

Fas to announce thousands of training places

By Nicola Cooke
Industry Correspondent

Fas will shortly announce plans for thousands of new training places for the long-term unemployed as part of the government's action plan for jobs.

Funding of £200 million has been allocated from the National Train-

ing Fund this year for a new Labour Market Education and Training Fund.

It will be managed by Fas and will deliver up to 6,500 education and training places.

The training agency is currently working on proposals designed to maximise the benefits from the funding.

They are set to be rubberstamped in the coming weeks before a tender

process for training and education providers is announced. A Department of Education and Skills spokeswoman said: "It is expected that Fas will make further public announcements on the issue shortly."

"The places are similar to those on the Springboard programme, which was aimed at graduates. These new course places – in the likes of third level colleges – are specifically aimed at re-training long-

term unemployed people." Separately, up to 1,000 construction jobs could be created when €30 million worth of sports capital programme funding is allocated from June onwards.

The funding was announced last month by junior sports minister Michael King, and is the first of its kind in four years.

A Department of Transport, Tourism and Sports spokes-

said that, while it was "not possible for the department to predict exactly how many jobs will be created as a result of the allocation of the €30 million in grants later this year, it has previously been calculated that approximately every €27,000 spent on sports capital grants supports a single job in the construction sector."

One of the measures in the jobs action plan was the establishment

of a senior management team in the IDA and Enterprise Ireland to collaborate in attracting inward investors, and to boost procurement opportunities for Irish companies with multinational corporations.

It is understood that a list of multinational companies that may be suitable for procurement opportunities in Enterprise Ireland's client base is also being drawn up.

The management team overseeing the project has met several times and is believed to be making progress.

Isaacch Eady Kenny said at the launch of the first progress report on the jobs action plan last Friday that he could "confirm that there are other [FDI] companies who are interested in opportunities in the country, and we are in discussions with them around this".

€2.6m road plan aims to boost Apple expansion

By Niamh Connolly
Political Correspondent

A €2.6 million road to Apple's European headquarters in Cork has been sanctioned to facilitate the technology firm's latest expansion, which will create 500 new jobs.

Leo Varadkar, the Minister for Transport and Tourism, said his department, the National Transport Authority (NTA) and Cork City Council were to co-fund the new road in order to allow Apple to expand and create the jobs. Funding of €1.4 million is being provided by the department, with the NTA and Cork City Council each providing €600,000.

Varadkar said he was pleased that his department was "in a position to support this new road, and allow the Apple expansion to proceed with the creation of 500 new jobs."

"It's a good example of joined-up government at national and local level. We often hear about how infrastructure is necessary for job creation. This is a concrete example."

The road at the Apple facility at Hollyhill is critical for the physical expansion of the site. It will also allow car parking to be re-integrated as part of the overall Apple site, and to improve accessibility in the facility.

Detailed discussions on the project have been under way since last November between the Department of Transport, Tourism & Sport, the IDA, the Department of Jobs, Enterprise & Innovation, the Na-



Leo Varadkar, Minister for Transport

tional Transport Authority, and Cork City Council. Work on the road and it is expected to be completed within 12 months.

Varadkar's department recently facilitated another road project for the pharmaceutical company Amgen in Dun Laoghaire, which allowed the company to secure existing jobs at the site and to provide expansion in the immediate future.

A major upgrade of Pottery Road was critical for Amgen's plans for the facility, and the department is providing €4.5 million towards the total cost of €18 million so that the project can proceed.

Apple is to construct a new office block on its site in Cork to accommodate the additional staff it plans to hire. The block is expected to be completed within the next 18 months.

Established in 1980, Apple's plant on the north side of Cork City was the company's first base outside the US.



Neola Killeen: preparing to open her third fashion store next month at Dundrum Town Centre MAURA HICKEY

Dressing up for Dundrum

By Lisa Brady

At a time when many business-owners are batten down the hatches, some are continuing to expand. One of them is Neola Killeen, who will open the third outlet of her Neola fashion chain in the Dundrum Town Centre at the beginning of May.

Killeen, who opened her first store in Malahide in 2007 following an outlet in Dundalk 18 months later, said the move was a natural progression for the company.

"We always applied to be in Dundrum," said Killeen, who was a buyer for Arncliffe and Brown Thomas before setting up her own business.

Killeen said that "choosing the right products and the right prices" had allowed her business to survive the downturn.

"I never hyped up my profit

margin, so I never had to bring it down," she said.

Neola, which Killeen originally started from her garage, now employs ten people and stocks more than 35 contemporary fashion brands, including Old Molly, Mimifrourou, Seven for all Mankind and True Religion. With fellow director Emmet McLoughlin, Killeen made what she described as "a huge investment" in her first store, which took a year and a half to establish.

"It's not just about setting up an online presence... it needs investment on a daily basis," she said.

"We have live stock control and next-day delivery, and pledge to be the cheapest place customers will find the products we stock. If they find it cheaper somewhere else, we'll take another 5 per cent off."

Killeen offers other incentives, including complimentary personal shopping and a deposit system where

clothes can be purchased over a few weeks, to get her customers buying.

"We've always had the deposit scheme – it's just now, as people's lives have changed, that they are availing of it more," she said.

To date, the business has been self-funded. "You can't just open a store and play shop; it's very hands-on," Killeen said.

"You have to keep your eye on the ball at all times. We have a high stock turnover, and have new deliveries on a daily basis. Each store has to operate independently and productively – one doesn't carry the other."

She said that, while the current retail environment was challenging for small players, there were also advantages for SMEs in the sector.

"A customer walking into a big store is not going to build a relationship with the staff in there. A boutique offers a more intimate service."

State inaction 'sees one diabetic go blind a week'

By Susan Mitchell

One person with diabetes goes blind each week due to failure to roll out an eye-screening programme first announced in 2010, Diabetes Action has said.

Eighteen months after the HSE announced funding for a €4 million national eye-screening programme to identify sight-threatening diabetic retinopathy (DR), the advocacy group has hit out at the lack of progress. Last summer, the Department of Health said the screening programme was likely to be operational at some point in 2012.

Over the weekend, the National Cancer Screening Service (NCSS), which is developing the screening programme, said it was "not in a position to specify a commencement date for the programme."

Diabetic retinopathy (DR) is the most common diabetic eye disease and a leading cause of blindness among Irish adults.

It is also the most common cause of blindness in working-age Irish adults. Figures from the National Council for the Blind of Ireland (NCBI) show that blindness registrations caused by DR, have doubled since 2003, and that, on aver-

age, one person with diabetes goes blind each week in Ireland.

Dr Kevin Moore of the Irish Endocrine Society, who chairs Diabetes Action, said patients with diabetes were more frightened by the possibility of blindness than by any other complication of diabetes. "Sight loss is a preventable complication of diabetes, and we need to get the screening process started as soon as possible in order to prevent more patients unnecessarily developing visual impairment," said Moore.

Studies show that 90 per cent of people with diabetes will develop retinopathy, and that 10 per cent of these cases will be sight-threatening if not treated. Diabetes Action and the NCBI said that more than 18,000 people in Ireland were likely to have severe, sight-threatening DR.

NCBI chief executive Denis Keane said clinicians were agreed that a national screening programme was vital and would be cost-effective in the short term.

It was envisaged that the national programme would be a combination of a national programme of screening developed on an annual basis. Screening programmes have already been introduced in Britain and other European countries.

Judge criticises land purchase for 'apparent wealth'

By Kieron Wood

A High Court judge has criticised the use of foreign bank loans to buy development land for the "paper accretion of apparent wealth."

Mr Justice Peter Charleton was rejecting a claim by a financial adviser for "consultancy services" to two developers. Joe Donnelly claimed he was owed €42,000 for advising Patrick Woods and Kevin McKenna, who had bought 18 acres of farmland near Monaghan town for €800,000 in 2007.

A housing association obtained planning permission in 2009 for "moderately-priced housing". But an Bord Pleanála overturned the permission on appeal. But with the rise in



Mr Justice Peter Charleton

land prices during the Celtic tiger years, Woods and McKenna eventually sold the fields for €4.4 million in 2007, just as the property bubble burst.

"The fields remain fallow, suitable for the raising of cattle," said Charleton in his judgment, "and the bank which lent the money – borrowed from foreign banks, in support of the paper accretion of apparent wealth – is now a burden on the Irish taxpayer."

Woods, who bought out McKenna's share, told the High Court that he had lost the money "twice as quick as [he] made it".

Donnelly claimed he had agreed to be paid 10 per cent of the net profit for financial and consultancy services, but the defendants said his claim was statute-barred.

Donnelly told the court that the bulk of his work was in negotiating the development plans with the housing association. He produced invoices for other deals showing fees ranging up to 5 per cent, but none of these came close to 10 per cent, said Charleton.

The judge said that, to dismiss a contractual claim just because of a missing term, would be to "undermine the business efficacy which the courts are obliged to give to commercial transactions". But he said the nature of the services provided by Donnelly were uncertain, due to lack of documentation.

"If people put their obligations in writing, even in the exchange of letters, then there is at least something to refresh the memory," said the judge. "All of that is absent in this case."

Charleton said that, if there was no written evidence, he would be paid the law could intervene on the basis of fairness. "When a service is given to a job, that worker is entitled to be paid, a principle perhaps derived from Luke 10:7," said the judge.

But it had been impossible to establish the rate to be paid to Donnelly, as in one stage, a figure of €100 was mentioned per hour. This is a substantial

sum but one that is possibly capable of being established," said the judge.

But there was no definite evidence about the rate, and the claim was also barred by the Statute of Limitations, as there was no evidence that Donnelly had issued the proceedings within six years of providing the professional services.

The judge said McKenna had paid Donnelly €70,000, which would have represented 700 hours' work at €100 an hour.

Even if Donnelly had been able to justify payment at that rate, he had already received "more than ample remuneration".

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The hardest cell

Irish Charities Expo hoping to attract up to 1,500 visitors

By Susan Mitchell

The organisers of the first Irish Charities Expo hope to attract up to 1,500 visitors to the event, which will be held in Dublin next month.

The expo aims to bring together not-for-profit organisations, businesses and members of the public to network, develop partnerships and discuss best practice in the charity sector.

More than 5,000 company

representatives have been invited to attend the event, which has been described as a first of its kind for Ireland. It is being organised by Clearpoint Media and supported by The Wheel, Business in the Community Ireland and the Irish Charities Tax Reform Group.

Specialist charity insurer Ecclesiastical is sponsoring the event.

"We are hoping to attract between 1,000 and 1,500 people. The charities are showcasing themselves – we'll have over 80 charities and suppliers

to the not-for-profit sector exhibiting on the day," said Greg O'Sullivan, managing director of Clearpoint.

A series of free expert seminars and panel discussions will run throughout the event. Topics will range from the benefits of corporate giving to charity regulations, social media, the use of charity ambassadors and taxation issues.

Speakers include economist Constantin Gurdie.

The event is free to attend and will be held at the RDS, Dublin on Wednesday, May 2.



Greg O'Sullivan, managing director, Clearpoint Media; David Lane, managing director, Ecclesiastical Insurance; and keynote speaker Dr Constantin Gurdie

JASON CLARKE