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ABSTRACT

Ireland's program of specific skills training (SST) Objective 1 courses, which are designed to train/retrain the labor force required for implementation of Ireland's Industry and Services Operational Programme, was evaluated by analyzing program expenditure reports and participant profiles, surveying a random sample of 101 employers, and visiting 8 Training and Employment Authority (Gaelic acronym: FAS) training centers. The following aspects of SST were examined: activities and expenditures; trainee characteristics; national and regional throughput; course development, skill needs identification, and relevance; training of trainers; certification and standards; placement; and employer attitudes regarding SST courses and recruitment. SST Objective 1 training courses were found to have been quite successful in meeting their specified goals, largely because of the SST's policy of allowing autonomy at the local level. It was also concluded, however, that the program could be improved through the following actions: standardization of course names, content, duration, structure, and progression to enhance the program's image and efforts to market it; formal integration of employer involvement in the program; and updating/revision of the program to make it more relevant to industry's needs. (Contains 28 tables. Appended are the following: FAS organizational chart; list of SST courses in FAS training centers; and information on sponsored training.) (MN)

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PROGRAMME EVALUATION UNIT

Evaluation Report

Specific Skills Training

December 1992

European Social Fund Programme Evaluation Unit

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Specific Skills Training

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Specific Skills Training measure under the Sub-Programme for Human Resources of the Industry and Services Operational Programme is the subject of this evaluation report. Funding for the Specific Skills Training (SST) programme as a whole is derived from

- the Industry and Services Operational Programme,
- the Operational Programme for the Adult Long Term Unemployed (Objective 3),
- the Operational Programme For The Occupational Integration of Young People (Objective 4), and
- training sponsored by employers.

With the exception of employer sponsored training, SST courses are funded from the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Exchequer under a combination of these Operational Programmes. This evaluation is primarily concerned with the provision of funding under the Industry and Services Operational Programme which accounts for approximately 75% of all SST funding. However the extent and nature of SST training funded from other sources will also be touched upon with a view to outlining the overall context of the SST programme as a whole and its total contribution to industrial development.

Rationale

SST courses contribute to the provision of trained manpower necessary for the implementation of the Industry and Services Operational Programme as a whole. It is intended that the SST programme should meet specific skill needs generated by the Operational Programme.

The SST measure is delivered by FAS, the Training and Employment Authority. As will be seen later SST accounts for a large portion of FAS activity.

The SST programme is part of the training element under the Sub-Programme for Human Resources intended to take advantage of the potential employment creation effect of the Industry and Services Operational Programme as a whole. Included in SST is the retraining of redundant workers.

SST courses are intended to deliver a good basic grounding in a specific skill typically at operative or semi-skilled level. Traditionally FAS strong points were in the engineering, mechanical, electrical, construction, business skills, secretarial skills and computer skills.

A major advantage of the SST Programme is its inherent flexibility. There is a local focus in the design of course types and content. This is facilitated by the regional structure introduced in recent years which was intended to make FAS services more responsive to the needs of its clients and to the needs of industry at local level.

Delivery

SST courses are, in the main, delivered at FAS training centres. Evening courses, which are based upon the SST programme, are run in FAS training centres. These are fee paying courses and are not funded by the ESF.

In 1991, 204 Objective 1 SST courses were run. A lot of these courses were run more than once. Of these, 128 courses were run in FAS training centres and 76 were run by externally contracted trainers. The throughput in FAS training centres was 7,889 (83%) and on externally run courses the throughput was 1,652 (17%).

The local focus of course delivery is important. Depending upon training centre locations the overall course mix delivered at individual training centres can be quite different. For example Loughlinstown Training Centre, which is located in the south Dublin suburbs, has targeted the service sector as the most likely provider of employment in the area. South Dublin has little traditional industrial activity but has a concentration of office based and information technology companies. Only one apprenticeship course is run in the training centre. Ballyfermot Training Centre, located in Dublin West, an area of traditional industry, concentrates on engineering and related trades.

Evaluation Approach

This report proposes to describe the SST programme which is the largest training measure operated by FAS. As such it is worthwhile outlining the actual extent and operation of the programme. Besides the examination of global information over a number of years it is proposed to outline in detail the operation of the programme for 1991. This year, the most recent complete year, was chosen because it is the first year for which FAS Client Database figures are available. FAS are in the process of instituting a new management information system and the transfer of existing information is in progress. As yet 1991 is the only year for which a complete set of data exists.

The details of expenditure returns submitted by FAS to the Department of Labour will be outlined.

The issues of certification, course development, placement and the identification of skill needs will also be examined.

As part of its programme of work the Programme Evaluation Unit carried out a small sample survey of employers during the summer of 1992. Findings of this survey relevant to SST are described below.

An important part of this evaluation of the SST programme involved visits to FAS training centres. Eight training centres were visited located in most of the FAS regions. These visits informed the evaluation about the actual operation of the SST programme on the ground and about the local circumstances that influence its delivery.

2. *ACTIVITY AND EXPENDITURE - FORECAST AND OUTTURN*

The SST programme is funded by three Operational Programmes. These are:

- the Industry and Services Operational Programme (Objective 1),
- the Operational Programme for the Adult Long Term Unemployed (Objective 3), and
- the Operational Programme for the Occupational Integration of Young People (Objective 4).

This report is primarily concerned with the extent to which SST meets the skill needs of industry and services and contributes to economic development, that is, the Objective 1 aims of the programme. The figures presented below relate only to Objective 1 funding.

The analysis of activity and expenditure contained in this section is based on forecasts in the Technical Description Sheets which are part of the Operational Programme and the 1990 and 1991 final claims submitted by FAS to the Department of Labour.

The following table gives details of the forecasts and outturn for the SST programme to date:

BST FORECAST AND OUTTURN £m				
Year	Total	ESF	State	No.s
1990				
Forecast:	25.055	16.286	8.769	9,470
Outturn:	27.661	17.981	9.682	10,553
1991				
Forecast:	26.108	16.970	9.138	9,470
Outturn:	27.767	18.047	9.718	9,490
1992				
Forecast:	27.863	18.111	9.752	9,470
Revised Forecast:	30.739	19.979	10.76	9,470
1993				
Forecast:	27.863	18.111	9.752	9,470
1990-1993				
Forecast:	106.889	69.478	37.411	37,880
Revised Forecast	114.027	74.117	39.910	38,983

The achievement of an extra 1,083 persons trained in 1990 was the result of a supplementary allocation of £2m ESF in that year. The small increase in the 1991 forecast figure is also reflected in a slight increase in persons trained. It is thought that the 1992 target will be met.

The unit cost per trainee hour in 1990 was £6.62 and £6.89 in 1991. This was an increase of 4% in the 1991 cost per trainee hour over the 1990 cost.

TRAINEE ANALYSIS					
	Total	Male	Female	Under 25	Over 25
1990					
Forecast:	9,470	5,966	3,504	6,250	3,220
	100%	63%	37%	66%	34%
Outturn:	10,553	7,809	2,744	7,598	2,955
	100%	74%	26%	72%	28%
1991					
Forecast:	9,470	5,966	3,504	6,250	3,220
	100%	63%	37%	66%	34%
Outturn:	9,490	6,003	3,487	5,431	4,059
	100%	63%	37%	57%	43%

It should be borne in mind that individual SST courses can, in most cases, contain trainees who are funded under all three Objectives. The bulk of Objective 1 funding, as outlined in the above table, is spent on the training of young persons, who form the target group of Objective 4 funding. There are also many long term unemployed, the target group of Objective 3 funding, among the Objective 1 funded trainees. As such the value of categorising funding under the various Objectives may be called in to question.

The forecast female proportion for 1990 was underachieved but in 1991 the target was met. In 1990 and 1991 the targeted proportions for age groups were not achieved. Slightly more under 25s were trained in 1990 and slightly less in 1991. The reverse is the case with regard to the over 25s.

The section which follows profiles, in more detail, the SST trainee population for 1991.

3. PROFILE OF SST TRAINEES

The following information is based on information supplied by FAS who have breakdowns of trainee population for individual Operational Programmes. The information presented below relates only to the Objective 1 trainee throughput for 1991.

AGE AND GENDER OF OBJECTIVE 1 SST TRAINEES 1991

Males		Total Males	Females		Total Females	Totals
Under 25	Over 25		Under 25	Over 25		
3,267	2,774	6,041	2,202	1,298	3,500	9,541
34%	29%	63%	23%	14%	37%	100%

Age Group	%		
Under 18	6.6		
18 - 24	50.7	All Under 25s	57.3%
Over 25	42.7		
Total	100		

These figures relate directly to the outturn figures shown in the Trainee Analysis table in the previous section. As mentioned earlier the proportion of over 25s in the throughput exceeded the forecast amount. This is probably indicative of fluctuating demand.

GENDER PROPORTIONS WITHIN AGE GROUPS

Under 18		18-24		Under 25		25 and over	
% Male	% Female	% Male	% Female	% Male	% Female	% Male	% Female
65	35	59	41	60	40	68	32

Males predominate in all age groups. The female participation rate peaked within the 18 - 24 age group at 41%. This is the largest age group comprising just over half the total Objective 1 throughput.

Gender and the composition of SST courses

There were 204 SST courses with Objective 1 throughput run in 1991. As one would expect males outnumber females on the majority of courses. However there is also an element of clustering about this. There were 85 courses, 41.7% of the total number, which were exclusively male. This is a high proportion. Only 20 courses (9.8%) were exclusively female. These were mainly in the areas of traditional female employment. However it should be borne in mind that Objective 1 figures are not the whole picture. If the gender composition of all SST trainees is examined the proportion of exclusively male courses falls to 16.2% and the proportion of exclusively female courses falls to 3.7%.

FAS introduced the Positive Action Programme for Women in 1990. The intention behind the programme is to broaden the career options of women into new and non-traditional areas of work. The programme is now in its third year of operation. Most women recruited under the Positive Action Programme would tend to be included under the non-traditional training for women measures under Objectives 3 and 4.

Duration of Unemployment

The FAS management information system allows us to look at SST participants as either short-term or long-term unemployed. By definition all SST participants (excluding sponsored participants) are unemployed prior to course commencement.

LENGTH OF UNEMPLOYMENT BY REGION OF OBJECTIVE 1 SST TRAINEES, 1991

Region	Under 25		Over 25		Total	%
	Male	Female	Male	Female		
Dublin North						
STU	428	444	349	133	1,354	60
LTU	207	128	368	218	921	40
Dublin South						
STU	160	106	54	42	362	53
LTU	80	56	86	97	319	47
Dublin West						
STU	361	175	509	82	1,127	81
LTU	51	33	94	84	262	19
Midlands						
STU	206	178	83	32	499	86

LENGTH OF UNEMPLOYMENT BY REGION OF OBJECTIVE 1 SST TRAINEES, 1991						
Region	Under 25		Over 25		Total	%
	Male	Female	Male	Female		
LTU	35	19	10	20	84	14
Mid-West						
STU	236	184	67	76	563	91
LTU	14	6	14	20	54	9
North-East						
STU	113	60	20	18	211	62
LTU	19	18	23	71	131	38
North-West						
STU	221	109	236	32	598	81
LTU	59	27	16	36	138	19
South-East						
STU	169	127	103	33	432	70
LTU	36	18	30	98	182	30
South-West						
STU	645	345	501	125	1,616	86
LTU	61	60	83	59	263	14
West						
STU	114	83	56	13	266	63
LTU	52	26	72	9	159	37
Total STU	2,653	1,811	1,978	586	7,028	74
Total LTU	614	391	796	712	2,513	26
TOTAL	3,267	2,202	2,774	1,298	9,541	100

The regional spread of long-term unemployment shows a considerable variance with the highest proportion being in Dublin South (47%) and the lowest in the Mid-West with only 9%.

Among 1991 Objective 1 trainees 2,513 (26.3%) persons were long-term unemployed, prior to course participation, and 7,028 (73.7%) were short-term unemployed.

One of the striking features of long-term unemployment among Objective 1 SST trainees in 1991 is its relative concentration among women. While females comprise only 37% of the total SST Objective 1 population, they make up 44% of the long-term unemployed. 31.5% of Objective 1 females are long-term unemployed as opposed to 22.3% of males.

Among females over 25 the long-term unemployed actually outnumber the short-term unemployed. When all SST trainees (including Objectives 3 and 4) are examined the level of female long-term unemployment is even more pronounced.

EDUCATION LEVEL OF OBJECTIVE 1 SST TRAINEES, 1991

Level	Percentage
Primary	8.5
Group	6.5
Intermediate	17.3
Leaving	35.7
Other	13.1
Degree	14.9
Not Stated	4.0
Total	100

Education Level refers to the level of education reached by trainees and is not an indication of educational qualifications achieved. The above information was abstracted from data supplied by trainees when they completed their registration forms. Trainees are not asked about their educational qualifications, only the level of education reached.

The educational levels of Objective 1 SST trainees are quite high. The FAS 1990 Follow Up survey, which will be described later, confirms that SST trainees generally reach higher levels of education than participants on all other FAS measures. Objective 1 SST participants should be particularly suited to jobs in industry, as they are gaining skills on top of an already generally high level of education.

4. NATIONAL AND REGIONAL THROUGHPUT

The figures presented in the tables below include all SST trainees across all three Operational Programmes and give a good indication of the contribution SST makes to FAS activities on a regional and national basis. It should be noted that regional breakdowns are based on the 10 FAS regions, not the sub-regions for Structural Funds purposes. The table below shows total SST throughput in the three years 1989 to 1991:

SPECIFIC SKILLS TRAINING	
Total SST Throughput	
1989	12,656
1990	13,605
1991	12,668
1989-91	38,929

FAS planned to increase the relative provision of SST in the period 1989-1993. The figures presented below demonstrate the considerable contribution that SST makes to the overall FAS training throughput. As the table below shows, rising from just under a third of all FAS training activity in 1989 SST accounted for nearly 40% of training in 1991. The proportion of SST training, relative to all other training, increased by 7% in the 1989-91 period. The increasing importance of the SST programme can also be seen by the fact that in most regions the proportion of SST training has also risen. The most spectacular rise was in Dublin South where SST rose from 35.5% to 50.3% of the region's training. In the Midlands the proportion of SST to total training rose from 29.2% to over 42% in 1990 and 1991. Only two regions, the Mid West and West, showed a marginal decrease over the 1989-91 period.

SST THROUGHPUT AS PERCENTAGE OF TRAINING THROUGHPUT 1989-1991										
Region	**Dublin North**	**Dublin South**	**Dublin West**	**South East**	**South West**	**Mid West**	**West**	**North West**	**North East**	**Mid-lands**
1989	33.1	35.5	32.2	25.0	42.6	30.5	27.4	29.6	22.6	29.2
1990	37.6	37.0	40.3	24.8	47.5	31.8	25.0	33.8	28.5	42.7
1991	44.7	50.3	40.8	29.2	44.8	29.6	25.3	40.9	31.3	42.2
% Up Down	11.6	14.8	8.6	4.2	2.2	0.9	2.1	11.3	8.7	13.0

Total	
1989	32.3
1990	36.6
1991	39.3
% Increase	7.0

SST as a proportion of total throughput

Total FAS throughput consists of training programmes and employment schemes participants. The main impact of the relative increase in SST throughput can be seen in the figures for overall training. The relative contribution of SST to total throughput is also increasing gradually.

The SST increase, relative to total throughput, is notable in the regions with the largest throughput. In Dublin North, Dublin West and the South-West, SST accounted for approximately 30% of total throughput. However Dublin North and the North-West showed the highest percentage increase over the 1989-91 period. Three regions had a marginal decrease over the period.

SST THROUGHPUT AS PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL FAS THROUGHPUT BY REGION 1989-1991										
Region	**Dublin North**	**Dublin South**	**Dublin West**	**South East**	**South West**	**Mid West**	**West**	**North West**	**North East**	**Mid-lands**
1989	24.9	20.7	26.0	16.1	28.7	20.5	15.6	16.7	12.9	16.8
1990	28.9	20.8	31.3	14.3	31.5	21.1	15.0	21.2	15.3	20.5
1991	31.0	23.7	29.1	14.7	29.1	18.1	13.5	22.8	15.4	17.7
% Up	6.1	3.0	3.1		0.4			6.1	2.5	0.9
Down 1989-91				1.4		2.4	2.1			

Totals	
1989	21.6
1990	23.9
1991	23.1
% Increase	1.5

Data presented in this section demonstrates the importance of SST activity as a proportion of total FAS activity across all regions. It is by far the most significant training measure operated by FAS and the only comparable activity, in terms of throughput, is the Social Employment Scheme.

5. COURSE DEVELOPMENT, SKILL NEEDS IDENTIFICATION & RELEVANCE

Skill Needs Identification

The identification of skill needs and relevance checking are central to the process of course development. Course development is, in the first instance, locally orientated. Part of the rationale behind the regionalisation of FAS is that the organisation will become more responsive to employer needs at a local level. New courses are introduced and existing courses are amended often as a result of the liaison between training centre staff, individual instructors, their section heads, training centre managers or Service to Industry staff and individual employers. Employers themselves often make specific requests for courses to be run.

Some training centres undertake research within their own catchment area, both from the point of view of identifying skill needs not catered for and to check on the relevance of courses provided. An example among those visited during this evaluation is Athlone training centre which is systematic in its approach to identifying skill needs and checking on course relevance. This training centre has recently introduced a new Factory Automation course. The development resulted from an extensive survey of all the relevant employers in the FAS Midlands Region. Follow up visits to employers, subsequent to trainee placement, are also used to check course relevance. Information from these visits is recorded on a locally designed form. After all visits to employers in any context, another locally designed form, seeking information on course relevance and skill needs is also completed. In addition to these measures, the usual channels of information, through the Service to Industry staff, also operate. Given the regional structure within FAS it is important that systematic procedures such as those described above are in place at the training centre level. This system appears to work well in this region and the adoption of similar systems, where they do not exist, in other training centres could lead to improved identification of skill needs.

Athlone training centre management and staff have agreed a Quality Programme and have produced a "Quality Procedures" document and a "Quality Manual". These procedures are in force since February, 1992. These documents set out the procedures to be followed in relation to course review, course design, course assessment and other matters. Reviews of the quality programme take place at a monthly meeting representative of all grades of staff. Staff ownership and involvement are very developed in this process and can only strengthen

the quality of service delivered. Similar developments are also taking place at Loughlinstown Training Centre.

Each FAS region produces an annual regional plan which attempts to draw together information about the training needs of its region over the coming year. FAS are also in the process of establishing regional advisory committees which will encompass the relevant local agencies and the social partners. The precise role of these committees is as yet unclear.

Course Development

The Programme Development Section of the Employment and Training Services Division (see FAS Organisation Chart at Appendix 1) has responsibility for co-ordinating input at a national level with regard to the development of new SST courses and changes made to existing courses. The section has inputs from a wide range of sources. However, programme development is not the subject of centrally planned processes.

A major consideration in the decision to amend a course is the placement rate that the course achieves. In general a placement rate of 70% is considered necessary for the continuation of a course (even though 75% is the targeted rate). If a course falls below this level it is examined with a view to either being discontinued or amended as appropriate. Few courses are wholly discontinued. It is more likely that a course will be updated or amended. On average, 15 - 20% of SST courses are modified each year.

Other inputs include the identification of changing skill needs at national level. This work is done by the Research and Planning Section of FAS and includes research on skill shortages and research into the manpower and training needs of specific sectors of the economy. Research and Planning are also part of a joint project with the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) to establish a manpower forecasting system. The project is included under the Innovatory Projects and Technical Assistance Operational Programme. Work on methodology and sectoral trends is well underway.

The work of the Programme Development section is also informed by contacts with other agencies. The Industrial Development Authority (IDA) has a role in ensuring that FAS meets the skill needs of foreign companies moving to Ireland. The IDA Small Industries Committees do not appear to have had much contact with any of the training centres visited. However, FAS participate on a series of joint Training/Grant Committees with the IDA, Shannon Development and Udaras na Gaeltachta for decisions on those organisations' training grants.

The Programme Development Section has responsibility for review of the SST programme. Individual courses are reviewed as outlined above. However the section has also requested an internal evaluation of the overall SST programme. This work has been undertaken by the Planning and Research Department for some time but as yet no findings are available.

The impetus for new course formation can originate at a sectoral level or with individual companies through the Programme Development Section. Examples of company lead initiatives that have come through the Programme Development Section are the Aircraft Maintenance course linked to Shannon Aerospace and the Electronic and Computer Numerical Control (CNC) courses linked to INTEL, a large U.S. company located in Kildare. In these cases the decisions to establish the courses also had implications for the FAS capital budget which may also be a consideration in new course formation or the alteration of existing courses. European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) expenditure has been instrumental in facilitating the development of new technology courses by making available capital for equipment without which these courses could not have proceeded.

The Industrial Training Committees

On the sectoral level the Industrial Training Committees (ITCs), which are in the process of being revamped, have a role in programme development. These are statutory advisory committees who have responsibility for gathering information about the manpower and training needs of their particular sector. A FAS industrial specialist works with each committee. Each committee compiles an annual sectoral manpower plan to the FAS Board. The following six sectors are those covered by the Industrial Training Committees.

Engineering, Food and Drink and Tobacco
Construction
Printing and Paper
Chemicals and Allied Trades
Textiles
Clothing and Footwear

As part of their review function a number of sectoral studies have been commissioned by the ITCs. At this stage one such study, for the Clothing and Footwear ITC, is complete. The Service to Industry Group, which is part of the Employment and Services Division has been made responsible for the dissemination of information from the study to the FAS staff involved in the relevant SST courses. These studies are also included under the Innovatory Projects and Technical Assistance Operational Programme. Under the Industry and Services Operational Programme funding has been made available through the Industrial

Restructuring Programme for the development and implementation of new training policies which meet the specific needs of the clothing sector.

Each sectoral committee may initiate the development of SST courses to meet the perceived needs of its own sector. Examples, under development at the moment are courses proposed by the Printing and Paper ITC for redundant print workers and retraining courses for freelance journalists. ITCs may also be involved in upgrading courses. An example of this, encountered during visits to training centres, was the Chemicals and Allied Trades ITC involvement in securing funding for the upgrading of Polymer courses at Sligo Training Centre.

As indicated above, FAS are currently in the process of restructuring the ITCs. In relation to the services sector two non-statutory committees fulfil similar functions. One committee has responsibility for the Retail and Wholesale sectors and another has responsibility for the Physical Distribution (including transport) sector.

The Review of Procedures

In 1990 a report on "Mechanisms for Identifying and Responding to Changing Skill Needs in Ireland" was published under the PETRA programme. The report examined CERT, FAS and the educational system generally. With regard to FAS, the report referred to the range of mechanisms at work and the problems of co-ordination this posed for the organisation. It also pointed to the developing structures at regional level and to the developments in the area of identifying "hard" data with regard to skill needs. This report was extensively quoted in the Operational Programme for Industry and Services.

The report pointed out that mechanisms for adapting FAS provision are not well developed. This is an area that needs to be examined in the context of the overall co-ordination of programme development activities including the possible creation of procedures for ensuring the adaptation of provision. This could be achieved within the current organisational structure of FAS.

A comprehensive set of systematic procedures for skill need identification, relevance checking together with a complementary procedure of course development does not exist in a uniform manner. In the course of the evaluation visits to training centres, it became clear that staff information forwarded by Service to Industry to training centre staff, information gathered by individual instructors and trends discerned from placement rates are the main sources of information about skill needs and course relevance at local level.

As described above, some training centres have developed systematic procedures for the co-ordination of information relevant to course development. It is essential that these procedures are effective at local level and not determined centrally. Central direction would diminish the responsiveness of training centres. However, the development of an outline set of procedures, adaptable to local circumstances, should be considered. This could be based upon current best practice in the training centres.

One striking feature of the system for checking relevance and effectiveness is the reliance, to a large extent, on placement rates. It could be argued that placement rates cannot directly inform FAS about skills gaps. In a sense this approach has been reactive rather than proactive. The joint manpower forecasting project with the ESRI will focus on developments on a more global basis but will include medium forecasts of demand for occupations classified by industrial sector. There are difficulties in co-ordinating course development at national level given the degree of autonomy at regional level. Perhaps the role of the Programme Development Section in this context should be to ensure that balance is achieved and that the results of national initiatives are translated into action at a local level.

6. THE TRAINING OF TRAINERS

FAS trainers are at present undergoing a training regime instituted under the Vocational Training Infrastructure and Training of Trainers Operational Programme. Under the Training of Trainers Sub-Programme, FAS in co-operation with St. Patrick's College, Maynooth and University College, Galway (U.C.G.) have developed courses that are designed to maintain and update trainer skills. The courses are delivered at Maynooth and U.C.G. and lead to a Certificate. An open/distance learning programme is also available. Development work on the Diploma level course has been undertaken by U.C.G. under the Euroform Community Initiative. The uptake among those training centres visited varied but most trainers have begun or completed the initial course. Measures such as this are essential if FAS training quality is to be maintained.

FAS are aware of the ageing of trainers as an issue in need of consideration and in the case of some of the more traditional skills areas retraining is essential. Courses of recent origin, such as some of the business, computer and new technology courses, are more likely to be staffed by younger trainers. Training centres, such as Loughlinstown training centre, which concentrate on these type of courses and have fewer traditional craft courses tend to have a younger age structure among trainers.

Training centres are in the process of taking appropriate action in this regard. An example of this type of retraining is that undertaken to update Machine Tool Operator trainers with regard to Computer Numeric Control (CNC) standard. All training centres visited, which had a Machine Tool Operators course, have had their machinery updated within the last year or so. The same process is underway with regard to machinery updating on Advanced Welding courses. These machinery updates have been effected with capital grants made under the ERDF funded part of the above mentioned Operational Programme and are vital for FAS to keep pace with the best standards obtaining in industry.

Retraining such as that mentioned in relation to CNC and Advanced Welding is upskilling within given course areas. Consideration could be given to the notion of giving a second skill to older trainers in the craft areas. This could be done as part of a structured programme and would yield benefits in terms of manpower flexibility for FAS.

Each FAS training centre produces an annual staff development plan outlining the educational programmes that staff will undertake in the coming year. In this context a considerable amount of skills updating takes place.

7. CERTIFICATION AND STANDARDS

The issues of certification and standards are of immense importance to the success of the SST programme. As outlined in previous sections of this report, the programme is a considerable one in terms of throughput and contains a wide range of course types offered at a number of levels.

It is vital that employers come to know and appreciate the standards practised within the programme so that the certification process will come to be accepted as a hallmark of reliability. The acceptance of industry is necessary if the SST programme is to meet its objectives within the context of the Operational Programme for Industry and Services and remain viable in the training market.

From the trainee point of view the acceptance and recognition of these standards and certification processes can only enhance the value of training offered and increase the likelihood of relevant employment. The development of certification and standards within the SST programme will be enhanced by developments in the field of comparability of qualifications in the international context.

The Certification and Standards Department of FAS has evolved from a unit largely concerned with curriculum development within AnCO to one which now administers a comprehensive assessment and certification system. In relation to certification the approach of the Department is set out in the "Certification Framework for FAS Training" issued in April, 1991. This sets out the enormous changes that have taken place in recent years. It documents the move from a time serving focus to a skills attainment focus. In 1986, only 1.8% of trainees left training with certificates of achievement, as opposed to attendance certificates. All FAS trainees, who complete training, now leave with a certificate attesting to skills attainment.

The Joint Agreement on Certification

FAS entered into a joint certification agreement with the City and Guilds Institute of London which covers SST courses. This agreement came into effect on 1st May, 1990 and was due to expire on the 30th April, 1992. However a new agreement is in place which will run from 1st May, 1992 to 30th April, 1994.

There are considerable benefits, from a FAS point of view, in the joint agreement. At the time of its establishment in 1988 FAS did not have a ready made reputation as regards

certification as is the case with the City and Guilds Institute of London. The vocational standards set by the Institute are known and accepted by Irish employers. The endorsement of FAS standards by the Institute is important in the context of the movement of workers abroad especially in the case of the U.K.. The process which led to the conclusion of the agreement also enabled FAS to open up its systems and procedures to external examination by the Institute. On the whole the agreement is good for FAS and must enhance the value and worth of FAS certification.

In 1986 the task facing the Certification and Standards Department was to plan an approach to certification and assessment that could cater for a wide range of courses. The Department chose not to design assessment for each course but to develop a certification framework that could cope with the range of course requirements and the flexibility of approach adopted within FAS as a whole and the SST programme in particular. This meant focusing on training standards which could be applied across the range of SST courses.

To facilitate this approach a modular approach was adopted. SST courses are delivered in modular form. Some modules (e.g. word-processing) are common to a number of courses and others are specialist or unique to a particular type of course. Assessment programmes were devised with this in mind. These assessments use a level of competence based on current industrial requirements. The levels of competence required are defined in terms of pre-specified criteria. In most cases these criteria are established in consultation with recognised experts. Key objectives are presented within each module, which must be achieved if skills attainment is to be certified. In this context the marking system is divided into essential and desirable criteria. The assessment procedure is administered locally subject to national monitoring.

The issue of assessment and certification is built into the design of programmes. The concerns to be addressed in the design of training programmes are outlined in the FAS document "Training Programme Specification". Standard number QA 58/01 applies for SST programmes. The standard does not consider matters such as the justification of programmes or their cost. It sets a design standard which is to be followed subsequent to the decision to run a programme as part of the Quality Assurance effort within FAS.

The procedure for assessing skills attainment on SST courses is set out in a series of documents entitled "Assessing Trainee Attainment". This series is required reading for FAS staff involved in the SST programme. The series elements are as follows:

Part 1	Principles of Assessment	Standard No. QA 98/01
Part 2	Operating Guidelines	Standard No. QA 98/02
Part 3	Designing an Assessment System	Standard No. QA 98/03

At local level the ultimate responsibility for assessment and certification rests with the training centre manager and the manager of external training. Each training centre has a curriculum officer responsible for the day to day operation of the assessment and certification procedures. The curriculum officer reports to the training centre manager. The Certification and Standards Department regularly call all curriculum officers together to discuss matters of concern. However it could be argued that a clearer line of responsibility would exist if the curriculum officers reported to the Certification and Standards Department.

The Certification and Standards Department have a general responsibility for monitoring the quality of assessment and certification. To this end they are involved in the dissemination of information within the FAS organisation. Visits, including unannounced spotchecks are made to training centres to check on procedures. Attention is drawn to any practices which do not meet the required standards and corrective action is taken by the department.

It could be argued that the joint agreement with the City and Guilds Institute links FAS Certification too closely with the standards in Britain. The report "Industrial Training in Ireland" commissioned by the Industrial Policy Review Group concluded that the "best practice" in Europe was to be found in Germany. In a three way comparison between Germany, France and Britain it was found that Germany had the most developed vocational training system and that Britain had the least developed. On this basis it could be argued that some form of joint assessment with Germany would link FAS with a better system of standards than the City and Guilds Institute of London joint agreement as far as the European context is concerned. However, negotiations with the relevant French and German authorities for mutual recognition of awards are underway. These negotiations are described below.

The joint agreement with the Institute is, however, a great improvement on the system that it replaced. Although FAS has its own statutory powers of certification, it is important that the organisation's awards are linked to a wider framework. In this context the organisation has operated in a situation where no national framework of certification exists, that would facilitate the upgrading of standards. The absence of such a national framework has

handicapped FAS in that its standards have not been comparable with other vocational training standards and hence more easily recognisable. In the long term the development of certification could be enhanced by the establishment of an independent national certification authority.

Certification and Standards Developments

FAS also seeks to involve industry in the setting of standards and in the certification of skills attainment. An example of this is the involvement of the Federation of Irish Employers in the Retail Sales course. A steering group of relevant employers has been established to advance this work. This co-operation is also taking place in the context of the development of modular certification which may become acceptable as interchangeable exemptions between FAS and the various other academic and vocational certifying authorities. Another example of employer involvement is that of Shannon Aerospace who endorse the standards on the Aircraft Maintenance course given in Shannon training centre.

A small number of SST courses offer vocational qualifications. The Gas Installation course is an example of this. The standards of skills imparted on this course are also endorsed by An Bord Gas and the Irish Liquid Petroleum Gas Association as meeting their own standards.

An agreement, facilitated by the Commission d'Homologation, whereby the Minister for Labour of France will recognise FAS awards in respect of Office Procedures, Industrial Electronics, Automated Manufacturing Systems and Domestic Appliance Servicing will shortly be concluded. The equivalent courses in France are presently run by the Association pour la Formation Professional des Adultes (AFPA). FAS will extend recognition to these courses. The basis for this is that common software and technology are in use. Negotiations are also underway with the Bundesinstitut fur Berufsbildung (Federal Institute for Vocational Training) of Germany for joint recognition of apprenticeship awards which will be carried over into the SST programme.

The conclusion of the joint agreement with the City and Guilds Institute allows FAS to participate on the policy committees of the Institute and thus influence the development of standards and certification in a wider international context.

The Certification and Standards Department also carries out a certain amount of research. Two recent surveys were conducted to determine the scope of given occupations and the standards applicable in occupations in given industries. Ten leading companies in each trade were also interviewed in this context. Interviews were carried out with management

and shop floor personnel in each case. This work feeds directly into the SST programme. The Gas Installation course is an example of a course that will be amended as a result of this work.

Other research work includes a project to develop the concept of the accreditation of prior learning. This will broaden access to training by developing a system to accredit prior learning and aptitudes developed through work experience or unstructured and uncertified training. When complete this work will feed into the SST programme. This project is also funded under the EUROFORM Community Initiative.

Another aspect of the organisations work in developing means of progression for its trainees is its involvement in CEDEFOP. FAS is represented on the Board and a number of sub-committees of CEDEFOP. Here FAS is involved in comparability studies which is necessary if the skills attainment achieved by FAS trainees is to be more widely recognised within the EC. FAS is also involved in the preliminary stages of the EUROQUALIFICATION project which is attempting to produce mutually agreed equivalence of qualifications across a range of 52 occupations.

8. PLACEMENT

Placement rates are important in terms of measuring the performance of SST courses. FAS places a great deal of emphasis on placement rates and a fall in placement rates is often the catalyst for a review of courses.

This section will firstly look at the actual placement performance of the SST programme over the period 1988 to 1991 and outline the placement performance of all SST courses in 1991. Placement is, in the first instance, the responsibility of individual instructors. Instructors monitor trainee placement for a period of up to six months subsequent to course completion. During that period the course placement rate varies. FAS policy is that placement rates of 75% of trainees are targeted six months after the end of the course. Placement rates below 75% usually prompt an examination of courses. However, it must be emphasised that this is an internal target rate set by FAS themselves.

Placement is recorded as employment obtained whether the employment obtained is relevant to the course completed or not. The FAS Placement Survey deals with the question of relevance and its findings in this regard are outlined below. Material from the FAS Placement Survey of 1991 is presented in the second part of this section.

The following figures relate to all SST throughput except where otherwise stated.

OVERALL ACTUAL SST PLACEMENT RATES

Year	%
1988	76
1989	75
1990	73
1991	70

These rates apply to total SST throughput as it is not possible to have rates calculated for trainee populations of individual Operational Programmes within the overall SST programme. As shown above, the global placement rate for SST has been in decline since 1988, the year proceeding the CSF.

SST REGIONAL PLACEMENT RATES 1991	
Region	**%**
North-West	77
Dublin North	73
Dublin West	71
Mid-West	71
Midlands	70
South-West	70
West	69
Dublin South	64
South-East	60
North-East	56
TOTAL	70

There is a considerable variation in placement rates between regions. A 21% difference is evident between the highest and lowest rates. It is also noticeable that the regions with large throughputs tend to have relatively high placement rates. The North-West, the region with the highest placement rate, is an exception. As such it cannot be argued that regions with large catchment areas have a greater chance of placing trainees.

The figures below refer to the total SST throughput across all three Operational Programmes, excluding sponsored training.

PLACEMENT RATES OF SST COURSES 1991			
Course	**Throughput**	**Placed**	**% Placed**
COE-Instrumentation	24	24	100
Clerical Development	12	12	100
Swimming Pool Management	1	1	100
Computer Assisted Training	2	2	100
Craft Skills	13	13	100
Food Retail	2	2	100
Computerised Book-Keeping	3	3	100
Product Engineering	2	2	100

PLACEMENT RATES OF SST COURSES 1991

Course	Throughput	Placed	% Placed
Basic Engineering	3	3	100
New Opportunity	25	24	96
General Print Skills	26	25	96
Screen Printing	33	31	94
Pharmacy Sales Assistant	14	13	93
Sales Planning Management	27	25	93
Polymer Updating	15	14	93
Canine Management	24	22	92
Machine Tool Overhaul	23	21	91
Recording Studio Production	23	21	91
Land Market Gardening	19	17	90
Home Workers	10	9	90
Production Skills	21	19	90
Cutting Cloth Trade	35	31	89
Construction Plant Fitter	24	21	88
Selling Financial Securities	103	91	88
General Construction for Operatives	14	12	86
Office Equipment Service	14	12	86
Advertising, Sales	22	19	86
Panel Beating	58	50	86
Shipping Freight Forwarding	29	25	86
Aircraft Maintenance	73	62	85
Business Administration	62	52	84
Hairdressing	305	255	84
Trainee Jeweller	12	10	83
Software Engineering	24	20	83
Accounting Taxation	120	100	83
Specialised Sales Rep	80	66	83
Managerial Skills	24	20	83
COE-Elect Business Equip	21	17	81
Electronics	43	35	91
Special	129	104	81
Production Supervisor	105	85	81
Maintenance of Automated Factory Systems	36	29	81
Export/Import Documentation	50	40	80
Electro/Mechanical Service Engineer	20	16	80
Sales Representatives	86	68	79

PLACEMENT RATES OF SST COURSES 1991

Course	Throughput	Placed	% Placed
Skill Training W/S	28	22	79
Sewing Machine Operator	325	257	79
Skills Development for Women	28	22	79
Basic Electronics	28	22	79
New Applications for Information Technology	18	14	78
Farm Relief Development Technician	23	18	78
Domestic Appliance Servicing	40	31	78
Data Communications	23	18	78
Beauty Therapist	13	10	78
Butcher/Boner	18	14	77
Painting/Decorating Craft	13	10	77
Computer Office Systems	149	113	76
International Trade and 1992	29	22	76
Animation and Graphics	24	18	75
Polymer Setting	16	12	75
Computerised Accounting	4	3	75
Micro Electronics	4	3	75
Alarm Installation	23	17	74
Redundant Apprentices	89	66	74
Business Accounting	114	83	73
Computer Office Systems	128	94	73
Food Skills	51	37	73
Women into Business and Technology	22	16	73
Electronic Servicing	62	45	73
Retail Sales	441	318	72
Computer Servicing	14	10	71
Polymer Operatives	21	15	71
Business/Computer Studies	53	37	70
Software Development	36	25	69
Struct. Prog/Technique	29	20	69
Junior Management	29	20	69
Computerised Office	85	58	68
Production Management Technician	25	17	68
Word Processing/Electric Office	209	141	67
Road Transport Organisation	15	10	66
Business Skills	176	116	66
Skin Care	12	8	66

PLACEMENT RATES OF SST COURSES 1991

Course	Throughput	Placed	% Placed
Advanced Manufacturing Technology	21	14	66
Executive Secretary	27	18	66
Certificate in Accountancy	12	8	66
Software Support	27	18	66
Book Keeping/Computer Applications	44	28	64
Welding/Fabrication	280	178	64
Engineering Craft	45	29	64
Computer Applications	511	325	64
Computer Numeric Control MC	14	9	64
Communications and Publishing	25	16	64
Machine Knitting	39	25	64
Clerical Skills	24	15	63
Electrical Assembly	420	266	63
Machine Tool Operators	211	131	63
Information Technology/Elect	52	32	62
Partsperson	37	23	62
Precision Machine Operator	39	24	62
Introduction to Business	42	26	62
Management Development Programme	23	14	61
Digital Electronics	13	8	61
Computer App/PC Op Sys	33	20	61
Computer Aided Engineer	25	15	60
Light Production & Assembly	37	22	60
Stores Procedures	62	36	59
General Engineering for Operatives	172	102	59
Draughting CAD/CAM	46	27	59
Childcare	111	66	59
Radio/TV Service	31	18	59
New Skills for the 1990s	82	48	59
P.C.B. Design and Layout	24	14	58
Manual Arc Gas Welding	240	137	57
Draughtsmen	79	44	56
Woodwork for Adults	27	15	56
Office Procedures	439	247	56
Basic Multi Skills	84	47	56
Software Support	77	43	56
Construction Operative	159	88	55

PLACEMENT RATES OF SST COURSES 1991

Course	Throughput	Placed	% Placed
Basic Electronics	49	27	58
Basic Accounting	31	17	55
Building Service/Draughting	11	6	55
Graphics/Photography	58	32	55
Advanced Welding	114	63	55
Materials Management	26	14	54
Plant Maintenance	26	14	54
Security/Surveillance	80	43	54
Home Services	33	17	52
Quality Control	50	26	52
Light Skills Development	93	47	51
Sales Marketing	76	39	51
Programmer/Analyst	4	2	50
Micro Computer Maintenance	14	7	50
Spray Painting	8	4	50
Garage Operatives	12	6	50
Co-op Development	6	3	50
Contract Plant Driving	21	10	48
Upholstery	21	10	48
Motor Cycle/Engine Repair	62	30	48
Redundant Craftsmen	23	11	48
Heavy Goods Transport	265	127	48
Desk Top Publishing	28	13	46
Industrial Skills	46	21	46
Building Service Operatives	42	19	45
Careers Assessment	49	22	45
Audio Visual Repair	22	10	45
Interior Design	25	11	44
Book-Keeping	27	12	44
Financial Management-Small Business	60	23	43
Updating of Skills	65	28	43
Hydraulic/Pneumatic	14	6	43
Industrial Electronics	67	29	43
Computerised Business	78	33	42
Sewing Machine Service	20	8	40
Property Maintenance	20	8	40
Drivers for Road Freight	26	10	38

PLACEMENT RATES OF SST COURSES 1991			
Course	**Throughput**	**Placed**	**% Placed**
Pattern Grad and Design	26	10	38
Industrial Instrument	8	3	38
International Transport Organisation	49	18	37
Health Studio Instructor	22	8	36
Draughting Computer Aid Engineer	14	5	36
Warehousing and Distribution	22	8	36
Commercial Business Skills	26	9	35
Legal Secretary	24	8	33
Software Applications	55	18	33
Engineering Skills	106	35	33
Machining Computer/Engineer	18	6	33
Project Romania	12	4	33
Retail Butcher	27	7	26
Furniture Restoration	19	5	26
Tourist Development	31	7	23
Equestrian and Stable	7	1	14
Redundant Apprentices/R.T.C.	106	9	8
Business Skills/Languages	26	2	8
Careers in Computing	4	0	0
Quality Management	23	0	0
Football Apprentice	37	0	0
Computer Service and Sales	1	0	0
Industrial Relations	5	0	0
Pilot	1	0	0
Security Officer	23	0	0
Women into Management	3	0	0
LTU Pilot	1	0	0
Wood Carving	1	0	0
Credit Control	23	0	0
COE-English Language	16	0	0
Gas Installation/Fault Diagnosis	12	0	0
Western Tourism News	1	0	0

Only one third (33%) of courses reached the target of 75% placement. Nine courses (4.8%) achieved a 100% placement rate. However some of these courses had a very small throughput. Fourteen courses (7.5%) recorded no placement. However the bulk of courses, 135 or 72%, achieved a placement rate of 50% or more.

Recommendations with regard to placement issues appear later in this report.

Placement Survey

In 1990 FAS commissioned the ESRI to conduct a sample survey of participants who completed FAS training courses and employment schemes between January and March of 1989. During this period 14,779 persons completed training courses and employment schemes. Excluding apprentices and sponsored trainees, the sample taken consisted of 1,385 ex-trainees. The survey collected information about individuals and their employment status for a period of up to 14-17 months after completion of their courses or employment schemes. The objectives and participant profile of SST should lead us to expect that SST will perform better than other FAS measures with more social objectives and less advantaged participants.

A total of 378 persons who had completed SST courses were covered by the survey. The total SST population for the relevant period was 3,357 of which 11.3% were covered in the survey. This is a good representative sample. It is not possible to distinguish the measures which funded the SST training undertaken by these trainees by Operational Programmes. However most would have been the subject of ESF intervention.

Perceived Benefits of SST Programme

The 1991 Survey sought the opinions of programme participants about the benefits of the courses/schemes they had attended. As anticipated, SST programmes scored very highly relative to other FAS measures.

Opinions were sought as to how course/scheme participation had effected the trainees confidence, ability to identify job opportunities, interview presentation, ability to gain employment and if the course/scheme had imparted new skills. The imparting of new skills is the most important effect that SST can have. The provision of new skills is a vital factor in promoting industrial development. From the individual participant's point of view the acquisition of new skills contributes greatly to the persons ability to gain employment.

GAVE NEW JOB SKILLS	
	SST %
A lot	56
A little	31
Not at all	13

Over half of SST participants felt that they had gained considerable new skills. Overall 87% felt that they had gained some new skills. This compared quite favourably with the average FAS figures.

HELPED GET JOB	
	SST %
A lot	42
A little	19
Not at all	38

The majority of SST participants believed that the programme helped them to get a job. This is in contrast to the overall majority of FAS programme participants who felt that they did not gain any advantage in seeking employment. SST also performed well in relation to improved confidence of trainees, in helping trainees identify job opportunities and interview presentation.

IMPROVED CONFIDENCE		
	SST %	All Participants %
A lot	51	37
A little	34	37
Not at all	15	26

HELPED IDENTIFY JOB OPPORTUNITY		
	SST %	All Participants %
A lot	50	31
A little	29	36
Not at all	29	33

INTERVIEW PRESENTATION		
	SST %	All Participants %
A lot	45	35
A little	26	29
Not at all	29	36

LEVELS OF SATISFACTION PERCENTAGE										
	Quality		Relevance		Content		Methods		Trainer	
	SST	All	SST	All	SST	All	SST	Sll	SST	All
Very Satisfied	42	31	40	25	33	27	45	34	59	51
Satisfied	47	49	44	42	46	43	39	44	29	35
Undecided	2	3	6	11	7	10	8	7	5	5
Dissatisfied	7	9	7	15	11	14	5	10	4	5
Very Dissatisfied	2	5	3	7	3	7	3	6	3	5

The SST figures above appear in Table 4.4 of the FAS 1991 survey. The figures for all, presented above, are derived from the average of the satisfaction ratings given for all training programmes.

The vast majority of all persons expressed satisfaction, under all headings, with their training courses. SST courses achieved a slightly higher rating than all other training courses. SST received the highest ratings under the headings of quality of training (89%) and satisfaction with trainer (88%).

POST PROGRAMME EMPLOYMENT STATUS

	Months			
SST %	**End**	**6**	**12**	**14-17**
At Work (IRL)	41	57	57	56
At Work abroad	2	11	8	10
Training/Employment Scheme	2	4	5	5
Further Education	3	3	4	4
Unemployed	46	20	20	19
Home Duties	3	3	3	3
Emigrated not Working	0	1	1	1
Other	3	1	2	2
All %				
At Work (IRL)	26	38	42	44
At Work abroad	2	7	6	6
Training/Employment Scheme	2	5	7	7
Further Education	1	1	2	2
Unemployed	62	43	38	36
Home Duties	4	4	3	3
Emigrated not Working	1	1	1	1
Other	2	1	1	1

SST programme participants performed better than any other programme participants. Other related findings of the survey were that younger age groups performed better than older age groups and that education level had an effect on performance. As SST has, in the main, a young and well educated client group these factors must play a part in the good SST performance.

METHOD OF PLACEMENT		
	SST %	All Participants %
Placed from Course	32	25
FAS Employment Office	8	8
Answering Ads	11	12
Employment Agency	4	3
Personal Contacts	41	47
Other	4	5

SST persons did not differ considerably from all FAS course/scheme participants in their methods of securing employment. SST persons were slightly more likely to have been placed directly from their courses and all other FAS persons relied more on personal contacts than was the case with SST people. The average figure given for all FAS measures would need to be treated with some caution as it includes figures for people recruited under recruitment incentive schemes which would naturally have a higher likelihood of being placed as a result of FAS intervention.

CONTRIBUTION OF ATTENDANCE AT FAS PROGRAMME TO FINDING FIRST JOB		
	SST %	All Participants %
Would have got job anyway	49	60
Not without FAS Course	51	40

SST seems to perform relatively well in this area with at least half the participants claiming that they would not have acquired their employment without having attended the course. As was the case with methods of placement the nature of some measures, Employment Incentive Scheme (EIS) for example, will skew the average figure somewhat as employment schemes, by their nature, place people in employment.

USE OF COURSE SKILLS IN JOB		
	SST %	All Participants %
All the time	39	26
A lot	9	7
Sometimes	18	15
A little	8	12
Never	26	40

SST performs better than any other FAS measure when it comes to the use of course acquired skills in employment. However, SST participants should perform better as they are gaining a specific skill which would not be the case in some other measures. At least three quarters of respondents stated that they used the skills acquired from their SST course. This is one of the most significant findings of the 1991 survey as it indicates, relative to other measures, SST has a greater degree of relevance to employer needs.

AVERAGE WEEKLY EARNINGS IN FIRST POST TRAINING JOB	
SST	£100.55
All Participants	£98.94

Other measures, such as jobsearch and enterprise training, exceeded the SST average by up to £20. This is almost certainly due to the high proportion of young people leaving SST and entering the labour market, in many cases for the first time, at relatively low wages. Programmes with higher weekly averages have much higher proportions of older and more experienced workers who are able to re-enter the labour market at slightly higher rates of pay. Placed in this context average earnings for SST participants are satisfactory. Employers usually pay in proportion to their perception of the relevant skill level of the employee. As the authors of the 1991 report point out, a comparison of pre-training pay levels with post-training pay levels would yield more relevant data.

PLACEMENT			
SST	Course End	6 months	12 months
%	43	68	65

The pattern of placement, which peaked at six months and fell slightly by the time a year has elapsed, is to be seen across the range of SST courses. Construction and the literary/artistic areas showed the greatest fluctuation.

Relevance of placement

In compiling the figures for relevance the occupations and industries reported were compared with the course content and a decision was made as to whether the placement was totally relevant, somewhat relevant or not relevant at all.

RELEVANCE OF SST COURSE TO EMPLOYMENT OBTAINED		
	% of employed	% of total SST
Relevant	48	38
Somewhat Relevant	21	17
Not relevant	31	25

Of those who secured employment 48% did so in wholly relevant areas. A further 21% secured employment that was somewhat relevant. However a total of 69% had secured employment that had some degree of relevance. Viewed within the context of the total SST population just over half of the course participants had found employment that had some degree of relevance to the courses that had been attended.

9. SURVEY OF EMPLOYERS

The Programme Evaluation Unit undertook a small sample survey of Irish employers. This was carried out in July and August of 1992. The survey was concerned with a range of general training issues which will inform the approach of the Unit in general. The 101 employers who were interviewed, on a face to face basis, were randomly selected using the Business and Finance Top 1,000 list, for the larger employers, and the Golden Pages directories for the remainder. The Unit sought to interview either the managing director or personnel manager in each case and in the majority of cases was facilitated in this.

The results of a survey based on such a small sample size cannot, in any way, be claimed as representative of the views and practices of Irish industry as a whole. However the employers concerned are spread across the range of sectors and collectively employ more than 8,500 people and to that extent can be said to give an indication of training practices and attitudes.

The Employers

Of the 101 firms surveyed, 28 (27.7%) employ more than 50 persons. There were 73 (72.3%) firms with less than 50 employees. Three quarters of the firms surveyed were Irish owned and one quarter foreign owned. However, while only comprising 25% of the total, the foreign firms employ 4,648 persons or 54% of all employees within the sample.

The firms surveyed fell into the following broad categories:

SURVEY OF EMPLOYERS: SECTOR OF COMPANIES INTERVIEWED

Industrial Sector	%
Engineering	5
Manufacturing	26
Physical Distribution	21
Construction	3
Communications	1
Services	44

Besides its general focus on training some specific measures were addressed. Employers were asked about their contact with FAS and about their perceptions and experiences of the SST programme. Most employers were not aware of SST as a programme of training and often identified SST by individual courses names or as "training in FAS training centres". FAS take the view that employers are more interested in the course type than the idea of a general body of training for industry. This will be referred to again later.

Of the employers surveyed 43 (42.6%) indicated that they had either recruited trainees directly from an SST course or had hired people in the last two years who had completed an SST course. Considering that a large number of the companies surveyed are very small, this is a very satisfactory proportion.

Most employers, 31 (72%), who had recruited former SST trainees considered that the programme provided an adequate general grounding in a specific skill and was indeed relevant to the companies activities. This represents a high level of satisfaction.

An attempt was made to gauge the extent to which SST qualifications influenced recruitment decisions. Employers were asked to recall the last former SST trainee they had recruited, if the recruitment took place within the last two years. They were then asked about the extent to which the fact that the person had completed an SST course influenced the decision to recruit the former trainee. The question was, "Would the company have hired that person if he/she had not completed the FAS course?" Employers were asked to choose between five alternative responses and did so as follows:

SST COURSES AND RECRUITMENT	
Response	**No. of companies**
Definitely Not	15
Probably Not	8
Don't know	8
Probably Would Have	3
Definitely Would Have	9

Over half the companies concerned indicated that the possession of an SST qualification influenced the decision to recruit partly or decisively. Only 12 companies indicated that they probably or definitely would have recruited the person anyway.

Some companies have contact with FAS personnel involved in the SST programme and recruit directly from SST courses. Other companies do not have such contacts and recruited former SST trainees as part of their normal recruitment process. By focusing on the last former SST trainee recruited it was hoped that more valid responses would be obtained from both types of employers. This proved to be the case at the pilot stage of the survey.

Some employers recruit extensively from the SST programme. One example of such a company, interviewed as part of the survey, is an electrical products manufacturer employing over 100 persons. The company has a policy of recruiting all its semi-skilled workers from SST electronic courses. To date they have recruited 65 such persons, more than half the company's workforce, in this way. This success has prompted the personnel manager to look at other SST courses, particularly word processing and secretarial courses as a source of recruits. The company is foreign owned and the fact that well trained semi-skilled workers can be obtained at a very low cost is seen as an important part of the argument for the retention of the operation in Ireland.

Employers were also asked if they were aware of any skill needs for which there are no suitable training courses. Twenty two employers made suggestions. The list of skill needs mentioned was varied and tended to relate to the specific industry with which the respondent was concerned. However, it is not the purpose of SST to provide training that is tailored to individual employer needs. Such training should be paid for by the employer. Some employers mentioned the need for particular SST courses to be run in their area. Among those were two employers who asked that the SST Retail Sales course be run in their area. Four employers mentioned customer care/professional image counselling as a skill need that should be addressed. These employers regarded these as very desirable skills to be acquired by their own employees and as a type of training they would be quite willing to pay for. These were mainly large firms in the sales and service sectors. Courses in multiskilling were mentioned by three employers as one area where increased resources could be invested. Some employers mentioned skill needs for which courses, in their areas, actually exist. These employers were among those lacking in information about the FAS range of activities.

Employers were not asked specifically about sponsored SST. However three companies volunteered the information that they regularly use FAS for this purpose. The three areas were, forklift truck driving, woodworking and electrical assembly.

10. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

FAS does not market SST as a distinct body of training for industry. This evaluation suggests that they should, perhaps under a different title. SST Objective 1 training is quite successful in achieving the aims set down in the Operational Programme for Industry and Services. However, the Programme has the potential to improve. It must be updated if it is to retain its present level of success and build on that success.

ESF Funding Mechanisms

It is evident, from an examination of the trainee population of the SST programme, that the division of ESF funding for SST between three Operational Programmes does not have a lot of meaning on the ground and may lead to some confusion. The provision of data would be a much easier exercise if only one Operational Programme were involved. However, it must be said that FAS have made every effort to provide the data in the required format for this evaluation, which was more detailed than that required for ESF purposes. If the SST programme was to receive all its ESF funding under Objective 1, then the upgrading of the programme could be more focused on the skill needs of industry. This would be in line with the suggestions outlined below.

The Public Perception of the SST Programme

SST is a successful FAS programme but it should be presented to the public as such. It became apparent, during the employer survey fieldwork, that while most employers were aware of some SST courses, very few were aware that the SST programme exists as a distinct body of training. As already mentioned, most employers have a good opinion of the SST courses that they have contact with. However, these good perceptions are not being built upon. The creation of an image, based upon the existing success of SST, which would focus on the concept of SST and the range of courses available should be considered. The public, employers and trainees included, could be presented with an image of SST as a large successful programme, relevant to industry and with good placement rates. This could be part of the promotional and marketing improvements that FAS are planning. However other developments would also need to take place simultaneously.

The lack of a clear public perception of SST means that the programme can be confused with other FAS interventions. Other programmes for the unemployed, managed by FAS have a more social orientation in terms of objectives. From an employer point of view these

measures are less relevant than SST. However, as no clear cut image for SST has been established it is sometimes associated with these programmes and this may facilitate an element of confusion. The relevance of SST to the needs of industry must be firmly established in the public mind. Upgrading the perception of SST might improve opportunities for unemployed participants as it would associate them more with the training than their previous employment status.

The survey of employers conducted by the Programme Evaluation Unit found that some employers thought that they lacked information about FAS activities in general. Some suggested that regular mailshots to employers be considered or that information campaigns be mounted. In this context the concept of SST as a training intervention designed to meet the needs of employers should be promoted. Any such campaign should seek to differentiate SST courses from other FAS activities and promote SST as an easily identifiable training measure relevant to all sectors of industry. Its elements and structure should be communicated to the public at large and to employers in particular. Some degree of programme streamlining would be necessary before such a campaign should be mounted.

Course Names

Courses which have largely the same content can be run in different training centres under different names. This is part of the FAS policy of allowing autonomy at local level. However it does nothing for the overall image of the SST programme. Name changes should also be kept to a minimum as the proliferation of course names presents an image of superficiality. It is essential that an image of certainty is presented to employers and trainees. Employer recognition will be enhanced by a standardisation of practice with regard to course names.

Course Harmonisation

During visits to training centres, conducted by the Programme Evaluation Unit, it became apparent that a harmonisation programme is underway. This is being carried out under the auspices of the Operations Manager of the FAS regions division. All training centre managers interviewed were involved in this process. Working groups have been established to look at courses relevant to certain sectors of industry. For example, all electronics courses are being examined by one group. The rationale of the programme is to bring some uniformity to the titles of courses and also to the content and durations. The approach involves the development of a range of core modules which will be common to all courses

in a given field. Optional modules will be permitted to cater for local circumstances where desirable. Course and module durations will also be of common length.

The potential benefits of the harmonisation process are obvious. Any effort at streamlining the SST programme will go a long way towards dispelling the confusion which may exist about SST. Also it assists in the development of a distinct identity for the SST programme. The planning process, including the requirements of certification and standards, will also be enhanced by an increased degree of harmonisation. This work is essential to any upgrading measures that may take place.

Upgrading, Employer Involvement and Course Duration

Within the context of an upgrading of SST the issue of course duration needs to be addressed. At present most SST courses run for slightly less than six months, some are in the 12 to 16 week range. In most cases courses are intended to deliver basic skills and deliver operatives or semi-skilled operatives with a good grounding in a specific skill. However some courses train to a higher level. Perhaps a hierarchy of levels should be established. This would facilitate moves towards a system of progression.

Employer involvement should be more formally integrated into the SST programme. Employers who recruit from SST courses or send employees on sponsored SST courses are usually pleased with the results. A commitment to deliver a structured element of practical training in the workplace should be sought. If employer involvement is to be part of the process then the average course duration will need to be extended. This might lead, in the long run to a lower throughput. However the potential increase in quality and relevance would outweigh these considerations.

Course Structure and Progression

Given that the SST programme produces a large range of skills and a large annual throughput the question of progression is relevant in any upgrading developments. A streamlined SST programme could provide a structure through which trainees could progress from a basic skill level to higher level courses, where appropriate, within FAS or other agencies. Recent improvements in the area of certification have prepared the way for the possibility of a system of credits whereby SST achievement would entitle trainees to entry to other courses and or exemptions to the basic elements of relevant courses in other agencies. This assumes that an effort to upgrade the SST programme is undertaken.

Placement Rates

FAS places a great deal of emphasis on placement rates. Placement rates are often the performance measure used by management in the course review process. A high proportion of courses, in 1991, failed to meet the 75% placement target. As suggested this target seems too high given current economic circumstances.

As mentioned earlier the method of placement tracking presently in operation gives on overall placement rate for a course for a period up to six months after course termination. Too much can be read into these rates. The rate of relevant placement may be more useful and may reveal more about the match between SST course contents and industry skill needs. The rate of relevant placement could be used to construct more realistic targets.

Consideration should also be give to the annual publication of placement rates, as part of the promotional work suggested above.

FAS Head Office and the Regions

The effective delivery of training requires a clear, systematic, working relationship between head office and the regions and FAS places emphasis on this issue. However, the apparent lack of such a relationship is to be seen in the area of skill needs identification and course development. FAS Head Office should develop a systematic co-ordinating role in these activities. This could take place within the context of the development of a comprehensive set of systematic procedures for skill need identification, relevance checking together with a complimentary procedure of course development.

The Aims of Programme Upgrading

The end result of any major change to the SST programme should aim to result in an upgraded and streamlined programme that is well known as a distinct body of training and is relevant to the needs of industry and involves industry in the training process in a structured way. The issue of progression should be given consideration in any upgrading of the SST programme.

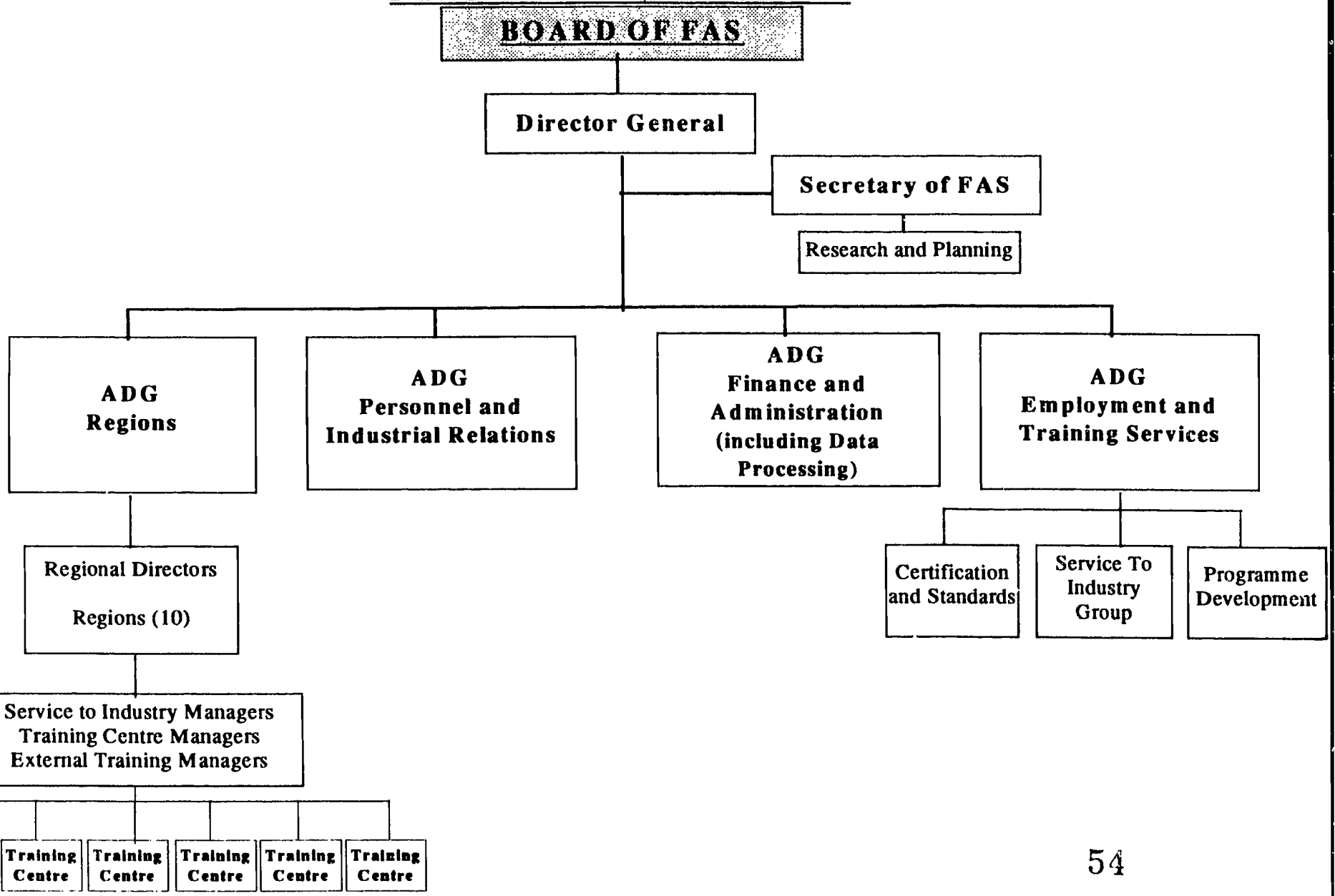
Final Comments

This evaluation has found that the SST programme, particularly the elements funded under the Industry and Services Operational Programme, has the potential to play a greater role in meeting the skill needs of Irish industry. Much has already been done in the area of

course development and certification and standards. However, with relatively minor adjustments, this evaluation concludes that the SST programme could increase its impact. In particular, a concentration on co-ordination, harmonisation and promotion is required, as outlined above, while maintaining the responsiveness to local needs generated by the regional structure of the organisation.

APPENDIX 1

FAS ORGANISATION CHART



APPENDIX 2

List of Objective 1 SST Courses run in FAS Training Centres, 1991

Hydraulic/Pneumatics	Construction Plant Fitter
Milling	Upholstery
General Engineering for Operatives	Materials Management
Electrical Assembly	Introduction to Business
Radio/T.V. Servicing	Screen printing
Manual Arc Gas Welding	Retail Sales
Updating of Skills	Advanced Welding
Machine Tool Operators	Machine Tool Overhaul
Sewing Machine Operators	Audio Visual Repair
General Construction For Operatives	Redundant Craftsmen
Business Administration	Knitting Machine Operators
Sewing Machine Servicing	Industrial Electronics
Office Equipment Servicing	Cutting Cloth Trade
Industrial Instrumentation	Light Skills Development
Panel Beating	Business Skill/Development Programme
Sheet Metal Work	Engineering Skills
Engineering Craft	Basic Multi Skills
Precision Machinery Operators	Electronics
Basic Electronics	Light Production and Assembly
Office Procedures	Industrial Organisation
Junior Management	Book Keeping/Computer Appreciation
Domestic appliance Servicing	Electromechanical Service Engineering
Stores Procedures	Polymer Operatives
Digital Electronics	Polymer Setting
In-Company	Polymer Updating
Special	Electronic Servicing
Construction Skills	Road Transport Organisation
Hairdressing	Micro Computer Maintenance
Heavy Goods Vehicle Driving	Computer Office Systems
Welding/Fabrication	Quality Control
Partsperson	Draughting CAD/CAM
Fork Lift Truck Driving	CRSE.Ware Technician
Draughtsmen	Land Market/Gardening
Garage operatives	Graphics/Photography

Construction Plant Drivers	Co-op Development
Industrial Skills	Craft Skills
Redundant Apprentices	Property Maintenance
Spray Painting	Gas Installation/Fault Diagnosis
Food Retailing Course	Word Processing/Electronic Office
Motor Cycle/Engine Repair	Business Computer Studies
Security/Surveillance	Agricultural Maintenance
Plant Maintenance	Woodwork for Adults
Furniture Restoration	Production Skills
Shipping Freight Forwarding	Basic Accounting
Building Service Operators	Book-Keeping
Computerised Office	New Technology
Alarm Installation	Computer Applications
Micro Electronics	Data Communications
General Print Skills	Information Technology/Electronics Computers
Software Applications	Skin Care
Sales Representative	Redundant Apprentices in R.T.C.s
maintenance of Automated Factory Systems	Pharmacy Sales Assistant
Clerical Development	Software Development
Business accounting	Computer Appreciation/ PC Operator Systems
Painting Decorating craft	Child Care
Careers Assessment	COE-Instrumentation
COE-Electronic Business Equipment	COE-English Language
Computerised Business Systems	Computer Servicing
Machining Computer Engineer	Draughting - Computer Aided Engineering
Computer Numerical Control Machining	Certificate in Accounting
Computer Aided Engineering	Micro Computer Technician training programme
Advanced Computer Aided Engineering	Aircraft Maintenance
Software Support	Desk Top Publishing
Interior Design	Building Service/Draughting
Computerised Book-Keeping	COE(1991) Combined
Project Romania	L.T.U. Pilot
Basic Engineering	Interior Decorating

List of Objective 1 SST Externally run courses , 1991

Printed Circuit Board Design and Layout	Advanced Manufacturing Techniques
Pattern Grad and Design	Accounting/Taxation
Sewing Machinists	Specialist Sales Representatives
Legal Secretary	Managerial Skills
Outdoor Recreation Centre Instructor/Manager	Production
Business Accounting	Careers in Computing
Tourist Development	Computer Office Systems
Women Into Management	Rural Development Programme
Machine Knitting	Quality Control
Butcher/Boner	Computer Applications
Business Skills/Languages	Security Officer
Accounting Technician	Sales/Marketing
Beauty Therapist	Hairdressing
Quality Management and Development Programme	Trainee Jeweller
Commercial Business Skills	Desk Top Publishing
Production Supervisor	Retail Butcher
Heavy Goods Transportation	Business Skills
Childcare	Swimming Pool Management
Communication and Public Relations	Health Studio Instructor
International Trade and 1992	Home Workers
Product Engineering	Pilot
Western Tourism News Project	Advertising and Sales
Basic Electronics	Drivers for Road Freight
Computer Service and Support Systems	Management Development Programme
Retail Sales	Credit Control
Skill Training W/S for Women	Recording Studio Production
New Applications for Information Technology	Animation and Graphics
International Transport Operations	Women into Business and Technical Skills
Executive Secretary	Farm Relief Development Techniques
Warehousing and Distribution	Office Procedures
Home Services	Food Skills
Construction Operators	Selling Financial Services
Clerical Skills	Canine Management
New opportunity	New Skills for the 90s
Equestrian and Stable Management	Struct. Prog/Techniq
Industrial Relations	Financial Management - Small Business
Computerised Business Studies	Horticultural Business Study
Sales Planning Management	Programmer/Analyst
Software Engineering	Software Support
Wood Carving	Computerised Accounts

APPENDIX 3

SPONSORED TRAINING

FAS carry out sponsored training for employers. This is training wholly paid for by employers. No exchequer or ESF funding is involved. These courses are mainline SST courses that are adapted to meet the needs of individual employers. The courses are developed as part of the ESF funded SST programme initially and as such must assist in maintaining course relevance in the overate programme.

The demand for sponsored training is a good indicator of relevance as it constitutes training for which employers are willing to pay in full. The table below sets out the sponsored courses run in 1991 and the throughput on each course.

However this is not an indication of true demand. FAS training centres are geared to deliver their own planned SST programme and can only "fit in" sponsored training during the natural breaks in training courses. This does not always suit employers who may not be able to release employees for training.

During visits to training centres it became apparent that sponsored training was not encouraged by the budgetary system. If a training centre carries out sponsored training the income cannot be retained at local level. Also planning for the following year will assume the same level of income can be generated. As such there is very little incentive for local management to promote or expand their sponsored training activities.

TOTAL SPONSORED THROUGHPUT IN 1991 FROM SST IN TRAINING CENTRES

Course	
General Engineering For Operatives	6
Electrical Assembly	81
Manual Arc Gas Welding	19
Updating of Skills	77
Machine Tool Overhaul	6
Machine Tool Operating	12
Industrial Instrumentation	15
Panel Beating	9

Precision Machine Operatives	65
Basic Electronics	3
Special	49
Construction Skills	22
HGV Driving	11
Welding/Fabrication	104
Fork Lift Truck Driving	641
Garage Operatives	183
Spray Painting	20
Construction Plant Fitter	7
Upholstery	3
Advanced Welding	42
Engineering Skills	25
Basic Multi Skills	65
Anco Electronics	16
Industrial Organisation	24
Electro/Mechanical Service Engineer	12
Polymer Operating	1
Polymer Setting	4
Polymer Updating	143
Micro Computer Maintenance	3
Course Ware Technician	7
Gas Installation/Fault Diagnosis	342
Word Processing/Electronic Offic	10
Agricultural Maintenance	75
Woodwork for Adults	1
Alarm Installation	10
Computer Application	16
Mouldwork-Fibre Plastics	4
Coe-English Language	35
Mechanised Computer Engineering	1
Computer Numeric Control Systems	1
Building Services Draughting	2
Coe 1991 Combined	43
OVERALL TOTAL	2,215

Sponsored training is concentrated in the traditional areas of FAS activity. These are the engineering, electrical and construction areas. However one course, Fork Lift Truck Driving, accounted for over one quarter (26%) of 1991 throughput.

Other Evaluations Completed by the European Social Fund Programme Evaluation Unit

Preliminary Review on Community Employment (June 1995)

Report on the Impact of Evaluations (May 1995)

Evaluation Report on Training and Employment Grants (February 1995)

Evaluation Report on the Vocational Preparation and Training Programme (August 1994)

Survey of Micro Enterprise (July 1994)

Thematic Evaluation on Women's Training Provision (April 1994)

Thematic Evaluation on Recording Systems (April 1994)

Thematic Evaluation on Impact Indicators (April 1994)

Thematic Evaluation on Training of Trainers (March 1994)

Survey of Employers (December 1993)

Follow-Up Evaluation on the FÁS Specific Skills Training Programme (December 1993)

Follow-Up Evaluation on the FÁS Industrial Restructuring Programme (December 1993)

Evaluation of Certification Systems (December 1993)

Evaluation Report on FÁS Enterprise Measures (June 1993)

Evaluation Report on the Human Resources Sub-Programme of the Tourism Operational Programme (June 1993)

Evaluation Report on the Middle Level Technician and Higher Technical and Business Skills Programmes (June 1993)

Evaluation Report on the Advanced Technical Skills Programme (December 1992)

Evaluation Report on the FÁS Industrial Restructuring Programme (December 1992)

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