

1

Training for a career at sea: Prospects for employment have never been better

Barry O'Keeffe reports on a new course to promote business ideas in tourism

Shannon scheme to develop tourism

A NEW programme aimed at developing new business ideas in tourism to attract more foreigners to Ireland is set to start in Shannon in September. The six month course, claimed to be the first of its kind in Ireland, will draw people with a proven track record in management from business, industry and even teaching.

Called the Tourism Entrepreneurship Programme, it is the brainchild of Brendan Russell, tourism innovation manager at Shannon Development, and director of the programme. He undertook a major study into the practice of innovation in tourism. It concluded that there was a need for such a programme.

He says that aside from hotel training in colleges in Ireland, there is no "incubating period" in which people who want to enter tourism can develop business skills and new ideas.

"The programme is an intensive, practically orientated one, which will indicate to participants the signposts for establishing new tourism businesses which will, in their own right, bring new, additional business into Ireland," he says.

The programme is split over six months comprising two days per week, involving case studies with 20 presenters from tourism and business. The participants will be analysing the existing tourism market and visiting existing tourism businesses as well as watching videos on how to start your own business.

"It will emphasise how to go about finding a business idea, how to develop it into a viable plan, how to set it up, etc," says Russell. "We will also be looking at what is happening in competitor destinations."

Aimed very much at the overseas tourism market, the types of tourism products he envisages

will be developed include new leisure activities, holidays catering for the senior citizens market, and new types of holidays for single females, the number of whom taking holidays is increasing and will continue to increase dramatically during this decade.

"They will be products with an Irish flavour and will give Ireland a distinctive edge in product choice," he says.

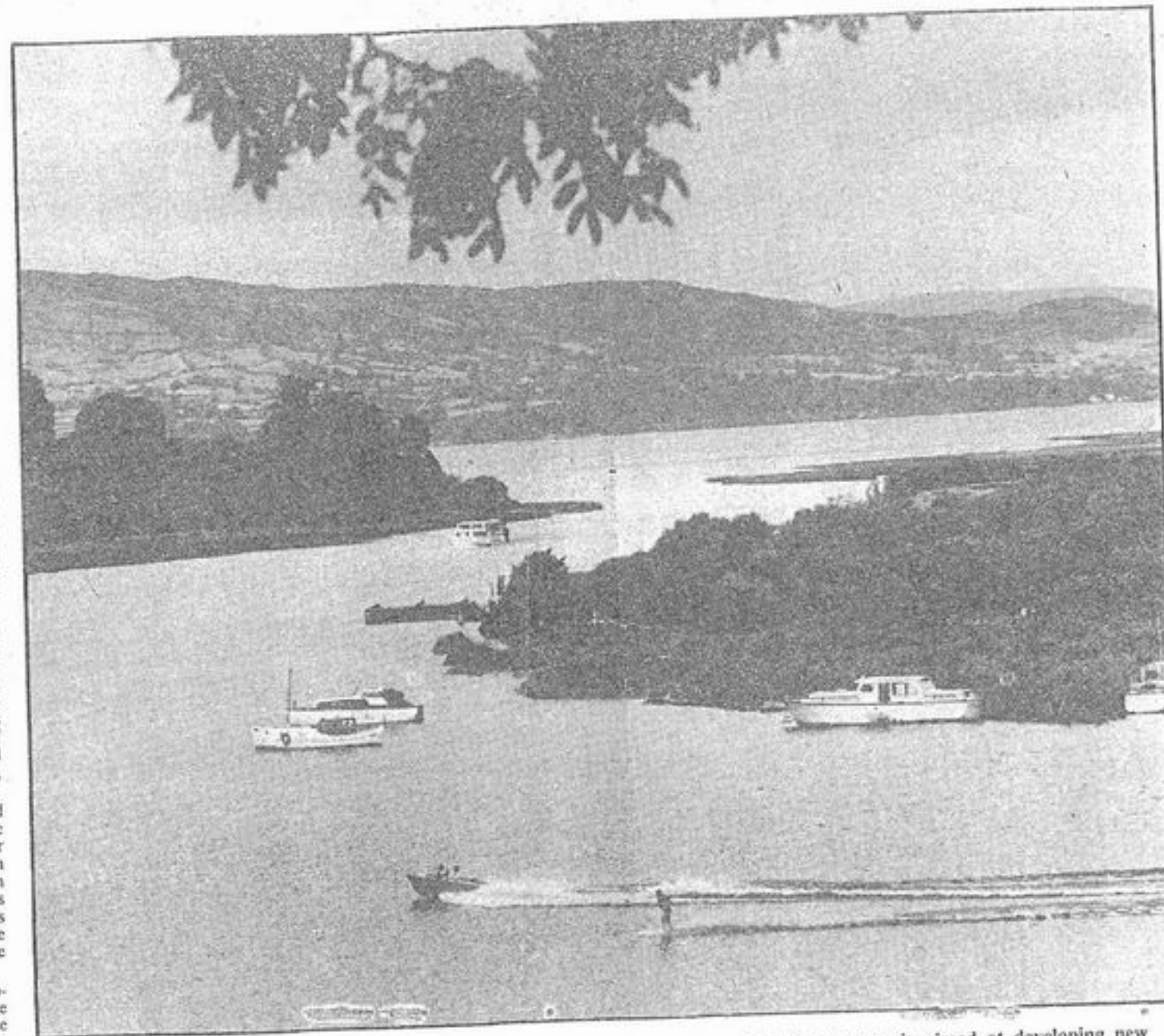
At the end of the programme, participants will have to produce their own business plan. The top six plans will each get £1,000 worth of consultancy free from Stokes Kennedy Crowley. "They will help the participants refine their plans and structure them properly so that they can seek venture capital for their new ideas," says Russell.

There will be four core supervisors as well as a programme director, Ray Cori, who is a consultant to the Welsh Tourist Board. He runs his own tourism business and has been involved in that sector for 20 years. He has also worked in manufacturing and marketing.

Over 230 people applied for the programme, research for which took six months. Fifty people were short-listed and 23 have now been selected following an interview. Russell was very pleased with the calibre of the applicants, who included sales managers, army personnel, and teachers.

He said that all of them had managerial experience of some kind. "The teachers, for example, have experience in managing people. Many of them are fluent in foreign languages and if they developed a business idea, they would be very suitable for the European market because of their skills."

The programme starts on September 15th and runs until the end of March 1992. The course is being funded by Shannon Development and by participants, who will be paying £420 each.



Boating on the Shannon at Killaloe, Co Clare: The Tourism Entrepreneurship Programme is aimed at developing new business ideas in tourism to attract more visitors to Ireland

Cork. It is the only training and educational establishment for the mercantile marine in the Republic. The State-owned Irish Shipping Ltd — which was liquidated in 1984 — had previously had responsibility for training in this area and was one of the main routes to a career at sea for school leavers.

The Department of Nautical

place on the course. The course covers maths, mechanics, electrotechnology, technical drawing, engineering, marine power plant technology, applied electronics, and includes practical and workshop-based teaching as well as marine engineering, electrical, welding and mechanics.

Apart from the NCEA Diploma, students, by spending a further year at sea after their three years at college, will have also completed the Marine Engineers Cadet Training Scheme, which is approved by the Department of the Marine and is recognised by the British authorities.

From next year applicants will also have to undergo an assessment for entry to the course. A marine engineer is responsible for the safe and efficient operation, maintenance and repair of the engines, systems, and ancillary equipment of a ship. It is a profession that demands long hours on occasions, constant attention always, and an ability to get on with others, particularly in the confines of a ship, says Donal Burke.

A marine engineer has to have the character to make difficult decisions when needed, he adds, and "these decisions are not always popular when it means the ship cannot sail due to the need for repairs". Burke also points out that the job is very demanding today, with reduced staffing levels on board ships for better cost effectiveness.

Applicants to the Diploma in Science (Nautical) or Deck Cadet courses are also assessed on non-medical and non-educational qualities, although otherwise entry requirements are almost identical to those for the marine engineering course. The three-year, full-time course in nautical science basically qualifies a student to be a deck officer. Deck officers have control of the ship's navigational gear, including radars, and while in port are fully involved in the loading or discharge of cargo. He or she also has some management responsibilities on board the ship.

Students on the course will spend between 17 to 23 months at sea, which includes watchkeeping duties, one of the main responsibilities of a deck officer. The college-based side of the course — about 18 months in total — covers navigation, ship stability, cargo handling, electronic navigation systems, survival craft and techniques, seamanship and safety, ship construction, shipping management and other relevant subjects.

Students must also gain a number of certificates of competence, which are required and issued by the Department of the Marine. These certificates include firefighting aboard ship, proficiency in survival craft, and efficient deck hand.

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Students on certificate and diploma courses qualify for grants under the European Social fund and do not have to pay fees, while at sea they receive about £275 per month.

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"There are great opportunities at present for students who are motivated towards a career at sea," says Burke. The Department of Nautical Studies has links with staffing agencies in shipping through the Irish Chamber of Shipping in Ireland, and through a number of agencies in Britain.

The demand in Britain for qualified personnel is very high at the moment, says Burke, due to a drop in the numbers of eligible students there because of demographic trends and because of the availability of alternative shore careers. Formal training arrangements are made with certain shipping companies and agencies to place students for training purposes and, in most cases, for immediate employment on qualifying, says Burke.

Fully qualified deck officers and junior engineer officers could expect to start earning about stg £11,000-£13,000, says the college. However, despite these apparently bright career prospects, the college cannot meet the demand.

"Career guidance personnel in the second level, in general, do not appear to appreciate the excellent career prospects at this time," says Burke, who would like to see greater numbers of students coming forward for training in this field.

"Permanent jobs are the priority and every effort is made to place our students in permanent positions."