

Chapter 1

Lifelong Learning Strategy

1.1 Current State of Play

The Department of Education and Science, in collaboration with the Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment, is currently finalising its Lifelong Learning Strategy.

1.2 Comprehensiveness, coherence and relevance

1.2.1 Which systems and levels of education and training are covered

Ireland's Lifelong Learning Strategy covers all phases of education, from early childhood education, primary and post-primary education to further and higher education and also includes youth provision.

1.2.2 Challenges addressed by the Strategy, including improving the efficiency and equity of education and training systems, and how these have been identified

Among other things, the Strategy takes into account the need to prioritise and utilise resources as efficiently and effectively to ensure optimum educational outcomes across all areas. Government policy for the medium to longer term adopts a lifelong learning approach where all aspects of education and training, whether in a formal, informal or non-formal setting. The key features of this comprehensive approach are:

- accessibility to all learners
- removal of barriers to access
- provision of a continuum of education, from pre-school right through to enabling older people to continue to engage in education and training
- seamless transfer and progression for all learners, with accreditation through the National Framework of Qualifications

A key challenge is to prioritise investment in favour of those most at risk and to optimise access, participation and outcomes at every level of the system for disadvantaged groups. This approach is adopted in national strategies e.g. Towards 2016 Ten Year Framework Social Partnership Agreement, the National Development Plan 2007 – 2013 and the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007 – 2016.

1.2.3 Priorities for action and policy development within the strategy, in light of these challenges

The priorities for action and policy development within the Strategy may be summarised as follows:

- Enhance early education provision for children from disadvantaged communities and those with special needs
- Substantially reduce literacy / numeracy problems among children, particularly in schools serving disadvantaged communities, and the adult population

- Encourage children to be active agents in their own learning and to engage in collaborative active learning
- Strengthen the technical and vocational dimensions of curricula and achieve greater participation in the sciences by young people.
- Drive the lifelong learning agenda by enhancing access to education and training, the development of new skills, the acquisition of recognised qualifications and progression to higher-level qualifications
- Provide learning opportunities for adults targeted at vulnerable groups and those in disadvantaged communities with low levels of educational attainment.

1.3 Main policy measures

1.3.1 the main policy measures in the strategy and how these fit together

The Lifelong Learning Strategy sets out specific measures to address the needs of learners in the Lifelong Learning context.

DEIS, the Action Plan for Educational Inclusion, is targeted at 3 to 18 year olds from disadvantaged communities and represents a shift in emphasis away from individual initiatives. The plan adopts a multi-faceted and more integrated approach. DEIS contains measures to enhance early childhood education provision, which will work by embedding quality early learning in partnership with other departments and agencies to complement and add value to existing childcare programmes in disadvantaged communities.

Regarding Further Education, measures include adult literacy and basic education provision, community education, the *Back to Education Initiative* which enables adults to access part-time education options, Youthreach which is a programme for early school leavers aged 15 – 20 years, *Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme* (VTOS) for adults who are over 21 years and are unemployed, Senior Traveller Training Centres and Post Leaving Certificate Courses which offer students accreditation at levels 5 and 6 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, through FÁS (the national training authority) provides part-time/full-time training programmes for unemployed people, to provide them with the skills to re-enter the workforce. FÁS also provides options for those in employment to enhance their skills and also provides managers with training.

Under the *National Development Plan (NDP) 2007-2013*, €13 billion will be invested in the Higher Education Programme over the life of the plan. The *Strategic Innovation Fund* (SIF) has been established to support the organisational transformation of Higher Education Institutions to deliver excellence across all activities.

The *Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation (SSTI)* was launched by the Irish Government in 2006. The Strategy envisages that by 2013 Ireland will be internationally renowned for the excellence of its research, and will be to the forefront in generating and using new knowledge for economic and social progress, within an innovation culture. In January 2007, the Minister for Education and Science

announced the availability of some €190 million for higher education research through the fourth cycle of funding under this Department's *Programme for Research in Third-Level Institutions* (PRTLII). The funding will be provided over the period 2007-2010. In addition to its main objective of supporting world class research, it will also reward innovation and collaboration in higher education.

1.3.2 outline the measures designed to address progress towards the EU benchmarks, including any national targets in these areas

Graduates in Maths, Science and Technology - The Irish Government's *Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation (SSTI) 2006 to 2013* sets out, *inter alia*, a range of measures to further strengthen science teaching and learning and improve the uptake of senior cycle Physics and Chemistry.

Literacy - The most significant levels of literacy and numeracy difficulties tend to be concentrated in schools serving disadvantaged communities. Significant resources are being targeted to address literacy and numeracy difficulties in disadvantaged schools through the measures in the DEIS action plan.

Reducing number of early school leavers - There are a number of initiatives in post – primary schools (e.g. the DEIS Action Plan, School Completion Programme, additional resources for Travellers, Migrant children with English language needs, special needs resources etc) and through the provision of alternative programmes such as Youthreach, and Community Training Centres.

Increasing completion of upper secondary – The aim is to exceed 90% completion levels of upper secondary education or equivalent by 2013.

Participation rates in Lifelong Learning – The aim is to increase participation at all levels in particular in pre-schools, retention in second level education and greater participation in Further and Higher Education

1.3.3 allocation of resources to main policy measures, including any national targets for more / more efficient use of funds and the use of EU funds to support lifelong learning

The resources required to implement the policy measures outlined in the Lifelong Learning Strategy come from a number of mainstream budget sources in Government Departments, including the Department of Education and Science and are provided under a variety of Government Strategies and national partnership agreements.

1.3.4 measures to change attitudes to learning

Measures include the provision of a suite of programmes within second level to cater for the needs of the students, guidance support to provide students with the information to make informed decisions, guidance for adults wishing to return to education, a National Framework of Qualifications which enables adult learners to re-access education at a level most suited to their needs, the provision of child care support and the encouragement of adults on social welfare benefits to access education whilst retaining their benefits and the provision of free education for those on full time courses.

1.3.5 strengthening evidence-based policy making, using a culture of evaluation, leading to innovation in education and training

A culture of evaluation is encouraged by various means. Expenditure review and policy review are features of the work of the Department of Education and Science on an ongoing basis. Such reviews provide a basis on which more informed decisions can be made on priorities within and between programmes. The Department's Inspectorate also conducts evaluations of various aspects of the school system. Research is undertaken by various agencies, such as the Economic and Social Research Institute, the Expert Advisory Group on Future Skills Needs, and the Education Research Centre and focus on education and training in the context of personal, social and economic development.

1.3.6 measures to target the needs of disadvantaged people (e.g. immigrants, ethnic minorities, the disabled)

The DEIS Action plan for Social Inclusion targets 3 to 18 year old in disadvantaged communities.

The needs of migrants are being addressed by the Department of Education & Science through the establishment of a Steering Committee. The Committee examines issues such as language supports, the adequacy and duration of existing supports, how language supports might best be deployed, the formulation of guidelines for schools in relation to the deployment of language supports and international best practice in this area. The appointment of extra language support teachers is a priority and Language Assessment Kits have also been produced and distributed. *Guidelines on Intercultural Education in the Primary School* have been developed on how the existing curriculum can be mediated and adapted to reflect the emergence of an expanding multi-cultural society. The Department of Education and Science is also supporting the development of an Intercultural Strategy for the Youth Work sector.

A new scheme for allocating *learning support / resource teachers* to schools to cater for the needs of children with high-incidence special educational needs, such as mild general learning disability and learning support needs, was introduced in schools in September 2005. FÁS, the National Training Authority, has developed a Vocational Training Strategy for Disabled People and has established Regional Networks of disabled people and providers to assist FÁS to identify and support training provision.

The Department of Education and Science is working in partnership with the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform to develop a national English Language Policy and Framework to cater for the needs of adult immigrants.

1.4. Development, implementation and dissemination of the strategy

The consultative process that was engaged in to achieve agreement for Towards 2016 Ten Year Framework Social Partnership Agreement 2006 – 2015 was used to inform the development of the Strategy. The funding that has been provided in Towards 2016 and in the NDP 2007 – 2013 is being allocated in consultation with the providers of the different services and in consultation with key stakeholders.

Chapter 2

Implementation of Transversal Policy Objectives

2.1 The establishment of National Qualifications Systems and Frameworks

The re-orientation of the system of qualifications in Ireland to meet the needs of learners in a lifelong learning context has been a key policy objective for many years. Progress towards this objective was significantly enhanced with the introduction of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999. The Act identified the development of a National Framework of Qualifications as a key action and established three new organisations to undertake this development in co-operation with existing stakeholders.

The three organisations are the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI), the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) and the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC). The roles and functions of each organisation were outlined in the Act.

The NQAI is a key Government agency in education and training. It has a lead statutory role in the Government's strategy for the highlighting of the importance of learning in all areas of Irish life and thus for the development of a lifelong learning society which is increasingly recognised as being vital for Ireland's development. The Authority's establishment aims to lead to an increasing focus on the learner and his or her needs rather than those of the education or training institution which provides the learning. Thus in the implementation of this work programme, the work of the Authority and the implementation of the National Framework of Qualifications, are key planning and enabling tools.

Following a detailed consultation process with stakeholders, the Authority introduced a National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) in October 2003, which is now being implemented across the education and training sectors. Implementation of the Framework has proceeded quickly. New awards have been in use throughout higher education and training since the autumn of 2004 and the FETAC system of awards commenced in the middle of 2006.

The national objective of moving towards a lifelong learning society, in which learners can avail of learning opportunities at various stages throughout their lives, was a key factor in the changes that have taken place. This led to the need for a more flexible and integrated system of qualifications that could accommodate all shapes and sizes of education and training in Ireland. The introduction of the NFQ addressed this need.

The NFQ is a ten level system that incorporates awards made for all kinds of learning, large and small, whether it is gained in schools, the workplace, the community, training centres, colleges or universities. For each level of the NFQ, standards of knowledge, skill and competence have been set out, defining the outcomes to be achieved by a learner seeking to gain a qualification. As the NFQ is designed to recognise both large and smaller packages of learning, it was necessary to ensure that more than one type of award was designed.

2.2 Identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning

One outcome of moving to a lifelong learning society will be the creation of a more diverse learning community with different learning needs. To help meet these needs, the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) has been given the statutory role to promote and facilitate access, transfer and progression.

The NQAI has developed and published Policies, Actions and Procedures for Access, Transfer and Progression for Learners. This document articulates a vision for learner mobility. It also sets out a range of policies which are designed to address many of the issues involved in improving learner mobility.

The NQAI has developed a number of these policies in greater detail through consultation with education and training stakeholders. Principles and Operational Guidelines are now available with respect to Credit and the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL).

The concept of lifelong learning indicates that learning should encompass the whole spectrum of formal, non-formal and informal learning. Learning occurs in many contexts that include work, involvement in social and community activities, or learning through life experience generally. In order to enable the individual to learn throughout life, equal value should be given to all these forms of learning regardless of source, how it is achieved or when in life it is achieved. A major objective of the National Framework of Qualifications is to recognise all learning achievements. It aims to do this by supporting the development of alternative pathways to qualifications (or awards) and by promoting the recognition of prior learning.

Recognition is a process by which prior learning is given a value. It is a means by which prior learning is formally identified, assessed and acknowledged. This makes it possible for an individual to build on learning achieved and be formally rewarded for it. The term 'prior learning' is learning that has taken place, but not necessarily been assessed or measured, prior to entering a programme or seeking an award. Prior learning may have been acquired through formal, non-formal, or informal routes.

The NQAI has set out the purposes of the recognition of prior learning in the Policies, Actions and Procedures for Access, Transfer and Progression for Learners:

- entry to a programme leading to an award
- credit towards an award or exemption from some programme requirements
- eligibility for a full award

In addition, the recognition of prior learning can also be directly relevant in terms of facilitating employment. While there is not necessarily a direct link with qualifications in such recognition, this is a very important dimension to the recognition of prior learning.

It is a policy of the NQAI to promote the co-ordination and harmonisation of processes for the recognition of prior learning on the part of education and training providers and awarding bodies. It sees the development of the national principles and operational guidelines as a first step in this direction. There are a number and a variety

of different approaches to the recognition of prior learning on the part of education providers, awarding bodies, in the workplace and elsewhere. Implementation work is now underway across education and training.

A policy on the Recognition of Prior Learning was published recently by the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC). This policy provides for the formal recognition of informal and non-formal learning, wherever acquired. The objective of the policy is to facilitate access, transfer and progression of learners through the recognition of prior learning within the national framework of qualifications. FETAC promotes the recognition of prior learning through quality assured providers in relation to entry, credit, exemptions and access to awards.

2.3 Widely accessible lifelong guidance policies and systems

The Education Act 1998 requires that schools must ensure that “all students have access to appropriate guidance to assist them in their educational and career choices”. In 2005, following a consultation process with the education partners, the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science issued guidelines for second level schools to assist them in providing access for all students to appropriate guidance. A full report on a top-to-bottom review of guidance in second level schools, commissioned by the Minister for Education and Science, was published on the Department’s website (www.education.ie) in September 2006. The review provides both quantitative and qualitative data on the use by schools of the resources provided for guidance and on the nature of the guidance programmes delivered to students. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) has developed a draft curriculum framework which will be piloted in schools in 2007/8.

The Adult Education Guidance Initiative (AEGI) is a phased programme aimed at developing a more skilled and knowledge-based workforce by means of a dedicated educational guidance service for adult learners. The AEGI provides guidance supports for learners such as information on education courses, one-to-one guidance, group guidance and outreach provision for learners within particular target groups. The AEGI services network closely with local education providers to identify needs and plan provision for guidance support. Since its inception in 2000, over 30,000 clients have accessed AEGI services.

The AEGI has developed a range of models of guidance delivery to suit a variety of needs. Innovative practice has been a feature of the initiative and staff members have developed expertise in meeting the specific needs of learners. The services have been monitored and evaluated regularly. One particular novel aspect of the project has been its outreach service to groups that are hard to access and its follow up on these clients. Evaluations of the AEGI show that contact with guidance services has had a positive impact on learners and has brought about changes in their attitudes to learning and to the progression opportunities available to them.

A National Guidance Forum was established in June 2004. The Forum was a joint initiative of the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. It aimed to facilitate collaboration between guidance providers and to make lifelong guidance a reality. The Forum had thirty members, including representatives of guidance policy makers, practitioners, trainers,

social partners, parents and consumers. Its work focused closely on the objectives of the Resolution on Guidance adopted by the Council of Ministers in May 2004. The Forum completed its work in October 2006 and its final report will be launched later in 2007.

2.4 Measures to reinforce transnational mobility in all sectors

The National Europass Centre is based in the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI). The implementation of each of the various elements of Europass is being advanced in a co-ordinated way.

The introduction of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) has aided the recognition of qualifications not only for holders of NFQ awards travelling abroad but also for those travelling to this country with awards made outside the State. The NQAI is the Irish centre for the recognition of international qualifications, known as “Qualifications Recognition – Ireland”.

Qualifications Recognition – Ireland provides an information service that helps individuals compare their foreign qualifications with Irish qualifications. The service provides information regarding the foreign qualification held by a learner and compares the foreign qualification to a qualification that is placed at a particular level on the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). The NFQ provides a way of relating foreign qualifications to the nearest comparable qualification in Ireland. Therefore, the advice provided helps put the foreign qualification in the context of the Irish education system. The aim is to indicate, where possible, the level that the award is at on the Irish NFQ. This is helpful for people who are not familiar with the Irish education system. In addition, a ‘rough guide’ to comparing qualifications in the UK and Ireland has been produced.

Proposed new legislation (the Student Support Bill, 2007) will legally underpin arrangements for the portability of student support grants. At present, there is provision in two of the three means-tested Third Level student support schemes for the payment of maintenance grants to eligible students who are attending a full-time undergraduate course of not less than two years duration pursued in a university or third-level institution which is maintained or assisted by recurrent grants from public funds in another EU Member State.

CHAPTER 3

IMPLEMENTATION OF POLICY OBJECTIVES IN SCHOOLS, HIGHER EDUCATION, VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING, AND ADULT EDUCATION

3.1 Elements to be reported on for all levels (schools, higher education, vocational education and training, adult learning):

3.1.1 governance and leadership of education and training institutions (e.g. organisational and administrative reforms, autonomy and accountability measures, public/private initiatives)

The Higher Education Authority (HEA) has an overarching role with regard to strategic plans and quality assurance procedures within the third level institutions. It is responsible for the management and disbursement of all recurrent and capital funds to these institutions. The **Universities Act 1997** provides for the academic freedom of the universities. The university, in performing its functions has the right and responsibility to preserve and promote the traditional principles of academic freedom in the conduct of its internal and external affairs.

The Government established the Regional Technical Colleges (subsequently renamed as Institutes of Technology (IOTs)) as self-governing autonomous legal entities through the RTC Act of 1992. The Dublin Institute of Technology was established under the Dublin Institute of Technology Act 1992. As DIT is an awarding body, its statutory Academic Council and Governing Body can make all the necessary decisions in the academic domain.

The passing of the Institutes of Technology Act 2006 gave greater autonomy to the DIT and IOTs with the HEA taking on the former roles of the Department in areas such as budgets, finances, borrowings and research.

3.1.2 stimulating private investment from enterprises, households and individuals

A *Public Private Partnership Unit* was established within the Department of Education and Science to promote the development of capital projects under the Government's Public Private Partnership programme. This programme provides infrastructure projects through a structured arrangement between public sector organisations and private sector investors. In the case of education projects, the intention is primarily to free up school/college management from the responsibility for the management and maintenance of buildings and allow them to concentrate on their core educational management functions. A major expansion of the Public Private Partnership Programme from 2006 to 2009 was announced in 2005 with €300m being provided for the provision of 23 new post-primary school and 4 new primary schools and €270m was allocated for the provision of 17 new Third Level projects. Under the National Development Plan 2007 – 2013, an additional €65 million has been identified for the provision of educational PPP projects.

Several training providers are currently undertaking awareness campaigns targeted at enterprises and individuals. These campaigns are designed to highlight the benefits, which education and training will have both for a company and an individual. Not

only will these campaigns increase awareness of the various training and education available but they will also lead to increased private investment in this area.

3.1.3 widening access, and improving equity of participation, treatment and outcomes, especially for disadvantaged learners (e.g. migrants, ethnic minorities, the disabled)

In 2005, the Department of Education and Science established a Steering Committee to co-ordinate its response to the education needs of migrants to Ireland. The committee has examined as a first priority the area of language supports in primary and post-primary schools for children who do not have English as a first language. At the commencement of the 2006/2007 school year there were 1,250 language support teachers employed in primary and post-primary schools. Provision for the appointment of an extra 550 language support teachers by 2009 is included as one of the priority actions in *Towards 2016*. Detailed language assessment kits based on best international practice have been developed and distributed. Information on the education system in Ireland of relevance to newcomer parents has also been translated into six languages – Polish, Latvian, German, Spanish, Russian and Lithuanian – and made available on the Department’s website.

DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools), the action plan for educational inclusion, focuses on addressing the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities, from pre-school through second-level education (3 to 18 years). The action plan will be implemented on a phased basis over five years (2005-2010) and will involve an additional annual investment of some €40m on full implementation. The action plan provides for a standardised system for identifying levels of disadvantage and a new integrated School Support Programme (SSP). The School Support Programme will bring together, and build upon, a number of existing interventions in schools with a concentrated level of disadvantage.

The new National Action Plan for Social Inclusion has three high-level goals which relate specifically to education:

- Ensure that targeted pre-school education is provided to children from urban primary school communities covered by the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) action plan;
- Reduce the proportion of pupils with serious literacy difficulties in primary schools serving disadvantaged communities. The target is to halve the proportion from the current 27%-30% to less than 15% by 2016;
- Work to ensure that the proportion of the population aged 20-24 completing upper second level education or equivalent will exceed 90% by 2013;

FÁS (Ireland’s National Training and Employment Authority) is involved in influencing, collaborating and supporting key stakeholders (including its own staff) to design, develop and deliver programmes and services that increase the participation and progression of marginalised groups, (namely members of the traveller community, lone parents, early school leavers, ex-offenders, migrant workers and women wishing to return to the workforce). People with disabilities are encouraged

to apply for training, and the appropriate supports are put in place to meet their particular individual needs. FÁS has adopted an evidence-based approach to the operation of its vocational training and employment programmes for people with disabilities.

The National Access Office, within the Higher Education Authority, facilitates educational access and opportunity for groups who are under-represented in higher education viz those who are disadvantaged socially, economically and/or culturally, those with a disability and mature learners. It also encourages flexible delivery opportunities.

The Universities and Institutes of Technology also have a number of programmes in place to encourage and facilitate access to higher education from these target groups. These include a direct access scheme for socio-economic disadvantaged school-leavers to gain access to high-demand subject areas where there is significant competition among school leavers.

3.1.4 measures to address gender aspects in education and training

The *Gender Equality Unit* of the Department of Education and Science was established to promote and monitor the mainstreaming of gender equality throughout the education system, from pre-school through to post-graduate education and adult learning. In carrying out this role, the Unit has undertaken a number of actions, including:

- Providing support for research into issues of gender and education.
- The production of resource materials for educational practitioners.
- The provision of training. Primary and post-primary inspectors have been provided with gender mainstreaming training and a training course for Women into Educational Management has also been supported.
- Support for policy committees. The Primary Education Committee, which addressed the need to encourage males into primary teaching, reported in late 2005, while the Women in Science, Engineering and Technology Committee is due to report in 2007.
- Support for conferences and seminars to increase the awareness of gender equality issues in education.

3.1.5 the use of learning outcome based approaches for the definition and design of education and training objectives, standards and curricula, and their relevance to the needs of society and the economy

The National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) has been built around an agreed architecture, as a result of an extended consultative period with a range of stakeholders. For each level of the National Framework of Qualifications, standards of knowledge, skill and competence have been set out, defining the learning outcomes to be achieved by a learner seeking to gain a qualification. The NFQ is designed to recognise both large and smaller packages of learning, through four award-types.

3.1.6 quality assurance systems

The Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science has a statutory quality assurance remit in relation to educational provision in primary and second level

schools in Ireland, set out under Section 13 of the Education Act 1998. The activities of the Inspectorate can be categorised broadly under four strands. These are (1) Operating an inspection and evaluation programme, (2) Assessing and advising on the implementation of legislation and Department regulations, (3) Advising schools, teachers and parents on educational provision, and (4) Contributing to and supporting policy development. Within this context the Inspectorate's remit extends to the work of more than 4,000 schools and approximately 50,000 teachers. The annual inspection programme includes mainstream evaluation of the work of primary and post-primary teachers and schools, and thematic evaluations of particular aspects of educational provision. Implementation of the Inspectorate's annual inspection plan is monitored on a quarterly basis.

A major development in quality assurance in Ireland has been the formal introduction of the Whole School Evaluation (WSE) model for primary and post-primary schools. The WSE process involves evaluation of schools under the areas of management, planning, curriculum provision, teaching and learning and student support. Information is gathered from a range of sources within a school in order to ensure that judgements made by inspectors are valid, reliable and consistent. Boards of Management and officers of the Parents' Association in a school are consulted by inspectors during a WSE. Following the evaluation a WSE report is published in which strengths are acknowledged and clear recommendations made in relation to the further development of educational provision in the school. The WSE report is published on the website of the Department.

The qualifications that are included in the National Framework of Qualifications, the providers of programmes leading to NFQ qualifications and the awarding bodies that make these awards, are all subject to quality assurance arrangements. This is a vital dimension to the implementation of the Framework. The principal legislation underpinning quality assurance in further and higher education and training in Ireland is the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 and the Universities Act 1997.

The Awards Councils (HETAC and FETAC) are responsible for agreeing quality assurance procedures with providers delivering programmes that lead to their awards. They are also responsible for reviewing the effectiveness of provider quality assurance procedures and the implementation of the findings which have arisen through the application of these procedures. HETAC is planning to commence effectiveness reviewing in 2007. The Qualifications Act also sets out the general quality assurance arrangements for the Dublin Institute of Technology.

The Universities Act sets out the requirement for each university to establish quality assurance procedures, to carry out evaluations, to review the effectiveness of its quality assurance procedures and the implementation of the findings which have arisen through the application of these procedures. The Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) has been delegated authority by the universities to organise periodic reviews of the effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures in place in the universities. An initial such review was completed in 2005.

The Qualifications Act also sets out the responsibilities of the Qualifications Authority in terms of quality assurance. This involves the review of the Awards Councils' performance of their functions and the review of the effectiveness of the

quality assurance procedures of the DIT. A review of the effectiveness of HETAC's performance of its functions was completed in 2006. This review process also tested the compliance of the Council with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*, and the outcome was that the Authority was satisfied that, in the performance of its functions, HETAC complies with these. A review of the effectiveness of FETAC's performance of its functions is due to take place in 2007. The Authority's effectiveness is also to be reviewed in 2007.

The Irish Higher Education Quality Network (IHEQN) was established in 2003. It provides a forum for the principal national stakeholders in the quality assurance of higher education and training (including HETAC, the Qualifications Authority, the DIT and the IUQB) to discuss quality in a national context, to work towards the development of a common national position on key quality assurance issues and to inform the debate on those same issues at a European level.

3.1.7 developing learning partnerships with stakeholders (policy-makers at national, regional and local levels, social partners, learners and representatives of civil society).

Both students and staff are elected to the Governing Bodies of the Universities and Institutes of Technology. Business and social partners nominate members to the Governing Bodies of the Universities and Institutes of Technology. They also nominate members of the Higher Education and Training Awards Council, the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland and the Irish Universities Quality Board.

3.2 Schools

3.2.1. Increasing investment in and strengthening pre-primary education

A new Early Years Education Policy Unit has been established by the Department of Education and Science. In response to a White Paper on Early Childhood Education, *Ready to Learn*, the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE) was set up in 2002 to provide advice and support to the Department in all areas of Early Childhood Education. This includes developing targeted interventions on a pilot basis for children who are educationally disadvantaged and children with special needs. The CECDE published their National Quality Framework *Síolta* in 2006 which can be applied across all settings.

Pre-school education is provided in the main by privately funded childcare facilities. However, the Department funds a number of pre-school initiatives, focusing in particular on children at risk. These initiatives include the Early Start programme and the provision of Traveller pre-schools. Additional funding for early childhood education has been made available under DEIS – the Action Plan for Educational Inclusion.

3.2.2 modernising school curricula and assessment arrangements (inter alia to address learning outcomes and the attainment of key competences)

A new Primary Curriculum was introduced in 1999 and is being implemented on a phased basis. At second level, there is ongoing review of curricula at both junior and senior cycle by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. Assessment for both the Junior and Leaving Certificate Examinations is currently conducted by the State Examinations Commission in a variety of ways. While all subjects are assessed by means of a terminal written examination, the use of additional modes of assessment which are completed in advance of the June examinations is increasing.

3.2.3 addressing the specific learning/training needs of teachers (including pre-primary) to enable them to cope with their changing roles in the knowledge-based society

The Department of Education and Science recognises the importance of a high quality of teacher education and is committed to the improvement/updating of teachers' skills and competences at all stages of their career.

Initial Teacher Education

The Department of Education and Science is currently assessing the provision of initial teacher education in Ireland. The assessment seeks to examine the current provision of initial teacher education and analyse whether this provision remains relevant to meeting the emerging challenges facing schools and teachers. Examples of these challenges include: increasing cultural diversity in classrooms, an enhanced provision to students with special needs, the requirement to deal with issues such as ICT, assessment for learning and preparing students for the knowledge economy.

Induction for Newly Qualified Teachers

At present, induction is represented by the National Pilot Project on Teacher Induction (NPPTI). The primary aim of the NPPTI is to develop high quality proposals for an effective national programme of Induction for newly qualified teachers (NQTs) in primary and post-primary schools in Ireland. The project is engaged in action research, examining and investigating a variety of approaches, with due regard to the range of professional needs of NQTs, the varied school/class contextual realities as they exist at primary level and at second level, and the needs at system level. The main objective of the Induction programme is towards supporting the professional development of NQTs by way of systematic support in their first year of teaching, thus laying the foundations for subsequent professional growth and development.

A Teaching Council was established in early 2006. Its functions are, inter alia, to review and accredit programmes of teacher education. In 2007, the Council published Codes of Professional Conduct for Teachers which include standards of teaching, knowledge, skill and competence. These codes will be influential in determining future initial teacher education provision.

Continuing Professional Development

The in-service programme for teachers at primary and post-primary level, currently consisting of 25 support programmes and national programmes, is designed to meet the continuous professional development needs of teachers generally and the particular needs of teachers/tutors involved in:

- New subjects, programmes and revised curricula in schools

- School management, including planning and leadership development
- Student Behaviour
- Special Education and Learning Support

3.2.4 Measures to reduce early school leaving, to increase rates of completion of upper secondary education, to reduce the proportion of low-achieving 15 year olds in literacy, and to increase the take-up of mathematics, science and technology subjects (EU benchmarks).

Early School leaving

The Education Welfare Act and the establishment of the National Educational Welfare Board is an important part in the campaign to keep students at school and will provide a comprehensive framework for promoting regular school attendance and tackling the problems of absenteeism and early school leaving.

Completion of Upper Secondary Education

One of the high-level goals under the new National Development Plan 2007-13, and the recently published National Action Plan for Social Inclusion, 2007-16, is to work to ensure that the proportion of the population aged 20-24 completing upper second level education or equivalent will exceed 90% by 2013. The Department's strategies have included widening the educational experience available to students by expanding funding for programmes such as the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and the Youthreach programme for unqualified early school leavers.

Literacy

Schools generally have relatively low proportions of children with significant literacy difficulties as evidenced by comparatively high overall achievement levels in successive international surveys of reading of 15-year-olds under PISA. The most significant levels of literacy difficulties tend to be concentrated in school serving disadvantaged communities. One of the high-level goals under the new National Development Plan 2007-13, and the recently published National Action Plan for Social Inclusion, 2007-16, is to reduce the proportion of pupils with serious literacy difficulties in primary schools serving disadvantaged communities from the current level of 27-30% to less than 15% by 2016.

To achieve this goal significant resources to address literacy and numeracy difficulties in schools serving disadvantaged communities are being provided through the DEIS action plan. These measures include a maximum class size of 20:1 in junior classes and 24:1 in senior classes in the urban primary schools serving the most disadvantaged communities and increased access to literacy and numeracy support services and programmes for all urban primary schools under the DEIS action plan. Additional literacy and numeracy tutors are being recruited to provide in-school support and guidance to all teachers in these schools. Extra resources will also be made available for intensive professional development programmes for principals and teachers in DEIS schools. A new Family Literacy Project is also being implemented. Finally, the School Development Planning service will support schools in developing their plans and policies for teaching literacy and numeracy and in setting measurable targets for the reduction of serious literacy and numeracy difficulties.

Increasing the take-up of Maths, Science and Technology subjects

The Irish Government's *Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation (SSTI) 2006 to 2013* sets out, *inter alia*, a range of measures to further strengthen science teaching and learning and improve the uptake of senior cycle Physics and Chemistry. These include ensuring that the project based hands-on investigative approach now in place at junior cycle is extended to senior cycle, and is reflected in assessment, and that there is an emphasis on the inter-disciplinary nature of science in society. The **Office of Science and Technology (OST)**, within the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, supports and monitors the integrated awareness programme, Discover Science & Engineering, with the aim of increasing the numbers of students taking science as a career and promoting science literacy generally.

3.3 Higher education

3.3.1 measures to reinforce the knowledge triangle between education, research and innovation

In June 2006 the Government approved the publication of the **Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation (SSTI)** and committed additional resources to allow implementation of the Strategy to commence. The full implementation of the Strategy has been costed at €3.8 billion.

The Key Actions arising from SSTI may be summarised as follows:

- Build on recent National Development Plan investments to deliver a sustainable, world class research system across the spectrum of humanities, physical and social sciences;
- Deliver quality by increasing the number of research teams led by internationally competitive principal investigators;
- Upgrade existing infrastructure and develop new facilities to support research;
- Enhance postgraduate skills through a graduate schools mechanism;
- Develop sustainable career paths for researchers;
- Enhance the mobility of researchers;
- Double the number of PhD graduates by 2013;

3.3.2 any participation targets and measures to achieve them

Increasing the participation rates in higher education of the following target groups is a key national priority in Ireland:

- Those who are disadvantaged socially, economically and culturally
- Mature students
- Students with a disability

There are positive indications that the combined investment of resources and measures at all levels of the education system to address social exclusion and educational disadvantage is paying dividends and that targets for increased participation in higher education that were set by the Action Group on Access in 2001 have been attained.

The following table shows evidence that the percentage-based targets for 2006 recommended by the 2001 Report of the Action Group on Access to Higher Education were reached:

Target % set for 2006	Current Position
Participation of students with a disability was to increase from 0.8% of the undergraduate population in 1998 to 1.8% in 2006.	A 2005 survey by the Association for Higher Education Access and Disability (AHEAD) shows that 2.4% of undergraduates are students with a disability.
Participation of full-time mature students was to increase from 4.5% of new entrants in 1998 to 10% in 2006.	The 2004 ESRI survey indicates that 9.4% of full-time entrants are mature students.
Participation of students facing social and economic barriers was to rise from 16% in 1998 to 27% in 2006.	The 2004 ESRI survey indicates that 33% of the age cohort of students from lower socio-economic groups entered higher education in 2004.

New participation targets will be set as part of the new National Equity of Access Action Plan that will include targets for the traveller community and other minority groups. These will be both quantitative and qualitative. More comprehensive student data available from 2008 onwards will enable the assessment of progress to date, the setting of national and institutional targets for participation and graduation and ensuring that resources are allocated transparently and consistently.

3.3.3 measures to increase excellence

Quality teaching and learning is at the core of the higher education mission. The Universities Act 1997 and the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 provides that institutions are obliged to establish procedures for quality assurance aimed at improving the quality of education and related services. Central elements in any system of quality assurance include self evaluation, peer review, reporting and external monitoring.

One of the objectives of the programme for Research in Third Level Institutions is to promote excellence in research and contribute to the quality of teaching and learning in the higher education institutions. The emphasis is on assisting the institutions – both individually and collectively – to enhance and develop their research capabilities and to attain research excellence in the national interest. Support is available for initiatives to enhance the quality training and education of postgraduate students, including structured graduate education through graduate schools.

The multi-annual Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF) was announced in 2005 and it has a seven year allocation of €10 million up to 2013. The fund is intended to be a major catalyst in bringing about substantial change and quality improvement in our higher education institutions and promoting system-wide collaboration that draws on all institutions' collective strengths. The Fund is directed towards support for innovation

in higher education institutions. It will support new approaches to enhancing quality and effectiveness within higher education and research, incorporating the use of existing resources more effectively, as well as new funding. There is a recognition that the strength of the Irish higher education system, which consists of a relatively large number of institutions with diverse missions, will only be fully realised through institutional collaboration. The Irish higher education system aims to build world class quality and capacity and it is intended that this Fund will allow institutions to draw on their considerable respective strengths and form strong partnerships across sectoral and other barriers.

3.3.4 measures to increase the number of graduates in mathematics, science and technology (EU benchmark)

Demand for places on science courses has remained consistent over the last five years. In 2006, there were no vacancies on any undergraduate science programme. The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN), composed of representatives of business, employees, education, Government departments and State agencies, has produced four main reports to date and a series of sectoral reports. Arising from the recommendations of the Group the Departments of Education and Science and Enterprise, Trade and Employment established an Information Technology Investment Fund, aimed at developing ICT education and training at a number of levels. The Undergraduate Skills programme meets the recurrent costs of the additional third level places being provided to meet the skills shortages as identified by the various reports of the EGFSN. The measure is particularly targeted at increasing the supply of graduates in the Information and Communications Technology area (ICT) and the Chemical and Biological Sciences area.

The **Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation** sets out a range of measures to further strengthen science teaching and learning and sets a target to increase the uptake of Physics and Chemistry in senior cycle to 20% of the overall cohort by the end of the Plan.

3.4 Vocational education and training and adult learning

3.4.1 measures to improve the quality and attractiveness of vocational education and training and of adult education

The Further Education and Training Awards Council's (FETAC) quality assurance policy became operational in 2005 and involves the evaluation by FETAC of providers' quality assurance procedures against published criteria. Agreement by FETAC on the potential efficacy of a provider's quality assurance procedures is a prerequisite for gaining and retaining registration to offer FETAC awards. Any provider wishing to register with FETAC to offer awards at levels 1 to 6 on the NQF was obliged to apply to FETAC by the end of 2006 for its agreement of their quality assurance systems.

FÁS has the statutory responsibility for the organisation and control of designated apprenticeship. The National Apprenticeship Advisory Committee (NAAC) oversees the development of standards for apprenticeships and advises the Board of FÁS on all

matters pertaining to apprenticeship. This committee is made up of representatives of the social partners in industry, the educational sector and FÁS. Following a review, FÁS commenced the implementation of revised curricula into the training and educational system on a phased basis in 2006.

3.4.2 measures to reinforce the link between VET and labour market needs including early identification of skills needs, improving the relevance of curricula and qualifications

The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) published a National Skills Strategy in March 2007. This Strategy sets out clear long-term objectives in developing Ireland's human capital through upskilling, training and education for the period to 2020. This will be essential in ensuring that Ireland's education and training systems are able to meet the future demands of industry in the medium to longer term.

Post Leaving Certificate courses (PLCs) are developed at local level based on a labour market needs analysis. PLCs are geared to improving the employment prospects of participants and/or enabling progression to other studies. Providers maintain the highest level of co-operation and contact with State agencies in the labour market area, local employers, Higher Education providers and training agencies. The latest data show that 50% of those completing PLCs progress directly to employment.

3.4.3 opening up pathways to further and higher education

The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) has a key role in the promotion and facilitation of access, transfer and progression. The NQAI has defined specific policies, actions and procedures through which it will meet its objectives in relation to access, transfer and progression.

In 2005, the NQAI, with the assistance of its Advisory Group on the Recognition of Prior Learning, adopted Principles and Operational Guidelines for the Recognition of Prior Learning in Further and Higher Education and Training. The principles are available to those who are developing systems of recognition of prior learning and to those who wish to make use of the prior learning that has been recognised by other providers or awarding bodies.

3.4.4 addressing the specific learning / training needs of vocational and adult teachers and trainers to enable them to cope with their changing roles in the knowledge-based society

Continuing Professional Development is a high priority area in Further Education with a dedicated budget for the staff of Youthreach, Senior Traveller Training Centres and the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme. This budget is allocated to each Vocational Education Committee so that they can determine the greatest needs for the staff in their localities. This budget was €300,000 in 2006.

3.4.5 measures which reinforce social partner involvement in training, in particular sectoral approaches to skills and qualifications

Under the Irish system the social partners are heavily involved in training, sectoral approaches to skills and qualifications and identifying skills needs through their involvement and membership of FÁS, the EGFSN and the National Apprenticeship Advisory Committee.

3.4.6 enhancing access and opportunities for learning among the disadvantaged, and alternative pathways, including for early school leavers

Youthreach is the national response to the needs of unqualified early school leavers in Ireland. The programme is designed to offer two years integrated education, training and work experience for young people age 15-20 who have left school early without qualifications or incomplete qualifications or vocational training. There are currently just over 3,000 approved places and an additional 1,000 places are being provided over the period 2007-2009.

Senior Traveller Training Centres operate on the same basis as Youthreach, but there is no upper age limit. Particular efforts are made to encourage Traveller parents into the centres because of the impact this can have on their children's schooling. There are 33 Senior Traveller Training Centres providing an out-of-school programme for Traveller early school leavers, with a specific emphasis on catering for the cultural needs of the travelling community.

3.4.7 measures to increase the rate of adult participation in lifelong learning, and to reinforce key competences among adult learners and older people whether employed or not (EU benchmark)

Adult literacy is the Government's top priority in adult education. Courses are delivered through the Vocational Education Committees (VECs) and the service is free of charge to students. The VECs delivered adult literacy courses to over 35,000 participants in 2005, almost 10,000 of which availed of English language tuition.

"Towards 2016", the Ten Year Framework Social Partnership Agreement, has the following goals in the adult education area.

- Prioritising adult literacy in the area of adult education. The annual student cohort availing of the general national literacy service delivered by the Vocational Education Committees will be significantly increased by the provision of an extra 7,000 places by 2009. There will be a particular focus on increasing the number of migrants receiving an English language service (ESOL).
- Guidance/counselling will be provided to literacy and language learners and the needs of migrants will be considered in the context of the Educational Equality Initiative.
- A Family Literacy Project will also be put in place under the DEIS initiative;
- Older people will be encouraged and supported in actively involving themselves in areas such as family literacy projects, as set out in DEIS, and bringing their knowledge, skills and experience to bear in furthering the aims of such projects.