Ireland's Education and Training Sector

Overview of Service Delivery and Reform

Department of Education and Skills

2015

AN ROINN
OIDEACHAIS AGUS SCILEANNA

DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Ireland's Education and Training Sector

Overview of Service Delivery and Reform

Department of Education and Skills

2015

Department of Education and Skills

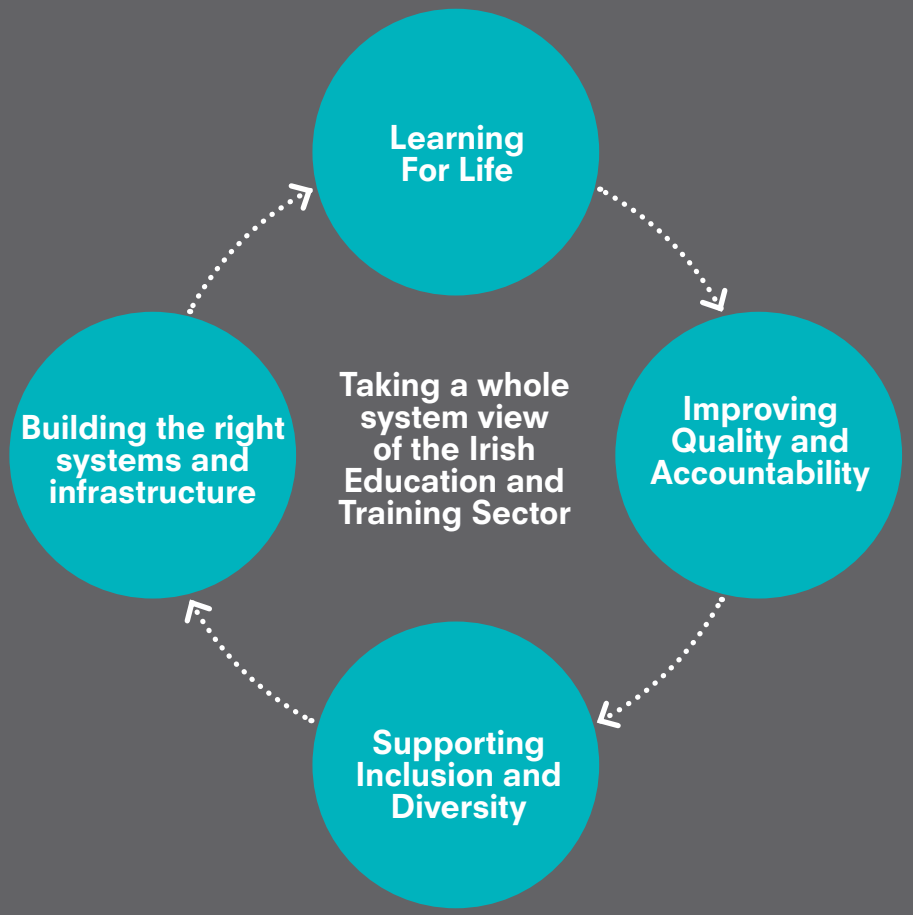
Our Mission

to facilitate individuals, through learning, to achieve their full potential and contribute to Ireland's social, cultural and economic development.

Our Vision

an internationally recognised education and training system based on evidence informed policies designed to anticipate and respond to the changing needs of learners, society and the economy.

Our Goals



An overview of the Education and Training sector in Ireland

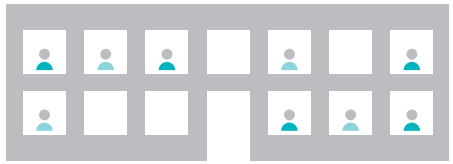
SCHOOLS

4,009

SPECIAL NEEDS ASSISTANTS IN SCHOOLS

11,820

FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING PLACES



270,000

FULL TIME LEARNERS ACROSS THE SYSTEM

1,090,000 +

EDUCATION AND TRAINING BOARDS

16

NO. OF UNEMPLOYED PEOPLE FOR WHOM TRAINING IS PROVIDED

50,000 +

FULL-TIME 3RD LEVEL STUDENTS

173,000 +

PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN

67,000 +

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE IN SCHOOLS

916,000 +

TEACHERS

PART-TIME 3RD LEVEL STUDENTS

38,000 +

STAFF IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

23,000 +

STATE FUNDED HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

31

The Department works with a range of agencies under its remit

The Comission to Inquire into Child Abuse
An Coimisiún chun Drochúsáid Leanaí a Fhiosrú

An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta & Gaelscolaíochta

Grangegorman Development Agency
Gníomhaireacht Forbartha Ghráinseach Ghormáin

HEA
Higher Education Authority
An tÚdarás um Ard-Oideachas

IRISH RESEARCH COUNCIL
An Chomhairle um Thaighde in Éirinn

léargas
insight through exchange
léargas tri mhalartú

NCCA
An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Curaclaim agus Measúnachta
National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

ncge
National Centre for Guidance in Education
Lárionad Náisiúnta um Threoir san Oideachas

ncse
An Chomhairle Náisiúnta um Oideachas Speisialta
National Council for Special Education

QQI
Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

Residential Institutions Redress Board

Skillnets
Enterprise-led learning networks
Scil-líonta Lionraí foghlama fiontair

SOLAS
An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna
Further Education and Training Authority

Coimisiún na Scrúdaithe Stáit
State Examinations Commission
Corr na Madadh, Baile Átha Luain, Co. na hIarmhí
Cornamaddy, Athlone, Co. Westmeath

An Chomhairle Mhúinteoireachta
The Teaching Council

How well are we doing?

National and International assessments show that Ireland is performing well in a number of areas

Performance in reading and mathematics at primary level

National Assessments (NA) of English Reading and Mathematics[1] at Second and Sixth classes were conducted in May 2014 in a representative sample of 150 primary schools. Overall performance on reading and mathematics in second and sixth classes was significantly higher in NA 2014 than in NA 2009. These are the first significant improvements in standards in reading and mathematics recorded by the national assessments in over thirty years.

Two international assessments published in 2011 (PIRLS and TIMSS[2]), showed that Irish students scored significantly above the international average in reading and mathematics at primary level (4th class). Irish students ranked 10th out of 45 participating countries for reading. Students in only five countries performed significantly better than Irish students. In mathematics, Ireland placed 17th out of 50 participating countries.

Performance in science and reading at second-level

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report published in 2015, Universal Basic Skills: What Countries Stand to Gain, ranks Ireland at 15th out of 76 countries in mathematics and science. The rankings are based on an amalgamation of assessments, including the OECD's PISA and TIMSS assessments.

The performance of Irish students in PISA 2012[3] was significantly better than in 2006, with Irish students performing well above the OECD average. The percentage of students in Ireland performing at the higher levels in science is 10.8% which is marginally higher than the OECD average of 8.4%. The percentage of students in Ireland performing at the lower levels in science is 11.1%, which is below the OECD average of 17.8%. In reading, Ireland ranked 4th out of the 34 OECD countries and 7th of all participating countries.

[1] 2014 National Assessments of English reading and Mathematics were prepared by the independent Educational Research Centre. The assessments involved a representative sample of over 8,000 pupils in 150 primary schools, using secure tests.

[2] PIRLS & TIMSS: The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) are undertaken by the International Study Center, Boston College

[3] PISA 2012: The OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is an international survey of the achievement of 15-year-old students in reading literacy, mathematical literacy and scientific literacy.

How well are we doing?

Early school leavers
Eurostat data from the EU Labour Force Survey[4] shows that the proportion of early school leavers in Ireland in 2012 was 9.7%, down from 13.1% in 2004,and well below the EU average of 12.8%.

Number of people who have third level qualifications
OECD Education at a Glance (EAG)[5] 2014 shows that 49% of 25-34 year olds in Ireland have attained third level education, significantly above the OECD average of 39% and EU average of 37%, placing us 5th in OECD and 2nd in the EU. 51% of 30-34 years old have attained tertiary education, compared to an OECD average of 40% and EU average of 38%. Placing us 3rd (shared with another country) in the OECD and 1st in the EU.

Some international benchmarks show that Ireland could do better

Performance in mathematics at second-level
PISA 2012 shows that there has been no real improvement in the performance of second-level Irish students in mathematics since 2003 or reading since 2000. In print mathematics, Ireland was ranked 13th of 34 OECD countries and 20th of all 65 countries. Ireland had 10.7% of students performing at the highest levels, compared with an OECD average of 12.6%

Performance in science at primary level
In TIMSS 2011, students in fourth class in Ireland ranked 22nd of 50 countries. Although above the international average, performance on TIMSS science lags behind performance on TIMSS reading and mathematics.

Adult literacy and numeracy
The PIAAC survey[6] shows that adults in Ireland have an average (adjusted mean) score on the literacy scale of 266, slightly below the study average of 270. Irish adults have an average (adjusted mean) score of 255 on the numeracy scale in Ireland, significantly below the PIAAC study average score of 266.

Progress on reaching EU 2020 literacy targets

The EU 2020[7] benchmarks state that by 2020, the share of 15-year-olds with low achievement (below Level 2 on PISA) in reading, mathematics and science should be less than 15%. Level 2 in PISA is considered the minimal level of competency required for future participation in education, work and society.

Reading
PISA 2012 shows that, in print reading, 9.6% of Irish students perform below Level 2 compared to 18% across OECD countries. In digital reading, the proportion of Irish students performing below Level 2 is 9.4% and considerably lower than the average of 17.6% across OECD countries.

Mathematics
PISA 2012 also shows that Ireland has considerably fewer students (16.9%) performing below Level 2 on the overall print mathematics scale compared to the OECD average of 23.0%. The percentage of Irish students scoring below Level 2 on computer-based mathematics in is 17.9% which is slightly below the OECD average of 20%.

Science
11% of Irish students are performing below Level 2 on the science scale, which is considerably lower than the corresponding OECD average of 17.8%.

[4] EU Labour Force Survey: http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plug in=1&language=en&pcode=tsdsc410

[5] The latest Education at a Glance (EAG) was published by the OECD in September 2014. EAG can be downloaded here: http://www.oecd.org/edu/eag.htm

[6] PIAAC: As part of its Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), the OECD collects and analyses data through its Survey of Adult Skills and further information is available on http://www.oecd.org/site/piaac/

[7] EU 2020 : http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Europe_2020_indicators_-_education

Some key features of the sector

Budget

- 2015 Budget for Education and Training (excluding National Training Fund) €8.6 billion
- Pay/Pensions€€6.4 billion (74%)
- Non Pay€€1.58 billion (18%)
- Capital €€0.568 billion (7%)
- 16.1% of Government spending

Staffing

- One third of all public sector employees are working in the education and training sector.
- Over 1,000 additional teachers have been provided for the school year 2014/15 in order to meet the needs of the increasing school going population.

Demographics

- Enrolments have risen substantially in recent years, with an increase of over 171,000 enrolments in full-time education, across all levels, since the 2004/05 school year.
- Enrolment in schools are expected to continue to grow over the next ten years.
- Full-time enrolment in higher education has grown by 30% over the past 9 years and demand for places is expected to increase by almost 27% by 2027.
- The rate of unemployment continues to fall and stands at 9.7% in June 2015.

Priority areas for action

Learning for Life

We want an education and training system that provides all learners with the knowledge and skills they need to participate fully in society and the economy.

Improving Quality and Accountability

We want to provide for the delivery of a high quality education and training experience for everyone and improve accountability for educational outcomes across the system.

With a focus on whole system reforms

International research shows that whole system reform is the most effective way to deliver meaningful change. Whole system reform strategies impact on:

- All learners
- All teachers
- All schools and colleges

Supporting Inclusion and Diversity

We want an education and training system that welcomes and meaningfully includes learners with disabilities and special educational needs, learners from disadvantaged communities/backgrounds, and those with language, cultural and social differences.

Building the Right Systems and Infrastructure

We want a modern, flexible education and training system which makes the best use of available resources.

Benefits of service delivery and reform

Benefits for Ireland

- Contributing to Ireland's economic and social development
- Contributing to creating a more equitable society
- Enhancing Ireland's international reputation
- Ensuring Ireland's 'Talent' remains a key selling point in attracting Foreign Direct Investment
- Attracting International students who make significant contributions to the local economy and who can retain social and economic links to Ireland in the future
- A skilled workforce to enhance competitiveness of Irish companies as well as attracting Foreign Direct Investment
- Achieving value for money and efficiency for the taxpayer

Benefits for Learners

- Enabling learners to reach their full potential and improve their life chances
- Enabling learners to acquire relevant knowledge and critical skills including literacy and numeracy, critical thinking and communication
- Enabling learners to develop behaviours, attitudes and values to act as responsible citizens, and to be adaptable and resilient
- Enabling learners to learn how to learn and to develop a positive attitude to life-long learning
- Education and training provision promotes more equitable outcomes for all learners
- The voice of the student is valued which will support individuals in their journey of lifelong learning throughout the education and training sector
- Providing learners with more flexible learning options and removing barriers to progression between levels of education and training

Benefits for Teachers

- Providing high quality initial teacher education that is relevant and rigorous
- Providing a new level of professional autonomy
- Building communities of practice in schools designed to foster continuous improvement
- Enabling teachers to facilitate and empower learners
- Enabling teachers to become reflective practitioners and life-long learners

Learning for Life:
We want an education and training system that provides all learners with the knowledge and skills they need to participate fully in society and the economy.

- Improving the educational experience for children 0 to 6 years old
- Improving the literacy and numeracy skills of children and young people in school
- Changing Junior Cycle in all second-level schools
- Transforming the teaching and learning of Mathematics in second level schools
- Modernisation of the Higher Education System
- Providing high quality further education and training opportunities

Improving the educational experience for children 0 to 6 years old

What we are doing

We are supporting the implementation of Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework. Aistear will be implemented on a national basis in pre-schools, crèches, infant classes in primary schools and in children's own homes. To support practitioners in its implementation, the NCCA will publish a web-based practice guide for the Aistear Framework, with phase one of the guide published on line in March 2015.

Why

We want to support the provision of challenging and enjoyable experiences so that all young children can grow and develop as competent and confident learners within loving and nurturing environments.

Improving the literacy and numeracy skills of children and young people in school

What we are doing

We are implementing a Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2011 – 2020 which includes increasing the amount of time spent on reading, writing and mathematics in primary schools, changing the school curriculum, developing digital literacy and changing how teachers are educated.

The Literacy and Numeracy Strategy includes a number of improvement targets to be achieved by 2020. An interim review of the Strategy is planned for 2015 to guide the second half of the lifespan of the strategy.

Why

Without the skills of literacy and numeracy, a young person or adult is cut off from full participation in many aspects of life and they are cut off from participating in, and contributing to, many aspects of the society and culture in which they live. Young people and adults who do not have adequate literacy and mathematical skills cannot participate fully in schooling or in further and higher education, and they have fewer opportunities to take up satisfying jobs and careers.Better literacy and numeracy for individuals contributes to a more just and equitable society.

Changing Junior Cycle in all second-level schools

What we are doing

The new Junior Cycle is designed to promote, amongst other things, creativity and innovation. It will support learners in learning how to learn, and in taking responsibility for their own learning. The first phase of Junior Cycle Reform commenced with the introduction of English in September 2014. Implementation of this major reform will progress in consultation with the education partners.

Over time, a dual approach to assessment will be introduced for all Junior Cycle subjects. This will involve classroom based assessment across the three years and a final externally assessed, State-certified examination. This will enable the appropriate balance between preparing students for examinations and facilitating creative thinking engaged learning and better outcomes for students.

There will be two national qualifications. The first, aligned to Level 3 on the National Framework of Qualifications, will replace the Junior Certificate. The second, aligned to Level 2, will be designed for students with particular special educational needs. All students will get a Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement to reflect their learning over the three years.

Why

The Junior Cycle has become a 'test-run' for the Leaving Certificate with too much emphasis on learning for the exams.

Our focus in reforming Junior Cycle is to ensure that:

- Students gain proficiency in 8 key skills
- We improve the quality of learning that takes place
- We get better literacy and numeracy outcomes
- Students obtain a broad and balanced educational experience

There will be less focus on high stakes exams giving schools more space and time to engage students in deeper learning informed by formative assessment.

Transforming the teaching and learning of Mathematics in second-level schools

What we are doing

A new mathematics curriculum has been fully implemented. The new Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle specifications for mathematics are now available and have been implemented in all post-primary schools. For 2015 the examinations for all Leaving Certificate and Junior Certificate candidates were based entirely on the new specification.

Why

We want to improve all students' understanding of mathematics and how to use mathematics in everyday life.

We also want to increase the number of students taking higher level mathematics in the Leaving Certificate and interest them in careers that require a knowledge of maths.

Modernisation of the Higher Education System

What we are doing

Through implementation of the Higher Education Strategy, we aim to develop the higher education system to equip people with the knowledge and skills necessary to live fulfilled and rewarding lives, and to meet the social and economic challenges facing Ireland.

Why

Our objectives include:

- Providing for increased participation, equity of access and lifelong learning in higher education
- Excellent teaching and learning and quality of the student experience and opportunities
- Enhanced engagement with enterprise and the community and embedded knowledge exchange
- High quality, internationally competitive research and innovation

Providing high quality further education, training and reskilling opportunities across the further and higher education and training sectors

What we are doing

Since 2011, €85 million has been allocated to Springboard, providing for free higher education opportunities for over 21,000 jobseekers.

Springboard+ 2015, which incorporates Springboard courses and the ICT skills conversion programme, will provide for a further 9,000 places on 285 courses in 42 public and private providers of higher education throughout Ireland.

A recent survey of all graduates 2011 – 2014 indicates that within two years of completing a Springboard course 60% are employed or self-employed. A scan by the Department of Social Protection indicates that 74% of all Springboard participants 2011 – 2014 are no longer on the Live Register.

In 2015, it is estimated that over 360,000 training places will be made available for learners through SOLAS funded programmes and services. A further 50,000 training places will be made available through further and higher education and training programmes to meet the needs of the long term unemployed.

Why

We want to provide high quality education and training that:

- leads to employment opportunities for the unemployed and in particular the long term unemployed and young people under the age of 25
- facilitates progression from school to further education and higher education
- meets the needs of employers
- assists those in employment to reskill and upskill to sustain their employability, and contribute to the success of business
- helps individuals to improve their lives and their communities

Improving Quality and Accountability:

We want to provide for the delivery of a high quality education and training experience for everyone and improve accountability for educational outcomes across the system.

- Supporting quality improvements in the Early Years sector
- Reforming initial teacher education courses for all new teachers
- Developing all teachers as professionals
- Implementing new models of school inspection in all schools
- Introducing School Self-Evaluation to all schools
- Establishing SOLAS, the new further education and training authority
- Improving the assessment and reporting of students progress
- Reviewing apprenticeship training
- Introducing a New Performance Framework for Higher Education Sector
- Developing a New International Education Strategy

Supporting quality improvements in the Early Years sector

What we are doing	Why
The Department is working closely with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs on quality improvement within the early-years sector. It will support the operation of Better Start, the newly established quality support service for the sector which will deploy a team of early year's specialists as mentors/advisers working with early-years services on quality improvement.	Upskilling the workforce will help improve the quality of the service that toddlers and children receive.
In March 2015, the NCCA published phase one of a two phase Practice Guide to support the implementation of Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education. The Practice Guide hosts a range of interactive resources and materials in support of quality in practice.	Síolta is designed to support practitioners to develop high quality services for children from birth to six years and is relevant to all settings where children spend time out of their home environment.
We are also introducing an inspection model which will complement the work of the inspectorate in the Child and Family Agency and will focus on the educational outcomes for children enrolled in the free pre-school year.	

Reforming initial teacher education courses for all new teachers

What we are doing

We are implementing a major programme of reform of initial teacher education courses as part of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy. Significant and substantial improvements have been made to primary and post primary initial teacher education courses, which include both the reconfiguration of the content and increasing the duration of many courses.

Why

We are making changes to teacher education courses to ensure that student teachers gain more practical hands-on teaching experience during their studies and to put a greater focus on the study of education and literacy, numeracy and assessment.

Developing all teachers as professionals

What we are doing

The Teaching Council is working on a number of initiatives to maintain and enhance the quality of teaching. The Teaching Council (Amendment) Bill 2015 is currently going through the Houses of the Oireachtas. When enacted, it will mark a significant milestone for the Council, as the professional standards body for teaching in Ireland. The Bill will amend the Teaching Council Acts 2001-2012 in the areas of Fitness to Teach and Garda Vetting.

Why

The quality of teaching is central to enhancing the quality of the learning experience for all of our learners, from early childhood to adult education.

Implementing new models of school inspection in all schools

What we are doing

We are developing a range of inspection models including short unannounced inspections and a range of whole-school type inspections. A new model of school inspection for primary schools was introduced in 2012 and formal follow-up inspections are being introduced. Work in 2015 will focus on continuing to implement a comprehensive programme of evaluation using a range of new and recently reformed inspection models, revising supporting guidelines and regulations, and developing and piloting new elements relating to curriculum evaluation, student wellbeing and the inspection of special education provision.

Why

The new models of school inspection will allow us to increase the number of inspections carried out every year and also help us to target more effectively those schools in most need of assistance.

Introducing School Self-Evaluation to all schools

What we are doing

We continue to roll out the new self-evaluation model for all primary and post-primary schools. The new self-evaluation model articulates a clear set of standards for schools and focuses on outcomes for the learner, the objective of which is to enable school improvement. This year work will focus on supporting schools to use the criteria provided in the SSE Guidelines to determine where improvements are needed and to set realistic and measurable targets to improve pupil/student learning.

Why

We want schools to be more responsible and accountable for their educational outcomes. We want school leaders, teachers and boards to constantly ask themselves how they can improve outcomes for learners and to consult regularly with parents and students about their views of the quality of teaching and learning in the school. This sort of reflective practice is highly effective in improving standards in schools.

Establishing SOLAS, the new further education and training authority

What we are doing

We have established SOLAS as a new oversight and funding body for the Further Education and Training sector. The first ever Further Education and Training Strategy was published in May 2014. The Strategy will inform funding for the sector in a manner that emphasises quality outcomes from programmes.

Why

SOLAS will provide coherent and integrated regional planning across further education, training and higher education, and will ensure the provision of high-quality, flexible and responsive education and training programmes at local level.

Improving the assessment and reporting of students progress

What we are doing

We have increased the use of standardised testing for reading, writing and mathematics in primary schools. All primary schools have returned 2013/14 data to the Department. Similar tests at junior cycle will be introduced in a phased way, following a review and when the new junior cycle assessments have become embedded.

Why

The use of standardised tests will enable schools to track how children are progressing. We will also be able to track progress at a national level. Reporting to parents on children's progress is also being improved.

Reviewing apprenticeship training

What we are doing

The report of an independent Review Group on apprenticeship training was published in January 2014. The report contains a large number of recommendations for the extension of apprenticeship to new sectors and for modernising the existing apprenticeship system. An apprenticeship Implementation Plan was published in June 2014. New standards and curricula will be developed and rolled out for existing apprenticeships in 2015. In addition, a call for proposals from employers and education and training providers for the development of apprenticeship programmes in new areas was undertaken by the Apprenticeship Council. The response to the call was very strong and a range of proposals will be approved for development.

Why

The review has identified reforms which will ensure that newly qualified apprentices are well placed to secure paid employment after their training ends, with the system becoming more closely aligned with labour market needs.

Introducing a New Performance Framework for Higher Education System

What we are doing

Implementation of the Higher Education Strategy involves the implementation of a new system of governance and a new performance framework.

A new System Performance Framework for 2014-16 is now in place. This framework formed the basis for the production of the first ever Annual System Performance Report which sets out progress against objectives.

As part of our implementation of the Higher Education Strategy, we have established a National Forum to support implementation of key initiatives in the areas of teaching and learning.

Why

The new system of governance and performance will support the transparency and accountability of the higher education sector to meet national goals overall and the use of public funds in particular.

The Forum will provide a system-level infrastructure for the enhancement of teaching and learning in higher education institutions and will drive initiatives in the areas of academic professional development, flexible provision and the development of digital capacity and use of technology.

Developing a New International Education Strategy

What we are doing

A review of Ireland's International Education Strategy 2010 – 2015 has been considered by the High Level Group on International Education. The outcomes of this review will be published as part of a new Strategy on International Education which is due to be delivered later this year.

Why

The new International Education Strategy will allow Ireland to develop it's reputation as a world leader in the delivery of high quality international education, by providing a unique experience and long-term value to students.

Supporting Inclusion and Diversity:

We want an education and training system that welcomes and meaningfully includes learners with disabilities and special educational needs, learners from disadvantaged communities/backgrounds, and those with language, cultural and social differences.

- **Providing additional supports for students with special educational needs and disabilities**
- **Providing additional supports to tackle educational disadvantage**
- **Introducing a new regulatory framework for school enrolment**
- **Increasing choice of primary school type**
- **Deciding the patronage of new schools based on parental demand**
- **Developing a Parents Charter**

Providing additional supports for students with special educational needs and disabilities

What we are doing

We provide €1.3 billion annually to support students with special educational needs and disabilities. These funds go towards providing numerous supports, including providing learning support and resource teachers, Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) and the National Educational Psychological Service.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) will allocate 6,454 resource teacher posts to schools for September 2015, which is an increase of 554 posts – or 9.4% – since September 2014. From September 2015 there will be 11,820 whole-time SNA posts available in our primary and post-primary schools. This is an 11.7% increase since 2011.

In conjunction with the NCSE we are currently developing a new model for allocating Special Educational Needs Teachers to schools so that schools will have greater autonomy in deciding how to deploy and manage these resources to ensure that the needs of all children with Special Educational Needs are met.

In preparation for the new model we have developed a pilot which will be rolled out in some 50 schools over the 2016/2017 school year. The pilot will assist in the development of the new model and in particular in the preparation of guidance and advice for schools which will be an essential part of the new model. Ongoing consultation with Education Partners and participating schools will be a feature of the model.

Why

We will continue to deliver supports for children and students with special educational needs and disabilities, to enable them to live full and independent lives so that they can fulfil their potential, contribute to their communities and continue to learn throughout their lives.

Providing additional supports to tackle educational disadvantage

What we are doing	Why
We support the implementation of DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools), the Action Plan for Educational Inclusion. 'Learning from DEIS' – a report on the implementation of DEIS over the last 10 years was published in April 2015 and outlines some encouraging findings in relation to the performance of schools catering for the highest concentrations of education disadvantage.	To contribute to the development of a more equitable society and to support those most at risk of not succeeding in education.
The Department has commenced a review of the DEIS programme to inform the development of appropriate future measures and supports to combat educational disadvantage. This review will involve consultation with education partners.	We aim to progress towards the Bologna Process objective that the student body entering into, participating in and completing higher education at all levels reflects the diversity of Ireland's population.
We promote access to higher education for disadvantaged and under-represented groups through the development and implementation of the National Access Plan for Higher Education. The next access plan is due to be launched in mid 2015.	

Introducing a new regulatory framework for school enrolment

What we are doing	Why
We have developed new legislation to underpin school enrolment practices. The Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2015 was published in April this year. The Bill will continue to proceed through the Houses of the Oireachtas during the course of 2015.	We want to ensure that the process of enrolling children in schools is more open, equitable and consistent.

Increasing choice of primary school type

What we are doing	Why
We are supporting a process of divesting patronage of Catholic primary schools in 28 areas. The Catholic patrons in each of these areas have been requested to consider options for reconfiguring schools under their management in order to allow the transfer of a school to a new patron provider. Between September 2014 and September 2015, nine new primary schools will have opened under this process.	We want to increase the choice of primary school type in areas where there is sufficient parental demand for a wider choice of school patron.

Deciding the patronage of new schools based on parental demand

What we are doing

In 2011, new criteria and arrangements were put in place for the recognition of new primary and post-primary schools. In applying to become a patron of one of the 40 new schools being established over a 6 year period from 2011, patron bodies must provide proof of parental demand for the school type proposed. Four new primary schools will open in September 2015 with patronage decided under the patronage determination process, strengthening diversity of provision in the four locations.

Why

To place a greater emphasis on parental preference in the establishment of new schools and to enable a move towards a more pluralist system of patronage for primary and second-level schools.

Developing a Parent and Student Charter

What we are doing

We are putting in place new legislative provisions which will make up the Parents' and Students' Charter.

We will bring proposals to Government, involving amendments to the Education Act 1998, which will provide the legislative underpinning for a Parents and Students Charter.

Why

The purpose of the Charter is to strengthen the position of parents within the school system and to bring about a culture change in how schools engage with and involve parents (and students in an age appropriate manner).

Building the right systems and infrastructure:

We want a modern, flexible education and training system which makes the best use of available resources.

- Rolling out the Five Year School Building Programme
- Building a primary and post primary learner database
- Rolling out high speed broadband to all second-level schools
- Improving the transition from school to higher education
- Education and Training Boards
- Reconfiguration of the Higher Education Institutions
- Rolling out new online student grant application system, SUSI
- Creating centres of excellence for teacher education
- Implementing the National Framework of Qualifications
- Supporting the implementation of new ways of working

Rolling out the Five Year School Building Programme

What we are doing

The School Building Programme includes 275 major building projects to be advanced over the period 2012 to 2016:

- 106 new and replacement primary schools
- 43 new and replacement post primary schools
- 8 new special schools
- 118 major extensions to existing schools

A further 28 major building projects (18 primary schools and 10 post primary schools) will be replaced or refurbished as part of the Government's "Investing in Infrastructure & Jobs" package.

In addition 16 further school projects (14 primary schools and 2 post primary schools) will replace inadequate accommodation and provide much needed additional capacity.

It is expected that a multi-annual capital investment framework covering the period 2016 to 2020 will be agreed with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and will lead to annualised allocations for each of the years 2016 to 2020. Details of the investment programme are expected to be announced later this year. The framework will allow planning to meet continuing growth within the entire education sector.

Why

The five year school building programme will provide over 100,000 permanent school places. Over 80,000 will be new school places with the remainder replacement of temporary or unsatisfactory accommodation.

Building a primary and post primary learner database

What we are doing

The Department of Education and Skills has developed new systems called the Primary Online Database (POD) and the Post Primary Online Database (PPOD). The POD and PPOD systems are databases which hold student information as they progress through primary and post primary school.

Why

These systems provide valuable information for the development of policy within the Department. They also go some way towards reducing the administrative burden on schools.

Rolling out high speed broadband to all second-level schools

What we are doing

The roll-out of high-speed (100Mbps) broadband to all post-primary schools has been completed. This brings to a close the third and final stage of this nationwide programme which was realised through a successful collaboration with the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources.

78 schools were connected during a pilot project, 202 schools were connected in 2012, 216 were connected in 2013 and the final 269 schools were connected in 2014.

Why

The benefit of having this bandwidth available in schools includes enabling teachers and students to:

- use ICT in the learning and teaching process
- share and collaborate online
- use video conferencing, Skype and other online communication tools
- use online learning and teaching spaces.

Improving the transition from school to higher education

What we are doing

We are working with the Higher Education Authority, State Examinations Commission, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment and higher education institutions to improve the transition from school to higher education.

This work is focused on four key changes that will impact on those students sitting the Leaving Certificate in 2017. These changes will address:

- The extent of predictability in the Leaving Certificate examinations
- A new grading scale for the Leaving Certificate examinations
- Proposals towards a revised common points scale for entry into higher education
- Broader undergraduate entry to higher education programmes

Why

The pressure to achieve high points from a student's Leaving Certificate exam results has had a negative effect on how students are taught and what they focus on learning in 5th and 6th year in second-level schools. The changes being implemented will reduce the pressure to achieve high points for entry to higher education and help to change the 'learning to the exam' culture in schools.

Education and Training Boards

What we are doing

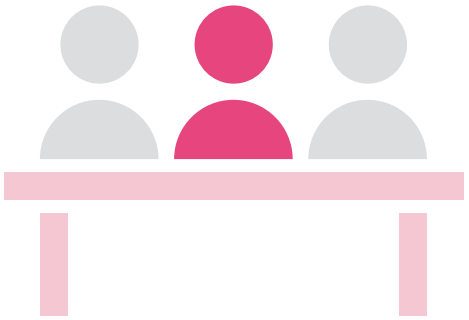
We have established 16 local Education and Training Boards to replace the existing 33 Vocational Education Committees.

Legislation to establish the Education and Training Boards has been enacted and the boards were formally established on 1st July 2013.

As part of the establishment of the Education and Training Boards, 19 training centres have been transferred from SOLAS to the Education and Training Boards.

Why

The Education and Training Boards will ensure better delivery and coordination of education and training at local level. The reform of the further education and training (FET) sector envisages a key role for Education and Training Boards in relation to the future delivery of FET in an integrated manner. Part of this involves the transfer of training centres from SOLAS to Education and Training Boards.



Reconfiguration of Higher Education Institutions

What we are doing

A major reform programme is being advanced in line with the Higher Education Strategy, to improve the quality of the experience of students, to improve the quality of the outcomes from the system and to enhance accountability and the efficient use of resources. The Technological Universities Bill is to be published in 2015, subject to Government decision. It provides the legal underpinning for the mergers of Institutes of Technology, the establishment of Technological Universities and the reform of governing bodies in the Institutes of Technology.

Why

The new configuration will support our higher education institutions in working collaboratively to deliver the highest quality research and teaching with full engagement with their local, regional, national and international communities.

Rolling out new online student grant application system, SUSI

What we are doing

Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) system went live in June 2012. For the 2014/2015 academic year, SUSI received in excess of 103,000 applications. SUSI anticipates that it will receive over 110,000 applications for the 2015/2016 academic year.

Why

The new single on-line student grant application system provides a more efficient and effective service, reducing the number of grant awarding bodies from sixty-six to one.

Creating centres of excellence for teacher education

What we are doing

We have developed a plan to create a small number of high quality centres for the provision of teacher education services. This will reduce the number of teacher education providers from nineteen to six. Following DCU's incorporation process, first year undergraduates of St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, and Mater Dei Institute of Education will be registered for the 2015/2016 academic year as DCU students.

Why

Structural change is required to ensure that a small number of high quality centres exist to service teacher education across all the sectors, from early childhood to adult education.

Implementing the National Framework of Qualifications

What we are doing

The National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), which embraces all sectors of education and training, enables qualifications to be compared and recognised, in Ireland and abroad.

Why

The NFQ facilitates individuals in accessing and progressing through education and training programmes including across different fields and disciplines. It also gives assurances that qualifications are robust.

Supporting the implementation of new ways of working

What we are doing

We are working to implement the Government's Public Service Reform Plan in the Education and Training Sector which includes a particular focus on implementing shared services, procurement reform and external service delivery models across the sector. Shared Service priorities for 2015 include Payroll and Financial Management Shared Services for the Education and Training Boards. The Education Procurement Service (EPS) was established in 2014 as a sector wide Education Hub, procuring sector specific goods/services on behalf of the sector-wide and managing two categories on behalf of the Office of Government Procurement (OGP). In addition to this, a Schools Procurement Unit has been established to support the schools sector and assist them in their engagement and compliance with the new centralised procurement model.

Why

The Public Service Reform Plan 2014 – 2016 is centred on four key themes:

- A Focus on Service Users
- A Focus on Efficiency
- A Focus on Openness, Transparency and Accountability
- A Focus on Leadership, Capability and Delivery

List of useful websites

www.education.ie
Department of Education and Skills

www.childabusecommission.ie
Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse

www.cogg.ie
An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta & Gaelscolaíochta

www.ggda.ie
Grangegorman Development Agency

www.hea.ie
Higher Education Authority

www.research.ie
Irish Research Council

www.leargas.ie
Léargas

www.ncca.ie
National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

www.ncge.ie
National Council for Guidance in Education

www.ncse.ie
National Council for Special Education

www.tusla.ie
Child and Family Agency

www.qqi.ie
Quality and Qualifications Ireland

www.rirb.ie
Residential Institutions Redress Board

www.skillnets.ie
Skillnets

www.examinations.ie
State Examinations Commission

www.solas.ie
SOLAS Further Education and Training Authority

www.teachingcouncil.ie
Teaching Council

www.dcya.gov.ie
Department of Children and Youth Affairs

www.juniorcycle.ie
Junior Cycle

www.momentumskills.ie
Momentum – Education and Training for Jobseekers

www.etbi.ie
Education and Training Boards Ireland

www.oecd.org
Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

www.pdst.ie
Professional Development Service for Teachers

www.projectmaths.ie
Project maths

www.siolta.ie
National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education

www.springboardcourses.ie
Springboard – free part-time higher education courses for jobseekers

www.studentfinance.ie
Student Finance

www.susi.ie
Student Universal Support Ireland

www.transition.ie
Transition from second-level to third-level

www.skillstowork.ie
Skills to Work

www.jct.ie
Junior Cycle for Teachers

www.languagesinitiative.ie
Post-Primary Languages Initiative

Department of Education and Skills

Athlone Office:

Department of Education and Skills, Cornamaddy, Athlone, Co. Westmeath.
Ph: (090) 648 3600

Dublin Office:

Department of Education and Skills, Marlborough St, Dublin 1.
Ph: (01) 889 6400

Tullamore Office:

Department of Education and Skills, Portlaoise Road, Tullamore, Co. Offaly.
Ph: (057) 932 4300