

# Working It Out

A report on the barriers to employment  
faced by people who are homeless





# I. Introduction

Cork Simon Community works with some of the most vulnerable and excluded people in Cork. Forty-four people stay every night at the Emergency Shelter – people who are sick, isolated and in need of high levels of care and support. At the end of June 2012, a quarter of all people staying at the Cork Simon Emergency Shelter every night were long term homeless<sup>1</sup> – staying at the Shelter for six months or longer because they had nowhere else to go.

A further forty-seven people live in five high-support houses – termed high-support because people living there have a complex range of needs that require round-the-clock care. A further twenty-seven people are supported in returning to independent-living in Cork Simon flats throughout the city – people who have survived homelessness and are on track to rebuilding their lives. That's housing and one-to-one support for 118 people every day and night.

Cork Simon also supports people living in private rented accommodation, in city and county council houses and in accommodation provided by various housing associations; supporting people to keep their tenancies and to begin leaving homelessness behind them. For some – particularly those with complex health and related needs, and who are long-term unemployed, it can be a long journey.

A Cork Simon Outreach Team is often the first point of contact for people who are sleeping rough or have just become homeless, or for people who have to live in appalling conditions in squats, making sure people can take that first step to finally getting the right help and support they need to begin their journey. The Cork Simon Soup Run operates every night of the year with hot, nourishing food, blankets, and a friendly ear, providing a vital link to the Outreach Team.

A Cork Simon Youth Homeless Drugs Prevention Project (YHDPP) is a key resource for young adults who are at risk of becoming, or who have already become, homeless. Almost one fifth of people using Cork Simon services during 2011 were in the 18 to 26 year old age group<sup>2</sup>. The YHDPP works with this age group - young people that have little or no direction in their lives, have poor relations with their families and have little experience to call on.

A Cork Simon Employment and Training Facilitator works on a one-to-one basis with people helping to identify gaps in training and education, organising appropriate training and offering encouragement and advice to each person along the way. The Facilitator also liaises with employers throughout Cork, identifying employment opportunities for people using Cork Simon services. In the 12 month period from May 2011 to May 2012, 23 job positions have been secured and 102 certificates achieved by Cork Simon residents through the programme which is one of the key factors in supporting people to move out of homelessness.

A Cork Simon Activities Co-Ordinator works across all Cork Simon services, liaising with external agencies and organisations where necessary, to create opportunities for people to build self confidence, social networks and to facilitate interaction with the wider community. Often people who are homeless have little or no self confidence or optimism. A programme of activities can help address that and offers an alternative to destructive lifestyles.

The complexity of homelessness cannot be underestimated. There is no one cause and no one solution. What works for one person, is most likely to be completely inappropriate for another. While the availability of good quality housing is crucial in addressing homelessness, the appropriateness of that housing - and the supports that go with it, are equally important. Complex needs – a combination of poor mental health, poor physical health, problem alcohol and drug use, low levels of education and qualifications, poor basic skills, poor coping skills, a lack of social networks and more must all be addressed if people are to have a chance of succeeding in leaving homelessness behind them.

This report on the barriers to employment faced by people who are homeless was conducted among 91 people using Cork Simon services during a four week period<sup>3</sup> in June / July 2012 in order to build a picture of the nature and extent of some of those barriers and to highlight the complex nature of homelessness among people using those services.

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<sup>1</sup> Government strategy on homelessness, The Way Home, defines long term homelessness as stays of six months or more in emergency accommodation.

<sup>2</sup> Cork Simon Community. (2011). Keeping Count 2011. Profile of Cork Simon Services.

<sup>3</sup> June 18<sup>th</sup> to July 16<sup>th</sup> 2012.

## 2. Executive Summary

A total of 91 Cork Simon residents, representing approximately 51% of people using Cork Simon services over a one month period, participated in this study. 80% of those surveyed are men, the majority are in the 35-44 age group, 13% are under 26 years of age and 78% are Irish nationals.

### *Employment Status*

8% of respondents are in receipt of a state pension, 4% are employed part-time and the remaining 88% are unemployed. 19% of those unemployed are affected by the Habitual Residency Condition (HRC)<sup>4</sup> precluding them from availing of any vital social protection supports. Among the 84 people of working age who participated in the survey, 95% are unemployed of whom 92% are long-term unemployed – out of work for a year or more.

### *Key Barriers Identified*

Those surveyed face personal and often complex barriers including poor physical and mental health, addiction, learning difficulty, low levels of confidence and high rates of perceived prejudice by employers against people who are homeless. Many encounter educational barriers of limited basic skills including literacy, numeracy and IT literacy, high rates of early school leaving and low levels of qualifications. They face work related barriers of long-term unemployment, criminal records, limited work experience and limited or redundant work skills. Combined, these barriers present a very challenging environment.

Many barriers influence and compound one another, such as the affects of long-term unemployment on confidence and the influence of early school leaving on literacy levels, qualifications and work frequency.

The five most significant barriers identified among participants are:

- Long-term unemployment affecting 92% of unemployed

- respondents;
- Early-school leaving affecting 65%;
- Perceived prejudice among potential employers affecting 65%;
- Poor physical and mental health affecting 63%; and
- Low confidence affecting 59% of unemployed respondents of working age.

### *Poor Mental and Physical Health*

Recurring repeatedly throughout this study, ill-health is one of the most pervasive barriers to employment. More than half of those that are unemployed are in receipt of Disability Allowance or Illness Benefit<sup>5</sup>, indicating a high level of poor health, while 63% of all respondents believe their physical or mental health would make working difficult. 58% of all respondents believe their alcohol or drug dependencies are making it harder to think about working.

### *Confidence and Perceived Prejudice*

The personal barrier of confidence and the perceived prejudice among potential employers identified by participants are strong. 59% of those that are unemployed and of working age do not feel confident looking for or returning to work while 65% of all respondents believe people are not going to employ someone who is or has been homeless, highlighting the lack of confidence and optimism among people who are homeless. Even among the small minority that indicate they are 'work-ready', 71% do not feel confidence looking for and returning to work.

### *Education & Learning*

The majority of participants have experienced difficult challenges from a young age with 65% of respondents leaving school early, at an average of 14 years of age. This rate of early school leaving is more than double the national average<sup>6</sup>. A majority of 29% left school early due to family circumstances while a further 12% were expelled – a strong indicator of troubled lives from an early age among more than 40%

<sup>4</sup> On May 1<sup>st</sup> 2004 the Irish Government introduced the Habitual Residence Condition (HRC) as an additional criteria for qualifying for social supports. In order to qualify a person must demonstrate that they are 'habitually resident' in Ireland – that they have been living in Ireland for approximately 2 years or more, and that they intend to settle here and make it their permanent home.

<sup>5</sup> To qualify for a Department of Social Protection Disability Payment applicants must satisfy a means test, have an injury, disease or physical or mental disability that has continued or may be expected to continue for at least one year, be substantially restricted in undertaking work that would otherwise be suitable for an applicant's age, experience and qualifications, and satisfy the Habitual Residence Condition – Citizen Information ([www.citizeninformation.ie](http://www.citizeninformation.ie)). To qualify for a Department of Social Protection Illness Benefit applicants must satisfy a number of criteria, including an adequate number of PRSI contributions and the HRC.

<sup>6</sup> 29% of those aged 15-64 left school early according to the Central Statistics Office Quarterly National Household Survey, Educational Attainment Thematic Report 2011.

of early school leavers. Early school leaving is a significant barrier because of its ripple effect: it generally contributes to and exacerbates other barriers such as low literacy, low confidence and low levels of qualification.

In addition to low rates of school completion, 54% have no formal qualifications while 75% have either no formal qualifications or their training is virtually out of date – having been completed three or more years ago and not having worked in the intervening years.

52% experience barriers to learning in the form of a diagnosed learning difficulty, functional illiteracy or such poor concentration levels and ability to remember that working and studying are difficult.

#### *Literacy, Numeracy & IT Skills*

Approximately a third of people who participated in this study lack the basic skills of literacy, numeracy and IT literacy needed for the workplace as well as for many everyday situations. 35% indicate low literacy while 1 in 10 indicate functional illiteracy. Numeracy is also problematic with almost a third believing difficulty with maths has made getting and keeping jobs harder. IT literacy is particularly low, highlighted by the 58% that have never used or are not confident using a computer - 30% of whom have never used a computer. Surprisingly, IT illiteracy is not exclusive to older age groups with 11% of 22-26 year olds, 8% of 27-34 year olds and 22% of 35-44 year olds reporting they have never used a computer.

#### *Employment & Skills*

90% of respondents worked at some point in their lives, with almost half working all or most of their lives. However, 52% have limited or no work experience, working only the 'odd job', working rarely or never working.

Almost half of those that worked were employed in unskilled jobs, indicating a limited range of transferable skills. The barrier of limited work skills is reiterated by the 49% of respondents who agree they need new skills to return to work.

Length of time out of work further impacts on work skills - 92% of those that are unemployed and of working age are long-term unemployed<sup>11</sup>. As the length of time unemployed increases, levels of confidence and skills decrease. Just over half of those unemployed for 3-5 years feel confident about looking for and returning to work, falling to a quarter of those that have not worked in 5-10 years and falling to just 13% of those out of work for ten or more years or never

worked.

As well as automatically precluding a person from certain jobs, according to a National Institute of Economic and Social Research report in 2001<sup>7</sup> a criminal record can also increase chances of subjective rejection from jobs. While 65% of participants hold a criminal record, 90% of those that hold a criminal record have worked in the past with 39% working all or most of their lives and 25% working in the last 3 years. Among those that hold a criminal record, more than a third (36%) left school early due to family circumstance, a higher number than the general survey and a number indicating troubled lives from a young age.

Some groups are affected by a particular set of barriers more strongly than others.

#### *Young People*

For example, addiction is a greater barrier among younger than older age groups, particularly for under 26s with a majority of 44% of 18-26 year olds who were employed identifying it as the cause of their unemployment. Low levels of education, training and work experience are also significant barriers for those under 26. Higher rates of early school leaving are noted among under 26s with 75% of 18-26 year olds finishing school before the Leaving Certificate. Compounding this, 75% of under 26s have never taken part in training. 1 in 4 under 26s have never worked and of those that have, the majority worked 'the odd job', employed in un-skilled work, highlighting limited or no work skills and experience as a particular barrier for young people.

#### *Older People*

Ill-health is a particularly significant barrier among older people. Almost three-quarters of unemployed respondents over 45 are in receipt of Disability Allowance or Illness Benefit while 83% of all respondents over 45 identify poor physical or mental health as their biggest worry regards working. Also, confidence drops with age and is a considerable issue among those over 45 years with only 23% of people in this age group expressing confidence about looking for and returning to work.

#### *Women*

Women appear more susceptible to poor physical or mental health with 31% of unemployed women who once worked compared to 19% of unemployed men who once worked reporting poor health as the main reason for losing their last job. More than a quarter of women have never worked, compared to

<sup>7</sup> National Institute of Economic and Social Research. (2001). Barriers to employment for offenders and ex-offenders. 2001.

7% of men, highlighting lack of work experience as a particular barrier among women. Possibly linked to lack of work experience, women report lower confidence looking for and returning to work – just over a third (35%) of unemployed women of working age express confidence in looking for and returning to work, whereas 43% of unemployed men of working age feel confident about looking for and returning to work.

#### Men

Men appear more susceptible to addiction with 23% of unemployed men who once worked compared to 15% of unemployed women who once worked reporting addiction as the main reason for losing their last job. A majority of 36% of men were employed in construction or construction related work, highlighting the likely need for re-skilling among these men. Perceived prejudice is also stronger among men with 70% believing people are not going to employ someone who is or has been homeless, compared to 44% of women.

#### HRC Affected

19% of respondents are affected by the HRC restriction, precluding them from vital social protection supports. The HRC restriction is an almost uniquely debilitating barrier faced by non-Irish nationals with 67% of unemployed non-Irish nationals affected. What's more, 1 in 2 non-Irish nationals lost their last job due to redundancy and among these, 78% are HRC affected and essentially rendered destitute.

#### Looking to the Future

Despite these severe challenges, people want to work, want to engage in training and want to improve their skills.

51% of unemployed respondents of working age say their main goal is to return to work as soon as possible. However, only 9% of unemployed respondents of working age indicate that they are 'work-ready' – that is that their main goal is to return to work as soon as possible and they feel they are ready now to start and keep a job. People who indicate that they are 'work-ready' still identify barriers to employment, the most significant being confidence.

Among those unemployed and of working age 36% do not see returning to work as their main goal and 13% are unsure. The former constitute the group with the most challenging set of circumstances of all - 90% indicate physical or mental ill-health while 80% lack

confidence to look for and return to work and 93% have either no qualifications or their training is out of date (three or more years old and they have not worked in the intervening years).

While low levels of formal qualifications are identified in this report, 58% of respondents have engaged in training at some point in their lives indicating interest, motivation and a desire to improve circumstances.

What's more, many want to further improve their skills with 49% believing they need new skills to return to work. 59% of those indicating low literacy would like to further improve their reading or writing and 28% of those indicating low numeracy would like to improve their math skills.

20% of respondents are currently participating in training or have participated in the last year – a figure one percentage point higher than the general public's engagement in formal or informal learning in a 12 month period<sup>8</sup>. This most probably is a reflection of the Employment and Training Programme's engagement and support.

#### Supporting People Back to Work & Out of Homelessness

Various supports are needed to help people back into work: health supports are vital so people can address the barriers of physical and mental ill-health and addiction; educational supports so people can improve their literacy, numeracy and IT skills; training supports for people who either have no qualifications or whose qualifications are out of date or redundant; and supports including work experience are needed to address the lack of recent work experience among respondents and to build confidence and optimism.

The Adult Homeless Multidisciplinary Team, Cork Simon's Employment and Training Programme, and Activities Programme are an example of vital supports that help to address many of these needs. However supports such as these are at their most effective when people are in secure, long-term housing that is appropriate to their needs. The impact of supported housing on training participation levels is evident from the 67% of those in high support housing that have taken part in training and the 30% that are currently or have previously received literacy support. When housing is in place, people are in a more secure position to concentrate on addressing their barriers.

<sup>8</sup> Central Statistics Office. (2008). Quarterly National Household Survey, Lifelong Learning, Quarter 3 2008.

## 3. Main Findings

### 3.1 General

A total of 91 Cork Simon residents participated in this study over the course of a month from June 18<sup>th</sup> to July 16<sup>th</sup> 2012.

The numbers surveyed represent approximately 51% of Cork Simon residents over a one month period.

80% of those surveyed were men, the majority were in the 35-44 age group, 13% were under 26 years

of age and 78% were Irish nationals. The demographics of the survey group were consistent with the general Cork Simon population.<sup>9</sup>

43% of those surveyed were staying at the Emergency Shelter, half of whom were long-term homeless – as defined by Government as stays of six months or longer in emergency accommodation, 2% were recorded as sleeping rough, 36% were in High-Support Housing and 19% were in a flat with visiting support from Cork Simon’s Housing Support Team.

Gender		Age	
Male	80%	18-21	3%
Female	20%	22-26	10%
		27-34	13%
		35-44	30%
Nationality			
Irish nationals	78%	45-54	25%
Non-Irish nationals	22%	55-64	13%
		65+	6%
Accommodation Type			
Emergency Shelter Short-Term Homeless			23%
Emergency Shelter- Long-Term Homeless			20%
Rough Sleeping			2%
High Support Housing			36%
Housing Support			19%

**Table 1 Demographic breakdown of the 91 Cork Simon survey participants**

### 3.2 Employment Overview

#### 3.2.1 Employment status - 95% of those of working age are unemployed

88% of all survey respondents are unemployed. Among the 84 people of working age, 95% are unemployed.

More than half (51%) of those that are unemployed are in receipt of a Department of Social Protection Disability Allowance or Illness Benefit, indicating a high level of poor health. Of the remainder, 30% are in receipt of Unemployment Benefit / Assistance and 19% are affected by the Habitual Residency Condition (HRC). Those affected by the HRC are precluded from availing of a range of

vital social protection supports. They are effectively destitute. 20% of those affected by the HRC are Irish nationals.

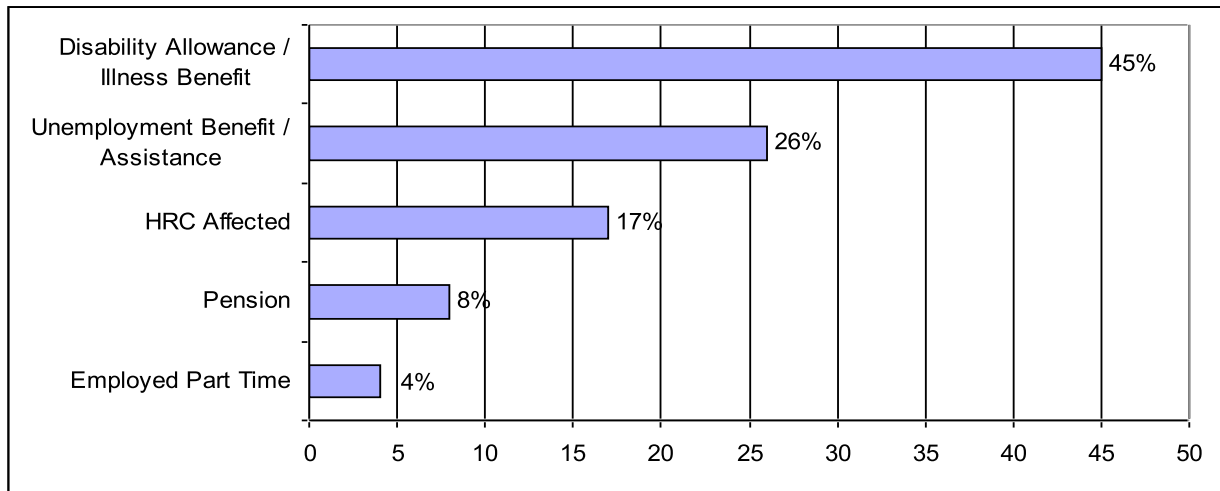
55% of those over 45 years of age are in receipt of Disability Allowance or Illness Benefit. When narrowed to unemployed respondents of working age over 45 years, the number rises to 73% indicating a particularly high level of poor health among older age groups.

8% are in receipt of a State Pension.

<sup>9</sup> Cork Simon Community. (2011). Keeping Count 2011.

4% are in part-time employment. Two are employed through the Community Employment (CE) Scheme.<sup>10</sup> Two are Irish and two are non-Irish nationals. Two are

in flats with visiting support from the Housing Support team, one is in High Support Housing and one is long-term homeless in the Emergency Shelter.



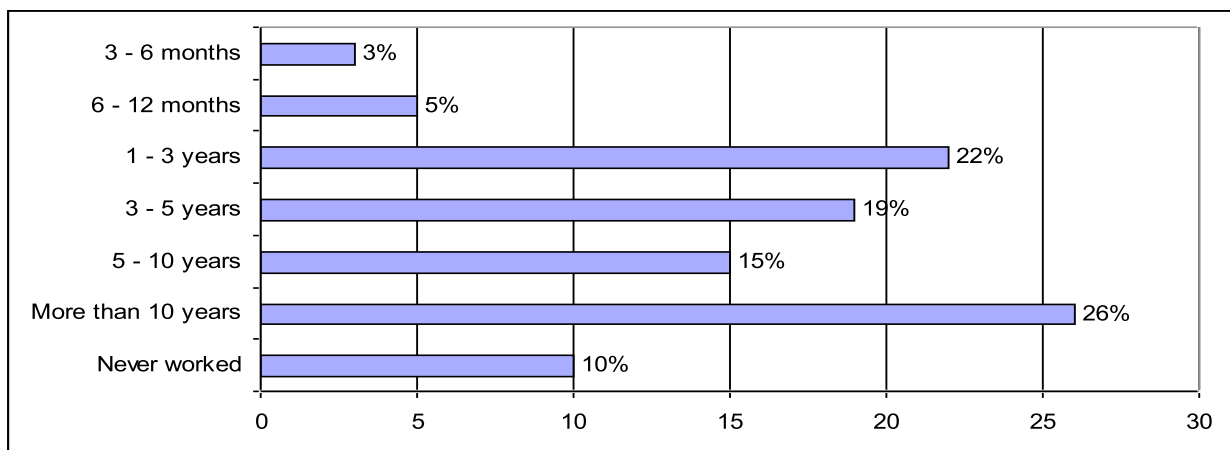
**Table 2 The frequency of unemployment (n.91)**

### 3.2.2 Length of time out of work – 92% of those that are unemployed and of working age are long-term unemployed.

Long-term unemployment is defined as one or more years unemployed.<sup>11</sup> 74 people, or 92% of those that are unemployed and of working age, are long-term unemployed.

for three years or more, 41% have been unemployed for 5 years or more and 26% have been unemployed for 10 years or more. Length of time out of work is a significant factor relating to a person’s ability to return to work. As years unemployed increase, work skills decrease while the psychological challenges of returning to work increase.

Whilst 10% of those unemployed and of working age have never worked, 60% have been unemployed



**Table 3 Length of time out of work among unemployed of working age (n.80)**

<sup>10</sup> The Community Employment (CE) programme is designed to help people who are long-term unemployed and other disadvantaged people to get back to work by offering part-time and temporary placements in jobs based within local communities.

<sup>11</sup> The Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed inou.ie



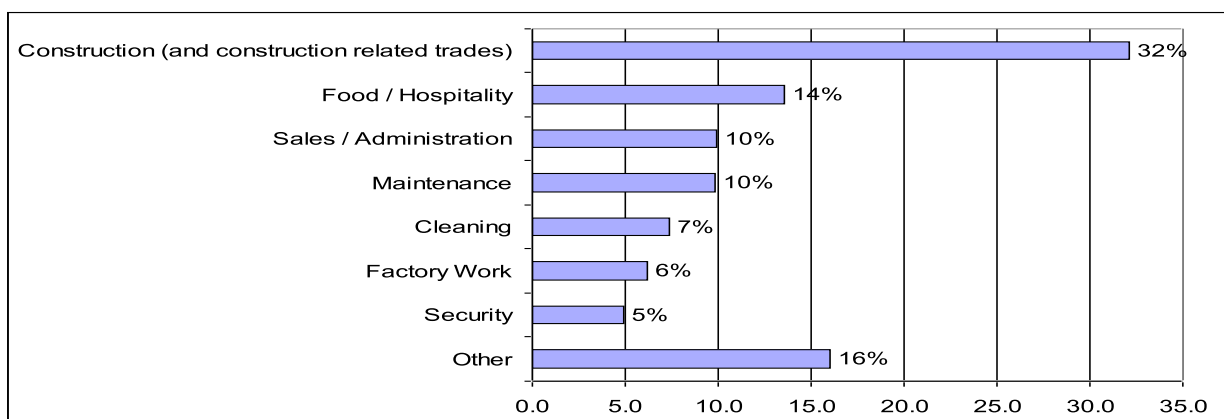
### 3.2.3 Work – how often, where and why not now?

90% of all respondent have worked at some stage in their lives. Almost half (48%) worked all or most of their lives while 30% worked 'the odd job', 12% rarely worked and 10% never worked. More women than men never worked – 28% of women never worked compared to 7% of men.

The majority of those that worked (47%) were employed in unskilled work, while 28% were employed in semi-skilled and 25% in skilled work.<sup>12</sup> The majority of men who worked (47%) were employed in unskilled work where as women who worked were as likely to be employed in semi-skilled (46%) as unskilled (46%) work. Men however were three and a half times more likely than women to be employed in skilled work with just 8% of women in comparison to 28% of men employed in this category.

People that completed second level education were much more likely to have worked most of their lives compared to people that left school early. Almost two thirds (64%) of those that completed school worked all or most of their lives whereas only one third of those that left school early worked all or most of their lives indicating the long-term effects of early school leaving. 35% of those that completed school were employed in skilled work compared to just 15% of those that left school early.

The majority of men were employed in the construction industry or in construction-related trades with 36% of men employed in this sector - highlighting a need for re-skilling among more than a third. Employment among women was more disperse with the most common areas of employment including the food / hospitality industry, cleaning and sales and administration.



**Table 4 Employment Industry among those that worked<sup>13</sup> (n.81)**

Reasons for unemployment vary among age groups. Addiction was the most common reason for job loss among 18-26 year olds who previously worked with 44% identifying it as the cause of their unemployment. Redundancy was the main cause of unemployment among 26-44 year olds who previously worked as identified by 40%, while the majority of

those over 45 years who previously worked identified ill-health (30%), closely followed by redundancy (27%), as their main cause of unemployment.

Addiction is a marginally more significant cause of job loss among men than women. The majority of

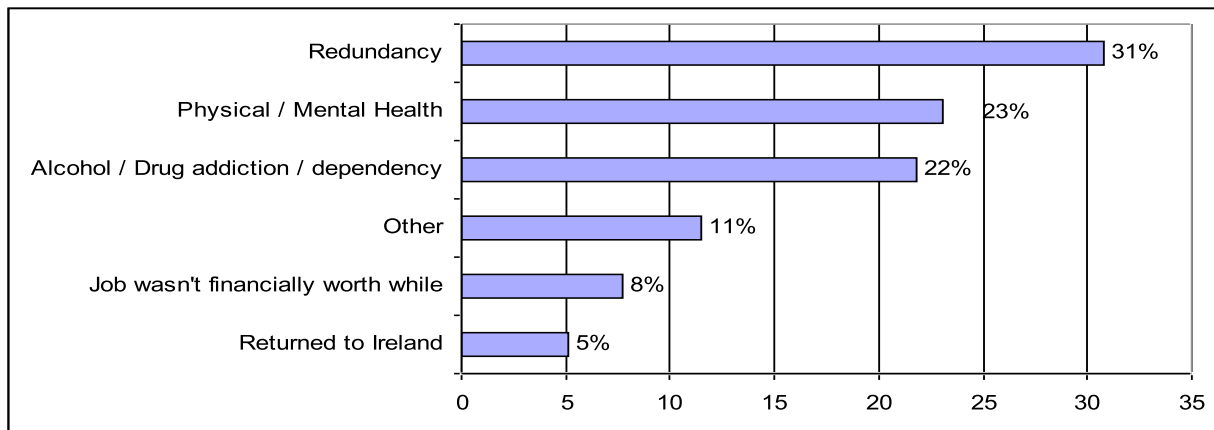
<sup>12</sup> Unskilled work is defined here as work which requires little or no judgment to do simple duties that can be learned on the job and little specific vocational preparation and judgment are needed. A person does not gain work skills by doing unskilled jobs. Semi-skilled work is work which needs some skills but does not require doing the more complex work duties. Semi-skilled jobs may require alertness and close attention, coordination and dexterity. They are similarly less complex than skilled work, but more complex than unskilled work. Skilled work requires qualifications in which a person uses judgment. Skilled jobs may require dealing with people, facts, or figures or abstract ideas at a high level of complexity.

In determining skill levels, length of time in a role has been considered. For example a respondent noting 'chef' as their occupation and 'worked most of my life' as their work frequency is most likely to have been employed in skilled work whereas a respondent noting 'chef' and who worked 'the odd job' is more likely to have been employed in semi-skilled work.

<sup>13</sup> Other = Van Driver / Assistant 3%, Postman 2%, Care Professions 2%, English Teacher 1%, Hairdresser 1%, Weaver 1%, Mechanic 1%, Studio Engineer 1%.

unemployed men (29%) and women (39%) who once worked lost their last job due to redundancy. However the second most common reason for job loss among unemployed men who once worked was addiction

(23%) followed by poor physical or mental health (19%) whereas the second most common reason for unemployed women who once worked was poor health (31%) followed by addiction (15%).



**Table 5 Main reason for loosing / leaving last job<sup>14</sup> (n 78)**

### EMPLOYMENT IN SUMMARY

The vast majority, 90%, of respondents have worked at some point in their lives, with almost half working all or most of their lives. The majority were employed in unskilled work. The majority of men were employed in construction whereas the majority of women were employed across the areas of cleaning, food and hospitality, sales and administration. The majority of over 26s lost their jobs due to redundancy and the majority of under 26s lost their last job due to addiction. Addiction is a more common cause of unemployment among younger people and men while poor health is a more significant cause of unemployment among older people and women.

There is almost full unemployment among those of working age with 95% unemployed. Among those that are unemployed and of working age, 92% are

long-term unemployed making their unemployment situation all the more challenging. Of those who are long-term unemployed, more than a third have not worked in ten or more years or have never worked, therefore facing the biggest challenge of all in returning to work.

Of note is the high level of poor health indicated by the numbers in receipt of Disability Allowance or Illness Benefit – more than half of those of working age and almost three quarters of those over 45 years are in receipt of these benefits. Poor health is also indicated by the 23% that lost or left work due to poor mental or physical health.

The impact of early school leaving is also evident with only a third of those that left school early employed most of their lives in comparison to two-thirds of those that completed school.

<sup>14</sup> Other = Retirement 3%, Migration 3%, Accommodation issues 1%, Returned to college 1%, Went to prison 1%, Job was boring 1%, Employee asked employer to PRSI and was let go 1%.

### 3.3 Education and Qualifications

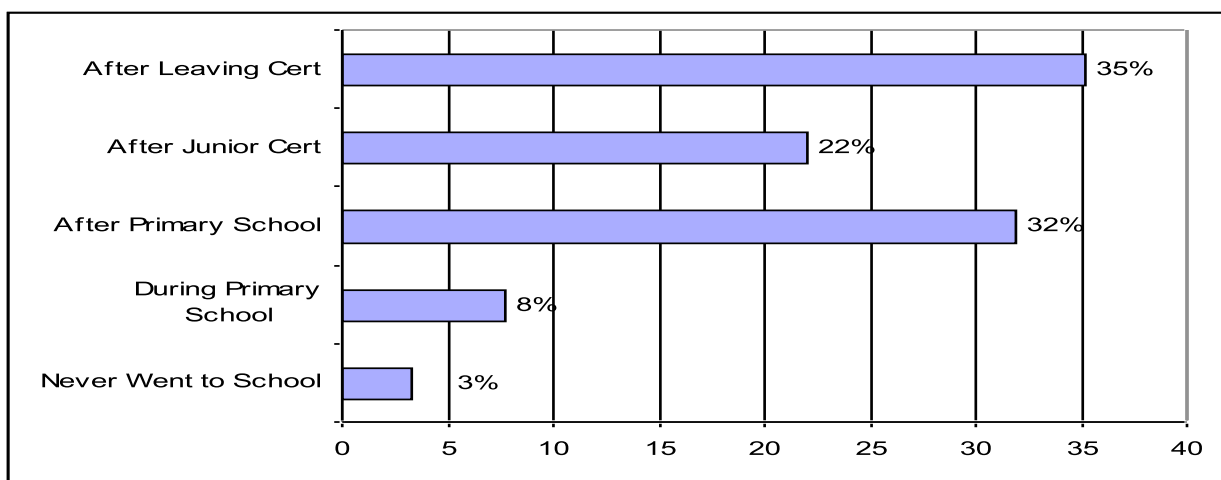
#### 3.3.1 Early School Leaving - 65% left school early

65% left school before completing the Leaving Certificate - more than twice the rate of early school leaving among the general population<sup>15</sup>.

43% left school without any state qualifications - that is before their Inter or Junior Certificate, representing almost four times the number of the general population to leave school without

completing a state exam<sup>16</sup>.

For 13% of people, their highest level of state schooling is primary school or below. High as this figure is it is only two percentage points higher than the percentage of the general population to leave school at this stage.<sup>17</sup> Among this group, more than 1 in 10 attained only a primary education and 3% never went to school.



**Table 6 Point of exit from school (n.91)**

Of those that left school early, the majority (66%) left before completing their Inter / Junior Cert - the average age at which they left school was 14 years. The majority, 29%, left due to family circumstances while a further 12% were expelled, indicating troubled lives from an early age for more than 40%.

Marginally more men (66%) than women (61%) left school early. However women who left school early tended to leave the education system earlier than men. For example, 17% of female early school leavers did not complete their primary school education compared to 10% of male early school leavers and 50% of female early school leavers did not sit their

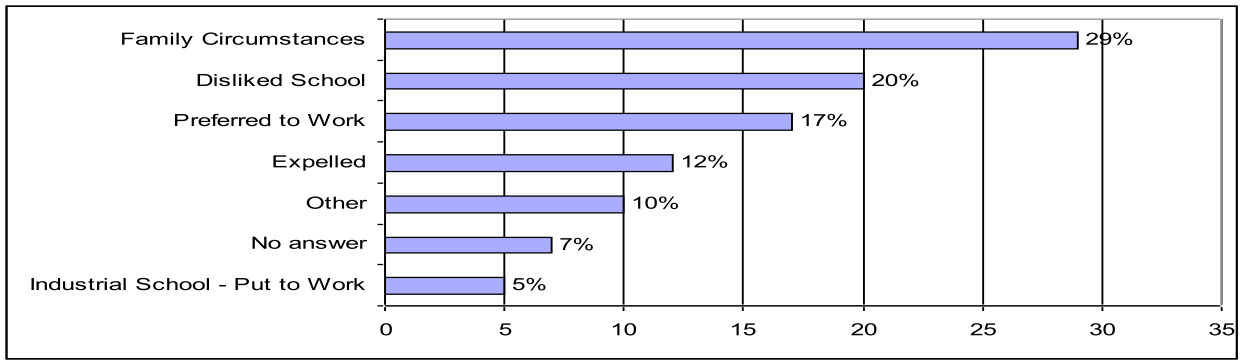
Inter / Junior Certificate compared to 41% of male early school leavers.

Early school leaving is evident across all age groups but is highest among under 26s with 75% of 18-26 year olds leaving school before the Leaving Certificate. Younger early school leavers were more likely however to leave the education system at a later point than their older counterparts. For example all under 26s completed their primary education where as 11% of those over 26 years did not complete primary school. Also 22% of under 26s left school without a state qualification compared to 40% of early school leavers over 26s.

<sup>15</sup> 29% of those aged 15-64 left school early according to the Central Statistics Office Quarterly National Household Survey, Educational Attainment Thematic Report 2011.

<sup>16</sup> 11% in age group 15-64 left school before the Junior / Inter Certificate according to the Central Statistics Office Quarterly National Household Survey, Educational Attainment Thematic Report 2011.

<sup>17</sup> 11% of those aged 25-64 had attained at most primary level education according to the Central Statistics Office Quarterly National Household Survey, Educational Attainment Thematic Report 2011.



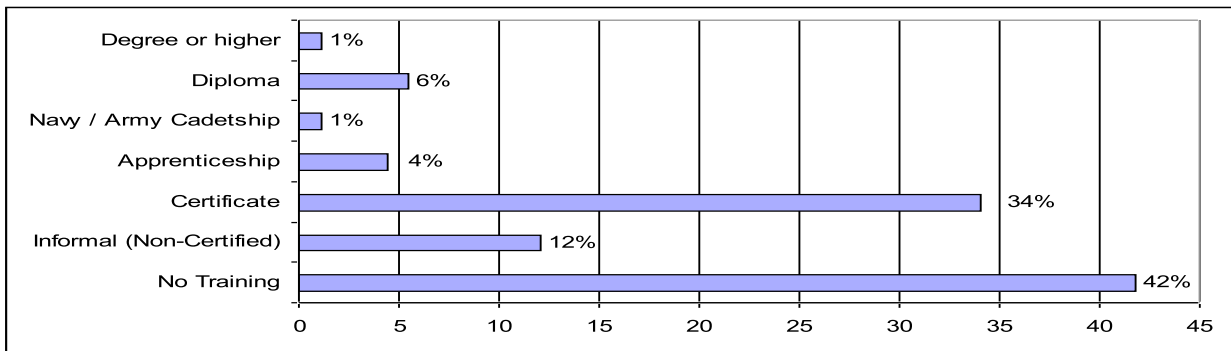
**Table 7 Reason for early school leaving among early school leavers<sup>18</sup> (n59)**

### 3.3.2 Training – 54% have no formal qualifications.

42% have never taken part in any form of training and 54% have no formal qualifications (certificate level or higher).

most common form of formal qualification. Only 7% hold a diploma or higher third level qualification. In comparison, 33% of the general population have attained a third level qualification<sup>19</sup>.

34% hold certificates, making it by far the



**Table 8 Highest level of training (n.91)**

7% are currently participating in training. However when added to those that took part in training in the last 12 months, 20% is reached which is one percentage point higher than the general public's engagement in formal or informal learning in a 12 month period<sup>20</sup>.

75% of all surveyed have either no formal qualifications or their training is out of date.

Among the 42 people that hold a formal qualification, half gained their qualification three or more years ago and have not worked in the last three years indicating they more than likely have not had the opportunity to maintain skills attained through training - their training is most likely out of date. Combined,

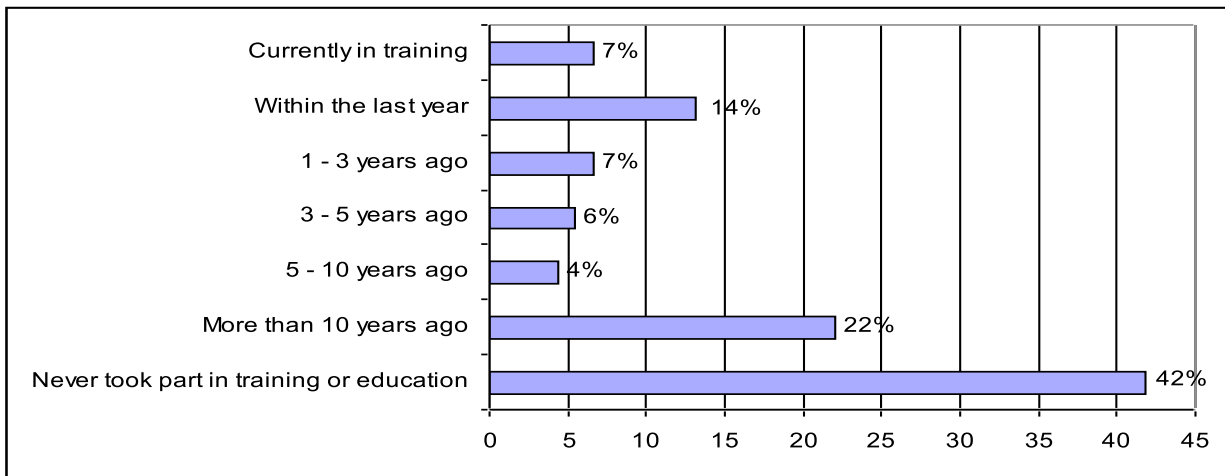
62% of those that completed the Leaving Certificate have formal qualifications whereas only 37% of those that left school early hold a formal qualification indicating the legacy of early school leaving.

Participation rates in training among men and women are almost even but more women (55%) than men (44%) hold formal qualifications..

<sup>18</sup> Other: Drug and alcohol use 1%, mental health 2%, pregnancy 1%, Traveller community 1% and war 1%.

<sup>19</sup> 33% of those aged 15-64 had attained a third level qualification according to the Central Statistics Office Quarterly National Household Survey, Educational Attainment Thematic Report 2011.

<sup>20</sup> Central Statistics Office. (2008). Quarterly National Household Survey, Lifelong Learning, Quarter 3 2008.



**Table 9 Last took part in training (n.91)**

### 3.3.3 New skills needed to return to work – 49% agree.

Among those unemployed and of working age, 49% responded 'yes' or 'probably' to needing new skills to return to work.

18% responded 'not sure' or 'don't know' indicating a lack

of knowledge about the jobs market. Of the 28 people that do not hold any qualifications and have not worked for three or more years, more than a quarter (26%) responded 'not sure' or 'don't know' indicating an even greater distancing among this group from the jobs market and the requirements for employment.

#### EDUCATION & QUALIFICATIONS IN SUMMARY

The level of educational disadvantage is very high. 65% - more than double the national average left school early. Among those that left school early, two-thirds left before their Inter / Junior Certificate at an average age of 14 years.

More than 40% left school early due to family circumstances or were expelled, indicating troubled lives from an early age.

There is a correspondingly low rate of engagement with further education. 42% have never taken part in any form of training and more than half have no formal qualifications.

Years out of the work place inevitably diminish the relevance of training and 75% have no formal qualifications or their training is three or more years

old and they have not worked in the last three years.

Early school leaving is more prevalent among younger age groups than it is among older age groups, however younger early school leavers are leaving the education system at later points than their older counterparts.

The impact of early school leaving on further education is evident with 62% of those that sat the Leaving Certificate holding a formal qualification compared to just 37% of those that left school early.

However, half of all respondents believe they need new skills to get back to work and 1 in 5 have taken part in training in the last 12 months or are currently participating in training - a figure in line with the national average for informal or formal learning. This engagement with training is most likely a reflection of Cork Simon's Training and Employment Programme.

### 3.4 IT, Literacy & Numeracy

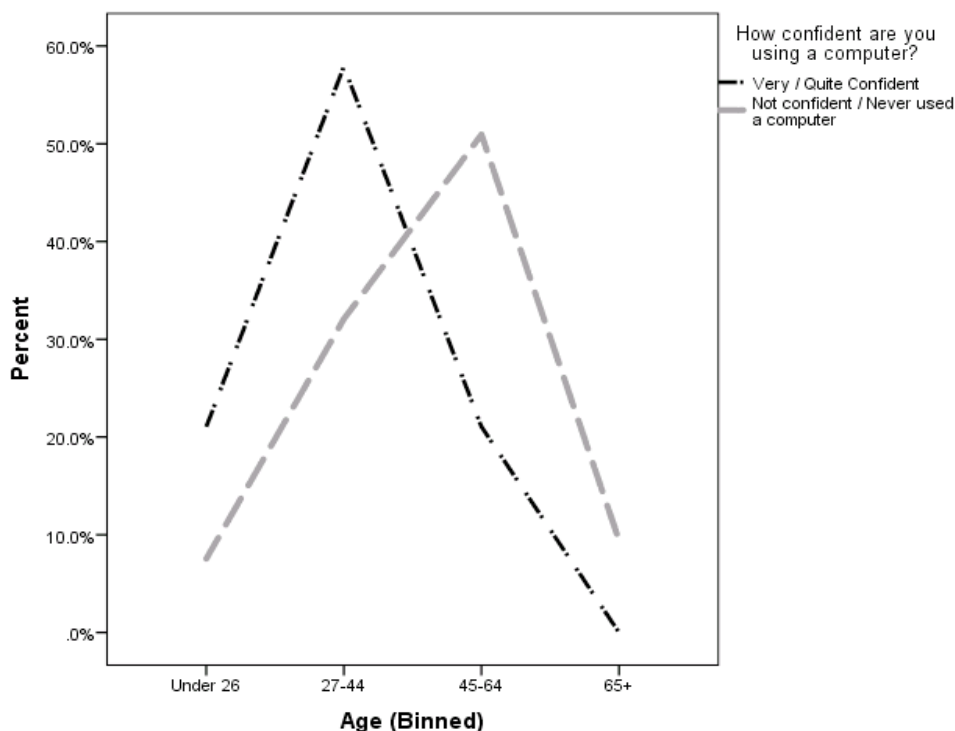
#### 3.4.1 IT – 58% are not confident using, or have never used, a computer.

30% have never used a computer. This absence of IT literacy is not exclusive to older age groups with 11% of 22-26 year olds, 8% of 27-34 year olds and 22% of 35-44 year old reporting they never used a computer. An even greater proportion of those over 45 have never used a computer with 35% of 45-54 year olds, 58% of 55-64 year olds and 80% of over 65 year olds reporting they have never used a computer.

27-34 age group having one of the highest work frequency (58% of this age group worked all or most of their lives) and therefore more exposure to IT and more opportunity to develop IT skills. Confidence falls steadily after the 27-34 age group with only 20% of those in the 55-64 age group expressing confidence and 0% of over 65s expressing confidence.

While IT illiteracy is present among younger age groups, those in the younger age brackets that are IT literate express the greatest IT confidence with 83% of 27-34 year olds ‘very confident’ or ‘quite confident’ using a computer. This is also consistent with the

High levels of IT literacy are not linked to completing school but low levels of IT literacy are linked to early school leaving with 60% of those that never used a computer leaving school before their Inter or Junior Certificate.



**Table 10 Confidence levels using a PC by age group**

### 3.4.2 Literacy – 35% indicate low literacy and 10% indicate functional illiteracy.

Literacy and numeracy levels have been assessed in the survey through participants' own experiences and perceptions. Using standardised tests were beyond the scope of the survey. There is the potential problem of respondents under reporting literacy and numeracy issues due to the stigma attached or reluctance to reveal a problem they have tried to conceal for years.

Also levels of literacy and numeracy may be considered satisfactory by respondents in terms of their own requirements, experiences and in terms of coping strategies they may have developed to compensate for low literacy or numeracy, but may be different to the skill level required by those in the workplace or in a study environment.

- 22% say they always or most of the time need help writing letters;
- 33% always or most of the time need help filling in forms;
- 26% never read newspapers or magazines;
- 45% never read books.

35% indicate low literacy, defined here as always or most of the time needing help to write letters or fill-in forms.

Needing help to fill-in forms invariably makes applying for work as well as social and educational supports difficult with form filling often an integral part of the process. This is reflected in the 26% who agree or strongly agree that difficulty with reading

and / or writing has made getting and keeping jobs harder.

87% of those indicating low literacy left school early with 59% leaving before their Inter/Junior Certificate.

Low rates of literacy are quite evenly spread among the age groups. Similarly, numbers expressing an interest in improving their literacy skills are quite evenly spread across the age groups.

Among those indicating low literacy, 22% are currently receiving support and 41% have received literacy support in the past. 59% of those indicating low literacy would like to further improve their reading or writing skills with another 12% not sure at the moment.

10% indicate functional illiteracy whereby literacy levels are insufficient for most work as well as day-to-day situations.<sup>21</sup> Functional illiteracy is defined here as always needing help to write letters, always needing help to fill-in forms, never reading newspapers and never reading magazines.

All of those that indicate functional illiteracy left school early - before their Inter / Junior Certificate. 22% are currently receiving literacy support and a further 55% received support in the past. 55% would like to further improve their reading and writing skills with another 22% responding they weren't sure at the moment.

### 3.4.3 Numeracy – 20% indicate difficulty with maths while 7% report having trouble with very basic numeracy.

- 11% say they always or most of the time have difficulty working out if they were short changed;
- 29% always or most of the time have difficulty with bus / train timetables;
- 35% always or most of the time have difficulty working out percentage discounts.

7% always have difficulty working out if they were

short changed – a task which calls on very basic numeracy.

20% indicate low numeracy, 'always' or 'most of the time' experiencing difficulty with timetables and percentages.

As with poor literacy, there is a link between early school leaving and poor numeracy with 78% of those indicating low numeracy and 83% of those that

<sup>21</sup> Collins English Dictionary. collinsdictionary.com

express trouble with most basic of numeracy leaving school before their Leaving Certificate.

Poor numeracy appears to have a greater impact on work prospects than poor literacy with almost a third (32%) agreeing or strongly agreeing that difficulty with maths has made getting and keeping jobs harder.

33% of those indicating trouble with the most basic of numeracy would like to improve their maths, with another 17% not sure at the moment. While 28% of those indicating low numeracy would like to improve their maths and another 28% are not sure at the moment.

Also, the lower the respondents' level of numeracy the keener they are to improve their numeracy skills - 22% of those reporting difficulty 'always' or 'most of the time' with percentages would like to improve their numeracy, increasing to 31% of those that have trouble reading timetables and rising to 50% of those who experience difficulty working out if they've been short changed

Difficulty with maths and a desire to improve numeracy are all quite evenly distributed among the age groups.

### **IT, LITERACY & NUMERACY IN SUMMARY**

The impact of low rates of literacy, numeracy and IT literacy on employability is evident.

1 in 3 indicate low literacy while 1 in 10 indicate functional illiteracy. Those indicating poor literacy say they 'always' or 'most of the time' need help writing letters and filling in forms while those indicating functional illiteracy 'always' need this help. Form filling is a basic requirement for many job applications as well as a requirement for accessing many supports through social welfare, local authorities and the education system, demonstrating in just one sense how poor literacy forms a barrier to employment and training. This is reflected in 26% agreeing that difficulty with reading and writing has made getting and keeping jobs harder.

In addition to the work limitations imposed by poor literacy, always or most of the time needing help to write letters and fill out forms can be isolating for the person and can impact negatively on confidence and self autonomy through dependency on others for day-to-day necessities.

20% indicate low numeracy while 7% experiencing difficulty with the most basic of maths. 29% always or most of the time have difficulty with bus or train timetables indicating challenges to everyday mobility and independence as well as work and study challenges. A greater number identify poor maths as having a detrimental effect on seeking and maintaining work than poor literacy with 33% identifying maths and 26% identifying literacy as a

barrier to employment.

There is a clear link between low literacy, low numeracy and early school leaving with 100% of those indicating functional illiteracy and 87% of those indicating low literacy, 83% of those indicating trouble with the most basic of numeracy and 78% of those indicating low numeracy, leaving school before their Leaving Certificate.

However the majority have taken steps to address these barriers – 63% of those indicating low literacy and 77% of those indicating functional illiteracy are currently or have previously received literacy support. Furthermore, over half of those indicating low literacy and functional illiteracy would like to further improve their reading and writing skills.

Many also wish to further improve their numeracy skills – 50% of those experiencing trouble with basic numeracy and 56% of those indicating low numeracy would or might like to improve their maths skills.

Very low IT literacy is highlighted by the 58% that have never used, or are not confident using a computer. While a more prevalent issue among older age group, IT illiteracy is present across all age groups. With IT present in almost all areas of work, an absence of basic IT skills limits job prospects. At the least, it limits the range of jobs people can apply for.



### 3.5 Learning - 52% Experience Barriers to Learning

- 7% have a diagnosed learning difficulty;<sup>22</sup>
- 10% indicate functional illiteracy;
- 49% agree or strongly agree that they their concentration levels and ability to remember make working difficult;

Combined, 52% experience barriers to learning in the form of a diagnosed learning disability, functional illiteracy or such poor concentration levels and ability to remember that working and studying are difficult.

### 3.6 Starting and Keeping Work – Older respondents identify physical and mental health and younger respondents identify addiction as their biggest challenges to starting and keeping work.

Among the 80 unemployed respondents of working age, physical and mental health is the most common worry by far in relation to starting a job, as identified by 58%. Addiction is the second biggest worry, as identified by 22%.

In terms of keeping a job, health (48%) and addiction (30%) are also the most common concerns.

However when broken down by age group, physical and mental health is a much greater obstacle for older people with 83% of those over 45 identifying it as their biggest worry regards starting work in comparison to 43% of those under 45. Similarly, 76% of those over 45 identify health as their biggest difficulty when it comes to keeping a job, in

comparison to 31% of under 45s.

On the other hand, addiction poses a greater challenge to younger age groups with 29% of under 45s identifying it as their biggest worry regards starting a job, compared to 10% of over 45s. Similarly, 39% of under 45s say addiction would cause the most difficulty in keeping work compared to 21% of over 45's.

The challenge posed by addiction is even greater again among the youngest age groups with 44% of 18-26 year olds identifying addiction as their biggest worry regards starting work and over half, 54%, identifying it as their biggest challenge to keeping a job.

#### STARTING & KEEPING WORK IN SUMMARY

Health is again highlighted as a significant barrier to employment, particularly among older people. In keeping with 73% of unemployed respondents over 45 years and of working age being in receipt of a Disability / Illness Benefit Allowance, and in keeping with health being the most common cause of unemployment among respondents over 45 years of age, poor physical or mental health is identified by a large majority of this group as a serious barrier to

employment with 83% saying it is their biggest worry regards starting work and 76% identifying it their greatest difficulty in terms of keeping work.

Along with addiction being the most common reason for job loss among those aged under 26 years, it is also identified by people in this age group as their most significant work challenge with 44% seeing it as their biggest worry in terms of retuning to work and more than half seeing it as their main difficulty regards keeping a job.

<sup>22</sup> Dyslexia 3%, ADD/ADHD 1%, Asperger's Syndrome 1%, Autism 1%.

### 3.7 Health & Addiction

63% agree or strongly agree with the statement 'My physical or mental health would make it hard to hold down a job at the moment'.

Older age groups are more likely to agree with this statement with 74% of over 45s agreeing or strongly agreeing. However agreement is still high among younger age groups with 54% of 27-44 year olds and 58% of 18-26 year olds agreeing or strongly agreeing.

A higher number of unemployed women of working age than unemployed men of working age believe their health would make working difficult with 41% of women agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement compared to 33% of men.

58% of all respondents agree or strongly agree

with the statement 'My issues around substances / alcohol are making it harder to think about working'. No age group dips below 54% in their agreement with this statement highlighting addiction as an issue across all age groups.

49% of all respondents agree or strongly agree that their concentration levels and ability to remember make working difficult – addiction, particularly cannabis use, is known to impact on concentration and memory<sup>23</sup> and may contribute to this high figure

A higher number of unemployed men than women of working age believe addiction is affecting their motivation to work with 62% of men agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement compared to 53% of women.

#### HEALTH & ADDICTION IN SUMMARY

It's becoming clear that poor physical and mental health is a serious barrier to employment. While it is a greater barrier among older age groups – 73% of unemployed 45-65 year olds are in receipt of Disability Allowance or Illness Benefit and 83% of respondents in this age group identify ill-health as their biggest worry in terms of starting work - it is also a significant barrier for younger age groups with 41% of under 45s and a third of under 26s in receipt of Disability Allowance or Illness Benefit. In addition, more than half of those under 45 agree that poor health would make it hard to hold down a job.

Addiction is also a prominent barrier to employment with 58% agreeing or strongly agreeing that addiction is making it harder to think about working. No age group dips below 54% in their agreement with this statement highlighting addiction as an issue across all age groups. In addition, 49% of all respondents agree or strongly agree that their concentration levels and ability to remember make

working difficult – addiction, particularly cannabis use, is known to impact on concentration and memory<sup>24</sup> and may contribute to this high figure.

While all age groups are affected by addiction, it is a more significant issue among younger age groups, most so among under 26s. It is the most common reason for unemployment among under 26s with 44% identifying addiction as the reason for losing or leaving their last job. Correspondingly, 44% of under 26s see addiction as their greatest worry regards starting a job and even more, 54%, see it as their greatest challenge in keeping a job.

The impact of ill health and addiction is evident among both men and women with health having a marginally greater impact on women's ability to work than their male counterparts, whereas addiction negatively affects men's work prospects marginally more than women's – this is in keeping with a higher percentage of men (23%) than women (15%) losing their last job due to addiction.

### 3.8 Criminal Conviction - 65% have a criminal record.

While a criminal record can automatically preclude people from certain jobs, employers are likely to reject people with a criminal record solely due to their

holding a record.<sup>24</sup>

However, 90% of those with a criminal record have

<sup>23</sup> Drugs: mood, memory and mayhem. (2004) In: Drug Treatment Centre Board Evening Seminar Series, 4 November 2004.

<sup>24</sup> National Institute of Economic and Social Research. (2001). Barriers to employment for offenders and ex-offenders.

worked in the past with 39% working all or most of their lives. 25% had work in the last three years and 25% also worked in skilled jobs. The majority, 27% lost their last job due to redundancy. The second most common reason for job loss was addiction (20%) followed by ill-health (17%).

Rates of criminal conviction are quite evenly spread among the age groups, however the highest rates of criminal conviction are among the youngest and the oldest groups with 75% of under 26s and 80% of over 65s holding a criminal record in comparison to 64% of 26-45 year olds and 60% of 45-64 year olds.

The likelihood of having a criminal record decreases with the number of years in school with 86% of those that left school during primary school holding a criminal record, falling to 76% of those that left after primary school, falling to 60% of those that left after their Inter / Junior Certificate and to 50% of those that completed school.

Among those that hold a criminal record, more than a third (36%) left school early due to family circumstance, a higher number than the general survey and a number indicating troubled lives from a young age.

### 3.9 Confidence

#### 3.9.1 Work Confidence – less than half believe they have the confidence to look for and return to work.

Only 41% of those that are unemployed and of working age agree or strongly agree with the statement: 'I feel confident about looking for and returning to work'.

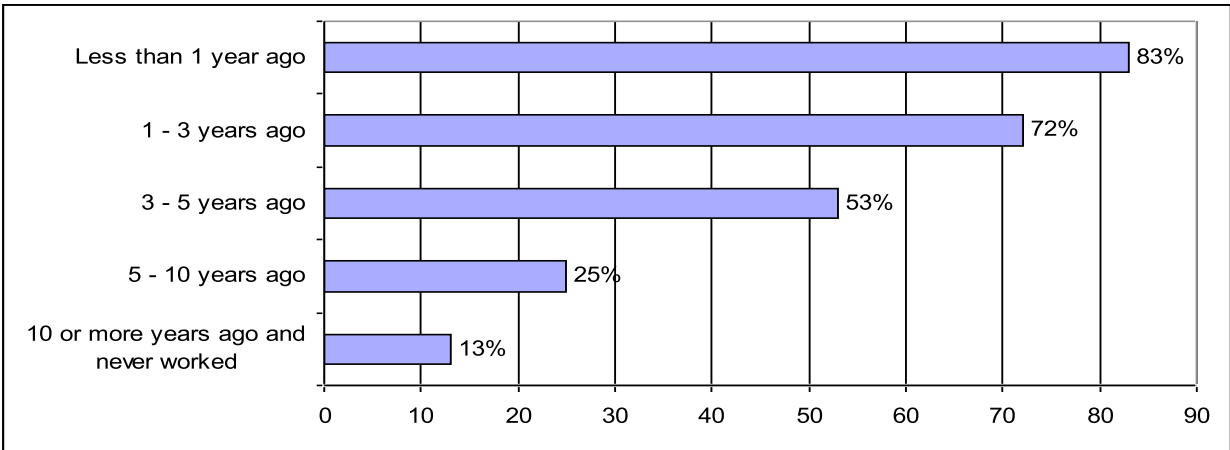
Confidence drops with age and lack of confidence is a considerable issue among those over 45 years with only 23% agreeing or strongly agreeing with the above statement.

The youngest age groups are the most confident but at that only 58% of unemployed under 26s agree or strongly agree with the above statement, falling to 50% of unemployed 27-44 year olds.

Women express less confidence than men with 35% of unemployed women of working age agreeing or strongly agreeing that they feel confident looking for and returning to work compared to 43% of unemployed men of working age. Lower work confidence among women may be linked with the higher rates of women than men that never worked.

Only a third (33%) of those that are unemployed, of working age and left school early feel they have the confidence to look for and return to work, whereas over half (57%) of those that completed school feel they do.

Confidence steadily decreases as years out of work increase as Table II shows.



**Table II Confidence returning to work in relation to time out of work among unemployed of working age (n.80)**

### 3.9.2 Work References – more than half believe a past employer would give them a good reference

Despite low levels of confidence, 55% of all respondents believe a past employer would, or probably would give them a good reference.

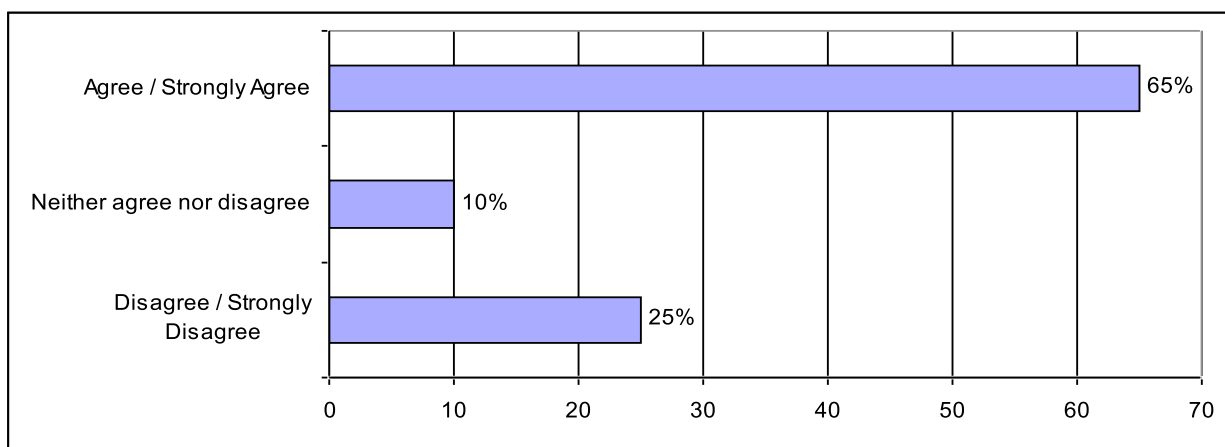
An even higher number of unemployed respondents of working age, 59%, believe a past employer would or probably would give them a good reference indicating a degree of confidence and the standard of previous work.

## 3.10 External Perceptions

### 3.10.1 Prejudice – 65% perceive prejudice against people who are or who have been homeless

There is a strong sense of prejudice against people who are or who have been homeless with 65% agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement: 'People are not going to employ someone who is or has been homeless'.

Perceived prejudice is stronger among men than among women with 70% of men agreeing or strongly agreeing compared to 44% of women.



**Table 12 How strongly would you agree / disagree with the statement: People are not going to employ someone who is or has been homeless?**

## **3.11 Work Ready**

### **3.11.1 Work Ready - at best, among unemployed respondents of working age, 9% are work-ready.**

While someone's goal may be to return to work, they may not be ready to do so in terms of physical or mental health, the management of an addiction, their confidence, motivation, basic skills, training or education.

Among unemployed respondents of working age, 51% agree or strongly agree that their main goal is to return to work as soon as possible. However, only 9% agree or strongly agree that their main goal is to return to work and believe they are ready to start and keep a job – that is, only 9% can be considered work ready. A tiny minority, 1 person, strongly agrees that their main goal is to return to work and believes they are ready to start and keep a job.

As would be expected, the 7 people (9%) that can be considered work ready present fewer barriers to employment than the general survey. For example 57% completed school whereas only 35% of the general survey finished school. 57% also worked most of their lives in comparison to 43% of the general survey and 71% were employed in the last one to five years in comparison to 48% of the general survey.

Never-the-less, those that can be considered work-ready still face barriers. 100% can identify worries and difficulties regards returning to work with poor health the most common worry and addiction the most common difficulty. 71% are not confidence about looking for and returning to work.

### **3.11.2 Work-Ready -uncertain.**

Among those that agree or strongly agree that their main goal is to return to work as soon as possible, a large majority (80%) are uncertain as to whether they would be able to start and keep a job.

Poor physical or mental health, as noted by 57%, is the most common worry among this group regards starting a job, followed by addiction as noted by 29%.

### **3.11.3 Not Work-Ready**

36% disagree or strongly disagree that their main goal is to return to work as soon as possible. This group constitutes those with the most challenging set of circumstances, particularly in terms of health, confidence and education.

The majority (40%) are aged between 45 and 54 years and ill-health is a serious factor with 67% of the group in receipt of Disability or Illness Benefit in comparison to 45% of the general survey. In addition 90% agree or strongly agree that their physical or mental would make it hard to work at the moment, compared to 63% of the general survey group. Also 73% agree or strongly agree that addiction is making it harder to think about working in comparison to 58% of the general survey.

Low confidence is a significant barrier with 80% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing to feeling confidence about looking for and returning to work, in comparison to 36% of the general survey.

No doubt contributing to low work confidence, this group presents a worse than average picture in terms of literacy, education and qualifications. 20% indicate functional illiteracy - more than double the number of the general survey group. 75% left school early in comparison to 65% of the general survey group, 67% in comparison to 54% have no formal qualifications and 93% have never taken part in training or their training is out of date (three years old or more) in comparison to 75% of the general survey group.

**WORK READY IN SUMMARY**

While a 9% minority feel that they are work-ready – that is, their main goal is to return to work as soon as possible and they believe they are ready to start and keep a job - all still identify challenges to

starting and keeping a job, with physical and mental health the most common worry regards starting a job and addiction the most common difficulty in terms of keeping a job. Also, 71% do not feel confident looking for or returning to work.

## 4. Summary of Barriers Among Main Study

### Barrier 1 - Poor mental and physical health.

Poor health presents as one of the most significant barriers for all, but particularly for people over 45 years.

Poor physical or mental health accounts for almost a quarter (23%) of all job losses. More than half (51%) of those of working age are in receipt of Disability Allowance or Illness Benefit, indicating a high level of poor health and possibly an acceleration in ill-health since losing work. A higher number again (63%) believe their physical or mental health would make future work difficult. Poor health emerges as both the most common worry regards starting work and the main difficulty regards keeping a new job. Consistent with this, among the 41 people whose main goal it is to return to work as soon as possible but who are uncertain as to whether they would be able to start and keep a job, poor health is noted by 57% as their most common worry regards returning to work.

Ill-health is all the more pronounced among older age groups. 55% of those over 45 years of age are in receipt of Disability Allowance or Illness Benefit. When narrowed to unemployed respondents of working age over 45 years, the number rises to 73%. Poor health was the most common cause of unemployment among

this group with 30% losing their last job due to it. 83% identify health as their biggest worry regards starting a new job, compared to 43% of those under 45 and 76% identify health as their greatest difficulty in terms of keeping work, compared to 31% of under 45s.

While it is a greater barrier for people in older age groups, poor health is also a significant barrier among younger age groups with 41% of under 45s and 33% of under 26s in receipt of Disability Allowance or Illness Benefit. More than half (55%) of those under 45 years of age agree or strongly agree that poor health would make it hard to hold down a job.

Poor physical or mental health is a marginally greater barrier to employment for women than for men. Poor health was the second most common reason for job loss among women and the third most common among men with 31% of women and 19% of men reporting poor health as the main reason for losing or leaving their last job. A higher number of unemployed women of working age than their male counterparts also believe their state of health would make working difficult - as noted by 41% of women and 33% of men.

### Barrier 2 - Addiction.

While health is a more significant barrier among older people, addiction poses a greater challenge to younger age groups with 29% of under 45s identifying it as their biggest worry regards starting a job compared to just 10% of over 45s. Similarly, 39% of under 45s say addiction would cause them the most difficulty in keeping work, compared to 21% of over 45s.

The challenge posed by addiction is even greater again among the youngest age groups. Addiction was the most common reason for job loss among 18-26 year olds with 44% identifying it as the cause of their unemployment. It is also identified by people in this age group as their most significant work challenge with 44% viewing addiction as their biggest worry regards starting work and over half (54%) identifying it as causing the most difficulty when it comes to keeping a job.

While addiction is a more serious barrier among younger people it still touches all age groups with 58%

of all respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement 'My issues around substances / alcohol are making it harder to think about working' indicating. There is no notable difference in the rate of agreement across the age groups with this statement. 49% of all respondents agree or strongly agree that their concentration levels and ability to remember would make working difficult - problem drug or alcohol use may add to poor concentration and memory, contribute to this high figure.

Addiction is a marginally more significant barrier among men than women as indicated by reasons for job loss. Addiction was the second most common reason for job loss among men and the third most common among women, with 23% of men and 15% of women reporting it as the main reason for losing or leaving their last job. In addition, 62% of men believing addiction is making it harder to think about working in comparison to 53% of women.

### **Barrier 3 - Early school leaving.**

The level of educational disadvantage is very high. 65% - more than double the national average, left school before the Leaving Certificate. Among those that left school early, two-thirds left school at an average age of 14 years without sitting a state exam – that is before their Inter / Junior Certificate.

The majority, 29% left due to family circumstances while a further 12% were expelled, indicating troubled lives from an early age for more than 40% of respondents.

Early school leaving is more prevalent among younger age groups with 75% of 18-26 year olds leaving school before their Leaving Certificate. However younger early school leavers are leaving the education system at later points than their older counterparts.

The effects of early school leaving ripple through the survey. Poor literacy and functional illiteracy are invariably linked with early school leaving - 87% of those indicating poor literacy left school before the Leaving Certificate while 100% of those indicating functional illiteracy left before their Inter/Junior Certificate.

The impact of early school leaving on further

education is also evident with 62% of those that sat the Leaving Certificate holding a formal qualification compared to just 37% of those that left school early.

People that completed second level education were much more likely to have worked most of their lives compared to people that left school early. Almost two thirds (64%) of those that completed school worked all or most of their lives whereas only one third of those that left school early did so - indicating the long-term effects of early school leaving. 35% of those that completed school were employed in skilled work in comparison to just 15% of those that left school early.

Almost half (48%) of those that are unemployed and of working age and that left school early feel they do not have the confidence to look for and return to work, compared to a quarter of those that completed school, indicating the negative impacts of early school leaving.

The likelihood of having a criminal record decreases as the number of years spent in school increases - 86% of those that left school during primary school have a criminal record, falling to 76% of those that left after primary school, falling to 60% of those that left after their Inter / Junior Certificate and falling to 50% of those that completed school.

### **Barrier 4 - Basic skills: Literacy, Numeracy & IT.**

1 in 3 indicate low literacy and 1 in 10 indicate functional illiteracy. Those indicating poor literacy 'always' or 'most of the time' need help writing letters and filling in forms while those indicating functional illiteracy 'always' need this help. Form filling is a basic requirement for many job applications as well as a requirement for accessing many social welfare and education supports, demonstrating in just one sense how poor literacy forms a barrier to employment. This is reflected in 26% agreeing that difficulty with reading and writing has made getting and keeping jobs harder. In addition to work limitations imposed by poor literacy, always or most of the time needing help to write letters and fill out forms can have an isolating effect on the person, while at the same time it can impact negatively on confidence and self autonomy through dependency on others for day-to-day necessities.

20% indicate low numeracy while 1 in 10 have difficulty with the most basic of maths. 29% always or most of the time have difficulty with bus or train

timetables indicating challenges to everyday tasks and independence in addition to low numeracy. A greater number identify poor maths as having a detrimental effect on seeking and maintaining work than poor literacy with almost a third (32%) agreeing or strongly agreeing that difficulty with maths has made getting and keeping jobs harder.

Very low IT literacy is highlighted by the 58% that have never used, or are not confident using a computer. While those in older age groups express the least IT confidence, IT illiteracy is not exclusive to older people with 11% of 22-26 year olds, 8% of 27-34 year olds and 22% of 35-44 year olds reporting they never used a computer. With IT present in almost all areas of work and study, an absence of basic IT skills limits job and training prospects.



## **Barrier 5 - Qualifications.**

42% have never taken part in any form of training while 54% have no formal qualifications. 34% hold certificates, making it by far the most common form of formal qualification. Only 7% hold a diploma or higher third level qualification - 33% of the general population have attained a third level qualification.

Years out of the work place inevitably diminish the relevance of training and 75% have no formal

qualifications or their training is three or more years old and they have not worked in the last three years.

Qualifications give confidence to look for and take up work - confidence is lowest among those unemployed and of working age who do not hold formal qualifications with only 29% believing they have the confidence to look for and return to work in comparison to 55% of those that hold a qualification.

## **Barrier 6 - Work skills.**

While almost half (48%) worked all or most of their lives, the remainder have limited work experience with 30% working 'the odd job', 12% rarely working and 10% never working. Over a quarter (28%) of women have never worked, compared to 7% of men.

Of the 80 people that worked, the majority (47%) were employed in unskilled work indicating a limited range of transferable skills. In addition, a third were

employed in construction or construction related work, the majority of whom will now need to re-skill.

The need to gain new skills is reiterated by the 49% of respondents that agree they need new skills to return to work. 18% are 'not sure' if they need new skills, indicating an even greater distancing among this group from the jobs market and the requirements for employment.

## **Barrier 7 - Long-term unemployment.**

74 people or 92% of those that are unemployed and of working age are long-term unemployed - unemployed for one year or more.

Whilst 10% of those unemployed and of working age have never worked, 60% have been unemployed for three years or more, 41% have been unemployed for 5 years or more and 26% have been unemployed for 10 years or more. The longer a person is out of work the harder it is to secure a job.

As the number of years unemployed increase, work skills decrease as does confidence in ones ability to return to work. Those out of work 3-6 months are 100% confident about looking for and returning to work. However confidence drops rapidly after this point with 72% of people who have been unemployed for 1-3 years expressing confidence in looking for and returning to work, falling to 53% of those out of work for 3-5 years, falling to 25% of those that have not worked in 5-10 years, bottoming out at just 10% of those unemployed for ten years or more.

## **Barrier 8 - Confidence.**

Only 41% of those that are unemployed and of working age feel confident about looking for and returning to work.

Confidence drops with age and is a considerable issue among those over 45 years with only 23% expressing confidence. Highest rates of confidence are identified among the youngest age groups, but at that only 58% of unemployed under 26s express confidence, falling to 50% of unemployed 27-44 year

olds.

Women identify less with work confidence than men with 43% of unemployed men of working age believing they have the confidence to look for and return to work compared to 35% of unemployed women of working age. This may be linked to the higher number of women (28%) than men (7%) that never worked.

## **Barrier 9 - Perceived prejudice.**

65% perceive prejudice against people who are or who have been homeless. Perceived prejudice is stronger among men than among women with 70% of

men agreeing or strongly agreeing that people are less likely to employ someone who is or has been homeless, in comparison to 44% of women.

## **Barrier 10 - Criminal Record.**

While a criminal record can automatically preclude people from certain jobs, a high proportion of employers are likely to reject people with a criminal conviction solely due to their record. 65% hold a criminal record with highest rates of criminal conviction among the youngest and the oldest groups - 75% of under 26s and 80% of over 65s hold a criminal record.

Among those that hold a criminal record, more than a third (36%) left school early due to family circumstance, a higher number than the general survey and a number indicating troubled lives from a young age.

## 5. Non Irish Nationals

22% (n.20) of survey respondents are non Irish nationals.

Non-Irish nationals are aged between 23 and 55 years and are generally younger than Irish nationals with 38 years the average age of non-Irish nationals. 90% of non-Irish nationals are men – a higher representation than among Irish nationals.

20% are in receipt of Unemployment Benefit or Assistance, 10% are in receipt of Disability or Illness Benefit and 10% are employed (n. 2). The majority, 60%, do not qualify for social supports due to HRC restrictions. Among the 18 non-Irish nationals who are unemployed, 67% are HRC affected, rendered literally destitute.

Non Irish nationals encounter far fewer barriers to work – they have higher rates of literacy, school completion and training, longer periods of time in the work force and shorter lengths of time out of work, lower rates of criminal records and higher rates of confidence.

80% of non Irish nationals completed school and 75% have completed some form of training with 50% participating in training in the last three years and 70% holding a formal qualification.

100% of non Irish nationals are literate and 80% are confident using a computer.

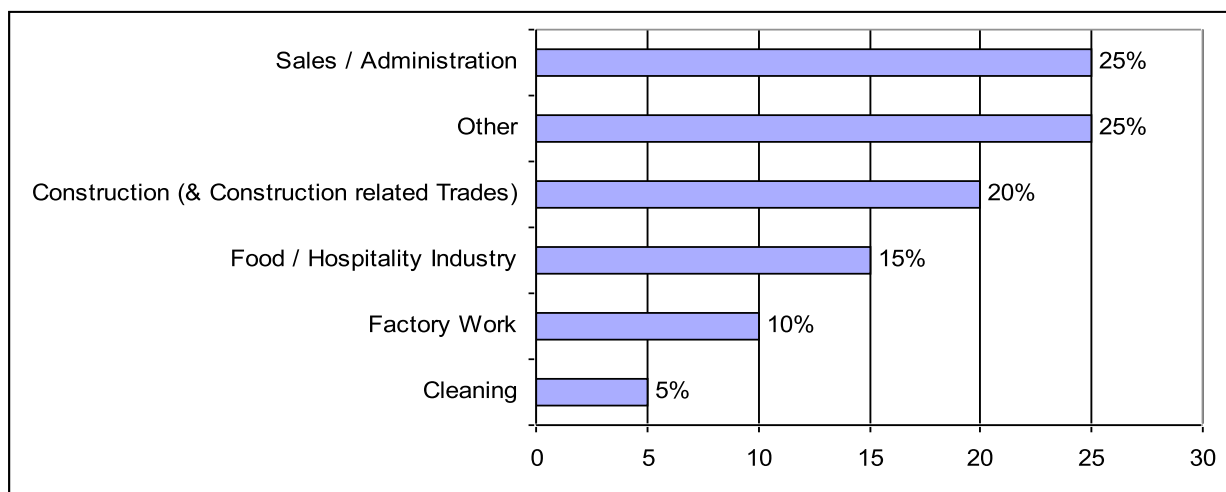
All non Irish nationals have worked in the past with 70% working all or most of their lives. The majority were as likely to have been employed in semi-skilled as un-skilled work and the majority were employed in sales and administration (25%) followed by construction (20%).

The main reason by far for job loss among unemployed non-Irish nationals was redundancy (50%) Over three quarters (78%) of those made redundant are now HRC affected.

70% of non Irish nationals agree or strongly agree that they feel confident looking for and returning to work while 80% agree or strongly agree that their main goal is to return to work as soon as possible .

While still a barrier to employment, a criminal conviction is a less common restriction among non Irish nationals with 35% holding a criminal record

Despite their better employment prospects, a significant majority of 72% of non-Irish nationals are long-term unemployed with the majority last working 1-3 years ago.



**Table 13 Employment category among non-Irish nationals<sup>25</sup>**

<sup>25</sup> Other – Studio Engineer, English Teacher, Postman, Farmer and Driver & Assistant.

## 5.1 Barriers to employment among non Irish nationals.

### Barrier 1 - Health.

While non Irish nationals indicate fewer health problems, poor health is still a barrier among this group with 45% identifying it as their biggest worry in terms of starting work and 35% identifying it as their main difficulty regards keeping work. Consistently, 40% agree or strongly agree that poor health would make it harder to hold down a job.

### Barrier 2 - Language.

34% believe or agree that they need to improve their English to a greater or lesser extent to secure work with 25% strongly agreeing that they need to improve their English.

### Additional Barrier - Skills.

While education and skill levels are higher among non-Irish nationals, basic skills are still a barrier for 1 in 4 non Irish nationals as 25% have never taken part in training and 30% have no formal qualifications. 65% are long term unemployed with the majority out of work for one to three years – as length of time out of work increases, skill levels decrease through lack of use.

### Additional Barrier - Addiction.

Up to 25% of non-Irish nationals see alcohol and drug dependence as a barrier with 5% identifying it as a worry in terms of starting work, 15% identify it as a difficulty to keeping work and 25% agree or strongly agree that addiction would make it harder to think about working at the moment

## 6. Under 26 Year Olds

13% (n.12) of survey respondents are under 26 years of age.

67% of under 26s are in receipt of unemployment benefit and 33% are in receipt of Illness Benefit / Disability Allowance.

Those aged 18-26 years demonstrate good motivation with 83% agreeing or strongly agreeing that

their main goal is to get back as soon as possible. They have greater confidence than those over 26 with 58% agreeing or strongly agreeing that they feel confident looking for and returning to work in comparison to just 38% of over 26s. 18-26 year olds are more IT literate than older age groups with two thirds of 18-26 year olds confident, or very confident, using a computer whereas almost two thirds (62%) of those over 26 years are not confident using, or have never used, a computer.

## 6.1 Barriers to employment among under 26 year olds.

### Barrier 1: Education & Training

Higher rates of early school leaving and lower rates of further training are noted among 18-26 year olds in comparison to older age groups. 75% of under 26s left school early in comparison to 63% of over 26s. 75% of under 26s have also never taken part in training in comparison to 37% of over 26s while among those under 26 that left school early, 89% have never taken part in training.

### Barrier 2: Literacy

Possibly in keeping with higher rates of early school leaving and lower rates of training, 50% of under 26s agree or strongly agree that difficulty with reading or writing has made getting and keeping jobs harder, compared to 23% of over 26s. A higher number of under 26s also need help filling in forms, a process which is integral to job searching. 42% of 18-26 year olds say they always or most of time need help filling in forms in comparison to 26% of over 26s.

### **Barrier 3: Work Experience**

1 in 4 under 26s have never worked (in comparison 8% over 26s have never worked). Of those that have worked, the majority worked 'the odd job' and were employed in un-skilled work. In addition, 92% of under 26s are long-term unemployed so any skills developed through work will be depleted as time out of work increases.

### **Barrier 4: Addiction**

Addiction is a more significant issue among younger age groups than older age groups. 44% of under 26s that were employed lost or left their last job due to addiction making it the most common cause of job loss among 18-26 year olds. While 58% of both under and over 26s agree or strongly agree that addiction is making it harder to think about working 33% of under 26s strongly agree where as 26% of over 26s strongly agree. In addition, a greater number of under 26s compared to those in older age groups identify addiction as a barrier to work with 42% identifying it as their greatest worry regards starting a job and 50% identifying it as their biggest difficulty in terms of keeping a job.

### **Barrier 5: Health**

While ill-health is a greater barrier for those over 26, non-the-less 33% of under 26s are in receipt of Disability Allowance / Illness Benefit. In addition, 58% agree or strongly agree that their physical or mental health would make it harder to hold down a job, with 50% strongly agreeing.

### **Barrier 6: Criminal Record**

75% of under 26s hold a criminal record precluding them from certain forms of employment and increasing chances of subjective rejection from others.

## **7. Participation in Training and Education highest among those in supported housing**

There are higher rates of people currently participating in or having completed training among those living in Cork Simon high-support houses and flats.

Those in high support housing have the highest training rate with 67% of respondents previously taking part in training; the rate among people short-term homeless in the Emergency Shelter is 44%.

Higher numbers of respondents in the Emergency Shelter feel they need new skills to return to work with 50% of those short-term homeless in the Shelter believing they need new skills.

Those in supported housing are more likely to access literacy support. However higher numbers in

emergency accommodation feel they are in need of these supports.

31% of those in flats and supported by the Housing Support Team indicate low literacy, and 30% are currently or have previously received support.

In contrast, 41% of those in emergency accommodation indicate low literacy and 26% are currently or have previously received support. The situation is worse for those short-term homeless with 28% indicating low literacy and none are currently or have previously accessed literacy support.

## 8. Conclusion

Many respondents have experienced troubled and challenging lives from an early age and face multiple barriers to employment, many of which influence and compound one another.

Early school leaving and long-term unemployment are particularly significant barriers as they can contribute to and exacerbate other barriers.

Despite severe challenges, people want to work, want to engage in training and want to improve their skills with one-in-five already participating in training in the last 12 months – a higher rate than the national average and most likely a reflection of Cork Simon's Employment and Training Programme.

Various supports are needed to help people back into work. These include health supports so people can address the barriers of physical and mental ill-health and addiction; educational supports so people can improve their literacy, numeracy and IT skills; training supports are needed for people with no qualifications or whose qualifications are out of date or redundant; and employment supports, in particular work experience, to address the impact of long-term unemployment on experience, skills, confidence and optimism.

The positive impact of supported housing on training participation levels is evident. In a secure, supported housing environment people are in a better position to address their barriers.