Minister’s Brief

Overview

May 2016
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent and Learner Charter</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School patronage issues</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy and Accountability consultation</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developments in Inspection of schools, including School Self-Evaluation</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish and Gaeltacht education policy</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital strategy</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Education</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Protection in schools</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Transport</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Needs Assistant and Resource Teacher numbers</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New allocation model</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autism policy advice</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEIS Review</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological service</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Wellbeing</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PART 3</strong> FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING AND HIGHER EDUCATION</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure and Governance</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation of the FET Strategy 2014 – 2019</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of PLC Provision</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of Apprenticeship System and introduction of New Apprenticeships</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation of National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher education performance funding</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technological Universities</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay compliance and strategic HR issues at third level</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Research agenda with the implementation of Innovation 2020</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation of the National Access Plan for Higher Education</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completion and publication of the International Education Strategy</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Skills Agenda</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
National Skills Strategy and Employer Engagement 68
European Social Fund (ESF) 70
European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF) 71

PART 4  INFRASTRUCTURE 72
Implementation of POD and PPOD and its impact 72
Research, Evaluation and Data Management 72
Shared Services and Procurement 73
School Building Programme – 6 year Programme 74
Capital Demands in Further Education and Training and Higher Education 75
Student Accommodation 77
Part 1 - Context

Overview of the System

The mission of the Department of Education and Skills is to facilitate individuals, through learning, to achieve their full potential and contribute to Ireland's social, cultural and economic development.

In pursuit of this mission, the Department has the following high-level goals:

Goal 1 - Learning for Life

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

Goal 2 - Improving Quality and Accountability

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

Goal 3 - Supporting Inclusion and Diversity

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

Goal 4 - Building the right systems and infrastructure

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

In all, there are over 1 million full time learners across the system. These include:

- Over 67,000 pre-school children;
- 916,000 children in over 4000 schools;
- 270,000 in further education and training; and
- 173,000 full time students and 38,000 part-time students in 31 state-funded higher education institutions.

The Education and Skills sector is a major employer, accounting for one third of public sector employees. This includes over 59,000 teachers, 12,000 special needs assistants (SNAs), 23,000 staff in higher education institutions and approximately 4000 staff working in the further education and training sector.

The Department provides a policy, legislative and funding framework for, and supports, education and skills development in early childhood settings, primary and post primary schools, higher education institutions, further education providers, and adult and second
chance education. It provides a range of services directly for the sector. In this, the Department is supported by a number of agencies, details of which are given in the main brief.

The Department is not involved in the direct delivery of education and works in partnership with schools and other education and training providers, parents, students, patrons, staff and communities to achieve its objectives. The Department’s role is reflected in the staff complement of 1289 (as of end December 2015) which is of a limited size in comparison with the scale of the sector and its budget.

**Department location and staff**

The Department is headquartered in Marlborough Street with most of its staff based in its main locations in Dublin (357), Athlone (451) and Tullamore (190). A further 291 staff are also based in a number of regional locations throughout the country. The staffing of the Department at end December 2015 totalled 1289 (1206 whole time equivalents) comprising administrative (general service) grades, professional and technical staff (inspectorate, psychologists in the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), architectural and engineering staff in the Planning and Building area) and other grades (service officers, cleaners and telephonists).

The overall staffing complement of the Department has been reduced by 114 whole time equivalents (9%) since the introduction of the moratorium on public sector recruitment in March 2009. The moratorium has since been replaced by a Delegated Sanction Agreement (DSA) for the recruitment and promotion of staff. Under the new DSA, sanction for recruiting and promoting staff up to and including PO (standard) level and equivalent is restored to the Department, subject to adherence by the Department to binding overall three-year pay ceilings from 2015-2017 and to ongoing compliance with Workforce Planning requirements. To recruit or promote staff at grades above PO (standard) level or equivalent, the consent of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) will still be required.

In the context of the pay ceilings for education that were allocated to the Department as part of the recent budgetary process, there is minimal scope for increases in staff numbers. Instead, the required focus will continue to be on the commitment to ongoing reform and efficiency measures across the sector and the reallocation or reorganisation of work. An annual workforce planning exercise is carried out to identify particular staff/skills shortages throughout the Department and a number of issues have surfaced in this context, particularly in relation to recruitment and retention of IT staff having regard to private sector salary rates and an increased demand for new skills, such as data analytics, project management, economics, evaluation and accountancy.

The senior management team comprises:

Secretary General: Seán Ó Foghlú
Deputy Secretary/Assistant Secretaries (with areas of responsibility):
Peter Baldwin: Further Education and Training, ETB/Solas, European Social Fund/European Globalisation Fund
Ruth Carmody: Central Policy, Statistics, Data Knowledge and Management Unit, Legal Services, Education Sector Reform
Mary Doyle, Deputy Secretary: Higher Education (Equity of Access, Policy and Skills, Research and Funding, Qualifications, International, North/South)
Martin Hanevy: Schools Division
Michael Keogh: Finance, Corporate (Personnel and Departmental IT), Teachers Payroll, Pensions
Kevin McCarthy: Education Sector Industrial Relations, School Transport, Teachers/SNAs Terms and Conditions
Gary Ó Donnchadha: Curriculum and Assessment; Teacher Education; Schools ICT, Early Years Education
Dalton Tattan: Special Education, Residential Institutions Redress, National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), Social Inclusion
Alan Wall: Planning and Building Division
Harold Hislop: Chief Inspector

The Role of the Education System

The Education and Training system operates on three interrelated levels. The individual benefits from education. He/she is developed as a person, while also acquiring the skills to prosper economically, socially and culturally. There is strong evidence to show that individual outcomes improve in line with the level of education attained.

Society as a whole benefits from education and training. Education can be a powerful instrument of social cohesion and cultural development, and serves to instil the deep-rooted values of the Irish people. As such, education is an instrument of social inclusion and development.

Finally, education plays a key role in economic development. Education is central to the economic wellbeing of the country and plays an important role in economic recovery, stability and strength.

This multi-faceted role of the education system is reflected in the range and depth of relationships between the Department and other stakeholders both within and outside the formal education and training system.

Education is delivered in a spirit of partnership with other key stakeholders. This is underpinned by statute, including in the Education Act, 1998. Furthermore, education has an important role in the delivery of a range of high level cross-Governmental objectives in fields such as:

• Delivering Better Outcomes for Children and Young People;
• Healthy Ireland, including promotion of physical activity, healthy eating, the responsible use of alcohol, combatting abuse of tobacco and other substances, promotion of wellbeing, mental health, anti-bullying strategies and the National Suicide Prevention Strategy;
• Labour Market Activation, the Implementation of the National Skills Strategy and Creation of a Knowledge Economy;
• Social Inclusion, including of Travellers, migrants and refugees, people with disabilities, the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion and the National AntiPoverty Strategy; ☐ Child Protection; and ☐ The Irish Language.

The Minister is a member of some Cabinet Committees dealing directly with these areas, such as the Cabinet Committee on Economic Recovery and Jobs, the Committee on Social Policy and Public Sector Reform and the Committee on Irish.

The Department is actively involved in a range of interdepartmental and cross-Government committees as well as broader fora and works with other Government Departments, public bodies, NGOs, civil society and external stakeholders in order to ensure that the Education and Skills sector plays a full and active role in the delivery of national policy in these and other areas.

Officials from the Department are centrally involved in developing good working relationships with stakeholders across a range of issues to ensure that policy objectives are achieved and cohere with policy objectives across the wider socio-economic context.

**Demographics**

The upward trend of previous years in numbers of learners at all levels of the education system will continue for the period 2015 to 2017 and beyond. Pupil numbers in primary schools are projected to increase by 25,000 between 2014/15 and 2017/18 to 569,000, eventually peaking in 2018/2019 at 574,000, while projections for second level are for an increase of 12,000 pupils over the same three year period to 350,000, peaking in 2025/2026 at 405,000.

At third level, numbers of full time students will increase by almost 9,000 over the next three years to 174,000 and will continue to increase until at least 2028. While it is more difficult to estimate demand trends in relation to further education and training places, it is unlikely, given the projected increase in the overall population and the requirement to service an ambitious activation and training agenda, that demand for these places will fall in the short term.

These trends will continue to place considerable pressure on places, funding, teaching numbers, related supports and capital infrastructure.
Budget

The gross voted current expenditure ceiling for 2016 of €8,115 million on Education and Skills services equates to 17% of total Government voted current expenditure, while voted capital expenditure of €595.5 million on education represents 15% of total Government voted capital expenditure. €6.5 billion of gross current expenditure will be spent on pay and pensions. In addition to the above gross allocation an additional €362 million will be spent from the National Training Fund. European Social Fund (ESF) and European Globalisation Fund (EGF) receipts for 2016 will be of the order of €34m.

The Net Voted sum for 2016 is €7,612m compared to €7,572m in 2015, an increase of some €40m or 0.5%. This compares to a 0.8% increase for Government Net Voted Expenditure overall in 2016.

There are 98,354 whole time equivalents (wte’s) employed in the education sector based on 31 December 2015 returns comprising 63,665 teachers, 11,940 special needs assistants, 17,347 third level posts, 1,497 civil servants and 416 in non-commercial state agencies.

The 2016 ceiling for current expenditure provides for some 2,260 additional teaching posts, 850 posts as a result of improvements in the staffing schedule in primary and post primary schools, 810 additional posts to meet demographic pressures and 600 additional resource teachers to meet special education needs.

Expenditure to end March 2016 is more or less on target. However a number of areas could come under pressure in 2016. These include Superannuation and Special Needs Assistants (Pay). The full extent of any possible excess in relation to superannuation will only become clearer later in the year when retirement applications from teachers are made at the end of the current school year.

The Department’s capital allocation remains particularly challenging for the school sector. Under the Stability and Growth Pact, there was an incentive to allocate increased expenditure into gross capital formation. This incentive to move current funds into new capital formation operates by smoothing the additional capital costs over 4 years. The Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform has recently sanctioned an additional €100m in this regard with this Department undertaking to contribute €7m from its 2016 current allocation towards the €25m saving required on the current side. The remaining saving of €18m to be identified will be considered as part of the overall 2016 REV Allocations for all Departments.
The situation will be carefully monitored and will be reported on during the course of the year.

Main Savings Measures Introduced in Budgets 2009-14

The necessity to maintain expenditure within reduced budgets during the period 2009-2014 required the introduction of a range of savings measures across all areas of the education and training sector which are outlined below.

School Staffing

In the primary schools sector the pupil teacher ratio was increased from 27:1 to 28:1 with effect from the 2010/2011 school year. Adjustments were also made to the staffing schedule for small primary schools which resulted in a phased reduction in the number of teaching posts in schools with effect from the 2013/2014 school year. In the post primary sector the pupil teacher ratio was increased from 18:1 to 19:1 with effect from the 2010/2011 school year while the PTR in the fee charging sector increased from 18:1 to 23:1 through a series of measures from 2009 to 2013. Post primary schools were required to manage guidance provision from within their standard teacher allocation rather than as a separate allocation with effect from the 2013/2014 school year. It is estimated that over 3,000 teaching posts were removed through a combination of these measures.

School Funding

Capitation rates for both primary and post primary school were reduced by 11% between 2012 and 2015.

Further Education

The PTR for Post Leaving Certificate was increased from 17:1 to 19:1 bringing it into line with post primary school in 2014. This resulted in a reduction of some 200 teaching posts. A student support charge of €200 was introduced for PLC students in 2012 and for apprentices attending IOTs. Capitation grants for VTOS, Youthreach, PLC and BTEI students were reduced by 11% in line with reduced rates for school generally.

Higher Education

Funding to higher education institutions for pay and non-pay was reduced by 6% between 2012 and 2015. The student contribution increased from €1,500 to €3,000 between 2009 and 2015 with a corresponding reduction in funding to higher education institutions to reflect the increased payment to the institution by the student. The rates of third level maintenance grants were reduced by 12% between 2011 and 2013. A series of changes to the eligibility criteria for student grants were introduced between 2011 and 2013 including changing the qualifying distance criterion for entitlement to the higher non-adjacent rate of grant (distance from home to the higher education institution) from 15 miles (24 kilometres) to 28 miles (45...
kilometres) and the cessation of maintenance grants payable to new entrants to post graduate courses.

**School Transport**

A charge of €50 was introduced for primary students for the first time in 2012 which was increased to €100 in 2013. The rate for post primary students was increased from €300 in 2010 to €350 in 2012. A range of measures arising from a value for money exercise including changes to distance criteria, closed school rule, ending of services below minimum numbers and cessation of catchment boundary system for post primary pupils was also introduced in 2012.

**Budget 2016**

Budget 2016 provided for some additional 850 teaching posts through improvements in primary and post primary schedules and supports for school leadership.

**Emerging Budgetary Pressures for 2017**

It is likely that the focus of external demands for increased investment in education and training will remain on those areas listed above.

**Impact of demographic challenges on numbers and expenditure**

**First and Second level Schools**

In the context of demographic increases, the two main drivers of current school costs are teacher numbers and school capitation grants. On the basis of a no policy change scenario in relation to both of these cost drivers it is estimated that increased expenditure of in excess of €50m, €40m and €30m will be incurred in 2017, 2018 and 2019 respectively due to increased enrolments in schools.
The upward trend in pupil numbers will also put pressure on administrative and Special Needs Assistants expenditure. In recent years, the numbers of special needs assistants have increased by some 600 per annum giving rise to additional full year cost of approx. €18m p.a. This school year, the increase will be in the order of 960 posts at a full year cost of €32.66m p.a.

Demographic pressures will create pressure on school accommodation and consequent pressure for capital investment. While much will depend on the location and distribution of the additional numbers it is expected that increases are likely to occur in cities and commuter belts while more rural areas may experience continuing population decline.

**Third level**

The numbers entering higher education and further education will grow as a result of labour markets requirements and demographics trends. Demands on institutional and student support budgets will grow as a result. The majority of students completing second level will desire to continue in education – either in further education or higher education and there will need to be a significant ramp up in additional places – just as has been seen in the primary and second level system in recent years. The changing needs of the labour market will also demand an increase in life-long and continuous learning, placing further demands on both sectors.

On the higher education side – this will require in the region of €500 million additionally in the base by 2030 and a capital investment of over €1 billion over the period. This is purely for demographics and does not include anything for quality improvement (improvement in staffing ratios, capital refurbishment etc.)

**Current Industrial Relations landscape, in particular re Lansdowne Road Agreement**

The period since 2008 has been very challenging on the industrial relations front. Over the course of those years, it was necessary to balance the requirement to achieve budgetary savings against the equally vital need to maintain industrial relations stability and avoid disruption of major essential services such as education.

The education sector accounts for close to one third of public sector numbers. The overwhelming majority of staff are employed in front line delivery and include teachers, lecturers and special needs assistants. Teachers make up some two thirds of the numbers in the education sector and are represented by the INTO, TUI and ASTI. Currently there are two public service industrial relations agreements which are in operation or relevant for this group. The Haddington Road Agreement (HRA) was agreed between the Government and the Public Services Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions in 2013. All of the unions in the education and training sector accepted the HRA and it is being implemented throughout the sector with effect from 1 July 2013. The HRA was originally due to expire on 30 June 2016.
An agreement in relation to a two year extension of the HRA, known as the Lansdowne Road Agreement (LRA), was reached with the public service trade unions in May 2015, in essence providing that the HRA will continue until September 2018.

However, getting acceptance of the Lansdowne Road Agreement with the teacher unions is proving problematical. While the INTO has accepted the Agreement (as have other nonteaching unions), the ASTI and TUI have rejected the Agreement and have stated that they will not be bound by the overall decision of the ICTU to accept the Agreement. Both unions have essentially stated that they will continue to cooperate with the HRA until its original expiry date of 30 June 2016 once the Government side continues its co-operation with that Agreement. Thus far, the stance of the Department has been to co-operate with the HRA and implement its terms as long the unions are doing so. While in the short term this approach has worked, as time passes it will become more difficult and in any case would become untenable once the original HRA expiry date is passed, unless of course by that time the ASTI and TUI change their minds and decide to accept the Lansdowne Road Agreement.

The LRA begins the process of restoring the cuts to public service pay which were implemented in recent years. Some of these measures (such as the 1 January 2016 pay increase for those earning up to €31,000 and reductions in the Pension-Related Deduction) are being implemented through legislation – the FEMPI Act 2015. It was determined that ASTI and TUI members could not be excluded from the legislation and they will therefore benefit from any pay improvements which are brought about through legislation.

The TUI has sought to articulate a range of current issues of its members (at third level, second level and further education) that lie outside the parameters of the LRA and on which it is seeking a process of engagement that would not involve varying the terms of the LRA. Following a recent decision of the TUI executive to call off a planned one day strike of their
second level and further education and training members (previously announced for 24 February), the Department agreed to meet with the TUI to discuss issues of mutual concern in the context of their continuing cooperation with collective agreements. Progress on any of these issues can only ultimately be possible where the question of the TUI’s position on the LRA from September is resolved.

For each of the teacher unions, the question of pay disparity between teachers who have recently entered the profession and their more long serving colleagues is emerging as a strategic industrial relations issue that will become increasingly more significant to the unions in the medium term as increasing numbers of younger teachers are recruited into the profession. This issue arises from changes, some imposed by previous Government Decisions and others agreed under the Haddington Road Agreement. The issue is not addressed in the Lansdowne Road Agreement.

**Overview of approach to system-wide reform and the IRDP**

An extensive programme of reform is being planned and implemented across the education and training sector. The Department is taking a system-wide approach to reform based on international research that shows this to be the most effective way to deliver meaningful change and better outcomes for all learners. A joined-up and consistent approach is needed to meet the requirements of the diverse education and training sector.

This system-wide approach is being implemented through a series of co-ordinated, targeted and integrated strategies across the continuum of education and training, which includes key areas of curriculum and assessment, teacher education, quality assurance, infrastructure and leadership. The reform programme is designed to provide all learners with the knowledge and skills they need to participate fully in society and the economy, to facilitate clear and simple pathways for learners within and across the system that support lifelong learning,
improve quality of the education experience and accountability for educational outcomes, to support diversity and inclusion, and to develop an infrastructure that supports a modern, flexible education and training system.

Departmental and sectoral reforms are captured in the Department’s annual Integrated Reform Delivery Plan (IRDP). The IRDP provides a strategic overview of the key reform initiatives from across the Department, its agencies and the sector as a whole. The reform programme centres on the four key goals of the Department’s Strategy Statement 2015 to 2017 highlights the key milestones and reform targets for each year:

1. Learning for Life
   • Curriculum and Assessment Reform
   • Reform of Teacher Education
   • Improving transitions and removing barriers to progression between levels of education and training
   • Providing high quality opportunities across Further Education and Training
   • Modernisation of the Higher Education system

2. Improving Quality and Accountability
   • School Self-Evaluation and Inspection
   • School leadership, autonomy and accountability
   • Targeted quality assurance initiatives in pre-schools and schools
   • New governance arrangements for the Further Education and Training Sector including SOLAS
   • Systems Performance Framework for Higher Education provision
   • International Education

3. Supporting Inclusion and Diversity
   • Enrolment and Choice of school type
   • Focused reforms for learners with special education needs
   • A new programme of DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools)
   • Widening participation in higher education

4. Building the Right Systems and Infrastructure
   • Roll out of the Six Year School Building Programme
   • Using Data to inform policy and improve efficiency in the system
   • Structural Reform including Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and Higher Education Institutes
   • Shared services strategy and establishment of the Education Shared Business Services Centre
Progress reports on the IRDP are provided to the Management Board, the Minister and DPER every quarter and are used to monitor progress against plans, prioritise reform initiatives and manage the related allocation of resources. To coordinate and manage the implementation of the education and training reform programme a Public Service Reform (PSR) Programme Office has been established in the Department.

**Legislative programme**

The Department is engaging in a programme of important legislative reform. Over the last five years, the following legislation has been enacted:

- Teaching Council (Amendment) Act 2015
- Further Education and Training Act, 2013
- Education and Training Boards Act, 2013
- Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Act, 2012
- Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012
- Education (Amendment) Act, 2012
- Residential Institutions Redress (Amendment) Act, 2011

There are two Bills which had been published but had not completed their passage through the Oireachtas before the dissolution of the Dáil in February.

**Education (Admission to Schools) Bill** - The objective of the Bill is to ensure that the processes for enrolling students by schools are more open, equitable and consistent. The Bill was published on 8 April 2015. It was introduced in the Dáil and circulated to members (First Stage). A date for second stage was never finalised.

**Technological Universities Bill** - The purpose of the Bill is to provide for the establishment of Technological Universities and the amendment of the IOT/DIT and HEA Acts. The Bill passed Third Stage in the Dáil on 14 January 2016. Report Stage commenced at the end of January but had not been completed when the Dáil was dissolved.

Drafting is under way on a further two Bills.

**Universities (Amendment) Bill** - The main purpose of this Bill is to allow the Minister for Education and Skills to give a direction to a university requiring it to comply with policy decisions made by the Government relating to the remuneration or numbers of public servants employed in that university. The OPC is well advanced on drafting the text of the Bill and a final draft is awaited.
Retention of Certain Records Bill – The Bill is to allow for the retention of the records of the Commission into Child Abuse, the Redress Board and the Residential Institutions Review Committee in the National Archives and sealed for a period of at least 75 years. The Bill has been approved by Government for drafting.

Work is under way in the Department on the preparation of general schemes for two further pieces of legislation.

Higher Education Authority Bill – The purpose of the Bill is to replace the HEA Act 1971 and amend other relevant legislation. Work on the general scheme is under way.

Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Amendment) Bill – The purpose of the Bill is to amend the 2012 Act to address some issues that have arisen regarding the scope of QQI’s responsibilities in relation to recognition of awards and regulation of private and voluntary providers; to ensure adequate protection of enrolled learners where providers discontinue a programme; and to give greater authority to Institutes of Technology to award Level 9 qualifications. Work on the general scheme is under way.

Board Appointments

There are a number of vacancies for board appointments to be made by either the Minister or the Government. Some of these are particularly urgent as there may not be any board in place or because important decisions need to be made by the board in the near future.

Vacancies (subject to limited and specified exceptions including the role of the Chair) are advertised on the State Boards portal operated by the Public Appointments Service (PAS). Applications are processed by way of a transparent assessment system designed and implemented by the PAS. In regard to reappointments, the PAS process is not necessarily required.

The PAS was unable to include boards of Higher Education Institutions in its process. Accordingly, the Department arranges the process itself and follows similar procedures to those of the PAS (i.e. advertising the vacancies etc.)

Appointments are needed as follows:

- Educational Research Centre Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson and Board members – body established in September 2015 and a board is not in place. Necessary for recruitment of new chief executive;
- Appointments of Chairpersons of some Institutes of Technology and to Governing Bodies of Higher Education Institutions. Some vacancies since 2015;
- Chair and Governing Body of the Higher Education Authority (HEA) – members (some vacancies since early 2016). Necessary for recruitment of new chief executive;
• Appointment of Board of National Council for Special Education – vacancies since end 2015; and
• Appointments to Teaching Council – vacancies since end March 2016.

Part 2 – Schools

Early Years Education

Structure and Governance of the Sector

Since 2010, with the introduction of the universal free pre-school scheme (ECCE), c. 4,500 pre-schools offer provision in Ireland. The majority of this provision is privately owned and managed, with 80% of providers operating on a commercial basis, and some community based services. In 2015, Pobal estimated that 370 pre-schools are co-located or situated in schools. Most early childhood care and education is funded by DCYA under contracts managed through Pobal. However, the Department of Education and Skills directly funds 40 Early Start centres in DEIS schools and a pre-school in Rutland Street in Dublin. The Department is also responsible for the implementation and development of the national quality and curriculum frameworks for early years education, Síolta and Aistear.

The sector is regulated by the Child and Family Agency, Tusla, under the Childcare Act 1991. A statutory Early Years inspectorate ensures compliance with regulations. Following a pilot in 2015, education-focussed inspections by the Department of Education and Skills inspectorate is being rolled out across the sector from April 2016.

Quality agenda and Key issues

The Department’s Early Years Education Policy Unit (EYEPU) is co-located with the Early Childhood sections of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and reports to an Assistant Secretary in the DES. The Unit has a remit to improve the quality of educational provision within the early childhood care and education sector. Since 2010, early years provision is mainly provided through the universal early childhood care and education (ECCE) programme funded by DCYA, although the DES EYEPU funds 40 Early Start centres in DEIS primary schools and a pre-school in Rutland Street.

To support quality provision for children in ECCE, the DES has developed two national practice frameworks that apply in all settings where children aged 0-6 are present. Aistear is the national curriculum framework for children aged 0-6 and Síolta is the national quality framework. DES support the implementation and dissemination of the frameworks. Funding
has been secured by DCYA in Budget 2016 for a Síolta/Aistear initiative which will co-ordinate the implementation of both frameworks throughout the sector.

Given the need to upskill the workforce in the sector, the unit works closely with DCYA on workforce development, advising on the qualifications list that will underpin the new regulatory requirements for minimum qualifications in the workforce that will come into force at the commencement of new regulations being drafted under the Childcare Act 1991. The unit is co-funding in 2016 the development and establishment of a national programme for inclusion co-ordinators as part of the implementation of the new model to support access to ECCE for children with a disability. The unit will also provide key inputs into strategic policy development in the early years sector in 2016 and participates in implementation structures for Better Outcomes Brighter Futures (BOBF), the national policy framework for children and on international networks in early years policy development. The unit also liaises closely with the new education-focussed inspection unit in the Department of Education and Skills inspectorate. As part of its remit in policy development, the unit chairs and supports the Early Years Advisory Group established by the Minister for Education and Skills in 2015 to provide advice on key policy issues in early years education.

**School Sector**

**Legal Status and Governance of Schools**

There are 4000 recognised schools in Ireland. These include:

- Primary schools, also known as national schools;
- Post primary schools, including voluntary secondary schools, community and comprehensive schools, vocational schools and community colleges; and □ Special schools.

All schools have the same management structure i.e. they have a patron, board of management and a Principal teacher. This structure has evolved over time and was given statutory effect in the Education Act, 1998.

For historical reasons, as the concept of patronage developed, the representatives of the main Christian churches, in particular the Catholic Church, came to be foremost as school patrons. This reflected the religious allegiances of the majority of the population at the time. However, other bodies, such as VECs (now ETBs) and Educate Together have also acted as school patrons.

Ownership of the school premises traditionally rested with the school patron, with the Exchequer providing grant aid towards the construction and maintenance of the school buildings and funding the operation of the schools. The situation as regards ownership of the
school premises is now changing with many new schools being established in premises owned by the Minister.

Under the Education Act of 1998, all boards of management have a duty to manage the school on behalf of the patron and for the benefit of the students and their parents in line with the policies of the Minister. In fulfilling this duty, the board of management is accountable to the Patron for upholding the characteristic spirit of the school.

Boards of Management act on a voluntary basis and are responsible for the overall management of the school. In most schools, they also act as the employer of the teaching and non-teaching staff and are responsible for ensuring that the school has adequate insurance, adheres to health and safety requirements and complies with relevant legal obligations.

The Principal teacher of a school is responsible for the day to day management of the school and for leading teaching in the school.

**Curriculum reform**

**Literacy and numeracy strategy**

The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020 was launched in July 2011. The Strategy sets ambitious targets and describes the actions needed to improve the teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy.

An interim review of the Strategy, scheduled for 2016, was brought forward to 2015 as many of the 2020 targets set in the Strategy have already been achieved.

The Department held a forum of internal and external stakeholders on 14 January 2016 to present the main findings and some provisional future directions arising from the collation of the review inputs. The forum gave stakeholders an opportunity to discuss the outcomes and the views of this forum will contribute to a re-fresh of the Strategy. The interim review is currently being drafted and is expected to provide an overview of both the successes of the Strategy as well as the remaining challenges. It will highlight priorities that need to be addressed during the second half of the Strategy’s lifespan.

New national assessment tests for reading and numeracy

- Under the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, primary schools are required to administer periodic assessments of students in literacy and numeracy and to report the outcomes for individual students to parents and summary findings to the board of the school and to the Department.
- Analysis of the data has shown that the tests used in schools are in need of urgent replacement. The Educational Research Centre (ERC) is to provide such assessments to schools.
National and international surveys of achievement

- The table below provides a timetable of publication of reports relating to National Assessments and International Assessments (PISA, TIMSS and PIRLS) in the coming years. The publication of each of these will attract considerable publicity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Report</th>
<th>Target Group</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Due for publication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015 PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment)</td>
<td>15 year old postprimary students</td>
<td>Main area: Science, Also English reading and Maths</td>
<td>Initial International and National Reports – December 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015 TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study)</td>
<td>Primary pupils 4th class Post-primary students 2nd year</td>
<td>Maths and Science</td>
<td>Main international and summary national reports in November 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015 TIMSS Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study</td>
<td>Primary pupils 4th class Post-primary students 2nd year</td>
<td>Maths and Science</td>
<td>Main national report in Autumn 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016 PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study)</td>
<td>Primary pupils 4th class</td>
<td>Print Reading; also Electronic Reading (ePIRLS)</td>
<td>Main international and summary national reports in December 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016 DEIS Evaluation</td>
<td>Primary 2nd, 3rd, 5th and 6th classes</td>
<td>Maths and Reading</td>
<td>Release date to be decided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018 PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment)</td>
<td>15 year old postprimary students</td>
<td>Main area: English reading, Also Maths and Science</td>
<td>Initial International and National Reports – December 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019 National Assessments</td>
<td>Primary pupils 2nd and 6th classes</td>
<td>English reading, Maths</td>
<td>Release dates to be decided</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The Educational Research Centre**

The Educational Research Centre, Drumcondra undertakes a number of national and international assessments of achievement in Irish schools, most of them in conjunction with the Inspectorate. A new governance structure was put in place for the centre in 2015.
Primary Curriculum

The NCCA is reviewing the primary school curriculum and will be consulting with stakeholders over the next year. In the meantime, a number of initiatives are already under way in relation to modernising the curriculum at primary level.

A new integrated Primary Languages Curriculum, incorporating Irish and English, has been developed by the NCCA. The new curriculum aims to ensure that pupils acquire transferrable language skills and promote a positive disposition towards communication and language, thus fostering in children a lifelong interest in, and love of, language learning.

The first phase will be introduced from Junior Infants to Second classes from September 2016 with work continuing on the curriculum for senior classes.

Early work on a new primary mathematics curriculum has also begun with some background research reports having already been published.

Junior cycle

Assessment arrangements for the new Junior Cycle are set out in the Framework for Junior Cycle 2015, which was published in August 2015, based on the revised junior cycle proposals that were published in summer 2015 following the conclusion of intensive discussions with the leadership of the two second level teaching unions.

New subject specifications will be introduced for all junior cycle subjects. The new specifications will be introduced on a phased basis over the course of the implementation period. Subjects will normally be assessed through a combination of two Classroom-Based Assessments (CBAs) assessed by teachers, an Assessment Task in each subject assessed by the State Examinations Commission (SEC), and a final examination also administered and marked by the SEC.

A circular clarifying all aspects relating to the implementation of the Framework for Junior Cycle issued in March 2016.

The first subject to be implemented is English. Classroom Based Assessment will commence in 2016 for those students in 2nd and 3rd year. A terminal examination in English, organised by the SEC, will take place in June 2017.

A comprehensive professional development programme to support Junior Cycle is being rolled out. This includes whole-school CPD, subject-specific seminars, seminars for school leaders, teacher-led CPD and school visits. This will be led by the specialist JCT team.

Additional resources/time will be given to teachers and school management to support the phased implementation of the Framework for Junior Cycle. This includes additional professional time, amounting to 22 hours p.a. (or 40 minutes per week), to be provided to every teacher involved in delivering the new Junior Cycle programme.
This is already being provided to English teachers and will extend to Science and Business Studies teachers from September. Under the phased implementation set out in the 2015 agreement, all teachers involved in the delivery of Junior Cycle will receive this additional professional time within timetable from September 2017.

The NCCA will continue with the development of subject specifications in line with the timetable outlined in the Framework for Junior Cycle 2015.

The roll-out of the original Junior Cycle proposals was beset by difficult resistance from the two main teacher unions, including industrial action involving one day school closures. Extensive discussions over many months culminated in an agreement with the leadership of both unions on revised proposals in May 2015 and on associated resources for implementation in July 2015. These revised proposals are reflected in the 2015 Framework which is now being implemented.

Following ballots of both unions, the new proposals were accepted by the TUI membership and are now being fully implemented by TUI members in schools. In the case of the ASTI, the proposals were rejected at ballot. In putting the proposals to ballot, unlike the TUI, the ASTI leadership did not recommend acceptance and did not seek to explain the proposals. They were rejected by a 55% majority of ASTI members, based on a ballot return of 38%.

Given the low turnout and narrow majority, the ASTI subsequently undertook a consultative process with their membership to establish the reasons for non-acceptance. Based on the feedback, a number of clarifications were sought from the Department and provided in November/December 2015. The ASTI subsequently advised that their Standing Committee had noted the Department’s clarifications but they have declined to put the proposals to a fresh ballot or to lift their directive to members to refuse to co-operate with essential elements of the new Framework. Their current directive involves non-attendance at CPD and non-cooperation with classroom based assessments. Failure to fulfil the latter will mean that their students cannot complete an associated Assessment Task which has a value of 10% of the final written examination and that their students will receive an incomplete Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement at the end of their junior cycle. This will affect students in the voluntary secondary school sector where ASTI membership is concentrated. It may also affect students in community and comprehensive schools where there are members of both unions. ETB schools tend to have mainly TUI members and so students there will not be similarly disadvantaged.
Implementation of the new Framework is now moving ahead. The new circular clarifies requirements and available resources for schools. It makes clear that a number of existing references in the Rules and Programmes for Second Level Schools will be superseded by the new provisions. CPD sessions are rolling out with very positive feedback. The first classroom based assessments in English are due to take place from Easter. The new specifications for Science and Business Studies will be introduced in schools from September.

The previous grounds of ASTI for principled objection to change are addressed in the new Framework - the dual assessment model now involved does not require any teacher involvement in assessing their own students for State certification purposes.

In the immediate interests of these students, it is intended to continue to encourage ASTI to re-consider their current directive. Following the recent circular, the ASTI decided to announce a series of one day strikes on Junior Cycle beginning in September. In announcing these, they have indicated that they see “a window of opportunity” for the new Minister to address their outstanding concerns before the 2016/17 school year.

**Senior Cycle Reform**

Given developments at junior cycle as well as the work on improving transitions from second level into higher education, the question of a more broad based review of senior cycle education will also now arise.

A number of subject specific reviews and developments are already underway as follows.

Work is underway on revising Leaving Certificate Agricultural Science, Applied Mathematics and Economics. A new specification for Politics and Society is being developed which will be introduced in September 2016 to a selected cohort of over 40 schools. Politics and Society aims to develop the student’s ability to be a reflective and active citizen, in a way that is informed by the insights and skills of social and political science.

The then Minister approved the three new Leaving Certificate specifications for Biology, Chemistry, and Physics. These were approved on a provisional basis pending the implementation of a trial of the assessment arrangements outlined in the specifications. The new specifications make provision for a practical assessment which will have resource and logistical implications. The trial of the terminal practical assessment will be carried out by NCCA working with the SEC and the Department during 2016/2017.

Revision to Assessment Arrangements for Leaving Certificate Art (for first examination in 2018) are being put in place for students entering Leaving Certificate Year 1 in September 2016 and taking their examinations in 2018 and thereafter.

Leaving Certificate P.E. is being developed by the NCCA as a full subject that can be assessed as a Leaving Certificate Subject.
Transition to higher education

The role of the Leaving Certificate in selecting school leavers for admission to higher education has increased the stakes and pressures involved on students. This has a negative impact on teaching and learning practices at second level.

All stakeholders initially made:

- A commitment to address any problematic predictability identified in an analysis of predictability in the Leaving Certificate examination;
- A commitment to reduce the number of grading bands used in the Leaving Certificate examination; and
- A commitment to significantly reduce the number of programme offerings for a broader undergraduate entry to level 8 honours bachelor degree programmes in the universities and to review level 8 programme provision in the institutes of technology to ensure a mixed portfolio of programmes with denominated and generic entry.

In April 2015 the then Minister published a report entitled “Supporting a Better Transition from Second Level to Higher Education – Implementation and Next Steps”, which set out a package of reforms developed by the stakeholders involved and which are designed to improve the transition experience of students moving from second level to higher education.

Those reforms are as follows:

- Introduce a new grading scheme for the Leaving Certificate, which will reduce the number of grade bands from 14 to 8 at each level;
- Introduce a revised Common Points Scale;
- Preserve the relative value of achievement at Ordinary level in relation to achievement at Higher level that applies in the current common points scale;
- Minimise the use of random selection that may result from too many students achieving the same points score, particularly at Higher level; and
- Encourage the take-up of Higher level subjects at Leaving Certificate by awarding points to the new H7 grade (30-40%).

School Governance and Management

The current school governance arrangements are highly devolved and low cost. School boards and to a lesser extent patrons discharge the day to day management functions of schools. The system depends on a high level of volunteerism in relation to the composition of boards. This underpins the relatively low level of expenditure on administration as a percentage of overall spend. The total staffing in the Schools Division deployed on general school governance issues (at 8.5) is an indicator of the reliance of the Department on the local structures for delivery across 4000 schools. While a management body exists in each of the sectors and sub-sectors,
the exchequer funding to support those bodies is quite low and they face constraints in consequence.

Over the period of fiscal consolidation there have been no increases in the funding grants provided to management bodies that enable them from day-to-day to provide support, advice and guidance to schools. There is an inevitability that pressure will mount for significantly increased levels of exchequer funding. The drivers of this will be the reduced capacity of Catholic dioceses to provide funding and personnel locally to engage in management activities, the withdrawal of religious personnel and the trust boards established to replace them in time running out of funding provided from the religious orders. Historically the Department has not funded patrons directly and relevant management bodies are identified and supported by the relevant patrons.

The lack of management capacity in the system is a constraint not just in relation to resource management but also in supporting principals and schools in improving school performance and accountability. In systemic terms the large number of relatively small primary schools and in consequence the reliance on the sourcing of a considerable voluntary resource to serve on boards presents a challenge. This is exacerbated by the increasing complexity, particularly in the employer space, of school governance and the responsibilities placed on boards. Small schools have teaching principals which impact on school leadership and on the effective deployment across the system of resources both generally and specific resources for special needs etc.

The Irish education system is untypical of the manner in which the education system is structured in many other OECD countries with the virtual absence of middle or local tier of government between school and central government. It is questionable whether it is feasible to continue to maintain the system and enhance quality without providing for better local or regional management structures, though still allowing necessary autonomy at school level. A key strategic objective of the Department in relation to the merger of VECs to form Education and Training Boards was to position the sector to be in a position to provide management supports to schools across patronage types and in cases of patron withdrawal to be available to take on patronage if necessary. To that end, the Education and Training Boards Act 2013 makes provision for the boards to provide services to all schools in their area. These are very much enabling statutory provisions and are not mandatory on schools. Put simply it will be
lawful for an ETB to provide services provided the school(s) want to obtain from them the service or support in question.

**School Leadership**

In terms of high performance and good outcomes through effective school governance is hugely dependent on the quality of school leadership.

To improve and support school leadership a new Centre for School Leadership (CSL), located in Clare Education Centre, involving the Department, IPPN and NAPD, has been established on a partnership basis for an initial 3 year pilot period. DES has committed to an investment of €3m for this pilot.

The Centre is staffed by three experienced school principals who are on secondment from their schools. The CSL will become a centre of excellence for school leaders, and the partnership will have many benefits for the profession in terms of the quality of training programmes, coordination of provision, and increased accessibility.

The Centre’s responsibilities will cover the continuum of professional development for school leaders, from pre-appointment training and induction of newly appointed principals, to continuing professional development throughout careers.

Priorities for the Centre include:- o a new post graduate qualification for aspiring school leaders, drawing on best international practice and research in the professional development of school leaders
   o a mentoring programme for newly appointed school principals
   o coaching support for serving principals who experience professional difficulty
   o a review and alignment of leadership programmes with Department standards and the continuum and the development of a quality assurance framework for leadership provision.

**School staffing and capitation resource restoration**

School funding levels have reduced in recent years due to the impact of various budget measures.

In the period 2011- 2015 the capitation and related grants were reduced by just over 11% in aggregate. Annual funding would need to be increased by circa. €40m to restore capitation funding and related grants to pre-2011 levels.
The level of funding for schools in the ETB sector has also been further affected by the fact that ETBs no longer receive a rates contribution from the local authorities of €2m per annum. This ceased when the ETBs were established in 2013.

While the funding situation for schools is being alleviated to some degree by the recent reductions in energy costs, the adequacy of capitation funding is a critical issue.

A further pressure point in relation to school funding arises in relation to the establishment of new schools. Once off costs can occur in the start-up phase for a new school. The adequacy of the current funding arrangements for start-up is a live issue and is being examined involving discussion with the relevant school management bodies.

The current reduced funding levels for all schools create a risk that some schools may not be able to cover critical costs - the absence of which could trigger school closure. A school that is unable to meet insurance or heat and light costs will be obliged to close regardless of class size. In the short term, inadequate capitation funding is potentially more risky than having large class sizes.

Any improvements in the funding arrangements at post-primary level would also need to consider the impact this would have on funding equalisation. Some equalisation measures were introduced to rectify historical inconsistencies in the funding arrangements for the Voluntary Secondary School Sector compared to the other two sectors (ETB Sector and Community & Comprehensive Sector). The level of disparity in the funding arrangements between the three sectors would need to be revisited to determine what further equalisation measures might be undertaken if resources become available.

The level of funding provided to schools for ancillary staff (school secretary, caretaker and cleaner) provides little more than a very basic service. There is a disparity in relation to how ancillary staffing levels are dealt with between the three sectors at post-primary. In the ETB sector and the C&C sector the number of such posts is approved directly by the Department. In contrast, in the Voluntary Secondary School Sector, the number of ancillary posts is determined at school level based on the level of grants provided by the Department. The above approach has meant that the moratorium on recruitment has impacted more directly in relation to ancillary posts in the C&C sector and the ETB sector compared to the Voluntary Secondary School Sector. The alleviation arrangements from the moratorium are minimal and are designed to be the minimum necessary to keep a school operational. The Department is aware of the need to make some improvement to the alleviation arrangements – particularly for the larger schools. This will require funding and there are many competing priorities for limited funding. The scope for any improvements in the short-term is therefore very limited.

In relation to teaching resources the most recent budget measure effectively restored the classroom staffing schedule for primary schools to where it was prior to the fiscal collapse.
The cuts made to the staffing schedule for second level schools were significantly deeper and reduced second level schools to staffing levels last seen in the early 1990s. It would take 1300 additional teachers over and above what is required to meet demographic pressures to bring second level schools back to the resourcing level they had prior to 2008. The reduction at second level is of particular significance given the need for the schools to broaden subject choice to make better provision (e.g. for STEM subjects).

The moratorium also impacted on schools in relation to middle management posts which involve the payment of an allowance to teachers. The moratorium did not apply to principal and deputy principal posts. The impact was more profound at second level and therefore, limited alleviation made was mostly applied at second level. Before the moratorium, 53% of teachers held a management allowance yet school principals in both primary and second level schools suffered significant work overload fundamentally because of any absence of distributed leadership, the constraint being the inflexible and largely low level tasks carried out by post holders, particularly in relation to the bottom tier, special duties posts. The continuation of the moratorium in its current form is unsustainable as it applies unevenly across schools depending on the level of loss of posts through natural wastage. The key challenge here is to get a transformation of the middle management structure and function so that principals are properly supported and teaching and learning is enhanced. This will require change and overcoming historic teacher union positions. It is difficult to see how any level of restoration could be justified if the unions do not buy into substantial changes of practice.

Work done in collaboration with the second level management bodies identified priorities for investment in school leadership and the budget made provision for some improvement in the amount of non-teaching time for deputy principals to support the principal. A phasing of further similar support was agreed and will need to be considered again in the context of the next budget. The budget also made an improvement to the number of release days for teaching principals in primary schools and this will continue to be a live issue.

**School Admissions**

The Education (Admission to Schools) Bill was published in April 2015. However, the Bill did not proceed through the Houses of the Oireachtas.

School enrolment is a topic which generates significant debate among parents, schools and wider society. A key objective in the legislation was to improve the parent experience of the admission process.

Parents trying to access services, which in this case is admission to a school for their children, behave as the consumers in making discerning and informed decisions as they would about any other type of service they are trying to access. In some cases, parents can have a negative
and frustrating experience in accessing or understanding school admission policies or procedures. It is important therefore that services, which in the case of schools are substantially supported by the state, are inclusive, transparent and fair.

Parents have an expectation that their child will be offered a place in their school of choice, which is often their nearest school, and if the child is admitted to the school of choice the parent is generally satisfied. An admission policy does not in itself represent a panacea for managing individual expectations and demand where schools are oversubscribed. Some schools will still continue to be oversubscribed where demand for that particular school exceeds supply. School admission policies can however be made more transparent and create greater confidence within the communities they serve. There is significant public confidence in relation to the CAO system for third level and its processes with extensive public knowledge of how those processes operate to determine who gets admission where a course is oversubscribed.

While schools are currently required to publish their admission policies, they are not required to consult with or inform parents when drafting or amending their admission policy; as a consequence transparency suffers. A mandatory consultation process can serve the purpose of improving transparency and accountability, but also ensuring that parents are fully aware of the oversubscription criteria in the school’s admission policy where oversubscription occurs. Once parents form a realistic expectation of the likelihood of their child receiving a place at their school of choice they can plan and decide whether to apply to another school to ensure that their child receives a school place.

Where a child is refused admission by a school, it is open to parents to make an appeal to an independent committee which is provided for by Section 29 of the Education Act, 1998. The intention behind this process was to provide parents with a non-judicial appeal process that could be easily accessed. However, this process has become burdensome for parents, schools and the Department alike. The existing Section 29 provisions do not distinguish between a refusal to enrol where there are ample places and a situation where there are insufficient places. The process has also become more litigious with some schools challenging the determinations made by appeal committees.

A better legislative framework for school admissions should provide reassurance not only for parents but also for schools, in that other schools, through their particular practices, are not impacting unreasonably on enrolment in a catchment area. It is desirable that all schools behave honourably in discharging their duty to not use ‘soft barriers’ to discriminate against newcomers, children with disabilities, and/or minority groupings. The emphasis should be on instilling best practice in relation to what schools do and how they do it, in order to reduce difficulties or the need for grievance resolution subsequently. Within an overall regulatory framework of clearly set out requirements, procedures and timelines, better transparency and effective compliance mechanisms, the number of cases where grievances might arise should diminish. Where difficulties arise for Tusla or the National Council for Special...
Education (NCSE) in seeking a school place for children of particular circumstances, a mechanism, such as having a power to designate a school place, is also required to deal more effectively with such situations.

The following are considered to be key requirements within any legislation in this area:

- If a school has places available the school must enrol each student seeking admission.

- If the school is oversubscribed then it must follow the oversubscription criteria outlined in its admission policy.

- Schools should therefore be prohibited from charging fees or seeking payment or contributions for admission or continued attendance at the school other than in the case of fee charging schools, boarding schools or for post leaving certificate courses.

- Provision of a power of designation for the NCSE and Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, to designate a school place for a child who has no school place.

- Provision of a requirement that allows parents to seek a review by the school of its initial decision to refuse enrolment before they take an independent appeal against the school’s decision.

- Amendment to the current independent appeals provision provided in section 29 of the Education Act to address the issues which have given rise to judicial reviews and to make the process less cumbersome both for schools and parents.

- A school should prepare its admission policy following consultation with the school community and the policy should then be published.

- An admission policy should explicitly state that the school will not discriminate against an applicant for admission on the grounds of disability, special educational needs, sexual orientation, family status, membership of the traveller community, race, civil status, gender or religion while respecting any exemptions provided under equality legislation.

- An admission policy should provide details of the school's arrangements for students whose parents do not want them to attend religious instruction.

- An admission policy should set out the selection criteria to be applied where the number of students seeking admission to the intake year is greater than the number of places being made available by the school, and set out the manner and sequence in which the selection criteria will be applied.
• An admission policy should contain clear procedures for the admission of students to classes or years other than the school’s intake group, and after the commencement of the school year.

• Prohibiting/limiting the use of oversubscription criteria which disadvantage certain applicants such as priority based on date of application and priority based on being the son/daughter of a past pupil of the school. The latter has been quite contentious with differing views as to the appropriate limit that should be set or indeed whether use of the criterion should be prohibited entirely.

• Providing the enabling power in primary legislation for regulations to be made in relation to the content of admission policies and the admission process. Regulations could specify standardised timeframes for the admission process which would benefit both parents and schools. Regulations could also place the onus on parents to advise schools when they have accepted multiple offers of enrolment.

• Providing for the Minister to direct schools to co-operate with each other in relation to their admission processes in cases where a school is due to close or where it is in the best interests of students in an area.

• Providing for the Minister or patron to issue a direction to a school where they have failed to meet the requirements of a new legislative framework for admissions or any regulations made under the legislative framework.

• Providing for the appointment of an independent person to comply with the aforementioned direction where a school has failed to do so

Admission to schools and baptismal certificates
There has been much media attention and public debate in recent times around the use of baptismal certificates for admission to schools where a school is giving priority to children of the church or faith concerned. However, in the majority of schools that are not oversubscribed (approx. 80%) this issue does not arise, and in most cases children seeking a school place are accommodated. The Education (Admission to Schools) Bill that was published in 2015 did not provide for the removal or amendment of the provision in equality legislation which allows oversubscribed denominational schools to prioritise applicants of the school’s denomination over other applicants.

The then Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education and Social Protection when considering this issue, noted that “there is a potential tension between Articles 42 (Education) and 44 (Religion) of Bunreacht na hÉireann, and this poses a particular difficulty when legislating in this policy area.”
Parent and Learner Charter

The Schools Division has been working on the preparation of legislation that would require schools to operate a Parent and Learner Charter in accordance with guidelines published by the Minister. There is likely to be some variation in the content between primary and postprimary schools particularly in relation to the direct engagement with students. For example, the Charter would not include guidelines for the operation of student councils in primary school but would nonetheless have to provide for primary schools respecting the voice of the child. Student involvement in how their own learning is shaped and delivered would be of particular significance at second level and will be aimed at increasing the role that second level students would have in inputting to their learning experience at school.

The overall approach is to shift away from concentrating on reacting to problems only after they have given rise to grievances (the narrow position covered in the existing Section 28 of the Education Act 1998). Instead, the emphasis is on improving the day-to-day experience students and their parents can expect from schools. This can be done by setting out in law the principles that schools must apply in their engagement with students and parents.

The legislative change through the use of statutory guidelines would in the first instance be requiring schools to self-regulate. However, to provide for situations where schools fall short in operating under guidelines the legislation will provide a power for the Minister to direct school to comply.

The legislative change under contemplation would replace the existing Section 28 of the Education Act with a totally reworked Section 28. In terms of timing, it had been planned to do this in tandem with the school admissions legislation.

School patronage issues

School patronage in the establishment of new schools

A new system was introduced from June 2011 for establishing, and determining the patronage of, new schools. In areas where the population is growing, there are opportunities for consideration of new schools with patronage reflecting the parental demand for increased availability of different types of schools such as those providing Irish medium and multidenominational education. Between 2011 and 2016, 27 new primary and 27 new postprimary schools have been, or are in the process of being, established.

The criteria to be used in relation to patronage of the new schools place a particular emphasis on parental demand for plurality and diversity of patronage, with parental preferences at the centre of the process. In this regard, patron bodies and prospective patrons applying for the patronage of a new school announced by the Department must collect and demonstrate
evidence of parental demand for the model of provision proposed as part of their application under the patronage process. As part of the process, a New Schools Establishment Group was put in place to advise the Minister on the patronage of the new schools following its consideration of a report prepared by the Department on the applications received from patron bodies.

Reconfiguration of existing primary schools for diversity

At primary school level, 90% of schools are under the patronage of the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church has itself highlighted the necessity for a greater plurality of provision to respond effectively to the changing social needs. The possibility of the Catholic Church divesting itself of the patronage of certain primary schools was raised by Catholic Church authorities initially.

The report of the Advisory Group to the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector examined how demand for different types of patronage could be met in areas of stable population by divesting patronage of existing schools where there is evidence of parental demand for change. As part of an action plan published in June 2012 in response to the report it was announced that the Department would undertake surveys of parental preferences in 44 geographic areas. The aim of the surveys was to establish the level of parental demand for a wider choice in the patronage of primary schools within these areas. The areas concerned had relatively stable populations and in these circumstances there is little prospect that new schools will be established there over the next number of years for demographic reasons. Therefore, the only mechanism for alternative patrons to become involved in school provision in these areas is through the possible divestment of some existing school provision in the areas provided there was sufficient parental demand for wider choice of patronage.

Sufficient parental demand for a wider choice of school patron emerged in 28 areas to support change in the patronage of schools. Intensive consultations ensued with the main Catholic patrons in each of the 28 areas to discuss divesting options. To date, eight new schools have opened under the patronage divesting process between 2013 and 2015.

In 2015, the then Minister had publicly stated that the patronage divesting process needed to be re-examined to better accommodate parental demand for diversity. To that end, a round of consultations with the principal patron bodies has taken place with the aim of reinvigorating and accelerating the process. Following on the consultations to date, it is clear that patrons and patron bodies recognise the need to give new impetus to the process and that school communities need to be supported in achieving this increased momentum for diversity.

Among the outcomes of the consultation process is a clear view that, although the aim of the patronage divesting process is to facilitate diversity of patronage through reconfiguration of existing school provision, the term “divesting” is frequently misunderstood and that there needs to be a clearer message to school communities that the process is about patrons working together to make the best use of existing school facilities to accommodate the
diverse needs of all children. Another point emerging from the consultation process was that school amalgamations continue to present important opportunities for school reconfiguration leading to patron diversity and it was decided that a working group would be established by the Department to examine how support for amalgamations might provide a greater impetus for reconfiguration for diversity.

In areas that were not included in the surveys of parental preferences in 2012/13, there is also a need to examine further ways in which emerging demand for diversity of school provision can be accommodated.

**Community National Schools (CNS)**

Since 2008, a new model of primary school patronage, Community National Schools (CNS) has been piloted in response to the increasing demand for parental choice in the patronage of primary schools. The distinguishing feature of CNSs is that they are multi-denominational schools which allow for the provision of faith formation during the school day. The aim of the model is to cater for the diversity present within the community in a single school setting, rather than in more than one school. There are now eleven such schools.

The Community National Schools were established on an interim basis under the nominal patronage of the Minister for Education and Skills, with the intention of transferring patronage formally to the Education and Training Boards, which currently act as de facto patrons of these schools. Work on this is at an advanced stage and patronage is to transfer in September 2016 and Boards of Management will subsequently be established.

**Religious Education in Community National Schools**

The CNS schools are multi-belief and welcome and respect children of all faiths and none. They recognise and aim to accommodate the wishes of parents to have their children receive religious education and faith nurturing within the school day. This commitment, within a multi-belief environment, is an important distinguishing feature of the model. A programme providing for the delivery of religious education and faith nurturing, Goodness Me, Goodness You (GMGY), in the new schools is being developed by the NCCA on an action research basis.

**Autonomy and Accountability consultation**

Across many developed countries, the school sector has seen a trend in recent years towards devolving greater autonomy away from central government to lower levels of the education system. In some countries, this has involved a direct increase in the formal autonomy of individual schools, while in others, intermediate bodies, such as local authorities or local education boards, have been granted greater autonomy over their management of education, while operating within parameters set by central government.
The Department of Education and Skills was requested by the Cabinet Committee on Social Policy and Public Service Reform to look further at this issue. As part of this work, the Department carried out extensive research on the issue of school autonomy, which was discussed by the Cabinet Committee on Social Policy and Public Service Reform. The key findings and conclusions of that research were published in Advancing School Autonomy in Ireland: Research Paper in December 2015.

The research found that in Ireland, schools have a good degree of autonomy over many aspects of their work, although they are not completely autonomous.

A strong thread in the research has been that schools must have the capacity to exercise autonomy granted to them if the policy is to improve education outcomes. This ties in with the initiative under way to build the leadership capacity in schools.

The experience of other school systems in terms of school autonomy indicate that changes to school autonomy must be carefully planned and delivered and are best preceded by an engaged policy debate on how autonomy can work best in an Irish context.

Therefore, following the completion of the research paper, the Department sought views from all interested parties on the issue of advancing school autonomy. A Consultation Paper was published with the Research Paper, which was designed to facilitate a discussion on why, how and in what circumstances school autonomy should be advanced in Ireland.

The Consultation Paper:
- summarised the research in the main paper;
- set out possible options for consideration;
- explored some of the advantages and disadvantages of each option;
- examined what would be needed if greater autonomy was implemented; and invited comment from education partners and members of the public.

The paper suggested that greater autonomy could be given to schools in three aspects or dimensions of their work:
- their Governance, Management and Ethos;
- their Curriculum, Pedagogy and Assessment; and
- their Budgets and Funding.

These broad dimensions were used in the paper to explore the key aspects in which autonomy can be analysed and considered.

Over 60 submissions have been received. The vast majority of these have been from teachers and the education partners. They are currently being analysed, with a view to producing an overview paper summarising the key messages from the submissions. However, a preliminary analysis of the submissions shows that there is some hostility to the concept of autonomy,
with many submissions criticising the importation of a concept from England and the USA which does not take account of the different features of the Irish education system.

Other consultees, while more positively disposed towards the concept of autonomy in principle, express the view that only certain dimensions of autonomy would benefit the Irish school system, while in other respects existing levels of autonomy should be reduced and a greater centralisation of authority take place.

**Developments in Inspection of schools, including School Self-Evaluation**

**INFORMATION, MONITORING AND QUALITY ASSURANCE IN EARLY YEARS AND SCHOOLS**

**Research-informed approach to quality**

The Department’s approach to quality assurance of provision in the schools sector is informed by international research, much of it produced under the auspices of the OECD:

- The Department’s approach recognises that one of the key contributors to quality is the quality of the teacher and the standards of teaching in classrooms and other settings. Studies have shown consistently that by attracting high calibre candidates into the teaching profession, by providing them with high quality initial and continuing professional development, and by retaining them in the profession, the quality of students’ learning is significantly enhanced.
- The Department acknowledges that a range of complementary policies are needed to ensure quality of learning for students, including:
  - well-designed, relevant curricula that are suited to the needs of learners now and in their lives as adults
  - assessment arrangements that monitor and report on students’ learning but do not distort learning
  - external inspection and internal self-evaluation in schools that complement each other to encourage improvement and provide adequate accountability to the management of schools, parents and the public
  - effective national and international monitoring to ensure that standards in Ireland are maintained or improved and that these standards bear comparison with best international practice.
- The Department recognises that parents and the public need and deserve good information about the quality of the work of schools and the learning of students, and the need to ensure that the ways in which this information is provided should be clear, easily accessible and should minimise any adverse effects that inappropriate use of data may generate.

The Department has been implementing a number of actions in line with approach above. Some, such as curricular and assessment changes, and developments in the initial and continuing professional development of teachers, are dealt with elsewhere in this Overview Brief and in the General Briefing document.
**Education-focused inspections in early years settings**

In 2015, the Inspectorate embarked on the development of the early-years education-focused inspection (EYEI) model. A Framework for Early Years Education-Focussed Inspections was published in draft form in 2015. New early-years inspectors were appointed and trained in 2015 and pilot inspections began in November 2015 and concluded at the end of January 2016. An extensive national consultation with the early years sector was undertaken in March 2016 and the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and the Minister for Education and Skills approved the new inspection arrangements for implementation from 11 April 2016. The first formal inspections commenced on 14 April and it is anticipated that the first published inspection reports arising from these inspections will be published in June 2016.

The Inspectorate participates in an Early Years Alignment group, established by Department of Children and Youth Affairs. This assists in ensuring that these Inspections and those of the Tusla Inspectorate, which focus on regulation of the centres and provision for children under three years of age, are properly integrated.

Discussions are under way with DCYA with a view to expanding the initial team of nine early years inspectors.

**Inspection of schools**

Under Section 13 of the Education Act, 1998, the Inspectorate of the Department is responsible for the evaluation of primary and post-primary schools and centres for education and for the provision of advice to the educational system and policy makers. It also has responsibility for the inspection of a range of other educational provision, including aspects of early childhood education. The Inspectorate also has a significant responsibility to assist officials in providing policy advice to Ministers on a number of issues.

**Using a range of inspection models, including follow-up inspections**

Work in the DES Inspectorate over recent years has sought to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the school inspection programme and to introduce school self-evaluation practices into the work of schools, as recommended by OECD and other research.

Traditionally, in Ireland, all schools were inspected in much the same way – the main model of inspection, used at primary and post-primary levels since 2003, was Whole-School Evaluation. These inspections took place in a cyclical fashion.

However, the more modern approaches to inspection that have been implemented since 2010, involve inspectors using a range of different inspection models. These range from short unannounced inspections, through more detailed inspections (for example of subject departments or the teaching of a curricular area or programme) to intensive examinations of teaching, learning, leadership and management practices in schools in different types of whole-school type inspections. Follow-through inspections have also been introduced: these
are scheduled in a sample number of schools where inspections have taken place and they are proving to be highly effective in ensuring that schools act on the recommendations arising from inspections.

Having a range of inspection models means that inspections occur more frequently in schools; schools in which there is a greater risk to the learning of students are identified more quickly; and a proportion of more intensive inspections can be focussed where the need for improvement is likely to be greatest. Having follow-through inspections also provides added flexibility that helps to increase the impact of inspection for improvement.

New inspection models for schools

Work on the creation of a range of inspection models for use in the schools sector will culminate this Autumn with the introduction of revised or new procedures for a number of inspection types. The procedures for all of these new and/or revised models have been subject to consultation with the education partners. Subject to approval by the Minister, the range of inspections used in primary and post-primary schools from September 2016 will include those shown in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inspection models planned to be in use in schools in September 2016</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Primary Schools</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incidental inspections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum evaluations (focussed on one subject or curriculum area)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEN evaluations (evaluating provision for special education only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEIS evaluations (for use in DEIS schools)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole-School Evaluations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-Through inspections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspections of Centres for Education (Youthreach)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Publication of “A Quality Framework for Schools”

The Inspectorate is completing the initial development of a single quality framework for schools. Put simply, this Quality Framework will provide a single, comprehensive yet accessible description of the standards to which schools should aspire. The framework will underpin inspections and school self-evaluation; a draft has already been provided to the Centre for School Leadership to underpin their work on supporting principals; and the Framework will mean that parents and others will have a clear guide to help them understand published inspection. It is anticipated that the Framework will be published in autumn 2016, following consultation with the relevant education partners and Ministerial approval.

School Self-Evaluation (SSE)

School self-evaluation is a process in which schools examine critically aspects of their own work, identify where this can be improved, and plan and implement improvements. International evidence shows that creating a self-evaluation culture in schools can have very positive impacts on student achievement and can make schools more responsive to parents and students’ needs, especially when complemented by external inspection. However, there is also clear evidence that where schools believe that school self-evaluation is mainly for external accountability purposes, the process is not effective and may even be misleading.

The Department has made school self-evaluation mandatory and has insisted that the topics to be examined in schools in the initial phase must be aspects of their teaching and learning. The Department deliberately made the “initial ask” regarding school self-evaluation a modest one, so as not to overwhelm schools and school leaders in the early stages. It has also emphasised the goal of school improvement over that of accountability.

The current issues related to self-evaluation of schools are as follows:

- The Inspectorate will monitor schools’ engagement with the SSE process and will promote school self-evaluation and support schools to improve teaching and learning.
- Ensuring compliance with SSE requirements and developing circulars that will set the requirements for schools regarding SSE in the period 2016-2020; these draft circulars
were issued for consultation with the education partners in April 2016 and will require Ministerial approval prior to June 2016.

- The publication of a Quality Framework for Schools (see above) will support the school self-evaluation process by providing suggestions as to how standards in teaching and learning can be improved.
- As SSE becomes embedded in the school system, external inspection will evolve.

**Information on Schools and School Performance**

A considerable amount of information on schools and school performance is available to parents and others but not in a single format and not easily accessible. In 2015, the Minister for Education and Skills and the Cabinet Committee on Social Policy asked the Department to begin examining issues concerning how information on schools could be made more easily accessible and this work has commenced.

**Gaeltacht education policy**

A policy on Gaeltacht education is currently being finalised. The policy is informed by extensive consultation with a range of educational and Irish language stakeholders. The policy proposals were based on the outcomes of a review of Gaeltacht Education carried out by the Department during 2014. The review included an examination of national research on Gaeltacht education, research on minority language contexts in other jurisdictions (e.g.
Wales, Scotland, New Zealand, and Basque Country) and case-studies of practice in primary and post-primary Gaeltacht schools.

The Policy on Gaeltacht Education aims to set out the vision of the Department for the provision of a quality education through Irish in Gaeltacht schools and the commitments of the Department for the enactment of that vision for the period 2016-2021. It recognises the uniqueness of the Gaeltacht as a linguistic and cultural entity, and the increasingly fragile status of Irish in Gaeltacht areas and schools. Indeed, Gaeltacht schools face considerable challenges to cope with students who come from homes with very varied levels of Irish language skill. Children raised through Irish are now a minority within Gaeltacht schools. There is increasing use of English in Gaeltacht communities and pressure on schools to move to English-medium instruction. The 5 Year time-frame for the implementation of the Policy takes account of the need for immediate action if the Gaeltacht as an Irish speaking entity is to survive.

The policy also complements the language planning processes that are being implemented in Gaeltacht communities in accordance with the Gaeltacht Act, 2012.

Irish in non-Gaeltacht areas

The period ahead provides opportunity to build on the progress achieved to date in the implementation of the 20 Year Strategy for Irish. Current developments include the following:

Primary Language Curriculum

A new language curriculum (English and Irish) for infants to second class has been published and will be implemented over a period of two years, beginning in September 2016.

The new language curriculum allows Irish-medium schools, including Gaeltacht schools, to implement a period of immersion education in Irish until the end of senior infants’ class.

Irish specification at Junior Cycle

Work is ongoing on the development of a new specification for Irish at junior cycle as part of the new Junior Cycle. Provision will be made in the new specification for assessment of oral language. This reflects the Department’s commitment to the development of learners’ oral language competence in particular.

Following consultation with stakeholders, it is intended that there will be separate specifications for Irish for students in English-medium schools and students in Irish-medium schools in order to enrich the Irish language development and support the capacity to learn through Irish of students in Irish-medium schools. It will particularly meet the needs of native speakers of Irish.

Review of the Irish Oral Exam in the Leaving Certificate
In 2012, changed assessment arrangements at Leaving Certificate increased the weighting of marks allocated to the oral exam from 25% to 40%. There has been a large increase in the number of students taking higher level in Leaving Certificate exams, increasing from 33% in 2010 to 42% in 2015.

**Provision for Irish medium education**

The Department continues to make Irish medium education available where it is feasible to do so in areas of population growth and in areas identified as suitable for divesting/reconfiguration. The decision takes account of need, demand from parents and the availability of resources.

**Review of Exemptions from Irish**

The Inspectorate and the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Unit have undertaken a review of exemptions from the study of Irish in order to examine the appropriateness of the arrangements for the granting of exemptions in the current educational and language context and to identify potential improvements and future options.

**Digital strategy**

A new “Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020, Enhancing Teaching, Learning and Assessment” was published in October 2015. It builds on previous work and supports the overall strategy of the Department in a number of key areas including curriculum implementation, skills development, teacher education and learner outcomes.

The Strategy is also aligned with the National Digital Strategy of the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources.

The Strategy is the result of extensive research and consultation and reflects the views of education stakeholders including young people. Input and development of the strategy occurred as follows:

- Survey of schools – leaders and principals input sought
- Focus Groups of parents, young people, and teachers
- Commissioned research report on international experience, research and best practice
- Consultation with education partners, relevant agencies and bodies, relevant Government Departments, colleges and higher education providers, and other stakeholders, including industry

The Strategy sets out a clear vision that is focussed on realising the potential of digital technologies to transform the learning experiences of students by helping them become
engaged thinkers, active learners, knowledge constructors and global citizens who participate fully in society and the economy.

The Strategy is underpinned by five key principles which were identified during the consultation and research phase namely:

- A Constructivist Pedagogical Orientation underpins the embedding of ICT in schools. This involves the use of more active teaching methodologies in schools.
- The use of ICT in teaching, learning and assessment can enhance the learning experience of all students.
- The use of ICT in teaching, learning and assessment is embedded in school curricula, Department policies and teacher education.
- ICT is used in an ethical and responsible manner.
- ICT Planning is required to ensure ICT integration in teaching, learning and assessment.

These principles are designed to ensure that the Department together with its relevant agencies and support services, schools, colleges of education and other key stakeholders play a proactive role in enhancing teaching, learning and assessment through the use of digital technologies.

The Strategy is organised around four Themes namely:

1. Teaching, Learning and Assessment Using ICT;
2. Teacher Professional Learning;
3. Leadership, Research and Policy; and
4. ICT Infrastructure.

The Digital Strategy recognises that school equipment requires updating and investing. Accordingly, a fund of €210m has been committed beginning with an investment of €30m in the next school year (2016/2017) rising to €50m a year thereafter.

The Strategy sets out a programme of work with clear outcomes for the 2015-2020 period. Planning for implementation is underway involving relevant sections of the Department, its agencies and support services, schools and the DCENR. Appropriate oversight and consultative structures are also being established.

Teacher Education

Initial Teacher Education Programmes

The relationship between good education outcomes and teacher quality is well attested in international research literature. Key steps in ensuring teacher quality relate to both initial teacher education (ITE) and ongoing professional renewal in the form of continuing professional development (CPD). In relation to ITE, the first cycle of review and accreditation has been completed for all initial teacher education programmes by the Teaching Council and
reports issued to the providers. These reviews are also central to the changes in teacher education that were made in accordance with the National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020, which proposes very significant changes to teacher education. Significant improvements include – an increase in ITE courses for primary teachers from a three to a four year degree from 2012 and from an 18 month to a two year post graduate programme from September 2014. ITE courses for the majority of second level teachers have moved from one to two year post-degree courses with concurrent degree programmes (i.e. programmes in which students undertake academic subjects and pedagogical studies) lengthened and reconfigured to four years duration from September 2014. All reconfigured programmes now include substantial periods of school placement as central to student teacher development (at least one year in total in the case of primary teachers) and a number of mandatory elements in all ITE programmes, such as literacy, numeracy and inclusive education.

Reconfiguration of ITE providers

The changes to initial teacher education structures, following from the 2012 Report of the International Review Panel on the Structure of Initial Teacher Education (headed by Pasi Sahlberg), involved 19 state funded providers of ITE being reconfigured to 6 centres of teacher education and are currently being progressed by the HEA. While the institutions involved in three of the proposed new centres have agreed to merge, the other ITE providers have agreed to come together as part of collaborative regional clusters and agree a programme of work designed initially to achieve greater co-ordination and sharing of academic planning and coordinated student pathways into and through the clusters of institutions.

Teacher Supply

The Teaching Council was asked, in accordance with its statutory remit, to advise the Minister on the matter of teacher supply. In this regard a Technical Working Group (TWG) was set up to undertake an analysis of arrangements for the planning of the teacher workforce.

The TWG, in December 2014, provided an interim report to the Minister, which was published in June 2015. A final report was submitted in late December 2015. The report is being considered by the Department and will be published and its recommendations implemented, as appropriate, in due course.

The purpose of this work is the development of a central planning mechanism to advise on the number of teachers required to meet the needs of primary and post-primary schools in view of changing demographics and curriculum needs.
Continuing Professional Development for Teachers

Programmes of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for teachers address a range of priorities such as facilitating the implementation of new and revised syllabi, new programmes and other changes in schools designed to increase the relevance of programmes, promote retention of students, update knowledge, develop school management expertise, meet special and learning support needs and support the development of educational and vocational guidance. It should be noted that curricular reform requires CPD to be provided if it is to succeed.

Section 39 of the Teaching Council Act 2001 relates to the Continuing Professional Development of teachers and will be commenced as soon as practicable after Part 5. When commenced, career long CPD will be a mandatory requirement for registered teachers. The Teaching Council is developing, in consultation with stakeholders, its policy on continuing professional development/teacher learning, “Cosán”.

Education Centres

There are 21 full-time Education Centres and 9 part time Education Centres. The nationwide network are essential partners in the provision of CPD and deliver national programmes of teacher professional development at a local level in areas such as School Self Evaluation (SSE), Literacy and Numeracy (L&N) and curricular reform (e.g. Junior Cycle).

Each Centre is headed by a Director who is a teacher on secondment from a primary or a post primary school. Education Centres are statutory bodies under Section 37 of the Education Act (1998) and are managed by voluntary Management Committees elected annually.

Droichead

In 2013 the Teaching Council established and introduced a new model of induction and probation for newly qualified teachers (NQTs). This new model is called Droichead and has been independently researched by the ESRI (Economic and Social Research Institute). Training for Professional Support Teams (PST) involved in the Droichead pilot, at school level, is provided by the National Induction Programme for Teachers (NIPT). Droichead is grounded in the belief that the people best placed to conduct the formal welcome into the profession are experienced fellow professionals, who know what is involved in teaching and learning in their school. These fellow professionals will themselves be supported through the provision of a range of structures and resources. Key to this support is a Professional Support Team (PST) which generally consists of the NQT, Principal and mentor teacher in the school.

The pilot which commenced in September 2013 and is due to finish in August 2016. In September 2016 a “growth” phase of two years will commence. The ESRI publication “Review of the Droichead programme” which has been finalised (February 2016) will inform further planning of the “growth phase”. In September 2018 it is expected that Droichead will be confirmed as the sole route of induction for almost all NQTs. This would mark a five year period of development from the date of the commencement of the pilot. The Inspectorate will
continue to be involved in the probation of NQTs until that time: the Teaching Council has
determined that from September 2016, the remit of the Inspectorate to conduct probationary
inspections should decrease in a staged manner while increasingly, Droichead will become the
main means by which teachers will satisfy their probationary and registration requirements,
other than in limited circumstances when the Inspectorate will undertake inspections where
the school staff are unable to assess a teacher’s professional competence. It should be noted,
however, that one teacher union (the INTO) has decided to conduct a ballot among its members
on whether they should cooperate with the implementation of Droichead

The Teaching Council

The Teaching Council was established on a statutory basis in March 2006 under the Teaching
Council Act 2001 to:

- promote teaching as a profession;
- promote the professional development of teachers;
- maintain and improve the quality of teaching in the State;
- provide for the establishment of standards, policies and procedures for the education
  and training of teachers; and
- provide for the registration and regulation of teachers and to enhance professional
  standards and competence.

The Council is self-financing, funded by teacher registration fees. Legislation was recently
enacted to enable the Council to perform certain vetting and “fitness to teach” functions. The
legislation is not yet commenced. The Council is also responsible for advising the Minister on
entry requirements to Initial Teacher Education programmes and for the review and
accreditation of those programmes.

Legislation

Section 30 of the Teaching Council Act

Section 30 of the Teaching Council Act 2001 was amended in the Education (Amendment) Act
2012 to provide for regulations to be made by the Minister to circumscribe the circumstances
in which an unregistered teacher may be paid from public funds.

Section 30 of the Teaching Council Act was commenced on 1 November 2013 and took effect
on 28 January 2014. From then, all teachers in recognised schools must be registered with the
Teaching Council, the professional standards body for teachers, in order to be paid by the State.
This is in the best interests of our children and our education system as a whole. The role of the Teaching Council is strengthened through this move which is a further step towards full regulation of the teaching profession. At the same time Statutory Instrument 32 of 2014 made regulations to enable a school or ETB, in urgent or unforeseen circumstances e.g. to avoid closure of a school or cancellation of classes, to employ, for up to five consecutive days at a time, a person who is not registered as a teacher with the Teaching Council.

**Fitness to Teach**

Part 5 of the Teaching Council Act 2001 makes provision for the Council to investigate complaints against a teacher and to conduct inquiries into a teacher's Fitness to Teach. The Department’s policy is that Part 5 (Fitness to Teach) of the Teaching Council Act would be commenced after section 30. Government approval was given on 10 December 2013 for drafting a Bill making changes to Part 5, including to provide for a wider range of sanctions such as advice, admonishment and censure, which may be applied by the Council following an inquiry.

Procedures were introduced in 2009 under the Education Act (Section 24) for schools and Education and Training Boards (then VECs), as employers, to address teacher competence issues. Generally speaking it will be necessary for these procedures to be exhausted before investigation by the Teaching Council under Part 5.

Following Government approval on 15 April 2014 to further amendments to the Teaching Council Act, the Teaching Council (Amendment) Act 2015 was enacted in July 2015. The purpose of this Act is to underpin, in statute, the central role of the Teaching Council in the vetting of teachers and to allow, on a statutory basis, the Teaching Council to implement fitness to teach provisions. It is intended to commence these provisions as soon as possible. Certain provisions of the Act are designed to act in tandem with the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012 so these provisions will be commenced when that Act, which passed all stages in the Oireachtas at dissolution of the Dáil, is commenced. It is intended that other sections of the Teaching Council Act, such as those which amended the sections on registration of teachers and renewal of registration will be commenced as soon as practicable, thereby enabling the Council to update their regulations to take account of improvements in recent years in teacher education.
**Child Protection in schools**

In all matters relating to child protection the Department is required to operate under and in accordance with national policy. National policy is fundamentally expressed in Children First, soon to be placed on a statutory footing, and is also given expression in a legislative context through the measures contained in vetting legislation and the legislation on withholding information. The Departments of Children and Youth Affairs and Justice and Equality are the lead Departments with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs having overall policy responsibility for child protection. Using the terminology used in relation to Government’s Emergency Planning, An Garda Síochána and TUSLA - The Child and Family Agency (CFA) and are the “blue light” agencies of the child protection system. For example Government has determined that investigation of a “child protection concern” (in reality akin to an allegation) are a matter for the CFA in relation to child protection and An Garda Síochána in relation to the investigation of alleged criminal behaviour. The CFA refer to such investigations as “assessments”. An Garda Síochána also has a particular additional responsibility to safeguard a child where a report is made that a child is in immediate danger.

Child protection concerns reported to the Department or that come to the Department’s attention are not investigated (or assessed) by the Department either by line division officials or by the Inspectorate. Under the Department’s internal child protection procedures there is duty on all Department officials (including staff of the Minister’s office where all correspondence is checked for child protection concerns) to comply with the internal reporting arrangements, whereby the concern is passed to the CFA or An Garda Síochána without any judgement being exercised in relation to it. There is a risk that this approach may be misconstrued publicly as being hands off. Quite the contrary it is grounded on the need to have absolute clarity throughout the organisation that information provided should not be second guessed and should simply be conveyed as received to the CFA. Furthermore where the subject of an allegation is a school employee, the Minister is not the employer and disciplinary procedures in schools in relation to misconduct are based on the role of the Board of Management as employer.

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs chairs an interdepartmental Children First Implementation Group comprising relevant Departments and agencies. The Department is a member of this group. The Children First legislation will place this group on a statutory footing. Following a recent Government decision, a sub-group of the Group is at present carrying out a review of current and planned child protection measures.

The Department has an oversight responsibility for the education sector in relation to compliance with Children First. This oversight role is distributed through the sector and the degree of direct action by the Department varies within the sector. For example in relation to bodies under the aegis of the Department (e.g. SOLAS, SEC, NCSE, HEA,) the Department requires the agencies to provide assurance that they are compliant with requirements of Children First. In the case of the third level sector the HEA seeks assurance from institutions that they are compliant. This is done in tandem with other assurances in relation to
governance. The Department is more “hands on” in relation to the school sector where specific and detailed guidance is provided. For example working with the partners the Department provides guidelines to schools that effectively translate the generality of Children First into specific requirements for schools and in relation to vetting under the existing administrative arrangements the Department has been quite prescriptive.

Three significant pieces of legislation are expected to be commenced in the coming months.

- Children First Act 2015
- National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012 (amended by the Criminal Justice (Spent Convictions and Certain Disclosures) Act 2016)
- Teaching Council Acts 2001 to 2012 (amended by the Teaching Council Amendment Act 2015)

Each of them is designed to enhance child protection safeguards.

The vetting legislation provides for the sharing of specified (soft) information by the new bureau along with information on pending criminal charges or convictions and places an obligation on employers (including schools) to receive a vetting disclosure from the new bureau. It will be an offence to employ without doing so. The school system has a high turnover in teacher appointments which peaks before the start of the school year but carries through the entire school year mainly in relation to substitution. The Department sought changes to the legislation to mitigate a major risk that schools might not be able to function while they waited for vetting disclosures.

The Teaching Council is at the heart of the vetting arrangements for schools. We see the Teaching Council involvement as pivotal in ensuring the vetting procedures relating to schools are as robust as possible. The vetting legislation is employer based. We have gone a step further by putting in place statutory arrangements that make vetting mandatory for registration as well. A teacher that is the subject of a relevant negative disclosure should be excluded from teaching in any school by being refused a place on the register or by removal from the register. The changes in the teaching council legislation when commenced should provide a more effective means of excluding a teacher, from his/her current employment and any further employment, than reliance on dismissal by a school alone. An estimated 35000 teachers in the system have never been the subject of a vetting disclosure. The commencement of the retrospective vetting provisions by the Minister for Justice and Equality will provide the mechanism to address this. While the Garda vetting unit in recent times had increased capacity that could have enabled commencing vetting of those teachers we took the view that it was preferable to wait for the statutory disclosures from the new bureau that will include specified information.
The Children First legislation when commenced will place new statutory responsibilities on all teachers in relation to mandatory reporting in certain circumstances. It will also require schools to have safeguarding statements. It is expected that the existing four definitions of child abuse (sexual, physical, emotional and neglect) will be retained and will continue to require reporting and that there will also be definitions/guidance that will determine what subset of the four will trigger mandatory reporting. Until settled text of a revised version of Children First is available it is not possible to gauge how the new procedures will operate in practice and the extent to which there may be a potential for confusion leading to excessive mandatory reporting.

Following the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in the Louise O’Keeffe case the Government decided that there should be a review of child protection arrangements in schools and generally. This work is being carried out by a sub-group of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs Interdepartmental Children First Implementation Group. The initial part of this work has concentrated on schools and is nearing completion and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs is expected to report to Government presently.

There are a number of challenges ahead.

Taken together the new legislative requirements will place an initial burden on schools; particularly in relation to training for all teachers as mandated persons and the preparation of safeguarding statements. The Department will support this by engaging with the education partners and providing guidelines. At present there is no budget line for this training. It will be important that the commencement timelines for Children First take account of the need for lead adequate lead in time to ensure stakeholder buy-in.

While the commencement of the vetting legislation will strengthen child protection arrangements it has its limitations when compared to neighbouring jurisdictions where there are barring procedures.
**School Transport**

The School Transport Scheme operates as an administrative arrangement between the Department and Bus Éireann. Following an EU Commission State Aid decision (C31/2007) on 15 October 2014, the Department has been engaging in dialogue with the Commission on "appropriate measures to ensure the scheme in its future implementation is compatible with the internal market". Initial proposals, involving potential organisational changes within Bus Éireann, have been made as part of the current dialogue without prejudice to our position that current arrangements are compliant with State Aid law.

Separately, we have faced judicial review proceedings challenging the current arrangements. The Applicant alleged that the arrangements between Bus Éireann and the Department is a contract which is reviewable by the High Court (Commercial), and that it was awarded in breach of the public contracts directive. Judgement was delivered in favour of the Minister on 23 October 2012. This judgement was appealed to the Court of Appeal by the Applicant and was heard in early February 2016. A judgement is awaited.

More generally, policy changes made in 2011 are impacting on levels of eligibility for school transport and on the overall proportion of primary and post primary children who are availing of school transport on a concessionary basis (i.e. not eligible but avail of spare places). The viability of services and the bus capacity provided is kept under review according to the numbers of eligible children on a route. The impact of previous policy changes will be fully realised by the end of the 2019 and 2018 school years in primary and post-primary respectively. It is anticipated that reductions in bus sizes on a number of routes will result in reductions in the number of concessionary seats available in the coming school year.
**Special Education**

There are a number of processes underway within the Department to review and update our main programmes for targeted supports to schools to support children with special educational needs:

- Special Needs Assistant and Resource Teacher numbers
- New allocation model
- Autism policy advice

**Special Needs Assistant and Resource Teacher numbers**

The Special Education Section is responsible for overseeing the development of Departmental policy for children with special educational needs as well as managing a range of initiatives aimed at supporting children with special educational needs and to develop comprehensive, efficient and effective services for such children.

Funding for special education provision in 2016 will amount to some €1.5 billion, which is equivalent to 18% of the gross overall current allocation for education and training.

This funding provides for a range of supports and services including additional learning and resource teaching support, Special Needs Assistant support, special transport arrangements, building adaptations, enhanced capitation, funding for the purchase of specialised equipment, services of the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), enhanced levels of capitation in Special schools and Special Classes and additional teacher training.

This provision ensures that all children with special education needs can be included within the education system. The policy of the Department is that children with special educational needs should be included where possible and appropriate in mainstream placements with additional supports provided. In circumstances where children with special educational need require more specialised interventions, special school or special class places are provided for.

**Special Needs Assistant Scheme**

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE), through its network of locally based Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), allocates Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support to schools to cater for the care needs of students with a diagnosed disability. SNAs are a school based resource and the assessed care needs of each individual student underpins the allocation of SNA support to a school.

Budget 2016 provided an additional 100 posts to meet additional demand arising from January to June 2016, bringing the total number of Special Needs Assistant Posts to 12,040.
This is a higher level of Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support than ever before, which will ensure that children with special educational needs can continue to participate in education and be supported in a manner appropriate to their needs.

The total number of Special Needs Assistant (SNA) posts which are available to the NCSE to allocate to schools, has increased by almost 14%, from 10,575 posts in 2011 to 12,040 to June 2016.

A Focussed Policy Assessment of the SNA scheme is also currently underway which is designed to review the extent to which the scheme continues to meet its objectives and the extent to which resources are being utilised effectively and efficiently, in line with the guidelines.

Resource Teaching Allocations

Each year the NCSE allocates resource teacher posts to schools to support children with a diagnosis of disability and an assessed level of need.

In recent years the NCSE has reported significant increases in the levels of diagnosed disability which is driving the allocation of resources at levels significantly in advance of the demographic growth. There is approximately a 10% increase in demand each year as more children are being assessed as having special educational needs.

In 2010 the Government capped the number of Resource Teachers at 5265. To address the increases in demand in 2011/2012 and 2012/2013 it was decided to adjust the levels of allocations to all children equally from 100% of the recommended levels to 85% of the recommended levels. This decision ensured that, although there were considerably more children receiving assessments of special educational need, provision could be made for all qualifying children on an equitable basis. This rate of allocation remains in place today, however, the cap on the number of posts which may be allocated has increased to meet extra demand.

Budget 2016 made additional provision for 2016, increasing the number of resource teacher posts from 6705 at the end of 2015 to 6852 at the end of June 2016 and to 7452 posts to end 2016.

The number of Resource teacher posts available to the NCSE to allocate to schools has increased by 29% in recent years, from 5265 posts available for allocation in 2011 to the current number of 6852 posts available for allocation.
New allocation model

In June 2014, an NCSE Working Group Report recommended a new model for allocating resource teaching support to schools, based on the profiled needs of each school, rather than on the diagnosed disability of individual children.

It is intended that the new model would replace the existing system of General Allocation Model (GAM) or Learning Support Allocations, combined with NCSE allocations, with a single profiled allocation model for schools.

In February 2015, the then Minister for Education and Skills announced that she was not proposing to change the way that resource teachers are allocated to schools for the 2015/16 school year.

Through a consultation process there was a broad welcome for the proposed new model from Parents, Disability Groups, Schools and Education Partners. However, there was not sufficient time to address all of the concerns raised in advance of the 2015 school year.

A pilot of the new allocation mode was established for the 2015/16 school year, and is currently underway. 47 mainstream schools, of different types and sizes, including 28 primary schools and 19 post primary schools are participating in the pilot. This pilot has been developed in order to test the model in a number of schools and to allow for the practical effect of the application of the new model in pilot schools to be gauged.

On conclusion of the pilot, a review of the pilot will be considered and the new model will be finalised with a view to its introduction from the start of the 2017/2018 school year.

Work is currently underway to develop the new allocation model in time to allow the model to be introduced, subject to Government Approval, from September 2017.

Autism policy advice

In October 2013, the Minister requested the NCSE to prepare policy advice on the Educational Provision for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders, in line with the NCSE’s role under the EPSEN Act.

The Minister specifically requested that the NCSE would consult widely with parents, professionals, other stakeholders and interested parties in the preparation of this policy advice.

The Minister has received the NCSE’s policy advice ‘Supporting Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders’. The report reflects the findings of the consultative process, the commissioned research and the extensive review of literature in the field.
The report is due to be considered by the Cabinet Committee on Social Policy and Public Service Reform at its next available meeting and it is planned that the NCSE would subsequently publish the report.

Proposals to implement the recommendations of the Report and an implementation Report will be developed for the Minister’s consideration.

**DEIS Review**

The DEIS Action Plan has now been in place for more than 10 years and a review is appropriate to ensure that the additional supports being provided to address educational disadvantage continue to reach those most in need of them. Following the April 2015 publication of the DES-commissioned ESRI Report ‘Learning from DEIS’ a process for a review of the DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) Programme commenced with a consultation process involving all education partners. The overall scope of the Review is to assess the existing DEIS Programme in the context of evaluations to date and any relevant policy and other developments in order to inform future policy on educational disadvantage.

This process is now underway with the majority of the work programme scheduled to take place during the course of the current school year – 2015/16. There are two strands to the review:

1. Consideration of an appropriate model for the identification of schools in terms of their relative levels of concentrated disadvantage;
2. An assessment of the DEIS School Support Programme to consider current and future inputs to DEIS and to develop a framework for interdepartmental and inter-agency links to ensure greater cohesion and cross-sectoral cooperation for future delivery of supports to schools.

Stakeholder consultation is a key element of the review process and invited submissions from education partners have already been considered – and made available on the DES website. Further engagement with education partners and other key stakeholders is planned in the coming months.

Subject to Government approval, it is planned to introduce a revised DEIS programme for the school year 2017/18.

**Psychological service**

The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), a constituent Section of the DES, provides a comprehensive, school-based, educational psychology service to all schools, through the application of psychological theory and practice, to support the academic, social and emotional development of all learners, having particular regard for children with special educational needs (SEN). NEPS understanding of SEN and inclusion encompasses a broad
definition that includes not only those with significant and enduring learning needs arising from a disability, but also those with diverse learning needs, ranging from mild/transient to severe/enduring and those groups of children at risk of marginalisation. NEPS also has particular regard for children and young people with well-being/mental health difficulties.

The scope of the NEPS service is broad and requires NEPS to work in a cross-cutting, collaborative manner with different sections of the DES and its agencies, and with service providers external to the DES.

NEPS achieves its objective through the provision of a tiered service delivery model encompassing:

- Engaging in casework (including consultation/assessment), working with teachers, parents and children/young people to maximise positive outcomes for the children and young people with greatest need
- Providing advice, support and consultation to teachers and parents to build their capacity to maximise positive outcomes for the children and young people with gaps in their academic, social and emotional competence
- Engaging in systemic work in schools to ensure that appropriate support structures are in place and to help build school capacity to provide universal, evidence-based approaches and early intervention to promote well-being and academic, social and emotional competence for all children/young people
- The provision of policy advice to the Department and liaising and working cooperatively with sections/agencies of the Department, as appropriate.
- Liaison with DOH/HSE and DCYA/TUSLA to ensure coordinated cross-departmental service delivery to children/young people at risk of marginalisation due to disability, mental health difficulties and/or other significant risk factors.

NEPS psychologists also support schools in the event of Critical Incidents (such as bereavement or death by suicide) and processes applications for Reasonable Accommodation in Certificate Examinations (RACE) for the State Examinations Commission.

NEPS has been leading a DES Cross-division Mental Health/Well-being Group (which includes Teacher Education Section (TES), Inspectorate, Curriculum and Assessment Unit (CAP), Early Years Education Policy Unit (EYEPU), Special Education, Social Inclusion Section, Further Education and Training Section (FETS) and Central Policy Unit (CPU)) to progress the provision of outcome focused work plans within relevant sections of the DES to promote mental health and well-being. At an inter-departmental level, NEPS is involved in progressing work related to actions agreed by the Department as part of the Connecting for Life Strategy (2015-2020), progressing coordinated service delivery for children and young people with mental health difficulties between DES and HSE/CAMHS services.

NEPS is supporting the Department’s piloting of a New Model of Resource Allocation for students with SEN and is involved in developing criteria for the identification of pupils/students with complex special educational needs, to be included as a weighted
element of school profiles for the purpose of resource allocation. NEPS is also working to agree optimal coordination arrangements for service delivery to schools between NEPS and the NCSE’s Inclusion Support Service (ISS) and the Department’s TES/PDST.

**Student Wellbeing**

Promoting and supporting schools in the area of health and wellbeing promotion requires bilateral and multi-lateral engagement. Oversight and ownership is shared with the Department of Health (DOH)/Health Service Executive (HSE) and Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA)/Tusla. Health and wellbeing promotion is an element of the work of many Divisions of the Department of Education and Skills and requires coordination to promote clarity and coherence in order to facilitate interface with the external partners. A cross division audit has been completed and a review of the recommendations will inform future development.

The Department collaborates in the implementation of Healthy Ireland 2013-2025, Better Outcomes Better Futures 2014-2020 and is actively participating in the cross departmental development of an implementation plan for *Connecting for Life: Ireland’s National Strategy to Reduce Suicide (2015-2020).*

The Department of Education and Skills promotes a comprehensive and whole-school approach to the promotion of health and well-being including positive physical and mental health, as well as supporting individual young people with identified need. This spans the curriculum, whole-school ethos, quality of teaching, learning and assessment, student support and pastoral care, guidance counselling and the provision of professional development for teachers. It also involves accessing other supports such as educational psychology services and teacher education. Schools engage in a wide range of sport and cultural co-curricular activities which provide opportunity for students to experience success and personal growth. The whole staff, and in particular the Student Support Team and Guidance Counsellors, share responsibility for general student well-being.

This Department has issued guidance for primary and post primary schools about measures to promote healthy lifestyles. The guidance was drafted in consultation with the Department of Health and the HSE and encompasses measures to promote healthy eating, healthy vending, as well as the promotion of P.E. and Physical Activity. The Department is involved in a number of other initiatives to further promote physical health and wellbeing including:

- Development of a Wellbeing curriculum for Junior Cycle as part of reform
- Development of new professional development programme for primary and post primary teachers in P.E.
- Active Schools Flag Programme
- Actions under the National Physical Activity Plan
- A Partnership with the HSE, Health Promotion Schools under the Healthy Ireland Initiative.
The Well-Being Guidelines for mental health promotion in post primary and primary schools (2013/2015) were developed as a cross departmental initiative and provide practical guidance on how schools can promote well-being and mental health in an integrated school-wide way and also provide evidence-based advice on how to support vulnerable young people. The Guidelines build on the significant work already in place including implementing the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum which provides a scaffold and structured framework to foster the health and well-being. Support for implementation is available from the Professional Development Support Service for Teachers, the National Educational Psychological Service and the HSE, Health Promoting Schools Officers.

As part of curriculum implementation the Department supports and trains schools and teachers to implement evidence-based approaches focusing on building protective factors such as resilience. These include Friends, Incredible Years and Stay Safe programmes, and promoting the review and development of Student Support Teams. The Department’s Action Plan on Bullying provides additional support. Guidelines on supporting schools in Critical Incidents response were revised in 2015 and the Department’s NEPS psychologists support schools in implementation which includes assistance to school staff when dealing with an incident. NEPS psychologists also support the promotion of wellbeing and mental health amongst the vulnerable group of early school-leavers attending Youthreach Centres. The Department also supports schools in implementation of Child Protection Guidelines.

Part 3 Further Education and Training and Higher Education

Structure and Governance

Further Education and Training (FET) comprises programmes leading to awards of levels 1 to 6 of the National Framework of Qualifications. It is primarily delivered or contracted by the 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs) under the funding and strategic direction of SOLAS, the Further Education and Training Authority. FET includes both labour market focused programmes and programmes with a strong social inclusion dimension.

FET programmes can be full time or part time and are delivered in a wide range of ETB settings including Post Leaving Certificate and Further Education Colleges, Youthreach and adult education centres and training centres. They are also provided through community and voluntary groups, commercial training providers and in workplaces.

Over €800 million is invested in FET each year, both from the Exchequer and through the National Training Fund and annual provision is set out in service plans developed by SOLAS and the ETBs. Some 270,000 FET places are delivered annually. An overall development and reform programme for the FET sector is set out in the FET Strategy 2014-19, drafted by SOLAS and approved by the Minister.
Higher Education in Ireland is provided mainly by 7 Universities and 14 Institutes of Technology including Dublin Institute of Technology. In addition, a number of other third level institutions provide specialist education in such fields as teacher education, art and design, medicine, business studies, rural development, theology, music and law. The Higher Education Authority (HEA) is the statutory planning and development body for higher education and research in Ireland. The HEA has wide advisory powers throughout the whole of the higher education sector. In addition it is the funding authority for the universities, institutes of technology and other designated higher education institutions.

Implementation of the FET Strategy 2014 – 2019

A significant programme of reform of the Further Education and Training (FET) sector has been undertaken in recent years. The former national training agency FÁS was disbanded and its training functions were transferred to the 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs). The ETBs were formed from the rationalisation of the 33 former Vocational Education Committees (the ETBs also provide mainstream second level education and in some cases primary education). SOLAS was established as a new oversight and funding body for the FET sector. These structural changes are still bedding down and some elements of the reform such as the senior management structure of the ETBs are still being finalised. Notwithstanding this, the reform process has been successfully managed without interference with the provision of further education and training to learners.

In accordance with its founding legislation, SOLAS was required to develop a 5 year strategy for the Further Education and Training sector. The strategy, which was approved by Government, was published in May 2014. It has five strategic goals under the headings

• Skills for the Economy;
• Active Inclusion;
• Quality Provision; □ Integrated Planning; and □ Funding and Standing of FET.

The implementation of the strategy involves a series of actions over the five year period from a range of actors including the DES, SOLAS, ETBs, QQI, DSP as well as other bodies such as AONTAS and NALA. Implementation is overseen by an advisory committee chaired by the department.

The purpose of the reforms is to ensure that FET provision is relevant to both the needs of the economy and the needs of those furthest from the labour market; that funding takes account of the evaluation of programmes while ensuring integrated and co-ordinated provision (in the past further education and training provision were planned separately resulting in duplication.); that the quality of provision is enhanced through quality assurance measures, connections with employers and evaluation processes. The range of actions encompassed by
the FET Strategy are designed to make FET a strong fourth pillar of provision (primary, post primary and higher education being the other three). While some of the measures envisaged in the Strategy are being achieved within existing resources additional investment will be required to fully implement the Strategy. For example, there is no capital budget for the sector and the expansion of apprenticeships will require additional funding.

**Review of PLC Provision**

In line with the goals of the FET Strategy for Quality Provision and for an Integrated Planning and Funding model that has regard to objective analysis of needs and evidence of social and economic impact, it is intended to undertake a series of evaluations of FET programmes over the lifetime of the strategy. The first of these evaluations is of the Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) programme. This evaluation is being conducted under SOLAS with the support of the ESRI and is expected to be completed by mid-2016. A submission will be made to the Minister following completion of the evaluation.

**Review of Apprenticeship System and introduction of New Apprenticeships**

A key recommendation of a review of apprenticeships carried out in late 2013 by an independent review group was that an Apprenticeship Council should be established to oversee a call for proposals for new apprenticeships. The Apprenticeship Council was established in 2014 and issued its call for proposals in January 2015. It reported to the Minister in June 2015 that it had received 86 proposals of which 25 were considered sufficiently robust for development as a first group of “new” apprenticeships. The establishment of new apprenticeships is also one of the significant measures envisaged in the implementation of the FET Strategy. The Council has been engaging with the consortia and development funding has been released to a number of them while other proposals continue to be explored further.

A number of key considerations need to be borne in mind in relation to new apprenticeships. Firstly, they need to be sustainable – if we are to persuade young people (and their parents) that new apprenticeships are an attractive alternative to higher education they need to know that they will get a sustainable job and career through this route. Secondly, apprenticeships are employer led – an apprenticeship is a contract of employment. An apprenticeship cannot succeed without the commitment of employers who give contracts of employment to apprentices. Employers have to contribute to the development of the curricula for new apprenticeships and must be in a position to put in place arrangements to deliver the on the job training. Thirdly, funding will be required for expansion into new apprenticeships. An amount of €10 million has been earmarked for new apprenticeships in 2016 from existing allocations. This is not additional funding – it has been diverted from other programmes. Any expansion of apprenticeships into 2017 will require additional funding.
Higher education policy is focused on implementation of the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030, which was published in January 2011. The Strategy sets out a comprehensive roadmap for reform of the higher education system, with the aim that the system becomes more performance-oriented and more flexible and responsive, while the diversity of mission is retained and enhanced.

Key elements of the Higher Education Reform Programme include the introduction of the System Performance Framework aligned with performance funding, which sets out national priorities and seven key system objectives for the higher education system against which higher education institutions (HEIs) will be monitored and which forms the basis for the agreement of compacts between the HEA and the HEIs which provide for targets and actions related to enhanced teaching, learning and engagement; system development and restructuring including; mergers; regional clusters and reform of the initial teacher education system.

The accountability of the system is also being increased by the implementation of the new National Employer Survey and the new National Student Survey (ISSE).

A report on the findings of the first National Employers Survey was published in May 2015. Overall, in terms of satisfaction with FET and HE graduates, employers were very satisfied with recent recruits across a range of workplace and personal attributes. These included ICT skills; teamwork; communication; adaptability and flexibility; positive attitude and energy. A lower level of satisfaction was noted for foreign language capability, entrepreneurial skills and business acumen/awareness.

In addition, the results of the Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE) published in November 2015, showed broad satisfaction among HE students with their experience. 68% of all participating students reported positive relationships with teaching staff, finding them to be available, helpful and sympathetic (a score of 5 or greater on 7 point scale) and 79% of all participating students selected good or excellent, when asked how they would evaluate their entire educational experience at their institution. 63% of all participating students selected often or very often, when asked if they were improving knowledge and skills that will contribute to their employability.

System Infrastructure
Changes to the system infrastructure to support and drive change across the sector have also been progressed. The key system developments are the establishment of the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning and the Regional Clusters of HEIs.

The National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning was established in 2012 and is a key system-level infrastructure for the enhancement of teaching and learning in Irish
higher education. The National Forum is engaged in a range of activities aimed at providing students with the highest quality teaching and learning experience. Its focus is on ‘adding value’ by providing a structure through which institutional and network initiatives can be synergised and leveraged to support a vibrant community of grass-roots’ activity.

**Regional Clusters**

Regional clusters of institutions in identified regions have been established and the clusters were requested to focus on shared academic planning and access, progression and transfer pathways in Dublin/Leinster, the South/South East and West/Mid/West. All seven universities, colleges of education and 14 ITs are grouped as follows:

- Dublin I (UCD, TCD, IADT, NCAD, MIE);
- Dublin II (DCU, MDI, SPD, NUIM, AIT, IT Dundalk; DIT, IT Tallaght, ITB);
- Mid-West (UL, LIT, MIC);
- West/North-West (NUIG, GMIT, LKIT, IT Sligo, St. Angela’s College); and
- South (UCC, CIT, IT Tralee, WIT, IT Carlow).

The HEA has recently led on a consultation process regarding progressing in developing the regional clusters and future priorities, particularly in the context of the development of the new Regional Skills Fora being led by DES and also in the broader context of economic and enterprise policy which has a strong regional development focus (e.g. Regional Action Plans for Jobs and Innovation 2020). Further work will be undertaken in 2016 in reviewing and developing policy in this area.

The Strategy also provides for the reconfiguration of the HE system and this includes the establishment of Technological Universities, establishment of centres of excellence for teacher education and consolidation of a number of smaller institutions (e.g. Shannon College was incorporated into NUIG in 2015).

**Higher education performance funding**

In 2013, the Minister set out an overarching framework to assess system wide performance. The HEA, using its new performance funding approach, engages with HEIs to assess performance, and reports to the Minister on the outcomes. The first such report was presented in April 2014.

The implementation of the System Performance Framework, Strategic Dialogue and agreement of compacts between the HEA and HEIs underpins a changed relationship between the State and the higher education system and provides for a new level of accountability for public funding against national objectives for the public funded higher education system.
The first System Performance Report was published in June 2014 and the second Systems Performance Report is currently being drafted by the HEA and it is expected that it will be ready for publication in Q2 2016. There will be a review of the Systems Performance Framework during 2016 with a revised framework put in place for the 2017 – 2019 period.

The HEA has also recently finalised cycle 2 of their strategic dialogue process with all HEIs and the HEIs have recently been notified of the outcome. In terms of the performance funding process, each HEI has been placed in one of three categories (Category 1, 2 or 3) based on the outcome of this process, and performance funding will be released accordingly to each Institution. For those HEIs in Categories 1 and 2 performance funding will be released in full in respect of the 2016 budget allocation. For those Institutions in Category 3, 2% of their funding is being reserved pending a process of engagement between the HEA and the Institution concerned, to be finalised during Q2 2016, at which time a final decision will be made on the funding allocation for 2016.

On foot of these steps the HEA has now set out preliminary assessments of HEI performance, and in some cases, where performance has not been to expected standards, has indicated that a funding penalty may apply in respect of 2016. HEIs have been invited to provide feedback to the HEA on any aspects of this preliminary assessment. The HEA will take this into account when making final funding allocations.

**Technological Universities**

The National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 recommended significant reform of the institute of technology sector in order to position it to meet national strategic objectives. In particular, the Strategy recommended consolidation within the sector and a pathway of evolution for consolidated institutes of technology to allow them to demonstrate significant progress against stated performance criteria and to apply to become technological universities. The Higher Education Authority (HEA) have published a four stage process and set of criteria for applicant groups of institutes of technology who wish to apply to become technological universities. There are currently four consortia engaged with the process to become designated as TUs. These are TU4Dublin (DIT, ITT, ITB), TUSE (WIT, ITC), MTU (CIT, IT Tralee) and CUA (GMIT, IT Sligo, IT Letterkenny). TU4Dublin and MTU are the most advanced and enactment of the Technological Universities (TU) Bill will enable these projects to proceed with legal merger and move to the final stage for application for designation as a TU.

The process and criteria will be placed on a statutory basis through the enactment of the TU Bill. This Bill provides for the criteria, process for applications, legal merger and designation of Technological Universities. It also provides for the reform of the existing governing authorities of the Institutes of Technology and these changes will also be provided for in the governing authorities of any TUs. This Bill was published in December 2015 and was at Report Stage at the time of dissolution of the Dáil in February 2016.
Further developments

Implementation of the HE Strategy provides for a number of other governance, funding and structural reforms which need to be enabled through legislation.

A number of reforms are being provided for in the General Scheme for the Higher Education Reform Bill. This includes university governing body reform and reform of the Higher Education Authority. Priority issues for inclusion in the Bill are currently being reviewed, however, the aim is to publish the General Scheme of this Bill in Q2 2016.

Pay compliance and strategic HR issues at third level

A further matter requiring comment is the issue of non-compliance with Government Pay Policy in the university sector. This issue is focused on specific cases (many of which have been addressed) rather than being systemic. It did, however, present real issues at a time of general public service pay cuts, and it did illustrate a limitation in the Government’s capacity to direct pay policy in the university sector in the way that it can in other areas. In some (but by no means all) instances it is argued that universities require greater pay flexibility to achieve nationally desirable targets in areas such as Research; but for the most part issues of this nature can be addressed successfully by engagement between the universities and the Department. Recognising the lack of regulatory capacity in this important area of public service employment and pay policy, the Government decided (in 2012 and 2015) to proceed with legislation giving the Minister significantly greater powers of investigation and intervention in situations of non-compliance in the university sector. This legislation is in the process of being drafted and the appropriate next steps will need to be discussed with the Minister.

In parallel with this, the Department is engaging with the Irish Universities Association on a number of strategic HR matters, including a framework which would provide latitude to make additional payments to academics for additional work in areas of verifiable revenue creating opportunity.
The Research agenda with the implementation of Innovation 2020

In December 2015, the Government published *Innovation 2020*, Ireland’s 5-year strategy for research and development, science and technology. A key ambition of the Strategy is to increase total investment in R&D in Ireland, led by the private sector, to 2.5% of GNP. This would mean that over €5billion will be invested per year in R&D by the private and public sectors by 2020, which will represent almost doubling current levels of investment. Among the targets to be delivered by the strategy are:

- research masters and PhD enrolments will be increased by 30% to 2,250;
- a new Programme of funding for Frontier Research will be introduced by the IRC,

The Innovation 2020 Implementation Group held its first meeting in March 2016 and will be meeting again in May. The group will be responsible for overseeing implementation of the various actions under the Strategy. The provision of additional funding will be critical to the delivery of the Actions under the Strategy.

Implementation of the National Access Plan for Higher Education

The third National Access Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education (2015 – 2019) was launched in December 2015. The Plan contains 5 key goals and more than 30 actions. Key actions to be delivered in 2016 include:

- Measures to promote participation in initial teacher education by target students. This is a key means of providing positive role models in the classroom for students from disadvantaged and other target backgrounds.
- Development of pre and post-entry mentoring programmes. The objective is to encourage target students to think about higher education as a realistic option and to support them while in college.
- Development of measures to engage directly with disadvantaged communities to promote the benefits of higher education.
- Review of the Student Assistance Fund and the Fund for Students with Disabilities. These funds supported almost 25,000 students in 2014/15.
- Addressing the issue of non-progression in higher education, which is a particularly significant issue particularly for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Developing a system for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). This is an important access tool as well as a means of labour market activation.

The new Plan also contains a number of key targets to increase participation in higher education by groups that are currently under-represented – travellers, students with a disability, mature students.
To facilitate measurement of progress towards achievement of these targets, the Plan provides for the development of a data strategy for access. Monitoring of progress will also be facilitated through data collated through the Department’s Higher Education System Performance Framework 2014 – 2016.

A Steering Committee, to be chaired by DES and comprised of key stakeholders, will be established to oversee implementation of the National Access Plan. There will also be an annual report on progress under the Plan.

**Completion and publication of the International Education Strategy**

Ireland’s International education policy seeks to position Ireland as a destination of choice in the international education market for higher education and English language students through new regulatory and marketing co-ordination arrangements that will enhance the promotion of Irish education overseas.

Our vision is to support the development of global citizens through Ireland’s high quality international education system, by attracting talent from around the world to our education institutions, equipping Irish learners with the skills and experience they need to compete internationally, supporting outward mobility, actively participating in EU programmes, engaging in world-class research and international collaborations, and addressing global challenges.

The potential economic effects are significant – the financial benefit of International Education (higher education and English language training) to the economy is growing substantially.

In the medium to longer term, international students are also likely to contribute to the development of stronger networks of influence for Ireland overseas.

In consultation with key stakeholders, Ireland’s International Education Strategy “Investing in Global relationships” 2010-2015 was reviewed by the high level group on international education in February 2015.

The International Section of the Department is currently in the process of finalising the new Government International Education Strategy (2016-2020) and aims to present it to the Minister and Government, during the second quarter of 2016.

This Strategy will aim to build on the considerable progress that has been made over the last five years in the internationalisation of education in Ireland.
The Skills Agenda

The Further Education and Training Unit and the Higher Education Division have close working relationships with the Department of Jobs Enterprise and Innovation in relation to Action Plan for Jobs (job creation strategy) and with the Department of Social Protection in relation to Pathways to Work (activation strategy).

National Skills Strategy and Employer Engagement

The National Skills Strategy (NSS) has recently been launched to provide a framework for skills development that will help drive Ireland’s growth both economically and societally over the next decade. The availability of a well-skilled labour force is key to Ireland’s continued recovery and return to economic growth. The availability of “talent” is a key selling point for Ireland in attracting foreign direct investment to locate in Ireland. The quality of the education and training system is also one of the “quality of life” factors impacting on our ability to attract highly-skilled individuals to live and work in Ireland.

The new NSS has been developed in the context of significant reform in the education and training sector to ensure a more dynamic, responsive and high quality system that provides all learners with the knowledge and skills they need to participate fully in the economy and society. The reform programme and NSS recognise the importance of all levels of education and training as integral elements of a framework for lifelong learning and skills development which starts through quality early childhood provision and is continually developed during school and in learning beyond school.

The NSS sets out a wide range of actions under six key objectives aimed at improving the development, supply and use of skills over the next decade. The objectives are:

• Education and training providers will place a stronger focus on providing skills development opportunities that are relevant to the needs of learners, society and the economy
• Employers will participate actively in the development of skills and make effective use of skills in their organisations to improve productivity and competitiveness.
• The quality of teaching and learning at all stages of education will be continually enhanced and evaluated
• People across Ireland will engage more in lifelong learning
• There will be a specific focus on active inclusion to support participation in education and training and the labour market.
• We will support an increase in the supply of skills to the labour market.

The Strategy provides the overarching framework for a range of existing initiatives and programmes of change which are already underway which are relevant to skills development including the rollout of Síolta and Aistear in Early Childhood Education, Junior Cycle Reform,
development of the new Apprenticeship model and implementation of the Further Education and Training Strategy and Higher Education Strategy to 2030.

The Strategy was developed following a public consultation process and the submissions received and analysis undertaken to develop the Strategy have led to the identification of a number of new actions to support the implementation of the high level objectives set out above:

- The production of employability statements by further education and higher education institutions;
- A strong focus on the provision and tracking of work placements for Transition Year, LCVP and LCA students in second level and full-time students studying at level 6 to 8 in further and higher education institutions;
- The development of a new Entrepreneurship Education Policy Statement and guidelines for schools to support the delivery of Entrepreneurial Education and experiential learning opportunities;
- A full review of guidance services, tools and resources to ensure they are fit-for-purpose;
  - Support for 50,000 apprenticeship and traineeship places up to 2020. Review of progress will take place in 2020 with a view to setting new ambitious targets for the period to 2025;
- A review of the school leaving age with a view to increasing it; and
- Promotion of lifelong learning to all people in Ireland and a target to increase participation from 6.7% in 2014 to 10% in 2020 and to 15% by 2025.

A new Unit was established within the Skills Development Division to oversee the establishment of 9 Regional Fora as a mechanism for employers and the FET and higher education systems to work together in identifying and meeting the skills needs in their areas. The National Skills Strategy included these Regional Fora within a new national skills architecture which also envisages a new National Skills Council. It is envisaged that the new unit will be expanded to support the work of the National Skills Council and to work closely with the FET Unit, Higher Education Division and other Divisions of the Department to drive a co-ordinated continuum of responses to skills issues.

**Foreign Languages and Entrepreneurship**

The DES has previously committed itself to the development of a Foreign Languages Strategy in response to a call from business representatives for enhanced foreign language capability and cultural awareness. A public consultation seeking submissions on the development of the strategy was undertaken as well as two consultation events during 2015. Work on the development of the new strategy is at an advanced stage. The strategy aims to outline the Department’s policy position regarding foreign languages in post-primary, further and higher education and will reference primary education, as appropriate; outline a rationale to convince the education stakeholders and the general public of the importance of foreign
languages in formal education and life-long learning; set out a course of action for the short and medium term, establishing definite priorities and targets; commit appropriate resources to achieving short term outcomes by means of targeted interventions.

**Entrepreneurship**

The National Skills Strategy commits to the development of an Entrepreneurship Education Policy Statement and guidelines to schools which will build on and consolidate the work being done in this area. There is also considerable work ongoing in the area of Entrepreneurship. In the schools sector work is underway on guidelines for schools on the ‘repositioning of entrepreneurship education in Irish schools’ encouraging and enabling the embedding of entrepreneurship across all of school life a transversal and cross curricular manner. The introduction of a National Entrepreneurial Award for the education sector – both primary and post-primary - is also currently under consideration.

In Further Education and Training, under the strategic objective to ensure that further education and training programmes are developed in line with the needs of entrepreneurs, SOLAS is currently finalising a research specification to Identify Best Practice Education and Training for Entrepreneurship within Further Education and Training. It aims to ascertain the nature and the extent of current provision that is taking place in ETBs and propose measures whereby the lessons learnt from best practice examples might be further diffused within the FET system.

An Enterprise Engagement Strategy for the Higher Education sector was published by the HEA in June 2015 and the actions set out in the Strategy are being integrated into the work of the Regional Skills Fora and the implementation of the National Skills Strategy. In addition, the DES is leading on a Country Review of Entrepreneurship in Higher Education in conjunction with the OECD and EU Commission. The objective of the reviews is to provide independent assessments of areas for improvement in the national framework and at the level of individual higher education institutions, together with a set of recommendations for policy action by HEI and government stakeholders.

**European Social Fund (ESF)**

This Department has primary responsibility for the administration of ESF investment in Ireland. It develops the ESF programmes and oversees the expenditure to ensure that the conditions imposed by the EU are met with a view to successfully drawing down funds from the EU. The 2007 – 2013 Programme, called the Human Capital Investment Operational Programme involved allocations of €751 million funded 50:50 between the State and the EU. Notwithstanding the title of the programme expenditure up to 2015 can be claimed and arrangements are in train to finalise claims and close out this programme. The 2014 to 2020 programme entitled Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning (PEIL) involves an allocation of €1.153 billion comprising ESF and Exchequer contributions of €542.43m each and an EU Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) budget contribution of €68.41m.
The EU conditionality on ESF spending and accountability systems have been increasingly onerous and significant efforts are made to ensure that claims submitted meet EU requirements. A range of programme and system audits take place to ensure claims comply with conditions. It has proved challenging at times to ensure that errors do not occur at operational level that could impact on our ability to claim. Such errors (as opposed to fraud) are a feature of programmes throughout the EU as the EU applies a maximum “allowable” error rate of 2%. Corrective action has to be taken when the error rate is exceeded.

**European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF)**

The EGF is an EU funded instrument to assist workers made redundant as a result of globalisation or due to the global financial and economic crisis. The EGF has a maximum annual budget of €150m for 2014 to 2020 which can be approved to fund 60% of the cost of a Member State’s individual active labour market programmes for the workers involved. There are conditions around number of redundancies (usually 500) over specified periods with some exceptional circumstances allowed. Ireland has made 10 successful applications, of which 7 are closed and 3 are on-going (Andersens Rathkeale; Lufthansa Technik Airmotive Ireland, Rathcoole and PWA International, Rathcoole).
Implementation of POD and PPOD and its impact

The Department hosts two online databases POD (primary online database) and P-POD (PostPrimary Online Database), which collect information on individual school children using the PPSN as the unique identifier. The databases can be used to monitor the progress of children through the education system in order to ensure that every student can meet their educational potential, and to ensure that every child of compulsory school age is in receipt of an education. They are also used as the basis for capitation grant payments, resource allocations and teacher allocations in schools. The databases will allow the Department to collate data for future resource allocation models such as DEIS and as part of the implementation of the new Junior Cycle.

Research, Evaluation and Data Management

The Data, Evaluation and Research Management Board Sub-committee (DERMS) oversees activity in the inter-related areas of data, research and evaluation with a view to improving the Department’s research and evaluation capacity, data usage and data and knowledge management. The objective is to use data, research and evaluation to optimum effect as a means of providing evidence and insights to support the development and evaluation of services and policies and in directing resources efficiently and effectively. This will be realised through the delivery of a Programme of Work incorporating a number of specific projects across the areas of data collection, data management, data analysis, research, evaluation and knowledge management. This programme of work will be approved, prioritised and governed by DERMS.

Data and Knowledge Management

A Data and Knowledge Management Unit (DKMU) has recently been established in the Department. While initially focusing on the development of a Data Strategy, its aim is to support business units in maximising the use and value of data while ensuring appropriate data governance.

The Unit will establish an Education Data Forum to facilitate a collaborative approach to data related activity across the Department and its agencies.

The Department is engaging with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform initiative on Open Data. An appraisal of existing published data is underway with a view to ensuring that it is made available in an open format. A plan to identify additional Departmental data to
be provided openly, once all privacy and data protection perspectives are considered, is being developed.

Other data related developments include the proposed Data Sharing and Governance Bill being prepared by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the new EU Data Protection Regulation due to come into force in April 2018. A thorough evaluation of the impact of this new regulation, which is more detailed and far reaching than the existing directive, will be required to determine its impact and the actions necessary to prepare for its implementation.

**Evaluation**

The Department is a member of the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES) and is represented on its Management Board. The IGEES is an integrated service to enhance the role of economics and value for money analysis in public policy making.

The Public Spending Code requires Departments to carry out evaluation of major programmes of expenditure. The Department has agreed a Value for Money programme (2015-17) with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, which is currently under way. Focussed Policy Assessments on Data on the Special Needs Assistant programme and on the Economic Contribution of International Students in Higher Education Institutions are currently in progress.

**Research**

The Department supports various research activities across a range of divisions, as well as supervising the work of the Educational Research Centre (ERC). Work has begun on developing a research strategy which will consider the structures required within the Department to allow the Department to take a more strategic approach to research so that it informs policy formulation and contributes to the development of evidence bases for policy development.

**Shared Services and Procurement**

**Shared services**

The Government’s Public Service Reform Plans up to 2016 have given a strong mandate for the increased use of shared services across the public sector. As part of this, Government required that a Shared Service plan be prepared by each of the four main sectoral Departments (Education, Health, Local Government and Justice) for the period 2014 - 2016.
This Department’s Shared Services Plan for 2014 to 2016 proposes to roll out traditional shared services in areas such as HR, Payroll, Pensions, Finance, IT and Corporate Services within both the Department of Education and Skills and across the entire education and training sector. The Shared Service Plan includes projects that have been scheduled and prioritised based on the business needs of the sector. Business Cases have been approved for Finance and Payroll shared services for the ETB/SOLAS sector and both projects are progressing through the design and implementation stage. A Business Case for Higher Education Payroll Shared Service has been developed and is being progressed through the appropriate governance channels.

It has been agreed that an Education Shared Business Services Centre will be established with potential to accommodate shared services from across the Education and Training sector. Bringing all shared service initiatives together in one location and on one technology platform allows for scaling up and the application of standardised processes and service management. This approach provides the greatest efficiencies and economies of scale, and will, over time, deliver the benefits of a centralised shared service. Putting in place the structures and processes to support the delivery of shared service reforms requires substantial initial investment.

**Procurement**

The Office of Government Procurement (OGP) was set up by the Government in early 2013 as part of an overall public service reform programme. Common goods and services will be sourced centrally by the OGP. In the Education sector, the Education Procurement Service (EPS) is the designated sector Hub (lead). Its function is to source goods and services for all public sector bodies with specific responsibility for laboratory equipment and diagnostics, veterinary and agriculture and research equipment and library supplies, and education specific requirements.

To further leverage the substantial savings which can be achieved through centralised procurement, a Schools Procurement Unit (SPU) was established by the Department in 2014. The SPU acts as the central coordinating function for procurement for schools in the primary, secondary and community and comprehensive sector (including special schools and excluding schools under the remit of ETBs). The SPU has a central role in communicating procurement requirements and opportunities to schools, and in driving and measuring compliance and managing procurement data across the schools sector. Procurement in the ETB Sector is coordinated through the Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI).

**School Building Programme – 6 year Programme**

The demographic position requires a continuation of the school building programme to meet projected demand for primary and post primary school places. Primary enrolments are projected to rise to a peak of over 574,000 pupils in 2018, an increase in enrolments of over
64,000 since 2011. Post-primary enrolments are projected to reach over 358,000 pupils in 2018, an increase in enrolments of over 41,000 since 2011, and will continue to rise until 2025, at which point enrolments at second level are expected to be in excess of 410,000 pupils for the first time in the history of the State. In total therefore, an additional 104,000 pupils are expected to enter the system across first and second level education up to 2019.

In November 2015, a 6 Year Construction Programme (2016-2021) was announced as part of a €2.8 billion schools capital investment plan, that will provide funding for over 300 large scale school building projects that are planned to proceed to construction over the duration of the Programme. The new Programme will also assist in completing large scale projects that were announced and are progressing under the 5 year multi-annual Plan (2012-16).

The 6 Year Construction Programme (2016-2021), as in the case of the 5 Year Construction Plan (2012-16) and subsequent stimulus packages, prioritises the delivery of Large Scale School Projects mainly in areas where significant pupil enrolment increases are projected. In the period 2012 to 2015, 189 large scale projects have been completed. Under the 6 Year Programme, a further 62,000 additional places will be provided by 2022 in addition to addressing the requirements of schools that have a major deficit of mainstream accommodation capacity in respect of current enrolments and future increases in enrolments.

Provision has also been made for devolved funding under the additional accommodation scheme for essential classroom accommodation for schools where an immediate enrolment need in an area has been identified. This prioritisation of capital spend is to ensure that every child will have access to a physical school place and that our school system is in a position to cope with increasing pupil numbers.

Due to the scale of the building programme and the need to prioritise available funding towards the provision of actual school places, there are significant challenges in operating each year within the allocation available for the school sector. In providing a financial commitment to school projects, the 6 year Programme has provided certainty to school communities that, barring unforeseen technical obstacles, their projects will be progressed to completion. The immediate consequence is that whilst this commitment will be maintained, the start date for when large scale projects can commence construction may need to be rescheduled depending on the availability of additional resources that in many cases may involve the continuance of temporary accommodation and approval of additional temporary accommodation.

Capital Demands FET and HE

Capital Demands in the Higher Education Sector

Enrolments in higher education have been steadily increasing in recent years with full-time enrolments rising over 25% in the past decade. Keeping pace with the upward trajectory of third level participation, ensuring the availability of third level student places as well as
maintaining the current stock of third level facilities has always been recognised as a national strategic priority.

Recent HEA and DES reviews show that the higher education sector requires at least €4 billion and perhaps as much as €5.8 billion of investment to address current conditions and to cater for continued growth in student numbers. However, due to fiscal constraints, and with the exception of funding for the DIT project at Grangegorman, no new capital was provided for the sector from the announcement of the moratorium on third level funding in November 2011 until the Budget announcement in October 2014. While welcomed at the time, this announcement provided limited funding to the sector, enabling the progression of just three higher education projects.

The 2016-2021 Capital Plan provides funding of €350m for the third level sector. However, only €110m of this has been provided by way of additional direct Exchequer capital funding. While this funding will go some way towards addressing the most critical needs of the sector in respect of minor works, equipment renewal and IT needs, it is almost entirely committed at this stage and is unlikely to meet those needs entirely. Additionally, this limited funding provides very little, if any, scope for new investment in major capital projects for the Sector prior to 2022 other than Public Private Partnership (PPP) projects for which €200m has been provided.

The Department, in consultation with the HEA, is currently finalising the development of a robust, transparent and effective selection process which will determine the selection of the most suitable projects. There are a number of variables to consider in terms of when and how these projects are delivered. In any event, it will be a few years before the projects are available for use.

The final portion of the Capital Plan funding for the Sector relates to €40m of previously approved direct Exchequer capital that was provided for expenditure on the Grangegorman project in 2016 and 2017. The actual remaining expenditure on that project is €32.7m with the balance consisting of spending that was accelerated in earlier years. A master plan prepared for the site, which had been approved by Government in 2010, formed the basis for the strategic plan that is now at various stages of delivery. When completed, the Grangegorman project will have delivered 50,000m² of accommodation for 10,000 DIT students to be delivered through the Public Private Partnership (PPP) process. It should be noted that the PPP project has been the subject of legal action by one of the unsuccessful bidders. This has impacted on the delivery timelines. However, the National Development Finance Agency (NDFA), the State responsible for PPP projects, is progressing the project on our behalf.

It should be noted that the lack of funding continues to significantly impede the capacity to provide for the critical investment needs of the Sector. In the case of the Institutes of Technology, this constraint is all the greater as a result of the absence of a borrowing framework for the sector.
Capital Demands in the Further Education Sector

The Department does not have a specific capital subhead for the Further Education and Training (FET) sector. The FET sector occupies a mix of accommodation, some of which is rented, some of which is shared with post primary schools (this is the case particularly with PLC courses) and other of which is owned by the relevant ETB.

In the past, limited capital grants have been made available to the further education sector when available. Often this has been to address urgent needs or emergency situations. However, there has not been a systematic programme of capital investment in the sector. The level of demand for capital investment in schools and in the higher education sector has impacted on the Department’s capacity to initiate a programme of capital investment in further education and training accommodation.

The SOLAS Strategy for Further Education and Training (FET) is intended to establish a focus for the setting of investment priorities, and to provide a framework for the establishment and development of a strong FET sector, responsive to the needs of learners and the requirements of a changed and changing economy.

The FET sector will require a dedicated capital budget to maintain and progress FET and to ensure improvements to (or construction of) facilities or to purchase new (or improve existing) campus and training centre equipment and infrastructures, including networks, other information technology investments and for capital maintenance to keep facilities/estates in good repair. A capital allocation is absolutely essential in the maintenance of the former FÁS training centres to meet health and safety requirements. The FÁS training centres were transferred to the ETBs in 2014 and will continue to be provided with capital funding by SOLAS.

Student accommodation

The significant increase in demand for higher education places over the past decade is projected to continue beyond the mid-2020s. This has had a very positive impact on Irish economic performance through the supply of well-educated and skilled graduates to meet the demand of the labour market. However this increase in student numbers, including international students, is creating an unprecedented demand for suitable, affordable student accommodation.

The HEA completed a report on supply and demand which was published by the Minister in September 2015 and which set out that forecasted demand for student accommodation will be greater than the available supply in certain areas of the country in the coming years. The areas most effected are Dublin, Cork and Galway and to a lesser extent Limerick. There are 13 recommendations in the report covering a range of issues including capital financing, tax considerations and planning issues, as well as supporting the rent-a-room scheme.
An inter-departmental steering group was established to oversee follow up on the issues and recommendations in the report. This group will provide a coordinating mechanism to ensure that the higher education institutions have access to information on new potential funding and delivery models to support the delivery of student accommodation projects in the coming years.

There are a number of significant challenges in addressing the issues around student accommodation. One of the major challenges, specifically for IOTs, is that they are precluded by legislation from entering into loan arrangements in the absence of an appropriate agreed borrowing framework. As IOT borrowing would be considered to form part of general government debt, there has been no sanction forthcoming for an agreed borrowing framework for IOTs. This restricts their ability to borrow to fund the building of student accommodation, even where the projects will have a guaranteed income stream available to fund repayments. There is only one student accommodation project in the IoT sector being progressed as part of a PPP project and this relates to the provision of student accommodation in the DIT Grangegorman development.

A further issue is the lack of available capital funding from central Exchequer funding. The national capital infrastructure plan has been published through to 2021 and there is no scope, at this point, for additional capital funding to be made available to fund the construction of student accommodation.

A number of universities are pursuing the development of student accommodation projects using non-Exchequer funding sources.