

Building a better workforce – from the ground up

There is a construction skills shortage on, and Europe is full of lucrative opportunities – here’s how ICT skills is arming students and workers with the best training and technology, writes Fiona Alston

It’s no surprise hearing about a skills shortage in Ireland these days. The recession hit many industries hard in terms of college places. What parent in their right mind (unless they had incredible foresight) would have recommended their children enter the school of the built environment, post-2008? There started the knock-on effect of lower student attendance, lower budget, fewer upgrades to equipment.

Joe Glennon, marketing manager of Topcon Ireland, said, “What we’ve found is Ireland is lacking really far behind the rest of our European colleges in the construction industry and it’s something we are beginning to see not only at graduate level. What we are beginning to see now in the industry is some of the Irish companies which are going up for European tenders, against some of the big construction companies in Europe, are not realising not only their skills levels but the technology they use, is way behind their European colleagues. It’s not just something that stems from graduates, but it’s creeping its way into the industry as well.”

Topcon donated equipment in 2013 to both Bolton Street and Kevin Street DIT campuses during a visit by Topcon’s now global chief executive Ray O’Connor, forming part of Topcon’s education partnering strategy. Glennon said, “They had the latest equipment and they set up Topcon technology rooms in both of the colleges. It meant as there is a four-year cycle of students in engineering and students in optometry studies, straight away they have access to the very latest equipment 12 months before they left college. They were comfortable with the technology, they learned how to use it. What it meant for the first year students was it gave them day in, day out use of the latest technology that was then coincided with all the theory-based lectures in the classrooms.

“That was just a physical donation, but we had to build on that and since the donation was made Topcon has connected with colleges throughout Ireland and we’ve donated our time and our knowledge to students. We’ve offered training courses, brought in our equipment to let the students spend one or two days using the equipment, and we have given them some real-life case studies and given them access to software. We’ve given the student hands-on experience. At the moment we are inundated by requests for industry support from the colleges.”

Creating more resources for college-level students is one way of improving the ICT skills in Irish employees, but what happens to those already in the workforce who need to up-skill? The likes of the recent upheaval of GDPR meant that there was a huge demand for IT training. The continuation of many in-house systems migrating to the cloud left many of the unskilled staring at their screens like lamed rabbits.

We are beginning to look at the world differently and the phrase ‘eliminating room for human error’ is now becoming



Third level education being carried out by Topcon

Inset: Joe Glennon, marketing manager, Topcon Positioning Ireland



a thing, but should we be so fast to trust everything on our screens?

Shane Broadberry, director at IACT, said, “Technology’s reach is growing and the expectation and trust end users have of what they use continues to grow. It is easy to forget that the output is only as good as the input when it comes to making decisions and therefore it is important for users to understand the technology they are using and its abilities as well as its limitations. We are becoming very trusting of anything we see on a computer and still require the human skills to understand and interpret what we see. This is going to become ever more important with the growth of AI and we start to treat machines more like infallible humans. We’ve a fair way to go before machines are smarter than we are – but the perception might lead us to conclude differently sooner.

“We work with companies to upskill their teams and develop internal expertise in new technologies or consult with them on the best strategies for their businesses.

“IT changes at a ferocious rate. Successful companies invest in their staff and with regular performance reviews assess the development and training plans of their teams – and, in common with many of the traditional certification bodies, require staff to continue with ongoing training to keep pace of that change.”

Demands are high for ICT skilled workers – it’s a great position to be in from an employee’s perspective, and you’ve got the pick of the crop when it comes to jobs with the demand to meet such a shortage – but how are the companies choosing to find the right level of employee? Ireland is a small pool – but Europe, well, there is an ocean of talent just waiting to be caught.

David McEvoy, resourcing director at Sabeo, said: “Clients come to Sabeo because we don’t use the traditional methods. We have a huge network of consultants who have worked for us on various projects across software development and infrastructure projects. We source all over Europe, we source in Ireland first and then we go to the British market and then



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we have to go the likes of Spain and Portugal and Eastern Europe because a lot of the niche skill sets are difficult to find in Ireland. The demand is a lot higher than supply.

“The ICT market in Ireland is moving at an unprecedented pace, with technology the main catalyst. These changes are showing no signs of slowing down, for the employer, the candidate and the resourcing companies alike. These trends present opportunities for innovative employers to source the best talent and adaptable candidates to secure the best roles. Sabeo adapts to these trends, providing our clients with hybrid resourcing solutions in both the contracting and permanent markets. Our clients use our specialist resourcing services as an alternative to the traditional recruitment methods provided by more mainstream agencies.

“Our broad network of ICT resources provides our clients with in-demand skill sets that would have previously worked for us on client-led projects. Specific skills that are in demand are Java micro services, full stack development, project managers with both infrastructure and software development experience, cyber security, DevOps and cloud architecture, data analytics and data science.”

A skills shortage in Ireland is not news to us. Maybe it’s about time the support given to third level students is ramped up. You can’t build anything on weak foundations because sooner or later it will collapse. Now, where have I seen this happen before?