



LOCAL AUTHORITY NATIONAL TRAINING SURVEY REPORT 2009

(Executive Summary Version)

Report prepared by the Institute of Public Administration
in partnership with the
Local Government Management Services Board

November 2009

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First edition published November 2009

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Executive Summary

The Local Government Management Services Board (LGMSB) initiated this survey to gather information from 3 separate and distinct groups:-

1. The Senior Managers and Directors of the Business Units
2. The Senior Management Team and the County Manager/Chief Executive
3. The staff members through the training requests they made in their PDPs

The survey which received 34 submissions generates (as best as is possible given the breadth of information sought) the overall national picture of training and development needs for the main functional areas within the Local Authority network. It further provides the budgetary situation in each of the Authorities given the current economic climate and attempts to quantify how the budgetary constraints and the impact of the downturn will affect the work of the units over the next 2/3 years.

Information has been provided on the business issues affecting 13 specific units and what training and development the staff are likely to need to deliver on these issues. Looking to the future as the cutbacks continue respondents are asked to consider what additional skills staff are likely to need to deliver on the corporate agenda. While each of the 13 (see section 1) listed a wide variety of issues, revenue generation, maintaining quality service delivery, and keeping abreast of both technology and legislation featured prominently. Regarding skills development (in addition to mandatory requirements to comply with legislation e.g. Health and Safety, procurement, financial management) the main requirement of managers for their staff is 'flexibility' – organisations need to be able to 'deliver more with less' and they need staff who are willing and able to multi-task.

The impact of the Department of Finance staff embargo on recruitment and the reduced funding (both central and local) coupled with reduced revenue generation is recorded by all the respondents. Over 50% of the respondents have had their training budget cut by up to 25% and almost 10% by up to 50% and it is acknowledged that this trend is going to continue. The challenge facing training officers is how to continue to deliver on the legislative commitments with regard to Health and Safety (which takes up to 50% of a training budget) with an ever reducing budget. Coupled with this is the need to identify innovative cost-effective ways to develop and enhance staff performance in order to maintain the high quality service delivery which the public have come to expect from their Local Authorities. A small number of respondents speak of the opportunity to develop initiatives working across county boundaries and sharing skills and expertise and many have already begun to do this. Aligned to this is the need to implement the recommendations of the Taskforce on Public Sector Reform with the introduction of shared services and interagency working.

Aligning the training needs to the business issues has never been more important – resources are severely constrained both in terms of funding and staffing. Organisations need to ensure that the training they are scheduling (either in-house or external) or the 3rd level educational assistance they offer to staff, achieves its objectives, enhances staff capability and has a wide and lasting organisational reach.

Closing Summary

The objective of this survey is to attempt to quantify the national picture of staff training and development in Local Authorities and Regional Assemblies from three (3) distinct perspectives:-

1. The Senior Management Team and the County Manager
2. The Senior Managers and Directors of the Business Unit
3. The staff members through the training requests they made in their PDPs

While acknowledging that the responses generated by the survey are not as perfect as one would wish in terms of accuracy, depth or completeness the results do nonetheless provide a starting point for further discussions and should greatly aid and enhance future decision making.

Each segment of the report has produced its own distinct findings, where possible these results have been cross referenced to the findings from, the other populations to determine if the messages from the three different sets of respondents complement or clash with each other.

There is no doubt that we are living and working in a new reality and this is reflected in the findings of the survey. The impact of the Department of Finance staff embargo on recruitment and reduced funding coupled with reduced revenue generation is recorded by all the respondents. The buzzword is 'flexibility' – organisations need to be able to 'deliver more with less' and they need staff who are willing and able to multi-task.

Local training needs (both mandatory and non-mandatory) have been recorded and collated to produce a national picture for all business units (irrespective of function or grade). In addition to this individual PDP requests have been collated to form a national priority list both by business unit and by grade. Furthermore there may be corporate wide training initiatives driven by County Managers to respond to specific initiatives in the Corporate Plan and these requests must also receive an allocation from an ever-diminishing budget.

Below is a list of the requests for non-mandatory training which arose repeatedly in the survey-

- People management skills
- Financial Management and Budgetary Control skills e.g. Agresso for all levels of staff
- Change Management skills
- Project management skills
- Time Management and Organisation skills e.g. prioritisation and workflow
- I.T. Skills (various forms)
- Innovative ways of working and achieving more with less e.g. flexible working, redeployment of staff, alternative methods to work distribution etc.,

The need for staff to have a deeper knowledge of the legislation underpinning the work they are doing is a key requirement for all respondents. Without this knowledge of the legislative and regulatory framework transfer of staff to units experiencing significant staff shortages will not be possible. Similarly re-deployment of staff within a unit in order to address a shift in emphasis or focus due to changes in the external environment or new initiatives (e.g.) shifting focus in the planning Department from processing planning applications to enforcement, will not prove to be

effective without staff receiving a detailed understanding of the legislative/regulatory framework underpinning the work.

Themes that emerged in the research in addition to the need for staff to be well-trained and highly flexible is an acknowledgment by managers that staff are working in very difficult circumstances and that many are likely to experience stress if the situation is not managed correctly. The challenge for units of trying to maintain quality service delivery with ever reducing staff numbers and ever reducing budgets resonates throughout the report. Line managers - the lynchpin between senior managers (anxious to deliver on the strategic goals and objectives of the Corporate Plan) and frontline staff (dealing with the public on a daily basis) in many cases are experiencing the greatest pressure. Questions need to be asked as to whether Local Authorities reduce the number of services they offer or reduce the quality of the services they currently provide – either way change is inevitable.

Health and Safety training which is both mandatory and essential for the many thousands of staff working in potentially dangerous situations e.g. on non-national roadways, with chemical pollutants, etc., figures very prominently throughout the report. Major investment of resources has been made over the years but it appears that it is a never ending cycle and respondents frequently mention Health and Safety Training as an annual event. The range of Health and Safety related courses available to staff is extensive and annual investment in this specific field must be considerable. However when the research shows that over 50% of the respondents have had the training budget cut by up to 25% and almost 10% by up to 50% (with further cuts expected by many) it is hard to know how this investment can continue to be funded in the current economic climate. Linked to this is the fact that several respondents mentioned that because Health and Safety training is mandatory in some organisations it is not listed by the staff on the PDP request form but rather is seen as a separate requirement with a dedicated ring fenced budget. The research showed that almost 50% of the training officers spent up to 50% of their budget on mandatory training to comply with legislation as opposed to discretionary spending in order to improve staff and organisational performance.

Staff who perceive that they are not having their training needs met (because they see PDP requests are not granted) over time may become demotivated as they believe their psychological contract is not being honoured. However they are completely forgetting about the wealth of work based on the job learning that they are receiving but perhaps for whatever reason place little value on. While almost 80% of the respondents use in-house trainers it is for less than 25% of their training needs with the same numbers being recorded for on the job training, so clearly there is still a strong cultural dependence on 'live education' rather than technology or work based solutions. However with the numbers of staff continuing to decline this is likely to shift considerably over the next few years. Equally necessary will be the continuing cultural shift from training to learning and the recognition that learning can take place in all sorts of different ways and it may not always necessitate time off work. The shift to targeted shorter interventions which are often just as effective and do not require the person to be off work for a whole day will please all managers/supervisors.

The research was very positive about the impact that the training is making on the organisation and the fact that staff in the main appreciate very much the investment being made in them.

Although sixty-four (64%) reported that they do have no-shows they are limited to certain sections and certain times of the year and on average are less than 10%. The main reason for 'no shows' was given as work load and work commitments on the day' which is particularly interesting as it may link back to the need for time management and the ability to prioritise our time and our work commitments and scheduled training could be one of them. The organisations who charge back training courses to the local units record little if any 'no-shows'. The research further tells us that occasionally staff feel the training they are scheduled for can be irrelevant as it is often difficult to transfer the skills/knowledge learnt on the course back into the workplace due to lack of interest amongst managers and peers. This finding is particularly important as the link between learning and the achievement of business goals is essential and without this transfer of learning to the workplace the investment will not yield long term benefits or enhance productivity.

In conclusion, this report is likely to raise many more questions than it answers given the breadth of information that was sought but this in itself is a positive outcome and a necessary and valuable exercise particularly in the challenging economic climate we are operating in. Despite the necessity to reduce discretionary spending across the board in local authorities training and development of staff will still continue. Even if the staff T&D budget is reduced to an absolute minimum for the next couple of years there will still be a need to be a budget allocated for mandatory training so that local authorities are compliant with the requirements of legislation and/or regulations. It should also be remembered that local authorities have consistently met (and in most cases greatly exceeded) the target spend of 3% of productive payroll on staff training and development. Staff recognise that local authorities have a commitment and track record in developing them as individuals and employees. The focus for Training Officers and all people involved in training provision across the sector will be achieving maximum value for money by the employment of innovative and cost effective methods both of training delivery and of transfer of learning to the workplace.

Recommendations

The general recommendations resulting from our analysis of the survey findings are presented here under 6 main themes,

- Distribution of the report
- Training will continue despite budgetary constraints
- PMDS
- Using alternatives and supplementary approaches to formalised classroom training
- Making greater use of in-house resources
- Maximising training budgets
- Achieving greater value for money for the sector

Distribution of the report

- ◆ Copies of the report once endorsed by the Managers should be distributed to the relevant committees and bodies charged with overseeing the training requirements for various programme areas (e.g.) Roads Training Group, Water Services Training Group, Environmental Training Group, the Library Council, National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management etc., in addition to being distributed to all individual local authorities. It will be for these bodies/committees to consider the report and undertake any actions that they feel relate to their area of operation. It will be for the County & City Managers and their senior management teams to decide how best to address the prioritised cross-functional training identified in the report and the training needs for those business units for which there is no dedicated committee/body overseeing training delivery.

Training will continue despite budgetary constraints

- ◆ The requirement for all staff to do more or at least the same with less resources coupled with the introduction of pay and pension levies will inevitably lead to demotivation of staff. The role of line managers in keeping staff motivated and ensuring that the usual levels of high performance are maintained within their sections will be critical. The training of line managers in the practical skills of managing staff, maintaining good performance and tackling under performance is an area of training that will be critical if the sector is to deliver upon its business goals irrespective of the fact that it is not mandatory training.
- ◆ If the current recruitment embargo continues for the next couple of years it will be important to recognise that all current and future work activities will be carried out by existing staff resources. In order to ensure that flexibility and ability to multi-task become the norm some front line staff will need to engage in learning new skills. Experience has shown that the provision of and successful participation in workplace skills training by some frontline staff will depend upon ongoing basic education and personal development

training and support. The ongoing financial support of LANPAG towards the provision of workplace basic education programmes will be crucial. It should be recognised that the successful LANPAG Return to Learning (RtL) initiative may have already reached the majority of those staff that required or wished for assistance with basic literacy. Successive evaluations of the RtL programmes have highlighted the need to develop progression routes to mainstream training for staff that have already completed phase 1 of RtL. These progression opportunities should seek to prepare employees with less than required levels of basic educational skills for the demands of mainstream work related training courses that they will be required to complete (e.g.) mandatory health & safety, customer service, required workplace skills training, etc.

- ◆ The principle of establishing a qualifications framework so that operational staff in certain business units (e.g.) water services, environmental services, roads can gain formal recognition for the single module training courses that they are being asked to complete as well as being able to use those qualifications towards obtaining higher level qualifications is one that should be supported by all bodies/committees involved in the provision of staff training in the sector. As the various regulatory bodies operating in these programme areas attempt to move towards a quality assurance model of licensing for some activities (e.g.) waste facility operation, provision of drinking water, etc., there will be an increasing need for operational staff and/or technical staff to obtain accredited training. Efforts should be undertaken by the various committees and bodies engaged in co-ordinating training provision for the sector to ensure that local authority staff can combine the various single module/minor award qualifications that staff are asked to complete into either a combined certificate or can get formal recognition/credit towards a higher nationally recognised qualification. It should be noted that a sub-committee of the WSTG has already commenced deliberations with a view to approaching FETAC and/or HETAC on this matter. It is therefore recommended that the National Training Group should oversee the development of an overarching framework agreement with FETAC/HETAC for the sector as a whole rather than asking individual committees/bodies to conduct their own discussions on combining of minor awards into major awards. Once again this framework for awards recognition could be built into an overall competency framework for staff in these sections. It should be noted however that agreement on a framework with FETAC/HETAC may take a number of years. In the meantime a number of courses will still need to be developed within a shorter timeframe to meet current regulatory needs. Therefore every development of new modules in these operational areas should consider where it fits in to an overall major award as part of their initial design stage.

PMDS

- ◆ Details of the conclusions and recommendations on the identification of training and development needs by means of the PMDS/PDP process should be forwarded to the PMAMG. The main recommendations to the PMAMG are as follows:

- the extent to which training and development needs identified by individual staff members at PMDS meetings are being prioritised and clearly linked to business goals and organisational goals needs to increase
- line managers conducting PMDS meetings should become more knowledgeable about other methodologies/approaches to addressing development needs/opportunities (e.g.) job shadowing, job swapping, on the job coaching, peer learning, self directed study, rather than relying on classroom based training courses. This will become increasingly important if the number of opportunities to attend training courses is reduced in line with reductions in the training budget.
- ensuring a more ‘resource led’ as opposed to ‘demand led’ system of staff training and development would support the introduction of a competency framework for staff doing particular jobs. This would help to achieve targeted provision of mandatory (i.e.) required by regulation/legislation training and training with demonstrable links to business needs/goals. The introduction of a competency framework would assist line managers in prioritising training needs discussed with staff.
- where development and training is provided to staff in formats other than classroom training this needs to be formally recorded. Business units that initiate their own staff development events must record the details and ensure that the individuals training records are updated. It is anticipated that existing training record databases or the proposed training module of the Core HR, Payroll & Superannuation systems should be able to capture this data.
- individual staff members and their line managers need to be informed of the outcome of all training requests in advance of PMDS review meetings. The practice of only notifying individual staff members if they have been placed on a training course may contribute to a lack of confidence in PMDS as a development tool. The anticipated reduction in the number of courses being registered and recorded in PDP forms should reduce the number of responses to be made. Methodologies for automating the response process either through existing technology or in the training module of the Core HR, Payroll & Superannuation system should be explored and where practicable employed by Training Officers
- the identification of individual training and development needs as part of the PMDS/PDP process needs to continue despite less resources being available to ensure training and development requests are being delivered upon. The survey contains evidence that the business units are able to identify organisational training needs through a mixture of PDPs and team meetings. However if the practice of conducting PDPs with each individual staff member dwindles as a result of disengagement with the PMDS process it will become increasingly difficult for Training Officers to identify which individual staff member is required to go on which course even the mandatory ones. PMDS therefore needs to be re-energised in areas where disengagement difficulties exist to ensure that it

remains the primary mechanism for determining the training needs of individual staff members. If this does not happen and the practice of conducting PDP's is discontinued, TO's will have to resort to meeting with section heads to determine which staff require what training in order to determine the numbers and names of staff involved. It has to be recognised however that whilst this would satisfy the requirement of achieving a targeted 'resource' led approach to training provision, it would not be as effective as using the existing PMDS/PDP process.

Using alternatives and supplementary approaches to formalised classroom training

- ◆ Training Officers and section heads should actively work to promote peer learning. Individuals attending external training or development opportunities should be required to share the learning with their colleagues at team meetings upon their return. Peer learning is a very cost effective way of disseminating learning for a wider audience. The practice of using existing intranets to post up and to download materials, documents and presentations obtained from training courses conferences, CPD sessions, briefings etc., should be encouraged. Directing staff and colleagues to the existence of these resources by means of a knowledge/learning centre section on the intranet would greatly improve peer learning and self directed opportunities as well as information dissemination. Local authority training officers should engage with their colleagues responsible for maintaining the intranet to ensure that an online knowledge/learning centre section is established and that procedures are put in place for the uploading of training materials, documents and presentations.
- ◆ Greater consideration should be given by all parties involved in procuring training for local authorities to organising more concentrated training events that are held closer to the workplace. Condensed modular training should focus on specific subjects of direct relevance to prospective attendees. The objective of shorter concentrated sessions is to place greater emphasis on imparting the key essential messages relating to the topic. Co-ordinated modular training sessions (2-3 hours maximum duration) could be delivered by in-house resources, by staff returning from an external training event or by bought-in external providers.
- ◆ The ongoing impact of decreased staffing levels will require that local authority staff will have to continue to be flexible and that line managers/supervisors will have to be more innovative in how staff are assigned to handle the required work. The ability to multi-task and be subject matter experts in a variety of areas will become the norm rather than the exception. It will be difficult to train staff in how to be flexible and creative. These skills are more attitudinal and are best developed by one-to-one coaching and team or individual based problem solving rather than taught classes. Approaches will need to be developed in order to give staff opportunities to develop the newly required skills and attitudes.
- ◆ On the job training is widespread across the sector and where it is happening it is being organised by direct line managers rather than by the Training Officers. The survey

indicates that the majority of this type of training occurs either in the Fire Service or as part of induction of new staff or when new equipment is introduced. In the absence of any clear requirement to complete a formal training course in order to demonstrate competency and where it is appropriate to the job/activity being learned more use should be made of this training and development approach. Strategies on how this approach can be more effectively used and the areas where it can most effectively be applied will need to be developed and identified by the LGMSB.

- ◆ Greater use of development opportunities other than formal 'off-the-job' training courses will necessitate an improved awareness amongst line managers and individual staff members that these activities still need to be recorded and added to the training records of individuals. All training and development activities undertaken should regardless of whether 'off', 'on' the job or 'self-directed' in nature should be recorded. While it may prove to be difficult to tie informal development activities into formal qualifications there should be recognition for completing non formal development activities within an overall competency framework. Informal training and development should not be used as a replacement for formal training nor should it be seen as piecemeal. It should be part of an overall integrated development pathway for individuals in certain jobs. Ensuring that informal development is completed before application/recommendation for specific formal courses of training and/or education could be one way of linking development activities into a competency development framework.
- ◆ All local authorities should consider introducing coaching as a way of addressing the developmental needs of some staff. Where a very specific and/or unique training or development need has been identified for an individual staff member through their PDP consideration should be given to addressing that need through some form of formalised coaching with either internal or external resources. The structured provision of coaching can be successfully employed to ensure that staff can, amongst other things, be guided towards addressing their own perceived skills gaps or to develop business solutions for specific, pressing business problems. As a form of informal training it can prove to be very effective when used to address either of these two areas. The use of trained and experienced senior staff to provide coaching to more junior staff has been successfully employed to date by a number of local authorities and has been proved to be a very cost effective approach to action based learning. In order to promote the use of coaching across the sector the TOs in all local authorities should be exposed to the lessons learned by those local authorities that have and continue to employ coaching using either internal, external or a mixture of both resources as an option for staff development.
- ◆ Greater consideration should be given by local authorities Training Officers to delivering training content (either wholly or as part of a blended approach to course delivery) using computer based training (CBT) packages, either on-line or in CD-ROM format as a cost effective alternative to tutor led classroom training. Some training activities will lend themselves ideally to CBT format and will certainly be a more effective way of delivering some aspects of training (e.g.) self-directed study of underpinning theory, compared to classroom based learning. It should be noted that where there is sufficient demand for certain course content or CBT package(s) there will be economies of scale to

be had by securing outright purchase or licensing of products for the sector as a whole rather than on a local authority by local authority basis. In order to promote the use of CBT or blended learning approaches across the sector the TOs in all local authorities should be exposed to the lessons learned by those local authorities that have and continue to employ CBT as one of many methods for delivering staff training.

Making greater use of in-house resources

- ◆ Local authorities currently possess quite a number of resources that could be more fully utilised in order to deliver more cost effective training. The following resources have been identified by the survey as already being in place across the sector,
 - Qualified in-house trainers
 - A network of local authority regional training centres with a tradition and proven track record of organising training on an outreach basis
 - Dedicated IT training rooms in the majority of local authorities

Strategies should be devised by the National T&D steering committee of the LGMSB in cooperation with the other committees/bodies involved in training provision across the sector in order to maximise the benefits accruing to the sector from their use of these existing resources.

Maximising training budgets

- ◆ In order to maximise the business impact of the spend on educational assistance it is recommended that local authorities should concentrate on providing assistance to individuals applying for certificate, diploma and degree courses. For the duration of the economic downturn educational assistance for Master level courses should only be provided where a link to carrying out current work duties is made by staff members or where a staff member has already completed a considerable amount of the course time.
- ◆ In order to minimise the negative impact on the centralised training budget and in order to achieve maximum value for the spend on bought-in or external training courses, Training Officers should instigate (if not already doing it) charging individual business units/sections for staff that fail to attend for training courses for which they were booked.
- ◆ The major compliance responsibilities placed on local authorities as a result of (i) an increasing legislative and regulatory framework; and (ii) the transposition of EU Directives into Irish legislation, has placed and will continue to place a major financial burden on local authorities particularly in areas such as water quality, waste management, health and safety, etc. Existing local training budgets will not be able to bear the burden of training for staff in sections where these new regulations are to take effect. Staff training costs need to be factored in by central government to any financial support being made available to local authorities to implement/address their new responsibilities.

Achieving greater value for money for the sector

- ◆ In order to ensure that bought-in training more closely reflects the specific needs of the individual local authorities purchasing the training, Training Officers should engage to a greater degree with external training providers. More engagement pre-delivery at the course design stage should increase the relevance of the material delivered by training providers and ensure the specific needs of the purchasing local authority are addressed more effectively.
- ◆ Local authorities are and will continue to be (in the future) employers and active recruiters of qualified graduates. This is especially true for engineering, technical and professional posts. In order to ensure that future graduates are equipped with an understanding of some of the cross functional issues currently affecting the work of local authorities efforts should be made to convince universities, colleges and places of further education to incorporate material (where appropriate) on some or all of the following areas in their undergraduate courses (both part-time, full-time)
 - Social inclusion
 - Sustainable development
 - Green procurement
 - Promoting accessibility to services
 - Managing information

It is recommended that the LGMSB should co-ordinate, on behalf of the sector, the approaches to be made to the universities, colleges and places of further education.

- ◆ In tandem with the above point it is recommended that the various designated bodies that provide ongoing competency development programmes (e.g.) Engineers Ireland, the Planning Institute, etc for their members should be approached in order to incorporate material (where appropriate) on some or all of the areas already identified. In addition the designated bodies could incorporate the following into their CPD programmes
 - financial management and budgetary and cost control
 - working in multi-disciplinary teams
 - managing staff performance
 - updates on legislation and their potential impact
 - more effective use of I.T.
 - developing leadership

Once again it is recommended that the LGMSB, on behalf of the sector, should co-ordinate the approaches to the various designated bodies that provide CPD frameworks.

- ◆ In order to further reduce the spend on travel and subsistence associated with staff attending off-site training events local authority Training Officers should be encouraged to make greater use of courses/events organised on a shared or regional basis. The current practice of determining whether any demand exists for shared training

opportunities either through the regional training centre network or directly should become more widespread. Where a local, regional demand has been identified the Training Officers should take advantage of current market conditions to achieve greater reductions in costs/charges due to economies of scale afforded by larger numbers of potential attendees. Where regional or clustered events are being planned for consideration should be given to choosing locations and venues served by public transport. External training providers and staff travelling to events should be actively encouraged to avail of cost effective public transport whenever possible rather than incurring high mileage costs which draw heavily on an ever reducing training budget.

- ◆ LGMSB should co-ordinate approaches to FÁS, Coillte et al on behalf of the sector in order to improve the local authority specificity for some existing Construction Skills Certification Schemes (CSCS) courses. Aspects of these courses where changes might be made include durations, assessment criteria both for initial and renewal certifications and overall course content.
- ◆ In order to take maximum advantage of current market conditions a national framework of suitably qualified training providers should be put in place for the most urgent of those cross functional generic training requirements identified in Section 2 of the report. With prices for bought in or external courses at a lower level than in the past couple of years it would be prudent to attempt to lock in training providers to these low levels of fee's for at least 18 months – 2 years. The various committees and bodies that currently organise tender competitions for the procurement of training and/or consultancy services (e.g.) WSTG, Regional Training Centres, An Chomhairle Leabharlanna, the LGMSB should examine the option of establishing (where required) multi-annual panels or frameworks of suitably qualified providers at the lowest possible prices.



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