

# **Achieving the Lisbon Goal:** **The Contribution of Vocational Education and Training Systems**

# **Country Report: Ireland**

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This report is one of a series of European country reports. It has been written to support a larger report: **Achieving the Lisbon Goal: the contribution of VET**, prepared by the **Lisbon-to-Copenhagen-to-Maastricht Consortium** for the European Commission. This report is not intended as an official view. But rather independent insight into specific aspects of National VET systems in Europe.



Qualifications and  
Curriculum Authority

## Theme 1: Progress of national VET systems towards meeting the challenges of Lisbon.

### 1. *Strategies and barriers for improving the status, flexibility and attractiveness of Initial VET (IVET).*

VET falls within the remit of several Government Departments (Ministries). The Minister for Education and Science is responsible for provision of both academic and vocational education (mainly initial, but also continuing) in schools and colleges at first, second, further and higher levels.

<b>Government Department</b>	<b>Department Funded Body (mentioned in this report)</b>
Department of Education and Science:	Further Education and Training Awards Council Higher Education Authority National Education Welfare Board National Qualifications Authority of Ireland VECs - Vocational Education Committees
Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment:	FÁS – the National Training and Employment Authority Skillnets Forfas Enterprise Ireland Expert Group on Future Skills Needs

Key Government Department funded bodies involved in VET.

The Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment has primary responsibility for continuing training and funds FÁS – the National Training and Employment Authority, and other agencies, including industrial development agencies. Other Ministers have responsibility for some aspects of sectoral training, such as agriculture, fisheries, tourism.

Outside the higher education sector, the principal providers of vocational education and training are the Vocational Education Committees (VECs), which are statutory bodies at county level, charged with responsibility for vocational and continuing education and FÁS, the National Training and Employment Authority which operates under the aegis of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

Other statutory providers at national level include Failte Ireland (tourism training), TEAGASC (agricultural training) and An Bord Iascaigh Mhara (fisheries training). There is also a wide range of private providers, including some private third level colleges and commercial training bodies as well as employer and trade union organisations. The vast majority of initial vocational education and training provision, however, is within the State sector.

Key aspects of education and training policies aimed at improving the status, flexibility and attractiveness of initial VET include:

- Strengthening the vocational and technical dimensions of school curricula, ensuring computer literacy for all and encouraging a greater take up of the physical sciences
- Expanding the provision of appropriate guidance and counselling supports for participants
- Improving progression pathways
- Providing for flexible assessment and accreditation
- Developing mechanisms for the accumulation of credits
- Developing mechanisms for the recognition of experiential and work-based learning.
- Development of a national framework of qualifications by the National Qualifications Authority to improve access, promote flexible assessment and accreditation processes, and enhance mobility across the further and higher education and training sectors.

Policy implementation issues in education and training are addressed by Government Departments in consultation with the social partners. There are national fora to facilitate enhanced collaboration between education, training, industry and community interests, and local structures (e.g. County/City Development Boards, Area-based Partnerships) to provide for integrated working at local level.

A White Paper on Adult Education – Learning for Life, which was published in 2000 reflected on the role of adult education in society and, in setting out principles, policies and strategies, built on a very wide consultation process which had followed the publication in 1998 of a Green Paper Adult Education in an Era of Lifelong Learning. The White Paper identified a range of areas requiring investment and development including:

- A national adult literacy strategy;
- The need to expand the scale and flexibility of existing provision at further and higher education levels;
- Measures to promote community education models;
- Enhancement of quality, accreditation and assessment, staff development and supporting services, such as guidance and childcare;
- Expansion of capital provision for adult education;
- Implementation of an ICT programme for adults;

- Specific equality initiatives to improve the participation of marginalised groups;
- Structures for national and local co-ordination.

The policies outlined in the White Paper were complemented by the work of the Task Force on Lifelong Learning, which was established by the Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment in collaboration with the Department of Education and Science and reported in 2002. A total of eight Government Departments with responsibilities for education, sectoral training, welfare and social and community development policies were represented on the Task Force, as well as education, training, social partner, community and voluntary interests and industrial development agencies. The focus of the Task Force on Lifelong Learning was on the labour market aspects of lifelong learning and concentrated on the key themes of:

- Developing and implementing a National Framework of Qualifications;
- Ensuring Basic Skills for All;
- Providing Comprehensive Guidance, Counselling and Information;
- Addressing delivery, access and funding measures;
- Providing better opportunities for workplace learning, and learning for workers.

The cross-sectoral approach of the Report of the Taskforce on Lifelong Learning supports and reinforces the recommendations on adult education policy, funding and provision. Together the two documents act as key reference points for all the stakeholders in the move towards co-ordination and coherence in adult learning provision in the context of lifelong learning policies.

Perhaps the two main barriers to improving the status, flexibility and attractiveness of Initial VET are lack of flexibility and integration. Though efforts are being made to address these (as detailed in later sections) there remain old systems in place to meet new needs. In terms of VET, FÁS and the VECs (through the funding of Post Leaving Certificates – PLC; detailed later in the report) are two of the most dominate departmental bodies. FÁS leads on Continuing VET whilst the VECs lead on Initial VET and as mentioned earlier both are funded by different Government departments ; yet they have overlapping interests and the Irish VET system as a whole would benefit from more integration.

## **2. Reducing the number of early school leavers.**

While some 3.2% leave school without completing lower second level education, a further 15.3% leave school after compulsory schooling but without an upper second level qualification. The National Partnership Agreement, Sustaining Progress, contains a special initiative on Tackling Educational Disadvantage – Literacy, Numeracy and Early School Leavers. The Special Initiative incorporates the headline target on early school leaving contained in the National Anti - Poverty Strategy and the National Action Plan

against Poverty and Social Exclusion, 2003-05 to reduce the number of young people who leave the school system early, so that the percentage of those who complete upper second level or equivalent will reach 90% by 2006.

The actions under this initiative involve the development of a more integrated approach to the delivery of programmes aimed at combating educational disadvantage, the continued development of the School Completion Programme, the roll out of services by the National Educational Welfare Board and the development of an enhanced strategy on Traveller Education.

The strategy for tackling early school leaving has a dual focus involving (a) targeting those at risk of early school leaving in order to provide additional supports to facilitate their continuation in school, and (b) targeting those who have already left school in order to provide them with the skills and training required for further education or to facilitate their entry into the workforce.

### ***School Completion Programme (SCP)***

The School Completion Programme is based on an integrated cross-community approach to tackling educational disadvantage, involving primary and post primary schools, parents, communities and relevant statutory and voluntary agencies. Its objective is to provide a range of interventions in areas of disadvantage that support the retention of young people in education.

Eligible schools are grouped into clusters of one or more second-level schools and their main feeder primary schools. Each cluster has established a committee composed of principals, voluntary and statutory agencies including County Development Boards, Local Drug Task Forces, Area Partnerships, the local programme coordinator, parents, community interests etc. This committee is responsible for developing and overseeing implementation of a fully costed, integrated plan to tackle early school leaving in the area, including specific retention targets. At present, 400 schools have been included in the School Completion Programme (288 primary and 112 post-primary), which is supported by a national coordinator and four assistant coordinators. Expenditure on the School Completion Programme in 2003 was €19.5 million. Provision for 2004 is €23.5 million.

### ***Education Welfare Board***

The Education (Welfare) Act 2000 established the National Educational Welfare Board as the single national body with responsibility for school attendance. The Act provides a comprehensive framework promoting regular school attendance and tackling the problems of absenteeism and early school leaving.

To discharge its responsibilities, the Board is developing a nationwide service to provide welfare-focused services to children, families and schools. Guidelines are being prepared for schools on the reporting of student absences and a protocol outlining the interaction between schools and educational welfare staff is being developed.

### ***Programmes for Early School Leavers***

YOUTHREACH is an inter-Departmental programme providing second chance education and training for disadvantaged 15-20 year olds, who have left school early with minimal or no qualifications. The programme caters for over 6,000 young people in an out of school setting in Youthreach Centres, Senior Traveller Training Centres and Community Training Centres.

Programme content includes a focus on personal development, literacy, numeracy, communications and ICT together with a range of vocational options and work experience. Participants receive a training allowance and assistance towards childcare costs, where required. A limited guidance, counselling and psychological service is also provided. Certification is provided through the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) the Leaving Cert Applied, and through subjects in the Junior and Leaving Certificate.

### ***3. Increasing VET at tertiary level.***

In Ireland, tertiary VET is delivered by universities or Institute of Technology Centres. The OECD 2003 'Education at a glance' (Table C. 2.I) shows that 26% of the cohort in Ireland entered Tertiary Type B (Certificate / Diploma/Degree) education and 31% entered Tertiary Type (A Primary Degree/Masters.) in 2000<sup>1</sup>. This can be compared with the OECD average rates of 15% and 45% respectively for a similar cohort.

The National Qualifications Authority and the Further and Higher Education and Training Awards Councils were set up in 2001 to develop a single unified framework for the accreditation of all non-university higher and further education, (including courses accredited by FETAC) for both the formal and non formal sectors.

The Operational Programme for Employment and Human Resources Development 2000-2006 contains three specific measures within the third-level system. The largest of these is the Middle-Level Technician/Higher Technical and Business Skills measure. This measure is delivered in the Institutes of Technology and essentially covers all courses at certificate and diploma level. In 2002 there were 33,137 students participating at a cost of €252.6 million. A second measure relates to Undergraduate Skills. This relates to the provision of certain additional third-level places to respond to identified skill needs in the labour market (e.g. IT courses). In the 2002/2003 academic year it is estimated that there are 3,810 students enrolled in universities within this measure. In addition, there were 411 students in Institutes of Technology under the Accelerated Technician Programme. A third strand of this measure is the Institute Trainee Programme under which about 200 trainees participated in 2002. The cost of this measure in 2002 was €18.6 million.

The third measure is post-graduate conversion courses, which consist usually of one-year diplomas in 'skill shortage' disciplines. These apply both in the

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<sup>1</sup> OECD classifications facilitating international comparisons. See Education at a Glance 2003.

university and technological sectors of higher education. In 2001/2002 there were 1,407 students and this is estimated to have risen to about 1,750 in 2002/2003. Expenditure was €8.7m in 2002<sup>2</sup>.

Programmes to increase the participation of vulnerable groups in third-level education have been greatly expanded and include the Special Fund for Students with Disabilities, the Student Assistance Fund, Higher Education Authority Targeted Initiatives, special rates of Maintenance Grants and the Millennium Partnership for Disadvantage. In November 2002, approval was granted for the establishment of a National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education<sup>3</sup>.

### **Science and Technology**

The availability of an adequate number of graduates skilled in the fields of Mathematics, Physical Sciences, Biological Sciences, Technology and Engineering will be a critical factor in supporting high value knowledge based industries on which Ireland's future economic growth and competitiveness will increasingly depend. Strengthening the quality of science teaching and learning, promoting increased scientific literacy and encouraging more students to choose science subjects at senior cycle and progress to third level options in this area is therefore a vitally important part of the national strategy to support competitiveness and employment.

While Ireland produces a relatively high proportionate output of graduates in these areas by reference to OECD comparisons, there is a need to address concerns that students turning away from science and technology disciplines could jeopardise future competitiveness.

ICT Ireland<sup>4</sup> was launched in May 2001 and is an industry-led umbrella organisation for high-tech sector in Ireland representing over a 1000 companies within the following:

Audiovisual Federation – AF  
Consumer Electronic Distributors Association – CEDA  
Federation of Aerospace Enterprises in Ireland – FAEI  
Irish Cellular Industry Association – ICIA  
Irish Software Association – ISA  
Music Industry Group – MIG  
Telecommunications and Internet Federation – TIF  
White Goods Association

The ICT industry directly employs 100,000 people and currently accounts for a third of Ireland's exports. It was the success of the IT sector in the late 1990s that fuelled Ireland's economic growth during that period. It is ICT Ireland's goal to maintain this economic success and to become a world leader in ICT by 2005. This implies that, inter alia: The ICT sector will have moved up the technology value chain, Ireland will have an expanded, educated and responsive skills base and its indigenous sector will have achieved critical mass. To do this seven key issues were identified, including:

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<sup>2</sup> Irish ReferNet Thematic Overview 4.5.

<sup>3</sup> Irish National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion 2003-2005; section 2.5.4.)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.ictireland.ie/sectors/ict/webict.nsf/whome?openform>

Research & Development, Education and Entrepreneurship a working group has been formed to address each one and develop priorities that form the basis of an action plan<sup>5</sup>. Proposed action within Research and Development include an expansion of ICT-related research within tertiary level institutions and to make Ireland an attractive location for overseas students pursuing doctoral and research careers. Some of the goals for education are more ambitious, such as to:

- Increase the numbers of students taking science and mathematics at primary and secondary levels by 25% over a five year period;
- Increase at tertiary level student numbers taking technology subjects by 15 % from 2002 to 2005.

However the education workplace goals appear to be achievable especially given the current high numbers of people who already study in their own time. This includes targeting 250 people annually to upgrade from diploma to degree courses through part time or modular study. The Entrepreneurship working group want to increase the number of high potential startups by 15-20% annually from 2002 to 2005 and want to have: financial incentives; encouraged third level student entrepreneurial spirit; links between the multinational and indigenous sectors and encourage executives with multinational experience to launch their own startups.

### ***Research and Development***

The Government has committed €2.5bn to research, technology, innovation and development under the National Development Plan (2000 - 2006). Since 1998, the commencement of the Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions, the establishment of two Research Councils (for the humanities and social sciences and for science, engineering and technology), and the establishment of Science Foundation Ireland have been particularly significant milestones in the development of a national research infrastructure that relies on the higher education system at its epicentre.

### ***Access and Participation***

There has been a massive expansion of higher education over the past two decades in terms of numbers and investment. Where there were approximately 40,000 people in higher education in the early 1980s, that now stands at over 130,000.

That growth is reflected in strong performance by Ireland among OECD countries in terms of higher education participation rates for the school leaver age cohort. The latest data available indicates that this stood at 55% in 2003, as compared with 44% in 1998, 36% in 1992 and 20% in 1980. It remains the case however that there are disparities in terms of access to higher education on the basis of socio-economic background. There is also a large proportion of individuals on self-funded part-time adult education in schools,

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<sup>5</sup> The working groups comprise representatives from FE, HE, Industry and Forfas as well as from tertiary level.

the Department of Education and Science estimated that in 2002 there were 140, 000<sup>6</sup>.

The National Development Plan provided for a third level access fund totalling €121m over the period 2000 – 2006, aimed at tackling under-representation among three target groups – Students from disadvantaged backgrounds; Mature students and Students with disabilities.

A National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education was established in the Higher Education Authority in the latter half of 2003. The establishment of this office was a key recommendation of the Action Group on Access to Third Level Education (McNamara report). The Office will facilitate the aim of increasing higher education participation among the three target groups.

Its key functions are:

- Facilitate access to third level;
- Advise on policy development;
- Liaise closely with the Department of Education and Science and associated bodies (e.g. National Educational Psychological Service, Educational Disadvantage Committee) to ensure coordination and continuity between initiatives at various levels of education;
- Allocate funds under a number of programmes including the Special Fund for Students with Disabilities, the Millennium Partnership Fund and the targeted initiatives currently operated by the HEA. The Office would also be responsible for financial and other reporting requirements;
- Oversee centralised data collection;
- Develop annual targets and to monitor and evaluate progress towards these targets in the various initiatives;
- Establish links with institutions, to promote links between those institutions and schools/local groups and to consult with stakeholders and interest groups;
- Commission and promote research on access issues.

The OECD is currently conducting a review of Higher Education in Ireland at the request of the Minister for Education and Science, this work is described in more detail in section 6 – Effectiveness and Efficiency of VET.

### **Post-Secondary VET Courses**

Though it is classified in Ireland as Further Education, (which is also funded by the Department of Education and Science) rather than Tertiary education, the Post Leaving Certificate is a full time programme offers further education and training for those who have completed upper second level education or equivalent. It is provided by the VECs (Vocational Education Committees) through FE colleges. (PLC is the biggest section of FE, though there are other

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<sup>6</sup> Page 19. “A Brief Description of the Irish Education System”. Department of Education and Science. 2004. Available: <http://www.education.ie/home/home.jsp?maincat=17216&pcategory=17216&ecategory=17237&language=EN>

programmes: VTOS, BTE, Youth reach and community education are discussed elsewhere in this report.) As well as catering for school leavers, the PLC programme, which is available in over 220 centres throughout the country, has become an important re-entry route for adults returning to education. Almost 29,000 places are available on this programme per annum and there has been an increase in PLC take-up which is now subject to capping.

In March 2002 the Interim Report by the Steering Group of the PLC Review was released<sup>7</sup>. It set out 4 main objectives:

- To transform the PLC student experience in colleges through addressing underfunding and undesirable features of PLC provision from its second level origins: The report found that most colleges with more than 150 students lacked space and equipment (including access to computers); were sometimes accommodated in substandard buildings; and lacked access to the proper canteen or social areas and recreational facilities required for a desirable student experience. Part of this should be done through separating Secondary level and FE within colleges; otherwise feelings of student freedom, responsibility and progression and impinged by Secondary Level regimes intended for younger students. Childcare for FE students should be prioritised, as access to conveniently located child care is one of the main constraints on mature students and some students who have completed Secondary Schooling; childcare facilities should be seen as a legitimate use of space in FE institutions. Another recommendation is for colleges to facilitate the formation and operation of students' unions for FE students;
- To change PLC colleges in order to allow them to play their proper role in lifelong learning, and in supporting economic development: course delivery should be modularised to allow for a variety of attendance patterns to increase access to lifelong learning opportunities to learners and encourage use by employers. There should also be flexibility in delivery location -ie in companies, out-centres, and use of distance learning, and in timings; a significant number of PLC students are mature and therefore could also be studying in their spare time. The steering group recommend that a National FE Information Systems Strategy Study be carried out to set out an IT strategy; also, all colleges should have broadband internet access. The steering group have also found that existing guidelines on teacher qualifications should be withdrawn. This is because they can be unduly restrictive with some being more suited to second level than to FE whereas a person with a degree (or relevant professional qualification where no appropriate degree exists) and industry experience may be most suited to FE teaching. Teaching methodologies would then be covered as part of an induction programme;
- To relieve the strains within PLC colleges caused by endeavouring to deliver economically-relevant courses that respond to changing industry needs, with very limited management resources, very few support staff and a

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<sup>7</sup>Interim report of the Steering Group of the PLC [Post Leaving Certificate] review Established by the Department of Education & Science. Prepared by McIver Consulting 15 March 2002. Available from: <http://www.tui.ie/Policy%20Documents/PLC%20Review.html>

heavy teaching load: include recommendations for calculations of ratios of support, management and teaching staff to students along with a reduction in teaching hours. The steering group state that every student and staff member should have web access and email accounts;

- To overcome the limitations on the sector that arise from the relatively small scale of most PLC providers, while avoiding undermining the benefits that arise from local initiative and local relationships, through providing support services and mechanisms for cooperation and coordination: (It is worth bearing in mind that all but the largest FE colleges in Ireland are smaller than the size of most FE colleges in comparable countries -ie England.) Local Adult Learning Boards (LALBs) should have the power to designate colleges and schools as PLC providers – this would allow planning and coordination to: promote student access; best use skills and expertise of providers and avoid unnecessary duplication. There should be three national offices offering centralised support services: FE office for Industry and International Links; FE Office for Quality Assurance and Course Development; FEnet. This should mean that the Fe sector can gain the benefits associated with both the economy of scale and coordination of a large centralised organisation and the flexible, collection of small organisations (colleges) orientated to the skills needs of the local labour market. The VECs (Vocational Education Committees) which fund the FE colleges should each have a written framework policy with its colleges, concerning each party's relationship and responsibilities with regard to planning, funding and resource/staffing allocations. Greater control on spending should be delegated from the VECs to the colleges so that 'management decisions should be moved closer to the point of decision'.

A wide range of courses for job seekers, women returning to the workforce and unemployed people is provided by FÁS<sup>8</sup>, and the education sector. Literacy, numeracy, communications and ICT skills form a core part of education and training programmes for those with low skills, in addition to a range of vocational options. The VTOS<sup>9</sup> (Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme) is supported by the European Social Fund. It is to encourage unemployed (often disadvantaged) people with low education and skills levels to study in order to improve those skills and therefore their employability. Participants have to be over 21 years old and have been receiving government benefit for 6 months or more. VTOS cover the cost of course fees and books, and offer a meal allowance and travel costs<sup>10</sup>. People on VTOS can use the scheme to study in VTOS specific centres, leading to a level 1 or 2 FETAC or to enter a course at a PLC college.

A Back to Education Allowance Scheme run by the Department of Social and Family Affairs; it has similar aims to VTOS and provides 6,000 part time places in Further Education for young people and adults with less than upper second level education.

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<sup>8</sup> Funded by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, FÁS training provision used to consist of traditional style apprenticeships – though the training on offer is now more diversified.

<sup>9</sup> Administered and part funded by the department of Education and Science.

<sup>10</sup><http://www.iol.ie/~hkvotos/index.html>

Ireland has a well-established apprenticeship system, which had grown rapidly over the last decade. About half of males who do not proceed to higher education enter the apprenticeship system. The system is run under the responsibility of FÁS in conjunction with the social partners and the Department of Education and Science. A major review process has been undertaken during the last two years with a view to up-dating the standards and curricula of the various trades and examining other issues that will ensure that apprenticeship remains a popular and relevant route for young people into employment

#### **4. *Incentives for updating knowledge & skills.***

Employers generally provide training on the basis of their own requirements and needs. This training is provided on a commercial basis by a large number of organisations, mainly private. However, in specific instances there is financial support through FÁS or Enterprise Ireland – the State Agency which assists the development of indigenous industry both financially and by skills training/advice provision. In some cases companies will pool resources to identify training needs and make provision for meeting them. An industry-led initiative “Skillnets” was established in 1999 to encourage and foster this kind of co-operation.

The pilot Training Networks Programme, operated by Skillnets Ltd., has made a significant contribution to in-company training. In the first round of the Programme 1999 – 2001, the Training Networks Programme supported 58 Networks and funded 12,800 trainees in 2,305 companies. In the second round of the Programme, 2002 – 2005, 55 Training Networks are being supported with training aimed at over 14,000 trainees in 2,400 companies.

The programme has had a significant impact in encouraging SMEs to invest in training – 73% of the companies in the programme had less than 50 employees and 38% of participating companies had less than 10 employees.

Enterprise Ireland is a government organisation charged with assisting the development of Irish enterprises. It aims to work in partnership with client companies to develop sustainable competitive advantage, leading to a significant increase in profitable sales, export and employment. Its clients are companies in manufacturing and internationally-traded services. It provides services in the human resources development area including education, training and development programmes. It runs a Mentor Network involving experienced managers advising young SMEs. It also provides financial support to selected companies as part of a business development plan. One element of such a plan is human resources development and funding may be provided by Enterprise Ireland to cover part of the costs of training.

FÁS provides a range of supports to different sectors of industry, to improve the skills and capabilities of employees and hence company performance. One of the major forms of support, in operation until 2002, was the Training Support Scheme. This Scheme provided financial grants to SMEs (up to 150 employees) seeking to improve the skills of their employees at all levels with the company – from operative to management. In 2002 a total of 2,133

companies were supported under this Scheme in relation to the training of 10,316 employees. Alongside the Training Support Scheme (which in 2002 covered companies in the commercial, financial and transport sectors), FÁS operated a Construction Training Incentive Scheme for companies in that sector. In 2002 34,710 employees were trained under this Scheme.

Excellence through People (ETP)<sup>11</sup> is Ireland's national standard for human resource development. FÁS manages this voluntary initiative that aims to improve a company's operation through staff training and improving employee communication and involvement in the company. Certification lasts for one year. There has been a steady increase in the number of companies holding the Excellence through People Award – 234 at the end of 2002.

FÁS is also involved, in co-operation with industry representatives, in the identification of sectoral training needs and the development of suitable training programmes in response, supported by financial incentives. In 2003 FÁS commenced a new Competency Development Programme aimed at raising the skills level of employees. The programme is targeted at a limited number of key skill needs identified by research and/or conversation with the relevant/industry sectoral stakeholders. Priority is given to employees who require up-skilling, cross-skilling and portable skills development. For identified skill needs under the programme, financial subsidies are provided to reduce the cost of approved training courses.

FÁS is also heavily involved in assisting persons made redundant in company closure or retrenchment situations. It works with local agencies and enterprise development agencies to find alternative opportunities for persons made redundant. FÁS supports include the provision of job information and advice, referral to training and, where appropriate the establishment of special training courses to meet group needs.

The CVTS Survey of Ireland found that seventy-nine percent of companies carried out some training in 1999. Nearly all companies employing 50 or more persons trained. Training was most prevalent in manufacturing and financial/business services, whereas construction and transport/communication companies were less likely to train. Even taking account of size and sector, overseas subsidiaries were more likely to train.

About a quarter of a million employees attended formal training courses during the year; 41% of all employees. Employees in larger companies were more likely to receive formal training. Overall, a higher proportion of females than males attended training courses. Employees spent 1.4 million days on training courses; the equivalent of 2.4 days per employee. There was a tendency for managers/professionals and clerical/services workers to be more likely to receive training, whether formal or otherwise, than craft and other manual workers.

Health/safety/environmental protection training was the most commonly provided type of training course. This amounted to 20% of all training course time. The other two major areas were computing/IT (17%) and machine operation/quality control (16%). Two-thirds of training course time was

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<sup>11</sup> [http://www.fas.ie/services\\_to\\_businesses/excellence\\_through\\_people.html](http://www.fas.ie/services_to_businesses/excellence_through_people.html)

delivered through internally-managed courses. Of the externally-managed courses, private training organisations were by far the largest providers<sup>12</sup>.

As mentioned, in Section 3 of this report, the Department of Social and Family Affairs operates a “Back to Education” Allowance for people in receipt of certain unemployment or other welfare benefits. The objective of the scheme is to enhance the employment skills of vulnerable groups who are distant from the labour market.

### **Expert Group on Future Skills Needs**

The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs<sup>13</sup> was established by Government in 1997 to develop national strategies to tackle the issue of skills needs, manpower estimating, and training for business and education in Ireland. It is composed of a range of public and private sector enterprise interests, development agency and educational representatives.

The Expert Group's objectives are to:

- Identify the skills needs of different sectors and to advise on the actions needed to address them;
- Develop estimating techniques that will assist in anticipating the future;
- Advise on the promotion of education and continuous training links with business at national and local levels;
- Consider strategic issues in developing partnerships between business and the education and continuous training sectors, in meeting the skills needs of business;
- Advise on how to improve the awareness of job seekers of career sectors where there are demands for skills, of the qualifications required, and of how they can be obtained.

The Group has produced four main reports to date and a series of sectoral reports. In particular the ICT sector listens to and works on the recommendations of the Group. These have resulted in a number of skills initiatives in the Higher Education and Further Education Sectors aimed at responding to the wider developing needs of the economy. One of the major relatively recent initiatives, on foot of the third report, was the establishment of an Information Technology Investment Fund aimed at developing ICT education and training on a number of fronts. This is resulting in ongoing investment in ICT skills through the provision of new courses, with a particular emphasis on part-time flexible provision targeted at disadvantaged and under-represented groups in ICT education; post-graduate conversion courses; the improvement of completion rates on ICT courses; and equipment renewal. This builds on a number of earlier skills initiatives triggered by earlier work of the Group.

The Expert Group has recently been placing an increasing focus on the skills and competencies being acquired through education programmes. This was a strong feature of the fourth report, published in October 2003 and will be a

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<sup>12</sup> Irish ReferNet Thematic Overview 5.3.

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.skillsireland.ie/index.html>

focus of the future work of the group. The fourth report also places strong emphasis on the science and technology skills requirements of the knowledge economy, particularly in context of the needs of the biotechnology sector – seen as a major growth area for the future – and for engineering skills.

## **5. Meeting the challenges of an ageing population.**

The Irish economy is unusual in its demographic structure. The share of the population in the working age groups is high and will continue to increase for some time to come<sup>14</sup>. (At present Ireland has a ratio of one person over 65 for every five persons of working age compared with a ratio of one to three in most other European countries) and is not expected to drop to 3:1 until 2025<sup>15</sup>. For historical reasons people stay in the workforce for longer making the effective exit age from the workforce approximately five years greater than most of Ireland's EU counterparts<sup>16</sup>.

As a long-term response to ageing population, the Government has set up the National Pensions Reserve Fund, which plans to save 1% of GNP per annum, the proceeds of which will part-fund the State's pension liabilities after 2025.

Skill, and subsequently, labour shortages became an important feature of the latter years of the Irish economic boom; though the subsequent economic slowdown and an increase in the labour supply through net immigration has reduced the urgency required in mobilising the older workforce.

Nonetheless, Ireland is committed to a policy of active ageing which will be addressed in the medium to long-term through the following:

- Changing the attitude of employers
- Up-skilling and re-skilling
- Flexible working arrangements
- Social security and tax provisions

A thematic review of policies to improve labour market outcomes for older workers is being undertaken by the OECD; Ireland through FÁS is participating in this process.

The Department of Social and Family Affairs intends to review how older people can extend their working life without being financially or socially penalised and will seek to remove financial disincentives and the requirement on those aged 55-66 to retire in order to qualify for pensions.

Increases of over 20% in the income tax exemption limits for those aged 65 and over were introduced in the 2002 Budget. The re-focusing of the employee strand of the Back-To-Work Allowance scheme in favour of longer term and older unemployed people in line with the findings of the evaluation of the Back-to-Work Allowance scheme published in December 2000 will also be beneficial in this area.

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<sup>14</sup> National Employment Action Plan; Ireland; 2003-2005; section 2.5.

<sup>15</sup> National Employment Action Plan; Ireland; 2003-2005; section 2.5.3.

<sup>16</sup> National Employment Action Plan; Ireland; 2003-2005; section 1.2.3.

Pre-Retirement Allowance (PRETA) is paid to long-term unemployment assistance recipients aged from 55 to 65 years on declaration of retirement from the workforce.

A number of disincentives to this group returning to the workforce have been removed since 2002. Changes to the scheme will enable PRETA customers who leave retirement to take up a job, to return directly to PRETA in the event of subsequent unemployment. The target of removing of all those on the minimum wage from the tax net in An Agreed Programme for Government will also encourage older workers back into the labour force.

FÁS also runs two training programmes particularly utilised by older persons – Return to Work for Women and Enterprise Training. As the name suggests, the former programme is aimed at women who have been out of the workforce for some time (usually to look after children) and now wish to return to work. The programme is typically of 12 weeks duration and provides social and interpersonal skills, confidence-building and up-dating of skills as required. Trainees either proceed to work or further training after the course. The Enterprise Training programme is designed to help unemployed persons start their own business. Normally, persons on the course have the technical skills and experience required to do so, but need training in such aspects as planning, marketing, finance and business law<sup>17</sup>.

## **6. Effectiveness and efficiency of VET.**

The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) 2002 report for Ireland was compiled on the basis of a survey of 2,000 adults within Ireland in June 2002 and face-to-face in-depth interviews with 18 experts and entrepreneurs in May and June of 2002. Each individual interview was also followed by a detailed 10-page questionnaire. The questionnaire is also sent by post to the experts and entrepreneurs from previous years.

Many of the experts and entrepreneurs were of the opinion that there is a shortage in Ireland of managers with the experience of managing rapidly growing new and young businesses. There was also perceived to be a shortage of managers with international sales and marketing experience. Such skills are particularly important in this country, as many young businesses have to internationalize at an early stage in their development, due to the small size of the Irish market.

Shortcomings in the contribution of the educational system to an enterprise culture: Particular mention was made of a failure to encourage and reward creativeness and independent thinking among students. There was a general belief that career guidance teachers, parents and other influencers of career choice within the educational system do not perceive entrepreneurship as a legitimate career option and still steer students towards traditional and 'safe' professional career choices<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> Irish ReferNet Thematic Overview 5.3.

<sup>18</sup> The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor 2002. The Irish Report; How Entrepreneurial is Ireland?

### ***OECD Review of Higher Education***

All of the issues associated with the contribution of higher education to sustainable growth and increased quality employment are relevant to a review of higher education in Ireland currently being conducted by the OECD at the request of the Minister for Education and Science. This is a comprehensive review with very wide ranging terms of reference. A key aim of the review is to ensure that the Irish higher education system is appropriately positioned in terms of governance, structure, policies, approaches to teaching, learning and programme delivery, investment and financing, quality and research and development in order that it can respond to the strategic challenges associated with its role in Ireland's future economic development in the knowledge age.

### ***Destinations of Graduates***

The Higher Education Authority produce a regular report on those graduating from HE. The First Destinations Report is compiled through a survey of graduates. The 2003 survey<sup>19</sup> gives details of post graduate diploma which is probably the most vocational of the selection of qualification types available at HE. Figures for 2001 show that 2348 students graduated with a postgraduate diploma (not including those receiving higher diplomas in Education), with the majority of courses orientated towards IT. The employment rates are significantly higher than the corresponding rates for primary degrees with 75% going into employment, 16% into further training or study and those looking for work at 5.4%. This compares to 59%;32% and 3.8% respectively for those with primary degrees. 28% of postgraduate diploma recipients had a starting salary of between €20,999 and €24,999 compared to 21% of primary degree graduates.

It is very difficult to measure the effectiveness and efficiency of a VET system, but perhaps these figures can be used as a proxy indicator. This results appear favourable although it is difficult to know whether the higher starting salaries are due to more demanding jobs that require higher and specific skills than those held by primary degree graduates or if the diploma is used as a filtering mechanism to find those who are likely to be of generally higher calibre within the labour market.

## **Theme 2: Innovation in Teaching and Learning Processes.**

### ***7. Improvements in learning processes and contents.***

Initiatives such as Junior Achievement Award, Young Enterprise Competitions, Young Scientists Exhibition etc are examples where business interests provide opportunities and incentives for young people to engage in project work and activities which support their learning in the formal curriculum.

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.heai.ie/index.cfm/page/publications/category/143/section/details/id/693>

For pupils at risk of educational disadvantage, measures to promote positive perceptions of learning include:

- The Home School Community Liaison scheme which implements actions with parents of children at risk, so that they can support their children's learning, and provide encouragement and affirmation;
- Integrated in-school and out-of-school activities, particularly with youth and community services under which summer programmes and after school actions are provided to stimulate children's interest in learning as fun;
- A focus on transition points, where schools develop structured links to facilitate the transfer to post primary school, and third level colleges develop links with disadvantaged schools to encourage pupils to aspire to third level education;
- An emphasis on assessment which rewards achievement rather than reinforces failure, involving an increased focus on practical and project work to the extent feasible;
- Optimum use of ICT and active learning approaches ;
- TV literacy awareness promotion through READ WRITE NOW. Feedback indicates that profiling successful literacy learners has an enormous impact in encouraging others to join;
- Adoption of 'learner-centredness' and flexibility as guiding principles in second chance education.

Examples of innovations in teaching and learning methods and content include the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme. The LCA<sup>20</sup> programme takes two years to complete and aims to prepare students for adult and working life; with an emphasis on forms of achievement and excellence, which the established Leaving Certificate has not recognised in the past. There is a modular format and many of these have a vocational orientation. However there is also the Leaving Certificate Vocational Program (LCVP)<sup>21</sup>; an intervention designed to enhance the vocational dimension of the Leaving Certificate (established), it was introduced in 1994 in response to Ireland's changing work and business environment. Though pre-Lisbon it is still regarded as a successful addition to the Leaving Certificate because of its approach to learning through entrepreneurial and vocational focus. The programme consists of: At least five Leaving Certificate subjects -one of which must be Irish and two of which must be from one of the designated Vocational Subject Groupings<sup>22</sup>; Two Link Modules: Preparation for the World of Work and Enterprise Education; And a recognized course in a Modern European Language other than Irish or English.

The range and variety of disciplines offered in Post Leaving Certificate Courses provide for a variety of modes of learning and assessment, including

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.lca.ie/>

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.lcvp.ie/>

<sup>22</sup> Subject groupings that naturally relate or complement each other ie Construction Studies, Engineering, Technical Drawing or Home Economics, Agricultural Science, Biology.

project work, portfolio, work experience etc., subject to the requirements of the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC)<sup>23</sup> for accreditation and validation being fulfilled. More information about the various Leaving Certificate qualifications are given in the next section.

The FÁS Net College provides e-learning and blended learning opportunities for employed and unemployed persons to access training in new and more flexible ways. This links in with the recommendations of the Interim Report of the Steering Group of the PLC review<sup>24</sup> to increase the provision of ICT and make use of the flexibility in terms of training delivery that it can offer. The work carried out by ICT Ireland should also be mentioned here but is discussed in detail in section 3. Though one of its aims is to foster closer links between colleges and local industry.

## **8. *Improving the integration of different learning sites; integration of formal and informal learning.***

The City and County Development Boards and Area-based Partnerships are playing a key role in measures to improve the integration of different learning sites. Projects such as the “City of Learning” (Limerick) are providing models of good practice in this field.

The White Paper (2000) proposed that thirty-three Local Adult Learning Boards would be established throughout the country, one in each Vocational Education Committee (VEC) area to promote a co-ordinated area-based approach to the delivery of adult education services, including VET. Membership of the local boards would include representation from social partners, education and training providers, learners, community and voluntary pillar interests, Traveller and disability organisations, area partnerships, library services, health boards and adult literacy interests. The Boards would be required to formally convene local community fora through which the views of a wide range of interests could be channelled. These Boards have not yet been formally established but many VECs have informal structures which are fulfilling a co-ordination role in this area. At present it is very difficult to gain statistics on formal outcomes because of these current informal structures; it is hoped that this will be resolved with formal establishment of the Boards.

At the end of compulsory schooling, the majority of students proceed to upper secondary education (or the Senior Cycle). This consists of an (optional) Transition Year followed by one of three versions of the two-year Leaving Certificate programme.

The Transition Year programme is offered following completion of the Junior Cycle. It is a year of active learning, which emphasises personal and interpersonal development, and experiential learning opportunities. The programme guidelines facilitate the school in developing its own curriculum to suit the needs and interests of the students who can also contribute to the development of the programme. Students are encouraged to explore and

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<sup>23</sup> <http://www.fetac.ie/>

<sup>24</sup> Discussed in detail in section 3.

develop their own particular academic, leisure, career and vocational interests as well as greater personal, social and cultural awareness of school, community and wider issues.

The mission of Transition Year is to promote the personal, social, educational and vocational development of the students and to prepare them to participate as responsible members of society. The development of such a programme was restricted to a small number of schools for many years. Over the past 10 years, the programme concept has been greatly enlarged and extensively developed and supported by the Department of Education and Science. It is now taken by a majority of the student cohort and is offered by most second level schools. The Transition Year remains optional, however, and some students prefer to directly proceed to one of the Leaving Certificate programmes.

There are three options within the Leaving Certificate:

- The traditional Leaving Certificate programme is taken by the majority of students. It is the accepted basis for entry into third level education institutions;
- The Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) is a more vocationally-oriented version of the traditional Leaving Certificate containing vocational and enterprise education emphases. As with the traditional Leaving Certificate it is fully accepted as a basis for entry to third level;
- The Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme is a separate, distinct and innovative programme designed for those who do not wish to take the direct route to third level education.

The percentages of pupils studying these three options in 1999/2000 were Traditional (74%), Leaving Certificate Vocational (21%) and Leaving Certificate Applied (5%).

The LCVP is based on combinations of Leaving Certificate subjects and aims to provide students with the opportunity to engage in self-directed learning, and to promote innovation and enterprise. These objectives are largely achieved through the requirement to follow three activity-driven modules known as Link Modules – Enterprise Education, Preparation for Work and Work Experience. The Link Modules are designed to develop:

- Communication skills, including ICT skills;
- Research and report writing;
- Team working, including interpersonal skills, listening skills, leadership and decision-making skills<sup>25</sup>.

As part of this approach mini-company activities are supported whereby students plan, develop and manage a mini enterprise. The Link Modules within the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme provide for formal assessment of learning in this area, as do the Tasks carried out by students under the Leaving Certificate Applied programme. Overall, some 43,000

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<sup>25</sup> Irish ReferNet Thematic Overview 4.5.

second level students engage in work experience each year as part of these 3 programmes<sup>26</sup>.

The use of active teaching and learning methodologies is encouraged across the LCVP curriculum. Experiences such as work placement, career investigation, mini-enterprise and business visits are an integral part of the programme. Vocational relevance is enhanced by putting in place opportunities for students to plan, organise and engage in active learning experiences both inside and outside the classroom.

In 2001, of the 54,499 students who completed the leaving Certificate, 12,354 or 23% completed the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme.

The LCA focuses on preparing students for the transition from school to adult and working life. Key principles underlying the LCA are activity-based learning and teaching, and maximising the student's involvement with the local community. The programme differs from the traditional Leaving Certificate by being more practical, community based, work-oriented and task-centred. Continuous assessment is used as the basis of about two-thirds of the final examination result, and those who successfully complete the programme are eligible for entry into a wide variety of Post-Leaving Certificate courses from which entry to third level may subsequently be gained if appropriate. The LCA does not provide direct entry to third level<sup>27</sup>.

## **9. Evaluation and quality assurance of VET provision.**

VET Programmes are subject to evaluation and approval each year. An overall evaluation of programmes was conducted by the ESRI for the mid-term review of the Human Resources Development Operational Programme under the National Development Plan 2000 – 2006. At programme level, annual surveys are carried out to track the placement of past trainees in employment or further education and training. However, though course content is scrutinised, at Further Education level there is no formal evaluation of the delivery and teaching standards on FE courses.

The Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 established the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, the Higher Education and Training Awards Council and the Further Education and Training Awards Council. The Act contains quality assurance procedures for any provider with programmes validated by either of the two awarding councils or with the delegated authority from an awarding council to make awards itself. The requirements provide that the quality assurance procedures must be agreed between the appropriate Council and the provider. The procedures must include regular evaluation by national and international experts and evaluation by learners. The provider must implement any of the findings arising from the application of the procedures that the awarding council determines. The effectiveness of the procedures must be reviewed on a regular basis by the council. In addition, the Act also requires the Dublin Institute of Technology to agree quality assurance procedures with the National Qualifications Authority of

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<sup>26</sup> National Employment Action Plan; Ireland; 2003-2005; section 1.2.3.

<sup>27</sup> Irish ReferNet Thematic Overview 4.5.

Ireland, which will include the regular evaluation of its programmes of education and training and ancillary services by national and international experts and learners. The Authority will consider the findings arising out of such evaluations and may make recommendations to the Dublin Institute of Technology, which it will implement. The Authority will also review the effectiveness of these procedures.

In the university sector the Higher Education Authority (HEA) has oversight of quality assurance while in the higher education sector outside of the universities the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) is the competent body for almost all institutions, apart from Dublin Institute of Technology which makes its own awards.

The Universities Act, 1997, which came into force in June 1997, specifically requires each university 'to establish procedures for quality assurance aimed at improving the quality of education and related services provided by the university'. This model, which recognises institutional autonomy, is one of self-assessment. It must include the evaluation, at least once in every 10 years of each department and, where appropriate, school of the university and any service provided by the university, by employees of the university in the first instance and by persons, other than employees, who are competent to make national and international comparisons on the quality of teaching and research and the provision of other services at university level. Furthermore, the procedures must include assessment by those, including students, availing of the teaching, research and other services provided by the university, and the procedures must provide for the publication in such form and manner as the governing authority thinks fit. A governing authority must implement any findings arising out of an evaluation carried out in accordance with procedures established under this section unless, having regard to the resources available to the university or for any other reason, it would, in the opinion of the governing authority, be impractical or unreasonable to do so. In addition, each governing authority must, at least every 15 years, having regard to the resources available to the university and having consulted with the Higher Education Authority, arrange for a review of the effectiveness of the procedures provided for by this section and the implementation of the findings arising out of the application of those procedures and publish the outcome of such a review.

In 2003, the Conference of Heads of Irish Universities published "*A Framework for Quality in Irish Universities – Meeting the Challenge of Change*". One of the principal recommendations was the establishment of the Irish Universities Quality Board. Its aim, which builds on the legislative framework in the Universities Act 1997, is to promote best practice in quality assurance throughout the university sector.

On a wider level, the Higher Education Authority has a statutory role under the Act to assist the universities in the achievement of their objectives generally. Furthermore, it may review the quality assurance procedures established and may publish a report on the outcome of any such review – a process which is conducted in consultation with the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland. The first such review of quality assurance procedures will be undertaken by the Higher Education Authority in 2003/04. It also provides earmarked funding under the National Development Plan, to the universities to facilitate the

development of quality assurance procedures and processes. A particular objective of this funding is to facilitate the development of a sectoral approach to quality assurance, which can be benchmarked against best practice in Europe and internationally.

Quality Assurance in higher education institutions outside the University sector (such as Institutes of Technology) is subject to the oversight of the Higher Education and Training Awards Council. The Council's predecessor, the National Council for Education Awards developed the Quality Assurance system since 1972. It involves the review of institutions and programmes, including the accreditation of programmes. Programmes accredited included short cycle sub-degree programmes as well as those for Bachelor, Master and Doctor degrees. The Council has established the ECTS system as the standard credit system in the extra-university sector. The Council is a member of the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, the European Accreditation Network, the Joint Quality Initiative and as host of the 2003 biennial conference of the International network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education organised the European Regional Meeting of that body.

## **10. Professional development and status of teachers and trainers.**

There is no formal recognised course of training provided for those who wish to pursue a career as a Teacher (Tutor, Lecturer) in the Third level of the Irish Education System. However there are minimum entry requirements in terms of education and training. These are generally a basic degree followed by a Masters and evidence of published research in the applicant's field of expertise. There are many additional opportunities for Teachers working in the Third level of education to avail of further education, training and development.

All organisations, responsible for the training of Teachers, aim to ensure that teachers and trainers are regularly updated in terms of new skills and developments by providing on-going in service training. The Teaching Council of Ireland will have the responsibility of ensuring that priorities are set for the professional training of an adequate number of teachers in the various subjects<sup>28</sup>.

The Teaching Council Act, 2001 provides for the establishment of a Teaching Council to promote teaching as a profession; to promote the professional development of teachers; to maintain and improve the quality of teaching in the state; to provide for the establishment of standards, policies and procedures for the education and training of teachers and other matters relating to teachers and the teaching profession; to provide for the registration and regulation of teachers and to enhance professional standards and competences<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> Irish ReferNet Thematic Overview 6.1.

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<http://www.education.ie/home/home.jsp?pcategory=10815&ecategory=17430&language=EN>

A wide range of in-career development has been provided under the Operational Plan for Human Resources Development 2000-2006. This includes the professional development of teachers generally, and support for teachers in schools in the context of changes in curricula and school programmes at first and second levels (i.e. revised Primary Curriculum, School Development Planning, Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE), English, Maths, Physics, Biology and Home Economics, etc). A Leadership Development Programme has been developed for Principals & Deputy Principals at primary and post-primary levels. The Substance Misuse Prevention Programme has been extended with specific emphasis on Local Drug Task Force areas. A Teachers Induction Pilot Project has commenced and will serve to benefit schools taking on newly qualified teachers. There are also substantial programmes in the areas of learning support and special needs and these continue to receive priority.

In the case of teachers or lecturers in Institutes of Technology and universities, they are required to have:

- a) An Honours Degree in their subject or an equivalent professional qualification.
- b) Three years relevant post-qualification work experience which can include teaching experience.

There is no requirement for any qualification in teaching for these third-level posts although it is the case that a significant proportion would hold such qualification and/or have relevant teaching experience.

The Training of Trainers measure for Third-Level provides targeted funding for staff development programmes and skills updating for staff in the sector. The aim of this programme is to provide the necessary training for staff in the third level sector to enable them to adapt to new technological, scientific and organisational challenges. In response to the broadening of higher education and training opportunities, this measure provides additional programmes to address these needs while also focusing on pedagogical training, teacher evaluation and appraisal and the development of management skills<sup>30</sup>.

There is no national system for the pre-service and in-service training of teachers, trainers and tutors employed in vocational education and training. The majority of those employed in the sector have been recruited on the basis of a second-level teaching qualification, or a trade or business qualification. The PLC review (discussed in section 3) highlights the potential mismatch of required qualifications of teachers at that level, which is sometimes more suited to second level, and proposes a change to degree and relevant industry qualifications. Significant work has been undertaken in this area by FÁS<sup>31</sup>, the National Training Authority both in the training of their trainers, in

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<sup>30</sup> Irish ReferNet Thematic Overview 6.2.

<sup>31</sup> ie *Synthesis Report / Literature Review on Aspects of Training of those at Work in Ireland*. Report

by McIver Consulting for Expert Group on Future Skills Needs. Available from the Expert Group website:

[http://www.skillsireland.ie/press/reports/pdf/egfsn0406\\_ntac\\_training\\_report.pdf](http://www.skillsireland.ie/press/reports/pdf/egfsn0406_ntac_training_report.pdf)

the registration of approved trainers and in leading the establishment of a trainers' network. Individual universities have provided programmes for staff in the sector aimed at specific target groups (e.g. people with disabilities) and the Department of Education and Science has funded national Certificate and Diploma programmes in the field of vocational education and training on an in-service basis, primarily for staff in Youthreach, Senior Traveller Training Centres and Adult Literacy Services. The issues relating to pre-service and in-service training were addressed in the White Paper - *Learning for Life* and the need to explore the feasibility of a generic training programme in this field was recognised, to be implemented initially in a modular format on an in-service basis, but ultimately to be available as a pre-service training programme for the sector.

Within FÁS, instructors and trainers are state employees and must comply with the standards as laid down in the statutory acts.

New trainers are required to have on entry to FÁS:

- A qualification in the discipline in which they will train, i.e. minimum of the Senior Trades Certification for craft instructors, or City and Guilds equivalent.
- In 'non-craft' areas a qualification equivalent to an undergraduate diploma is required and further in-house development.
- Employment experience in their discipline for a minimum of 2 years after the date of qualification including a minimum of 1 year's experience in a supervisory or management post in the area of their discipline.
- Competence in communication and interpersonal skills<sup>32</sup>.

## **Theme 3: Building European competences for a European Labour Market.**

### ***11. Challenges & policies in relation to the Lisbon employment strategy.***

The Kok report assesses that Ireland has made impressive progress in terms of employment and productivity performance since 1997. The total employment rate has increased from 57.5% to 65.7% while unemployment has fallen by nearly two-thirds and long-term unemployment from 6.1% to 1.3%. Labour shortages remain a problem although they are eased by increased immigration. A significant element in Ireland's success is its capacity to attract foreign direct investment. Social partnership, its tax system, a good regulatory environment and investment in human capital are also major factors. Regional imbalances remain a matter of concern. The report makes the following recommendations:

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<sup>32</sup> Irish ReferNet Thematic Overview 6.3.

### ***Increasing adaptability***

- Promote a better balance of business activity throughout the territory.

### ***Make work a real option for all***

- Increase access to active labour market measures for a larger share of the unemployed and inactive population;
- Pursue efforts to increase female participation: improve the provision, and affordability, of childcare facilities; address the other causes of the gender pay gap.

### ***Investing in human capital***

- Ensure that the school system effectively tackles numeracy and literacy problems and takes effective action to reduce early school leaving;
- Review incentives to develop lifelong learning, especially in enterprises, and increase access to training, especially for the low-skilled and older workers<sup>33</sup>.

## **12. Involving stakeholders.**

The social partners have been involved in vocational training for a long time. In general, their role as providers has been concentrated in training in industrial relations/human resources matters. In more recent years they have developed a role in the provision of vocational training on a pilot basis. This work is generally undertaken in order to popularise the idea of training in the workplace and is exemplified by the 'training awareness campaign' (A campaign to emphasise the importance of training) run jointly by ICTU (Irish Congress of Trade Unions) and IBEC (Irish Business and Employers Confederation) under the ADAPT programme.

The social partners have an established place in their representative capacity within those structures established by the State to meet the country's training needs. Specifically, the social partners have seats on the board of FÁS and on its advisory bodies. It has been a major principle of the FÁS board and its committees that the social partners (employers and unions) have equal representation on them. The social partners are also members of the board of Fáilte Ireland, responsible for training in the catering/tourism industry, and Teagasc in relation to training for agriculture. They also play an important role in relation to award bodies established under the Qualifications Act (1999).

Within the national partnership agreements policies on education and training have played an important part. Since 1987, Ireland has had a series of three-year 'national partnership agreements' covering a range of economic and social policy issues. These agreements have been negotiated by government and the social partners and provide overall policy objectives in a range of areas including vocational training. They do not have any legal standing but are nevertheless important in guiding policy development. Such agreements have included, for example, policies in relation to apprenticeship,

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<sup>33</sup> Jobs, Jobs, Jobs Creating more employment in Europe; Report of the Employment Taskforce chaired by Wim Kok. November 2003: Annex 1 : Summary of country-specific messages.

the needs of early school leavers, persons with disabilities and long-term unemployed people. The last agreement (2000 – 2002) included a specific section on lifelong learning.

Since 2000 the Agreements made nationally between the Social Partners have encouraged the formation worker/management partnerships at local level and in many organizations both public and private this is now happening. The current Sustaining Progress Agreement makes further provision for this kind of arrangement<sup>34</sup>.

The Vocational Education (Amendment) Act in July 2001 amongst other things set a new composition for the membership of VECs setting out levels of representation from: the local authority; parents of students under the age of 18 and teaching staff.

### **13. *Transparency, recognition & mobility.***

The Task Force on Lifelong Learning was established by the Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment in collaboration with the Department of Education and Science and reported in 2002. A total of eight Government Departments with responsibilities for education, sectoral training, welfare and social and community development policies were represented on the Task Force, as well as education, training, social partner, community and voluntary interests and industrial development agencies. The focus of the Task Force on Lifelong Learning is on the labour market aspects of lifelong learning and concentrated on skills and lifelong learning development and delivery. They are also responsible for developing and implementing a National Framework of Qualifications<sup>35</sup>.

Given the deadline of June 2006 for the implementation of the national framework of qualifications, and the range of groups contributing to the development of the debate on various aspects of vocational education and training policy, it is probable that over the next five years VET programmes and services will undergo further change in order to provide improved access, better progression and more transparent, and more transferable, accreditation<sup>36</sup>.

To fill the gaps in the provision of vocational education and training in Ireland, the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act (1999) established the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI). The remit of the Authority encompasses further and higher education and has three main functions:

- To establish and maintain a framework of qualifications based on standards of knowledge, skill or competence to be acquired by learners regardless of where, when or how such learning takes place whether in institutions or colleges of education and training, or in the workplace or the community;

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<sup>34</sup> Irish ReferNet Thematic Overview 3.3.

<sup>35</sup> Irish ReferNet Thematic Overview 2.1.

<sup>36</sup> Irish ReferNet Thematic Overview 2.1.

- To facilitate lifelong learning through the promotion of access, transfer and progression for all learners including those who have special needs;
- To establish and promote the maintenance and improvement of the standards of awards of the further and higher education and training sector, other than in the universities and to liaise with bodies outside the state for the mutual recognition of awards at transnational level.

The national framework of qualifications is a new development and is not just an amalgam of existing awards and systems. It is an outcomes-based approach to the recognition of learning. It is “a framework for the development, recognition and award of qualifications in the State, based on standards of knowledge, skill or competence to be acquired by learners” (Qualifications Act, 1999). In its policies and criteria (April 2002), the Authority further defined this to be

*the single, nationally and internationally accepted entity, through which all learning achievements may be measured and related to each other in a coherent way and which defines the relationship between all education and training awards.*

The framework embodies a vision for learning which recognises all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective.

The national framework of qualifications focuses primarily on learner needs. It promotes the setting of standards for awards in a coherent and transparent way and promotes the quality of both programmes and awards. The framework will create a coherent and understandable system for co-ordinating and comparing awards. In addition, it will facilitate international comparisons between awards. By broadening the possibilities for recognising learning, the framework will facilitate lifelong learning. In addition, it will also facilitate access, transfer and progression.

On 11 June 2001, the remaining parts of the Act were enacted and the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) and the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) were established. The two new awarding Councils will make national certification available for all education and training in the State, other than awards made in respect of primary and second-level education, the Dublin Institute of Technology and the Universities.

The two awards Councils have three principal functions:

- The establishment of policies and criteria for the making of awards and the validation of programmes;
- The determination of standards of knowledge, skill or competence to be acquired by learners, before an award may be made by a Council or recognised by a Council;

- The making and recognition of awards where persons have achieved the required standards as set out<sup>37</sup>.

### **Europass**

The Irish Europass system is centrally managed and co-ordinated by the Certification and Standards Department of FÁS, they also undertake the training work. FÁS have also established an Europass National Steering Group. The members of the group were drawn from:

- Department of Enterprise, Training and Employment
- Department of Education
- Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC)
- Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU)
- Leargas: The Exchange Bureau.

Since its start there have been a total of 261 Europass training recipients. Of those 137 have been funded by the Leonardo da Vinci programme. Most Europasses have been issued for a stay of three weeks. Most of the courses followed (though not all) were service based, (ie tourism, leisure, hospitality catering etc). The take up of Europass is not particularly high; it has been felt that Irish students do not see the Europass as something of value; maybe because there is no funding attached to it. Students who travel abroad with the Leonardo project do not automatically apply for Europass, maybe indicating that they do not see it as something desirable or important for their future career. The written document is not very impressive to employer, and hence overall the Europass is not desirable or impressive enough for people to seek one<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>37</sup> Irish ReferNet Thematic Overview 8.1.

<sup>38</sup> Questionnaire 'Evaluation of the Dissemination of Europass Training. Carried out by BBJ Germany