

Run don't walk, to re-skill and re-train

As 'celebrity' and being 'cool' increasingly set the aspirations for hordes of individuals, the past few decades increasingly challenged the values of principled hard work, education and lifelong learning.

Many people scoffed at academic and professional success while people with little or no education or formal qualifications rose to the top. It is surely no coincidence that this preoccupation with celebrity mirrored the decline in so many professions as they abandoned quality and integrity and were freed from regulation and monitoring.

Now, though, I believe change is on the horizon. Skills and qualifications are once again being recognised as important following the crisis visited upon us by those in the banking and financial services industries who have caused economic collapse and soaring unemployment.

In a matter of months, the fallout from the folly of deregulation has led to a paradigm shift in thinking in banking and the financial world and even in traditional professions such as health, education and social work.

Increasing unemployment always results in greater competition for fewer and fewer job vacancies, and those with qualifications will be in greater and greater demand, especially as regulators and inspectors once again take more notice of risk.

The public sector, often a haven in troubled economic times, will see tougher times as the economic squeeze continues to hit public spending. Sadly, many public sector bodies that bought into 'cool' and made the most of deregulation have inspired a dumbing down of their professions, ironically at a time when the public is being advised by politicians and public sector leaders alike to 'expect more and demand more' from public servants.

We all want better, quicker and cheaper services (education, health, policing, social care services) and our right to challenge and complain has overtaken any sense of personal responsibility and personal contribution.

As a lifelong advocate of, and enthusiast for, 'lifelong learning', I welcome the current shift in the public and private sectors, where there are growing demands for those in banking to have 'banking qualifications' and those in social work to have appropriate and recognised skills backed up by appropriate and recognised social work qualifications.

Worryingly, the shortage of qualified and skilled teachers is seen by government and opposition as a means of bailing out unemployed banking high flyers through fast tracking them into the classroom. Experienced and long-serving teachers (and many parents) believe that these high flyers are merely seeking respite from the dole queue and will jump ship once reality hits, or as soon as the economy picks up.

Constant assault from the media has not helped public sector professionals such as teachers and social workers, but the imposition of a tick box culture of targets and performance indicators and declining interest in qualifications and training has clearly contributed even more to the current shortage of appropriately-qualified professionals.

Readers need to run, rather than walk, to their local university or third level college and rush to re-skill and re-train as greater competition increasingly sees those with good education and good qualifications succeed while celebrity and tick box culture wither in the newest version of the brave new world.