



# Opportunity knocks abroad

Emigration has become a necessary evil during the recession, but where people go will often depend on what skills are needed in other countries, writes Gareth Naughton

**E**migration is firmly back on the agenda, with huge numbers of people leaving these shores for opportunities overseas. Work abroad is not that plentiful, however, with available jobs restricted to a handful of sectors.

CSO figures for the year to the end of April show some startling trends. A total of 76,400 people left Ireland during the period, a jump of close to 17 per cent on the previous year. At 40,200, Irish nationals account for 53 per cent of this figure. Many of those will have secured employment before they have even stepped on the plane, with recruiters such as Cora Barnes, managing director of 3Q Recruitment, reporting a marked increase in interest from agencies and companies abroad.

"In the last month, we have been contacted by companies from the UK, Australia and New Zealand hiring in hospitality, healthcare and construction," Barnes said. "They are actively looking to get people over and, more specifically, they are actively looking for Irish people because of the similarities in culture and work ethic and the lack of language barriers."

## Shortages

Skills shortages elsewhere are the driving force behind Irish emigration. Countries like Australia, New Zealand and Canada are hoovering up the skills and experience gleaned by Irish professionals in the boom.

Barnes is currently recruiting quantity surveyors to work in Christchurch in New Zealand, with the first tranche already in place. She is also looking for chefs to work in Melbourne and Britain. The demand for Irish workers is undeniable, she said, but it is those working in sectors where travel has always been par for the course who are responding.

"There is a misconception that everyone wants to emigrate, but I haven't seen it," Barnes said. "It is happening with the specific skill sets that were already predisposed to emigration: hospitality, healthcare and construction. I have not seen a surge in people saying: 'I'll take any job and I will move anywhere for it.'"

"We do find that people are considering it, asking about timeframes and relocation packages, rather than just heading to Australia and hoping that a friend can get them a job."

## Progression

Career stagnation is an unfortunate side-effect of the recession here. While many people are just grateful to have weathered the storm and kept their position, some are finding themselves stuck in a role they may have outgrown.

The options that once existed – for promotion with an existing employer or a move to a new company – are no longer there in many sectors. Moving out of the stagnant Irish market is proving increasingly attractive to professionals keen to progress their careers.

According to Richard Eardley, managing director of Hays Ireland, even candidates who go abroad without a firm offer can expect to find work relatively quickly.

"It is critical that you maintain your career," Eardley said. "Keeping a job in that area means that you are not throwing away the investment that you made earlier in your career. It also means that when we do need the skills here in Ireland – and undoubtedly we will – you are going to be able to come back without a huge experience gap on your CV."

"The danger is that for people in industries and sectors where there is no work and who don't maintain their experience, when the demand comes back on the jobs market here, they have been five years

out doing something completely different. They are going to really struggle to get a job even if the work is there."

This message is beginning to sink in with jobseekers in sectors where Ireland holds few opportunities. At the start of the downturn, most were resistant to the idea of moving abroad to secure employment. This attitude has changed considerably in the last 18 months, particularly in the sectors where recovery seems unlikely in the short term.

In its annual candidate survey, carried out earlier this year, Hays found that 74 per cent of jobseekers would consider leaving Ireland in the next three years if the economic situation did not improve. The report's findings found little optimism, with just 5 per cent of respondents claiming they were "very confident" the economic situation would improve within the three-year period.

"There are certain sectors where we are seeing a lot of people coming in saying that they need to go abroad," said Eardley. "Out of a typical class of graduates, we find that a third are committed to staying here, a third don't know what they are doing and a third are planning on emigrating."

"If you think about it, one in every three graduates is leaving the country. That is quite scary and does not bode well for the future. We are not going to be in this position forever, things are already improving and organisations like ours are getting busier, but we still have a net outflow of people from the country."

He believes skills shortages in the IT and financial services sectors will begin to spread to other areas in the near future.

"We could find ourselves, even as little as one or two years down the line, in a situation where people are not talking about unemployment, but rather about the gap between the people who have lost their jobs and haven't retrained yet and the skills that are needed," he said.

## Making the move

Emigrating is easier than ever before, with companies around the world taking advantage of technology and globalisation to secure good employees.

While obtaining a visa still requires considerable effort on the part of the applicant, places like Western Australia and the Northern Territories are making it easier to fill major gaps in the workforce created by the Australian resources boom, according to Stephen McLarnon, director with SGMC, organisers of the Working Abroad Expo taking place in the RDS in October.

"Western Australia has, in the last month or so, been designated 'regional', so people who are interested in going to Perth, for example, can actually apply for a new regional visa," McLarnon said. "That means that the requirements needed for permission to work

there are somewhat lower or easier than, for example, in Victoria or New South Wales."

"Western Australia is looking for upwards of 150,000 people over the next four or five years just to meet the current skills shortage. A lot of their people are being pulled into industries that they wouldn't have been involved in before and they have to be replaced."

How you emigrate also depends on your age and your destination of choice. Those under 30, who can secure a working holiday visa to Australia, are much more likely to take a chance and hope that work turns up.

"There is greater flexibility of movement, but not necessarily the same career opportunities, because if you go out on a working holiday visa to Australia, you can only work for the same employer for six months and then you have to move on," said McLarnon. "In a lot of instances, it is about getting your foot on the ladder and then trying to find an em-

ployer to sponsor you.”

Those aged over 30, who are dependent on skills-related visas, are more likely to seek work relating to their career.

“The best thing to do is to

find a job before going and some of those employers may actually sponsor and process your visa on your behalf, covering the cost of it and managing it for you,” he said. “You

can also find a job over there where the employer will make you an offer, but you have to get your own visa.”

Working in Canada will require sponsorship from a local

company. It must be able to prove that it cannot source your expertise from the indigenous population.



Stephen McLarnon, director with SGMC: ‘Western Australia is looking for upwards of 150,000 people over the next four or five years’

TONY O'SHEA

## Case study: **Gavin Dunne**

# The lure of Australia

For **Gavin Dunne**, emigrating to Australia offers the chance to get back into construction and advance a career he was forced to abandon with the onslaught of the property crash.

“In Australia, if you are willing to work and show initiative, you are pushed up the ladder very quickly,” Dunne said. “They’ll take hold of you, see that you are an asset to the company and train you so you can get going

straightaway.”

Dunne was a construction project manager and, along with wife Mary, had planned to move to Australia even before the downturn kicked in. A lucrative contract, which kept him at home, fell through as the recession took hold.

Although he subsequently secured work in the wholesale food sector in Cork, the lure of Australia is proving too strong to ignore.

“Things proved extremely hard and, even now that I am working, I don’t see a future here for us – life is just too difficult,” he said.

With the Dunes already having secured a general skills migrant visa, the process of applying again was relatively simple. The couple will make the move to Sydney along with their children, Ryan and Zoe, in November.

Dunne has already lined up a management role with

a concreting company through contacts he made during a previous ten-year stint in Australia. Mary, an ICU nurse, will take on agency work as the family settle in.

“We want to hit the ground running when we get over there,” said Dunne. “We are all looking forward to it. I want to give my kids a better future – this is the best option for us.”



**Gavin and Mary Dunne with their children Ryan and Zoe at their home in Kilworth, Co Cork**

CILLIAN KELLY