

Free lunches, massage chairs and games room all in a day's work

by Niamh Hennessy



FANCY a free lunch every day, massage chairs in the office or hassle-free sick time? It's time then to apply for one of the 250 Facebook and Google jobs currently on offer in Dublin. Facebook tells its employ-

ees if they're sick, "stay home and get better" as there are unlimited sick days at the company. The social network giant also provides free snacks to employees in Dublin. At its Palo Alto headquarters in California, it provides laundry, dry cleaning, photo processing and leather repair for staff.

"You drop your laundry off at work and we'll return it right to your desk," says the company. In Dublin, Google's 1,500 employees enjoy free bikes, massage chairs, a games room and a complimentary canteen. "There is such a thing as a free lunch after all. In fact we have them every day:

healthy, yummy, and made with love," the company said. One Google worker in Dublin said: "It really is that good working here. We have so many perks but we work very hard too. I'm usually in the office until 8pm in the evening." Jobs are available in Dublin in areas such as

sales, marketing, engineering and advertising. Managing director of Berkley recruitment, Fergal Brosnan said, however, jobs growth is not unique to Google and Facebook. "Berkley are a recruitment partner of Google, and we see the growth here coming in very similar to our other major clients.

"While people assume these companies are here for tax, it is in fact the people that is top of their list. Also, the return of competitiveness has not gone unnoticed by the foreign direct investment sector," he said. Ireland's capital is home to the European headquarters of Facebook and Google. On its Dublin

recruitment site Facebook says: "When we're not working, we're out enjoying a good 'craic' in one of the city's many pubs, socialising with the friendly locals, and going to top-notch music shows." Facebook currently has 85 jobs on offer in Dublin. Google has 165 jobs advertised, with an

average salary of €72,207. Spokesman Darren Connolly said Facebook offers a competitive package with an employee share option scheme. "Applications for the new job positions have been strong so far and Facebook has been very pleased with the calibre of people applying to work at the company," he said.

RED ALERT FOR SPRING



Clockwise from above left: Sarah Morrissey models a Stella McCartney tulip print dress, €875, at a preview of Brown Thomas Spring 2011 Collections; Sarah models a Lanvin Fushia silk dress, €1,570; Nasrin Leahy models a Mary Katrantzou Le Meurice silk blouse, €850, with a Dorchester lampshade skirt, €696; Sarah models a Balenciaga pink suede shift dress, €1,095; Nasrin models a Giambattista Valli black and white animal print silk dress, €2,420.

Pictures: Leon Farrell



Irish private sector debt highest in Europe

by Ann Cahill
Europe Correspondent



PRIVATE sector debt in Ireland is the highest of the EU's 27 member states, according to new European data.

Ireland is also revealed as just one of three countries who failed to set targets for increasing employment and spending on research and development in the EU's first annual growth survey.

European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso said member states had committed to setting the targets and developing strategies to achieve them and suggested member states "should make them".

The targets are the first steps in the EU's new policy of keeping a much closer eye on national budgets and ensuring that all countries work towards lowering state debt and spending deficits.

Each country has been asked to set targets in eight areas and, while failing to do so for increasing employment and spending on research and development, the Government has set out targets in other areas.

According to the survey Ireland has set a target of 60% in relation to school leavers going on to third-level education next year, compared with the overall EU target of 40% and have also pledged to cut the number of early school leavers to 8% compared with a EU target of 10%.

Reducing emissions by 20% in Ireland is in line with the EU targets but the renewable energy target of 16% is below the EU's 20% target.

The commission's data also reveals how private sector debt, as a percentage

of GDP, is the highest of the 27 member states.

Other figures show Ireland has the fourth worst rate regarding non-performing loans while the sustainability of the country's public finances is revealed as the third worst.

While labour productivity is recorded as the second highest, actual competitiveness was recorded as the eighth lowest, less than a quarter of the EU average.

The survey also makes it clear that member states must also take into account the EU's advice on how to meet the challenges for their economies in drawing up their budget strategies for 2012 and set out the action they will take in employment, research, innovation, energy and social inclusion.

These will be assessed this April by the European Commission and based on their analysis the European Council — representing all member states — may advise national governments on what changes should be made to the draft budgets.

After these have been taken on board the budgets will then go to the national parliament where they will be voted on.

Authority seeks to reassure consumers over health insurance changeover

by Seán McCárthaigh

CONSUMERS are able to switch health insurance companies as well as switch policies by the same provider without any penalty regardless of their age or any pre-existing medical condition.

The Health Insurance Authority (HIA) yesterday

sought to reassure consumers that there is nothing to prevent them from changing their existing cover to a different policy or insurer.

The HIA said it believed there was some concern and confusion among people with private health insurance about their ability to switch from their current

policy based on the large volume of calls it has received over the past week.

"This is a common misconception, particularly among older people," said HIA chief Liam Sloyan.

"Consumers can be assured that any person can switch health insurance product without penalty, whilst maintaining

existing benefits."

The HIA confirmed it had received thousands of calls and visits to its website since the VHI announced last week that it was introducing dramatic increases to its annual premiums.

The VHI sparked major public anger and concern after it stated the annual cost of its policies would

rise by up to 45% from next month.

The price hikes will see some VHI customers with a family policy having to pay more than €1,000 extra per annum for private health insurance cover.

The HIA has advised any consumers with concerns about their private health cover to contact

the authority's helpline on 1850-929166 or its website on www.hia.ie, which provides comparisons on more than 200 health insurance products provided by VHI and its competitors, Aviva and Quinn.

The HIA said it believed consumers could make substantial savings by comparing similar policies.

Meanwhile, the VHI has confirmed it plans to increase premiums on corporate plans from next March.

Most insurers offer corporate plans, which are rarely publicised to individual customers, but offer a similar range of benefits at a cheaper price. However, there are no restrictions on such policies being

available to individuals.

It is believed a large number of VHI customers have already sought to switch to the cheaper policies.

Several politicians, including Junior Health Minister John Muloney and Fine Gael health spokesman James Reilly, have already called on the VHI to postpone the price increases.

Thieves prove Guinness makes you strong

by Sean O'Riordan

THIRSTY thieves crossed a railway line and several hundred yards of rough terrain in pitch darkness yesterday morning to steal 35 kegs of lager and stout from a Diageo compound in Co Cork.

Gardaí believe a number of strong men had to be involved in the theft as they had to carry the kegs to waiting transport.

Gardaí confirmed 25 kegs of Budweiser and 10 kegs of Guinness were taken from the compound at North Esk at Dunkettle, near Glanmire.

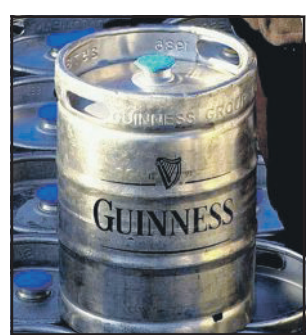
"The culprits entered from the side of the old

M25 near the Island Gate Restaurant. They then crossed the Cork-Middleton railway line and some rough terrain before breaking through the compound fence," a Garda spokesman said.

"There had to be a number of people involved in this theft due to the physicality required."

Each keg contains 88 pints and, if sold on by any unscrupulous publican, could net around €13,860. Detectives are hoping anybody in the licensed trade offered kegs at a knockdown price would contact them.

"We are also seeking to speak to anybody who may have seen anything suspi-



10 kegs of Guinness were stolen, along with 25 kegs of Budweiser.

cious in the area. We believe the theft took place between 12.30am and 5.30am," the spokesman said.

Gardaí said the culprits must have had transport such as a number of cars or a truck.

"If anybody saw any vehicles parked during that time near the Island Gate Restaurant we would like to talk to them," the spokesman said.

Anybody with information is asked to contact Cobh Garda Station on 021-4908530.

Lidl own-brand vodka beats market leaders

by Kerrie Kennedy

HIGHER prices do not always mean better quality, as an own-brand vodka has proven by thrashing top-shelf brands to be named the best vodka on the market.

German retail giant Lidl's Putinoff Vodka received the highest rating in a survey by comparison site supermarkettown-brandguide.com, coming in ahead of the world's leading premium vodka Smirnoff Red Label.

Marking it 10 out of 10, the €11.99 vodka beat own-label vodkas from Aldi, Tesco and Marks & Spencer, as well as the celebrity favourite Grey Goose which can retail for as much as four times the price of Putinoff.

Editor of the site Martin Isark said it goes to show you can find better than brand quality, even in a

Vodka: The clear winners

■ Lidl's Putinoff, Triple Distilled Vodka, Alc.40% €11.99

"Neat or with a mixer this is a stunning vodka. Tastes better than the leading brands. Put a bottle or two in the trolley." **Score 10/10**

■ Grey Goose Vodka, Alc.40% €45.79

"A good quality vodka, but not worth the extra premium." **Score 9/10**

■ Smirnoff Red Label Vodka, Alc.37.3% €16.99

"The own brands taste as good and sometimes better than this brand." **Score 8/10**

■ Aldi's Tamova Triple Distilled Vodka, Alc. 37.5% €11.99

"This has grainy notes on the nose, the palate is smooth and the finish is fiery. Will hit spot for vodka and tonic drinkers." **Score 8/10**

■ Marks & Spencer Vodka, Alc. 37.5% €14.65

"If you are a vodka and mixer drinker put a bottle of this in the trolley rather than the brand — you won't tell the difference." **Score 8/10**

■ Tesco Imperial Vodka Pure Grain, Alc. 37.5% €16.79

"Tesco shoppers who want a smooth-tasting Vodka — put a bottle of this in the trolley." **Score 8/10**

■ Tesco Value Vodka, Alc. 37.5% €11.69

"Smooth and delivers subtle grainy notes — perfect for vodka and tonic drinkers." **Score 8/10**



competitive market, at the lowest prices. "Neat or with a mixer [Putinoff] is a stunning vodka. Better

than leading brands." Spokeswoman for Lidl Aoife Clarke added that the secret of Putinoff

vodka is that it is triple distilled "which adds a smooth quality and a deliciously unique taste

— all without the celebrity price tag".

However, Lidl is no stranger to food awards, after winning four Blasca na hÉireann National Irish Food Awards in a blind taste test last October.

Lidl took gold in the dairy category for its deluxe Irish premium devon toffee-flavoured yoghurt and for its Irish Valley Irish country cream, bronze in the best newcomer category for its Bridge Bakery luxury lemon cake and gold and bronze in the drinks category for its Carrick Glen cranberry and raspberry flavoured sparkling water.

Lidl also won a gold star from the Good Food Guild last year when its Glensallagh pale streaky bacon was described as "close to perfection" by the British Great Taste Awards.