Ireland


Note: The first version of this profile was prepared in 2000 using the following publications:
Department of Education and Science, Brief description of the Irish education system, 1996;
For more detailed and updated information consult: http://www.eurydice.org

Principles and general objectives of education

The mission of the Department of Education and Science is to ensure the provision of a comprehensive, cost-effective and accessible education system of the highest quality, as measured by international standards, which will enable individuals to develop to their full potential as persons and to participate fully as citizens in society and 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.

Current educational priorities and concerns

In the last decades the education environment in Ireland has changed rapidly and it is continuing to change: increasing numbers of students are availing of education, particularly second-level and third-level education; students, parents and teachers increasingly demand better education services; the range of services provided by the Department of Education and Science is growing in response to technological and economic changes and an increasing demand for second-chance education; the public is increasingly demanding a more efficient and effective use of State resources and transparency and accountability in the uses to which these public resources are put; there is a growing interest by the media and the general public in education policies.

During the 1990s there has been a remarkable debate on national education policy. The publication in June 1992 of the Green Paper, Education for a Changing World, was followed by a wide-ranging consultative process. The National Education Convention which took place in Dublin Castle in October 1993 was an unprecedented event in Irish education and indeed in policy formation generally. The publication of the Convention Report in January 1994 was followed by the publication by the Minister for Education of two position papers on regional education structures and school governance which were then the subject of formal consultations with the partners in education. This consultative process culminated in the publication in April 1995 of the White Paper, Charting our Education Future, which outlined a comprehensive programme for change in Irish education. This process paralleled the launch in 1994 of the Strategic Management Initiative (SMI), the beginning of a major change programme for the civil, and wider public, service. The preparation of the White Paper took full account of the SMI initiative. In setting out plans for a fundamental reorganization of the Department of Education and Science, as well as a

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wide range of policy measures and directions, the White Paper provides the basic strategic planning framework for the Department.

The White Paper charted the broad course of education reform and set out significant organizational developments for the delivery of education services, seeking to allow for flexibility to meet particular needs and circumstances, and respecting legitimate rights and responsibilities among the partners and the different levels of the education system. A major objective of the White Paper has been that the responsibility for the provision of educational services should, where possible, be devolved to regional, school or institutional level. The primary school curriculum has been reviewed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) to take account of the ongoing rapid social, scientific and technological change, and of Ireland’s position in the European Union and in the wider world. The objective has been to ensure that, with regard to the assessment of their intrinsic abilities, there are no students with serious literacy and numeracy problems in early primary education.

A new targeted initiative aimed at “Breaking the Cycle” of educational disadvantage was launched in 1996. Under this initiative, a number of selected primary schools in urban and rural areas have been targeted for an intensive package of additional supports, including additional staffing and reduced class sizes in large urban schools, special additional funding for materials and equipment and a special programme of in-career development. The schools also had the support of newly appointed coordinators. Each school participating in the “Breaking the Cycle” initiative prepared a five-year development plan identifying current problems and proposing strategies to tackle the problems of educational disadvantage in the school. Concerning second-level education, a major objective is that the percentage of the 16-to 18-year-old age group completing senior cycle will increase to at least 90%. This objective is to be achieved through providing a combination of an effective foundation of general education and a strengthened and expanded vocational orientation. The White Paper signalled a number of changes at Junior Cycle level to ensure that a broad and balanced curriculum would be available for all students. A particular priority has been to develop a system of assessment for testing the achievement of all the objectives of the curriculum. A new Junior Certificate Programme has been developed to cater to a small minority of students whose learning needs are not adequately met by the Junior Certificate. Particular emphasis has been laid on continuous assessment.

The principal policy directions envisaged in relation to adult and continuing education and vocational education and training are to establish both as components of the education system, with equivalence of treatment for different modes of delivery. Tackling disadvantage among adults has also been emphasized, through, for example, the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme and through ensuring that programmes are in place for all those who wish to overcome literacy and numeracy difficulties.

The past twenty years have seen a major transformation in the structure of the third-level sector. This includes the development and expansion of the Regional Technical Colleges (now the Institutes of Technology), the Dublin Institute of Technology and the two National Institutes for Higher Education. In 1989, the National Institutes were designated as universities and, in 1993, the Regional

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Technical Colleges (the Institutes of Technology) and the Dublin Institute of Technology were placed on a statutory footing. During the same period, considerable growth occurred in the university sector, particularly in the disciplines of technology and business. This growth was accompanied by a wide range of innovative developments in the arts and the social sciences. The White Paper contained a commitment to introduce new legislation for the university sector. An extensive consultation process on the scope of the legislation followed the publication of the White Paper. A position paper was published in 1995 and the dialogue continued following the publication of the Universities Bill in July 1996. The Bill, passed as University Act No. 24, 1997, reconstituted the constituent colleges of the National University of Ireland and placed them on an independent footing. It provided for more representative governance structures for all universities in which all major stakeholders have an involvement, and established more representative and democratic structures within the universities themselves. It provided for improved accountability, quality and transparency provisions for all the universities. All of this has been achieved within a legislative framework which has at its centre the preservation of academic freedom, respect for the diverse traditions of the universities and a strong commitment to institutional autonomy.

There is universal acceptance that education must be a lifelong process if the aim is 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 in 2000 following an extensive consultation process. The Paper set 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 has been 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.

The White Paper on Early Childhood Education, *Ready to Learn*, set out a comprehensive strategy for the development of early childhood education for children aged up to 6. Action has been 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 has been placed on catering for disadvantaged children and children with special needs. The Centre for Early Childhood Education and Development was established in 2002 in order to coordinate and develop early childhood education provision in pursuance of the objectives in the White Paper. In the context of the National Development Plan 2000-2006, an allocation of €93.96 million has been made available for early childhood education over the period of the Plan. The National Development Plan 2000-2006, launched in November 1999, included provision of over €6.7 billion (in 1999 prices) for measures in the education sector. The European Community Support Framework for Ireland has allocated over €457 million from its Structural Funds for measures in the education sector.

Education has a crucial role to play in tackling social exclusion by providing full access to life chances and avoiding and breaking the cycle of disadvantage.
Tackling educational disadvantage is set in the context of the Government’s National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS), published in 1997 and revised in 2002, and the Social Partnership Agreement. A central objective of the strategy is to ensure that all young people leave the education system with a high quality education and related qualifications to support their full participation in society and the economy. A related objective is to ensure that all those who have already left school have an opportunity to address any lack of educational and related qualifications that militate against their ability to participate fully in society, the economy and employment. This approach is based on a continuum of provision, from early childhood through adulthood, with the focus on preventive strategies, targeting and integrated community responses. Some €460 million was provided in 2003 for measures designed to counter educational disadvantage. This provision encompasses pre-school initiatives, programmes for disadvantaged students at primary and post-primary level, disadvantaged youth schemes and further education measures. A number of measures designed to broaden access to third level education for students from disadvantaged backgrounds have been put in place. The statutory Educational Disadvantage Committee established under the Education Act 1998, advises the Minister of Education and Science on the policies and strategies to be adopted to identify and correct educational disadvantage.

The aim of the new Action Plan for Educational Inclusion (Delivering Equality of Opportunities in Schools) is to ensure that the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities are prioritized and effectively addressed. Its core elements comprise: a standardized system for identifying, and regularly reviewing, levels of disadvantage; a new integrated School Support Programme (SSP) which will bring together, and build upon, existing interventions for schools and school clusters/communities with a concentrated level of educational disadvantage. The differences between urban and rural disadvantage will be taken into account in targeting actions under the programme. The action plan will be implemented on a phased basis over five years (2005/06 to 2009/10) and will involve an additional annual investment of some €40 million on full implementation. It will also involve the creation of about 300 additional posts across the education system generally. The following existing schemes and programmes will be integrated into the SSP on a phased basis over the five-year implementation period: Early Start; Giving Children an Even Break (incorporating the primary Disadvantaged Areas Scheme and Breaking the Cycle); the Support Teacher Project (primary level); aspects of the Early Literacy Initiative, including the Reading Recovery initiative and the Junior Certificate School Programme Literacy Strategy and Demonstration Library Project; the Home/School/Community Liaison Scheme; the School Completion Programme (which is being funded under the National Development Plan with assistance from the European Social Fund); the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme for second-level schools and related projects in second-level schools supporting access to third-level. (Department of Education and Science, DEIS– Delivering Equality of Opportunities in Schools. An Action Plan for Educational Inclusion, May 2005).

The Strategy Statement sets out the key objectives and related strategies of the Department of Education and Science over the period 2005-2007. In addition, the goals and objectives outlined in the Statement are designed to contribute to a range of policies developed by the Government to address issues of national strategic importance. These include among others the National Development Plan 2000-2006, the Social Partnership Agreement Sustaining Progress 2003-2005, the National Anti-
Poverty Strategy, the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion 2003-2005, and the National Children’s Strategy. The Strategy Statement is drawn up within the framework of available resources and in the context of Government policy and the Department’s mission statement and high-level goals. These are: deliver an education that is relevant to individuals’ personal, social, cultural and economic needs; support, through education, a socially inclusive society with equal opportunity for all; contribute to Ireland’s economic prosperity, development and international competitiveness; improve the standard and quality of education and promote best practice in classrooms, schools, colleges and other centres for education; and support the delivery of education by quality planning, policy formulation and customer service.

**Laws and other basic regulations concerning education**

In accordance with the Irish Constitution (1937), the State has specific constitutional duties concerning education, primarily under Article 42. Foremost among these is to provide for free primary education and to supplement and support other educational initiatives. The State discharges its constitutional duties by disbursing almost all the funding for the education system at first and second levels and by ensuring that the education provided by the schools meets appropriate standards in curriculum and teaching methods. Parents also have constitutional rights in regard to education; parents are acknowledged as the “primary and natural” educators of their children. In addition, the role in education of the various religious denominations is recognized in the Constitution. The result is a complex interweaving of the rights and responsibilities of the principal interests in education, which requires a careful balancing so that the rights of the child, as student, can be upheld.

The Education Act of 1998 complements the constitutional provisions relating to education. The Act 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 recognizes 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 standardize 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 Act also provided for the establishment of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.

The University Act No. 24 of 1997 gives effect to the policy commitment in the White Paper to: the re-structuring of the National University of Ireland; provision of revised governance structures; provision of a modern framework for interaction between the universities and central government and for accountability to society generally.

The new Institute of Technology Act of 2006 brings the country’s fourteen Institutes of Technology (established under the Regional Technical Colleges Act of
1992 and Amendment Act of 1994), including the State’s largest third-level institute, the Dublin Institute of Technology, under the responsibility of the Higher Education Authority (HEA) for the first time. Until 2006, the HEA has only had funding responsibility for the seven universities and certain smaller designated institutions.

The Child Care Act of 1991 acknowledges the links between health and education measures. It provides for consultation with the Minister for Education in regard to regulations concerning the health, safety, welfare and development of pre-school children availing of pre-school services.

The legislation relevant to secondary schooling in Ireland is in the School Attendance Act of 1926 and its amendments, the Intermediate Education (Ireland) Act of 1878 and the Intermediate Education (Ireland) Act of 1914. The Vocational Education Act of 1930 and its amendments (the most recent was in 2001), provides for technical and continuing education. The Education (Welfare) Act of 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 coordinated 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. Education welfare officers throughout the country work in close cooperation 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 maintains a register of children receiving education outside the recognized school structure and assesses the adequacy of such education on an ongoing basis. The Act repealed the School Attendance Acts, 1926 to 1967.

The Teaching Council Act of 2001, amended in 2006, 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, determine the education and training requirements for the purposes of registration as a teacher, and promote the continuing education and professional development of teachers, who must be given a significant degree of autonomy in the regulation and development of their profession. The Act also provides for the repeal of the Intermediate Education (Ireland) Act, 1914. The Council has been formally established in March 2006.

According to the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act of 1999, providers are responsible for the quality assurance of their programmes, with the Further Education, Training and Awards Council having the role of agreeing providers’ quality assurance procedures and monitoring the effectiveness of their implementation.

The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act of 2004 gives statutory rights to children with disabilities to assessment of their educational needs and provision for those needs in an inclusive setting, unless such a placement is inappropriate or impractical. The Act sets out a range of services which must be provided, including assessments, education plans and support services.

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The School Attendance Act of 1926, and subsequent amendments to that Act, obliges parents to ensure that their children attend school from age 6 years to age 15 years, unless there is a reasonable excuse – for example, illness, or where the child is receiving suitable elementary education, other than by attending a national or other suitable school. Attendance at full-time education is compulsory for all children between 6 and 15 years of age. The minimum school leaving age is being raised to 16 under the Education (Welfare) Act of 2000.

Administration and management of the education system

The **Department of Education and Science** (prior to June 1997, the Department of Education) is responsible for the administration of public education, primary, post-primary and special education. State subsidies for universities and third-level colleges are channelled through the Department. The particular functions of the Department of Education and Science include: policy formulation and review; resource allocation and appropriate monitoring of the allocation; evaluation of performance; assurance of quality of the education service; performance of certain executive activities; advice and support to educational management and staff.

The Department has three main offices, is divided into a number of divisions, and also includes the National Educational Psychological Service and the Inspectorate. The mandate of the **Inspectorate** is: to evaluate and promote the achievement of quality of education processes and outcomes for the primary and second-level education sectors; to facilitate the development of all pupils in the primary and second-level education sectors, particularly those with special needs, by the provision of a comprehensive psychological service for schools, teachers and children; to provide advice on education policy and issues across the full spectrum of provision, including out-of-school programmes. The Regional Subdivision is responsible for the delivery and management of inspection/evaluation services and related advisory activities in schools and educational centres in five regional business units covering the country.

The **National Council for Curriculum and Assessment** (NCCA) advises the Minister on all aspects of the curriculum, provides curricular objectives and guidelines, and advises on assessment methods and on transition arrangements from primary to second-level schools. The **Teaching Council** was established on a statutory basis in March 2006 to promote teaching as a profession at primary and post-primary levels, and in particular to promote the continuing professional development of teachers, establish and maintain a register of teachers, regulate the teaching profession, and maintain and improve standards of teaching, knowledge, skill and competence.

The aim of the **Centre for Early Childhood Education and Development**, established in 2002, is to develop and coordinate early childhood education in pursuance of the objectives of the White Paper *Ready to Learn* and to advise the Department of Education and Science on policy issues in this area. The Centre’s brief covers children from 0 to 6 years of age in a wide variety of settings, including families, nurseries, crèches, playgroups, child minders, pre-schools and the infant classes of primary schools.

The **State Examinations Commission** is a new body established by statutory order in March 2003. The Commission assumed responsibility for the operation of the State Certificate Examinations from the Department of Education and Science from 2003 onwards. The organization is staffed by civil servants and there are five Commissioners appointed by the Minister for Education and Science. The Commission is responsible for the operation of all aspects of the established Leaving Certificate, Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme, Leaving Certificate Applied and Junior Certificate Examinations including written, oral, aural and practical components and assessed course work in some subjects. Certain trade and professional examinations are also organized.

Legislation passed in 1971 set up the **Higher Education Authority** (HEA) with responsibility for furthering the development of higher education and assisting in the coordination of State investment in higher education and preparing proposals for such investment. In addition, the Authority advises the Minister on the need or otherwise for the establishment of new institutions of higher education, on the nature and form of those institutions and on the legislative measures required in relation to their establishment. It is also required to maintain a continuous review of the demand and need for higher education. The annual block grant to the universities is paid to and distributed by the HEA. From 2007, the fourteen Institutes of Technology, including the State’s largest third-level institute, the Dublin Institute of Technology, have been placed under the responsibility of HEA.

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 of Technology 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 recognized by academic, professional, trade and craft bodies. Most colleges also have courses leading directly to the examinations of the many professional institutes.

The National Council for Vocational Awards (NCVA) was established on an *ad hoc* basis in October 1991 to develop a comprehensive assessment and certification system for a wide range of vocational programmes with particular reference to the education sector. Its functions have been transferred to the **Further Education, Training and Awards Council**, set up as a statutory body in June 2001 under the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act of 1999. Its mission is to make quality assured awards in accordance with national standards within the national framework, creating opportunities for all learners in further education and training to have their achievements recognized, and providing access to systematic progression pathways.

TEASTAS, the Irish National Certification Authority, was established on an interim basis in 1995. Its main function was to advise the Minister on the establishment of an integrated framework of certification for all education and training outside of the universities. It issued its first report in January 1997 and its second in January 1998. These reports contained different proposals for the format for a new authority or authorities that would be responsible for certification and would guarantee quality. The Qualifications (Education and Training) Act of 1999 is substantially based on the proposals in the second report. The **National**

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Qualifications Authority of Ireland was established in February 2001. The Authority itself has three principal objectives which are set out in the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act: (i) 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; (ii) 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; and (iii) the promotion and facilitation of access, transfer and progression throughout the span of education and training provision. The way that the Authority undertakes to meet these objects is two-fold: it works 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; and it works closely with the awards Councils (the Further Education and Training Awards Council and the HETAC) on their validation, award making and quality assurance processes.

The National Council for Special Education was set up to improve the delivery of education services to persons with special educational needs arising from disabilities with particular emphasis on children. The Council was first established as an independent statutory body by order of the Minister for Education and Science in December 2003. With effect from 1 October 2005 it has been formally established under the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004. That Act sets out the general functions of the Council as follows: planning and coordinating provision of education and support services to children with special educational needs; disseminating information on best practice concerning the education of children with special educational needs; providing information to parents in relation to the entitlements of children with special educational needs; assessing and reviewing resources required by children with special educational needs; ensuring that progress of students with special educational needs is monitored and reviewed; reviewing education provision for adults with disabilities; advising educational institutions on best practices; consulting with voluntary bodies; conducting research and publishing findings.

There are a number of other bodies, both statutory and non-statutory, which have a relationship with the Department of Education and Science. These include, for example, the National Education Welfare Board, the National Adult Learning Council, the National Centre for Guidance in Education, the National Coaching and Training Centre, and the National Centre for Technology in Education, established in 1998 under the auspices of the Department of Education and Science to provide advice, support and information on the use of information and communications technology (ICT) in education.

While certain categories of schools, such as community and model schools, are the property of the Minister for Education, Irish schools, in the main, are owned not by the State, but by community groups, traditionally religious groups (although, more recently, schools have been formed under the aegis of other groups, in particular all-Irish and multi-denominational groups) and vocational education committees. Schools are managed by Boards of Management, representative of the owners/trustees, teachers and parents, by individual managers, appointed by the owners/trustees, or by Vocational Education Committees, which act as an
intermediate administrative tier and oversee a wide range of educational services in the vocational sector.

The day-to-day running of national primary schools is the responsibility of Boards of Management. Secondary schools, educating about 60% of students in the second-level sector, are privately owned and managed institutions; the majority of schools are managed by religious communities and the remainder by Boards of Governors and individuals. They are recognized by the Department of Education and Science and are subject to its regulations. The State gives considerable financial assistance to these schools, including payment of the teachers’ salaries and allowances, per capita grants for each recognized student, and grants in lieu of tuition fees to the 95% participating in the free education scheme. The salaries and allowances of teachers in fee-paying schools are also paid from State funds. In the main, these schools are not eligible for other grants under the free education scheme. Protestant-managed fee-paying schools receive assistance under the Protestant block grant, in lieu of the per capita grant, and are also eligible for other grants available under the free education scheme. Vocational schools, are administered by, and funded through, Vocational Education Committees. Community and comprehensive schools are managed by Boards of Management of differing compositions. The Boards of Management of community schools are representative of the local Vocational Education Committee, the religious communities, parents and teachers. The Boards of Management of comprehensive schools are representative of the relevant diocesan religious authority, the local Vocational Education Committee and the Minister for Education and Science. Community and comprehensive schools are allocated individual budgets by the State.

A network of ten Regional Offices (including two offices in Dublin) of the Department of Education and Science has been established since 2002 as a consequence of the Government’s decentralization programme. Similarly, there are offices of the National Educational Psychological Service in ten regions (including Dublin).

The National Parents’ Council, with its primary and post-primary tiers, affords parents the opportunity and the mechanism for having a voice in national decisions on educational issues. Parents are represented at the individual school level by parents’ representatives on boards of management and by parents’ associations.
Structure and organization of the education system

Ireland: structure of the education system


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Pre-school education

The pre-school is an integral part of the primary school to which it is attached and operates within the general framework of the primary school system. Although children in Ireland are not obliged to attend school until the age of 6, most 4-year-olds and almost all 5-year-olds are enrolled in infant classes in primary schools. Pre-school education is provided in the main by privately funded childcare facilities. The Department of Education funds a number of pre-school initiatives, focusing in particular on children at risk.

Primary education

As children may be enrolled in primary education on their fourth birthday, primary schools accommodate an age group which in many other countries is considered pre-school or nursery. The typical primary school divides pupils by age into eight year-groups or standards ranging from Junior and Senior Infants to Sixth Class. The normal age for completing primary education is 12 years. The primary education sector comprises primary schools, special schools and non-aided private primary schools.

Secondary education

Secondary 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 the senior cycle there is an optional one-year Transition Year Programme followed by a choice of three two-year Leaving Certificate programmes. The Senior Cycle caters to students in the 15-18-year-old age group. Students normally sit for the examination at the age of 17 or 18, after five or six years of post-primary education. The second-level sector comprises secondary, vocational, community and comprehensive schools.

An increasing number of courses are available to students on completion of second-level education (age 17+). These courses are organized mainly in vocational schools and offer a wide variety from repeat Leaving Certificate courses, vocational preparation courses and pre-third level courses. There are more than 300 post-Leaving Certificate courses of either one or two years’ duration, all provided under the Vocational Education Act.

The higher education or third-level sector comprises the universities, the institutes of technology, the colleges of education as well as some non-state-aided private higher education colleges. At the colleges of National University of Ireland, the duration of study for the first degree (bachelor’s degree) is, with some exceptions, three years. First-degree courses in engineering, agriculture and science generally take four years, five years in the case of architecture and veterinary, and five or six years for dentistry. Six years are required for medicine. The first postgraduate degree (master’s degree) requires another one to three years of study and can be taken either by thesis or by examination and minor thesis. A further two years at least are normally required for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) and four years for a higher doctorate, such as Doctor of Science (D.Sc.) or Doctor of Literature (D.Litt).

The vast majority of primary schools operate a year from the beginning of September to the end of June—a total of 183 official school days. The private primary
schools normally have a shorter school year. At the discretion of the Board of Management, secondary schools may operate a five or six day week. Schools adopting a five-day week must operate a minimum of 179 days. If the school has a six-day week it is required to be in operation for a minimum of 199 days. Twelve days of public examinations (usually the last three weeks of June) may be included as part of the 179 days required at second level since the majority of the examination centres are in the schools.

The financing of education

The current and capital costs of primary schools, including the full cost of teacher salaries, are predominantly funded by the State and supplemented by local contributions. In addition, special funding arrangements are in place for some schools, for example, in disadvantaged areas and for children with special needs.

In recent years in response to local parental demand, a number of multi-denominational schools, and a number of primary schools where education is through the medium of Irish, have been established. The multi-denominational schools receive State support similar to denominational schools. The all-Irish schools receive full capital grants, an additional 50% of the normal capitation grants and usually have an extra teacher. Teachers in all-Irish schools receive a special annual allowance. Most of the all-Irish schools function as denominational, with Catholic Bishops as patrons.

All vocational, comprehensive and community schools are funded directly or indirectly by the Department of Education and Science. The majority of voluntary (privately owned) secondary schools receive capitation grants and some additional grants from the Department. Full-time and other teachers who are recognized as being within the quota receive most of their salaries from the Department. Since 1969, the school management authorities paid an annual sum to each incremental teacher: this was called the basic or school salary. The Department paid the bulk or incremental salary. Traditionally the voluntary school managers paid the basic salary as a token of their role as employer. However, from 6 April 1996 each incremental teacher’s salary is paid in total from the Department of Education and Science, the sum per teacher being deducted from the school’s capitation grant. The fee-paying voluntary secondary schools do not receive capitation or other grants. However, their teachers’ salaries are almost fully paid by the Department: the school authorities as employers continue to pay the “basic” sum annually. Along with the Vocational Education Committee the religious communities contribute about 10% of the capital cost of Community Schools—though Vocational Education Committee money comes from the State. The State pays the balance (90%) of capital cost and all of the running costs. Boards of Management submit an annual estimate to the Department of Education and Science which then allocates a school budget.

Higher education institutions receive income by way of State grants, tuition fees paid by students and, in the case of the universities and technological colleges, income earned from research and development and other activities.

Although the removal of barriers to more equal participation at third level requires a range of policy measures, fee and maintenance costs are a major constraint.
These were mitigated to some extent by the student support schemes. Widespread concern about the equity of the student grant schemes and the regressive impact of income tax relief for covenants led the Government to abolish undergraduate tuition fees in publicly funded third-level institutions. In 1996, students paid half-fees and from 1997 undergraduate fees in these institutions have been abolished. At present the abolition of fees does not apply to part-time students. Income tax relief at the standard rate will also be available for fees paid for approved courses in private colleges.

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 some IRL£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. According to national data, almost 6.4 billion euro (€) was provided for the education sector in 2004. About 80% and 77% of expenditure, at primary and second level respectively, was spent on salaries and superannuation. Education and related expenditure amounted to €2,415.9 million at the first level, €2,464.6 million at the second and further education level, and €1,504 million at the higher education level. The total current expenditure (at all levels) amounted to €5,930.9 million.

According to Eurostat, the total public expenditure on education represented 4.75% of GDP in 2004.

The educational process

Pre-primary education

As mentioned, there is no national system of pre-school education in Ireland and primary schools may accept children to infant classes on or after their fourth birthday. Most of the children are in these classes at age 4 and about 99% at age 5. The curriculum in those two years is part of an integrated programme which extends for eight years to the end of primary schooling. Each pre-school employs fully qualified primary school teachers and qualified childcare assistants. Parental involvement is also a fundamental part of the programme.

When pre-schooling services exist, they are usually private and outside the formal education system. Most of pre-school playgroups are privately owned registered with the Irish Playgroups Association. The health authorities also give grants to voluntary bodies, to provide pre-schooling for children with disabilities and for disadvantaged groups. These are mainly in nurseries and in community playgroups run by voluntary agencies.

Most pre-schools offer a curriculum that aims at giving children an experience of the fun that learning can be: games, educational toys, sand, clay, water, paint, musical instruments are to be found in many pre-schools. Speech development through rhythm, rhymes and poems, story-telling, puppetry, mime and drama may also be used. At the appropriate ages, children will be introduced to the written word and to the elements of reading and writing. Developing the number concept will also

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be part of the curriculum offered. There is wide variety in the number of hours children spend in pre-schools. To help parents, many pre-schools look after children from 8:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m. Children who attend primary school before the compulsory age will usually spend from 9:15 a.m. until between 1:00 and 2:30 p.m. in infant classes. The normal curriculum laid down for primary education is followed in these classes and monitoring of pupils’ progress through continuous observation is a normal part of teachers’ professional work.

The Centre for Early Childhood Education and Development, operational since October 2002, develops and coordinates early childhood education in pursuance of the objectives of the White Paper *Ready to Learn* and advises the Department of Education and Science on policy issues in this area. The Centre is responsible for: establishing a national quality framework for early childhood education in all its aspects which is capable of being applied in the various settings in which early education is provided; developing targeted interventions for children up to 6 years of age who are disadvantaged or who have special needs, building on the experience of existing initiatives; and laying the groundwork for the establishment of an Early Childhood Agency as envisaged by the White Paper. The activities of the Centre target children from 0 to 6 years of age in a wide variety of settings, including families, nurseries, crèches, playgroups, child minders, pre-schools and the infant classes of primary schools.

**Primary education**

Primary education is founded on the belief that high-quality education enables children to realize their potential as individuals and to live their lives to the fullest capacity as is appropriate to their particular stage of development. A good primary education gives children a firm basis for future participation in and progression through the education system. The *Green Paper* (1992) sums up the aims of the primary curriculum as follows: to enable pupils to communicate effectively, to master the two languages (Irish and English) taught in the primary schools; to enable pupils to develop their understanding of mathematical concepts and become numerate; to develop some appropriate understanding of science and their environment; to enjoy and to develop an appreciation of the arts; to grow in understanding of their own religion and in tolerance of others; and to develop appropriate health awareness. The *White Paper* (1995) re-iterated these aims.

The primary education sector comprises national schools, special schools and non-aided private primary schools. There were 3,157 national schools and 127 special national schools in 2004/05. These schools catered for 449,298 full-time pupils, including 9,357 pupils with special education needs in national schools and 6,621 pupils in special national schools. In the same school year, national schools were staffed by 26,282 full-time teachers, and the pupil/teacher ratio was 1:17.1. Most primary schools are co-educational.

The vast majority of the primary schools are state-aided parish schools, having been established under diocesan patronage. The State gives explicit recognition to their denominational character. The privately-owned primary schools are not part of this system, but they offer broadly a similar type of education as primary schools. In recent years, a small number of multi-denominational schools have been established.
in response to local parental demand, and these receive State support on the same terms as denominational schools.

The average age for starting school is age 4 and the typical primary school divides pupils by age into eight year-groups or standards ranging from junior and senior infants to Standard VI. However, in smaller schools it is necessary to combine different class levels with one teacher, for example infants and senior infants will often be taught in one class; Standards I and II, or at times, I, II and III may be combined. Normally pupils who spend less than two terms in junior infant classes in one year will be retained in the same grade in the following year. On occasion, a pupil who moves from one national school to another may be asked to repeat junior infants or senior infants class in the second school. More than half the classes in primary schools are single grade classes. Some are multi-grade classes and almost a quarter of all classes are consecutive grade classes or classes where two Standard groups are combined, for example first and second standard together.

There are different levels of responsibility for the development and implementation of the curriculum. At national level, the curriculum is formulated by the Minister of Education on the advice of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) and the Department of Education and Science oversees its implementation through its Inspectorate. At school level, the particular character of the school makes a vital contribution. Adaptation of the curriculum to suit the individual school is achieved through the preparation and continuous updating of a school plan.

The primary school curriculum is based on the following principles: (i) the full and harmonious development of the child, with due allowances made for individual differences; (ii) the central importance of activity and guided-discovery learning and teaching methods; and (iii) teaching and learning through an integrated curriculum and through activities related to the child’s environment. These principles identify a child-centred approach, outlined in the 1971 review of the primary school curriculum, which radically changed the philosophy and methodology of primary education from its previous emphasis on subject-centred, didactic teaching. Primary education now emphasizes the central position of the individual child and promotes a curriculum related to the child’s needs and interests.

The child-centred principles of the 1971 curriculum were endorsed in 1990 in reports by the Review Body on the Primary Curriculum and the Primary Education Review Body. The following year, the Minister of Education invited the NCCA to conduct a continuing review of the primary curriculum, while retaining the basic principles adopted in 1971. 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/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 organized under seven areas of learning, some of which are further subdivided into subjects: language (Irish and English); mathematics; social, environmental and scientific education (SESE, including 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 ICT. 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 has been supported by an extensive programme of in-service training for all primary teachers.

**Primary education: suggested minimum weekly time framework**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Curriculum area</th>
<th>Number of weekly hours in each grade (min.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Short day (infants classes, age 4–6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– First language (Irish/English)</td>
<td>3h</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Second language (English/Irish)</td>
<td>2h30m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>2h15m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social, environmental and scientific education (includes history, geography and science)</td>
<td>2h15m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social, personal and health education</td>
<td>30m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical education</td>
<td>1h</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts education (includes visual arts, music and drama)</td>
<td>2h30m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discretionary curriculum time</td>
<td>1h</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total secular instruction</strong></td>
<td><strong>15h</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious education (typically)</td>
<td>2h30m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assembly time</td>
<td>1h40m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roll call</td>
<td>50m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breaks</td>
<td>50m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreation (typically)</td>
<td>2h30m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>23h20m</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Department of Education and Science, 1999.* In accordance with the Rules for National Schools and relevant circulars, the suggested time framework is based on the minimum of four hours of secular instruction, with the modification of that to take account of the shorter day in infant classes. [...] The period of discretionary curriculum time can be allocated, at the teacher’s and at the school discretion, to any of the six curriculum areas or to any of the subjects within them. This framework also allows for the inclusion of a modern language in the curriculum where this is available. The element of discretionary curriculum time can be used for different purposes and in different ways. It could be used, for example, to provide extra time for the completion of an aspect of learning in one subject, to respond to children’s needs in particular areas of learning, or to afford flexibility when dealing with a specific project or theme (p. 67-68).

Under the regulations of the Department of Education and Science, primary schools are required to open not later than 9:30 a.m. In practice, most schools tend to have
begun classes by 9:00 a.m. Primary schools are required to provide four hours of instruction per day in all classes except infants classes where three hours are required. A flexible approach consisting of blocks of time rather than clearly defined half-hour periods is advised. However, there is a pattern evident in the numbers of teaching hours per year allocated to specific subjects. In the early years of primary schooling 129 hours are devoted to the mother tongue (Irish) and 110 hours to English. At the end of primary school, 184 hours are given to the mother tongue and 147 to the second language. Hours for mathematics increase from 110 to 147 by age 9. Artistic activities take up 129 hours approximately at all levels. Religion is taught for 92 hours while sport receives an annual 37 hours. Teaching the human and natural sciences increases from 37 hours to 97 hours. Officially, no other European language is taught in primary schools. However, a small number of schools provide opportunities for learning a European language (usually French); this is taught after school hours and usually funded by parents.

The Education Act 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. Primary school teachers carry out their own assessment of pupils’ performance, either through standardized tests or their own tests based on areas of the curriculum. While many teachers of senior classes give regular tests to assess progress, all teachers follow some method of continually assessing their pupils. End-of-year tests are given in most classes. Reports (normally in writing) are provided for parents. A formal report card is completed by each teacher about each pupil at the end of primary education. These cards are sent to the pupil’s secondary school and are not given to parents. It is the normal procedure that pupils advance from one class to another at the end of each school year, and repeating a class is not usual.

There is no formal examination at the end of primary education and no formal certification is provided. The recommendations of the NCCA regarding assessment in the primary curriculum do not specify certification as such. The Council recommends the development of a standard pupil profile and a pupil report card with access to dated assessment being available to teachers, head teachers or principals and parents.

Basic staffing levels for primary schools are governed by the numbers of pupils in the schools and the manner in which these numbers fall within the enrolment ranges specified by the Department of Education and Science in the schedule of enrolments for the appointment and retention of teachers. Substantial additional teaching resources have been provided to schools in recent years. As a result the overall pupil/teacher ratio has been reducing steadily. At primary level, the creation of additional teaching posts, together with the retention of the demographic dividend, means that the pupil/teacher ratio was 1:17.1 in 2004/05. 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, has a significant step towards improving the educational experience of primary school pupils.
Secondary education

Secondary education consists of a three-year junior cycle followed by a two- or three-year senior cycle. As a rule, children may transfer to secondary schools when they have completed the full primary course, usually at age 12. The Junior Certificate Examination is taken after three years. 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 a Transition Year programme before the commencement of the three two-year Leaving Certificate programmes. The Transition Year has been introduced to provide students with enriched opportunities for personal development. Accordingly, schools are not permitted to offer a three-year Leaving Certificate programme, since this would undermine the Transition Year objectives. The second-level sector comprises secondary, vocational, community and comprehensive schools. There were 335,162 full-time students in this sector in 2004/05, attending a total of 742 publicly aided schools; 403 of these schools were secondary (with 185,026 students enrolled), 247 were vocational (with 97,693 students) and 92 were community or comprehensive (with 52,443 students). The number of full-time teachers was 21,034 and the number of full-time equivalent of part-time teachers was 3,956; the student/teacher ratio was 1:13.4. In addition, there were a few other aided and non-aided schools.

Educational objectives at second level promote the right of each student to full and equal access, participation and benefit from educational provision, in accordance with her/his ability. Whatever their socio-economic background, gender or special educational or curriculum needs, individual students are encouraged to reach their full potential as they advance through the education system. The education of each student is valued equally, despite a wide range of individual differences in background, abilities or early experiences and achievements. The junior cycle covers a vital period in young people’s lives when they encounter significant changes in their educational experience. The Junior Certificate Programme was introduced in 1989 to provide a single unified programme for students broadly between 12 and 15 years of age. This programme seeks to extend and deepen the quality of students’ educational experience in terms of knowledge, understanding, skills and competencies and to prepare them for further study at senior cycle. The Junior Certificate Programme also contributes to the moral and spiritual development of students, and encourages them to develop qualities of responsible citizenship in a national, European and global context.

Secondary schools offer a broadly similar, comprehensive programme during the three-year junior cycle. Facilities for certain subjects such as metalwork, woodwork (materials technology) and mechanical drawing are generally more available in the state-funded schools (vocational, comprehensive and community) and in boys’ single-sex schools. The provision of modern languages, art, music, drama and home economics has traditionally been more widespread in voluntary secondary schools. The introduction of the Junior Certificate Examination and the three-year curriculum leading to it, has helped to bring the types of secondary schools towards a fairly similar pattern of curricular provision.

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. The junior cycle curriculum is subject-centred and teachers specialize in particular subjects. Students take a number of core subjects (Irish, English, mathematics, history, geography and civics) and at least two other subjects from a list that includes languages, science, home economics, business studies, music, art, craft and design. Comprehensive and community schools are required to provide comprehensive curricula combining academic and practical subjects. Vocational schools, by tradition, emphasize the practical subjects. As a rule, students in junior cycle study from eight to ten subjects for the Junior Certificate Examination. In addition, the majority of schools also include physical education and religious education.

**Junior cycle of secondary education: recommended time allocation for each area of experience (national guidelines)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Curriculum area</th>
<th>Minimum recommended time allocation (in %)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language, literature and communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) vernacular language</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) other European language</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematical studies and applications</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science and technology</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social, political, environmental education</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts education</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical education</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious and moral education</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidance, counselling, pastoral care</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discretionary allocation</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 1999.*

In August 1996, the Minister for Education announced the introduction of the Junior Certificate Elementary Programme. The new programme offers an alternative approach to achieve the aims and educational standards of the Junior Certificate. It caters to disadvantaged students who have serious difficulties with basic literacy, numeracy and other skills or lack adequate confidence because of experiencing repeated failure in their schooling.

All schools organize tests during and towards the end of the school year. These school-based examinations are usually formal and set by the subject teachers. Reports are normally sent to parents. Many teachers also give regular tests within class periods to stimulate the learning process. A small number of schools (mainly fee-paying private voluntary secondary schools) have more frequent tests and forms of evaluation to provide information for pupils and parents. The majority of the schools also organize formal tests a few months prior to the sitting of the Junior Certificate examination to assess the performance levels of students. The Junior Certificate examination is an externally set and externally assessed state examination.

The aims of the senior cycle are 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. The objectives are to develop each student’s potential to the full, and equip them for work or further education.

A major restructuring of the senior cycle took place in recent years, involving four main elements: (i) the provision of the Transition Year Programme as an option for all second-level schools; (ii) the revision of the established Leaving Certificate; (iii) the development and expansion of the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme (LCAP); and (iv) the development and expansion of the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). An important overall objective of the restructuring of the senior cycle is to provide for the holistic development of all students progressing to the end of senior cycle and to foster the sense of self-esteem, self-reliance and innovation which will empower them to actively shape the social and economic future of society.

Introduced in the early 1970s on a pilot basis, the transition year became an option in 1987 and since September 1994, all junior cycle students had a right to an additional year in senior cycle. Almost 40% of those students entering senior cycle in the school year 2000/01 were participants in the Transition Year Programme. While the curricular content of the transition year is a responsibility of the school, the Department of Education’s guidelines advise appropriate consultation with students and parents. The curriculum includes social education, moral education, education for living (including homemaking and education for parenthood, employment and leisure), philosophy and applied logic, music and the arts, Irish studies, civilization courses for pupils of European languages, visual and media education, communication skills, amongst many areas of the curriculum. A feature of the transition year programme is work experience. Participation in community service, as well as mini-company work is recommended. Most schools that offer transition year programmes organize some form of local work experience which is then monitored by personnel in the work situation as well as from the school. Part of the work of the transition year is developing appropriate forms of pupil evaluation. In general, schools continue to set twice-yearly tests as in the junior cycle. Prior to the Leaving Certificate Examination the majority of schools organize formal pre-leaving examinations. These help teachers and pupils to assess their performance levels. The Department of Education and Science does not provide formal certification on completion of the transition year programme. However, schools continue to develop appropriate forms of certification to suit their pupils.

Senior cycle students must take at least five subjects from a wider list than that offered to junior cycle students and one of the five must be Irish. The list is divided into five groups: languages (ten subjects), sciences (six subjects), business studies (four subjects), applied sciences (eight subjects), and social studies (six subjects). While it is officially recommended that each student should take at least three subjects from one group and two from outside the group, for various reasons this is rarely observed in practice. Apart from these five groups, a new group was introduced in 1989 under the LCVP. Since many subject curricula, notably those for languages, are vertically structured—i.e., programmes in the senior cycle build on and assume completion of those for the same subject in junior cycle—it is often difficult for students to alter significantly their subject choices between the two levels.
The Leaving Certificate Examination is the terminal examination of post-primary education. Students normally sit the examination at the age of 17 or 18, after five to six years of post-primary education. This examination is used for a variety of purposes; for example, as an entry qualification for a range of third-level institutions, including the universities and as a selection test for entry to many kinds of employment. This variety of use makes the Leaving Certificate a dominant influence upon much of the work of second-level schools, affecting curriculum, methodology, assessment and organization. However, two alternative Leaving Certificates have been developed; the LCVP (since 1989) and the LCAP. In 2003, over 53,000 students took the Leaving Certificate examination.

The LCVP is the normal Leaving Certificate Programme with a concentration on technical subjects and some additions. In 1994, it was expanded to broaden the choice of subjects and to strengthen the vocational content of the programme by including three link modules on 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.

The LCAP is a self-contained, two-year programme replacing and expanding on the existing Senior Certificate and Vocational Preparation and Training (VPT) Programme. It is a person-centered programme involving a cross-curricular approach rather than a subject-based structure. It has as its primary objective the preparation of participants for adult and working life through relevant learning experiences. The framework of the LCAP consists of a number of modules grouped under three general headings: (i) general education (at least 30% of the time); (ii) vocational education (at least 30% of the time); (iii) vocational preparation (at least 25% of the time). Unlike the other two leaving certificate programmes, the LCAP is cross-curricular and has a different form of assessment. This includes the accumulation of credits through three distinct and complementary modes: satisfactory completion of modules (40 credits); student tasks (27 credits); external examination (33 credits). Certification is earned on the basis of overall performance and has three levels: pass (60 credits); merit (70 credits); distinction (85 credits). The LCAP is intended to meet the needs of those students who either chose not to opt for other leaving certificate programmes or who are not adequately catered to by other programmes. While certification in the LCAP is not a qualification for direct entry to higher education, students who successfully complete the programme are able to proceed to many post-leaving certificate vocational and training courses.

As well as the courses provided in third-level institutions, a wide range of vocational education and training courses are offered at the post-secondary level. Post-Leaving Certificate courses are full-time one- and two-year programmes of integrated education, training and work experience provided in schools and colleges outside the third level sector to prepare participants for employment or further education/training, and develop the skills needed for specific occupations. The new system of apprenticeship training provides alternating on-the-job training in conjunction with off-the-job training in Training Centres and Institutes of Technology. On successful completion of training an apprentice receives the National

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Craft Certificate awarded by the Further Education and Training Awards Council. Traineeships combine workplace training with formal off-the-job tuition in a Training Centre which is conducted by experienced and professional trainers. Traineeships vary in duration from six to twenty-four months, depending on the scope of the curriculum, the skills requirement of the occupation and the entry level of the trainees.

Assessing learning achievement nationwide

The Government has agreed 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. The State Examinations Commission was established by statutory order in March 2003 and assumed responsibility for the operation of the State Certificate Examinations from the Department of Education and Science from 2003 onwards. The organization is staffed by civil servants and there are five Commissioners appointed by the Minister for Education and Science. The Commission is responsible for the operation of all aspects of the established Leaving Certificate, Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme, Leaving Certificate Applied and Junior Certificate Examinations including written, oral, aural and practical components and assessed course work in some subjects. Certain trade and professional examinations are also organized.

The 2004 National Assessment of Mathematics Achievement (NAMA 2004), carried out by the Inspectorate with the support of the Educational Research Centre, has been the fifth in a series of national assessments of mathematics in primary schools, dating back to 1977, and the first since the introduction of the 1999 Primary School Curriculum. The purpose of NAMA 2004 was to describe performance in mathematics at fourth class level in primary schools, identify variables associated with achievement, and compare performance with performance on the 1999 National Assessment of Mathematics Achievement. The main findings included the following: (i) the average scale scores of pupils in 1999 and 2004 were similar; (ii) pupils performed best on the skill Understanding & Recalling (62%), and least well on Applying & Problem Solving (48%); performance on Reasoning items improved significantly between 1999 and 2004; (iii) almost 12% of pupils achieved at an advance level (Level 5) on the overall proficiency scale, while 15% achieved at or below the minimum level (Level 1); (iv) pupils achieved a significantly lower mean score on the calculator section than on any other section, indicating that they found the calculator items to be more challenging.

Higher education

The higher education or third-level sector comprises the universities, the institutes of technology, the colleges of education as well as some non-state aided private higher education colleges. According to data of the Higher Education Authority (HEA), in 2005/06 there were 82,522 full-time students enrolled in HEA-funded institutions (of whom 66,834 at the undergraduate and 15,688 at the postgraduate level); there were also 16,315 part-time students, of whom 8,742 at the undergraduate and 7,573 at the postgraduate level. In the same year, there were 52,842 full-time students enrolled in the institutes of technology and the Dublin Institute of Technology, of whom 51,517 at the undergraduate level.
There are seven universities recognised under the Universities Act of 1997: University College Cork, University College Dublin, National University of Ireland Galway, National University of Ireland Maynooth, Trinity College Dublin, the University of Limerick and Dublin City University. The universities validate and award their own qualifications as well as those of institutions with which they have agreements, such as the colleges of education. The Higher Education Authority is responsible for furthering the development of higher education and assisting in the co-ordination of State investment in higher education and preparing proposals for such investment. In addition, the Authority advises the Minister on the need or otherwise for the establishment of new institutions of higher education, on the nature and form of those institutions and on the legislative measures required in relation to their establishment. It is also required to maintain a continuous review of the demand and need for higher education. The annual block grant to the universities is paid to and distributed by the HEA. After the passing of the Institute of Technology Act of 2006, the fourteen Institutes of Technology, including the State’s largest third-level institute, the Dublin Institute of Technology, have been placed under the responsibility of HEA.

The universities validate and award their own qualifications as well as those of institutions with which they have an agreement, such as the colleges of education. The autonomy of the Universities ensures that inspection and evaluation are within their own remit. External examiners from the United Kingdom, Europe and the United States of America have been involved in the monitoring of standards for degrees, postgraduate degrees and doctorates. The approach to quality assurance in higher education has been a combination of the development of performance indicators and of internal quality review procedures within the colleges, together with appropriate external monitoring with assistance through a proposed academic audit unit within the HEA. Accordingly, the Department of Education and Science, the university Presidents and the HEA have established a joint working group to develop appropriate performance indicators for the university sector; they will embrace the widest possible range of activities, including teaching and research. Indicators for the non-university colleges are being developed in a similar fashion. The National Council for Educational Awards (NCEA) is also involved in monitoring of standards for an increasing number of awards.

The range of faculties, departments and subjects varies from college to college. At the colleges of NUI, the duration of study for the first degree, the bachelor’s degree, in arts and humanities, the social sciences, law and commerce/business studies, is (with some exceptions) three years. Cognate degrees would generally be of four years’ duration at Trinity College, University of Limerick and Dublin City University. First-degree courses in engineering, agriculture and science generally take four years; five years in the case of architecture and veterinary medicine, five or six years for dentistry. Six years are required for medicine. The first postgraduate degree, the master’s degree, requires another one to three years of study and can be taken either by thesis or by examination and minor thesis. A further two years, at least, are normally required for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.), and four years for a higher doctorate, such as Doctor of Science (D.Sc) or Doctor of Literature (D.Litt). About a third of primary degree graduates proceed to further study, which includes postgraduate degrees, teacher training and other professional training. These colleges provide a comprehensive range of courses ranging from second-level craft apprenticeship programmes right through to two-year certificate,
three-year diploma and four-year degree programmes in the applied fields of engineering, science (including computer science) and business studies. In addition, these Colleges play an important role at the regional level in providing for recurrent educational needs by way of part-time day and evening programmes.

As a general rule, higher education courses include end-of-year examinations. Success in these is necessary for advancement; opportunities for failed students to repeat examinations are widely available. Many university and college courses also include ongoing assessment of assignments, projects, extended essays, research work and field work.

The Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) formerly comprised six constituent colleges operated by the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee. Legislation enacted in 1992 established a single Institute on a statutory basis as a self-governing institution. There is a network of thirteen Institutes of Technology (formerly known as the Regional Technical Colleges) throughout the country. These Institutes offer a wide range of courses in business studies, science, technology and engineering leading to national certificates and diplomas and, in a limited number of areas, to degree qualifications. Legislation enacted in 1992 established these Institutes as self-governing institutions and granted them greater autonomy in their day-to-day operations.

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 recognized by academic, professional, trade and craft bodies. Most colleges also have courses leading directly to the examinations of the many professional institutes. The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) has been established in 2001. The Authority has three principal objectives: (i) 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; (ii) 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; and (iii) the promotion and facilitation of access, transfer and progression throughout the span of education and training provision. 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; and it will work closely with the awards Councils (the Further Education and Training Awards Council and the Higher Education and Training Awards Council) on their validation, award making and quality assurance processes.

As regards the National Framework of Qualifications the first milestone was reached in July 2004 with the announcement of the implementation arrangements for the framework in higher education. The National Qualifications Authority has determined that awards at levels 6 to 10 will be made by the Higher Education and Training Awards Council and the Dublin Institute of Technology, while universities
generally make the awards from level 7 to 10. The framework does not impose any requirements in relation to the duration of programmes, rather, the emphasis is on the development of learning outcomes. Its structure is as follows: Levels 1-5: further education/schools awards; Level 6: higher certificates/advanced certificates (the advanced certificate is a further education and training award at level 6 and is not aligned with the Bologna framework); Level 7: ordinary bachelor’s degree; Level 8: higher diploma, honours bachelor’s degree (levels 7 and 8 correspond to the first cycle of the Bologna framework); Level 9: master’s degree, postgraduate diploma (corresponding to the second cycle of the Bologna process); Level 10: doctoral degree (third-cycle programme).

The training of teachers for primary schools is provided in specialized Colleges of Education which are privately managed but largely financed by the State. There are four colleges in Dublin. A fifth college is located in Limerick. All first-level teachers are now awarded a university degree. Teachers in second-level schools are trained in university one-year postgraduate (Higher Diploma in Education) courses, which most universities offer, or in colleges for particular curricular specializations.

**Special education**

Educational provision for pupils with special needs is made in both mainstream primary and special schools. In 2004/05 there were about 6,600 pupils with special education needs attending 127 special national schools and 9,357 pupils with special needs attending mainstream primary schools. There are also recognized special classes in secondary schools.

In recent years there has been a considerable decline in the numbers of children with physical impairment requiring lengthy hospitalization. Because of their sparse distribution, special schools for children with physical impairment exist in only a few major population centres. Such schools provide education from age 4 to the end of secondary education, as required by the needs of the children. Teachers receive initial training in the Colleges of Education. After some teaching experience many take a further year of full-time study to achieve the diploma in special education. The teachers also avail of opportunities to attend in-service courses dealing with aspects of the general curriculum or related to the particular needs of children with disabilities. The majority of children with physical impairment attend their local national school. Transport to/from school is provided free-of-charge. The costs of adaptations necessary for access to the school building and for the provision of suitable toilet facilities are borne by the state. Special units have been set up in a number of second-level schools to cater for the special requirements of adolescents with physical impairment. In these units the students have the opportunity of following as many subjects as they wish in mainstream classes with the support of resource teachers and care personnel.

It is estimated that about 1.5% of the school-going population are in the category of mild mental handicap, about 0.5% in the category of moderate mental handicap and about 0.4% in the category of severe/profound mental handicap. Entry to the schools is approved only after a full psychological assessment has been made and consideration is given to the adequacy of the child’s present learning situation. In
the senior classes special emphasis is placed on practical subjects, competence in literacy and numeracy, vocational preparation and training and work experience.

The Department of Health, through the aegis of the Health Boards, provides substantial services for children with disabilities before they reach the compulsory school-going age. Special emphasis is placed on the need for early assessment and diagnosis. Parents are advised of the special requirements of the children and are advised on how best to meet those needs. Parents are also encouraged to co-operate with the various specialists in providing therapy, training and early education.

The parents of children with special educational needs are represented by a range of specialist organizations dedicated to the educational advancement of children with particular disabilities. The majority of these organizations are also represented under the umbrella of the Disability Federation of Ireland and the National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education. Parents of children with special educational needs contributed significantly to the formulation of the report of the Special Education Review Committee which provided a blueprint for the development of special education services.

The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act of 2004 gives statutory rights to children with disabilities to assessment of their educational needs and provision for those needs in an inclusive setting, unless such a placement is inappropriate or impractical. The Act sets out a range of services which must be provided, including assessments, education plans and support services. The National Council for Special Education was set up to improve the delivery of education services to persons with special educational needs arising from disabilities with particular emphasis on children. The Council was first established as an independent statutory body by order of the Minister for Education and Science in December 2003. With effect from 1 October 2005 it has been formally established under the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004. That Act sets out the general functions of the Council as follows: planning and coordinating provision of education and support services to children with special educational needs; disseminating information on best practice concerning the education of children with special educational needs; providing information to parents in relation to the entitlements of children with special educational needs; assessing and reviewing resources required by children with special educational needs; ensuring that progress of students with special educational needs is monitored and reviewed; reviewing education provision for adults with disabilities; advising educational institutions on best practices; consulting with voluntary bodies; conducting research and publishing findings.

Private education

Under the Irish Constitution of 1937 the State acknowledges the primacy of the family as the natural educator of the child; parents may choose to educate their children at home or in schools of their choosing. The State’s duty under the Constitution is to provide for free primary education; since compulsory schooling is from age 6 to 16, the State is not obliged to provide for pre-school education. Excluding those voluntary organized pre-schools in disadvantaged areas, there are some 1,750 pre-schools registered with the Irish Playgroups Association. All of these are non-aided, privately owned and administered institutions.
There has been a significant drop in enrollments in private, fee-paying primary schools since the early 1980s. In 1981, approximately 2.7% of all children attended fee-paying primary schools – a total of 15,000 children. By 1993/94 the numbers had fallen to 8,329 or 1.6% of the cohort. Private, non-aided education is not significantly developed. In 1995, there were 68 private primary schools on record – 2.0% of the total number of primary schools aided by the Department of Education and Science. These private primary schools catered to a total of 3,857 children from 3 to 14 years of age. Traditionally, private primary schools tended to be feeder schools for private secondary schools. In recent years there has been a marked tendency on the part of religious orders particularly to close their private primary schools. The existing private primary schools are autonomous in ownership and administration. Normally, teachers in such schools are fully qualified. There is no public funding for these schools. In addition to parents’ fees there may be donations, fund-raising or other private means. Where religious orders are involved, there is usually subsidizing in the form of partial salaries (or none) for the religious teachers.

In 1995, out of a total of 772 secondary schools, 453 or almost 60% were voluntary secondary or independent schools, catering to 231,167 students (approximately 64% of the cohort), and 2.9% or twenty-three of the voluntary secondary schools were owned by non-Catholic groups – mainly Protestant. Legally, all 453 voluntary secondary schools were private in ownership. However, there is a distinction between: (i) fee-paying voluntary secondary schools; and (ii) non-fee-paying voluntary schools. Parents pay fees in the former but the State pays almost all the salaries of recognized teachers. Fees are not paid in the latter and the State pays almost all of the salaries of recognized teachers. In addition, the State pays capitation grants and certain other grants.

To ensure State recognition, all secondary schools must operate in accordance with the Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools, set by the Department of Education and Science. Details regarding appropriate premises, teachers’ qualifications, minimum pupil numbers, the curriculum to be followed are clearly laid down by the Department. These schools are subject to inspection by the Inspectorate. Private secondary schools appoint their own teachers but the Department of Education and Science determines the pupil/teacher ratio, i.e. the quota of teachers. Private schools often choose to employ additional teachers at their own expense in order to provide smaller class groups and a wider choice of curriculum. Headteachers or school principals are appointed exquota; there is no State sanction of these appointments. Each school has a deputy head or vice-principal who is appointed on seniority in the particular school and has teaching duties in accordance with the pupil enrolment. The majority of principals of voluntary schools are members of religious orders, appointed directly by the orders concerned.

**Means of instruction, equipment and infrastructure**

Between 2000 and 2005, over €2 billion was spent on educational infrastructure on over 6,500 individual school building projects. At primary level this has delivered: 57 new schools with construction underway at a further ten new schools; 251 large-scale refurbishment/extension projects; 4,598 small-scale projects typically involving upgrading works in schools and some small-scale extensions. At post-primary level this has delivered: 19 new schools with construction underway at a further 13 new
schools; 129 large-scale refurbishment/extension projects; 1,457 small-scale projects typically involving upgrading works in schools and some small-scale extensions. In addition it has also delivered: thousands of other small-scale works in primary schools under the devolved minor works grant which is paid on an annual basis to all primary schools; and 4,000 grants for the provision of furniture and equipment in schools. (Department of Education and Science, School building programme, key achievements 2000-2005, April 2006).

The main objective of the School Transport Scheme is the provision of transport for children at both first and second level who might otherwise find it difficult to attend school regularly. The School Transport Scheme provides a service each day to some 133,000 pupils/students on 5,750 routes, to primary and post-primary schools.

Funds are provided for fully equipped computer rooms, with the necessary computer equipment, but only where a new school is being built or where an existing school is being extended in the context of a building project. Computer equipment is provided for use in the teaching of Computer Studies or other subjects to which it is relevant. The extent of equipment provided in each case is determined by reference to pre-established norms.

The Schools IT 2000 project was launched in November 1997 and by the end of the year 2000, more than €50 million had been invested in implementing the project. The overall aim of Schools IT 2000 was to ensure that pupils in every school would have the opportunity to achieve computer and Internet literacy and to equip themselves for participation in the information society. A survey carried out in June 2000 showed the following: there were approximately 56,000 multimedia computers in first- and second-level schools, an increase of 65% since 1998; this translates into an average of 8.7 computers per first-level school, and 42.7 computers per second-level school.; pupil/ computer ratios were 17.7:1 at the first level and 13:1 at the second level; 78% of second-level schools had a Local Area Network (LAN); all schools have been provided with an Internet connection since early 1999 and over 90% of schools have used e-mail; 8% of first-level schools and 11% of second-level schools had websites on which school details and student work was published; 78% of second level schools offered certification in ICT skills to students; 92% of first-level teachers reported having some skill in ICT and 74% having some Internet skill; 77% of second level teachers reported having some skill in ICT and 64% having some Internet skill.

A new programme, Blue Print for the Future of ICT in Education, was launched in December 2001 envisaging an investment of approximately €108 million until end of 2003. Recently, the Government announced that developing an e-learning culture in all schools, where ICT is fully embedded in teaching and learning across the curriculum is a major priority, and that between 2008 and 2013 over €250 million will be provided for investment in infrastructure, professional development and technical support.
**Adult and non-formal education**

The White Paper on Adult Education: *Learning for Life*, published in 2000, defined adult education as any “systematic learning undertaken by adults who return to learning having concluded initial education or training”. The concept includes: re-entry by adults to further education; re-entry by adults to third level education; continuing education and training and professional development of people in or re-entering the workforce, regardless of the level; community education; other systematic learning undertaken by adults in a variety of settings and contexts, both formal and informal. An extensive consultation process informed the White Paper *Learning for Life* and marked the adoption of lifelong learning as the governing principle of educational policy.

The term ‘further education’ embraces education and training which occurs after second-level schooling but is not part of the third-level system. This includes programmes such as Post-Leaving Certificate courses, the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (second chance education for the unemployed), programmes in Youthreach and Senior Traveller Training Centres for early school leavers, adult literacy and basic education, and self-funded evening adult programmes in second-level schools. A distinctive feature of further education is its diversity and breadth of provision, and its linkages with other services such as employment, training, area partnership, welfare, youth, school, juvenile liaison, justice, community and voluntary sector interests. A wide range of Government Departments, statutory agencies and voluntary and community organizations provide services in this area.

The Department of Education and Science financially supports a range of national voluntary youth organizations (including voluntary adult involvement and the active participation of young people in the running of their organizations). The national voluntary youth organizations carry out the vast majority of the activities in the youth work area. In addition, a number of agencies at local level provide support services for all the organizations involved in youth work activities in a particular area which are not affiliated to any larger organization, such as clubs, projects and community groupings, as well as local units or groups of national organizations. The services include training, programme development, information, advice and special initiatives to cater to the needs of young people in areas of disadvantage.

The Vocational Training Opportunity Scheme (VTOS), which is administered through the Vocational Education Committees (VECs) as agents of the Department of Education, is designed to provide education and training opportunities for the long-term unemployed; that is, people over 21 years of age who have been in receipt of unemployment payments or signing for credits for at least twelve months. The scheme enables these people to attend full-time secondary education and courses free of charge without foregoing their Social Welfare entitlements. They are also entitled to allowances for travel and meals. The courses, which are specially designed to meet the needs of the long-term unemployed, are of an education and vocational nature. These courses are full-time and are of thirty hours duration per week. The total number of participants under the scheme in September 2002 was 5,174.

In 1988, FAS – the Training and Employment Authority, was established. FAS was formed from three previously separate bodies: ANCO (the Industrial
Training Authority), the Youth Employment Authority and the National Manpower Service. It now provides an integrated labour market service for unemployed persons while also promoting training within Irish industry. The functions of FAS are: training and re-training; employment schemes; placement and guidance services; assistance to community groups and workers cooperatives for the creation of jobs; consultancy and human resource services on a commercial basis outside the State. The Authority operates 20 Training Centres throughout the country.

In 2002, participation in other programmes was as follows: Youthreach and Senior Traveller: 3,520 participants; Adult Education Guidance Initiative: 17,089; Adult and Community Education: 25,000; Adult Literacy: 28,363 learners; self-funded part-time adult education in schools: an estimated 140,000 participants.

Teaching staff

Initial training of teachers for primary education takes place in the Colleges of Education. There are five Colleges of Education whose function it is to educate and professionally prepare teachers for work in primary schools. The colleges are denominational in character and are privately owned. They are funded by grants from the Department of Education and the scheme for free third-level fees. St. Patrick’s College of Education, Dublin is a recognized college of the National University of Ireland (NUI) and had been associated with University College Dublin. In 1993 an agreement was made with Dublin City University (DCU) and as a result from 1996 all degrees, diplomas and certificates are conferred by that university. Students who successfully complete their course are conferred a Bachelor of Education degree by the relevant university. In the case of colleges associated with the NUI these courses are of three years’ duration; for colleges affiliated to the University of Dublin the degree courses last three years and the honours courses, four years. Teachers of home economics are trained in two colleges of education for home economics. These colleges provide a full-time four-year course leading to a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) degree.

The study of Education holds a prominent place in all college programmes. Generally speaking, the subject is presented under three broad headings: (i) theory, including psychology, philosophy, sociology and history; (ii) content, including teaching in the curriculum areas, in order to impart curriculum content and specific subject methodologies; (iii) method, including preparation, presentation, evaluation, class management, resource management. Practical experience of teaching under the supervision and guidance of college staff is given in all three years of the course. Practices vary somewhat between the colleges, but typically a student would spend two periods of two or three weeks’ duration in each of the first two years and a further block period of some four weeks in the third year at teaching practice. The students’ performance during these periods is carefully monitored and assessed by college staff. This internal assessment is subject to moderation in the last year by the associated University and the Department of Education. Generally, students are required to attain an Honours rating in Teaching Practice (A or B on a five-point scale) if they are to receive an honours degree. The choice of academic subjects also varies between colleges.
Second-level teachers are subject specialists trained in a university one-year postgraduate course leading to the Higher Diploma in Education (HED), generally after having completed a BA, BSc or a BComm programme. The Department of Education is not involved in the selection of trainees for the HDE courses. This is a matter for each individual university authority. In general, there is a pattern of open entry to graduates of the university itself or of another university or degree-awarding body of recognized status. Since 1994 a quota system has been in place and competition for entry is very keen in spite of the difficulty of obtaining teaching posts.

Individual variations exist between the colleges in relation to the structure of the HDE course. Generally, the course has three major sections: (i) studies in the foundations of education (philosophy, psychology, sociology, history, curriculum studies and contemporary systems of education); (ii) professional studies (general methodology, special methods relating to school subjects, micro-teaching, classroom interaction analysis and educational measurement and assessment); (iii) practical teaching in schools with the help and advice of supervisors. At least 100 hours must be spent in actual class teaching. Colleges differ in the organizing of teaching practice. In some instances the HDE students spend a number of hours teaching each week throughout the academic year. Other HDE courses concentrate the teaching practice in two days each week, while some courses focus on a block period of approximately six weeks of teaching practice.

The Board of Management of each national school has responsibility for the selection of teachers. This function is exercised through a Selection Board which comprises the Chairperson of the Board of Management, the Principal Teacher and an assessor independent of the Board of Management, to be appointed by the Patron after consultation with the Chairperson. As a general rule, primary education teachers are required to spend one year in probation before being accorded full recognition and the payment of their first salary increment. During the probationary year, the teacher is visited on a number of occasions by the inspector, is observed in action, and the work of the class is evaluated and discussed.

A teacher who wishes to enter secondary school teaching, and to qualify for the receipt of incremental salary, must satisfy the conditions stipulated for registration by the Teaching Council (previously, by the Registration Council for Secondary Teachers). The Teaching Council was established on a statutory basis on 28 March 2006 (Establishment Day) and one of its first tasks has been the registration of teachers. One year from Establishment Day, or at a later date which will be announced by the Teaching Council, all teachers will be required by law to register with the Teaching Council if they are, or want to be, employed in a recognized school. Registration will be renewable annually and a fee will be payable.

For appointment to teaching posts in Institutes of Technology, the Dublin Institute of Technology and other technological colleges, the minimum qualification normally required is a degree from a recognized degree-awarding authority (with the subject or subjects in question taken in the final examination) or an equivalent qualification and not less than two years of approved post-qualification teaching experience.

Compiled by UNESCO-IBE (http://www.ibe.unesco.org/)
The average working week is generally taken to be 35 hours. At second level, teachers are required to teach a minimum of 18 hours per week during the school year and, in practice, not more than 22 hours. Vocational teachers and teachers in comprehensive and community schools are required to teach between 21 and 23 hours per week. In any of the university colleges the usual pattern is a 25-30 week teaching year broken into three terms.

In-service training and professional development of teachers has developed on separate and somewhat different lines within first-level and second-level education. Throughout the system, however, the preponderant role of the central authority in regard to curriculum, syllabi, assessment, certification and school inspection has inevitably meant central responsibility for providing and funding programmes. From the mid-1960s onward, the emphasis has been on programmes designed to help teachers cope with extensive and continuing curriculum reform. At the same time, the growth of special education provision, an increasing awareness of the problems of under-achievers, and the new demands made upon schools and teachers by social and economic change have led to a range of courses related to remediation, guidance counselling and the personal and social development of pupils, referring very often to cross-curricular interventions rather than traditional academic disciplines.

The establishment of a special In-Career Development Unit (ICDU) in the Department of Education and Science has resulted in the development of national policy on teacher in-service. The Teacher Education Section (TES), established in April 2004, incorporates the work of the former ICDU and includes a remit for initial teacher education, which was previously the responsibility of the Colleges Section. TES was formed to reflect the Department’s view of teacher education as a continuum from initial teacher education, to induction and continuing professional development. The work of the Section embraces policy formulation, coordination, general direction and management, quality and financial control in supporting the provision of education and continuing support for teachers and school leaders throughout their careers.

The highest level of participation in in-service training at first level is during the first two weeks of the teachers’ summer holiday (i.e. the first two weeks of July). There is a variety of courses provided by institutions such as Education Centres, Colleges of Education, local interest groups, etc., and they cover a wide range of topics. If they fulfil certain criteria, such courses may be approved by the Department. Generally, the content of the courses must be directly related to the primary school curriculum and/or the organization/management of the school, and/or the professional development of the teacher. In-service training for post-primary teachers is mainly organized by the TES, by subject-associations, Education Centres and third-level educational institutions. They are financed by the Department, in whole or in part, and monitored by the Department’s Inspectorate and the Psychological Service. Courses range from one-day seminars to courses of up to four weeks’ duration.

Education Centres, formerly known as Teachers’ Centres, play a key role in the area of continuing professional development at national and local levels. The network of Education Centres has expanded from nine centres with full-time directors to twenty-one full-time and nine part-time centres. Under the remit of the Department the centres host the national programmes of curriculum reform and the support
services which work on a range of issues relating to teaching and learning. They also provide a range of supports to address identified needs of teachers and schools in their various catchment areas.

**Educational research and information**

The Report on the National Education Convention which was held in Dublin October 1993 stressed the importance of continually improving the quality of education at all levels. A number of the submissions to the Convention acknowledge the need to seek quality through appropriate research and development.

Much of the work of evaluation in the education system is assisted and often carried out by the Educational Research Centre which is located on the campus of St. Patrick's College of Education, Dublin, and works closely with the Department of Education and Science on the work of educational research. The Department of Education and Science is constantly reviewing all its work on the basis of research through the Planning Unit and other sectors, including the In-Career Development Unit. The Statistics Unit is charged with the task of coordinating the gathering of information within the Department. This Unit also collects statistics for educational planning and policy formulation. An annual publication of the statistical information collected is prepared in collaboration with the Central Statistics Office (CSO).

The Educational Studies Association of Ireland is a major agency for the promotion and dissemination of educational research. It also publishes an annual register of research theses conducted in the universities of the whole Island. Staff in the education departments are also involved in many forms of educational research and participate in international joint-research projects.

**Sources**


**Web resources**


EURYBASE, the information database on education systems in Europe: [http://www.eurydice.org/](http://www.eurydice.org/) [In several languages.]
