

# Set a revolution in train



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**N**OISY, CROWDED Delhi is one of the most chaotic metropolises on Earth. It's not the most likely destination for Western professionals in search of a peaceful, distraction-free study environment. And yet, they have come in their thousands to brush up on their IT skills, lured by India's technical competencies and one other significant pull factor: Indian operators can offer quality computer training at up to half the price of similar courses in Europe.

For many of the 90,000 people employed in the Irish IT industry, continuous professional development is a must, but it's not cheap. Since January 2010, 13 Irish and 388 UK professionals – from backgrounds as diverse as software engineering, the petroleum industry, and the military – have attended classes provided by Indian-based IT-training company Koenig Solutions. Microsoft, Cisco, and Oracle are the three most popular training courses. Linux and Red Hat are other popular options.

The international market for professional IT education is estimated at €18 billion per annum, and India's private education sector is determined to dominate it. At the same time, the Irish Government is actively seeking to increase from 1,145 its share of the 100,000 Indian third-level students studying abroad. However, it seems that, at least in the area of CPD, the subcontinent may be stealing a march on Europe's educational ambitions.

Koenig rules the market in Indian IT training, but they're not alone: newer firms such as IPSR and IP-Gates, with bases in Goa and Kerala, are snapping at their heels.

Koenig has grown exponentially, with reve-

nues rising from €70,000 in 2002 to almost €5 million in 2010. The firm is a large operation, and has trained more than 10,000 students to date.

*The Irish Times* met several Koenig students in two locations: Delhi and the stunning Himalayan mountain retreat of Shimla – once the summer retreat and capital of the British Raj in India, a laid-back architectural wonder with breathtaking views. They had come from England, Wales, the Netherlands, Angola, Congo, Afghanistan, Mexico, Canada and the United States. All had a clear focus in mind: to learn as much as possible, free of distractions, as quickly as possible. Some had paid for themselves, while others were entirely funded or subsidised by their companies. Education was the agenda; tourism, if it featured at all, came a distant second.

Koenig's tendrils are spreading, and it is planning to send Indian trainers to European and American locations, where they will still be able to offer IT courses at a fraction of the cost. Koenig also intends to open regional hubs in London, Amsterdam, Dubai, Mongolia, Nigeria, and at least 10 other locations, and is looking at expanding its range of professional education courses to embrace language and, potentially, other areas such as healthcare.

Educational tourism, or the "offshore training model", is perhaps a logical follow-on from medical or dental tourism, where people have procedures carried out in lower-cost destinations.

Despite its strength, however, the model faces strong competition: New Horizons, a US multinational IT training company which operates 320 centres in almost 70 countries, is among the firms offering an e-learning option.

IT training is undergoing a transformation as offshore training providers compete with traditional services in Ireland and elsewhere

According to Liam McMahon, franchisee and managing director of New Horizons Ireland, e-learning accounts for 10 per cent of the company's turnover. This tends to be a more popular option among more advanced IT professionals and those who want to fit study around their timetable, rather than for over a week or more.

Video link is another emerging option. New Horizons has seen the popularity of its innovative, US-based Online Live service surge over the past 18 months. Students on this full-time, five-day course can work from home with full access to a certified instructor. Around 25 per cent of New Horizons courses in the US are now delivered via Online Live. Significantly, however, the price is the same as classroom-based learning.

There's no fundamental obstacle preventing an Indian firm from providing IT training to European students via video link – indeed, once regulatory issues are dealt with, this may be the next wave of IT training.

McMahon admits that Irish operators cannot compete on price. Vendors such as Microsoft, Oracle, Red Hat, and Java operate tiered pricing structures, and charge less in developing or low-cost countries, while wages and other costs drive the price up here. However, he argues out that when flights and time off work are factored in, some of the shorter courses at New Horizons offer very good value compared to Indian operators.

Nonetheless, Koenig's chief executive Rohit Aggarwal believes that Indian powered IT training companies will come to dominate the market. "Offshore training is a silent revolution in education," he says. "Within the next five years, people will have noticed a complete change in how IT training is delivered." ■

## India v Ireland

Costs vary depending on skill level, course duration, and the number of exams taken. An MCITP (Enterprise Administrator: Windows Server 2008) course in Ireland can cost up to €5,500, without travel, accommodation, and other costs.

The same course in India costs €2,630, with the return fare from Europe (€800) bringing the cost up to €3,430, including accommodation and food.