



Expert Group on
Future Skills Needs

National Survey of Vacancies
in the Public Sector 2001/2002

A study for the Expert Group on
Future Skills Needs by the
Economic and Social Research Institute

FAS

Forfás



NATIONAL SURVEY OF VACANCIES IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR 2001/2002

A study for the Expert Group on Future Skills
Needs by the Economic and Social
Research Institute

ESRI Project Team

Gerard Hughes

James Williams

Sylvia Blackwell

Barra Casey

Final Report

February 2003

FOREWORD

This report is submitted by the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs to Mary Harney, T.D., Tánaiste, and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment. The report is the second part of a national vacancy study undertaken by the Economic and Social Research Institute, who were appointed by Forfás, acting on behalf of the Expert Group on Future Skill Needs. The focus of the report is on vacancies in the public sector. The results of the private sector survey are published in a separate report. This is the first time that the public sector have been included in a study of national vacancies as previous national vacancy studies have focused exclusively on the private sector.

The aim of the study was to identify the incidence and nature of vacancies and provide a representative picture of the issues surrounding public sector vacancies. The report provides useful information on the employment size and structure, projected employment and vacancies in 413 public sector organisations which constitutes a response rate of about 72 per cent. It is gratifying to know that so many public sector organisations participated so generously with their time to complete the survey.

The report highlights the level of vacancies in the different subsectors of the public sector, identifies those sectors that are experiencing difficult-to-fill positions and the extent of recruitment from abroad. In addition, an interesting overview of the differences between vacancies within the public and private sectors is also presented.

On behalf of the Expert Group on Future Skill Needs, we wish to thank the steering group who guided the work, Prof. Gerard Hughes and Prof. James Williams of the Economic and Social Research Institute for their dedicated work on the project, and in particular, all the public sector organisations who participated in the study. A particular word of thanks to the Office of An Tánaiste for preparing a letter which was sent with the questionnaire to all public sector organisations encouraging participation in the survey. The findings of this study are important as they provide a valuable insight into the number of reported vacancies, by sector and by occupation, and the consequences of those vacancies for the public sector.

Dr Daniel O'Hare,
Chairman
Expert Group on Future Skills Needs

CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
Overview of Vacancies in the Private Non-Agricultural and Public Sectors 2001/2002	xi
<i>Chapter</i>	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. SURVEY DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION	2
2.1 The Questionnaire	2
2.2 Design and Response Rate	2
2.3 Re-weighting the Data	4
2.4 Survey Implementation	5
3. EMPLOYMENT LEVELS	6
3.1 Sectoral Changes in Employment Structures	6
3.2 The Structure of Employment, 2001/2002	8
3.3 Employment Projections for One Year's Time	9
4. INCIDENCE AND LEVELS OF CURRENT VACANCIES	12
4.1 The Incidence of Current Vacancies	12
4.2 The Level of Current Vacancies	13
4.3 Current Recruitment and Recruitment Abroad	16
4.4 Summary	18
5. VACANCIES OVER THE PREVIOUS YEAR	20
5.1 Incidence of Difficult-to-Fill Vacancies of the Last Year	20
5.2 Nature of Most Difficult-to-Fill Vacancies	22
5.3 Consequences of Difficult-to-Fill Vacancies	22
5.4 Steps Taken to Address Difficult-to-Fill Vacancies	23
5.5 Summary	23
6. DIFFICULTIES IN RETAINING STAFF AND PERCEIVED CHANGES IN SKILL LEVELS	25
6.1 Difficulties in Retaining Staff – Incidence Levels and Nature of Jobs Affected	25
6.2 Perceptions of Changes in Skill Requirements	26
6.3 Summary	27
7. TRAINING IN PUBLIC SECTOR ORGANISATIONS	28
7.1 Incidence of Formal, Structural Training	28
7.2 Summary	30
8. MAIN TRAINING	31
8.1 Background	31
8.2 Size and Forecasted Growth of the Labour Market	31
8.3 Incidence and Level of Vacancies	31
8.4 Difficult-to-Fill Vacancies	32
8.3 Difficulties in Retaining Staff	32
8.6 Training	32

LIST OF TABLES

<i>Table</i>	<i>Page</i>
2.1 Response Outcomes from 2001/2002 Survey of Vacancies in the Public Sector	3
2.2 Structure of Population of Public Sector Organisations as Derived from Annual Report on Public Sector Employment and the Labour Force Survey	4
3.1 Estimates of Employment in the Public Sector in 2001/02	6
3.2 Breakdown of Current Employees by Occupational Grade	7
3.3 Public Sector Employment Projections by Occupational Grade for Twelve Month Period 2002 to 2003	9
3.4 Summary Employment Projections by Broad Sector 2002 to 2003	10
3.5 Public Sector Projected Employment Change 2002 to 2003 Classified by Occupational Grade	11
4.1 Reporting Entities Classified by Whether or Not They Currently Have Job Vacancies	12
4.2 Summary of Public Sector Vacancies and Vacancy Rates by Occupational Grade and Sector, 2001/02	13
4.3 Summary of Public Sector Vacancies by Occupational Grade, All Categories in Aggregate	14
4.4 Summary Rates of Vacancies in the Public Sector by Occupational Grade Within Each Sector Category in Percentages	15
4.5 Reporting Entities Classified by Whether or Not They Are Currently Trying to Recruit Staff	16
4.6 Reporting Entities Which Have Current Job Vacancies Classified by Whether or Not They Are Attempting to Recruit Abroad	16
4.7 Reporting Entities Which Have Current Job Vacancies Classified by Whether or Not They Attempting to Recruit Abroad in the Last Twelve Months	17
4.8 Number of Persons Recruited by Public Sector Organisations from Other EU Countries or from the Rest of the World in the Twelve Months Preceding the 2001/02 Survey	17
4.9 Reporting Entities Which Have Current Job Vacancies Classified by Whether or Not They Consider Them Difficult-to-Fill	18
4.10 Reporting Entities Which Have Current Job Vacancies Classified by Whether or Not They Consider Some or All of their Vacancies are Difficult-to-Fill	18
5.1 Reporting Entities Classified by Whether or Not They Had Any Vacancies in the Last Year Which Were Particularly Difficult-to-Fill	20
5.2 Reporting Entities Which Had Difficult-to-Fill Vacancies Within the Last Year Classified According to Whether or Not They Also Had Current Vacancies Which Were Difficult-to-Fill	21
5.3 Percentage of Reporting Entities Which Had Experienced Both a Current Difficult-to-Fill Job Vacancy and Also a Difficult-to-Fill Vacancy in the Year Preceding the Survey	21
5.4 Nature of the Single Vacancy or Type of Vacancy Which the Reporting Entity Found Most Difficult-to-Fill in the Last Year	22

<i>Table</i>	<i>Page</i>
5.5 Perceived Consequences of Difficulties Associated with Difficult-to-Fill Vacancies Which Reporting Entities Experienced in the Last Year	23
5.6 Steps Taken by Reporting Entities to Address the Difficult-to-Fill Vacancies Which were Experience by Them in the Last Year	24
6.1 Reporting Entities Which Have Current Difficulties in Retaining Existing Staff	25
6.2 Nature of the Specific Jobs Which Public Sector Organisations Find Most Difficulties in Retaining Staff	26
6.3 Reporting Entities Perceptions of Trends in the Overall Skills Needed to Keep Their Organisation Running Effectively	26
7.1 Reporting Entities Classified According to Whether or Not Anyone in the Company (Apart from Apprentices) Attended a Formal, Structure Training Course in the Twelve Months Preceding the Survey	28
7.2 Number of Persons in Public Sector Organisations Undertaking Formal, Structured Training; Total Days on Such Training Courses and Average Length of Such Training Classified by Sector	29
7.3 Public Sector Organisations Engaged in Formal, Structured Training in the Twelve Months Preceding the Survey Classified According to the Percentage of their Total Workforce which Attended Such Training.	30

OVERVIEW

PRIVATE NON-AGRICULTURAL AND PUBLIC SECTORS 2001/2002

In 2001/2002 a national survey of non-agricultural vacancies was carried out by The Economic and Social Research Institute for FÁS and Forfás on behalf of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs. Interviews for the private sector were completed from December 2001 to March 2002 and for the public sector from January 2002 to June 2002. This report presents the results for the public sector. The results for the private non-agricultural sector are published in a separate report. In this section we use results from both reports to provide an overview of non-agricultural vacancies in the private and public sectors. We begin by looking at response rates and employment by occupation. Then we discuss the number of vacancies and vacancy rates by occupation and sector and we conclude with an analysis of where employers recruited workers from abroad in the twelve months preceding the survey.

The Sample and Response Rates

The questionnaire was designed to collect details on, *inter alia*, current employment size and structure; projected employment; and vacancies. In the context of vacancies a large proportion of the survey form was devoted to recording information on the nature of difficult-to-fill vacancies both those which were currently being experienced as well as those which were experienced over the twelve months preceding the survey.

A harmonised questionnaire was used to survey both the public and private sectors with some questions amended to take account of upper limits on the number who can be employed in public sector organisations. The objective of the survey was to provide a representative picture of the issues surrounding vacancies among private and public sector employing entities. The sample used came from two sources. For the private sector a random stratified sample of businesses was selected from lists of firms which are maintained in The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI). For the public sectors a census was carried out of all organisations on a list of public sector organisations maintained by the ESRI. Statistical adjustment of the responses for both sectors was implemented to account for non-response of private sector firms or public sector organisations. The response outcomes

are outlined in Table 1 below. From this one can see that a total of 1,481 organisations (1,068 private sector firms and 413 public sector reporting entities) successfully completed the questionnaire. This means that the overall effective sample response rate was 45 per cent.

The response rate for the public sector was considerably larger than for the private sector.

Table 1: Response Outcomes from 2001/02 Survey of Vacancies

	Private Sector		Public Sector		Total	
	No. of Cases	Per Cent	No. of Cases	Per Cent	No. of Cases	Per Cent
Successfully Completed	1,068	40	413	72	1,481	45
Non response	1,447	54	107	19	1,554	48
Refusal	96	4	35	6	131	4
Other	74	2	16	3	90	3
Total	2,685	100	571	100	3,256	100

The overall response rate is largely in line with what one would expect from a general, nationally representative survey of organisations in the target sample or target population. Only 4 per cent of all the firms or organisations contacted explicitly refused to participate in the survey. A substantial proportion, however, did not respond to the survey and their non-responses could be interpreted as a *de facto* refusal.

Table 2: Breakdown of Current Employees by Occupational Grade

	Private Non-Agricultural Sector		Public Sector		All Non-Agricultural Sectors	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Managers/Proprietors	149,300	13	25,000	9	174,300	12
Engineering Professionals	24,800	2	3,600	1	28,400	2
Science Professionals	6,800	1	1,600	1	8,400	1
Computer Professionals	15,800	1	1,000	0	16,800	1
Other Professionals	48,600	4	76,700	27	125,300	9
Engineering Technicians	20,600	2	1,700	1	22,300	2
Science Technicians	8,900	1	6,200	2	15,100	1
Computer Technical Staff/ Associate Professional Staff	14,700	1	1,600	1	16,300	1
Other Associate Professional	17,000	1	40,900	15	57,900	4
Clerical & Secretarial	170,400	14	53,600	19	224,000	15
Skilled Maintenance & Skilled Production	101,100	9	5,400	2	106,500	7
Production Operatives	187,300	16	300	0	187,600	13
Transport & Communications	75,600	6	3,400	1	79,000	5
Sales	139,900	12	100	0	140,000	9
Personal Services	99,700	8	23,500	8	123,200	8
Labourers & Security	101,000	8	36,100	13	137,100	9
Total	1,181,500	100	280,900	100	1,462,400	100
Per Cent	80.8%		19.2%		100.0%	

Table 2 shows that almost 1.5 million people were employed in non-agricultural jobs at the time of the survey. Over 80 per cent of these were working in the private sector and about 20 per cent in the public sector. There were significant differences in the occupational structure of the two sectors. Nearly three-fifths of those at work in the public sector are in high

skill Manager/Proprietor, Professional and Associate occupations compared with just over a quarter in the private sector. Conversely, three-quarters of those employed in the private sector were working in intermediate and low skill jobs compared with about two-fifths in the public sector. Within the high skill occupations, the private sector had proportionally almost half as many Managers/Proprietors as the public sector, probably due to differences in the scale at which activities are carried out in the two sectors. The private sector consists of a very large number of mostly small firms employing few people on average whereas the public sector consists of a relatively small number of organisations employing a much larger number on average. Proportionally, the public sector had more than twice as many employed in Other Professional occupations (e.g., in business, finance and the law) as the private sector.

The number of vacancies, the vacancy rate, and the share of all vacancies in each sector are shown in Table 3. There were 52,000 vacancies in total so

Table 3: Summary of Vacancies by Occupational Grade

Occupational Grade	Private Non-Agricultural Sector			Public Sector		
	Vacancies	Vacancy Rate	Share of All Vacancies	Vacancies	Vacancy Rate	Share of All Vacancies
		(Per Cent)	(Per Cent)		(Per Cent)	(Per Cent)
Managers/Proprietors	1,800	1	5	1,000	4	8
Engineering Professionals	900	3	2	500	12	4
Science Professionals	300	5	1	100	5	1
Computer Professionals	500	3	1	0	3	0
Other Professionals	2,000	4	5	2,200	3	18
Engineering Technicians	1,100	5	3	100	7	1
Science Technicians	400	4	1	400	6	4
Computer Technical Staff				200		
Associate Professional Level	600	4	2		13	2
Other Associate Professional	500	3	1	2,800	6	23
Clerical and Secretarial	4,100	2	10	2,000	4	17
Skilled Maintenance & Skilled Production	8,300	8	21	100	1	1
Production Operatives	4,400	2	11	0	2	0
Transport & Communications	2,000	3	5	0	1	0
Sales	4,800	3	12	0	4	0
Personal Service	4,200	4	10	900	4	8
Labourers & Security	4,200	4	10	1,600	4	13
Total	40,000	3	100	12,000	4	100

the overall non-agricultural vacancy rate was just under 3.5 per cent. About three-quarters of the vacancies (40,000) were in the private sector and the remainder (12,000) were in the public sector. In absolute terms the occupations accounting for the largest number of vacancies were all in the private sector. They included Skilled Maintenance and Skilled Production workers (8,300), Sales workers (4,800), Personal Service workers and Labourers and Security workers (both occupations having 4,200 vacancies), and Clerical and Secretarial workers (4,100). In the public sector the highest number of vacancies was for Other Associate Professional workers (2,800), which includes teachers and nurses, Other Professionals (2,200), and Clerical and Secretarial workers (2,000). There were few vacancies in the public sector for Production Operatives, Transport and Communications workers and Sales workers as total employment in these occupations was relatively small.

The highest vacancy rates in the private sector were recorded for Skilled Maintenance and Skilled Production workers (8 per cent), and Science Professionals and Engineering Technicians (both 5 per cent) while the lowest rates were for Managers/Proprietors (1 per cent), Clerical and Secretarial workers and Production Operatives (both 2 per cent). In the public sector the highest vacancy rates were for Computer Technical Staff at Associate Professional level (13 per cent) and for Engineering Professionals (12 per cent). The vacancy rates for Other Associate Professional staff and Science Technicians in the public sector were also relatively high at 6 per cent. The lowest vacancy rates in the public sector were for Transport and Communications workers and Skilled Maintenance and Skilled Production workers (1 per cent each). At this low level the unfilled posts which are available probably reflect normal staff turnover rather than labour shortages. Analysis of the share of vacancies in both sectors shows that about two-thirds of all vacancies in the private sector occur in five occupational groups, *viz.* Skilled Maintenance and Skilled Production (21 per cent), Sales (12 per cent), Production Operatives (11 per cent), Labourers and Security and Personal Service (both 10 per cent). Thus, the bulk of vacancies in the private sector is in the intermediate and lower skill levels. In contrast the bulk of the vacancies in the public sector is in the intermediate and higher skill levels. Nearly 60 per cent of all public sector vacancies occurred in three occupational groups. Other Associate Professionals accounted for 23 per cent, Other Professionals accounted for 18 per cent and Clerical and Secretarial occupations accounted for 17 per cent of all public sector vacancies. As 61 per cent of all staff employed in the public sector work in these three occupational groups the distribution of vacancies is in line with the distribution of current employment.

The detail of vacancy levels in sub-sectors within the public and private non-agricultural sectors category is shown in Table 4. In the private sector Construction had the highest vacancy rate (6 per cent). The other sub-sectors had rates in the range of 2 to 4 per cent. In the public sector the highest vacancy rates were in the Gardaí/Defence and Health sectors (6 per cent in both cases) and the lowest rates were in the Civil Service and Education sectors (both 3 per cent). Table 4 also allows one to assess the degree of variation in terms of vacancy rates for occupational grades according to the

Table 4: Vacancy Rates by Occupational Group Within Each Sub-Sector in the Private Non-Agricultural and Public Sectors

	Trad. Mfg.			Hi-Tech. Mfg.			Private Non-Agricultural Sector				Public Sector				
	2	2	0	2	3	0	Constr.	Dist. Svcs.	Fin./Insr./Bus/	Trans./Pers./	Civil Service	Gardai/Defence	Educ.	Reg. Bods.	Non-Comm. Semi-State
Managers/Proprietors	2	2	0	1	1	1	0	1	2	3	10	1	3	3	7
Engineering Professionals	3	3	5	3	3	0	5	3	0	11	14	4	13	14	17
Science Professionals	2	6	0	10	0	0	0	10	0	5	0	0	8	4	13
Computer Professionals	8	2	5	1	4	0	5	1	0	0	0	2	15	6	13
Other Professionals	2	1	8	3	5	1	8	3	1	10	37	3	6	1	4
Engineering Technicians	2	5	11	3	4	1	11	3	1	1	0	5	11	3	10
Science Technicians	2	3	0	13	21	1	0	13	1	2	0	0	9	1	10
Computer Technical Staff/Associate Professional Staff	3	4	0	2	5	1	0	2	1	16	0	10	12	19	9
Other Associate Professional	1	1	0	2	18	3	0	2	3	8	0	1	4	6	7
Clerical & Secretarial	1	1	3	1	3	2	3	1	2	2	0	5	5	4	5
Skilled Maintenance & Skilled Production	3	3	11	7	13	2	11	7	2	0	0	11	1	4	4
Production Operatives	2	2	0	6	5	4	0	6	4	0	0	0	0	0	5
Transport & Communications	2	3	3	6	1	2	3	6	1	2	0	0	1	6	1
Sales	3	2	26	3	7	3	26	3	3	0	0	0	5	0	0
Personal Services	2	1	0	1	1	5	0	1	1	3	0	3	1	0	4
Labourers/Security	2	2	4	7	6	2	4	7	2	4	6	2	2	0	4
Total	2	2	6	3	4	3	6	3	4	3	6	3	4	3	6

sub-sector classification. The reader should note that in some sub-sectors the current level of employment is very low in absolute terms, as is the number of outstanding vacancies. Given the low absolute base in some of these sub-sectors even a relatively small number of outstanding vacancies registers as a relatively high vacancy rate.

In the private non-agricultural sector there was a substantially higher than average vacancy rate for Sales workers and Engineering Technicians in the Construction sector and for Skilled Maintenance and Skilled Production workers in Construction, Distributive Services, and Finance/Insurance/Business Services. The vacancy rate for Computer Technical Staff/Associate Professional Staff was about average in Manufacturing and Finance/Insurance/Business services but lower than average in Construction, Distribution and Transport/Personal/Other services. In the public sector there was a substantially higher than average vacancy rate for Computer Technical Staff/Associate Professional Staff and Other Professionals in the Civil Service and for Other Professionals in the Gardai/Defence sector. In the Education and Regional sectors the vacancy rates were above average for Computer Technicians and in Regional Bodies the vacancy rate for Computer Professionals was 15 per cent. There was also a high vacancy rate for Computer Technicians in Non-Commercial Semi-State bodies. In the Health Services high vacancy rates were recorded for Managerial staff and for Engineering and Science Technicians.

There are a wide variety of steps which private firms or public sector organisations can take to respond to labour shortages. One way, which is particularly important in Ireland in view of the openness of its economy, is to recruit abroad. Table 5 shows the number of workers who were recruited abroad in the year preceding the survey for jobs in the public and private non-agricultural sectors together with information on where they came from.

Table 5: Number of Persons Recruited from Other EU Countries or from the Rest of the World in the Twelve Months Preceding the 2001/02 Survey

	No. Recruited	Per Cent from EU	Per Cent from Rest of World	Total
Traditional Manufacturing	3,200	17	83	100
Hi-Tech. Manufacturing	1,500	48	52	100
Construction	700	25	75	100
Distributive services	3,000	39	61	100
Finance/Insurance/Business Services	3,200	67	33	100
Transport/Personal/Other Services	9,800	33	67	100
Total private non-agricultural sector	21,300	37	63	100
Civil Service	0	70	30	100
Gardai/Defence/Education	300	92	8	100
Regional Bodies	100	35	65	100
Non-Commercial Semi-State	0	56	44	100
Health	2,600	12	88	100
Total public sector	3,000	20	80	100
Total all sectors	24,300	35	65	100

In total just over 24,000 workers were recruited from overseas in the year preceding the survey. About one-third were recruited in other EU countries while around two-thirds were recruited from countries outside the EU. Nearly 90 per cent of the foreign workers were recruited for jobs in firms in the private non-agricultural sector and the remaining 10 per cent or so were recruited for jobs in public sector organisations. The largest number of foreign workers were hired for the Transport/Personal/Other Services sector (9,800), Traditional Manufacturing and Finance/Insurance/Business Services (both sectors hired 3,200 workers from overseas), Distributive Services (3,000) and the Health sector (2,600). Less than 100 workers from overseas were recruited for the Civil Service and Non-Commercial Semi-State sectors and overseas recruitment for the Gardaí/Defence/Education and Regional sectors was also quite small.

NATIONAL SURVEY OF VACANCIES

IN THE

PUBLIC SECTOR 2001/2002

1. INTRODUCTION

National surveys of vacancies in the private non-agricultural sector were carried out in 1998 and 1999/2000 by The Economic and Social Research Institute for FÁS and Forfás on behalf of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs.¹ Since the last survey was carried out in 1999/2000 the Irish economy has experienced a slowdown in the rate of employment growth. This was not unexpected as the employment growth rates recorded during the last half of the 1990s were unsustainable in the long term. Nevertheless, new jobs continue to be created and the demand for labour has been accommodated by increases in the female labour-force participation rate and immigration. In the context of slower employment growth it is clearly important to try and measure if labour shortages exist in particular occupational groups which may place constraints on the further expansion and development of the economy. Another national survey of vacancies in 2001/2002 was, therefore, jointly commissioned by Forfás and FÁS for the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs. It extended the scope of the previous surveys to encompass public sector organisations. The results for the private non-agricultural sector are published in a separate report and the results for the public sector are presented in this report.²

This report is based on a nationally representative sample of public sector organisations. The objective in surveying these organisations was to assess the incidence, level, nature and consequences of vacancies in the public sector in Ireland today. Particular attention was given to an examination of vacancies which public sector organisations consider are “difficult-to-fill”.

The information was collected in postal surveys with intensive phone follow-up. In addition to details on the level and structure of employment, the report provides information on vacancy rates and where vacancies occur both by sector and occupational group within sector.

The report is divided into eight chapters. In Chapter Two we discuss survey design, questionnaire structure, response rates and re-weighting of the data. Chapter Three discusses the size and structure of the current labour force in terms of sectoral distributions and grade within sector. Chapter Four addresses the core issue of the incidence, level, nature and consequences of current vacancies. Chapter Five examines vacancies which were experienced in the previous year. Chapter Six presents information on difficulties public sector organisations had in retaining staff as well as on their perceptions of changing skill levels. Chapter Seven presents basic information on training in public sector organisations and Chapter Eight provides a summary of our main results.

¹ James Williams and Gerard Hughes, *National Survey of Vacancies in the Private Non-Agricultural Sector 1998*. Dublin: The Economic and Social Research Institute, 1999.

James Williams, Sylvia Blackwell and Gerard Hughes, *National Survey of Vacancies in the Private Non-Agricultural Sector 1999/2000*. Dublin: The Economic and Social Research Institute, 2001.

² Gerard Hughes, James Williams, Sylvia Blackwell and Barra Casey, *National Survey of Vacancies in the Private Non-Agricultural Sector 2001/2002*. Dublin: Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, 2003.

2. SURVEY DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

In this section we explain how the survey was designed and outline our approach to the analysis of the data. First, we consider the structure and content of the questionnaire; second, we discuss sample design and response rates; third, we consider the way in which the data were re-weighted. This third section presents a breakdown of the sectoral classification adopted throughout the report. Finally, in the fourth section we discuss the way in which the survey was implemented.

2.1 The Questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed to collect details on, *inter alia*, current employment size and structure; projected employment; and vacancies. In the context of vacancies a large proportion of the survey form was devoted to recording information on the nature of difficult-to-fill vacancies both those which are currently being experienced as well as those which were experienced over the twelve months preceding the survey. The questionnaires contained a total of nine sections as follows:

- A. Background details and classificatory variables;
- B. Current employment size and structure;
- C. Level of current vacancies and incidence of difficult-to-fill vacancies;
- D. Employment projections for one year's time;
- E. Nature, characteristics and consequences of the current difficult-to-fill vacancies;
- F. Incidence, nature, and consequences of difficult-to-fill vacancies;
- G. Difficulties in retaining current staff;
- H. Organisations' perceptions of changes in skill levels required to keep them running effectively;
- I. The incidence, level and nature of training undertaken by public sector organisations.

A common questionnaire was used to survey both the public and private sectors. However, the questions relating to vacancies in the public sector were amended to take account of upper limits agreed with the Department of Finance on the number who can be employed in public sector organisations

2.2 Design and Response Rates

The objective of the survey was to provide a representative picture of the issues surrounding vacancies among public sector organisations. The survey was administered to a comprehensive list of public sector organisations which is maintained in The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI). A total of six broad categories of public sector organisation is recognised within the ESRI list. These are: Civil Service; Gardaí/Defence; Education; Regional Bodies; Non-Commercial Semi-State Bodies; and Health. In the private sector counterpart of this survey we administered the questionnaire only to a random sample of selected companies and, *ex post*, statistically re-adjusted the data to take account of design (sample selection) and also response/non-

response effects. In contrast in the public sector survey we targeted *all* organisations identified as being in the public sector. In this regard we attempted to conduct a census of the identified public sector organisations as compiled by the ESRI. *Ex post* statistical adjustment of the completed questionnaires was implemented to account for non-response of certain organisations, bodies etc.

Some of the broad areas of the public sector are represented only by a single reporting body. The best examples of this would be An Garda Síochána and the Defence Forces. A single questionnaire in respect of the former covers approximately 11,700 employees, the latter approximately 11,600. In order to ensure that the individual responses of public sector organisations cannot be identified we have had to aggregate results across several sectors in some of the chapters throughout the report.

The reader should also note that because of administrative or institutional convenience several public sector organisations opted to have their figures returned along with other related bodies. This was common in respect of, for example, Urban District Councils (UDC) which often had their figures returned with the appropriate County Council. In organisations such as UDC's the number involved were generally small. One area where this was an important issue, however, was in first and second level education; figures in respect of these two sectors were collated centrally from the relevant sectors in the Department of Education. Accordingly, the reader should note that the figures for the 3,000 or so national level schools in the country were returned on a single questionnaire as were those in respect of about 750 second level schools. Third level institutions and VEC's (universities, IT's and related institutes of education) were returned individually from their respective organisations.

A total of 571 valid non-commercial public sector organisations were targeted for interview. The response outcomes are as outlined in Table 2.1 below. From this one can see that a total of 413 organisations successfully completed the questionnaire and the report is based on the analysis of their responses. This means that the overall effective sample response rate is 72 per cent. Only 6 per cent of all relevant organisation explicitly refused to participate in the survey. A total of 19 per cent of organisations, however, did not respond to the survey and their non-responses could be interpreted as a *de facto* refusal.

Table 2.1: Response Outcomes from 2001/02 Survey of Vacancies in the Public Sector

	Total Sample	
	No. of Cases	Per Cent
Successfully Completed	413	72
Partially completed but unusable	8	1
Non-response	107	19
Refusal	35	6
Other	8	1
Total	571	100

The reader should also note that the respondent firms accounted for a total of 198,400 employees. This represents 71 per cent of the total estimated non-commercial public sector employment of 280,900. These response levels of over 70 per cent (both in terms of organisations and also employment) are extremely high relative to the standards which might be expected from surveys of this nature.³

³ The authors gratefully acknowledge the co-operation of the Office of An Tánaiste in preparing a covering letter which was sent with the questionnaire to all public sector organisations, encouraging participation in the survey.

2.3 Re-weighting the Data

Prior to analysis, the information from the 413 respondents was statistically adjusted in order to ensure that the structure or composition of the effective sample is in line with the structure or composition of the population from which it has been selected. The re-weighting of the data is necessary to minimise the effects of any systematic differential non-response between differential levels of non-response as between one group of organisations and another within the target sample.

Accordingly, one should statistically adjust or re-weight the data to ensure that all subgroups of the population are approximately represented in the sample, in line with their representation in the overall population.

Two sets of grossing factors or adjustment weights were derived for the public sector sample. The first was based on a number of employees. Each respondent is assigned a weight based on sectoral employment totals. The population structure of public sector employment used in re-weighting procedures is as outlined in Table 2.2 below. This contains a total of ten sectors set out in the Central Statistics Office (CSO) report on *Public Sector Employment and Earnings* and also the *Quarterly National Household Survey*. The table shows the number of employees in each sub-sector who were “captured” by the survey.

One can see that, in aggregate, the completed sample accounted for 71 per cent of total relevant non-commercial public sector employment. In some sectors, like the Gardaí, the figures reconcile exactly with those published in the CSO’s series on public sector employment. In others, such as primary and secondary education and also Defence they are well in excess of 90 per cent. The differences may be due to timing differences in compiling the CSO figures. One can see that the Health Sector has the lowest level of employment “captured” by the survey (58 per cent). By the usual standards of surveys of this nature it would be most usual to capture 58 per cent of the total employment within scope.

In addition to the employee-based weight we also derive a set of organisation-based weights which are analogous to firm-based weights in a survey of private sector companies. In interpreting the analysis based on these organisation-based weights we would once again draw the reader’s attention to the points raised above regarding the aggregation of results from a number of organisations onto one questionnaire.

Table 2.2: Structure of Population of Public Sector Organisations as Derived from Annual Report on Public Sector Employment and the Labour Force Survey

Sector	No. Captured in the Sample	Population of Employees	Percentage Population Captured
Civil Service	26,700	34,100	78.2
Defence	10,500	11,600	90.4
Gardaí	11,700	11,700	100.0
Primary Education	24,200	28,100	86.1
Second level (excl. VEC & ITs)	17,600	18,500	95.2
VECs/ITs/Third level	20,900	33,400	62.5
Regional Bodies	19,800	37,100	53.3
Non-Commercial Semi-State	9,900	10,100	97.6
Health	53,900	93,000	57.9
Prison Service	3,300	3,300	100.0
Total Public Sector	198,400	280,900	70.6

In deriving both the employment-based and also the enterprise-based weights a standard ratio weighting technique was used in which the respondents (or their employees) were assigned a weight corresponding to the ratio of the population employment total to the sample total in the relevant cell. In other words, the weight is given as:

$$W_i = P_i/S_i$$

where the p_i 's refer to the size cells in Table 2.2. The P_i is the total number in the population of each cell and the S_i refers to the number of employees or organisations in the corresponding cell in the sample which successfully completed the questionnaire and so were included in the analysis. The W_i 's are the weights associated with employees in the sample and it is this which ensures that the sample figures are adequately grossed to population totals.

2.4 Survey Implementation

The survey was implemented on a so-called mixed mode postal/telephone basis. This involved initially sending the questionnaire to the respondent in the post, followed by a postal reminder two weeks later. There then followed an extended period of very intensive postal phone follow-up in which all respondents were repeatedly contacted by phone with a view to securing a completed questionnaire or other definitive outcome. This phase of the fieldwork involved posting and faxing questionnaires on request. Interviews were completed from January 2002 through June 2002.

3. EMPLOYMENT LEVELS

In this chapter we consider three aspects of employment levels and structures. First we discuss employment levels by broad sector in recent years. Second, we consider the structure of employment by sector and by detailed occupational grade within sector. Third, we outline employment projections over 2002/03 by sector and occupational grade.

3.1 Sectoral Changes in Employment Structures

The Irish labour market has undergone very substantial change in recent years. The figures in Table 3.1 present estimates of employment levels in public sector organisations at the end of 2001 and the beginning of 2002. The levels during the first quarter of 2002 are taken as representative of the size and structure of the labour market when fieldwork for the 2001/02 survey was undertaken. These figures relate to the population of public sector employees at that time.

Table 3.1: Estimates of Employment in the Public Sector in 2001/02

	(000s)
Civil Service	37,400
Gardaí/Defence	23,300
Education	80,000
Regional Bodies	37,100
Non-Commercial Semi-State	10,100
Health	93,000
Total	280,900

Source: CSO Public Sector Employment and Earnings release of 22 November, 2002.

One can see that the total number of persons in employment at the end of 2001 and the beginning of 2002 was 280,900. Of these, a total of 37,400 were in the Civil Service, 23,300 in the Gardaí and Defence Forces, 80,000 in the Education sector, 37,100 in local government and other regional bodies, 10,100 in Non-Commercial Semi-State bodies, and 93,000 in the Health Services. The sum of these categories leaves us with a total of 280,900 persons which represent the public sector workforce to which all figures in the report have been grossed.

3.2 The Structure of Employment, 2001/2002

Table 3.2 provides details on the breakdown into occupational grades of current employment in the relevant public sector categories as recorded in the survey. Respondents were presented with a total of 17 different pre-defined grades. This grading structure reflects different levels of skill and managerial content. It ranges from a number of professional grades such as Managers/Proprietors, through Engineering Professions, Science Professionals etc. to Associate Professional/Technical grades. Intermediate skill levels are reflected in grades such as Clerical/Secretarial, Skilled Maintenance/Skilled Production, Production Operatives, Sales Personnel through to Unskilled Labourers. A set of examples of the various jobs included in each of the grades was included on the questionnaire as an aid to the respondent when breaking down his/her workforce. Although the classification system

Table 3.2: Breakdown of Current Employees by Occupational Grade

	Civil Service		Gardai/Defence		Education		Regional Bodies		Non-Commercial Semi-State		Health		Total All Sectors	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Managers/Proprietors	7,400	20	1,600	7	5,500	7	1,700	5	2,500	24	6,400	7	25,000	9
Engineering Professionals	100	0	100	1	400	1	2,800	7	200	2	0	0	3,600	1
Science Professionals	500	2	0	0	100	0	200	0	600	6	200	0	1,600	1
Computer Professionals	0	0	0	0	700	1	100	0	100	1	0	0	1,000	0
Other Professionals	1,200	3	100	0	64,500	81	1,200	3	2,000	19	7,700	8	76,700	27
Engineering Technicians	300	1	0	0	400	1	800	2	100	1	100	0	1,700	1
Science Technicians	2,000	5	0	0	200	0	200	1	400	4	3,400	4	6,200	2
Computer Technical Staff/ Associate Professional Staff	700	2	100	0	300	0	300	1	100	1	200	0	1,600	1
Other Associate Professional	400	1	100	0	1,700	2	900	2	400	4	37,500	40	40,900	15
Clerical & Secretarial	20,100	54	900	4	4,000	5	10,600	28	2,500	25	15,500	17	53,600	19
Skilled Maintenance & Skilled Production	300	1	1,200	5	100	0	2,900	8	0	0	800	1	5,400	2
Production Operatives	0	0	0	0	100	0	100	0	0	0	100	0	300	0
Transport & Communications	500	1	1,000	4	0	0	1,600	4	0	0	300	0	3,400	1
Sales Security	0	0	0	0	0	0	100	0	0	0	0	0	100	0
	3,300	9	18,200	78	600	1	1,300	4	0	0	100	0	23,500	8
Personal Services	500	1	0	0	900	1	1,300	4	300	3	20,600	22	23,600	8
Labourers	0	0	0	0	400	1	11,200	30	900	9	100	0	12,600	5
Total	37,400	100	23,300	100	80,000	100	37,100	100	10,100	100	93,000	100	280,900	100
Per Cent	13.3%		8.3%		28.5%		13.2%		3.6%		33.1%		100.0%	

presented to respondents appears to have worked well there is, understandably, a subjective element in the assignment of workers by the respondent to the categories in question.

The figures in Table 3.2 allow one to consider the structure of employment according to sector as well as by detailed occupation grade within sector. We first consider the sectoral distribution of employment before moving on to discuss the distribution of occupational grades.

3.2.1 EMPLOYMENT STRUCTURE ACCORDING TO SECTOR 2001/2002

The bottom row in Table 3.2 presents details on the percentage breakdown of relevant public sector employment according to broad category. From this one can see that a total of 13 per cent is employed in the Civil Service, 8 per cent in Gardaí/Defence, and 29 per cent in Education. Regional Bodies account for 13 per cent of the relevant labour force, 4 per cent are accounted for by Non-Commercial Semi-State companies, and 33 per cent are employed in the Health Services.

3.2.2 EMPLOYMENT STRUCTURE ACCORDING TO GRADE WITHIN SECTOR

The figures in the last column of Table 3.2 provide details on the total number of persons engaged in each grade as well as the relevant percentage breakdown. From this one can see, for example, that a total of 25,000 persons are engaged as Managers/Proprietors. This represents a total of 9 per cent of all relevant employment. Other major employment categories include: Other Professionals (27 per cent), Other Associate Professionals (15 per cent), Clerical and Secretarial (19 per cent), and Personal Services (8 per cent).

A total of 38 per cent of persons are engaged in professional grades (Managers/Proprietors to Other Professionals) while a further 19 per cent are classified in Associate Professional/Technical levels (Engineering Technicians to Other Associate Professionals). In total 57 per cent of those employed in the public sector are in Professional or Associate Professional grades compared with 26 per cent in the private sector.

The remainder of the table provides a comparable breakdown for each of the relevant sectors. The largest group in the Civil Service is Clerical and Secretarial workers (accounting for 54 per cent of persons engaged). This is followed by Managers (20 per cent), Security (9 per cent), Science Technicians (5 per cent), and Other Professionals (3 per cent). In the Gardaí/Defence sector almost all of those employed are security workers (78 per cent) with the remainder being employed as Managers (7 per cent), Clerical & Secretarial workers (4 per cent), or Skilled Maintenance & Skilled Production workers (5 per cent). Similarly in the Education sector the great bulk of those employed are Other Professionals (81 per cent) in teaching jobs. The remainder employed in the Education sector work as Managers (7 per cent) or Clerical and Secretarial workers (5 per cent). Employment in the remaining sectors is more dispersed across occupational groups. In Regional Bodies 30 per cent of those employed work as Labourers employed by Local Authorities, 28 per cent work in Clerical and Secretarial positions, 7 per cent are employed as Engineering Professionals and 5 per cent as Managers. The Non-Commercial Semi-State bodies employ about a quarter of their staff in Managerial positions and another quarter as Clerical and Secretarial workers. In the Health Services 40 per cent work in Associate Professional positions as nurses or health or technical inspectors while 22 per cent are employed in Personal Service occupations such as laundry workers and hospital porters.

3.3 Employment Projections for One Year's Time

In the course of the survey, respondents were asked to record an estimate of their projected employment level in one year's time (i.e. employment as it would relate to the first quarter of 2003). From this information one can derive one-year employment projections according to grade and sector. In interpreting the figures the reader should bear in mind that the figures are based on what respondents' may consider desirable rather than on staffing levels for the coming year agreed with the Department of Finance.

Table 3.3 provides a breakdown of employment projections by occupational grade for one year's time as recorded in the 2001/02 survey. The figures show that in aggregate terms across all grades public sector employers are forecasting a further growth in employment of around 3 per cent over 2002 to 2003. This would represent an employment growth of about 9,300 jobs in the public sector over the twelve months in question. It compares with a forecast for the private sector for the same period of 1 per cent or 12,000 jobs. In the Spring of 2002, shortly after the private sector survey was taken, the ESRI forecast for non-agricultural employment growth between 2002 and 2003 was 2 per cent but this was reduced to 1.8 per cent or 31,000 jobs in the Summer 2002 *Quarterly Economic Commentary*.⁴ Although the combined public and private sector employers' employment forecast for the year following the survey is lower it is broadly in line with the ESRI forecast.

The detail of Table 3.3 shows that the greatest percentage growth is forecast for the Computer Technician/Associate Professional Level category (13 per cent), followed by Engineering Professionals (9 per cent), Engineering Technicians (8 per cent), and Other Associate Professionals (5 per cent). Unlike the private sector there are no categories in which employment is expected to decline.

In terms of *absolute* growth levels public sector organisations project the largest growth in numbers of employees among Other Associate Professionals (2,200) followed by Clerical and Secretarial (1,800) and Other Professionals (1,600).

Table 3.3: Public Sector Employment Projections by Occupational Grade for Twelve Month Period, 2002 to 2003

	Current	Projected	Change	% Change		Current	Projected	Change	% Change
Managers/Proprietors	25,000	25,800	900	4	Clerical and Secretarial	53,600	55,400	1,800	3
Engineering Professionals	3,600	4,000	300	9	Skilled Maintenance/Skilled Production	5,400	5,400	0	0
Science Professionals	1,600	1,700	100	4	Production Operatives	300	307	0	2
Computer Professionals	1,000	1,000	0	4	Transport & Comm.	3,400	3,500	0	1
Other Professionals	76,700	78,300	1,600	2	Sales	100	100	0	1
Engineering Technicians	1,700	1,800	100	8	Security	23,500	24,000	400	2
Science Technicians	6,200	6,600	400	6	Personal Services	23,600	24,800	1,200	5
Computer Technical/Associate Professional Level	1,600	1,800	200	13	Labourers & Security	12,600	12,700	100	1
Other Associate Professional Level	40,900	43,200	2,200	5	Total	280,900	290,300	9,300	3

⁴ Table 8, *Quarterly Economic Commentary*, Spring 2002 and Summer 2002, Dublin: The Economic and Social Research Institute.

Table 3.4 outlines projected growth levels by broad sector. Growth is projected for all sectors. Highest growth is forecast in the Health Services, 6 per cent or 5,400 employees. This is followed by the Civil Service and Regional Bodies with growth of around 3 per cent or about 1,100 employees in each case and by Education with growth of about 2 per cent or 1,200 employees.

Table 3.4: Summary Employment Projections by Broad Sector 2002 to 2003

Sector	Current	Projected	Projected Absolute Change	Projected % Change
Civil Service	37,400	38,700	1,200	3
Gardaí/Defence	23,300	23,600	300	1
Education	80,000	81,200	1,200	2
Regional Bodies	37,100	38,200	1,100	3
Non-Comm. Semi-State	10,100	10,200	100	1
Health	93,000	98,400	5,400	6
Total	280900	290,300	9,300	3

Table 3.5 presents details on employment projections classified by grade within each sector. As the numbers employed in many occupations are quite small a change in employment of less than 50 is shown as zero as we round the change in employment to the nearest hundred. However, we show the percentage change for each occupation to indicate that changes in employment are expected for most occupations. In discussing the results we will focus on those occupations in which the absolute change projected is 50 or more. In the Civil Service the largest change projected is for Clerical and Secretarial workers (500 persons or about 2 per cent). An increase of around 100 in each case is projected for Other Professional and Science Technicians while it is expected that about 200 more Managers will be employed in the Civil Service in the coming year. Almost all of the projected increase in employment projected in the Gardaí/Defence sector is expected to be for security personnel (300 persons). In the Education sector expectations are that there will be about 1,000 more teachers in Other Professional occupations and 200 more in Clerical and Secretarial posts. Regional Bodies said that they hoped to employ 400 more Engineering Professionals and 400 more Clerical & Secretarial workers but about 200 less workers in Personal Services. Non-Commercial Semi-State bodies project increased employment for only about 100 more workers in the coming year and they are likely to be in Managerial occupations. In the Health Services employment is projected to increase by 5,400 persons. Somewhat less than half of these are likely to be nurses in Other Associate Professional occupations and about 1,300 are expected to be in Personal Service occupations. There are expected to be openings in the Health Services in the coming year for 300 Science Technicians and about 500 Managers.

Table 3.5: Public Sector Projected Employment Change 2002 to 2003 Classified by Occupational Grade

Occupational Grade	Percentage Breakdown of Persons Engaged													
	Civil Service		Gardai/Defence		Education		Regional Bodies		Non-Comm. Semi-State		Health		All Sectors	
	Change 2002 to 2003 Nos.	%	Change 2002 to 2003 Nos.	%	Change 2002 to 2003 Nos.	%	Change 2002 to 2003 Nos.	%	Change 2002 to 2003 Nos.	%	Change 2002 to 2003 Nos.	%	Change 2002 to 2003 Nos.	%
Managers/Proprietors	200	3	0	1	0	1	0	3	100	3	500	8	900	4
Engineering Professionals	0	12	0	5	-100	-28	400	14	0	11	0	20	300	9
Science Professionals	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	8	0	1	0	13	100	4
Computer Professionals	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	21	0	7	0	7	0	4
Other Professionals	100	9	0	25	1,000	2	100	7	0	2	400	5	1,600	2
Engineering Technicians	0	1	0	0	0	6	100	11	0	4	0	5	100	8
Science Technicians	100	4	0	0	0	-1	0	13	0	1	300	8	400	6
Computer Technical Staff/Associate Professional Level	100	18	0	2	0	1	0	13	0	11	0	10	200	13
Other Associate Professional	0	7	0	3	0	1	0	4	0	-8	2,200	6	2,200	5
Clerical and Secretarial	500	2	0	-1	200	5	400	4	0	0	700	5	1,800	3
Skilled Maintenance & Skilled Production	0	-1	0	-2	0	13	0	0	0	4	0	3	0	0
Production Operatives	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-2	0	7	0	2
Transport & Communications	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	12	0	1	0	1
Sales	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	1
Security	100	4	300	2	0	3	0	-1	0	0	0	16	400	2
Personal Service	0	2	0	0	0	3	-200	-13	0	0	1,300	6	1,200	5
Labourers	0	0	0	0	0	2	100	1	0	0	0	0	100	1
Total	1,200	3	300	1	1,200	2	1,100	3	100	1	5,400	6	9,300	3

4. INCIDENCE AND LEVELS OF CURRENT VACANCIES

4.1 The Incidence of Current Vacancies

In this chapter we consider the level and characteristics of all current vacancies in public sector organisations. We begin in Section 4.1 by considering the incidence of vacancies in terms of the percentage of organisations which say they are experiencing current vacancies. In Section 4.2 we focus on the level or estimated number of current vacancies. We continue in Section 4.3 by discussing vacancies which organisations consider to be difficult-to-fill and we conclude with a summary of our results in Section 4.4. The results in this and the following chapters are presented in terms of the number and percentage of reporting entities in the public sector responding to the questions in the survey. We use the term “reporting entities” to highlight the fact that, as discussed in Chapter 2, the results presented for the public sector are strongly influenced by institutional arrangements which dictate whether the questionnaire was completed by an autonomous organisation or by a government department or government body to which an organisation reports. For example, the questionnaires for all primary and second level schools were completed by the Department of Education and Science whereas the questionnaires for third level colleges were completed by individual colleges.

Vacancies were defined in the course of the survey as “...unmet demand for labour relative to the staffing level agreed with the Department of Finance where the positions are currently unoccupied, available immediately and where the organisation is actually searching for workers”. In the course of the questionnaire respondents were asked to record the incidence, and number of such current vacancies. Summary results are presented in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Reporting Entities Classified by Whether or Not They Currently Have Job Vacancies

Vacancies at Present	Civil Service	Regional Bodies	Non-Comm. Semi-State	Health	Gardaí/Defence/Educ.	Total
Yes	69.6	38.1	61.2	93.0	80.4	62.5
No	30.4	61.9	38.8	7.0	19.6	37.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Over 62 per cent of reporting entities say that they are experiencing current vacancies. The incidence level is highest in the Health and Gardaí/Defence/Education sectors with 93 and 80 per cent respectively of reporting entities saying they have current vacancies. These are followed by the Civil Service and Non-Commercial Semi-State sectors with 70 and 61 per cent of reporting entities recording current vacancies. However, it should be noted that the number of reporting entities for the Civil Service is rather low. The incidence level is lowest for Regional Bodies with 38 per cent of reporting entities saying they have current vacancies. The incidence level for all reporting entities in the public sector is much higher at 62 per cent than it is for the private sector where only 22 per cent of firms reported current vacancies in the 2001/02 survey. This difference is not unexpected because

the number employed in the average public sector organisation is much larger than the number employed in the average firm. The larger the organisation the more employment “slots” it has, by definition, and the more employment “slots” the greater the probability of one or more of them being vacant at any time.

4.2 The Level of Current Vacancies

In this section we consider how vacancies are spread across sectors and occupations. After looking at vacancies by sector, we consider vacancies by occupation from two perspectives. First, we show how many vacancies there are in each major occupational group. Second, we add current vacancies to current employment to provide an estimate of total labour requirement for each occupational group. Using the estimates of labour requirement we calculate vacancy rates which show the percentage of the labour requirement by occupation which is not currently being met.

Table 4.2: Summary of Public Sector Vacancies and Vacancy Rates by Occupational Grade and Sector, 2001/02

	Current Employment	Vacancies	Vacancy Rate
Civil Service	37,400	1,200	3
Gardaí/Defence	23,300	1,500	6
Education	80,000	2,000	3
Regional Bodies	37,100	1,500	4
Non-Comm. Semi-State	10,100	300	3
Health	93,000	5,500	6
All public sector organisations	280,900	12,000	4

Table 4.2 shows that at the time of the survey there were 12,000 vacancies in public sector organisations. Almost half of these were in the Health Services, 2000 were in Education, about 1,500 each in the Gardaí/Defence and Regional Bodies, 1,200 in the Civil Service and the remaining 300 in Non-Commercial Semi-State Bodies. Overall the vacancy rate was 4 per cent which was one percentage point higher than in the private sector. The highest vacancy rates were in the Gardaí/Defence and Health sectors, 6 per cent in each case. Regional Bodies had a vacancy rate of 4 per cent, the Civil Service, Education, and Non-Commercial Semi-State bodies each had vacancy rates of 3 per cent. In Table 4.3 we consider vacancies by occupation from two perspectives. First, we show how many vacancies there are in each major occupational group. Second, we relate current vacancies to current employment levels to derive an estimate of the total labour requirement for each occupation group. This enables us to calculate vacancy rates which show the percentage of the labour requirement for each occupation group which is not currently being met.

The figures in Table 4.3 provide summary details on the level of vacancies in each occupational group across all sectors. There was a total of 12,000 vacancies in relevant public sector organisations at the time of the survey in early 2002. This implies that, on the assumption that the full labour requirement is the sum of vacancies plus those currently in employment, a total of 96 per cent of the labour requirement was being met. This means that the overall vacancy rate was about 4 per cent across all organisations and all occupational groups. In other words, the 12,000 vacancies represent 4 per cent of the total labour requirement which is made up of the sum of the current 280,900 persons at work in the public sector plus the number of vacancies recorded by public sector employers.

Table 4.3: Summary of Public Sector Vacancies by Occupational Grade, All Categories in Aggregate

Occupational Grade	Current Employment	Vacancies	% Labour Requirement Currently Being Met	Vacancy Rate (Per Cent)	Share of All Vacancies (Per Cent)
Managers/Proprietors	25,000	1,000	96	4	8
Engineering Professionals	3,600	500	88	12	4
Science Professionals	1,600	100	95	5	1
Computer Professionals	1,000	0	97	3	0
Other Professionals	76,700	2,200	97	3	18
Engineering Technicians	1,700	100	93	7	1
Science Technicians	6,200	400	94	6	4
Computer Technical Staff Associate Professional Level	1,600	200	87	13	2
Other Associate Professional	40,900	2,800	94	6	23
Clerical and Secretarial	53,600	2,000	96	4	17
Skilled Maintenance & Skilled Production	5,400	100	99	1	1
Production Operatives	300	0	98	2	0
Transport & Communications	3,400	0	99	1	0
Sales	100	0	96	4	0
Security	23,500	1,400	94	6	12
Personal Service	23,600	900	96	4	8
Labourers	12,600	200	99	1	1
Total	280,900	12,000	96	4	00

Table 4.3 shows the breakdown of these figures by occupational group. The breakdown of vacancies by occupation group is presented in terms of the number of vacancies, the percentage of the labour requirement being met, the vacancy rate, and the distribution of vacancies across the groups. Focusing first on vacancy rates, the groups which have the highest vacancy rates are Engineering Professionals (12 per cent), Computer Technicians, (13 per cent), Science Technicians, Other Associate Professionals, and Security workers (each 6 per cent), and Science Professionals (5 per cent). The vacancy rates in Tables 4.3 indicate that vacancies exist in all occupational groups in the public sector but the rates are so low in some cases that they probably reflect job openings occurring due to normal staff turnover rather than labour shortages.

The detail of vacancy levels in each sector category is shown in Table 4.4. The table allows one to assess the degree of variation in terms of vacancy rates for occupational grades according to the sector classification. The reader should note that in some sector categories the current level of employment is very low in absolute terms, as is the number of outstanding vacancies. Given the low absolute base in some of the sector categories even a relatively small number of outstanding vacancies registers as a relatively high vacancy rate.

From Table 4.4 one can see, for example, that there is a substantially higher than average vacancy rate for Computer Technical Staff/Associate Professional Staff and Other Professionals in the Civil Service and for Other Professionals in the Gardaí/Defence sector. In the Education and Regional sectors the vacancy rates are above average for Computer Technicians and in Regional Bodies the vacancy rate for Computer Professionals is 15 per cent. There is also a high vacancy rate for Computer Technicians in Non-Commercial Semi-State bodies. In the Health Services high vacancy rates were recorded for Managerial staff and for Science Technicians.

Table 4.4: Summary Rates* of Vacancies in the Public Sector by Occupational Grade Within Each Sector Category in Percentages

	Civil Service			Gardaí/Defence			Education			Regional Bodies			Non-Comm. Semi-State			Health		
	Current Emp	Vac	Vac. Rate	Current Emp	Vac	Vac. Rate	Current Emp	Vac	Vac. Rate	Current Emp	Vac	Vac. Rate	Current Emp	Vac	Vac. Rate	Current Emp	Vac	Vac. Rate
Managers/Proprietors	7,400	200	3	1,600	200	10	5,500	0	1	1,700	100	3	2,500	100	3	6,400	500	7
Engineering Professionals	100	0	11	100	0	14	400	0	4	2,800	400	13	200	0	14	0	0	17
Science Professionals	500	0	5	0	0	0	100	0	0	200	0	8	600	0	4	200	0	13
Computer Professionals	0	0	0	0	0	0	700	0	2	100	0	15	100	0	6	0	0	13
Other Professionals	1,200	100	10	100	0	37	64,500	1,600	3	1,200	100	6	2,000	0	1	7,700	300	4
Engineering Technicians	300	0	1	0	0	0	400	0	5	800	100	11	100	0	3	100	0	10
Science Technicians	2,000	0	2	0	0	0	200	0	0	200	0	9	400	0	1	3,400	400	10
Computer Technical Staff/Associate Professional Staff	700	100	16	100	0	0	300	0	10	300	0	12	100	0	19	200	0	9
Other Assoc. Professional	400	0	8	100	0	0	1,700	0	1	900	0	4	400	0	6	37,500	2,700	7
Clerical & Secretarial	20,100	400	2	1,000	0	0	4000	200	5	10,600	500	5	2,500	100	4	15,500	800	5
Skilled Maintenance & Skilled Production	300	0	0	1,200	0	0	100	0	11	2,900	0	1	0	0	4	800	0	4
Production Operatives	0	0	0	0	0	0	100	0	0	100	0	0	0	0	0	100	0	5
Transport & Communications	500	0	2	1,000	0	0	0	0	0	1,600	0	1	0	0	6	300	0	1
Sales	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	100	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0
Security	3,300	100	4	18,200	1,200	7	600	0	2	1,300	0	2	0	0	3	100	0	7
Personal Services	500	0	3	0	0	0	900	0	3	1,300	0	1	300	0	0	20,600	900	4
Labourers	0	0	0	0	0	0	400	0	1	11,200	200	2	900	0	0	100	0	0
Total	37,400	1,200	3	23,300	1,500	6	80,000	2,000	3	37,100	1,500	4	10,100	300	3	93,000	5,500	6

4.3 Current Recruitment and Recruitment Abroad

Public sector organisations were asked if they were currently trying to recruit staff and if so were they attempting to recruit abroad as well as in Ireland. Table 4.5 indicates that almost half of the reporting entities responding said that they are currently trying to recruit staff. Over nine-tenths of the reporting entities in the Health sector and two-thirds in the Gardaí/Defence/Education sector are trying to recruit staff. Over half of the reporting entities in the Civil Service and somewhat under half in the Non-Commercial Semi-State sector are also trying to recruit. A significantly smaller percentage of Regional Bodies, 29 per cent, said that they are currently trying to recruit staff.

Table 4.5: Reporting Entities Classified by Whether or Not They Are Currently Trying to Recruit Staff

Currently Trying to Recruit	Civil Service	Regional Bodies	Non-Comm. Semi-State	Health	Gardaí/Defence/Educ.	Total
Yes	53.6	29.0	45.2	90.5	67.4	48.5
No	46.4	71.0	54.8	9.5	32.6	51.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Further information on recruitment was provided by public sector organisations, which said that they were currently trying to recruit staff, in response to being asked if they were also trying to recruit abroad (see Table 4.6). Over 38 per cent of these organisations said that they are trying to recruit abroad. This compares with 27 per cent of firms in the private sector which report attempts to recruit abroad. Health organisations are the most heavily involved in overseas recruiting. Almost two-thirds of reporting entities in the Health sector said they are looking abroad for staff. This degree of recourse to overseas recruitment of health workers is not unexpected as the Health Service Employers Agency carried out a survey in 2001 which showed that overseas recruitment accounted for a quarter of all recruitment of nurses. Overseas recruitment is also resorted to by 40 per cent and 36 per cent respectively of organisations in the Non-Commercial Semi-State and Gardaí/Defence/Education sectors and by 28 and 20 per cent of reporting entities in the Civil Service and in Regional Bodies.

Table 4.6: Reporting Entities Which Have Current Job Vacancies Classified by Whether or Not They Are Attempting to Recruit Abroad

Currently Trying to Recruit	Civil Service	Regional Bodies	Non-Comm. Semi-State	Health	Gardaí/Defence/Educ.	Total
Yes	27.8	19.7	40.4	63.5	35.6	38.4
No	72.2	80.3	59.6	36.5	64.4	61.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

The percentages of reporting entities in each sector which had tried to recruit abroad in the last twelve months or had used the services of a recruitment agency for this purpose are shown in Table 4.7. Involvement in overseas recruitment by the Health sector in the twelve months preceding the survey was at the same high level as reported for current recruitment but it was very much lower for organisations in the remaining sectors. Only around 6 per cent of organisations in the Civil Service and in Regional Bodies reported overseas recruitment activity in the twelve months before the survey compared with 28 and 20 per cent respectively for current recruitment.

Table 4.7: Reporting Entities Which Have Current Job Vacancies Classified by Whether Or Not They Attempted to Recruit Abroad in the Last Twelve Months

Currently Trying to Recruit	Civil Service	Regional Bodies	Non-Comm. Semi-State	Health	Gardaí/Defence/Educ.	Total
Yes	5.8	5.2	18.4	65.5	15.7	17.2
No	94.2	94.8	81.6	34.5	84.3	82.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Public sector organisations recruited almost 3,000 staff from overseas in the twelve months preceding the survey (see Table 4.8). In the private sector over a similar period 21,300 staff were recruited from overseas so total overseas recruitment amounted to about 24,000. In public sector organisations the great bulk of overseas recruitment was done by organisations in the Health sector. This sector recruited 87 per cent of all those recruited by public sector organisations. Following a long way behind the Health sector is the Gardaí/Defence/Education sector which recruited around 300 staff in the period we are dealing with. Almost all of these were for jobs in the education sector. Regional and Non-Commercial Semi-State Bodies recruited small numbers of staff from overseas. Government departments recruited only a very small number of staff for the Civil Service. The breakdown of staff recruited overseas from the rest of the European Union and the Rest of the World is shown in Table 4.8. Four-fifths of those recruited came from the Rest of the World but this was predominantly due to recruitment outside the EU by the Health sector. Very nearly 90 per cent of Health sector workers recruited overseas came from the Rest of the World whereas most of those recruited by the remaining sectors came from within the European Union.

Table 4.8: Number of Persons Recruited by Public Sector Organisations from Other EU Countries or from the Rest of the World in the Twelve Months Preceding the 2001/02 Survey

	No. Recruited	Per cent from EU	Per cent from Rest of World	Total
Civil Service	0	70	30	100
Gardaí/Defence/Education	300	92	8	100
Regional Bodies	100	35	65	100
Non-Commercial Semi-State	0	56	44	100
Health	2,600	12	88	100
Total	3,000	20	80	100

In addition to being asked to report on the number of current vacancies public sector organisations were asked to state if they considered the current vacancies which they had in each occupational category were difficult to fill. Table 4.9 shows their evaluations. A much smaller proportion of organisations in Regional Bodies, 20 per cent, said they consider current vacancies difficult-to-fill than in any of the other sectors. Around 30 to 40 per cent of reporting entities in the Non-Commercial Semi-State, Civil Service, and Gardaí/Defence/Education sectors reported difficulties in filling vacant posts while in the Health sector the figure was over 83 per cent. These differences may be partly due to the Health Boards having to use open recruitment on the domestic and international labour markets and the Civil Service and other public sector organisations being able to use internal labour markets to fill jobs above a certain level.

Table 4.9: Reporting Entities Which Have Current Job Vacancies Classified by Whether or Not They Consider Them Difficult-to-Fill

Currently Trying to Recruit	Civil Service	Regional Bodies	Non-Comm. Semi-State	Health	Gardaí/Defence/Educ.	Total
Yes	34.8	19.6	31.7	83.3	42.7	35.4
No	65.2	80.4	68.3	16.7	57.3	64.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Considering Table 4.9 on recruitment difficulties and Table 4.5 on current vacancies it appears there are similarities between the incidence of difficult-to-fill vacancies and the incidence of current vacancies. This suggests that a significant percentage of the vacancies which are experienced by public sector organisations are perceived as difficult-to-fill. Table 4.10 considers job openings from the perspective of firms which have current vacancies and which feel that some or all of them are difficult-to-fill. Almost 60 per cent of public sector organisations which have current vacancies consider them difficult-to-fill. The rates are highest in the Health sector where approximately 90 per cent of reporting entities say they experience difficulties in-filling current job vacancies. For all of the remaining sectors almost half of the reporting entities say they are having difficulties in filling their vacant posts.

Table 4.10: Reporting Entities Which Have Current Job Vacancies Classified by Whether or Not They Consider Some or All of their Vacancies are Difficult-to-Fill

Currently Trying to Recruit	Civil Service	Regional Bodies	Non-Comm. Semi-State	Health	Gardaí/Defence/Educ.	Total
Yes	50.0	51.5	51.6	89.7	53.5	59.9
No	50.0	48.5	48.4	10.3	46.5	40.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

4.4 Summary

In this chapter we considered several aspects of the incidence, level and characteristics of vacancies. We began by noting that 63 per cent of public sector organisations reported having vacancies in the 2001/02 survey. This compares with 22 per cent of firms in the private sector which said they had vacancies. This difference may be mainly due to the average public sector organisation being a very much larger employer than the average private sector firm.

Total public sector vacancies in the 2001/02 survey were in the order of 12,000. This represents a vacancy rate of 4 per cent of total labour requirement. The largest vacancy rate, 6 per cent, was reported for the Health sector and the smallest, 3 per cent, was for the Civil Service and Education sectors.

In terms of the share of vacancies, Other Associate Professional grades accounted for nearly a quarter and Other Professional and Clerical grades for around one-fifth each. Vacancies for Computer Professionals and Computer Technical staff accounted for a very small share of all vacancies.

Almost one-fifth of public sector organisations which have current vacancies said that they had recruited staff from abroad in the twelve months preceding the survey. The Health sector was the most active in recruiting overseas with 66 per cent of organisations responding positively to the relevant question. The Civil Service was only peripherally involved in overseas recruitment with about 6 per cent of reporting entities saying they had tried to recruit staff from abroad. The inclusion of a question in the survey for 2001/02 on the sources of labour supply from abroad revealed that

80 per cent of foreign workers came from outside the EU and the Health sector was by far the biggest recruiter of labour from outside Ireland. The issue of difficult-to-fill vacancies was also addressed and it was shown that just over one-third of public sector organisations which had current vacancies considered them difficult-to-fill.

5. VACANCIES OVER THE PREVIOUS YEAR

In the previous chapters we considered the incidence of *current* vacancies and the extent to which these vacancies were considered by the employer to be difficult-to-fill. In this chapter we broaden the reference period to consider the incidence of difficult-to-fill vacancies in the year preceding the survey. The chapter is divided into five sections. We begin in Section 5.1 by discussing the extent or incidence of difficult-to-fill vacancies in the year preceding the survey. In Section 5.2 we move on to discuss the nature of the vacancies in question. Section 5.3 considers the consequences for organisations of difficult-to-fill vacancies while Section 5.4 discusses the steps taken to fill the vacancies in question. Finally, Section 5.5 provides a brief summary of our main findings.

5.1 Incidence of Difficult-to-Fill Vacancies of the Last Year

Table 5.1 presents information on the incidence of difficult-to-fill vacancies in the year preceding the survey. Somewhat less than 45 per cent of all reporting entities recorded that they had experienced difficult-to-fill vacancies in the reference period. The highest incidence of such vacancies was in Health where nearly 80 per cent of reporting entities said that they had experienced difficulties in filling vacancies. This was followed by the Gardaí/Defence/Education sector (58 per cent) and the Civil Service (54 per cent). The rates were lowest in Regional Bodies and Non-Commercial Semi-State bodies (24 and 42 per cent respectively).

Table 5.1: Reporting Entities Classified by Whether or Not They Had Any Vacancies in the Last Year Which Were Particularly Difficult-to-Fill

Currently Trying to Recruit	Civil Service	Regional Bodies	Non-Comm. Semi-State	Health	Gardaí/Defence/Educ.	Total
Yes	53.6	24.3	42.2	78.6	58.4	43.0
No	46.4	75.7	57.8	21.4	41.6	57.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 5.2 provides details on the extent to which public sector organisations which were currently experiencing a difficult-to-fill vacancy have also experienced such a vacancy in the year preceding the survey. Just over 28 per cent of all reporting entities in the population currently experiencing a difficult-to-fill vacancy had also experienced one in the year preceding the survey. A further 15 per cent of organisations experienced at least one difficult-to-fill vacancy in the year preceding the survey but were not experiencing one currently. Almost 50 per cent of the organisations did not experience a difficult-to-fill vacancy either currently or in the year preceding the survey while 7 per cent of them were experiencing difficult-to-fill vacancies currently but they had not had this experience with vacancies in the year preceding the survey.

Table 5.2: Reporting Entities Which Had Difficult-to-Fill Vacancies Within the Last Year Classified According to Whether or Not They Also Had Current Vacancies Which Were Difficult-to-Fill

Difficult-to-Fill Currently?	Difficult-to-Fill in Last Year		Total
	Yes	No (Total Per Cent)	
Yes	28.2	7.3	35.6
No	14.8	49.6	64.4
Total	43.1	56.9	100.0

It is relevant to our understanding of the prevalence and persistence of vacancies to consider what type of organisations experience difficult-to-fill vacancies both currently and also in the year preceding the survey. In other words, can we identify any sectoral patterns in the distribution of the subgroup of 28 per cent of firms which appear to have experienced a slightly more persistent problem with difficult-to-fill vacancies over the period in question?

Table 5.3 provides a breakdown of the entities which experienced both current and historic difficulties in filling some vacancies. The table also outlines the percentage breakdown of all entities in the population according to the sector classification. By comparing the distribution of reporting entities which display persistence in their difficulties in filling some vacancies with the distribution of all public sector organisations one can get some indication as to whether or not concentrations of reporting entities with these persistent difficulties exist within given sectors.

Table 5.3: Percentage of Reporting Entities Which Had Experienced Both a Current Difficult-to-Fill Job Vacancy and Also a Difficult-to-Fill Vacancy in the Year Preceding the Survey

Sector	Per Cent	Population Per Cent Total
Civil Service	12.0	11.2
Regional Bodies	23.4	43.8
Non-Commercial Semi-State	12.6	16.9
Health	33.9	13.6
Gardaí/Defence/Education	18.2	14.4
Total	100.0	100.0

From the figures in Table 5.3, for example, one can see that 12 per cent of reporting entities which have experienced greater persistence in their difficult-to-fill vacancies are in the Civil Service sector. This set of organisations represents about 11 per cent of all public sector organisations. This means that reporting entities which are experiencing persistence in terms of difficulties in filling vacancies are not over-represented in the Civil Service sector. Similarly, organisations which are experiencing persistent problems in terms of difficult-to-fill vacancies are over-represented to the extent of 150 per cent in the Health sector (33.9 per cent compared with 13.6 per cent in the population).

Overall, the figures suggest that persistence of difficult-to-fill vacancies occurs overwhelmingly and predominantly in the Health sector. Although there is some moderate evidence to suggest some over-concentration in the Gardaí/Defence/Education sector the figures would seem to indicate that this is a phenomenon which is largely concentrated in the Health sector.

5.2 Nature of Most Difficult-to-fill Vacancies

Table 5.4 outlines details of the nature of the single vacancy or type of vacancy which reporting entities found difficult-to-fill in the twelve months preceding the survey. From the final column in the table one can see that, in aggregate across all sectors, the type of vacancy mentioned by the largest percentage of firms was Other Professional (cited by 51 per cent of organisations). This was followed by Managers (14 per cent), and Engineers (11 per cent of firms).

Notwithstanding some variations by sector categories Other Professionals and Managers are consistently mentioned by the largest percentage of firms. The Other Professional category, which includes nurses and teachers, was mentioned by a particularly high percentage in the Health and Gardaí/Defence/Education sectors (76 and 92 per cent respectively) and by 20 to 30 per cent in the remaining sectors. Managers were mentioned by 24 per cent of organisations in both Regional and Non-Commercial Semi State Bodies and Engineers were mentioned by 30 per cent and 17 per cent respectively of organisations in these two sectors. Computer and Finance Specialist posts were mentioned by only a small minority of organisations in the Civil Service, Regional Bodies, and in the Health sectors.

Table 5.4: Nature of the Single Vacancy or Type of Vacancy Which the Reporting Entity Found Most Difficult-to-Fill in the Last Year

	Civil Service	Regional Bodies	Non- Comm. Semi- State	Health	Gardaí/ Defence/ Education	Total
	Per Cent					
Finance Specialists	5	5	0	3	0	3
Computer Specialists	8	0	4	3	0	3
Engineers	5	30	17	0	0	11
Chemists	0	0	4	3	0	2
Skilled Trades Persons	5	0	0	0	0	1
Semi-Skilled	0	2	0	0	0	0
Unskilled	8	0	0	0	0	1
Sales	0	2	0	0	0	0
Managers	8	24	24	9	4	14
Clerical	24	6	20	0	0	8
Other Professional	26	29	22	76	92	51
Catering and other areas	10	3	8	6	4	6
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

5.3 Consequences of Difficult-to- Fill Vacancies

In the course of the survey respondents were presented with four pre-coded outcomes or impacts of difficult-to-fill vacancies in the year preceding the survey. They were asked to indicate whether or not the difficulty which they encountered in filling positions in the year in question resulted in any of the four outcomes. The results are presented in Table 5.5.

In aggregate, the most frequently cited outcome was an increased strain on management and staff in covering the shortages in question. This was mentioned by 85 per cent of relevant reporting entities. An increase in recruitment costs was cited by 64 per cent while loss of quality of service was recorded by 44 per cent. Just under one-third of all relevant reporting entities mentioned "an increase in running costs".

Some variations in perceived consequences of difficult-to-fill vacancies according to the sector classification are apparent from the table. For example, a reduction in the quality of service provided is mentioned more frequently by reporting entities in the Civil Service and Health sectors; an increase in recruitment costs was mentioned by a high percentage of organisations in all sectors except the Civil Service. As Civil Service posts above Executive Officer level are filled by internal promotion this may explain why the percentage of reporting entities in this sector experiencing increased recruitment costs is so low.

6. DIFFICULTIES IN RETAINING STAFF AND PERCEIVED CHANGES IN SKILL LEVELS

In this chapter we consider two main aspects of the current labour market. First, we discuss the extent to which public sector organisations are experiencing difficulties in retaining their existing staff, the nature and types of jobs where such difficulties are being experienced and the perceived reasons for those difficulties. We then move on to consider firms' perceptions of the extent of changes in skill levels among their workforce over the previous twelve months.

6.1 Difficulties in Retaining Staff – Incidence levels and Nature of Jobs Affected

Table 6.1 presents details on the incidence of current difficulties experienced by public sector reporting entities in retaining their existing staff. About one in five (21 per cent) record that they are experiencing such difficulties. The incidence of these difficulties appear to be greatest in the Health and Gardai/Defence/Education sectors. Nearly 45 per cent of organisations in the Health sector and 31 per cent in the Gardai/Defence/Education sectors record that they are experiencing difficulties in retaining their current workforce. The lowest incidence of difficulties in retaining staff seem to be in Regional and Non-Commercial Semi-State Bodies; 13 per cent of Regional organisations and 15 per cent of Non-Commercial Semi-State Bodies said they had difficulties in retaining staff. Approaching one-fifth of reporting entities in the Civil Service also experienced difficulties in retaining staff.

Table 6.1: Reporting Entities Which Have Current Difficulties in Retaining Existing Staff

Difficulties in Retaining Staff?	Civil Service	Regional Bodies	Non-Comm. Semi-State	Health	Gardai/Defence/Educ.	Total
Yes	18.8	13.1	15.5	44.0	31.0	21.0
No	81.2	86.9	84.5	56.0	69.0	79.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Public sector organisations which indicated that they were experiencing difficulties in retaining staff were asked to specify the type of staff which they were experiencing most difficulties in retaining. The results are shown in Table 6.2 below.

Because only a relatively small proportion of organisations (21 per cent) indicated that they were experiencing such difficulties the number of actual sample organisations in question is smaller than desirable and so does not allow a detailed sector breakdown of the data. Consequently, only aggregate figures are presented in Table 6.2.

Table 6.2: Nature of the Specific Jobs Which Public Sector Organisations Find Most Difficulties in Retaining Staff

	Per Cent
Finance Specialists	2
Computer Specialists	2
Engineers	7
Technicians	5
Skilled Trades Persons	2
Unskilled	1
Sales	1
Managers	5
Clerical	18
Other Professional	42
Catering and other areas	16
Total	100

From the table one can see that in the 2001/02 survey 42 per cent of organisations which are experiencing difficulties in retaining staff mentioned Other Professionals. This occupational description includes nurses and teachers. About 18 per cent mentioned Clerical staff and 16 per cent mentioned Catering and other areas. Difficulties in retaining Engineers and Managers were experienced by 7 and 5 per cent respectively of public sector organisations. It is notable from the table that only 2 per cent of all relevant organisations mentioned Computer Specialists.

6.2 Perceptions of Changes in Skill Requirements

In the course of the survey respondents were asked to consider the skill level necessary to ensure the continued effective running of their organisation. They were asked to record whether or not they felt that skill levels among the average worker today had increased, remained static or decreased as compared with the preceding twelve months.

Table 6.3 outlines public sector organisations' views regarding changes in current skill levels. From this one can see that a significant minority of them (46 per cent) consider required skill levels have been static over the period in question while a majority (53 per cent) believe skill requirements are increasing. Virtually none of the public sector organisations thought that skill requirements are decreasing. These results contrast with the views expressed in the survey of private firms where the great majority of firms (68 per cent) consider skill levels are static and a minority (29 per cent) said they thought skill levels are increasing.

Table 6.3: Reporting Entities Perceptions of Trends in the Overall Skills Needed to Keep Their Organisation Running Effectively

Skill Level Is?	Civil Service	Regional Bodies	Non-Comm. Semi-State	Health	Gardaí/Defence/Educ.	Total
Decreasing	4.3	1.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.1
Static	49.3	47.0	47.1	41.7	39.1	45.4
Increasing	46.4	51.5	52.9	58.3	60.9	53.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

There are clearly some variations in perceptions of changing skill levels according to sector. An above average percentage of organisations in Health and Defence/Gardaí/Education feel that skill levels are increasing (58 per cent and 61 per cent respectively). This view is also held by from 46 to 53 per cent of reporting entities in the Civil Service, Regional Bodies, and Non-Commercial Semi-State Bodies.

6.3 Summary

This chapter has considered two main aspects of the current labour market. First, we discussed in detail public sector organisations' difficulties in retaining staff and, second, we considered their perceptions of the overall skills needed by the organisation to keep it running effectively.

We found that a total of 21 per cent of organisations recorded that they were experiencing difficulties in retaining staff. The incidence of these difficulties was highest in the Health and Gardaí/Defence/Education sectors. The lowest incidence of this problem was in the Regional and Non-Commercial Semi-State Bodies.

We also examined perceived changes in the skill requirement of staff to allow for an efficient running of businesses. We saw that 53 per cent of firms consider that skill requirements were increasing while 46 per cent thought that necessary skill levels were static. The view that skill levels required to keep organisations running effectively are increasing is held by a much higher proportion of public sector organisations than of private firms which generally regard skill levels as fairly static.

7. TRAINING IN PUBLIC SECTOR ORGANISATIONS

In this chapter we consider various aspects related to training in public sector organisations. The training in question relates, in the first instance, to *formal, structured* training courses undertaken in the twelve months preceding the survey. This training may have been undertaken in the organisations premises or at locations outside the organisation. The definition provided on the questionnaire of formal, structured training explicitly excluded “on-the-job” training and related instead to systematic, supervised training courses during which the trainees were not engaged in productive activity.

In Section 7.1 we consider the extent to which firms undertake formal, structured training and the intensity of such training and we provide a brief summary of our main findings in Section 7.2.

7.1 Incidence of Formal, Structural Training

Respondents were asked to indicate whether or not anyone in the company (including the owner-manager or proprietor but excluding apprentices) had attended any formal, structured training in the twelve months preceding the survey. It was pointed out that the training in question could have taken place either on the company’s premises or at locations outside the company. Formal, structured training involved systematic, supervised training during which the trainee was not engaged in the production process and hence excluded “on-the-job” training. The results are presented in Table 7.1.

Table 7.1: Reporting Entities Classified According to Whether or Not Anyone in the Company (Apart from Apprentices) Attended a Formal, Structure Training Course in the Twelve Months Preceding the Survey

Formal Structured Training?	Civil Service	Regional Bodies	Non-Comm. Semi-State	Health	Gardaí/Defence/Educ.	Total
Yes	88.4	68.4	77.9	92.9	81.6	77.5
No	11.6	31.6	22.1	7.1	18.4	22.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

From the table one can see that a total of 78 per cent of all organisations said that they had undertaken structured training in the year preceding the survey. The highest incidence levels were in the Health, Civil Service, and Gardaí/Defence/Education sectors – 93 per cent of organisations in the Health sector, 88 per cent in the Civil Service, and 82 per cent in the Gardaí/Defence/Education sectors. The incidence levels are also very high for organisations in Regional and Non-Commercial Semi-State Bodies, 68 and 78 per cent of them respectively participated in this type of activity. Only 34 per cent of firms in the private sector survey said that someone had participated in a formal, structured training course in the preceding twelve

months. The significant difference in responses relating to training between the private and public sectors may be due in part at least to the fact that public sector organisations are much bigger employers than private firms so there is a much greater likelihood that they will train some of their staff.

Table 7.2 presents details on a number of different measures of formal, structured training by sector. From Row C in the table one can see that a total of 29 per cent of persons engaged in public sector organisations received some form of formal, structured training. This represents 83,000 workers in the relevant sectors. The incidence is highest in the Civil Service sector, 59 per cent, and in Regional and Non-Commercial Semi-State Bodies (both about 40 per cent) while it is lowest in the Health sector, 17 per cent.

Details on the average number of days training received are presented in Rows E and F of the table. The figures in Row E are based on the average number of days among those who received any such training. The figures in Row F are based on all persons engaged in the sector. Those who received any such training received an average of 1.9 days. The lowest incidence of employees in training occurred in the Health sector and this sector also had the lowest average number of days, 0.8, spent on such training among those who participated in the relevant courses or programmes. It is clear from the table, however, that the differences between the sectors are fairly small in absolute terms as the range for those trained is from 1 to 3 days.

Table 7.2: Number of Persons in Public Sector Organisations Undertaking Formal, Structured Training; Total Days on Such Training Courses and Average Length of Such Training Classified by Sector

	Civil Service	Regional Bodies	Non-Comm. Semi-State	Health	Gardaí/Defence/Education	Total
A. Total Workforce	37,400	37,100	10,100	93,000	103,300	280,942
B. No. of persons on training courses	22,300	14,200	4,000	16,100	26,500	83,000
C. % persons on training courses	59.5	38.2	39.4	17.3	25.6	29.5
D. Days on training courses	52,000	23,700	13,000	12,900	54,200	155,800
E. Average no. of days on training courses for those trained	2.3	1.7	3.3	0.8	2.0	1.9
F. Average no. of days on training course for all persons engaged	1.4	0.6	1.3	0.1	0.5	0.6

Another measure of average number of days trained is provided in Row F of the table. This is based on *all* persons engaged in the sector and, consequently, incorporates a consideration of both incidence and also duration among those who receive the training in question. Accordingly, the figures in Row F provide an insight to the sectoral intensity of formal structured training received. When calculated on this basis one can see that persons engaged in the relevant public sector organisations received, on average, 0.6 days formal structured training. This level was highest in the Civil Service sector (1.4 days) while being lowest in the Health sector (0.1 days).

An alternative perspective on the levels of training activity in the firm is provided in Table 7.3. This shows the percentage of the workforce engaged in the firms in question which went on training courses. The figures are based only on the 78 per cent of organisations in which some persons attended formal training programmes or courses.

The last column of Table 7.3 shows, for example, that in 11 per cent of public sector organisations which provided some such training, less than 10 per cent of the workforce was involved. A further 23 per cent of reporting entities had 10-25 per cent of workers involved in such training and so on. Reporting entities in the Civil Service stand out in Table 7.3 as providers of training for the great majority of staff. Almost three-quarters of reporting entities in the Civil Service said they provided training for three-quarters or

more of their staff in the twelve months preceding the survey. The majority of organisations in the remaining sectors provided training for only a minority of their staff.

Table 7.3: Public Sector Organisations Engaged in Formal, Structured Training in the Twelve Months Preceding the Survey Classified According to the Percentage of their Total Workforce which Attended Such Training

Percentage of Workforce which Attended Formal Training	Civil Service	Regional Bodies	Non-Comm. Semi-State	Health	Education	Total
<10 per cent	0.0	7.7	10.1	13.8	25.4	10.5
10 to <25%	8.8	20.9	10.1	36.2	44.4	22.8
25 to <50%	7.0	25.3	17.7	36.2	22.2	22.6
50 to <75%	10.5	20.9	29.1	10.3	6.3	17.5
75% or more	73.7	25.3	32.9	3.4	1.6	26.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

7.2 Summary

In this chapter we considered several aspects of the incidence and nature of training. We saw that a total of 78 per cent of all public sector organisations engage in formal, structured training. In general, there is a high incidence of formal training across all areas of the public sector ranging from 93 per cent in Health to 68 per cent in Regional Bodies. Approximately 29 per cent of public sector employees are recorded as having experienced formal structured training in the year preceding the survey. The great majority of staff in the Civil Service received some training in the twelve months preceding the survey while only a minority of staff in other public sector organisations received some formal training in this period.

8. MAIN FINDINGS

8.1 Background

Since the last survey of vacancies in the private sector was carried out at the end of 1999 and the beginning of 2000 the Irish economy has experienced a slowdown in the rate of employment growth. This was expected as the employment growth rates experienced during the last half of the 1990s were unsustainable in the long term. Nevertheless, new jobs continue to be created and the demand for labour has been accommodated by increases in the female labour-force participation rate and immigration. The vacancies survey carried out in 2001/2002 extended the scope of the inquiry to the public sector and the results are presented in this report.

8.2 Size and Forecasted Growth of the Labour Market

In Chapter 3 we considered the structure of employment in the relevant sub-sectors of the public sector which we are addressing in the report. We saw that total employment amounted to 280,900 persons. Our sample includes public sector organisations employing 198,400 persons and this represents a total of 71 per cent of relevant public sector employees. By the standards of sample surveys of this nature this is a very high response rate. By far the biggest employers in the public sector are the Health and Education sectors with 93,000 and 80,000 employees respectively. The Civil Service comes next with 37,400 employees and it is closely followed by Regional Bodies which employ 37,100 people. Non-Commercial Semi-State Bodies employ around 10,000 persons.

Of particular significance to the tightness of the labour market were employers' perceptions and forecasts of future likely growth levels in their labour requirements. They expect employment in the public sector to grow by about, 9,300 persons in the year following the survey. The biggest absolute and percentage changes in employment are projected for the Health sector where Health Service employers project employment growth of 5,400 people or 6 per cent.

8.3 Incidence and Level of Vacancies

In Chapter 4 we saw that almost two-thirds of public sector organisations in the 2001/02 survey indicated that they were experiencing vacancies. This compares with about one-fifth of firms in the private sector who said in the same survey that they were experiencing current vacancies.

The 2001/02 survey indicated that there were approximately 12,000 vacancies in the public sector at the time of interviewing. This represents a vacancy rate of 4 per cent. In other words, 4 per cent of the total labour requirement of the relevant public sector organisations could not be met. Combining these results with those for the private sector gives an estimate of 52,000 vacancies overall in the economy at the time the 2001/02 survey was carried out.

The largest number of vacancies in the public sector were in the Health and Education sectors. They had 5,500 and 2,000 vacancies respectively. The Gardaí/Defence and Regional Bodies both had 1,500 vacancies and the Civil Service had 1,200.

Nearly 40 per cent of public sector organisations which have current vacancies were trying to recruit staff overseas. In the twelve months preceding the survey they recruited almost 3,000 workers from outside Ireland. Of these 20 per cent were recruited in other EU countries and 80 per cent from the Rest of the World. Differences in the recruitment pattern by sector show that the Health sector recruits nearly 90 per cent of its foreign workers from outside the EU and that it accounts for 87 per cent of the total number of overseas workers recruited by public sector organisations.

8.4 Difficult-to-Fill Vacancies

In addition to questions relating to the experience of *current* vacancies, firms were also questioned about difficult-to-fill vacancies which they may have experienced in the year preceding the survey. We found that 43 per cent of respondents said that they had experienced such vacancies.

When faced with difficult-to-fill vacancies the vast majority of employers (85 per cent) indicated that these vacancies had imposed an extra strain on management and staff in covering current staff shortages. Somewhat less than two-thirds of public sector organisations also mentioned that the problematic vacancies resulted in increased recruitment costs (64 per cent) while 44 per cent noted that they resulted in a loss of quality of service. In relation to the consequences of difficult-to-fill vacancies only a small minority of the relevant organisations said their response is to offer higher wage and salary levels. The most frequent response was to consider a wider range of people for the difficult-to-fill vacancies (44 per cent) or to hire part-time or contract staff (41 per cent).

8.5 Difficulties in Retaining Staff

A total of 21 per cent of firms recorded that they were experiencing difficulties in retaining their existing staff. The incidence of such difficulties was highest in the Traditional and Hi-Tech. manufacturing sectors. The type of jobs which were most frequently mentioned by firms as posing difficulties in retaining staff were Other Professionals, which includes teachers and nurses, and Clerical staff.

8.6 Training

The final issue considered in the report related to training. We found that nearly 80 per cent of public sector organisations had some staff who participated in formal, structured training courses in the twelve months preceding the survey. The highest incidence of training provision was in the Health and Civil Service sectors where around 90 per cent of reporting entities said that some of their staff attended such courses. The remaining sectors all had quite high levels of training provision with the lowest incidence of 68 per cent being recorded for Regional Bodies.

In total 83,000 employees in public sector organisations received some training in the year preceding the survey. This amounted to almost 30 per cent of all public sector employees. The comparable figure for the private sector is 24 per cent. On average each employee who attended a course received about 2 days training with the longest duration, about three days, occurring in the Non-Commercial Semi-State sector and the smallest, less than one day, in the Health sector.

EXPERT GROUP ON FUTURE SKILLS NEEDS LIST OF MEMBERS

Members	Organisation
Dr. Danny O'Hare (Chairperson)	President Emeritus, Dublin City University
David Barry	Department of Enterprise, Trade & Employment
Enda Connolly	IDA Ireland
Roger Fox	FAS
Jack Golden	Cement Roadstone Holdings/Institution of Engineers of Ireland (CRH/IEI)
Una Halligan	Hewlett Packard
John Hayden	Higher Education Authority (HEA)
David Lowe	Goodbody Stockbrokers
Joe McCarthy	Arkaon
Kevin McCarthy	Department of Education & Science
Dr. Sean McDonagh	Skills Initiative Unit
Eugene O'Sullivan	Department of Finance
Colm Regan	Forfás
Peter Rigney	Irish Congress of Trade Union
Lorcan O'Raghallaigh (Secretary)	Forfás

REPORTS PUBLISHED BY THE EXPERT GROUP ON FUTURE SKILLS NEEDS

Report	Date of Publication
The First Report of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs Responding to Ireland's Growing Skills Needs	December 1998
Business Education & Training Partnership Report on the Inaugural Forum, Royal Hospital Kilmainham	March 1999
The Second Report of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs Responding to Ireland's Growing Skills Needs	March 2000
Business Education & Training Partnership 2nd Forum, Dublin	March 2000
Report on e-Business Skills	August 2000
Report on In-Company Training	August 2000
Benchmarking Mechanisms and Strategies to Attract Researchers to Ireland	June 2001
The Third Report of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs Responding to Ireland's Growing Skills Needs	August 2001
Labour Participation Rates of the over 55s in Ireland	December 2001

National Survey of Vacancies in the Public Sector 2001/2002

