

## ***Education Provision in Ireland***

Traditionally, in Ireland, the three main components of the education system have been first, second and third levels. The first and second levels are referred to as primary and post-primary, respectively. The growth of further and continuing education, in addition to developments in the area of early childhood education, has significantly extended the scope of education provision in this country, changing from a system primarily focused on the 6 – 22 year old age group, to one which strives to meet the education needs of all members of the community. This concept of lifelong learning is reflected in the courses and programmes available, and there are now over 900,000 students in full-time education in schools and colleges in Ireland, with an additional 209,000 in further and adult education programmes.

The Department of Education and Science aims to ensure the provision of a comprehensive, cost-effective and accessible education system of the highest quality, as measured by international standards, which will:

1. enable individuals to develop to their full potential as persons and to participate fully as citizens in society and
2. contribute to social and economic development.

The State's role in education is underpinned by the principles of pluralism and respect for diversity in Irish society. The role is discharged in a spirit of partnership with all of those involved in the education system, including teachers, parents, school managers and the community served by schools and other education institutions.

At national level, the curriculum for primary and post-primary education is approved by the Minister for Education and Science, on the advice of the *National Council for Curriculum and Assessment* and the Department of Education and Science oversees its implementation through its Inspectorate. Within the Further Education Sector, each programme complies with an overall framework and avails of national certification and assessment processes provided for by the *Further Education and Training Awards Council*.

At school level, the particular character of the school makes a vital contribution. Adaptation of the curriculum to suit the individual school is, in part, achieved through the preparation and continuous updating of a school development plan. Attendance at school is compulsory from ages 6 to 15 (the minimum school leaving age is being raised to 16 under the *Education Welfare Act*). Primary and post-primary education is provided free of charge in publicly funded schools.

The higher education or third-level sector in Ireland comprises universities and institutes of technology as well as colleges of education and some non-State aided private higher education colleges.

Developments in higher education in Ireland, particularly over the past twenty years, have been based on this differentiated system of third-level education. One part is formed by the universities and the designated institutions under the Higher Education Authority, with state funding allocated by the Authority. The other part includes the institutes of technology – these are the institutions designated under the Regional

Technical Colleges Act, 1992, and the Dublin Institute of Technology, with state funding allocated directly by the Department of Education and Science.

## **1. PRIMARY EDUCATION**

The primary education sector comprises national schools, special schools and non-aided private primary schools. There were 3,172 national schools in the 1999/2000 school year, of which more than 300 have classes for pupils with special needs, and 106 are Special Schools. These schools catered for some 444,300 pupils. Primary schools, which account for the education of 98 per cent of children in the primary sector, are staffed by over 21,800 teachers. In addition, there are 49 private primary schools which do not receive State funding.

The current and capital costs of primary schools, including the full cost of teachers' salaries, are funded almost entirely by the State, supplemented by local contributions. In addition, special funding arrangements are in place for some schools, for example, those serving disadvantaged areas and those for children with special needs. Total expenditure on primary education amounted to some £935 million in 1999.

### ***Primary school curriculum***

A revised primary curriculum was launched in 1999, the first complete revision of the curriculum since 1971. The curriculum is designed to develop the child in all dimensions of his or her life and reflects the educational, cultural, social and economic aspirations and concerns of Irish society. It also takes account of the changing nature of society and aims to help children to adjust to these changes. The curriculum incorporates the most advanced educational theory and practice and is designed to enable children to acquire knowledge and skills that are relevant to their lives.

The curriculum is organised under seven areas of learning, some of which are further subdivided into subjects - Language (Irish and English), Mathematics, Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE - History, Geography and Science), Arts Education (Music, Visual Arts, Drama), Physical Education and Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE - including Relationships and Sexuality Education). New emphases within the curriculum include a focus on pupils' learning styles, the integration of assessment into all areas of teaching and learning and the role of ICTs.

For school staffs and for the individual teacher, the teaching/learning content for each curricular area/subject is supported by written teacher guidelines. The phased implementation of the revised curriculum which is currently underway is being supported by an extensive programme of in-career training for all primary teachers.

### ***Assessment at primary level***

Primary teachers currently use a range of pupil assessment instruments (for example, teacher-designed tests, standardised tests) in their work, though only at the discretion of individual schools and teachers. The *Education Act* now places an obligation on Principals and teachers to regularly evaluate students and periodically report the results to the students and their parents.

A significant feature of the revised primary curriculum is the central position given to assessment in the teaching and learning process. It is accepted that the use of assessment strategies directed towards the identification of, and provision for children's needs adds enormously to the effectiveness to teaching and learning. Curriculum documentation contains statements and guidance on appropriate assessment procedures. The NCCA is engaged currently in further developmental work in this key area.

## **2. POST-PRIMARY EDUCATION**

The post-primary sector comprises secondary, vocational, community and comprehensive schools. There were just over 354,000 students in this sector in 1999/2000, attending a total of 752 publicly aided schools. 424 of these schools are secondary, 245 are vocational and 83 are community or comprehensive. In addition, there are 30 other aided and non-aided schools. Expenditure on post-primary education amounted to £1,127 million in 1999.

Secondary schools, catering for almost 57% of second-level students, are privately owned and managed. The majority of these schools are managed by religious communities and the remainder by Boards of Governors or by individuals. The cost of teachers' salaries is, in the main, met by the State. In addition, allowances and capitation grants are paid to the 95 per cent of secondary schools which participate in the free education scheme.

Vocational schools, covering some 28% of all second-level students, are administered by Vocational Education Committees. The State funds up to 93 per cent of the total cost of provision in vocational schools. The balance is provided by receipts generated by the committees.

Community and comprehensive schools, covering almost 15% of second-level students, are allocated individual budgets by the State and are managed by Boards of Management which are constituted in different ways according to the instrument of establishment.

Second-level education consists of a three-year junior cycle followed by a two or three-year senior cycle. The Junior Certificate examination is taken after three years. In senior cycle there is an optional one-year Transition Year Programme followed by a choice of three two-year Leaving Certificate programmes.

### ***Junior cycle***

The principal objective of the Junior Cycle is for students to complete broad, balanced and coherent courses of study in a variety of curricular areas which will promote student personal development and equip them to proceed to Senior Cycle education. In 2000, 61,470 candidates sat the Junior Certificate examination.

In September 1996 the new *Junior Certificate School Programme* was introduced to cater for a small number of students whose learning needs are not adequately met by the present Junior Certificate. This programme was introduced into 44 centres in the 1996/97 school year and by September 2000 this number had increased to 118 including mainstream schools, Special Schools, Remand Centres and Traveller

Centres. A *Co-ordination and Training Support Service*, based in the City of Dublin VEC Curriculum Development Unit, is in place to assist schools implement the new programme, which emphasises the essential skills of numeracy and literacy as well as personal and social needs.

### ***Senior cycle***

The senior cycle caters for pupils in the 15 to 18 year old age group. The senior cycle aims to encourage and facilitate students to continue in full-time education during the post-compulsory period by providing a stimulating range of programmes suited to their abilities, aptitudes and interests.

Students may spend up to three years in senior cycle. They may follow a two-year Leaving Certificate programme immediately after Junior Certificate, or they may opt to follow the Transition Year programme before starting the two-year Leaving Certificate programme.

The senior cycle has undergone significant restructuring in recent years, involving four main elements:

- the provision of the Transition Year Programme as an option for all second-level schools
- the revision of the established Leaving Certificate
- the development and expansion of the Leaving Certificate Applied course
- the development and expansion of the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme.

### ***Transition Year Programme***

The Transition Year has been an important innovation providing an opportunity for students to experience a wide range of educational and work experiences, at a remove from an examination focus. Almost 40% of those entering senior cycle in the school year 2000/2001 are participants in the Transition Year Programme.

### ***Leaving Certificate***

Pupils following the established Leaving Certificate must take at least five subjects, including Irish. The Leaving Certificate examination is held at the end of the senior cycle in post-primary schools. It is the terminal State examination of post-primary education. Students normally sit for the examination at the age of 17 or 18, after 5 or 6 years of post primary education. The Leaving Certificate programme is now significantly more inclusive, catering for a diversity of needs and aptitudes.

In tandem with the revision of individual subjects, in-career development courses are provided by the Department of Education and Science for teachers of all the revised syllabi.

In 2000, over 63,000 students took the Leaving Certificate examination. Some 60,700 followed the established Leaving Certificate programme or the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme and some 2,700 followed the Leaving Certificate Applied.

### ***Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme***

The LCVP is the established Leaving Certificate with a concentration on technical subjects. In 1994 it was expanded to broaden the choice of subjects and to strengthen the vocational content of the programme by providing three link modules on Enterprise Education, Preparation for Work and Work Experience. Participation by schools has grown rapidly since its introduction and in the school year 1999/2000, this programme was offered in approximately 460 of the 752 post-primary schools involving almost 29,000 students.

The LCVP includes the following elements which students must take:

- two Leaving Certificate subjects from one of the designated Subject Groupings
- a Leaving Certificate Continental Language or Vocational Language Module
- three Link Modules - Enterprise Education, Preparation for Work, and Work Experience.

LCVP students receive the same certificate as other Leaving Certificate students but their Certificate includes an additional statement of the results of the Link Modules (Pass, Merit or Distinction).

LCVP students have the same opportunity to proceed to universities and colleges as the student of the established Leaving Certificate. Grades obtained in LCVP can be used in lieu of a sixth subject with regard to access to higher level education under the CAO system.

### ***Leaving Certificate Applied***

The Leaving Certificate Applied, introduced in 1995, is a self-contained, two-year, alternative programme to the established Leaving Certificate. The programme is pre-vocational by nature, aimed at those students who do not wish to proceed directly to third-level education and for those whose aptitudes and needs are not fully catered for by the established Leaving Certificate. Students of the Leaving Certificate Applied are predominantly engaged in work and study with an active, practical, task-based orientation. Assessment for the Leaving Certificate Applied takes place over the full two years of the programme. On completion of the programme, students generally proceed to Post-Leaving Certificate Vocational Education and Training courses or directly to the labour market. Direct access to higher education is not possible from the LCA.

In the school year 1999-00, almost 204 post-primary schools were participating in the programme with over 6,900 participants (approximately 6% of senior cycle students).

### ***Examinations at second level***

There are two State Certificate Examinations provided by the Department of Education and Science – the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate.

A report by the *National Council for Curriculum and Assessment* on the junior cycle notes that, while some of what was envisaged in the development and introduction of the Junior Certificate programme has been achieved, work remains to be done in the area of assessment. The failure to implement the wide range of modes and techniques of assessment associated with the aims and objectives of the Junior Certificate programme has had a negative impact on the breadth and balance of the curriculum at junior cycle and on teaching and learning.

In examining the nature of student assessment in the Junior Certificate Programme, the NCCA has identified a need to move from a centrally devised and marked terminal written examination to a broader range of assessment modes and techniques and a combination of external and school-based components.

A further issue is the fundamental change in the context of assessment at junior cycle. With increased retention to the end of junior cycle, formal assessment needs to be viewed now in the context of assessment for further learning. There is no reason why the Junior Certificate should continue to be a mirror image of the Leaving Certificate. An expansion of the range of assessment modes cannot come about if assessment continues to be confined to an external model where the assessor is from outside the school.

A key difference between the role of second-level teachers in Ireland and elsewhere is the absence in the Irish second-level system of any element of internal assessment of student performance feeding into a formal, structured and certified State endorsement of that assessment. Second-level teachers engage in the assessment of their own students on a very widespread basis, in the certification of PLC and other courses.

### ***Examinations Commission***

The Government has agreed in principle in 2001 to the establishment of an Examinations Commission as a body independent of the Department to which responsibility for the administration of the certificate examinations will be transferred. An Examinations Commission with operational responsibility for the running of the examinations will bring Ireland into line with international practice. It will focus the Department on assessment, policy and evaluation and allow the Commission to concentrate on the day to day running of the examination. The precise timing of this transfer of responsibility will be related to the completion of the detailed planning and consultative arrangements which have been set in train.

### **3. *PROVISION FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS***

At present, special educational provision for students with disabilities ranges from additional support in mainstream schools to specialist support in special schools. Key developments in this area since 1998 include provision of services such as resource teachers, additional teaching hours and special needs assistants, as required, and an extension of the learning support teacher service to all primary and second-level schools.

In providing an automatic response to special needs children, the Department has allocated over 1,700 special needs assistants and over 750 resource teachers in primary schools.

It is estimated that currently there are:

- some 6,800 children with disabilities attending 106 special schools
- 3,600 children with disabilities attending 300 special classes attached to mainstream schools
- 7,600 children with disabilities attending mainstream schools on a fully integrated basis.

The Government has approved in 2001 proposals for the establishment of a National Council for Special Education which will have two key functions:

- to carry out research and to provide expert advice to the Minister in relation to special education issues and
- to provide a range of educational services at local and national level.

The Council will also be required to put in place an independent appeals mechanism to cater for cases where parents of special needs children dispute the adequacy of the proposed response to their children's needs.

#### **4. FURTHER EDUCATION**

The term further education embraces education and training which occurs generally after second-level schooling but which is not part of the third-level system. A distinctive feature of further education generally is its diversity and breadth of provision, and its linkages with other services such as training, area-based partnership, welfare, youth, school, juvenile liaison, justice and community and voluntary sector interests. A wide range of Government Departments, statutory agencies and voluntary and community organisations provide services in this area. The past decade has seen a dramatic growth in further education provision.

##### ***Vocational education and training***

A wide range of vocational education and training courses are offered within the education sector for students who have completed second level. The principal programmes are Post-Leaving-Certificate courses. In addition, off-the-job training for apprentices is provided in the Institutes of Technology and in FÁS Training Centres.

##### ***Post Leaving Certificate Courses***

Post Leaving Certificate courses are provided in second-level schools and colleges and evolved as add-on classes to the second level system which were introduced with European Social Fund Support in 1984/5 at a time of high youth unemployment. At that time their main role was to bridge the gap between school and work for pupils who needed vocational education and training in order to secure lasting employment. Since then participation has grown rapidly, and some 18% of all school leavers now enter PLC courses. However, in more recent years, PLC courses are an important re-entry route for adults seeking further education – some 33% of all entrants are now

aged 21 or over. As PLC enrolments increased and mainstream enrolments declined in the vocational sector, many of the colleges evolved into large-scale PLC colleges. While 224 centres offer PLC courses, over 80% of enrolments are in 38 colleges with 150 or more PLC students.

### ***PLC programme***

PLC courses integrate the technical knowledge for a particular discipline or occupation, with the generic skills essential for all employment such as communications, inter-personal skills, problem solving and IT. They also integrate the technical knowledge with a work experience programme. A wide range of disciplines is offered including business and secretarial services, information technology, arts and crafts, languages, construction, engineering and electronics, tourism and catering, childcare and community care, sport and leisure, interior design, presentation graphics, animation, equestrian studies, performance art, and multi-media studies.

The programmes are of one and two years duration and lead to awards certified by the *Further Education and Training Awards Council* (FETAC). Awards have an 8-module structure which embraces mandatory Communications, Work Experience and General Studies modules, and 5 vocational modules. A Higher Education Links scheme enables holders of certain awards to progress to designated courses in Institutes of Technology. Details are circulated annually to school Principals and guidance counsellors.

## **5. *THIRD LEVEL EDUCATION***

Traditionally the third level education system in Ireland has comprised the university sector, the technological sector and the colleges of education, all of which are substantially funded by the State and are autonomous and self governing. In addition, a number of independent private colleges have developed, offering a range of mainly business-related courses conferring professional qualifications and, in some instances, recognised diplomas and degrees.

Numbers in third-level education have grown from 18,500 in 1965 to more than 120,000 at present. These rapidly-growing numbers reflect increasing retention rates at second level, demographic trends and increasing transfer rates into third-level education. Presently, nearly half of young people advance to third-level, with around half of these taking degree-level programmes.

Access to third level education is competitive in Ireland with entry based on points acquired from results in the Leaving Certificate Examinations, taken in year five or six of second-level.

Third level institutions receive income by way of State Grant, tuition fees paid by certain students and, in the case of the universities and technological colleges, income earned from research and development and other activities. Expenditure on third level education amounted to £752 million in 1999.



## ***Universities***

There are four universities in the Republic of Ireland, the National University of Ireland, the University of Dublin (Trinity College), the University of Limerick and Dublin City University.

The National University of Ireland (NUI) is organised on a federal basis but the constituent universities- NUI, Dublin, NUI, Cork, the NUI, Galway and NUI, Maynooth - enjoy a large measure of autonomy. The Royal College of Surgeons and the National College of Art and Design are also recognised colleges of the NUI. In addition to undertaking research in a wide range of disciplines, the universities and university colleges offer degree programmes at Bachelor, Masters and Doctorate level in the humanities, in the scientific, technological and social sciences, and in the medical area. A range of undergraduate and post graduate diplomas is also offered and all the universities have continuing and some distance education programmes.

The Irish university system offers programmes leading to a bachelors degree at the end of three or four years, depending on the course followed. In recent years some universities have introduced semesterisation and modularisation of courses, giving greater flexibility to students. Typically teaching at undergraduate level is by way of a programme of lectures supplemented by tutorials and, where appropriate, practical demonstration and laboratory work. Masters degrees are usually taken by course work, research work or some combination of both. Doctoral degrees are awarded on the basis of research. Universities award their own degrees using external examiners to ensure consistency of standards.

The Higher Education Authority (HEA) oversees the activities of the universities on behalf of the Department of Education and Science.

In 1999, there were over 63,000 full-time students and 11,000 part-time students at university.

## ***Institutes of Technology***

The Institutes of Technology (formerly Regional Technical Colleges), which were introduced in the 1970s to provide for further technical education needs, have, over the years, become an integral part of the Irish third level system. There are now fourteen Institutes of Technology throughout Ireland offering education and training, both full-time and part-time, for trade and industry over a broad spectrum of occupations and levels, in the areas of Business Studies, Engineering & Technology and Science & Paramedicine.

The Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) is the biggest third level institution in Ireland with about 22,000 students. It has six constituent colleges, two Colleges of Technology, the College of Catering, the College of Marketing & Design, the College of Commerce and the College of Music. The DIT is an awarding authority in its own right.

Currently there are over 43,000 full-time students and nearly 14,000 part-time students attending the Institutes of Technology.

The *Higher Education and Training Awards Council* (HETAC) has statutory award-giving authority for non-university higher education qualifications. It also sets and monitors standards in the Institutes and, through it, a transfer network operates whereby students can move from Certificate to Diploma to Degree level depending on examination performance. Qualifications awarded by this body are internationally recognised by academic, professional, trade and craft bodies. Most colleges also have courses leading directly to the examinations of the many professional institutes.

### ***Colleges of Education/Teacher Training***

In Ireland the system of teacher training differs between primary and second level school teachers. Typically second level teachers complete a primary degree at university and then follow up with the Higher Diploma in Education, also at university. Primary school teachers complete a three-year programme, leading to a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) degree, at one of the five teacher training colleges. In addition, an 18 month Post-graduate Diploma is available in four of the teacher training colleges. Four of these, St Patricks College, Church of Ireland College, St Mary Marino and Froebel College of Education, are based in Dublin. Mary Immaculate College is based in Limerick.

Mary Immaculate and St Patrick's Colleges are now also providing B.A. courses in humanities for which they set their own entry requirements.

One of the entry criteria for primary school teacher training in Ireland is a good proficiency in the Irish language. This also applies to overseas students. Teachers of Home Economics are trained in Colleges of Education for Home Economics. There are two such colleges in Ireland, (St. Angela's, Sligo and St. Catherine's, Sion Hill, Dublin) which provide a full-time four-year course leading to a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) degree. All graduates of these colleges are awarded a university degree on successful completion of their studies. A specialist college for teachers of Physical Education and Crafts, Thomond College in Limerick, was incorporated into the University of Limerick in 1991. Finally, teachers of Art are trained in the National College of Art & Design in Dublin. All of these institutions are associated with the universities for their degree awards.

### ***Independent Business & Professional Training Colleges***

Side by side with the publicly funded third level sector, there are also a number of independent private training institutions, mainly involved in the provision of business and professional training. Many of the programmes offered by these colleges are validated by HETAC and some have liaisons with universities and/or professional associations through which the courses on offer are validated.

### ***Student Support at Third Level***

Concern about the equity of the student grant schemes and the regressive impact of income tax relief for covenants led to the abolition of undergraduate tuition fees in publicly funded third-level institutions. In 1995/96, students paid half-fees and from

1996/97 undergraduate fees in these institutions were abolished. At present the abolition of fees initiative does not apply to part-time students. Income tax relief at the standard rate is also available for fees paid for approved courses in private colleges.

The Student Support Schemes will continue to play an important role in promoting access particularly through the payment of maintenance grants. Significant improvements have already been made in this area in recent years and the Department will be considering further initiatives in the light of the recent report on Access to Third Level Education.

Additional funding has also been made available to third level students with special needs. Expenditure under the Special Fund for Students with Disabilities at third-level has increased from £250,000 in 1998 to over £1,000,000 in 2000. The objective of the Fund is to assist students who have special needs in attending third level institutions and Post Leaving Certificate Courses (PLC). Grants are provided to students for the purchase of special equipment, materials, technological aids, targeted transport services and sign language assistance/ interpreters and personal assistants.

Expenditure under the Special Fund for Students with Disabilities is complemented by funding, allocated by the Higher Education Authority, for targeted initiatives within the universities. Funding by the HEA for initiatives aimed at students with disabilities amounted to £539,000 in 1999 and £664,000 in 2000.

### ***The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland***

The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) has recently been established under the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999. The Authority has three principal objects which are set out in the Act:

- the establishment and maintenance of a framework of qualifications for the development, recognition and award of qualifications based on standards of knowledge, skill or competence to be acquired by learners
- the establishment and promotion of the maintenance and improvement of the standards of awards of the further and higher education and training sector, other than in the existing universities
- the promotion and facilitation of access, transfer and progression throughout the span of education and training provision.

In effect the way that the Authority will undertake to meet these objects is two-fold

- it will work through the by establishing and maintaining a framework of qualifications which will facilitate the development of procedures for access, transfer and progression throughout education and training
- it will work closely with the new awards Councils (the Further Education and Training Awards Council and the Higher Education and Training Awards Council referred to above) on their validation, award making and quality assurance processes.

## 6. **LEGISLATIVE DEVELOPMENTS**

With the exception of the Vocational Education Committees, Irish education has up to recently lacked any significant legislative basis. This has changed with the enactment of a number of important pieces of legislation, including the *Education Act, 1998*, the *Education (Welfare) Act, 2000* and the *Teaching Council Act, 2001*.

The *Education Act, 1998* places the central features of first and second-level education on a statutory basis and clarifies the roles and responsibilities of all of those involved in education including school principals and teachers. It promotes the development of partnership at school level and provides a framework for the development of a supportive and dynamic working environment for teachers. It also explicitly recognises the roles of the partners in education at a national level in the policy making process, providing for consultation in a wide range of areas. Many of the provisions of the Act simply codify and standardise what is already happening within schools. However, this serves an important purpose in providing transparency and clarity as regards the rights and responsibilities of each of the stakeholders, as well as facilitating best practice and the effective and efficient use of resources.

The *Education (Welfare) Act, 2000* provides a new statutory framework for promoting regular school attendance and tackling the problems of absenteeism and early school leaving. The Act provides for co-ordinated supports and strategies to ensure that young people remain actively involved in education up to early adulthood. The lead role in this is given to the National Educational Welfare Board, a new statutory agency to develop and implement school attendance policy. The Board will deploy education welfare officers throughout the country to work in close co-operation with schools, teachers, parents and community/ voluntary bodies with a view to encouraging regular school attendance and developing strategies to reduce absenteeism and early school leaving. The Board will maintain a register of children receiving education outside the recognised school structure and will assess the adequacy of such education on an ongoing basis.

The National Educational Welfare Board, which was recently established on a designate basis, will be a significant new support service for schools and teachers. Obviously it will take some time for the education welfare service to be built up, but ultimately it will operate on a nationwide basis, with particular focus on disadvantaged children and children at risk of dropping out of school.

The *Teaching Council Act, 2001* provides for the establishment of a Teaching Council as an independent statutory agency to promote and maintain best practice in the teaching profession and in the education and training of teachers. The Teaching Council will maintain a register of teachers and a code of professional conduct for registered teachers. The Council will determine the education and training requirements for the purposes of registration as a teacher and will promote the continuing education and professional development of teachers. It will conduct inquiries into the fitness to teach of teachers, and impose sanctions where appropriate.

The Teaching Council will consist of 37 members, the majority of whom will be registered teachers. The Council will give teachers a significant degree of autonomy in the regulation and development of their profession. It will enhance the professional

status of teaching and the quality of our education service. Planning the implementation of the Act and the establishment of the Council is currently underway in the Department.

## **7. PROVISION OF RESOURCES AND SUPPORT SERVICES**

Education has been one of the key foundations of economic and social progress in Ireland. Over recent years the State has invested substantial resources in the education service, both in schools and in support services for students and teachers alike. Since 1997, State funding for education has increased by some 70%, with an education budget for 2001 of £3.7 billion. The increase in funding has facilitated significant improvements in services across all levels of education provision including the provision of additional teaching posts.

A twin track approach has been taken in the allocation of additional resources for education. A proportion has been allocated across the system as a whole to meet the needs of students at all levels, while at the same time targeted supports have been introduced for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and students with special needs.

### ***Teaching Resources***

Substantial additional teaching resources have been provided to schools in recent years and further resources will be provided in accordance with commitments under the PPF. In the school years 2000/01 to 2002/03, an additional 1,100 teachers will be allocated to primary schools and 1,400 additional teachers to post-primary schools.

As a result the overall **pupil-teacher ratio has been reducing steadily** in recent years and will continue to fall over the coming years. At primary level, the creation of additional teaching posts, together with the retention of the demographic dividend, means that the pupil-teacher ratio is now 19.6 to 1 and is expected to reduce further over the coming years as additional posts allocated under the PPF come on stream. The introduction of a recommended average maximum class size of 30 at primary level, with associated increases in staffing allocations to enable schools to achieve this objective, is a significant step towards improving the educational experience of primary school pupils. In addition, a new programme to target children at risk of educational disadvantage has been developed. This programme, *Giving Children an Even Break*, will ensure a maximum class size of 20 in junior classes in the 224 primary schools identified as having the highest concentration of children with disadvantaged characteristics.

At second level, both the appointment PTR and the *de facto* PTR (including the full time equivalent of part-time teachers) have decreased in recent years. The former now stands at 17.4 to 1 while the latter has declined from 16.3 to 1 in 1995/96 to an estimated 14.8 to 1 in 2000/01. Within the last two years, a focussed scheme, aimed at targeting for additional resources schools experiencing significant retention problems has been put in place. The essence of this scheme is to link the provision of additional monies to plans formulated by schools themselves.

### ***Funding of Schools***

Schools' running costs have traditionally been met by the Department's scheme of capitation grants and the local contribution. These grants are intended to contribute towards the general operating costs of schools which include heating, lighting, cleaning, insurance, teaching aids and other miscellaneous charges.

At primary level, the capitation grant has been increased from £45 per pupil in 1997 to £75.50 per pupil this school year. A rate of £80 per pupil will apply in the 2001/2002 school year. A grant scheme to enable minor works to be carried out to national school properties is also in place. Payment is made every school year at a rate of £3,000 per school plus £10 per pupil. The scheme is intended to cover minor improvements to school buildings and grounds, replacement of mechanical and electrical services, the purchase of furniture and the provision of floor coverings and blinds. In addition, grants are provided to primary schools for secretarial and caretaking services, with the rates of grant increased by 33% from £30 per pupil to £40 per pupil with effect from January 2000.

At second level, the per-capita grant now stands at £192 (£202 from September 2001) and a further amount of £30 is paid in the case of disadvantaged schools. Dedicated provision in respect of secretarial and caretaking facilities was augmented in the current year by the bringing into being of a *Support Services Fund* for second-level schools. This fund channels an additional £7m to such schools based upon a per-capita payment of £20 and a floor which guarantees every school no less than £4,000.

### ***ICT Initiatives***

The Schools IT2000 initiative has achieved the following objectives to date:

- there are now almost 60,000 multimedia computers in Irish schools (up from 16,000 in early 1998)
- the average primary school now has 8.7 computers, up from 3.8 in early 1998
- the average second-level school now has 43 computers, up from 31 in early 1998
- more than 95% of schools state that they are using the Internet (up from 25% in early 1998)
- well over 37,000 teachers have attended one or more IT training courses since early 1998.

Additional funding of £81m (£60m in capital and £21m in current expenditure) over the three years 2001 – 2003 is being made available and planning for the investment of this money is well advanced.

### ***Capital Investment in School Buildings***

Increased funding in recent years has enabled major progress in improving the quality of educational buildings. Nevertheless, the scale of under-investment in school accommodation over the years has been such that many Irish schools do not fully meet modern standards. Accordingly, a major investment programme is underway to upgrade primary and post-primary school buildings and £800 million is being allocated under the *National Development Plan* for this purpose.

### ***National Educational Psychological Service***

The Government is making significant improvements in the psychological service for schools with the establishment of the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS). Following recruitment of an additional 50 educational psychologists, there are now nearly 100 psychologists employed in the NEPS and this will be further increased to 200 psychologists by the end of 2004. NEPS currently provides a psychological service to all second-level schools and to approximately 1,300 primary schools. It is anticipated that as additional psychologists are appointed the service will be expanded to all schools.

### ***Career guidance***

State funding is currently available to second-level schools to provide guidance and counselling for their pupils. While the guidance priorities of individual schools are a matter for the school's management, it would be expected that these would reflect overall educational priorities, especially in respect of the importance of focussing on the guidance needs of at-risk pupils and potential junior cycle early leavers. Currently, some 580 whole-time equivalent guidance posts at second level are funded by the Department.

### ***Curriculum and other support services***

With the introduction of the revised curricula and syllabi, new programmes and system-wide initiatives (especially in the area of educational disadvantage), a range of services is now in place to support schools and teachers. More than 200 teachers are attached to these services in a variety of support and development roles.

### ***Learning Support Service***

With effect from September 1999 all schools have access to a learning support service. There are now 1,463 learning support posts at primary level and 560 posts at second level. This service provides an invaluable support to teachers in their work with children who are experiencing learning difficulties.

### ***Home School Community Liaison***

The role of the family and the wider community in supporting and enhancing each child's educational experience is widely recognised. The Department currently provides funding for *Home School Community Liaison* teachers in primary and second-level schools serving areas designated as disadvantaged. The scheme aims to promote active co-operation between home, school and relevant community agencies in promoting the educational interests of children.

## ***National Educational Welfare Board***

The Board has been established on a designate basis to undertake the necessary planning and preparatory work for the implementation of the *Education (Welfare) Act, 2000* and the roll-out of the new educational welfare service.

### **8. TACKLING EDUCATION DISADVANTAGE**

Promoting education for all is a major policy priority and £400 million has been set aside in the National Development Plan for various measures to counter educational disadvantage in society. A high-level Educational Disadvantage Committee is being established under the Education Act to ensure that these measures are focused to best effect. The measures introduced include:

- Early education interventions at pre-school level, such as the Early Start programme.
- A targeted support package for disadvantaged children at primary level – *Giving Children an Even Break*; £26 million is being provided over a three year period for this initiative which will apply in over 2,300 primary schools and will involve the creation of over 200 additional teaching posts.
- Expansion of the Early School Leavers and Stay in School Initiatives and the establishment of a new statutory authority, the National Educational Welfare Board, to promote regular school attendance and discourage early school leaving.
- Extension of the Home/ School / Community Liaison Service to schools with disadvantaged status.
- Improvements in support grants for disadvantaged third level students and provision of a Third Level Access Fund of £95 million under the National Development Plan aimed at tackling under representation by students from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Extension of Youthreach and Youth Work programmes.
- Measures to combat substance abuse including the *Walk Tall* programme at primary level and *On My Own Two Feet* at second level.
- Measures to improve literacy and numeracy attainment at school and for those who have left school.

### **9. LIFELONG LEARNING**

There is now universal acceptance that education must be a lifelong process if we are to have an inclusive society which can adapt successfully to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing global economy.

A **White Paper On Adult Education**, *Learning for Life* was launched last year following an extensive consultation process. The Paper sets out a comprehensive strategy for the future development of adult education, covering a major expansion of learning options, a national adult literacy programme, technical, guidance and quality supports and structures for co-ordination and integration.

Funding of £1 billion is being provided in the National Development Plan for a **Back to Education Initiative** providing for a wide range of second-chance education



programmes aimed particularly at those with less than upper secondary education, with priority support for IT training and language skills. A Working Group is finalising implementation arrangements for the initiative with a view to its coming on stream in September/October 2001.

Over £70 million is being allocated to a **National Adult Literacy Strategy** under the NDP. Following on the success of the recent TV series, *Read Write Now*, a radio series has commenced, and work is underway on the development of a further TV series. A referral directory for the adult literacy service has been published and disseminated. A quality framework has been developed in partnership with international interests and is being implemented on a phased basis. A staff development programme leading to national certification at certificate and diploma level is being implemented for literacy organisers and tutors.

The **White Paper on Early Childhood Education**, *Ready to Learn*, sets out a comprehensive strategy for the development of early childhood education for children aged up to six years. Action is proposed on a wide range of issues including: the promotion of quality of provision, measures to facilitate and encourage parental involvement in their children's early education and the development of a system of inspection to determine whether providers meet quality standards and to assist them in doing so. Particular emphasis will be placed on catering for disadvantaged children and children with special needs.

With a view to implementation, the Department has sought and received proposals from third-level institutions for a pilot project to develop early childhood education provision in pursuance of the objectives in the White Paper. Discussions with the institutions concerned are well advanced and the Minister should be in a position to announce details of the project in the near future. The main objectives will be

- to develop a quality framework for early childhood education, including a *Quality in Education* (QE) mark for providers in the sector
- to develop targeted interventions on a pilot basis for children who are educationally disadvantaged and children with special needs
- to prepare the groundwork for the establishment of an *Early Childhood Education Agency* as envisaged by the White Paper.

In the context of the *National Development Plan*, £74m is being made available for early childhood education over the period of the Plan.