broken down according to age and gender.

These surveys, statistics and reports are hugely important in formulating policy and are used by government and economists to assess the state of the economy, influences on it and what action is required.

CO-OPERATION IN SOCIETY

Community

We all live within a community and learning to interact well with each other and being aware of our responsibilities as members of a community and as citizens are significant factors in a well functioning society.

Regardless of the community to which we belong it is important to understand how it functions and the expectations associated with being a member. An individual engaged in local politics is an example of a community organisation (political party) engaging individuals to become involved in issues of importance to the local suburb or neighbourhood. A student involved in school councils or student organisations is another example of community participation.

School is also a form of community and this is a good starting point to illustrate how communities function and the responsibilities within them.

There are different types of community including:

↘ geographic communities such as a local area, neighbourhood, village, suburb etc;

↘ cultural communities might include ethnic groups or membership of church groups; and

↘ community organisations consist of political or professional organisations and trade union organisations.

Community means…

↘ an interacting group sharing an environment;

↘ a social group of any size whose members reside in a specific locality, share government and often have a common cultural and historical heritage;

↘ a locality inhabited by such a group as described above;

↘ a social, religious, occupational or other group sharing common characteristics or interests and perceived or perceiving itself as distinct in some respect from the larger society within which it exists, for example the business community or the community of scholars;

↘ a group of associated nations sharing common interests or a common heritage, for example the community of Western Europe;

↘ ecclesiastical – a group of men or women leading a common life according to a rule;

↘ ecology – an assemblage of interacting populations occupying a given area;

↘ joint possession, enjoyment, liability etc, for example community of property;

↘ similar character; agreement; identity; for example community of interests; and

↘ the community, the public; society: the needs of the community.

NGOs & volunteers

Voluntary work is unpaid work that individuals choose to perform for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as charities or community organisations. Many of these NGOs rely heavily on volunteers to provide and ensure the continuation of their essential services, whilst individuals who find themselves marginalised by society are reliant on the assistance of such organisations.

NGOs are funded or partly funded by the government through taxes collected from society and are not-for-profit organisations. Their revenue is generated mainly through state contributions, individual donations or fundraising.

Activism

Activists are committed to bringing about economic, social or political change through individual and collective action. They are active across a broad spectrum of areas including health, education and welfare and are of local, national or international interest but are always of public concern. Government administers and implements changes in these areas by way of policy frameworks and/or legislation.

Activists engage at different levels of society through membership of community, political or trade union organisations regarding public issues in order to influence decisions taken elsewhere. There are generally as many different opinions on public policy problems and their solutions as there are people in a community. Society is made up of people with different experiences, backgrounds and points of view and it is important that students become aware of that and also of the process by which political decisions should attempt to include a range of different perspectives.

Typical areas of interest include:

↘ labour standards and workers' rights;

↘ the environment;

↘ the workplace and working conditions;

↘ local government;

↘ health and safety;

↘ education;

↘ peace and anti-war issues; and

↘ human rights.

Those involved in such campaigns want to bring about changes which ensure everyone gets the respect they deserve, the rights to which they are entitled and access appropriate services to ensure they can lead independent lives. They also demonstrate to ensure that there is equality across society and everyone's views are heard and not just those of the wealthy, privileged or corporate sector. Activism takes many forms and is not always about protest and dissent.

How public debates are informed or opinions espoused are through participation in activities such as:

↘ writing letter to politicians;

↘ campaigning or lobbying politicians;

↘ organising public awareness campaigns;

↘ conducting petitions requesting change;

↘ rallies or demonstrations;

↘ online blogging;

↘ street marches; and

↘ protests and strikes.

For further information on these and related topics go to www.youth-connect.ie