Draft National Plan to Improve Literacy and Numeracy in Schools

Consultation with Business and Industry Interest Groups

Friday 15 April 2011 – 10am

Attendees

Harold Hislop   DES
Eamonn Murtagh, DES
Anne O’Mahony, DES
Eve McKay       DES
Kaye Fallon     DES
Caitríona Geraghty  Engineers Ireland
Tony Donohoe  IBEC
Paul Sweetman  ICT Ireland
Breda O’Sullivan  IDA Ireland
Andrew Colgan  Forfás
Kevin Marshall   Microsoft

Key points made to the Department in addition to those in the written submissions:

- Literacy and numeracy are important but should not be prioritised at the expense of higher order skills: this is not a “zero sum game”.

- Virtually all occupations are becoming more knowledge based, requiring an increased breadth of knowledge, rising technical, qualification and regulatory requirements and continual learning. Generic skills, including literacy and numeracy, are required in almost all roles of the modern workplace and are very important to employers for the 21st century workplace.

- Educational outcomes in Ireland are of major importance when selling this country as a possible location of inward investment and we must improve standards in literacy, numeracy and science. The PISA 2009 outcomes were influential but the pro-active response to improving literacy and numeracy is being viewed positively by international firms.

- The Draft Plan underplays the role of technology in addressing literacy and numeracy difficulties.

- The Junior Certificate needs to change. Students are taking too many subjects. Changes to Junior Cycle should be made in the context of the Junior Cycle Review. Subjects should be based on learning outcomes that prioritise key skills including literacy and numeracy.
As well as addressing pre-service, it is important to ensure that the current teaching cohort is equipped to teach literacy and numeracy. IBEC has made a submission to the Teaching Council regarding the teaching continuum. The central argument of this submission is that it is impossible to propose a meaningful approach to CPD without a model of teacher career development that encourages and rewards ambition and achievement.

The conceptualisation of CPD is too narrow. For example, Microsoft estimates that 70% of its training of staff was in the form of ‘on-the-job’ training, 20% in the form of mentoring and only 10% in formal training.

Teachers need ‘life-long portfolio of learning’. They should continue to learn and reflect on their teaching practice, for example, by recording their lessons and reviewing them critically with other teaching staff.

Training on assessment and self-evaluation is vital for teachers.

Good leadership training programmes and leadership mentoring arrangements will be essential to equip principals to lead schools effectively and to improve standards.

Ready access to high quality assessment results would be useful for schools at local level and for national policy development.

Measurability is paramount to communicate that Ireland’s workforce has the necessary skills. There should be early achievable milestones as well as longer term objectives in the Draft Plan. It is important that progress is communicated to business and industry groups.