



REFERNET

VET POLICY REPORT 2008

IRELAND

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REFERNET COUNTRY REPORT IRELAND 2008

**PROGRESS IN THE POLICY PRIORITY AREAS FOR VOCATIONAL
EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

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THIS REPORT IS ONE OF A SET OF EUROPEAN COUNTRY REPORTS ON VET POLICY DEVELOPMENT. IT HAS BEEN PRODUCED AS A CONTRIBUTION TO CEDEFOP'S THIRD POLICY REPORT WHICH REVIEWS PROGRESS IN VET TOWARDS THE POLICY GOALS OF THE COPENHAGEN PROCESS. THE OPINIONS EXPRESSED IN THIS NATIONAL REPORT ARE NOT NECESSARILY THOSE OF CEDEFOP.

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1. NATIONAL POLITICAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT

1.1 National Political/Policy Context

Vocational education and training (VET) in Ireland is seen both in policy and structural terms as one of the main pillars for building and maintaining a skilled workforce. The Government's main human resource priorities, in recent years, has been to maintain a focus on education and training, and in particular provide a framework to progress lifelong learning strategies within the VET system, to target those with low educational and vocational qualifications and to ensure the development of a highly skilled workforce.

Ireland's three-year National Partnership Agreements involving the Government and the social partners, including the current Agreement 'Towards 2016', have all included policies in relation to education and training. The recent 'Programme for Government', concluded by the government partners after the 2007 election, has also devoted considerable attention to education, with priority been given to introducing new curricula in various subjects including in maths and the sciences. While higher rates of school completion will be encouraged, it is intended that there will also be increased access to alternative educational provision for young people who may find mainstream second level school is not suitable for them.

With regard to linking VET to the needs of the labour market, Government policy on vocational training is set out in the annual National Reform Programme (formerly the Employment Action Plan), developed within the context of the European Employment Guidelines. Under this Programme, Irish labour market policy during 2005-08 will focus on:-

- Sustaining a high level of employment and low unemployment;
- Ensuring an adequate supply of labour to meet the needs of the economy;
- Maintaining a strong focus on education and training, including lifelong learning, to ensure the development of a high skilled, adaptable workforce.

In recent years there have been several significant developments designed to provide a more coherent and efficient structure and framework for the provision of VET in Ireland. In 2001 a National Framework of Qualifications was established under the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999, in order to improve access, transfer and progression within the general VET system. Other significant developments have included the establishment of the Taskforce on Lifelong Learning in 2002, which gave official sanction to the funding of community education, and the introduction of the Part-time Options strand of the 'Back to Education Initiative' (BTEI), in 2002, which provides opportunities for second chance education. There has been the establishment of the 'Adult Guidance Initiative' to offer information and counselling to adult learners, followed in 2004 by the establishment of a National Guidance Forum to bring together key stakeholders from across the education, training and labour market spectrum, to develop an agreed cohesive strategy for a national lifelong guidance service. A National Adult Literacy Programme has also been set up to

address the low literacy level of some of the Irish adult population, identified in the OECD International Adult Literacy Survey¹.

Another priority in recent years has concerned broadening access to third-level education for those from socially-disadvantaged and economically-marginalized backgrounds. In 2003 a National Office for Equity of Access to Third Level Education was established to progress the third-level access agenda. Changing demographic and economic circumstances are creating demand for new and higher skills and this will pose challenges and opportunities for the third-level sector. In particular, universities and Institutes of Technology will have to deliver more flexible, labour market-orientated qualifications. In order to unify the publicly-funded higher education sector, the Institutes of Technology have being brought within the remit of the Higher Education Authority through the Institutes of Technology Act, 2006.

Until recently Government policy has been that CVET for persons at work is primarily the responsibility of employers, who are the main source of funds for training for the employed, through their direct funding of in-company training and their financial contributions to the National Training Fund (NTF) introduced in 2000. There is no statutory obligation on companies to provide CVET for their workforce and no specific sectoral agreements in respect of the provision of CVET within enterprises. However, while in the past Government-sponsored CVET schemes were largely aimed at the unemployed, now work-based learning initiatives are seen as critical to maintaining the employability and job-security of many of the workforce. It is recognised that educational disadvantage among adults is no longer concentrated among the unemployed, but exists also among workers in low-paid, low-skilled employment. The Government now plays a significant role in helping and encouraging employers' to meet their responsibilities to train their employees, principally through the services of a range of publicly-funded state agencies, who all offer financial and other incentives, such as training advice, to encourage companies to meet their employees' training needs.

Table 1: VET Policy Priorities

	Policy Priority	Main causes and reasons	Policy approach
1.	Continue to support VET provision for disadvantaged young people with little or no qualifications, targeting in particular early school leavers.	Recent statistics show that early school-leaving continues to be a problem in Ireland, despite the large amounts of money invested in special educational initiatives at school level.	Over the years several strategies have been put in place to address the IVET needs of those who drop-out of school without any qualifications, as well as the other transition or progression issues associated with this group. A variety of measures and legislation have been introduced to tackle early school leaving. There has also been an expansion of VET programmes paying allowances, to encourage a greater take-up or return to education and training of disadvantaged persons, particularly early school leavers.

¹ Literacy Skills for the Knowledge Society, an International Adult Literacy Survey, Paris: OECD

2.	Provide the necessary supports for people with disabilities so that they can successfully access mainstream VET provision and employment opportunities.	Over recent years Government sponsored research, such as the National Disability Authority survey on Disability and Employment: (2005) and ‘How Far Towards Equality? Measuring how Equally People with Disabilities are Included in Irish Society’ (2005), have all indicated that people with physical and intellectual disabilities continue to experience barriers to and difficulties in accessing mainstream training and employment opportunities.	Legislation in recent years, such the Disability Act, 2005, has reinforced Government policy to ensure equity of access to VET for people with disabilities. Strategies to overcome marginalisation from the workforce experienced by persons with disabilities have been outlined in the National Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016. These policies, together with Government plans to further mainstream employment and training for people with disabilities, form key elements of the new national ‘Strategy of Engagement: Towards a Comprehensive Strategy for People with Disabilities’ (2006). The National Office for Equity of Access to Third-Level Education will also progress the third-level access agenda for this group.
3.	Expand second chance and community based CVET for marginalised adults with few or no formal qualifications, to facilitate greater access to post secondary and further VET opportunities.	Increasingly, community and voluntary groups are seen as important providers of CVET for unemployed adults and those with low educational levels. These groups operate mainly in disadvantaged areas and facilitate access to training and employment opportunities. Many of these CVET activities are now publicly-funded and co-ordinated by public authorities such as the Vocational Education Committees.	In 2002 the Government increased funding to this sector by providing a Part-Time Options Strand under the ‘Back to Education Initiative’ (BTEI). This has resulted in second chance VET opportunities for young disadvantaged people and adults with low education qualifications, providing them with flexible learning opportunities to help them re-enter the labour market. The Government also introduced a Community Strand under the BTEI, ensuring that a proportion of BTEI funding be given to education activities organised by local community groups.
4.	Provide structured lifelong learning routes to increase access, progression and transfer opportunities within the general VET system.	Until recently one of the gaps in the provision of education and training in Ireland was the absence of a unified framework of qualifications. Traditionally, progression within the Irish VET system has been vertical and only in limited circumstances was informal and non-formal learning	The introduction of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act (1999), which in turn led to the establishment of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI), and in 2003 a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) covering all awards in the State, was designed to fill this gap. The Framework focuses primarily on learner needs and the setting of

		accepted for entry into further and higher VET.	standards for awards and also facilitates the recognition of non-formal as well as formal learning.
5.	Expand support for upskilling adults with low qualifications in vulnerable occupations within the workforce.	<p>According to the National Economic and Social Forum - NESF², <i>'Ireland has a high proportion of low-skilled workers compared to other best performing countries and our level of lifelong learning remains low.'</i></p> <p>Approximately 39% of all working age persons have less than upper second level qualifications. In the past, Government-sponsored CVET schemes were largely aimed at the unemployed. Now, work-based learning initiatives are seen as critical to maintaining the employability and job-security of many of the workforce.</p>	<p>The Government uses a number of financial and other mechanisms to support and encourage employers to invest in training to improve the skills of staff, particularly those employed in SMEs. An emphasis on training for the employed has been a feature of recent policy documents and new strategies to meet the skill needs of the workforce, particularly those with low qualifications, have now been put in place. An example is the FÁS <i>Competency Development Programme</i>, which aims to raise the skills level of employees throughout the country by providing a training subsidy to reduce the costs of training for employers.</p>

² National Economic and Social Forum, Report No. 33, 'Creating a More Inclusive Labour Market' January 2006.

6.	Provide skills training for the unemployed and those vulnerable to exclusion in the labour market.	While Ireland's unemployment rate fell rapidly in recent years, it rose by 10 700 to 101 000 in 2007, mainly due to a contraction in the construction industry and it was forecast to rise by a further 23 000 in 2008. There also continues to be a considerable number of young and older people seeking to enter or re-enter the labour market after an absence due to unemployment, disability or other reasons. In many cases these groups are encountering barriers to accessing employment due to low education and skill levels.	There are a broad range of Government-funded VET programmes available for unemployed people and those vulnerable to exclusion in the workforce to help them re-enter or upgrade their skills within the labour market. In particular, FÁS, the National Employment and Training Authority, provides a broad range of CVT programmes for short and long-term unemployed people seeking to enter or re-enter the labour market.
7.	Expand the linkages between VET and the labour market by continuing to provide ongoing assessments of future skill needs.	Changing demographic and economic influences such as globalisation are creating demands for new and higher skills and this will pose challenges and opportunities for the Irish VET sector.	There are a number of mechanisms for skills anticipation in Ireland and one of the principal is the 'Expert Group on Future Skill Needs'. This Group has undertaken research into the supply of skills in a range of areas and examined the skill needs of the labour market generally. The Group's 2007 report 'Tomorrow's Skills -Towards a National Skills Strategy', sets out the skills needs of the economy over the next decade.
8.	Continue to support adult literacy strategies and programmes, addressing in particular the language needs of migrants.	An OECD Adult Literacy Survey ³ identified low literacy levels among some of the Irish adult population. This literacy deficit will need to be addressed by continued investment in specific programmes targeting this group. Also the increasing number of migrants joining	The Government's National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS), identified education and training as central to addressing poverty, and targeted support for individuals and groups with inadequate literacy and numeracy skills by making provision for major investment in these areas. This policy is being implemented through the National Adult Literacy

³ Literacy Skills for the Knowledge Society an International Adult Literacy Survey, Paris: OECD

		the workforce, (according to the Central Statistics Office ⁴ nine out of every ten jobs added to the workforce in 2007 were filled by non-Irish nationals), will necessitate more resources for language learning for this group of people.	Scheme. The 2007 ‘Programme for Government’ proposed not only to continue to expand adult literacy provision, but also to provide funding for English language training for groups such as migrants.
9.	Progress strategies to promote lifelong learning pathways by establishing new structures to facilitate better and more effective guidance and counselling services at all levels of the VET system.	Ireland does not currently have an integrated structure for the provision of career guidance services at all levels of the VET system. Recent reports on guidance provision in Ireland have revealed many strengths and also significant gaps. The ‘Task Force on Life Long Learning’ in 2002 stated that: <i>"An integrated strategy for development of guidance services is seen as vital"</i>	In 2004 a National Guidance Forum was established by the two main Government education and training departments in response to an OECD review of career guidance policies in Ireland in 2002. The Forum brought together key stakeholders from across the VET spectrum and an agreed cohesive strategy for a national lifelong guidance service was developed. The Forum’s 2007 report ‘Guidance for Life: An Integrated Framework for Lifelong Learning in Ireland’, provides a plan for the provision of a guidance service which would underpin national priorities in lifelong learning.
10	Invest in VET strategies to progress competitiveness and innovation to meet the needs of future technological change and globalisation.	The Government-sponsored reports ‘Ahead of the Curve-Ireland’s Place in the Global Economy’ (2004), and ‘Tomorrow’s Skills - Towards a National Skills Strategy’ (2007), highlighted the need to invest in higher skills training strategies to ensure future competitiveness in a global economy.	In 2006 the Government launched its Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation. Under the National Development Plan 2007-2013 €13 billion will be invested in the Higher Education Programme. A Strategic Innovation Fund will support the organisational transformation of Higher Education Institutions to deliver excellence across all their activities. At the CVET level, FÁS has developed a Strategic Alliances Programme with relevant industry and VET stakeholders to progress skills training at higher levels for the workforce.

⁴ 1st Quarter 2008, Quarterly National Household Survey, Central Statistics Office.

1.2. Socio-Economic Context

Until 2008, the Irish economy had experienced very strong growth over the previous ten years. GDP in 2007 was €186 billion. This was a rise of 5.3% over 2006. In 2006, agriculture, manufacturing industry, and the services sector, accounted for 5%, 35% and 60% of the economy respectively. The percentage of GDP spent on education and training for 2003 was 4.4%⁵. This compares with an OECD average of 5.9%.

Ireland in recent years has had a high level of population growth due in part to a high birth rate. While in the past this growth has been lessened by high levels of emigration, since the mid 1990s, there has been an increase in the birth rate, a corresponding decrease in emigration and marked increase in immigration, resulting in a significant rise in the population. The 2006 census found that the population of Ireland had increased by 322,000 or 8% since the 2002 census and now stands at 4.24 million⁶.

Table 2 below, shows the demographic trends by age up to 2026. While the number in the 0-24 age group is expected increase by 148 000, the number of people aged 65 and over, is expected to increase by 395 000 (16%), leading to a significant ageing of the population.

Table 2: Population trends by age 2006-2026

Age-Group	2006	2026	Change
0-24	1 504 000	1 652 000	+148 000
25-64	2 261 000	2 786 000	+525 000
65+	471 000	866 000	+395 000
Total	4 240 000	5 304 000	+1 069 000

Source: Central Statistics Office (CSO) Ireland. Population and Migration Estimates (2006) and Population and Labour Force Projections* (2006) (*Based on MIF2 Scenario)

By the end of 2007 there were 2 138 million persons in employment, (69.1%), an increase of 66 800 from 2006 and a 3.2% annual employment growth rate. The labour force (both employed and unemployed), in 2007 stood at 2 239 900, an increase of 77 5000 in the year. Net inward migration accounted for approximately 63 000 (80%) of this demographic increase. The male employment rate was 77.1%, a slight decrease (77.5%) from 2006, while the female employment rate increased from 59.8% in 2006 to 60% in 2007. Female employment rose by 43 900, while male employment increased by 29 300. Female participation in the labour force, which had been low, has seen a marked improvement in recent years.

⁵ OECD Education at a Glance 2006 (Table b.2.1a)

⁶ Central Statistics Office, Census 2006, Government Publications Office, Ireland 2007

Until comparatively recently Ireland's unemployment rate was one of the highest in the EU. However, as Table 3 below shows, it fell rapidly in recent years. The unemployment rate was 4.4% in 2006, but mainly due to a contraction in the construction industry, it rose by 10 700 to 101 000 in 2007 and it is forecast to rise by a further 23 000 in 2008.

Table 3: Unemployment trends 1999/2004-06 (in thousands)

	Live Register	LFS Unemployed	% Unemployed ILO Basis
1999	220	148	8.3
2004	167	87	4.4
2005	160	89	4.4
2006	160	93	4.4

Regarding educational attainment, the percentage of young people participating in third-level education has risen in recent years and therefore the education profile of the population has increased. Relative to the EU-25, Ireland has a greater percentage of people with third-level qualifications. In contrast, the proportion of early school leavers in Ireland has fallen from 14.7% in 2002 to 12.3% in 2005 and has remained the same percentage in 2006. This is a lower percentage than the EU average for 2005 of 15.2%.

1.2.1 Examples of policy measures

Title of policy/measure - The FÁS⁷ ‘Know before you go’ campaign
<p>Outline of the policy/measure: : Addressing Demographic Change/Migration</p> <p>Rationale: In recent years an increasing number of migrants have joined the workforce and according to statistics published by the Central Statistics Office⁸ nine out of every ten jobs added to the Irish workforce in 2007 were filled by non-Irish nationals.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objectives/measurable targets: The FÁS⁹ ‘Know before you go campaign’ aims to promote the integration of migrants from the ten new Member States into Irish society and the economy. The FÁS-led campaign was launched in 2006 in the new Member States through the EU EURES Network and provides relevant information to jobseekers before coming to Ireland. • Target groups/educational level/educational sector: Migrants from the 27 EU member states and other EEA countries and specifically targeting those from the ten new Member States. • Status of implementation: This campaign commenced in 2006.
<p>Policy/measure operation and delivery:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level of operation: As part of the campaign, DVDs in five languages were produced, together with leaflets in 16 languages, and these are available in all

⁷ FÁS, National Training and Employment Authority.

⁸ 1st Quarter 2008, Quarterly National Household Survey, Central Statistics Office.

⁹ FÁS, THE National Training and Employment Authority

FÁS employment offices and Training Centres and on the internet. In order to make VET services more accessible to EU nationals residing in Ireland, FÁS has a telephone interpretation line service available in all European languages and staff have been invited to participate in intercultural training in order to make them more competent in dealing with migrants from different backgrounds. The use of FÁS Guidelines on Inter-Culturalism is an integral part of this training. The campaign was developed by the FÁS EURES service and is implemented throughout all FÁS offices, and on the FÁS website and through the EURES Network. Information can also be provided, on request, on English language course providers recognised by the Department of Education and Science in Ireland.

- **Is it an isolated measure or part of a larger education/training/employment/social policy approach?** This campaign contributes to strategies highlighted in the National Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016.
- **Key actors involved:** FÁS and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

Conclusions: This measure facilitates mobility within the EU.

Title of policy/measure:- Discover Science and Engineering Programme and the FÁS Centre of Excellence, Cork

Outline of the policy/measure: *Addressing competitiveness, innovation, technological change and globalisation.*

Rationale: The technology industry has grown over the past years to account for one-third of all exports from Ireland. If Ireland is to maintain growth in these areas it will need a steady stream of high quality graduates and skilled workers in these sectors. It is therefore important in the future that school students take a greater interest in higher level maths and science subjects.

The ‘Discover Science and Engineering’ (DSE) Programme was developed in response to a key recommendation of the Taskforce on the Physical Sciences, which called for a co-ordinated effort to increase interest in science generally among the population and to encourage young people to consider science as a viable career. The FÁS Centre of Excellence was set up to assist firms to train and recruit workers in the Biopharmaceutical/ Pharmaceutical sector.

- **Objectives/measurable targets:** The DSE Programme was set up in 2003 to increase interest in science, technology, innovation and engineering among school children, students, teachers and the wider population. In order to increase further skills training, FÁS in 2007 set up a National Centre of Excellence to provide hands-on practical skills for process operators and technicians in the Biopharmaceutical/ Pharmaceutical sector in Co. Cork, which has a significant concentration of manufacturing plants in the area.
- **Target groups/educational level/educational sector:** The DSE programme targets young people at school and those participating in initial vocational education and training, as well as teachers and trainers. The FÁS Centre trains existing and new entrants in the Biopharmaceutical/ Pharmaceutical sector.
- **Status of implementation:** With the technology sector in Ireland employing 80 000 people, the Government has encouraged various exhibitions and promotions such as the ‘BT Young Scientist and Technology’ Exhibition, the ‘Scifest’ festivals, which are hosted by the Institutes of Technology, and the

‘Steps to Engineering’ programme which gives information on careers in ICT and electronic engineering. The annual ‘Science Week Ireland’ event is organised under the auspice of the DSE Programme and it is designed to raise the awareness of young people and their parents to the potential of science and technology as career opportunities. In 2008 the FÁS Centre of Excellence in Cork was awarded the Public Service Excellence Award.

Policy/measure operation and delivery:

- **Level of operation:** The DSE Programme brings together many science, engineering and technology awareness activities that were previously managed by different public and private bodies. It aims to build and expand these activities in a focused and strategic manner. The key aims of the FÁS Centre of Excellence are to:

- Increase the pool of skilled operators/technicians available to new companies locating in Ireland and
- provide up-skilling programmes for existing employees in companies such as Pfizer and Eli Lilly.

This development is designed to support the IDA-Ireland’s strategy to attract investment in the biopharmaceutical/ Pharmaceutical sector in Ireland.

- **Is it an isolated measure or part of a larger education/training/employment/social policy approach?** In 2006 the Government launched its ‘Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation’, which included a range of measures to further strengthen science teaching and learning. The recent ‘2007 Programme for Government’, has also devoted considerable attention to education, with priority to be given to introducing new curricula in various subjects in schools and strengthening the teaching of maths and the sciences.
- **Key actors involved:** The DSE Programme is managed by Forfás on behalf of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. The Department of Education and Science, FÁS, the National Training and Employment Authority; the Institutes of Technology; the Industrial Development Authority (IDA) and Enterprise Ireland, are also involved in this programme. The Cork Centre of Excellence is managed by FÁS.

Title of policy/measure: Technical Employment Support Grant (TESG)

Outline of the policy/measure: *Addressing the Labour market/employment*

Rationale: The Technical Employment Support Grant (TESG) is designed to assist FÁS Employment Services Officers to implement a range of responses to meet the needs of jobseekers experiencing barriers in progressing from unemployment into the workforce.

- **Objectives/measurable targets:** Assist jobseekers enter the labour market.
- **Target groups/educational level/educational sector:** The following persons are eligible for support under the TESG.
 - Employment Action Plan (EAP) jobseekers, including clients categorised as “not progression ready”.
 - People with a Disability.
 - Jobseekers such as the homeless, ex-prisoners, members of the Traveller community, and people made redundant with low skills.
 - Persons who wish to explore alternative training/employment options.

- **Status of implementation;** A training fund is available to purchase this training. In 2004 FÁS spent €1.2 million on this type of training intervention.

Policy/measure operation and delivery:

- **Level of operation:** FÁS administers the TESH scheme which provides training options for unemployed jobseekers. The TESH is utilized where a jobseeker identifies, during a guidance interview, a need for support to enter or re-enter the labour market. This may require a training or education programme that cannot readily be met by FÁS directly or any other state provider within a reasonable timeframe, or at a location convenient to the jobseeker. Where specific skill training is required, this training will usually be certified under the National Qualifications Framework.

In addition, the High Support Process¹⁰ (HSP) is also utilised in relation to jobseekers experiencing *extreme barriers* in entering the labour market i.e. literacy, numeracy, health related problems or substance abuse. A training fund of €1,270 per jobseeker is available for the purchase of the required support, however in certain circumstances, an upper limit of €2,500 can apply. Funding is for a 12-month period. If an intervention is identified that meets the needs of a number of jobseekers, each individual funding allocation can be combined to purchase this intervention.

- **Is it an isolated measure or part of a larger (education/training/employment/social) policy approach:** See Level of Operation above.
- **Key actors involved:** As the High Support Process (HSP) continues to be a feature of the TESH, the latter utilises multi-agency teams established under the HSP. These teams include representatives from agencies involved in the provision of services to the identified client group and consist of the following players.
 - FÁS Employment Services Officers.
 - Local Employment Services Mediators.
 - Department of Social and Family Affairs Job Facilitators.
 - Health Service Executive.
 - Vocational Educational Committees.
 - Other service providers as appropriate.

¹⁰ The HSP was developed to address commitments made under the National Partnership Programme for Prosperity and Fairness (PPF) 2000-06, following consultations with the social partners and was launched throughout the country in 2004.

2. IMPROVING ACCESS TO AND EQUITY IN VET

2.1 National policy context on improving access to and equity in VET

Government strategies to increase access to VET for the unemployed and socially-excluded are set out in policy documents which have been incorporated into the National Development Plan (NDP) 2007-13. These include the annual Reform Programme, developed within the framework of the European Employment Guidelines, and the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS). Both of these programmes target major investment for individuals with inadequate literacy and numeracy skills and have identified education and training as central to addressing poverty. Strategies to overcome problems causing obstacles to access to employment and VET, for marginalised adults with low qualifications or with disabilities, were also outlined in the National Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016. Social Inclusion was also one of the key policy contexts within which the former Irish Employment and Human Resources Development Operational Programme (EHRD OP) for 2000-06 was prepared in terms of the needs to be addressed and the strategies and policies to be put in place at a national level.

Recent legislation has also reinforced the Government's policy to ensure equity of access to VET. This has included the Employment Equality Act, 1998, which established the Equality Authority, whose mandate was expanded under the 'Equal Status Act 2000' prohibiting discrimination in the provision of educational and training services. The rights of people with disabilities has been re-enforced by the Education of Persons with Special Needs Act 2004 and the passing of the Disability Act 2006. These Acts, together with Government plans to further mainstream employment and training for people with disabilities by FÁS, form key elements of a new National Disability Strategy, which sets out to address the barriers to employment and training experienced by those with physical and mental disabilities.

A specific policy focus of Government policy over a number of years has been alleviating educational disadvantage, with particular attention being given to young disadvantaged persons with low educational attainment. In 2002 an Educational Disadvantage Committee (EDC) was set up by the Minister for Education and Science (DES). It includes representatives from schools and the DES, as well as representatives from adult education and the youth services. The Committee's report, entitled 'Moving Beyond Educational Disadvantage' published in 2005, attempted to look at disadvantage on a lifelong curve, making specific recommendations, for example, in relation to adult and community education. It acknowledged the inter-generational nature of disadvantage, and that this needs to be tackled in families and in communities as well as in schools.

In the context of the provision of vocational training, FÁS, the national Training and Employment Authority, in its Statement of Strategy 2006-09, has committed the organisation to equality proofing the services it provides, and how it provides these services, and to evaluate their effectiveness and efficiency in meeting the changing and increasingly diverse customers' needs and demands.

2.2 Increasing access to and attractiveness of VET

2.2.1 Policy progress since 2002

In recent years there have been a number of measures to support continuing vocational education and training (CVET) for adults, targeting, in particular, those with low skills and low educational qualifications. CVET for adult learners is now more accessible since the Government provided funding under the 'Back to Education Initiative' (BTEI) in 2002 for part-time learning and for community-based education, as well as providing increased public funding for childcare costs, which are now recognised as a potential barrier to participation in CVET. This has facilitated an expansion of second-chance options for young disadvantaged people and adults, providing them with flexible learning opportunities to help them re-enter the labour market.

It is also recognised that educational disadvantage among adults is no longer concentrated among the unemployed, but exists also among workers in low-paid, low-skilled employment. The Government now plays a significant role in helping and encouraging employers to meet their responsibilities to train their employees, principally through the services of a range of publicly-funded state agencies, who all offer financial and other incentives, such as training advice, to encourage companies to meet their employees' training needs.

In general, unemployed persons and those from other socially-excluded groups are given financial assistance to undertake VET programmes. A portion of the budget allocated to the state agencies providing VET is set aside for the payment of trainee allowances. In the area of vocational training, FÁS, the National Training and Employment Authority, is the main provider of these allowances.

Another form of adult learning which can be pursued at the initiative of the individual is open, distance and e-learning. FÁS e-College offers on-line flexible e-learning opportunities to employed and unemployed persons. Courses are available for a fee or free of charge to certain groups such as the unemployed. There are also a number of private providers of this type of e-learning in Ireland and, recently, increased interest is being shown by employers in this approach to learning. The Open University (Ireland), and the National Distance Education Centre (OSCAIL), based in Dublin City University, both have a network of study centres throughout the country.

There is no legislative entitlement to paid CVET leave in Ireland and in general no public funds are distributed directly to the population for adult learning, which usually is paid for directly by the individuals themselves. While participation in full-time further education (e.g. Post Leaving Certificate courses), and higher education does not require the payment of tuition fees, this is not the case for part-time participants. In this regard tax relief of up to €5,000 per annum (2005-06) is available for persons attending recognised 3rd level courses, and limited tax relief (up to €1,270) is also available for the fees paid for attendance at approved CVET courses aimed at improving ICT and foreign language skills.

Cost barriers still remain for those in full or part-time employment who wish to access courses to gain further qualifications. When the BTEI (Part-time) was initiated there

was a clear intention to target the skill needs of those in employment, particularly those with low educational qualifications. However, the current financial eligibility criteria acts as a disincentive to this group, as those in employment, even the low skilled, and some categories of the unwaged (e.g. women in the home) are required to pay fees for part-time courses.

There have been various attempts recently to rectify these barriers and under proposals in the 2007 'Programme for Government, a system of means-tested free fees for approved part-time courses will be introduced. The Department of Education and Science has also provided funding of € 7 million to the Vocational Education Committees (VECs) in 2006¹¹ to assist with the childcare expenses of participants in the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS), Youthreach and Senior Traveller Centre programmes. The aim is to attract people, whose attendance is currently prevented by childcare responsibilities, to enrol on these programmes.

Until recently mobility within the Irish education system has been vertical and only in limited circumstances was informal and non-formal learning accepted for entry to higher education. In recent years, policies regarding non-formal and informal learning organised on a sub-tertiary basis, and with particular reference to community-based education and workplace learning, have been given formalised accreditation, and these will allow for greater access, transfer and progression within the VET system. The introduction of the National Framework of Qualifications in 2003 will also allow progression routes to be developed from the informal community education sector into the formal education system. Awards will become more flexible to fit with the non-linear way in which some adults progress through education system and will be more relevant to community-based learners. A policy on the Recognition of Prior Learning was published in 2005 by the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC), which provides for the formal recognition of informal and non formal learning wherever acquired.

While most entrants to third-level and higher education are school leavers, Government policy is to encourage greater participation at this level by mature and second-chance learners. Priority has been given to increasing participation from persons from traditionally under-represented groups, such as students from disadvantaged backgrounds and Travellers¹². To achieve this, special arrangements have been put in place in various universities, including access officers, alternative entrance qualification requirements and special foundation or preparatory courses. In 2003 a National Office for Equity of Access to Third-Level Education was established within the Higher Education Authority, and it has since published a plan for 2005-07¹³ to progress the third-level access agenda. This plan includes recommends for provision for student childcare facilities and a proposal to financially support mature students in part-time third level education. A number of other initiatives have been established, including special links with second-level schools. Students with disabilities are supported with technical education aids and supports. One of the key outcomes of this plan has been the publication in 2006 of the first national evaluation

¹¹ Annual Report, Department of Education and Science, 2006

¹² The Travelling Community in Ireland is a nomadic ethnic minority. There are estimated to be in excess of 25 000 Travellers in the Republic of Ireland

¹³ Higher Education Authority, (HEA), 'Progressing the Action Plan: Funding to Achieve Equity of Access to Higher Education', 2005.

of higher education access programmes, which provides a practical framework for policies and initiatives for a successful access programme.

An important financial aid for this category of second chance learner is the Third-Level Access Measure (Fund), which promotes and facilitates social inclusion through its financial support for students with disabilities and for students from disadvantaged backgrounds as well as mature students in further and higher education.

2.2.2. Example of policy measures

<p>Title of policy/measure: Back to Education Initiative (Part-Time Options and Community Strands)</p> <p>Rationale: Introduced in 2002, the ‘Back to Education Initiative’ (BTEI), Part-Time Options strand has resulted in a major expansion of second-chance vocational education mainly in the form of Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses, for young disadvantaged people and adults with low education qualifications, as it provides them with flexible part-time learning opportunities to help them enter or re-enter the labour market. Increasingly, community and voluntary groups are also seen as important providers of CVET for unemployed adults. These groups operate mainly in disadvantaged areas and facilitate access to training and employment opportunities. Many of these part-time and community-based activities are publicly-funded and co-ordinated by public authorities such as the Vocational Education Committees (VECs). In 2002 the Government introduced a Community Strand under the BTEI, ensuring that a proportion (i.e. 10%) of all funding for this initiative should be given to education activities organised by local community groups.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objectives/measurable targets: The aim of the BTEI (Part-time and community Strands) programme, is to increase the participation of young people and adults with less than upper second-level education in a range of learning opportunities. Under this initiative, a programme may be offered for as little as one hour or as much as 17 hours per week, depending on the needs and demands of the prospective learners. • Target groups/educational level/educational sector: This type of learning caters for learners at all levels, from pre-foundation to further, non-tertiary, level. It is not confined to CVET and mainly addresses the educational deficits of those people who have not completed upper second-level education. Participants are often from disadvantaged, marginalised or rural communities. • Status of implementation: This initiative is implemented throughout the country.
<p>Policy/measure operation and delivery.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level of operation: The majority of BTEI part-time provision is Post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses. Although principally directed at school leavers, these courses are also an important re-entry route to learning for adults, with 30.18% of all participants in 2004-05 over 25 years of age. PLC courses can be taken on a full or part-time basis. Accreditation is at FETAC¹⁴ Foundation levels 1, 2 and 3. These courses are publicly-funded under the ‘Back to Education Initiative’. A team of thirty-seven Community Education Facilitators support the community-based non-formal adult education sector

¹⁴FETAC Further Education and Training Awards Council

and build links between community groups and the vocational education sector. The BTEI Part-time and the Community Strands are generally open to all and free for the unemployed.

- **Is it an isolated measure or part of a larger (education/training/employment/social) policy approach?** An Pobal, a State agency responsible for measures to promote social inclusion at local level, allocates funds to around seventy-six community organisations including Local Area Partnerships, which implement locally-identified VET projects.
- **Key actors involved:** Department of Education and Science; Vocational Education Committees; An Pobal; Local Area Partnerships; community and voluntary groups.

Conclusions: A document, issued by the Department of Education and Science in 2006, summarised the main issues emerging from consultations with BTEI (Part-time) providers. While identifying some challenges and system constraints, the report emphasised the positive achievements of the BTEI (Part-time), in particular the flexibility of the funding mechanism which has led to a significant expansion in the range of learning options available to adults.

2.3 Improving equity for specific target groups

2.3.1. Policy progress since 2002

Legislation such as the Disability Act 2005, the Employment Equality Act 1998, the Equal Status Act 2000, the Education Welfare Act 2000 and the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004, have all reinforced Government policy to ensure equity of access to VET for specific target groups traditionally subject to marginalisation from mainstream vocational education and training provision.

The provision of a national adult literacy strategy to address the low literacy levels of some of the Irish adult population, identified in the OECD International Adult Literacy Survey, was one of the principal policies underpinning the Government's *White Paper on Adult Education*.

This strategy was implemented through the establishment of a Taskforce on Lifelong Learning in 2002, which in turn led to the setting up of the 'National Adult Literacy Scheme' co-ordinated by the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA). The scheme provides free tuition to those who wish to access literacy programmes and it is available nationwide. It is open to individuals, family groups, travellers, ex-prisoners, migrants, non-Irish nationals and unemployed people participating in FÁS employment programmes. The programme is mainly operated by the 33 Vocational Education Committees (VECs). Participation rates have surpassed the expectations of the National Development Plan, with the number of clients catered for in the VEC adult literacy service in 2006 amounting to 39,514.

In 2005 the Department of Education and Science established a Steering Committee to co-ordinate its response to the education needs of migrants to Ireland. To meet the language needs of the growing number of non-EU immigrants now residing in Ireland, Integrate Ireland Language Training (IILT) was also established to co-

ordinate the provision of English language training for adult refugees and asylum seekers, by the VECs and other agencies.

While migrants from EU member states participate on many courses run by FÁS, it is expected that the levels will increase. In 2007 a number of steps were taken to progress this matter:-

- Interpreters were made available for a number of specified courses.
- Two generic English language modules were developed at FETAC Levels 3 and 4 and three sector-specific modules in the Hospitality, Construction and Security Industries were developed at Level 3.

A Lone Parents Initiative, jointly co-ordinated by the Department of Family and Social Affairs and FÁS, aims to facilitate the labour market integration of lone parents, the majority of whom are women. *Expanding the Workforce* (ETW) is another FÁS tailored and flexible response to the training needs of lone parents and women returnees seeking a gateway into the labour market, and assists them in progressing to higher-level positions once they are in employment.

Another scheme, the Educational Equality Initiative (EEI), supports education for very disadvantaged men and women such as those in treatment for substance dependence, Travellers and other groups experiencing educational disadvantage. EEI projects have piloted a range of innovative approaches designed to attract the most disadvantaged adults through active outreach work, neighbourhood worker schemes, buddy schemes and a range of other activities. Participation levels in the men's groups have increased due to their success in outreach to isolated men in rural areas.

The Social Partnership Agreement, 'Towards 2016', contains commitments to increasing the participation of older people in the labour market. Over the period 2005-07 FÁS participated on a project called Senior Select Retain & Retrain (SSRR), to improve the employment situation of older workers. The project was funded under the EQUAL Initiative and aimed to assist in the development, recruitment and retention of older workers (50+ years old).

2.3.2. *Examples of policy measures*

<p>Title of policy/measure: The Youthreach Programme</p> <p>Rationale: In recent years a variety of measures and legislation have been introduced to tackle early school leaving, such as the Education Welfare Act 2000 and the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004. The National Anti Poverty Strategy aims to reduce the number of young people who left school early, so that the percentage of those who complete upper second level or equivalent will reach 90 % by 2006 from a baseline figure of 81.6 % in 1999.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Objectives/measurable targets: The Youthreach Programme is designed as part of an integrated strategy to ensure that young people who have left school early with no or few qualifications have a second chance to gain access to, and benefit from, education of sufficient quality to allow them to find employment, or to progress to further education and training.• Target groups/educational level/educational sector: Status of implementation: The Youthreach Programme is defined as an IVET programme at lower secondary level. Certification is provided by FETAC and
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progression options to the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate Applied programmes are available.

- **Key actors involved:** The Youthreach programme is a joint initiative between the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. The programme is managed locally by Vocational Education Committees (VECS) and FÁS regional management.
- **Status of implementation:** Youthreach was introduced in 1989 and is an ongoing programme.

Policy/measure operation and delivery:

- **Level of operation:** Youthreach provides a two year, full-time integrated education, training and work experience for young people between 15-20 years, who have left school early without qualifications or vocational training. It consists of two distinct phases. A foundation phase to help overcome learning difficulties; develop self-confidence and a range of competences essential for further learning. A Progression phase which provides more specific development through a range of education, training and work experience options. An example of the latter option developed by FÁS, is 'Linked Work Experience', an employer-supported training and work experience initiative intended for trainees who have completed the Foundation phase of Youthreach, or who do not require foundation training and can benefit from structured on-the-job training. A training allowance is paid to participants.

The Youthreach programme also has measures for guidance, counselling as well as psychological services. An Advocacy Service managed by FÁS, provides a tailor-made approach to career planning designed to meet the guidance, training and work experience needs of disadvantaged early school leavers, as they move from Youthreach centres to mainstream training, education or employment. Mentoring facilities are also available, providing Youthreach participants with: - (a) help to identify the best way forward; (b) negotiating on their behalf with VET providers and (c) supports and tracks their progress.

- **Is it an isolated measure or part of a larger (education/training/employment/social) policy approach?** Programmes such as Youthreach and the FÁS Foundation (Bridging) Programme, aim to facilitate labour market access for young educationally disadvantaged young people. The School Completion Initiative combining the Early School Leaver and the School Retention Initiatives, are a number of other measures established to enhance support for the continued participation of young people in school.

Conclusions: A survey of outcomes from the Youthreach programme in Vocational Education centres, found that 71% had obtained employment or had progressed to further education or training. A value for money review of the Youthreach and Senior Traveller Programmes was also undertaken by the Department of Education and Science in 2008.

Title of policy/measure: The FÁS Traveller Strategy 2007-2010 and Training and Employment Programmes for Travellers¹⁵

Rationale: In 2006 a comprehensive five-year Strategy for Education for Travellers was developed with the assistance of the Educational Disadvantage Committee and the Advisory Committee on Traveller Education. One of the issues it addresses relates to how existing educational supports for Travellers and their children might best be integrated into mainstream IVET provision.

- **Objectives/measurable targets:** The FÁS Traveller Strategy, completed in 2007 to improve labour market provision for Travellers, recognises the importance of altering the cultural context of the organisation in ways that are welcoming of the Traveller culture and history, as well as the importance of creating a training environment which can facilitate working with the Traveller community in the context of equality and anti-discrimination. To achieve this aim, FÁS has introduced intercultural awareness training for its staff. FÁS is also aware that Travellers, as a group, may need additional supports to attend mainstream training and employment programmes. Fundamental to the achievement of the recommendations of the Strategy is the setting up of networks with representatives of the Travelling community, to create links and manage expectations between FÁS and the Traveller community.
- **Target groups/educational level/educational sector:** The strategy is aimed at Travellers, both young and older, with low levels of educational qualifications (i.e. below Leaving Certificate level). The Young Traveller Programme is defined as an IVET programme at lower secondary level.

- **Status of implementation:** The FÁS Traveller strategy is being implemented countrywide.

Policy/measure operation and delivery:

- **Level of operation:** The training programmes being developed under this strategy places emphasis on the core skills of literacy and numeracy. The Senior Traveller Training Programme provides Travellers with the skills to successfully make the transition to work and to participate fully in their communities. Certification by the Further Education Awards Council (FETAC) of courses provided in Traveller Training Centres ensures a range of progression opportunities for participants. Travellers Training Workshops are run by the Department of Education and Science with instruction provided by the Vocational Education Committees.
- **Is it an isolated measure or part of a larger (education/training/employment/social) policy approach?** Part of a comprehensive five-year strategy for the education of Travellers developed by Government agencies. The FÁS strategy aims to give a range of skills to the trainees and endeavour to break the cycles of illiteracy and social deprivation.
- **Key actors involved:** Department of Education and Science-Education Disadvantage Committee; Advisory Committee on Traveller Education Vocational Education Committees; FÁS, the Training and Employment Authority; Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

Assessment of the policy:

- **Integration of outcomes into (a) larger (national, sectoral, regional, local)**

¹⁵ The Travelling Community in Ireland is a nomadic ethnic minority. There are estimated to be in excess of 25 000 Travellers in the Republic of Ireland

policy/ies: In 2007 FÁS participated in a Special Initiative for Travellers to expand the employment prospects of this group. The initiative had three aims:

- To redress the imbalance in Traveller unemployment;
- To support Travellers already engaged in the Traveller Economy;
- To provide a special training fund to address the specific training needs of adult Travellers across all regions in order to ensure the inclusion of Travellers in the labour force.

Conclusions: The outcomes of this FÁS strategy and the special training initiative above, has demonstrated the willingness of Travellers to move into mainstream employment and develop their business ideas. It also demonstrated the need for on-going support and mentoring, and the willingness and capacity to deliver high support employment opportunities which understand Travellers needs and expectations.

Title of policy/measure: FÁS Vocational Training Strategy for Persons with a Disability and other Support programmes for people with disabilities

Rationale: Legislation such as the Employment Equality Acts 1998 and 2004, and the Disability Act, 2005, which have been introduced by the Government, aim to ensure equity of access to VET for people with disabilities. Strategies to overcome marginalisation from the workforce experienced by persons with disabilities have been outlined in the National Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016. These strategies, together with Government plans to further mainstream employment and training for people with disabilities, form key elements of a new national disability 'Strategy of Engagement: Towards a Comprehensive Strategy for People with Disabilities' (2006).

- **Objectives/measurable targets:** In 2005, FÁS developed a Statement of Strategy, which focused on the organisation's objectives to ensure social inclusion, equality and diversity in all its programmes and for all its clients. To progress this policy the FÁS Vocational Training Strategy for Persons with a Disability was issued in 2006. This sets out to address the particular requirements of people with disabilities so that they can realise their potential opportunities in the labour market, through increased access to FÁS mainstream training and employment programmes.
- **Target groups/educational level/educational sector:** People with physical and intellectual disabilities and those currently undergoing rehabilitative training provided by Specialist Training Providers.
- **Status of implementation:** In order to more effectively implement Disability Policy, a FÁS 'Equality Policy for its Customers' was issued in 2007 and this will be implemented together with further training to increase staff competence in working with persons with disabilities.

Policy/measure operation and delivery:

- **Level of operation:** Mainstream training and employment programmes provided by FÁS are open to people with disabilities. In 2007 a number of steps were taken to further assist those with disabilities to access these courses:-
 - Specialist classroom equipment and assistive technology were made available as required.
 - Accessibility to FÁS training centres has been significantly improved.FÁS has also put in place a High Support Bridging process for persons who have the requisite skills to progress from rehabilitative training to mainstream vocational training.

FÁS, also administers several grants and schemes to assist those with a disability, access employment. The Disability Awareness and Training Support Grant schemes and the Adaptation of Training Equipment and the Employee Retention Grant Scheme are designed to help employees who acquire a disability to continue at work. FÁS, also subcontracts the delivery of some training programmes for people with disabilities to specialist training providers.

- **Is it an isolated measure or part of a larger (education/training/employment/social) policy approach?** In 2007 a Consultative Forum on an Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities was established to meet key commitments under the Disability Act, 2005. This Forum included representatives of people with disabilities together with FÁS representatives and other relevant Government agencies.
- **Key actors involved:** FÁS; the Health Service Executive; Departments of Social and Family Affairs and of Enterprise, Trade and Employment; specialist training providers; National Disability Authority; the Social Partners and other relevant agencies.

Assessment of the Policy/Measure:

- **Integration of outcomes into (a) larger (national, sectoral, regional, local) policy/ies:** Arising from commitments made by the Government in the National Development Plan (2007–2013), and as part of the National Partnership Agreement ‘Towards 2016’ to extend the current labour market employment activation process to other groups including disabled people, a High Level Government Inter-Departmental Group has been established to develop tailored support for each specific group.

Conclusions: The FÁS Disability Customer Survey (2005) and the National Disability Authority surveys on Disability and Employment (2005) and reports such as ‘How Far Towards Equality? Measuring how Equally People with Disabilities are Included in Irish Society’ (2005), have all indicated that people with physical and intellectual disabilities have experienced barriers to, and exclusion from, training and employment opportunities.

3. LIFELONG LEARNING THROUGH VET

3.1. National policy context on lifelong learning through VET

Ireland's proposed Lifelong Learning Strategy will cover all phases of education and training from primary and post-primary education, initial vocational education and training which also includes youth provision, to further and continuing VET and higher education. Recently the Government appointed a Minister for State for lifelong learning.

Enhancing access to education and training, the development of new skills, the acquisition of recognised qualifications and progression to higher education, are the key issues driving the lifelong learning agenda in Ireland. Lifelong learning can only be successful if it is fully inclusive, participative, accommodating of diversity and focused on equality of outcomes for all. The establishment of the Taskforce on Lifelong Learning in 2002, which gave official sanction to the funding of community education, and the introduction of the 'Back to Education Initiative' (BTEI) and its extension to part-time provision in 2002, provides significantly increased opportunities for second chance education for those from disadvantaged backgrounds with low qualification levels.

The re-orientation of the system of qualifications in Ireland to meet the needs of learners in a lifelong learning context has been a key objective for Government. Progress towards this objective was significantly enhanced with the introduction of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999, which in turn led to the setting up in 2001 of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI). Following this, in 2003, a National Qualifications Framework was established, covering all awards in the state from initial schooling to higher doctorate level, and thereby providing pathways to facilitate the transfer between different levels of the education and training system.

3.2 Facilitating transfer between VET Pathways

3.2.1. Policy progress since 2002

Education in Ireland has traditionally comprised three strands; Primary, Second-Level, and Higher Education or Third-Level. Higher education comprises Universities, Institutes of Technology, National Institutions and other third level colleges.

At IVET and CVET levels, both the education and training systems run bridging courses to facilitate progression onto mainline training programmes for the long-term unemployed or those who have become marginalised due to disabilities or other social problems¹⁶ and who have little or no qualifications or skills. In 2002 the Government expanded 'The 'Back to Education Initiative' (BTEI), providing a Part-Time Options Strand, which has facilitated an expansion of second-chance education for young disadvantaged people and adults with low education qualifications, by providing them with flexible learning opportunities to help them increase their qualifications.

¹⁶ Source: Department of Education and Science – Further Education Unit 2005.

At post-secondary level, Post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses are an important area of second chance education which, although principally directed at school leavers, they are also an important re-entry route to learning for adults, with 30% of all participants in 2004-05 over 25 years of age.

While in Ireland has been a lack of a sharp distinction between initial and continuing VET, in contrast, there has been a clear separation between further and higher education, with few progression routes facilitating transfer between these areas. The introduction of the National Qualifications Framework in 2003 now provides a system for co-ordinating and comparing awards, thereby facilitating progression and mobility for learners irrespective of the entry point or the education or training path followed. Under the Framework strategy, all IVET and CVET programmes must have provision for access, transfer, and progression. The following link shows the various awards and levels within the National Framework of Qualifications.

http://www.nfq.ie/nfq/en/public_resources/documents/NFQFanPosterA1.pdf

3.2.2. *Example of policy measures*

Title of policy/measure: Post-Leaving Certificate Programme

Rationale: In recent years there have been several initiatives to increase progression from the VET sector into further and higher education. The introduction of Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses, originally with aid from the European Social Fund, has increasingly provided a pathway and a link into third-level programmes. Several higher education institutions, including universities, have a range of schemes to facilitate direct progression from PLC courses to degree level courses and third level colleges such as the Institutes of Technology (ITs), now reserve a number of places for those with Further Education and Training Awards under the Higher Education Links Scheme.

- **Objectives/measurable target:** Post Leaving Certificate courses (PLCs) aim to provide a bridge between school and work for those who need further initial vocational education to enhance their employment opportunities. These courses were introduced in 1985 to provide integrated general education, vocational training and work experience for young people who had completed upper second-level education or equivalent. Its purpose was to enhance the prospects for these young people to gain employment. This remains the priority objective of PLC provision.
- **Target groups/educational level/educational sector:** Young people and adults wishing to further their educational qualifications. Some 40% of all participants are over 21 years of age; accordingly they are an important re-entry route to learning for adults, as well as catering for some 18% of all school leavers each year. The PLC programme is for those who have completed the senior qualifications cycle or equivalent.
- **Status of implementation:** The courses have grown considerably and the programme now offers over 1,000 courses in over 60 disciplines in some 230 centres around the country. They are delivered in both second level schools and further education colleges, mainly in the Vocational Education (VEC) sector. PLC courses are now the largest non-tertiary, post second-level, initial vocational education programme in Ireland.

Policy/measure operation and delivery:

- **Level of operation:** The PLC programme options are designed to be broadly based to allow entry into a series of possible occupations, and provide a foundation for lifelong learning. The courses have been developed in a wide range of disciplines supporting industry and community needs, these include Business Studies, Electronics, Engineering, Computing, Catering, Sport and Leisure, Community Care, E-commerce, tourism, Theatre, Childcare, Equestrian Studies and Multi-Media. Programmes are (usually) of one to two years duration and can be taken on a full or part-time basis. The courses adopt an integrated approach, focusing on technical knowledge, core skills and work experience and lead to accreditation typically at levels 5 to 6 from the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETEC).

Through the Higher Education Links Scheme, PLC courses also provide an alternative route to higher education in the Institutes of Technology for those who have completed the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme, or who were unable to enter third-level education after leaving school. For example, FETAC level 5 PLC courses in community and health services subjects have progression links to nursing degree courses in universities and Institutes of Technology.

- **Key actors involved:** Vocational Education Committees and the Department of Education and Science.

Assessment of the Policy/Measure: The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) Report 'The Post Leaving Certificate Sector in Ireland - A multivariate Analysis of Educational and Employment Outcomes' published in 2006, highlighted how the PLC sector has been growing in importance since its inception in 1985. Most participants have been female, outnumbering males by about two to one. The analysis has also pointed to the changing profile of PLC participants, since the early 1990s, the bulk of the growth has been among those over age 21. This highlights the emerging role of the PLC sector in providing a route to 'second chance' education and lifelong learning. The report indicates that approximately 90% of those students completing a PLC course progress to further education and training or to employment.

Conclusions: Post-Leaving Certificate courses are an important source of supply of skilled people for the Irish economy, with courses aimed at preparing students for employment and for progression into other areas of education and training. For young people looking to enhance their qualifications and employment prospects, for those seeking an alternative route of entry into higher education and for adults wishing to return to learning, the PLC route offers an invaluable opportunity .

3.3 Improving Guidance and Counselling Services and creating guidance structures

3.3.1 Policy progress since 2002

Ireland does not have an integrated and comprehensive structure for providing career guidance and advice. Recent reports on guidance provision in Ireland by the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs and the Department of Education and Science (DES), have revealed many strengths but also significant gaps. The 'Task Force on Life Long Learning', set up in 2002 by the Government, stated that: "*An integrated strategy for*

development is seen as vital with all relevant agencies participating in supporting co-ordinated actions - particularly through joint approaches by FÁS, the Training and Employment Authority, the National Centre for Guidance in Education and second level, further education and third-level providers”.

Guidance services in Ireland are available within both the education and labour market sectors and are located within educational institutions and in FÁS employment services offices. In the educational area, guidance services are based in post-primary schools, higher and further education institutions and through second chance education programmes such as the Youthreach programme (see Theme 2 Best Practice Example). The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) published, in January 2007, a draft curriculum framework for guidance in post-primary education for the areas of Personal Guidance, Educational Guidance and Career Development. The framework reflects the importance of a balanced approach to guidance provision, both in terms of the coverage of a broad range of topics and skills, and in terms of student access to guidance across all the years of post-primary education.

Under the Guidance Enhancement Initiative, 2001, each school was granted an additional teaching resource to assist it with its guidance provision. Later, schools received additional staffing for guidance purposes in response to proposals to establish links with the local and business community, promote the uptake of science, and focus on the disadvantaged. In recent years priority has been given to additional elements of guidance in the curriculum e.g. 'substance abuse' programmes and 'stay safe' programmes. In some schools, support teachers are available to support the needs of children with social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties.

At post-secondary school level, guidance and counselling provision is provided mainly within further education colleges and centres, operated locally by Vocational Educational Committees (VEC) and in community education settings. Youth Information Centres, managed by a variety of youth organisations, also offer information on a wide number of issues including employment matters, local community services and education and training to young people. In 2000 an Adult Educational Guidance Initiative (AEGI) was established to pilot, and eventually mainstream guidance information and counselling services which would include outreach provision for adult learners from disadvantaged backgrounds with low educational attainment.

Universities and Institutes of Technology (ITs), have careers and counselling services available to students. A counselling service is also available in the adult education sector to help clients assess their current situation and look at the options open to them for the future.

The National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE), funded by the Department of Education and Science (DES), plays a role in developing quality career guidance in Ireland. Its main functions are to develop and evaluate guidance practice and material in all areas of education, provide technical advice, and organise in-career development training, as well as contributing to policy formation in the field of guidance. The Centre acts as Secretariat to the National Guidance Forum and provides co-ordination activities for the Adult Education Guidance Initiative (AEGI), referred

to above. It makes available information on best practice in guidance education and systems in Europe, as well as education and training opportunities for practitioners in Ireland.

In the labour market context, FÁS, the Training and Employment Authority, is responsible for the provision of guidance, advice and information in respect of employment and career choices. Recent initiatives undertaken by FÁS to support and develop their guidance systems include:-

- The establishment of a national internet-based job vacancy contact centre.
- The development of a multimedia careers package - Career Directions.

The latter is a computerised career guidance tool which hosts a database on careers information. It is a web-based interactive programme accessible nationwide, which allows users to perform self-assessments and access information on over 720 careers. Career Directions has links to all current vacancies and training courses on the FÁS website and is available on multimedia CD and online at www.careerdirections.ie. It is also accessible in FÁS Employment Offices and Training Centres, as well as Youth Information Centres, second-level schools and publicly-funded careers advisory services in third-level institutions.

In recent years both the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE) and FÁS have been active in guidance policy developments at European level and both are members of the Euroguidance network of national resource centres, funded under the European Commission’s Lifelong Learning Programme.

3.3.2 Example of policy measures

<p>Title of policy/measure: The National Guidance Forum</p> <p>Rationale: Currently, the provision of guidance in Ireland is quite fragmented, with many different providers delivering services to various target groups in a wide range of educational and labour market settings. In 2004 a National Guidance Forum was jointly established by the Departments of Education and Science (DES) and of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE) in response to an OECD review of career guidance policies in Ireland in 2002. The Forum brought together key stakeholders from across the education and labour market spectrum and for the first time an agreed cohesive strategy for a national lifelong guidance service was developed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objectives/measurable targets: The Forum’s report and recommendations entitled ‘Guidance for Life: An Integrated Framework for Lifelong Learning in Ireland’, published in 2007, has provided an opportunity to plan the provision of a guidance service that would underpin national priorities in lifelong learning. The Forum’s report:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ noted the role of guidance practitioners in the dissemination of quality educational and careers information; ➤ provided a national lifelong guidance framework which outlines the knowledge, skills and competencies that guidance aims to develop among individuals, covering the life stages from early childhood to adulthood, and ➤ recognised that guidance should be needs-based rather than age-based. • Target groups/educational level/educational sector: Within the educational context the main target groups for the provision of guidance and counselling are:-
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- young people in the secondary school system;
- early School Leavers;
- university students at undergraduate and post graduate level and
- adult and second chance learners.
- **Status of implementation:** A decision about the Forum’s report has yet to be taken.

Policy/measure operation and delivery:

- **Level of operation:** The Forum’s proposed guidance framework is to be supported by quality standards for service delivery which will support a comprehensive lifelong guidance service, implemented through qualified practitioners and new interlinked structures. At national level, the Forum proposes a National Guidance Agency and a National Guidance Forum to promote and implement a lifelong guidance strategy. At local level a Lifelong Guidance Co-ordination Board and a Local Guidance Forum is recommended, to facilitate the delivery of guidance by labour market and education providers. The Forum has also agreed a common vision and definition of guidance across the education, labour market and community sectors and will support research on careers information. It has also announced its participation in the European-funded project for the establishment of a European network of guidance forums.
- **Key actors involved:** Departments of Education and Science (DES) and of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE) and other key national stakeholders.

3.4 Validating (identifying, assessing and recognising) skills and competencies acquired through non-formal and informal learning

3.4.1 Policy progress since 2002

Over the past number of years, new informal learning routes offer a variety of learning opportunities for adults. Until recently mobility within the Irish education system has been vertical. Traditionally, the Irish education structure comprised three strands; primary, second level, and higher education or third-level, and only in limited circumstances was informal and non-formal learning accepted for entry to higher education. In recent years, policies regarding non-formal and informal learning organised on a sub-tertiary basis, and with particular reference to community-based education and workplace learning, have been given formalised accreditation, and these will allow for greater access, transfer and progression in learning.

The introduction of the National Framework of Qualifications in 2003, to provide for all awards in the State within a 10 level framework, from literacy and basic education to post- doctorate level, has further facilitated progression routes to be developed from the community education sector into formal education. Awards will become more flexible to fit with the non-linear way in which adults progress through education and will be more relevant to community-based learners.

All awards issued since 2005 by the recently established Awarding Councils fall under the new national qualifications framework. The remit of FETAC-The Further Education and Training Awards Council, includes the validation and assessment of prior and experiential learning and work-based learning. Community and private sector education also come under its aegis. It is thus possible for a learner to achieve

an award without having participated in a specific formalised programme of learning. The remit of HETAC-the Higher Education and Training Awards Council also includes the validation and assessment of education and training programmes.

The National Qualifications Authority (NQAI), established in 2001, has the principle role in the development and implementation of the National Framework of Qualifications. Included in the remit of the NQAI are the following functions.

- To establish and maintain a framework of qualifications based on standards of knowledge, skill or competence to be acquired by learners regardless of where, when or how such learning takes place.
- To facilitate lifelong learning through the promotion of access, transfer and progression for all learners including those who have special needs.

In 2005 the NQAI issued ‘Principles and Guidelines on the Recognition of Prior Learning in Ireland in Further and Higher Education’. These established policies to ensure that non- formal learning is recognised and accredited and addressed issues of quality and assessment. Under these guidelines providers of further and higher education and vocational training leading to awards must follow a set of procedures which include the following statements concerning informal learning.

- A statement of arrangements for recognition of prior learning (RPL) for entry to their programmes.
- Possibilities for transfer and/or progression associated with these programmes, including any relevant specific progression linkages.
- Details of learning support available for specific learners such as for learners with disabilities.

These guidelines aim to encourage the development and expansion of processes for RPL so that providers and awarding bodies may:

- communicate their commitment to RPL,
- bring coherence and consistency to RPL,
- remove difficulties that may confront an applicant wishing to transfer within and between the different education and training sectors

In 2007 FETAC completed a pilot project¹⁷ with a number of providers who facilitated learners through a range of RPL processes in accordance with FETAC’s own Policy on the Recognition of Prior Learning launched in 2005. Among the comments arising from an evaluation of that project were that ‘ FETAC supports the recommendation of the Expert Group on Future Skill Needs in their report *‘Tomorrows Skills: Towards a National Skills Strategy’*, to develop new initiatives to support flexible and responsive training provision and adequate funding to ensure learners move one step up the framework of qualifications’.

Recently FÁS, in co-operation of the Institutes of Technology, has developed protocols and procedures for the recognition of Prior Learning for the apprenticeship process, thus facilitating increased access to apprenticeship. Other FÁS initiatives to

¹⁷ Recognition of Prior Learning Pilot Project-Evaluation Report 2007, FETAC, Ireland, 2007.

accredit prior learning have taken place in the retail, construction and childcare sectors, including the co-funding of the ‘Líonra -Accreditation of Prior Learning’ (APL/PPL) project, 2006-07, (See example below), which sought to accredit/recognize prior learning in Information Technology (IT).

3.4.2 Example of policy measures

<p>Title of policy/measure: Validation of non-formal learning – Líonra Case Study</p> <p>Rationale: Líonra, a pilot higher education network for the Border, Midland and Western (BMW) region of Ireland was established in 2001 as a pilot project. It aimed to provide a collaborative response to the education and development challenges facing the Border Midland and Western (BMW) Region as delineated under the EU Operational Programme.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objectives/measurable targets: This Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) pilot project received funding from FÁS. It sought the development and application of a standard model to recognise and accredit prior learning in Information Technology (IT) for companies operating in the BMW region. The project aimed to meet the need across the region for up-skilling of IT skills among the workforce, particularly in small and medium enterprises. Many employees in these enterprises have acquired some IT skills, but these are often uncertified. • Target groups/educational level/educational sector: Employees of SMEs operating in the BMW Region. • Status of implementation: The initial timeline for the pilot project was extended and it ran until July 2007.
<p>Policy/measure operation and delivery:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level of operation: All of the participating Institutes of Technology in this project offer Higher Certificate Courses in Office Information Systems or equivalent. They agreed to develop a common APL methodology for awarding exemptions to IT modules on such courses. APL would enable them to offer those who qualify for exemptions a FÁS track to attaining a Higher Certificate. The following were the proposed outcomes of the project <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 250 individuals trained in portfolio preparation. Mentoring provided for these people while they are producing their portfolios. ➤ Three staff members who are IT subject matter experts trained in portfolio assessment in each participating Líonra Network college. ➤ All portfolios assessed, individual gaps in learning identified, exemptions from IT subjects offered, and third level certification awarded in individual IT subject areas where merited. ➤ Common methodology for APL in relation to IT subjects developed and agreed by the Líonra Network of colleges <p>By early May 2007, 237 employed people had received training in APL awareness, while 180 people received training in portfolio development. Some 70 portfolios were prepared and submitted for assessment at National Qualification Framework Level 6. A minor award in mentoring was developed by Athlone Institute of Technology and delivered to 20 mentors in 2007.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is it an isolated measure or part of a larger (education/training/employment/social) policy approach: In 2005 the National Qualifications Authority issued Principles and Guidelines on the

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in Ireland to facilitate those wishing to progress to further and higher education.

- **Key actors involved:** Members of the network comprise the five Institutes of Technology; namely Athlone, Dundalk, Galway-Mayo, Letterkenny, Sligo, the National University of Ireland, Galway, St Angela's College, Sligo and the BMW Regional Assembly.

Assessment of the policy:

- **Integration of outcomes into other policies:** This project is part of the FÁS, Services to Business, Strategic Alliances Programme.

Conclusions: An evaluation of this project indicated the need for a national strategy on RPL. It highlighted the role of RPL in recognising the knowledge, skills and competences individuals have acquired in informal settings such as the workplace and in their private activities. Attention needed to be given to developing an understanding of the language of certification, e.g., award, learning outcomes and assessment, also to the time to develop a portfolio of evidence related to an award and to resources and support for applicants throughout the RPL process. For providers, there is a need for more flexible provision and adaptation of IT systems to manage RPL. For Awards Councils, the project indicated a need for more awards in different fields of learning and at different levels, the need for minor, supplemental and special purpose awards and clear procedures for applicants. At national level the project suggested that funding of RPL is a significant issue to be addressed.

4. IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF VET

4.1 National policy context on improving quality of VET

The principal legislation underpinning quality assurance in further and higher education and training in Ireland is the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 and the Universities Act 1997. The National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), set up under the Qualifications Act, requires that all awards which are included in the National Framework of Qualifications are quality assured.

The Awards Councils (HETAC and FETAC) are responsible for agreeing quality assurance procedures with providers delivering programmes that lead their awards, as well as the monitoring of standards of these awards. They are also responsible for reviewing the effectiveness of provider quality assurance procedures and the implementation of the findings which have arisen through the application of these procedures. Both awarding Councils have individually published their quality assurance criteria for providers who wish to become recognised and the Councils in turn are also subject to quality assurance arrangements.

4.2 Improving quality in VET provision

4.2.1 Policy progress since 2002

The Qualifications Act 1999 sets out the responsibilities of the National Qualifications Authority (NQA) in terms of quality assurance (QA). This involves the review of the performance of the Awards Councils and the review of the effectiveness of the QA procedures of Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT). The effectiveness of the Authority itself was due to be reviewed in 2007.

The Universities Act sets out the requirement for each university to establish quality assurance procedures, to carry out evaluations, and to review the effectiveness of its QA procedures. The Irish Universities Quality Board has delegated authority to organise periodic reviews of the effectiveness of the QA procedures in place in universities. The Higher Education Authority also has an overarching role with regard to quality assurance procedures within the third-level sector.

An evaluation of the effectiveness of HETAC was completed in 2006 by an international review panel commissioned by the NQA. HETAC was one of the first agencies in Europe to be reviewed in terms of compliance with the standards and guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area. The process concluded that HETAC has performed effectively its principal statutory functions, and has developed policies and procedures for each function which are being implemented and operated as appropriate.

HETAC and the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in the UK signed a Memorandum of Understanding in June 2006 to cooperate and collaborate on quality assurance matters in higher education. One of the areas of cooperation selected relates to the identification of fraudulent award bodies, which have the potential to damage the reputation of both Irish and UK higher education institutions.

A review of the effectiveness of quality assurance procedures in the Dublin Institute of Technology was undertaken, on behalf of the NQAI, by the European University Association in 2005. The subsequent report, published in 2006, made a range of recommendations in regard to ongoing enhancement and concluded that the Institute was “a dynamic institute.”

The Irish Higher Education Quality Network was established in 2003. It provides a forum for the principal national stakeholders in the quality assurance of higher education and training to discuss quality in a national context, to work towards the development of a common national position on key QA issues and to contribute to the debate of these issues at a European level.

At non-tertiary VET level, in March 2006, FETAC published its policies on Quality Assuring Assessment, Validation Monitoring of Programmes. This involves the evaluation by FETAC of VET providers’ QA procedures against published criteria. This validation process examines how a programme meets the specifications for an award.

Agreement by FETAC on the efficacy of providers’ QA procedures is a prerequisite for gaining and retaining registration to offer FETAC awards. A review of FETAC’s performance of its own functions commenced in 2007.

4.2.2. Example of policy measures

<p>Title of policy/measure: FÁS Quality Assurance Strategy</p> <p>Rationale: The FÁS Statement of Strategy 2006-2009 specifies that it will “<i>provide higher quality, more innovative and flexible services to customers by embracing a culture of quality and service excellence, by providing programmes and services that are approved and accredited by the Awards Councils and by seeking customer feedback and continuous improvement</i>”. As the national training and employment authority, FÁS also has an important role in the implementation of the National Framework of Qualifications, and a basic principle of the National Framework is that all awards which are included in it, or aligned with it, are quality assured.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objectives/measurable targets: Building on good practice, FÁS has developed a Quality Assurance (QA) Policy Framework which (a) interprets and reflects HETAC and FETAC QA requirements in an organisational context, (b) incorporates FÁS’s own QA requirements, and (c) augments existing organisational quality assurance policies and practices. A Senior Management Quality Assurance Group has been set up to oversee the harmonisation and alignment of FÁS QA procedures with those of the Awards Councils’ criteria. • Educational levels/educational sector: FÁS QA strategy relates directly to the operation of good practices in its provision of initial and further vocational training for new entrants and those already employed in the workforce. • Status of implementation: In 2007 FÁS reached agreement with FETAC which sanctioned the compliance of its quality assurance (QA) policy framework for its training programmes with those standards set out by FETAC. FÁS have also reached agreement in principle with HETAC, concerning a formal agreement which will be concluded following successful validation of relevant training programmes currently under development. <p>Policy/measure operation and delivery:</p>
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- **Level of operation:** The FÁS QA Policy is based on the following keys points.
 - (1) Provide a QA Policy for all training that it provides, organises and/or procures.
 - (2) Build on organisational good practice.
 - (3) Incorporate a learner focus which identifies and meets learner needs.
 - (4) Ensure a consistent approach to quality assurance across the organisation.
 - (5) Ensure the continuous development of FÁS training programmes and related services.

FÁS has also established quality assurance policies for the following areas:-

- Effective system of Communications with stakeholders; Equality i.e. facilitating diversity; Systematic staff recruitment and professional development; Information and arrangements on access, transfer and progression.
- Systematic approach to programme development, delivery and review; fair and consistent assessment of learners; protection for learners e.g. in the event of unexpected cessation.
- Clarity in sub-contacting/procuring programme delivery and internal monitoring and evaluation of programmes to ensure continued relevance and effectiveness.

In future FÁS learning provision will be externally approved and monitored and the findings will be published by the Awards Councils.

- **Is this an isolated measure or part of a larger (education/training/employment/social) policy approach:** FÁS has contributed to the shape and form of the National Framework of Qualifications and to the manner in which the Framework operates and continues to influence developments through its nominated representation on the Qualifications Authority and on FETAC.
- **Key actors involved:** FÁS, the National Training and Employment Authority, FETAC and HETAC, the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland.

Assessment of the policy/measure:

- **Assessment of impact:** FÁS learners are the primary beneficiaries of its quality assurance policy as there will be no more cul-de-sacs for learners. Under FÁS programmes they will have access to an ever increasing range of awards on the National Framework of Qualifications, their needs will be facilitated regardless of their life stage, and their progression opportunities will be greatly enhanced.
- **Intergration of outcomes into other policies:** FÁS also implements the quality management systems, Q-Mark and ISO9000 awards. These systems play an important role in improving the day to day delivery of training services for all FÁS clients. FÁS, through its Services to Business provision, also has a national scheme to promote quality excellence in training for employed workers.

Conclusions: Public recognition as a quality-assured organisation ensures a number of key advantages for FÁS. Specifically, as a training provider, it is further enhanced in an increasingly competitive training and education environment. Also learners' confidence in the quality and relevance of FÁS learning will be further developed.

4.3 Supporting the professional development of VET teachers and trainers and increasing the attractiveness and social status of teaching and training professions

4.3.1. Policy progress since 2002

In Ireland, teachers are primarily concerned with the education of young people within the formal school system at either primary or secondary level. The term teacher also refers to persons employed to teach in non-tertiary colleges such as colleges of further or continuing education. At third level in academic institutions, such as universities and Institutes of Technology, persons providing teaching are generally known as lecturers or professors.

In contrast, there is no legal description of the role of a vocational trainer, nor is there any requirement for them to have any educational qualifications or pedagogical skills. Trainers are involved in the skills training and development of trainees of all ages outside of the formal education system, and this training is generally provided either by private companies or within semi-state organisations such as FÁS, the Training and Employment Authority. Trainers may also operate as independent practitioners, or private training consultants, who offer training to companies.

The Table below lists the types of teachers and trainers operating in the formal second-level education system and at IVET and CVET levels.

Table 4: Occupational type of teachers and trainers in the second level education system and at IVET and CVET levels

Occupational type	Type of Location
Teachers at second-level in the formal education system*	Secondary schools; Community schools or colleges; Vocational schools; Comprehensive schools.
IVET teachers	Non-tertiary Education Centres, Colleges of Further Education.
CVET teacher	VTOS (Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme), which is delivered in vocational education schools and colleges. Colleges or Institutes of Further and Continuing Education
CVET lecturer	Institutes of Technology; universities; privately run professional colleges and other private institutions.
CVET trainer or instructor**	FÁS and other state training agencies in specific sectors e.g. for the tourism and agricultural sectors.
CVET private trainer or training consultant	Company training centres in all types of industrial and services enterprises and private training companies.

**The terms trainer and instructor are used interchangeably. Trainers are generally persons providing training on an independent basis or within private companies, while persons providing training within state organisations such as FÁS are usually referred to as instructors.

In 2006, as a result of the 2001 Teaching Council Act, the Teaching Council was set up to promote and develop teaching as a profession at primary and post-primary levels, and to ensure that priorities are set for the professional training of an adequate number of teachers in various subjects. (See Theme: 4.3.2. below for further details).

The Department of Education and Science is currently assessing the provision of initial teacher education in Ireland, in particular whether this provision remains relevant to meeting the emerging challenges facing schools and teachers. These challenges include increasing cultural diversity in the classrooms, enhanced provision for children with special needs, preparing school students for the knowledge economy and the use of ICT. Regarding the latter, the role of the teacher is critical in integrating ICT into teaching and learning. The National Centre for Technology in Education (NCTE) operates a Teaching Skills Initiative to meet the specific needs of teachers in their use of ICT, including internet, web design and digital media courses. The NCTE also provides on-line teaching resources via the Scoilnet Portal, and, together with the regionally-based ICT advisory service, it provides advice on the integration of ICT into teaching and learning.

The In-Career Development Unit of the Department of Education and Science (DES) funds and develops a national programme of in-service training and continuing professional development (CDP) for teachers, tutors and school managers at all levels in the education system. These programmes are provided in Teacher Training Colleges, universities and by other agencies and include support for teachers in schools in the context of changes in curricula and school programmes at first and second levels. A School Management and a Leadership Development Programme have been developed for principals and deputy principals at primary and post-primary levels. There are also programmes for teachers in specific areas of learning support, student behaviour and special education needs, for example the Substance Misuse Prevention Programme.

A nationwide network of Education Centres are key partners in the provision of teacher continuing professional development (CPD). Under the remit of the DES, the centres host the national Programmes of Curriculum Reform and support services on a range of issues relating to teaching and learning, in particular the identified needs of teachers and schools in their various catchment areas.

There are many opportunities for teachers and lecturers working in third-level education to avail of further education and training. In response to the broadening of higher education opportunities, the 'Training of Trainers' measure for Third-Level in the Employment and Human Resource Development Operational Programme (EHRD OP) 2000-06, provided funding for development programmes for staff in this sector. These programmes were designed to enable third-level staff to adapt to new technology, while also focusing on pedagogical training, teacher evaluation and appraisal and the development of management skills. More recently, one of the objectives of the Government 'Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions', is to promote excellence in research and contribute to the quality of teaching and learning in higher education institutions.

Continuing VET support services across the adult vocational education services are varied and receive certain resources. Within the VEC adult education service,

programmes have developed their own support services, with different categories of staff requiring different types of professional development depending on their roles, skills, and qualifications. The DES has funded Certificate and Diploma programmes, on an in-service basis, primarily for staff involved with the Youthreach, Senior Traveller Training Centres and Adult Literacy Services. The National Adult Literacy Agency provides training for literacy personnel within the VEC service, while the National Committee for Guidance in Education provides a support service for adult guidance personnel.

Training for community education staff is provided through a variety of sources. Maynooth University offers students a Higher Diploma and MA in Adult and Community Education.

With regard to continuous professional development for vocational trainers, the Irish Institute of Training and Development (IITD), a professional body which develops and monitors standards in training and development in Ireland, organises Certificate and Diploma part-time courses in training and development in co-operation with a number of Institutes of Technology. In 2006 the IITD, in association with the National College of Ireland, launched a part-time three year BA degree in Training and Development, aimed at human resource practitioners working in small, medium and large enterprises as employees or consultants. The degree aims to develop skills and knowledge in specialist training areas such as the design and delivery of training.

FÁS, the National Training and Employment Authority, decided in the 1990s that it would be beneficial for its own trainers and instructors to have access to formal qualifications in training and development. A series of programmes from Foundation, Certificate to Degree and Master level, accredited by the National University of Ireland (NUI), were set up in co-operation with Maynooth and Galway Universities. These programmes were initially designed for FÁS instructors, but are now available to those practicing or planning a career as trainers in vocational colleges and the commercial, voluntary and community sectors. Programme delivery combines open learning and self-instructional modules, along with attendance at workshops and practical assignments.

Other state organisations involved in training for specific industries such as: Fáilte Ireland (for the tourism and hospitality sector); Bord Iascaigh Mhara (Irish Fisheries Board); Coillte (Irish Forestry Board) and Teagasc (Agriculture and Food Development Authority), all have their own training centres for their industry sectors, and trainers within these centres would be skilled in their own occupational areas. The Further Education and Training Awards Council-FETAC has now assumed the awarding function for training trainers in these sectoral areas, bringing together all teacher and instructor certification for these occupational areas under one banner i.e. FETAC Special Purpose Award-Level 6.

4.3.2. *Examples of policy measures*

Title of policy/measure: The Teaching Council
Rationale: The Department of Education and Science recognises the importance of high quality teacher education and it is committed to the improvement and updating of teachers' skills and competences at all stages of their career. To progress this agenda the Teaching Council Act was passed in 2001 and this led to the establishment

of a Teaching Council which was established on a statutory basis in 2006.

- **Objectives/measurable targets:** The Teaching Council implements policies relating to teacher education and training, probation, qualification, professional conduct and standards of teaching. The Council seeks to promote and develop teaching as a profession at primary and post-primary levels, and to ensure that priorities are set for the professional training of an adequate number of teachers in the various subjects. Its functions are as follows:-
 - to promote teaching as a profession;
 - to promote the continuing professional development of teachers;
 - to provide for the establishment of standards, policies and procedures for the education and training of teachers;
 - to provide for the registration and regulation of teachers and to enhance professional standards and competences.
- **Target groups/educational/level/educational and sector:** Professional development of teachers at primary and post primary levels.
- **Status of implementation:** Since its establishment, the Teaching Council has undertaken work across a wide range of responsibilities as set out in the Teaching Council Act. During 2006, significant progress was made in developing a national Register of Teachers and in 2007 the Council published Professional Codes of Conduct for Teachers which include standards of teaching, knowledge, skill and competence. These codes will be influential in determining future initial teacher education provision.

Policy/measure operation and delivery:

- **Level of operation:** The Council provides a forum for presenting the views of the profession on all aspects of teaching as a career, from initial recruitment to in-career professional development.
- **Key actors involved:** Department of Education and Science and teachers.

Title of policy measures: The Certificate in Equality Studies in the National University of Ireland, Maynooth, the FÁS ‘Equality Matters’ course module and other FÁS equality training courses.

Rationale: To meet the challenges of a more diverse population and to facilitate increased equity of access to VET for clients with special needs, the Government has in recent years, passed new legislative regulations dealing with equality matters. (See Theme 2 of this Report). This has led to the need for VET trainers and educators to become more aware and skilled in the particular pedagogical and other special learning needs of these clients.

The Certificate in Equality Studies in Maynooth University will heighten participants’ knowledge and understanding of equality and diversity issues and contribute to the development of socially-inclusive workplaces. The ‘Equality Matters for Trainers’ course module was recently developed as part of the National University of Ireland (NUI), Certificate in Training and Continuing Education, to deal with

emerging issues such as cultural diversity and clients with special learning needs in the training environment.

- **Objectives/measurable targets:** (a) The Certificate in Equality Studies is designed to equip trainers, who work with people with diverse needs, to become more effective trainers. (b) The FÁS Equality Module course is designed to help FÁS staff work more effectively in an equality competent manner, and to raise awareness on how to apply or conform to the word and spirit of equality legislation when communicating with customers.
- **Target groups/educational level/educational sector:** The Maynooth Certificate course is targeted at adult educators, trainers and others working with people with diverse needs. Potential course participants will come from organisations such as:
 - FÁS Community Training Workshops and Local Employment Services,
 - Specialist Training Service Providers,
 - Community Groups and Youth Services,The FÁS Equality module course is targeted at trainers and instructors employed or sub-contracted by FÁS to deliver vocational training programmes.
- **Status of implementation:** The Certificate course, which was originally offered by Maynooth University in a flexible learning format, has recently, with the assistance of FÁS eCollege, been redesigned for delivery as an online interactive learning experience supported by three-day workshops.

FÁS, working with Maynooth University (NUI), has also developed a NUI Diploma in Arts- Training and Development (in Socially Inclusive Workplaces), which addresses the wider issues of social inclusion, including those groups listed in the Equal Status Act. This Diploma is aimed at adult educators and trainers who deliver training and development programmes with an interest in equality in the workplace. The course builds on two Certificate courses: The Certificate in Equality Studies outlined above, and the Certificate in Training and Continuing Education.

Policy/measure operation and delivery:

- **Level of operation:** The Certificate carries credit under the European Credit Transfer system and has five modules providing participants with knowledge in:-
 - Reflective Practice
 - Equality Issues in a Diverse Ireland
 - Ability and Disability Issues
 - Teaching and Learning in a diverse environment.

As well as the Equality module which provides trainers with a broad overview on equality matters including gender, race, ethnicity and disability issues, FÁS has also recently developed a series of short (one/two day) courses designed to help staff deal with specific client groups. These include:

- *Disability Awareness Training* to help staff respond appropriately to the needs of people with disabilities and to ensure equality of participation for people with disabilities. (The minimum qualifications for trainers involved in the training for persons with disabilities are determined by the individual employing organisation).

- *Intercultural Training* aims to provide staff with the skills and knowledge to work more effectively in an intercultural environment, to help staff explore their own attitudes to anti-racist best practice and to work within the context of Equality Legislation. The use of FÁS Guidelines on Interculturalism is an integral part of this training.

A short training course on the FÁS 'Equality Policy for its Customers' has been developed to familiarise staff with both the policy and its guidelines. This half-day training is currently being piloted.

- **Key actors involved:** FÁS and Maynooth University, (the National University of Ireland).

5. STRENGTHENING THE LINKS BETWEEN VET AND THE LABOUR MARKET

5.1 National policy context on strengthening the links between VET and the Labour Market

Irish VET organisations use a mixture of formal consultation, informal feedback and research to identify skill needs and there are several key players involved in this process. *The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN)* provides a national research and co-ordination mechanism and includes representatives of the social partners, government departments, industrial development organisations and education and training bodies. (See Best Practice example 5.4.2 below).

FÁS, the national Training and Employment Authority, has a Board, and advisory committees representing a number of sectors, to inform it of sectoral training needs. The organisation also has a Planning and Research Department which undertakes studies of employment trends and skills needs in order to inform VET provision. The FÁS Skills and Labour Market Research Unit has produced a series of studies on different occupational groups and provides a research facility for the EGFSN. A series of Manpower Forecasting Studies carried out by the Economic Social Research Institute (ESRI), in co-operation with FÁS, also forecasts occupational employment trends in about 40 different occupational groups for 5-10 year periods.

The 2007 report 'Tomorrow's Skills - Towards a National Skills Strategy' sets out the potential skills needs of the economy over the next decade, the likely supply and demand for skilled labour and the key policy issues required to address these skills needs. An Inter-Departmental Committee, chaired by the Irish Minister for Lifelong Learning, has been set up to oversee the implementation of the National Skills strategy and its delivery. This will be a key policy in maintaining Ireland's competitiveness, through investment in the training and up-skilling of its workforce."

5.2. Involving companies/sectoral organisations/social partners in VET provision to make it more responsive to labour market needs

5.2.1. Policy progress since 2002

Government policy has long been that CVET for persons at work is primarily the responsibility of employers, who are the main source of funds for training for the employed, through their direct funding of in-company training and their financial contributions to the National Training Fund (NTF).

There is no statutory obligation on companies to provide CVET for their workforce and no specific sectoral agreements in respect of CVET within enterprises. Employers generally provide training on the basis of their own requirements and this is usually provided in-house or sub-contracted on a commercial basis to private training providers. Various sectoral committees, which include representatives of the social partners, promote and advise on initiatives to provide training for the different industrial and service sectors. In some cases companies will pool resources to identify

and make provision for training needs. An industry-led initiative “Skillnets” encourages and fosters this kind of co-operation. (See Example of Policy measure below).

The social partners, through their participation in National Partnership Agreements, generally encourage employers to provide access for employees to ongoing training. Under the recent agreement 'Towards 2016', the social partners agreed on the need to increase the levels of workplace learning and up-skilling.

Employer organisations such as IBEC (Irish Business and Employers Confederation), ISME, (Irish small and medium-sized enterprises), and the Construction Industry Federation (CIF), all provide either financial or other incentives to promote training practices among their membership. They also make a contribution to enterprise-based CVT activities through their participation in the industry-led ‘Skillnets’ Training Networks Programme.

The trade unions have been particularly active in supporting non-job-related training. The People’s College, a voluntary adult education institution working closely with the Irish Congress of Trades Unions (ICTU), provides a range of courses from basic education to personal development. The ICTU has a network of Centres for the Unemployed, which offer training to workers seeking to re-train or to up-skill, and to unemployed people seeking to access the labour market. SIPTU, the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Trade Union, operates a training facility for its members providing courses ranging from health and safety at work to employment rights.

The industry-led Skillnets agency and the Strategic Alliance Programme, which comprises partnerships between FÁS, the employers and unions and other bodies such as the Chambers of Commerce, are examples of co-operative partnerships between the public and private sectors to promote CVET within enterprises. At higher education level the Programme for University Industry Interface was established to forge greater links between the learning needs of industry and third-level institutions. These are all examples of collaboration between the Government, education and training organisations, industry and the social partners generally, to encourage and promote CVET within enterprises.

The Government also uses a number of financial and other mechanisms to support and encourage employers to invest in training to improve the skills of staff employed in SMEs. The level of this support depends on a number of factors including region, type and size of company, sectoral grouping or type of employee (e.g. low skill operatives in declining industries), and the stage of company development. These subsidies are provided by state-funded agencies to reduce the costs of training, particularly for SMEs.

Through its ‘Specific Sectoral Skills Training Programme’ FÁS consults with specialist Advisory Committees, representing sectoral groups such as the Engineering, Construction and Film/TV sectors, and in cooperation with these sectors carries out regular reviews of national skills and training needs. In consultation with these Advisory Committees, FÁS has developed and co-funds programmes for specific sectors such as management training for owner-managers in the services sector and

the Construction Skills Certification Scheme, designed to raise standards of safety among construction industry employers. FÁS, also manages the Workplace Basic Education Fund, in association with the National Adult Literacy Association, to develop the literacy and numeracy levels of employees. This project is overseen by a National Steering Group which includes representatives from the educational, business and trade union sectors.

In 2007 in order to raise the skills and competencies within the SME sector, FÁS, in conjunction with the Irish Small and Medium-sized Enterprises Association (ISME), introduced a scholarship scheme for people employed in this sector who have little or no formal qualifications. The scholarship will be awarded to individuals wishing to undertake development in areas such as Strategic business management, research and technological development, marketing, product development, entrepreneurial development, new systems and processes to National Framework of Qualifications Level 6 or higher.

Under the recent 'Programme for Government 2007-13', Regional Skills Advisory Groups consisting of enterprises and education and training providers will be established to meet regional skill needs. An existing example of this type of collaboration is the Lónra higher education network, funded under the Higher Education Authority Strategic Initiatives Fund, which aims to provide a collaborative response to the education and development challenges of the Border and Midland and Western (BMW) Region.

5.2.2. *Examples of policy measures:*

Title of Policy/Measure: The Training Networks Programme- Skillnets
<p>Rationale: This initiative was set up as a pilot project in enterprise-led training in 1999. The state-funded and employer-led Training Networks Programme, supports networks of enterprises to engage in training. These learning networks, now referred to as 'Skillnets', are led and managed by the enterprises themselves and have created and delivered training programmes across a broad range of industry and service sectors nationwide.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objectives/measurable target: The mission of Skillnets is to enhance the skills of people employed in Irish industry. It aims to promote and facilitate learning as a key element in sustaining Ireland's national competitiveness and to enhance the employability of the workforce. Skillnets is a significant promoter of training within the SMEs sector and is funded from the National Training Fund. Its stakeholders include leading employer and employee representative bodies. • Target groups/educational level/educational sector: The majority of Skillnet promoters are industry associations, chambers of commerce and trade unions. Individual companies can act as promoters on behalf of the Skillnets members and in a small number of cases, enterprise-support bodies or educational establishments have promoted networks. The network structure has expanded both regionally and nationally, providing training in sectors ranging from technology, agriculture, construction, design, food and drink, hospitality and tourism, radio, renewable energy and childcare. • Status of implementation: Based on positive results from the original pilot project 1999-2000, the Skillnets agency was commissioned to continue the

programme in 2002. Since then it has facilitated over 10,000 Irish enterprises in over 150 networks, to improve the range, scope and quality of training, and allowed over 50,000 employees to improve and meet their skills needs. In 2007 Skillnets was allocated further funding (€15 million), to continue to support training networks from 2007-10. In line with national policy many of these networks will have a strong focus on the training needs of the lower skilled.

Policy/measure operation and delivery:

- **Level of operation:** The Skillnets approach is based on the strengths and synergies of networking and partnership. A 'Skillnet' is a group of three or more enterprises that decide to co-operate in order to undertake a training project that individual members of the group would be unable to undertake as successfully if acting alone. All training and development activities are supported, and enterprises are given the ownership of training strategies and plans. The Programme has also facilitated the development of new certified courses by the national awarding Councils, FETAC and HETAC, at many levels of the National Framework of Qualifications, and many networks (35%) have developed or attained certification for existing courses.

The Skillnets Accel Programme, which commenced in 2006, is designed to up-skill the workforce and enhance company competitiveness. Projects include innovative methods such as the development of e-Learning models, and virtual learning centres, others are developing new courses (up to Masters level) to meet the future needs of the member companies.

- **Is it an isolated measure or part of a larger (education/training/employment/social) policy approach:** Skillnets Ltd. is funded by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment from the resources of the National Training Fund.
- **Key actors involved:** Skillnets stakeholders include the Irish Business and Employers Confederation, (IBEC), Chambers Ireland, the Construction Industry Federation, the Small Firms Association and the Irish Congress of Trade Unions.

Assessment of policy/measure:

- **Assessment of impact (indicators of success):** The Skillnets' strategy is to encourage and support companies from all sectors and regions in the country to engage in training networks. This approach allows companies to achieve economies of scale, increase efficiency, lower costs and provide training that is more relevant to individual sectors or types of companies.

Title of Policy Measure: The FÁS Strategic Alliance Approach

Rationale: A feature of FÁS' promotion of enterprise-based training is the 'Strategic Alliance' approach, whereby FÁS contracts with major national organisations to deliver a suite of suitable training courses. FÁS set up a Strategic Alliance unit in 2004, when the Government significantly increased funding for the training of people in employment. Under the recent 'Programme for Government', over €7 billion has been earmarked for training and skills development for the

employed, with a particular focus on the low-skilled in SMEs where 40% of the workforce are employed. This initiative is the FÁS response to a number of Government-sponsored reports on the training needs of the Irish workforce, such as 'Ahead of the Curve-Ireland's Place in the Global Economy' by the Enterprise Strategy Group, and the Expert Skills Group 'National Skills Strategy' report, both of which highlighted the importance of SME management development.

- **Objectives/measurable targets:** This FÁS strategy has several aims. It is directed at SME management development and training of low-skilled employees and is designed to organise training in partnership with industry representatives such as the Irish Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (ISME), Chambers of Commerce and the Irish Congress of Trade Unions. It also specifically targets the needs of low skilled workers and those in vulnerable sectors.
- **Target groups/educational level/educational sector:** There are different approaches to the two main target groups. The first focuses on the lower skilled workers, (there are 500 000 workers in the Irish workforce who have not attained the second-level Leaving Certificate standard of education). The second focuses on SME management development training. Three-quarters of the funding for SME management development is ring-fenced for training with certification within the various Further Education and Training Awards Council award levels. All courses for lower-skilled workers are free to participants, and SME training courses certified within National Framework of Qualifications, are subsidised by FÁS at a level of 70% of costs. (There is a subsidy of 50% for non-certified short duration courses).
- **Status of implementation:** FÁS is currently monitoring the progress of the 15 Strategic Alliance contracts with different organisations.

Policy/measure operation and delivery:

- **Level of operation:** Under the Strategic Alliance approach, FÁS contracts with national organisations to deliver suites of training courses. These courses deliver a wide range of training for employed people at management, technical and operative levels. Since it commenced, approximately 47, 000 training days were delivered to 9,900 employed people, at a cost of €10.8 million. In 2007, FÁS approved twelve new contracts for the delivery of Strategic Alliance training programmes with partners, for two distinct groups of employed people. Over €10 million was assigned for SME Management Development programmes and €8.9 million for the training of low-skilled and vulnerable workers.

In 2007, in alliance with the National College of Ireland, two pilot projects were implemented: - (1) The Knowledge Economy Skills Passport – a training programme, which focuses on providing learners with the key skills to be highly productive in the knowledge economy, and (2) KNOW IT- a programme, designed to support learners in the workplace taking their first steps in using IT for basic tasks..

- **Is it an isolated measure or part of a larger (education/training/employment/social) policy approach:** The Strategic Alliance approach complements the FÁS Competency Development Programme and the 'One Step Up' concept, both of which promote the idea of raising the qualification levels of the Irish workforce by one level within the

<p>National Framework of Qualifications.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key actors involved: FÁS, the social partners, educational and training organisations and other national and sectoral associations concerned with skills development for the workforce.
<p>Assessment of measure/policy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment of impact (indicators of success): It is the view of FÁS that SMEs who themselves have benefited from training, will be more inclined to promote training across their own workforce.

5.3. Integrating learning with working

5.3.1. Policy progress since 2002

Two forms of alternating type training in Ireland which integrate learning with work are the apprenticeship system and the new traineeship system developed by FÁS. (See Best Practice example below). Apprenticeship is the recognised means by which individuals are trained to become craftspersons, it is managed by FÁS, in co-operation with the Department of Education and Science (DES), the employers and the trade unions, under the aegis of the National Apprenticeship Advisory Committee. The apprenticeship system comprises seven phases over a period of four years. Three of the phases are off-the-job and are delivered in FÁS Training Centres and Institutes of Technology. The four on-the-job phases take place with the employer. Apprentices receive training in 26 designated occupations (trades) in the construction, engineering, motor, furniture and printing sectors. On successful completion of training, an apprentice receives an Advanced Certificate, awarded at Level 6, from FETAC, the Further Education and Training Awards Council.

The FÁS apprenticeship curriculum, which is agreed with industry, is standards-based, focusing on learning outcomes and structured on a modular format. It is reviewed regularly by subject expert committees, representing the social partners and education and training organisations, under the direction of the National Apprenticeship Advisory Committee. A recent outcome of this VET co-operation has facilitated FÁS, in co-operation with the Institutes of Technology, to develop protocols for the Recognition of Prior Learning for the apprenticeship process, thus allowing increased access to this programme.

FÁS has recently revised its curricula for all the apprenticeship trades and has agreed three additional apprenticeship trades for Industrial Insulation, Electronic Security Systems, Farriery, as well as new 'Generic Common Modules', (for example basic IT awareness.) Under the National Development Plan 2007-2013, it is planned to introduce apprenticeships in further occupations such as Environmental Stone, Jewellery, Hairdressing and Pipe Fitting. The National Partnership Agreement 'Towards 2016 has also recommended that measures should be introduced to promote the take-up of apprenticeship by older workers. Apprentices are registered with FÁS eCollege where they have access to a range of on-line learning materials relevant to their course.

In order to progress links between apprenticeships and higher education, in particular raise awareness of opportunities in high skill science and technology employment, and as part of the Governments' strategy to promote the knowledge economy, an

innovative six month Science Challenge Intern Programme was introduced. This is for apprentices at Phase 5 on the apprenticeship programme, and for students who have recently graduated from Irish Universities or Institutes of Technology and who are committed to pursuing a Ph.D. The interns will have the opportunity to work in world-class institutions and private sector companies located in the USA. Forty-one persons participated on the programme in 2007. Another initiative in this context is the Science Challenge Up-skilling Programme for graduates apprentices and qualified craftspersons who have a minimum of three years' work experience. This offers theoretical and on-the-job training with leading US companies. The focus is on the application of technology and up-skilling in respect of their crafts and areas of expertise. To date 35 people have participated on this twelve-week programme.

Similar apprenticeship type models are found in some other areas of initial vocational training, e.g. in the farming, the tourism and hospitality sectors and Defence Forces. In addition, many professional bodies also operate apprenticeship-style schemes involving full-time employment with day release or evening course provision, for example in accountancy and law.

While in the past Government-sponsored CVET schemes were largely aimed at the unemployed, now work-based learning initiatives are seen as critical to maintaining the employability and job-security of many of the workforce. There has also been a growing awareness by the Government and among the social partners that in the emerging knowledge economy the workforce needs to become more competitive, and that on-going education and training will be required to ensure that skills are kept up-to-date and relevant. The Enterprise Strategy Group in their 2004 report 'Ahead of the Curve' identified the need to increase skills training for low-skilled and unskilled employees, and support for lifelong learning has been prioritized in the National Development Plan for 2007-2013. As a result there has been a significant increase in state funding for schemes to encourage in-company training and training for people in employment.

The following are some of the programmes and incentives that FÁS makes available to employers and employees in order to encourage work-based training and learning.

- *The Competency Development Programme (CDP)* and the *One Step up initiative*, both administered by FÁS. (See 'Best Practice Example' below).
- The *Strategic Alliance*' approach, whereby FÁS contracts with major national organisations to deliver a suite of suitable training courses. (See 'Best Practice example' Theme 5.2.2. above).
- *Individual Learning Options* whereby individual support is available to meet an identified training need of a low-skilled employee not available under the CDP programme.
- The FÁS '*Excellence through People*' programme (ETP), which is Ireland's national standard for human resource development to improve a company's operational performance through staff training. It is a voluntary initiative to encourage companies to identify and plan their staff training activities.

- In 2007, FÁS opened a new *Centre of Excellence Training Facility* for the Bio-Pharmaceutical sector in County Cork. The centre will provide hands-on practical skills to process operators/technicians in the Bio-pharmaceutical and Pharmaceutical sector. (See ‘Best Practice’ example Theme 1.2.1)
- FÁS e-College offers online flexible e-learning opportunities to employed persons including apprentices. Courses are available for a fee or free of charge to certain groups such as the unemployed. There are also a number of private providers of this type of e-learning for example, the Open University (Ireland), and increased interest is being shown by employers to this type of learning.

The National Centre for Partnership and Performance (NCP) initiated a project called ‘Implementing a Learning Strategy in Irish Organisations’. This aims to identify how organisations learn, and how they use their learning to improve processes and meet changing business needs. The Institutes of Technology, together with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, have also set up a programme of workforce up-skilling called ‘Reaching into the Workforce’.

The Workplace Basic Education Programme providing literacy and numeracy courses for employed people was expanded in 2007. Modules, including communications and computer and interpersonal skills, were made available to participants under this programme. Total expenditure in 2007 for this programme was €3.7 million, there were 251 courses delivered and the total number of participants trained was 2,054. The programme is funded under the Workplace Basic Education Fund. External consultants carried out a review of the programme in 2007. The results were positive and a number of recommendations were made to improve the delivery of the programme.

5.3.2. Example of policy measures

<p>Title of policy measure: The Competency Development Programme and the ‘One Step Up’ Initiative</p>
<p>Rationale: In 2003 the ‘Competency Development Programme’ (CPD) was launched to raise the competency levels of targeted employees in companies in a range of sectors, and to assist employees cope with frequent ongoing changes in workplace practices. The Programme was developed to ensure that the national stock of skills matches the human resources requirements for economic development. It provides employers with up to 100% support for training low skilled and vulnerable workers.</p> <p>In 2005, in response to recommendations in the 2004 Enterprise Strategy Group report¹⁸, and in support of the CDP approach, FÁS launched the ‘One Step Up’ Initiative to promote the raising of the qualification levels of the Irish workforce by at least one level within the National Framework of Qualifications as well as promoting the ethos of lifelong learning in the workplace.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objectives/measurable targets: The CDP is an umbrella programme, administered by FÁS, which aims to raise the skills level of targeted employees throughout the country and in particular those employed in SMEs.

¹⁸ Ahead of the Curve, Enterprise Strategy Group Report, 2004.

<p>The programme encourages the training of employees by employers in certain sectors, by subsidising the cost of approved training programmes. It covers a wide variety of competencies including: - management, IT, retail, contract cleaning and carers, and provides course participants with portable and transferable skills.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Target groups/educational level/educational sector: The programme is available to companies in the private sector and covers employees in companies in the industrial and services sectors, in particular low skilled and older workers, as well as individuals in the workforce in vulnerable occupations. A subsidy of 70% of training costs for SMEs is available for certified programmes and 30% for non certified programmes. CDP courses for the low-skilled are free to participants. • Status of implementation: It was estimated that about 22 000 employed persons were trained with FÁS support under this Programme in 2006.
<p>Policy/measure operation and delivery:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level of operation: The CDP provides a training subsidy to reduce the costs of training for employers and to enhance the competences of targeted employees in particular occupations and skill areas. Training programmes, based on local and national needs, are agreed after consultation between FÁS and the relevant industry organisations. For example, in 2007 two programmes were developed to meet the needs of low-skilled employees in the retail sector. These were the Certificate in Retail (FETAC Level 4), and the Advanced Certificate in Retail Management (FETAC Level 6). • Key actors involved: FÁS, Enterprise Ireland, employer bodies, trade unions and education establishments.
<p>Assessment of the policy/measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integration of outcomes into other policies: To promote VET progression within the context of lifelong learning facilitated within the National Framework of Qualifications. (See also the FÁS Strategic Alliances approach 'Best Practice Example' Theme 5.2.2.)

5.4. Integrating skill and competence needs of the labour market into VET provision

5.4.1. Policy progress since 2002

In recent years there have been several important policy reports and strategies issued by the Government and its agencies. These have included assessments of the skills and competence needs of the labour market, and have in turn led to the introduction of new national programmes for VET provision to meet these needs. These documents have included:

- Report of the Taskforce on Lifelong Learning, 2002
- Ahead of the Curve – Ireland’s Place in the Global Economy, 2004.
- Towards a National Skills Strategy, 2007.
- A Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation, 2006.
- The National Development Plan 2007 – 2013.
- The National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016.
- Lisbon Agenda-Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs, the implementation of the National Reform Programme in Ireland and the following Annual Reports.

Some of the most important policy reports in the context of skill needs and VET provision, have been produced by the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN), (See Best Practice Example 5.4.2 below). The EGFSN has produced a series of reports on the skills supply and needs of various sectors of the economy, including recently a report on ‘Monitoring Ireland’s Skills Supply-Trends in Education and Training Outputs’ published in 2008.

In 2007 the Government published a National Skills Strategy on the future skills needs in Ireland up to 2020. This Strategy examined the existing supply of labour in Ireland in terms of quantity and quality (as per educational levels), and looked at existing provision of training and the benefits of investment in training for individuals, employers and the nation as a whole.

The EU-wide CVTS3 survey¹⁹ found that 69% of companies, employing 10 or more persons, had carried out some training in 2005, and companies spent, on average, 2.5% of labour costs on training – this is the highest percentage in the EU. The survey found that training was most prevalent in the manufacturing and financial sectors, whereas construction companies and the leisure industries were less likely to train their employees.

Surveys of Irish companies have found that enterprise-based training mainly takes place in larger companies rather than in SMEs, where the majority of low-skilled workers are located, and studies have indicated that in-company training remains skewed towards certain types of employees based on age, gender, sector and educational attainment, as well as according to the size and type of the company that employs them.

While training for employed people is seen as essential for the building of a skilled workforce, there remains a significant number of employed people who are poorly-qualified and vulnerable to unemployment. It is recognised that educational disadvantage among adults is no longer concentrated among the unemployed, but exists also among workers in low-paid, low-skilled, employment. According to the National Economic and Social Forum – NESF,²⁰ *‘Ireland has a high proportion of low-skilled workers compared to other best performing countries and our level of lifelong learning remains low.’* Approximately 39% of all working age persons have less than upper second-level qualifications.

In 2007, in response to recommendations made in the ‘National Skills Strategy’, FÁS developed two further initiatives, one in respect of ‘Paid Learning Leave’ which provides assistance to employers towards the wage cost of releasing low-skilled employees to attend training programmes. The other, Individual Learning Options, provides individual support to meet an identified training need of a low-skilled employee, not available under CDP programme.

The 2006 National Skills Strategy identified information and communications technology (ICT), pharmaceuticals, biotechnology as well as high value engineering as areas within the Irish economy which had potential for future growth.

¹⁹ Continuing Vocational Training Survey 2005, Central Statistics Office, Ireland, 2007.

²⁰ National Economic and Social Forum, Report No. 33, ‘Creating a More Inclusive Labour Market’ January 2006.

Technology, scientific and engineering industries have grown over the past years to account for one-third of all exports from Ireland and if the country is to maintain growth in these areas it will need a steady stream of high quality graduates and skilled workers in these sectors. In 2006 the Government launched its Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation which included a range of measures to further strengthen science teaching and learning. FÁS also introduced a number of new programmes in 2007 to respond to skill needs identified in the labour market. These included a number of Bio-Pharmaceutical training programmes, Sustainable Energy System Installation programmes and new Financial Services programmes.

There are also a broad range of Government-funded VET programmes, mainly provided by FÁS, which are available for unemployed people and those vulnerable to exclusion in the workforce; for example people with disabilities to help them enter, re-enter or upgrade their skills within the labour market. The needs of this group were highlighted under the Government National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016. An OECD Adult Literacy Survey²¹ also identified low literacy levels among some of the Irish adult population and, in response, the 2007 ‘Programme for Government’ proposed not only to continue to expand adult literacy training, but also to provide funding for English language training for other groups such as migrants.

Other recent initiatives designed to integrate the skills and competence needs of the labour market into VET provision, include the introduction of the National Framework of Qualifications in 2003, to facilitate progression routes within the formal and informal VET system. The establishment of a national Guidance Forum in 2004, in response to recommendations in the 2002 ‘Task Force on Life Long Learning’, aims to ensure that the delivery of guidance by labour market and education providers is co-ordinated and delivered effectively. The setting up of the National Training Fund (NFT) in 2000 gave the social partners a policy and consultation forum in relation to the allocation of funding for skills training for the employed. The expansion of the ‘Back to Education Initiative’ in 2002 facilitated increased access to further education for those with low qualifications, by providing flexible part-time learning options and the provision of funding for community education.

5.4.2 Example of policy measure:

<p>Title of policy/measure: The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs</p> <p>Rationale: The Expert Group on Future Skill Needs (EGFSN) was established in 1998, under the aegis of Forfás, the national body responsible for providing policy advice to the Government on enterprise, trade, science, technology and innovation in Ireland. The EGFSN was set up by the Government in the context of increasing concerns about labour and skill shortages in Ireland.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objectives/measurable targets: EGFSN provides a national research and co-ordination mechanism and includes representatives of the social partners, government departments, industrial development organisations and education and training bodies. Its objectives include the following. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Identify the skills needs of different sectors and advise on the actions to address them; ➤ Consider strategic issues in developing partnerships between business and the

²¹ Literacy Skills for the Knowledge Society in International Adult Literacy Survey, Paris OECD

- CVET sectors to meet skill needs at national and local levels;
- Advise on how to improve the career awareness of job seekers to areas where the demand for skills exist, of the qualifications required, and of how they can be obtained.
- **Target groups/educational level/educational sector:** The Group reports jointly to the Ministers of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and Education and Science. Its target audience includes labour market policy-makers, practitioners and experts on VET at all levels.
- **Status of implementation:** The Group is reviewed on a periodic basis and re-appointed as required. Its current term of appointment is from 2007-10.

Policy/measure operation and delivery:

- **Level of operation:** The EGFSN has undertaken research on a range of skill areas including Financial Skills, Digital Media, ICT, Biotechnology, Engineering and Construction. It produces the annual National Skills Bulletin. The FÁS Skills and Labour Market Research Unit provides a research facility for the EGFSN.
- **Is it an isolated measure or part of a larger (education/training/employment/social) policy approach:** The EGFSN is part of the Government mechanisms to assess labour market supply and demand.
- **Key actors involved:** The Social Partners, Government Departments and agencies.

Assessment of policy/measures:

- **Integration of outcomes into other policies:** The research undertaken by the EGFSN has underpinned the development of a National Skills Strategy. The report ‘Tomorrow’s Skills -Towards a National Skills Strategy’, published 2007, sets out the potential skills needs of the economy over the next decade, the likely supply and demand for skilled labour and key policy issues required to address these skills needs.

6. GOVERNANCE AND FUNDING

6.1. National policy context on VET governance and funding

Among the issues addressed by the proposed lifelong learning strategy, currently being finalised by the Department of Education and Science (DES), is the need to prioritise and utilise resources as efficiently and effectively to ensure optimum VET outcomes across all areas. This imperative was also underpinned in the general recommendations set out in the recent National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) report on 'Improving the Delivery of Quality Public Services' and the recent OECD Report on the Irish public service, published in 2008.

A culture of evaluation is encouraged within the whole public service by various means. Expenditure and policy reviews, on an ongoing basis, are features of the work of the DES. Such reviews provide a basis on which more informed decisions can be made on priorities within and between programmes. The Department's Inspectorate conducts evaluations of various aspects of the school system through a number of 'Value for Money' reviews, including one on Youthreach and Senior Traveller Training Centres. This report was finalised in late 2007. The aims of the Value for Money reviews are to:-

- provide a systematic analysis of what is being achieved by expenditure on each programme;
- provide a basis on which more informed decisions can be made on priorities within and between expenditure programmes.

Evaluative analysis and research is also undertaken by various other Government agencies such as the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), the Expert Group on Future Skill Needs and the Education Research Centre. FÁS, through the work of its Planning and Research Department, undertakes reviews and assessments of the impact, efficiency and effectiveness of its vocational training programmes and reports regularly, together with other relevant Government Departments and agencies, to an ESF Monitoring Committee on the utilisation of ESF funds under the Operational Programmes.

6.2. Changes made to administrative/institutional structures

6.2.1. Policy progress since 2002

A €300 million five year Strategic Innovation Fund for Higher Education was established in the 2006 Budget. This fund is aimed at promoting collaboration, organisational reform and quality improvement in the higher education sector. In 2006, 14 major projects received funding of over €42 million for projects aimed at enhancing collaboration between higher education institutions, improving teaching and learning, supporting institutional reform, promoting access and lifelong learning and supporting the development of fourth-level education. Due to the collaborative nature of the projects approved, all seven universities, thirteen Institutes of Technology and the Dublin Institute of Technology will be involved.

The Institutes of Technology Act, 2006, dealt with structural reform in third-level education and designated the Institutes of Technology (ITs) as institutions of higher education within the remit of the Higher Education Authority. This will provide for greater autonomy for the Institutes, improved governance and will facilitate the development of a strategic approach to higher education within a unified policy framework.

While most entrants to third-level and higher education are school leavers, Government policy is to encourage greater participation by mature and second-chance learners. Priority has been given to increasing participation from persons from traditionally under-represented groups such as students from disadvantaged backgrounds and Travellers²². To achieve this objective, in 2003 a National Office for Equity of Access to Third Level Education was established within the Higher Education Authority.

A key policy objective for many years, in the context of access and progression within the VET system, has been the re-orientation of the system of qualifications in Ireland to meet the needs of learners and to progress the lifelong learning agenda. Progress towards this goal was significantly enhanced with the introduction of the 1999 Qualifications Act, which established structures for a national framework of qualifications to co-ordinate awards and promote access, transfer and progression within the VET system. To implement this process the Act established the National Qualifications Authority (NQAI), together with the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) and the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC). This was followed by the establishment of a National Framework of Qualifications.

6.2.2. Example of policy measures

<p>Title of change: The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI)</p> <p>Rationale: Until recently one of the gaps in the provision of education and training in Ireland was the absence of a unified framework for the validation and certification of qualifications. The introduction of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act (1999), which in turn led to the establishment of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) in 2001, was designed to fill this gap.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objectives/measurable targets: Traditionally, formal qualifications were a pre-requisite for access to higher education. Access to IVET and further education has been less restrictive and young people with no school leaving qualifications can avail of further education and training provided by the Vocational Education Committees (VECs), FÁS and the various sectoral training agencies such as Fáilte Ireland for the tourism and hospitality industry. Generally, however, these qualifications do not entitle this category to progress to higher education. The NQAI policy regarding eligibility for entry arrangements is to extend accessibility where possible to higher education on the achievement of an appropriate award. This requires procedures by providers to be fair, with consistent arrangements for entry, appeals processes, and statements of the knowledge, skill and the competences required.

²² The Travelling Community in Ireland is a nomadic ethnic minority. There are estimated to be in excess of 25 000 Travellers in the Republic of Ireland

- **Target groups/educational level/educational sector:** All policy makers and providers of Education and training in the State. The NQAI covers all awards in the State from initial schooling to further education and training including higher doctorate level, and has an over-arching role in regard to the development and implementation of a National Framework of Qualifications.
- **Status of implementation:** Following the establishment of the NQAI, the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) and the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) were set up in 2001. The new awarding Councils are responsible for the certification of all education and training in the State, other than awards made in respect of primary and second-level education, the Dublin Institute of Technology and the Universities.
- In 2003 a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) was established by the NQAI covering all awards in the State. This focuses primarily on learner needs and has a ten-level awards system for all kinds of learning whether obtained in schools, further education centres/colleges, the workplace, vocational education/training centres, community colleges or universities. (See also Best Practice example 7.2.2 below).

Policy/measure operation and delivery:

- **Level of operation:** The remit of the NQAI covers three main functions.
 1. To establish and maintain a framework of qualifications based on standards of knowledge, skill or competence to be acquired by learners regardless of where, when or how such learning takes place.
 2. To facilitate lifelong learning through the promotion of access, transfer and progression for all learners including those who have special needs.
 3. To establish and promote the maintenance and improvement of the standards of awards of the further and higher education and training sectors, other than in the universities, and to liaise with bodies outside the country for the mutual recognition of awards at transnational level. In this context the NQAI has set up a national qualifications recognition service, “Qualifications Recognition-Ireland” to facilitate the recognition of international qualifications. (See Theme: 7.4.2 for details on the Qualifications Recognition Ireland Service).

The NQAI has a role with regard to the validation of both formal and informal learning. It has defined policies and procedures under four themes, through which it meets its objectives.

- Credit.
- Transfer and progression routes.
- Entry arrangements.
- Information provision.

The policy on credit is to facilitate credit accumulation, transfer and processes for the recognition of prior learning, as well as to accord with developments in Europe in relation to credit systems. Learners, on achieving awards, should also have eligibility to progress to further awards. The NQAI has developed policies, and set out

procedures for providers, for the identification and specification of the requirements of these routes

- **Key actors involved:** All stakeholders and providers in the education and training system, including the Social Partners.

Assessment of the measure:

- **Assessment of impact:** The Authority aims to increase the focus on the learner and their needs, rather than those of the education and training institution which provides the learning.
- **Integration of outcomes into other policies:** The NQAI is a key Government agency in the education and training system. It has a lead role in the Government strategy for promoting and developing lifelong learning.

6.3 Changes made to funding arrangements for VET

6.3.1 Policy progress since 2002

Central Government funding for VET is now more structured as it is allocated within the framework of the National Development Plan (NDP) to the various publicly-funded VET providers. Human resource development (HRD) continues to be an important element of NDP policy, as shown by the investment of €25.8 billion, allocated to HRD programmes in the current Human Capital Investment Operational Programme (HCI OP) 2007-2013.

Over the past decades the European Social Fund (ESF) provided significant co-funding for VET in Ireland. The Employment and Human Resources Development Operational Programme 2000-2006 (EHRD OP) was Ireland's largest ESF-supported programme in the 2000-06 round of Structural Funds, with €92 million in ESF aid allocated to the Programme. It was also one of the largest national Operational Programmes under Ireland's National Development Plan 2000-06, with a total investment of almost €5 billion. While the amount of funding is now much less, ESF support is still a factor in shaping VET policy in Ireland, and EU funding priorities continue to be reflected in the recently published National Development Plan (NDP) 2007-2013, together with the complementary Human Capital Investment Operational Programme (HCI OP) 2007-2013. The latter is Ireland's only ESF-supported programme in the 2007-2013 round of Structural Funds, with a total of €75 million in ESF aid allocated to the Programme. The overall funding for the programme, including the State's contribution, will total €36 billion.

Human Capital is one of the five strategic investment priorities in the new NDP for 2007-2013, and some €25.8 billion will be invested in the following three programmes under the complementary Human Capital Investment Operational Programme (HCI OP) 2007-2013:-

- Training and Skills Development (€7 billion)
- Schools Modernisation & Development (€1 billion)
- Higher Education Programme (€3 billion)

The Training and Skills Development Programme has been allocated €7.7 billion funded through the Exchequer (€4.8 billion); the National Training Fund (€2.8 billion) and State bodies (€100 million). This Programme is divided into two main sections.

- **‘Upskilling the Workforce’** - €2.8 billion will be invested in training for people in employment, for new skills for those affected by industrial restructuring, and the expansion and enlargement of the apprenticeship system and for early school leavers.

- **‘Activation and Participation of Groups outside the Workforce’** - €1.9 billion will be provided for employment and training services to promote opportunities for a wide range of socially-excluded groups, i.e. the unemployed, people with disabilities, lone parents, Travellers²³, ex-offenders and women.

A key challenge within the VET sector is to prioritise investment in favour of those most at risk and to optimise access, participation and outcomes at every level of the VET system for disadvantaged people. This approach has been adopted in national strategies such as in the current Social Partnership Agreement ‘Towards 2016’, the National Development Plan 2007-2013 and the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion.

Expenditure on initial vocational education and training (IVET) is considerable, and has been growing over the last two decades as young people stay longer at secondary school and a greater proportion attend post-school education and training. Recent statistics show that early school-leaving continues to be a problem in Ireland, despite the large amounts of money invested in special educational initiatives at school level. Over the last few years there has been an expansion of VET programmes paying allowances, to encourage a greater take-up or return to education and training of disadvantaged persons, particularly early school leavers with low qualifications, (e.g. the expansion of the Youthreach Programme and Post-Leaving Certificate courses under the Back to Education Initiative-BTEI).

There have also been a number of financial incentives and measures to support CVET for adults, targeting, in particular, those with low skills and educational qualifications. CVET for adult learners is now more accessible since the Government provided funding under the ‘Back to Education Initiative’ in 2002 for part-time learning and for community-based education, as well as providing increased public funding for childcare costs, which are now recognised as a potential barrier to participation in CVET. In 2006 the Department of Education and Science provided €5.7 million to the Vocational Education Committees (VECs) to assist with the childcare expenses of participants in the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS), Youthreach and Senior Traveller Centre programmes. The aim is to attract people whose attendance is currently prevented by childcare responsibilities to enrol on these programmes.

In 2000 a new National Training Fund (NTF) was established, resourced by a levy on employers of 0.7% of earnings of employees. The levy applies to the main kinds of employment and covers approximately 75% of all employees. The monies collected

26 The travelling community in Ireland is a nomadic ethnic minority. There are estimated to be in excess of 25,000 Travellers in the Republic of Ireland

can be used to fund training schemes and programmes for the employed (including apprenticeship training) and for those seeking employment. The Social Partners have a role to play in the allocation of the NTF as they are consulted by the government in relation to the allocation of NTF funds for training programmes. The Government-sponsored Expert Group on Future Skill Needs is the forum used to fulfil this requirement.

While training for employed people is seen as essential for the building of a skilled workforce, there still remains a significant number of employed people who are poorly-qualified and vulnerable to unemployment. To overcome this problem, in recent years, there has been a significant increase in state funding for training for employees. Under the 2007 'Programme for Government', over €7 billion has been earmarked for training and skills development for the employed, with a particular focus on the low-skilled in SMEs, where 40% of the Irish workforce are employed.

During 2007, FÁS increased its support for the training of people in employment. Total expenditure was €64.1 million compared to €52 million in 2006. The FÁS 'Competency Development Programme', which aims to raise the skills level of employees particularly the low skilled, provides a training subsidy to reduce the costs of training for employers, and is one of the principal state-funded vehicles to achieve this objective. Skillnets, an employer-led programme which receives the majority of its funding from the NTF, was also allocated increased funding (€15 million), to continue to support company and sectoral training networks during 2007-10. Total expenditure on the Workplace Basic Education Programme to tackle numeracy and literacy deficiencies in the workforce was €7 million in 2007.

When the Back to Education Initiative-BTEI (Part-time) was initiated there was a clear intention to target the skill needs of those in employment, particularly those with low educational qualifications. However, until recently, cost barriers and the financial eligibility criteria acted as a disincentive to this group, as those in employment, even the low skilled, and some categories in full or part-time employment, including the unwaged (e.g. women in the home), who wished to access courses to gain further qualifications, were required to pay fees for part-time courses. In 2007, as a result of proposals in the new 'Programme for Government', the BTEI eligibility criteria were amended to allow free tuition to any adult with less than upper second-level education. This change encompassed those who were previously eligible (people with a social welfare entitlement or medical card), and extended eligibility for free tuition to unwaged people and those in employment. In making this change, the key priority was to remove barriers to access for adults who did not have the Leaving Certificate or its equivalent, and so increase participation by this group in further education without the fear of incurring tuition costs. In particular, this change in eligibility criteria extends access to free tuition to women in the home and men in low-paid employment.

In order to increase the skills base at higher levels, the Government, under the Strategy for Science, Engineering and Technology Programme, has allocated €5 billion for school programmes in maths and science and for the education of third and fourth level science, engineering and technology graduates essential for the future of the knowledge economy. In 2006 a €300 million five-year Strategic Innovation Fund for Higher Education was put in place, to promote organisational reform and quality improvement in the higher education sector. At third-level, a major policy priority

concerns broadening access to further education for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. In 2003 a 'National Office for Equity of Access to Third Level Education' was established, and a Plan to progress the third-level access agenda recommended a proposal to financially support mature students in part-time education. An important financial aid for second-chance learners attending further and higher education is the Third Level Access Measure (Fund), which promotes and facilitates social inclusion through its financial support for students with disabilities and for mature students and those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

6.3.2. Example of policy measures

Title of policy/measure: The Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF)

Rationale: The strength of Irish higher education institutions, which consist of a relatively large number of institutions with diverse missions, will only be fully realised through institutional collaboration. The aim of this Fund is to build world class quality and capacity and to enable these institutions to form partnerships across sectoral and other areas.

- **Objectives/measurable targets:** The Strategic Innovation Fund was established in the 2006 Government Budget. It supports innovation in Irish higher education institutions, and is intended to be a major catalyst in bringing about substantial change and quality improvement in higher education by incorporating the use of existing resources more effectively and by promoting institutional collaboration.
- **Target groups/educational level/educational sector:** Higher education institutions and other stakeholders in the third-level sector.
- **Status of implementation:** In 2006, 12 major projects received funding of over €42 million. This funding was aimed at enhancing collaboration between higher education institutions, improving teaching and learning, supporting institutional reform, promoting access and lifelong learning and supporting the development of fourth level education. These funds were allocated as follows:-
 - Supporting Institutional Restructuring: €2 745 million.
 - Enhancing Teaching and Learning: € 332 million.
 - Enabling Fourth Level: € 995 million.
 - Improving Access and Lifelong Learning: €10 208 million.

In 2008, a further €7 million in funding was allocated for 31 projects which included:-

- €35 9 million to enhance the systems of teaching and learning in higher education.
- €20 7 million to extend research capacity in the sector, in line with the Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation.
- €15 7 million for lifelong learning and up-skilling.
- €13 million for institutional restructuring.
- €1 8 million to increase access for under-represented groups.

Policy/measure operation and delivery:

- **Level of operation:** The SIF is a multi-annual fund with a seven-year allocation of €10 million up to 2013. It is directed to support innovation in third-level institutions. In particular, it aims to enhance quality, effectiveness and research within higher education by promoting collaboration, organisational reform and quality improvement in the sector. Due to the collaborative nature of the projects approved, all seven universities, thirteen institutes of technology and the Dublin Institute of Technology will be involved. (See Theme 6.4 below for examples of collaborative projects).
- **Key actors involved:** Higher Education Authority and the Department of Education and Science.

Assessment of measure:

- **Integration of outcomes into (a) larger (national, sectoral, regional, local) policy/ies:** The Institutes of Technology Act, 2006, facilitated the development of a strategic approach to higher education within a unified policy framework, leading to greater opportunities for collaboration between third-level institutions. The funding and the projects which will be implemented under the Government's Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation, launched in the National Development Plan 2007-2013, will provide a complementary resource to further progress innovatory activities in the third-level sector.

Conclusions: The development, through the allocation of the SIF, of strategic alliances, creates new synergies and potential for the higher education system. Of the funding announced to date, 13 projects involve alliances between universities and institutes of technology. Through the range of initiatives being supported, the Fund is driving reform of structures and systems within and across institutions to cater for growing student numbers at all levels, improved teaching and learning, ensuring graduates are equipped for a lifetime of innovation and change in the workplace and enhancing research and innovation capacity.

6.4 Promoting partnerships in VET policy making

6.4.1. Policy progress since 2002

At Government inter-departmental and state agency level, there has traditionally been close co-operation between the relevant bodies involved in various aspects of the VET system. For instance, at IVET level the Department of Education and Science (DES) and FÁS co-operate in the delivery of apprenticeship programmes for which they are jointly responsible. Similarly, both the education and training sectors co-operate in addressing the needs of early school leavers as in the Youthreach programme. (See Example of Policy measure: Theme 2.2.2.).

Arising from commitments made by the Government in the National Development Plan (2007–2013), and as part of the National Agreement 'Towards 2016' to extend the current labour market employment activation process to other groups including disabled people, a High Level Inter-Departmental Group was recently established, comprising representatives from the Departments of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Social and Family Affairs and FÁS. This Group will examine the specific needs of different groups experiencing social exclusion, and carry out a fundamental review of training and

employment measures, to ensure they focus on the needs of the most marginalised groups in order to help them to progress to the open labour market.

The Regional Offices of the Department of Education and Science support a socially-inclusive society by representing the Department on appropriate regional and local bodies, such as the 34 City and County Development Boards and related sub-groups, communicating information on education issues and providing other educational services that can best be undertaken regionally. At local level a number of local community partnership structures have been established in recent years and many of these groups are involved with community-based VET activities. These structures have facilitated consultation between locally-based groups and the main VET authorities.

At CVET level co-operation within the public sector also remains close. For example, an inter-Departmental Committee, chaired by the Minister for Lifelong Learning, has been set up to oversee the implementation of the National Skills Strategy. This will be a key policy in maintaining Ireland's competitiveness, through innovation and investment in the training and up-skilling of the workforce up to 2020. FÁS also manages the Workplace Basic Education Fund in association with the National Adult Literacy Association, to develop the literacy and numeracy levels of employees. This project is overseen by a National Steering Group which includes representatives from the educational, business and trade union sectors.

Ireland's three-year National Partnership Agreements, involving the Government and the social partners, have all included policies in relation to education and training. The social partners are represented on VET bodies such as the National Qualification Authority, the FETAC and HETAC Awarding Councils and the Boards of state agencies such as FÁS, Enterprise Ireland and Fáilte Ireland, (the tourism and hospitality development agency). The 'Expert Group on Future Skills Needs' also includes representatives from the social partners among its members and they have a major consultative role in the relation to the distribution of funds from the National Training Fund.

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development in a study on *Investment in Training and Development*²⁴ in 2002 noted that there was a need for much greater involvement by the education sector in the provision of learning opportunities for those in employment. To facilitate this involvement, an increased level of partnership between industry and the education sector was recommended.

This need was further highlighted in the Enterprise Strategy Group report - Ahead of the Curve, which stated that companies together with educational and research institutes should work together to promote the development of industry and its skill needs, and that the enterprise sector, in general, should also play an increased role in the governing bodies in the higher education system. The report noted that companies that participated in collaborative networks benefited from enhanced learning and the sharing of information on 'Best Practices' within their sectors. They could also advise

²⁴ *Investment in Training and Development*, 2002, Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development in Ireland (CIPD).

educational and research institutions on requirements for syllabi, skills and technological developments and could more effectively articulate their needs to the relevant state agencies.

The Enterprise Group Report was among the influences which led to increased funding for the employer-led Skillnets agency, (see example of Policy measure: Theme 5.2.2.), and the setting up of the Strategic Alliance Programme, (see example of Policy Measure: Theme 5.2.2.). The latter programme comprises partnerships between FÁS, the employers and unions and other bodies such as the Chambers of Commerce. These are some examples of co-operative partnerships between the public and private sectors to promote CVET within enterprises. (Membership of the Construction Industry Training Association Skillsnet Network, launched in 2008, is drawn from a wide variety of enterprises operating in the construction sector, ranging from architects' practices, consulting engineers and contractors, through to suppliers, institutes of technology and IT companies).

Under the 2007 Programme for Government, it is proposed that a Regional Skills Advisory Groups consisting of enterprises and education and training providers should be established to meet regional skill needs. The Programme for University Industry Interface was established to forge greater links between the learning needs of industry and third-level institutions. The Strategic Innovation Fund, (see example of policy measure: 6.3.2. above), has also been instrumental in promoting institutional, regional and sectoral partnerships. These partnerships include the Limerick, Cork and Tallaght Institutes of Technology project 'A Work-Based Learning approach to progression for craft persons on the National Framework of Qualifications'. This collaborative project will address the skill needs of craft persons progressing to Levels 7 and 8 on the National Framework of Qualifications.

Other examples of SIF collaborative partnerships include the 'Roadmap for Employer-Academic Partnership' (REAP). This involves three Institutes of Technology and Cork and Galway Universities, working together to identify learning needs within workplaces, and to draw up a comprehensive plan for partnership between employers and higher education to facilitate this learning. Galway University, in collaboration with the Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology, received funding for its project, the 'Knowledge Region', which aims to develop the Galway area as a recognised 'Knowledge Region', and to develop a model which aligns the capacity of the higher education institutes in the area with enterprises in order to make a significant contribution to regional development.

The need for increased co-operation in the future among all bodies concerned with the VET sector and the economy in general, was highlighted in the National Skills Strategy (2007), which recommended that better linkages should be established between education and training providers and regional and sectoral needs. The work of the National Centre for Partnership and Performance, together with the policies contained in the National Workplace Strategy 2007-10 and the new National Agreement 'Towards 2016', should assist in the development of dynamic partnerships among all stakeholders to transform and improve the skills required for the competitive workplace of the future.

6.4.2. Example of policy measures

Title of policy/measure: The National Partnership Agreements- 'Towards 2016'

Rationale: Over the past two decades a system of National Partnership has been in place, involving the Government and the social partners i.e. employer and employee representatives, and other stakeholders. Every three years these partners agree a national programme for social and economic development. These agreements cover such policy issues as pay, taxation, social welfare, the environment, the labour market in general and education and vocational training matters. The current Agreement 'Towards 2016', provides policy directions for the ten-year period from 2006-2016, and includes a number of developments in respect of vocational education and training. Progress will be monitored by a process involving the social partners on a regular basis.

- **Objectives/measurable targets:** The Agreement sets out the overall aim that Ireland should exceed the Lisbon objectives of a 70% employment rate for the workforce for 2010, with the additional targets of 60% employment for females and 50% for older workers. The Agreement supports efforts to review curricula, assessment processes and delivery mechanisms for apprenticeships, and to continue to progress additional occupations towards formal apprenticeships. It also states that measures are to be introduced to promote the take-up of apprenticeship by older workers. The document emphasises the need for up-skilling the workforce, with particular focus on the low-skilled and low-paid. In this context reference is made to improved access to vocational education and training, the development of new skills, the acquisition of recognised qualifications and progression to higher levels within the VET system.
- **Target groups/educational level/educational sector:** Policy makers and the Irish labour market in general.
- **Status of implementation:** The approach to the 'Towards 2016' implementation 'Action Plan' was agreed by the National Partnership Group which monitors progress on the delivery of the Agreement.

Policy/measure operation and delivery:

- **Level of operation:** Under the 'Towards 2016' National Partnership Agreement, priority will be given to 'second chance' education measures such as Youthreach, (see Best Practice example Theme 2.2.2.). The Agreement calls for action by the social partners to encourage greater numbers of women to advance to higher levels within their chosen careers through training. It refers to the elaboration of a comprehensive employment strategy for people with disabilities. This will include "consolidating and progressing vocational training and employment services" and promoting awareness regarding employment and employment retention.

The Agreement proposes the development of a National Childcare Training Strategy to provide 17,000 childcare training places during 2006–2010. Other developments in the education system should include efforts to strengthen the technical and vocational dimensions of the second-level curricula and to address falling quality in mathematics and the decline in numbers studying science and technology. There will also be provision of extra language support teachers. To address the issue of fees in part-time higher education, a targeted fund will be put in place for those at work who have not previously pursued a third-level qualification.

- **Key actors involved:** The Government Departments of the Taoiseach (Prime Minister), Enterprise, Trade and Employment, and Education and Science and the Social Partners.

7. EU TOOLS AND GEOGRAPHIC MOBILITY WITHIN VET

7.1. National policy context to introduction and dissemination of EU tools: EQF, ECVET. Europass and the promotion of geographic mobility within VET

Ireland has participated fully in the European Unions' education and training policy agenda and notably in the Bologna and Copenhagen processes. A major goal for the Irish qualification system is to improve access, transfer and progression. To progress this agenda in 2003 the Government introduced a National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), which covers all awards in the State. (See example of Policy Measure: 7.2.2. below). The approach taken in Irish National Framework has many parallels to the general approach taken to the proposed *European Qualifications Framework (EQF)*, and in November 2006, Ireland became the first European country to verify the compatibility of its National Framework of Qualifications with the Bologna Framework, i.e. a Framework for Qualifications for the European Higher Education Area.

In 2004 the National Qualifications Authority (NQAI) published the 'Principles and Operational Guidelines for the implementation of a national approach to credit in Irish Higher education and Training'. These Guidelines provide a framework for learners to accumulate credits towards awards, including for prior and experiential learning. This builds on and is compatible with the developments under the Bologna process and in particular the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), a key component for the development of the European Higher Education Area, as well as facilitating student mobility and international curriculum development.

Ireland is also participating in and actively contributing to the debate concerning the development of a European credit system for vocational education and training (ECVET), (See example of Policy Measure: 7.3.2 below). In November 2006, the European Commission formally launched a consultation paper on the *European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training-ECVET*. FETAC- the Irish Further Education and Awards Council, will play a key role in the eventual facilitation of ECVET in Ireland, as the Irish credit system being introduced in the context of a Common Awards System, has the capacity to be integrated with ECVET. In 2007 the Department of Education and Science requested FETAC to carry out a consultation on its behalf with relevant stakeholders regarding the future implementation of ECVET²⁵ in Ireland, so that it will be in a position to commence introducing ECVET in parallel with other VET developments in the future. (See example of Policy Measures: 7.3.2 below, for a summary of the main outcomes of this consultation process).

In recent years there has have significant progress in progressing the agenda for the development of common principles for greater European co-operation in the area of education and training. Relevant Irish organisations have been involved in discussions regarding these developments, for example the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) worked with the Department of Education and Science

²⁵ 'Towards a European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training-Irish Response' FETAC 2007.

(DES) on drafting the (EU) Council conclusions on Common European Principles on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (2004). This has resulted in:-

- the adoption of common European principles in the field of quality assurance and
- the adoption of common European principles on the identification and validation of non formal and informal learning outcomes.

The building of sustainable quality assurance in the delivery of VET within and across countries, is a key component to improving the mobility of learners and workers. Ireland is a founding member of the European Network on Quality Assurance in VET, (ENQA-VET). This network aims to promote co-operation in implementing quality assurance policies with in the participating countries, to exchange information and experience and to provide a forum to develop common criteria and principles for quality within VET systems. The main tool of ENQA-VET is the Common Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF), developed by the European Commissions' Technical Working Group on Quality Assurance in VET in 2004. The Irish Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC), was one of the first agencies in Europe to be reviewed in terms of compliance with the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area.

Other areas where Ireland has implemented measures to support the European Commissions' education and training policy include promoting and facilitating mobility for learners within the member states. In 2005, following a European Council decision, Europass was officially launched in Ireland.

The EU Commission has also acknowledged guidance as a key component to advance the European policy objectives of Lifelong learning. Arising from the EU Guidance Resolution 2004, the Commission set up two pilot European Networks of National Forums for Lifelong Guidance and has Ireland participated in one of these forums. Finally Government actions to increase participation in education and to enable early school leavers access the labour market, also reflects the policies of the European Youth Pact to address the labour market challenges facing young people.

7.2 Promoting the comparability of qualifications between different national, regional or sectoral contexts and ensuring their future compatibility with EQF

7.2.1. Policy progress since 2002

The Irish Government fully supports the introduction of a European Qualification Framework (EQF). In 2003 the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland established a National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). This National Framework also facilitates the international recognition process, as each foreign qualification is compared to an Irish qualification which is placed on the National Framework of Qualifications.

In 2006, the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) published policies and criteria on the inclusion in, or alignment with the National Framework of Qualifications, of the awards (or the learning outcomes associated with them), of certain international and professional awarding bodies. These policies on alignment and the anticipated future alignment of the NFQ to the *European Qualifications Framework*. are crucial to and will greatly facilitate the recognition of foreign

qualifications between countries. Ireland has already co-operated in recent years with other EU countries on the development of qualification recognition agreements. (See example of Policy Measure: 7.4.2 below).

The proposed EQF comprises eight levels and the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) which has ten award levels, has devised a tentative referencing of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) to the Irish Framework of Qualifications, (see Table 5 below).

Table 5: NFQ and EQF Levels

NFQ (Ireland) Levels	EQF Levels
1 & 2	1
3	2
4	3
5	4
6	5
7 & 8	6
9	7
10	8

7.2.2. Example of policy measures

Title of policy measure: The National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)
<p>Rationale: Ireland is one of a few European countries with a single framework of qualifications, the National Framework of Qualifications, established in October 2003 by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI). Prior to the introduction of the NFQ, it was extremely difficult to compare and contrast the level and standard of different qualifications. The NFQ was proposed in the 1999 Qualifications (Education and Training) Act. This Act focused on issues such as the establishment of consistent standards in education and training, the promotion of quality, access, transfer and progression opportunities and the recognition and comparison of qualifications at home and abroad. The broad approach of the NQAI regarding the development of the NFQ system is to work towards a national approach that will facilitate a seamless transfer between further education and training and higher education and training.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objectives/measurable targets: The NFQ covers all awards made for all kinds of learning in the State, from initial schooling, further education and training to universities. The levels of the NFQ are based on standards of knowledge, skill and competence. Qualifications in the NFQ are also quality assured and the Framework provides a tool to facilitate the comparison of qualifications gained abroad with the national qualifications system. Apart from major awards, the NFQ also includes qualifications that are awarded for the achievement of smaller packages of learning and offers for example, a means of rewarding employees for their participation in continuous professional development programmes. It also helps learners to make informed choices about their qualifications and to see what progression opportunities are available to them.

- **Target groups/educational level/educational sector:** All learners, education and training providers and career guidance counsellors. Among the areas reviewed by the Qualifications Authority in the development of the NFQ was the employment perspective and employers are seen as important stakeholders and beneficiaries in terms of the outcomes of the NFQ and the benefits it represents.
- **Status of implementation:** The NFQ is at an advanced stage of implementation. Important progress in the development of the NFQ was the establishment of the two awards councils' FETAC and HETAC in 2001 with responsibility respectively for the issuing of awards for further vocational training and higher (non university level) education. (See example of Policy Measure 7.3.2 below). Following an extensive placement and classification process in 2005, all FETAC awards are now included on the National Framework of Qualifications and all new FETAC awards will be developed in the context of the Framework.

Policy/measure operation and delivery:

- **Level of operation:** The NFQ focuses primarily on learner needs and promotes the setting of standards for awards. Under the Framework strategy, all IVET and CVET programmes must have provision for access, transfer and mobility. FÁS, the Department of Education and Science (DES) and other providers, must ensure their courses qualify for appropriate awards within the new Framework, which has set criteria for the level and award type available for all programmes that are submitted for its recognition. The Framework comprises 10 levels of awards, from Foundation (Level 1) to higher doctorate level (Level 10), as well as award types, i.e. major, minor, special purpose and supplemental, together with level indicators, (expressed as learning outcomes) and related policies on access, transfer and progression, and the Recognition of Prior Learning.

The Framework is also designed to facilitate the development of a credit accumulation and transfer system based on learning units. Apart from major awards, the NFQ also includes qualifications that are awarded for the achievement of smaller units of learning. The Qualifications Authority has published descriptors for these award-types, which are known as minor, supplemental and special purpose awards. The following link shows the various awards and levels within the National Framework of Qualifications.

http://www.nfq.ie/nfq/en/public_resources/documents/NFQFanPosterA1.pdf

- **Key actors involved:** The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) has an overarching role and responsibility in relation to the development and maintenance of the NFQ, and acts as agent for the Departments' of Education and Science (DES) and of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

Assessment of measure:

- **Integration of outcomes into other policies:** The European and international dimension of the NFQ is very important as it has provided a tool which facilitates international comparisons between awards. In this capacity the National Framework will also support the establishment of a *European*

Qualifications Framework as a common reference for the recognition of qualifications.

Conclusions: At national level the Qualifications Framework provides a system for co-ordinating and comparing awards, thereby facilitating progression and mobility for learners irrespective of the entry point or the education or training path. The establishment of the EQF will in turn provide a common reference basis (based on learning outcomes), for the future comparability of qualifications between the different member states and this will greatly enhance European learner and worker mobility.

7.3 Promoting the transfer and accumulation of qualifications between different national, regional or sectoral contexts and facilitating the future implementation of ECVET

7.3.1. Policy progress since 2002

ECVET is one of a suite of initiatives being undertaken at European level to improve the transparency of qualifications within and between the Member States, and the extent to which qualifications provide appropriate recognition for learning achievements in a lifelong learning context. The proposed approach to ECVET has many parallels with the Irish approach to qualifications frameworks, credit and vocational education and training in general. Following the establishment by the Irish Government of the National Qualifications Authority (NQAI) in 2001, the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) and the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) were also set up in 2001. The broad approach of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland and its partners FETAC and HETAC is to work towards a national approach to credit that will facilitate a seamless transfer between further education and training and higher education and training. This is similar to the approach proposed for the ECVET system.

The adoption of a system of credit is also a key component of the Bologna process within the European Higher Education Area. Introduced originally to support international student mobility and international curriculum development, in so far as it aims to facilitate a flexible system that will allow a transfer between further education and training and higher education, the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), is becoming a generalised and common basis for credit systems in higher education in many European countries including Ireland.

Ireland has in place a National Framework of Qualifications, (See example of Policy Measure 7.2.2 above), designed to facilitate the development of a credit accumulation and transfer system based on learning units. The development of ECVET is closely associated with the development of a European Qualifications Framework (EQF) as the proposed EQF should also support the operation of a European Credit system for VET, in so far as it will bring greater clarity and transparency to the complex and diverse range of national qualification systems across Europe.

7.3.2. Example of policy measures

Title of policy measure: The Further Education and Training Awards Council – FETAC and the Higher Education and Training Awards Council -HETAC

Rationale: The Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) and the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) were established by the National Qualifications Authority (NQAI) in 2001. The broad approach of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland and its partners FETAC and HETAC is to work towards a national approach to credit that will allow a progression and transfer between further education and training and higher education and training.

- **Objectives/measurable targets:** The awarding Councils are responsible for the certification of all education and training in the State, other than awards made in respect of primary and second-level education, the Dublin Institute of Technology and the Universities. Both Councils have similar functions with regard to their different sectors, and this includes responsibility for the quality assurance of the providers and programmes.

FETAC is responsible for the development and making of awards for all vocational courses in the further education and training sector, including the assigning of credit, leading to certification from level 1 up to level 6 (Advanced Certificate) within the National Framework of Qualifications. Awards at Levels 1–6 are available for both CVET and IVET (depending on the status of the trainee). FETAC also recognises and will give learners credit for unitised parts of “other quality assured awards” they have successfully achieved. (Many of the qualifications available in the further education sector are modularised to allow students and trainees to accumulate units towards full qualifications). HETAC is responsible for making awards for academic type courses from level 6 to level 10, which are provided by the Institutes of Technology and other institutions of higher education (private colleges or business schools).

FETAC does and will continue to establish comparability between its minor awards and units or parts of qualifications in other countries, and as the national awarding body for further education and training it would be the appropriate body in Ireland for the purposes of overseeing the implementation of ECVET. Comparability decisions are currently based on existing national alignment agreements (e.g. between Ireland, Scotland, England, Wales, and Northern Ireland) and/or direct comparisons between the two systems. These decisions are conditional on the existence of appropriate quality assurance arrangements within other countries systems.

- **Target groups/educational level/educational sector:** All learners, providers and stakeholders in the further and higher education and training sectors.
- **Status of implementation:** Until 2003, the Institutes of Technology and other third level institutions and colleges availed of awards made by the National Council for Educational Awards (NCEA). HETAC has now assumed this awarding function. Likewise, until 2003, the most common award system in further education was that developed by the National Council for Vocational Awards (NCVA), and bodies such as FÁS, the Training and Employment Authority, and other State industry agencies involved in vocational training, had each developed separate systems for the recognition of learning taking place under their responsibility. These agencies ceased this activity in

December 2007 and FETAC has now assumed these awarding functions, bringing together all certification for these areas under one banner.

FETAC currently has over 2000 awards within its existing Directory of Awards. Over the next three years FETAC will systematically plan and manage the conversion and harmonisation and review of all existing awards into the Common Awards System. This Common Awards System (CAS) incorporates a credit, accumulation and transfer system (CATS), for further education and training in Ireland. It will provide coherent, flexible and unitised awards at levels 1-6 on the National Framework of Qualifications.

Policy/measure operation and delivery:

- **Level of operation:** The Awards Councils, which have separate but inter-dependent roles, have three principal functions.
 - The establishment of policies and criteria for the making of awards, the validation of programmes and the setting and monitoring of standards;
 - The determination of standards of knowledge, skill or competence to be acquired by learners, before an award may be made by a Council or recognised by a Council, and
 - The making and recognition of awards where persons have achieved the required standards.

The Councils can provide for the progression and transfer of trainees to further third level Institutes and Universities. For example FETAC level 5 Post Leaving Certificate courses in community and health services subjects have progression links to nursing degree courses in universities and Institutes of Technology. Any provider can apply to the relevant Council for validation of a programme of education or training. Such programmes can take place in institutions, in the workplace or in the community and be either part-time or full-time. The remit of FETAC and HETAC also includes the validation of prior and experiential learning and work-based learning, community and private sector education and training also come under its aegis. The awarding Councils must inform themselves of the education and training skills and qualifications requirements of industry, including agriculture and the professions, the level of knowledge, skill and competence to be acquired by learners, and promote practices in education and training which meet those requirements.

All FETAC awards are now included on the National Framework of Qualifications and all new FETAC awards will be developed in the context of the Framework. Major awards are the principle class of awards that FETAC makes and these will be divisible into minor awards. Minor awards can be accumulated over time towards one or more named major awards. All minor awards will identify the appropriate standards of knowledge, skills and competence required to achieve the award. The standards will be expressed as learning outcomes. The new Common Award System will ensure awards are relevant to both employers and learners needs, and coherent with the national framework of qualifications. New awards will be developed solely through the Common Awards System from January 2008. Over time all existing awards will be harmonised (reviewed) into the Common Awards System which will enable FETAC and VET providers to enter into arrangements and agreements for credit transfer based on their

respective competences.

- **Key actors involved:** The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, the Departments of Education and Science and of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. Members of both Councils include representatives of learners and providers of further and higher education training, as well as the social partners.

Conclusions: The current lack of transparency and non recognition of qualifications in VET at a European level is a real barrier to mobility of people and the main added value of ECVET will be the enhanced mobility of learners within the further education and training sector of Europe. On the positive side the new systems proposed will bring increased opportunities for recognition of Irish awards abroad and recognition of other awards here in Ireland. It will also increase the mutual knowledge and understanding of different systems of education and training amongst European states.

In November 2006 the European Commission formally launched a consultation process on a European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET). FETAC, as the Irish awarding body for further education and training, was nominated to carry out consultations with relevant VET stakeholders regarding the future implementation of ECVET in Ireland. The results of this consultation were published in a Paper entitled, 'Towards a European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training-Irish Response' 2007. The following are some of the key recommendations proposed.

1. Prior to the introduction of ECVET, supports and funding arrangements need to be considered at national and European level. Considerable time will be required to introduce and implement ECVET in Ireland, and the pilot testing of the ECVET processes at European level was strongly recommended. Support for the training and exchange of VET personnel between partner countries for the facilitation of ECVET was also seen as important.
2. The introduction of ECVET should commence with a pilot study to ascertain- a) the demand for such a mobility instrument, b) the level of funding required, c) the impact on providers, d) and the type of supports required.
3. ECVET should be developed in conjunction with the EQF, as the implementation of EQF is central to the successful implementation of ECVET.
4. The development of National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) and the future alignment of national frameworks to the EQF were seen as central to the facilitation of mobility of learners in Europe and should be given priority at national and European level.
5. The focus on learning outcomes was welcomed as outcome based qualifications systems will enable easier comparisons to be made across borders and contribute to the development of national qualifications frameworks.
6. Linking ECTS and ECVET was a significant and recurring issue, and the integration of ECTS and ECVET mechanisms was clearly identified as an issue of concern by Irish stakeholders. Two parallel systems operating on different principles would it was believed, complicate the implementation of ECVET. Coherence and mutual understanding needed to be achieved between VET and higher education in order to facilitate learners moving across borders

and across systems. The Stakeholders recommended that the Commission establish a working group to look into the development at a European level of a unified credit system (across VET and Higher education), to link and accompany the EQF.

7. A standardised metric for the size of units as proposed needs to be determined before further progress is made on ECVET. The metric of 120 credits needs to be considered. In the Irish context 120 credits apply to a full major award. ECVET should have the facility to allow recognition of smaller credits which could be achieved while studying/training outside the learners' country of origin.
8. Stakeholders expressed concerns that the proposed system is complex and bureaucratic. When implemented ECVET will need to be more flexible to allow for the diversity of providers.
9. Consideration should be given to the need for the establishment of an organisation (existing or new) in each participating country to coordinate and standardise arrangements for ECVET and to assist providers. There will be a need to monitor implementation across the European community to ensure fairness and consistency for learners participating in ECVET. An independent European based monitoring service may also be required.
10. Queries were raised in relation to the Irish National Framework of Qualifications, where level 6 of the framework is shared by further and higher education. Stakeholders expressed concern that the higher and further sectors should have a compatibility and coherence between them in an Irish context and at European level. The Irish framework of qualifications is a competency based system built on learning outcomes which have to be assessed. This is a critical feature for the introduction of ECVET.

The outcome of the FETAC consultation process highlighted in broad terms that the objectives and functions of ECVET as outlined in the Commissions' consultation document, were welcomed by Irish stakeholders who support its objectives. However there is a need for the alignment of ECVET and ECTS in order for a seamless transfer of learners between further and higher education as well as facilitating transnational mobility. Concerns were also raised regarding the timing of the initiative as it may be overtaken by developments with EQF. The majority of stakeholders believe that the development of the EQF and NQFs should be a policy priority for Europe for 2007-2010.

These consultations have shown that in principle Ireland is ready to participate in ECVET and that there was strong support and awareness of European developments amongst Irish stakeholders. There was also a consensus amongst contributors that Ireland is in a good position to facilitate learners for ECVET, given the existence of the national framework of qualifications, and HETAC and FETAC awards systems. FETAC as the competent body through the implementation of its Common Awards System will eventually play a key role in the future facilitation of ECVET in Ireland.

7.4. Promoting Europass and ensuring synergy with EQF and ECVET

7.4.1. Policy progress since 2005

The Europass programme, which is designed to enable people to gain access to learning and employment throughout Europe, was officially launched in Ireland in 2005. NQAI is the designated National Europass Centre working in collaboration with the relevant agencies and providers.

The extent and how ECVET and Europass could complement each other to enhance mobility is an important issue to be addressed at national and EU level, and this was referred to in the FETAC consultation Paper on the processes for the introduction of ECVET, summarised above. The consultation recommendations noted that the relationship between the Europass portfolio and ECVET needs to be carefully worked out, as Europass Mobility is not validated and therefore ECVET may become a more useful tool within the Europass Portfolio and lead to a merging of these tools. General comments by stakeholders referred to ECVET as ‘another tool’ to support learners engaging in mobility activities. It will be there to assist learners who wish to travel to study or work abroad, and will be part of a package of materials to assist in the transfer and recognition of learning already acquired and to be acquired as part of learning and training exchanges. (ECVET proposes an approach whereby learning outcomes acquired abroad can be taken into consideration for the purposes of issuing a qualification in a learner’s country of origin). During the FETAC consultation process there was also general consensus that the implementation of the EQF will greatly support and facilitate the implementation of ECVET.

There are existing arrangements for transnational learning exchanges between Ireland and other European countries. Many of these are facilitated under the EU Erasmus and Socrates Programmes and other funding arrangements, and ECVET will offer recognition to these learners. However the debate did not suggest that there would be a significant increase in mobility as a result of ECVET, but that the support structure would be there for those who need and wish to travel to learn or work outside their own country. Recognition of the qualifications of other countries and access to education and training in Ireland was viewed at the time of the FETAC consultation process as a more important national issue, however this view could change as a result of the recent down turn in the economic climatic.

7.4.2. Example of policy measure

(See Example of policy measure: 7.3.2 above)

7.5. Promoting geographical mobility of learners within VET

7.5.1. Policy progress since 2002

There is an increased emphasis at national and European level on the importance of facilitating geographical mobility for learners. A considerable amount of intra European learning and learner exchange activity already exists between Ireland and other EU member states. This operates relatively effectively within existing EU transnational partnerships. Co-operative partnerships utilising EU-funding under the former Leonardo, Grundtvig and Socrates programmes, have facilitated the development of new VET processes and this will continue under the current EU

Lifelong Learning Programme. Cross-border, North South co-operative initiatives and VET partnerships between Ireland and Wales, also continue to be funded under the EU INTERREG Programme.

In order to facilitate learner mobility, Ireland has participated in a number of European projects based on transnational partnerships for example in developing common apprenticeship curriculum and facilitating the transparency of qualifications. Some of these have involved participation by Irish VET agencies such as FÁS, in specific EU VET networks, for example the European Vocational Training Association (EVTA) network. Irish VET professionals have also been involved in study visits within the EU for the exchange of 'Best Practices' in VET.

To promote language learning in higher education, students are encouraged to spend a period of time overseas under for example under the Erasmus Programme. School students, who participated in the Comenius Programme, have spent some time in a European country to improve their language skills. Under the former LINGUA Programme several Irish projects were funded to develop the quality of language learning and Ireland participated in the Leonardo Da Vinci, Young Worker Exchange Programme, which facilitated language training together with periods of work placement in EU member states.

In order to make VET services more accessible to EU nationals residing in Ireland, FÁS has a telephone interpretation line service available in all European languages. The FÁS 'Know before you go campaign', launched in 2006 in the new Member States, provides relevant information to jobseekers before coming to Ireland and a DVD in five languages has also been produced. (See the 'FÁS Know Before You Go' Policy Measure example in Theme: 1.2.1).

The introduction of the European initiative Europass and the services of Qualifications Recognition - Ireland were both significant in facilitating learner mobility into and from Ireland. However the debate during FETAC consultation process, summarised above, suggested that the take up of mobility opportunities in Ireland was quite small and providers noted that the movement in recent times been mainly inwards with less outward movement.

The National Qualifications Authority through its Qualifications Recognition Ireland Service (described below), has provided a tool by which international qualifications can be compared against national qualifications. This will benefit learners travelling into this country with qualifications gained outside the State, and Irish learners and workers with national qualifications wishing to study and work abroad. It will also enable the employment of appropriately qualified applicants by potential employers in Ireland and abroad.

7.5.2. Example of policy measures

<p>Title of policy measure: Qualifications Recognition Ireland Service</p> <p>Rationale: The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) is the Irish centre for the recognition of international qualifications.</p> <p>Objectives/measurable targets: The NQAI has set up a ‘Qualifications Recognition-Ireland’ service to facilitate the recognition of international qualifications under the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention. This service provides:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• advice on the recognition of international qualifications in Ireland;• represents Ireland in the National Reference Point network of centres and• consults with appropriate awarding body in Ireland (FETAC, HETAC, Department of Education and Science etc.) and professional bodies, in order to assess the learner’s qualifications and to determine their comparability within the Irish education system. <p>While the decisions of the Qualification Recognition Service do not have any legal effect, as the Service itself does not have a direct recognition function, it can facilitate access to education and training and the labour market generally. By the end of 2006 approximately 1200 applications had been received by the Authority’s Service²⁶. The website address for the service is set out below.</p> <p>http://www.qualificationsrecognition.ie?recognition/prof_rec/index.html</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Target groups/educational level/educational sector: Irish and overseas students, trainees, employees and potential entrants to the labour market.• Status of implementation: There has been continued expansion of the activity of ‘Qualifications Recognition Ireland’, with the establishment of a ‘one stop shop’ by the NQAI to advise on the comparability of international awards. The service has played an important role in providing advice on the recognition of international qualifications for recent recruitment drives for example to the Irish police force (the Gardai) and the Defence Forces, as well as offering advice to migrants seeking access to further learning or employment in Ireland.
<p>Policy/measure operation and delivery:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Level of operation: The NQAI, through the medium of its’ Qualifications Recognition-Ireland service, represents Ireland in a European Network of centres known as <u>ENIC/NARIC (European National Information Centre/National Academic Recognition Information Centre)</u>, a network of national centres created to help further the academic recognition of international awards and facilitate the integration of national education systems. <p>The Qualifications Recognition Service also facilitates access to the <u>NRP (National Reference Point Network of Centres)</u>, which promotes the recognition</p>

²⁶ These figures refer to applications only and do not include enquiries received by ‘Qualifications Recognition-Ireland’ that did not progress to applications. In addition, the service also handles an extensive number of recognition queries by e-mail and telephone, and makes available a growing body of information on international qualifications on its website

of international qualifications throughout Europe and further afield. The NRP acts as an International Qualifications Database which contains information on foreign qualifications and education and training systems. It lists for example the foreign qualifications that have been processed to date by Qualifications Recognition – Ireland Service, and gives advice regarding the comparability of overseas qualifications in Ireland. (Leaflets have also been published by the NQAI on the qualifications recognition system in Ireland and these are available in Polish, Latvian, Lithuanian and Russian).

While working within the overall context of national awarding bodies' policies and the Qualifications Recognition service, higher education and university level providers have developed independent recognition and evaluation processes for the admission of international students to their institutions. These include:-

- The identification of appropriate levels of English language proficiency.
- The establishment of the legitimacy of submitted academic documentation.
- **Key actors involved:** National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, FÁS and the Department of Education and Science.

Assessment of change:

- **Assessment of impact (indicators of success):** The 2007 report on a National Skills Strategy noted that *'the system for recognition of international awards should be reviewed to ensure that it is meeting its objectives and that the facility is widely communicated to employers and international employees'*

8: Development of VET statistics

8.1 Progress made on national VET statistics since 2002

The two principal sources of statistics on VET in Ireland are the Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS; similar to the EU-wide Labour Force Survey) and the CVTS survey. The QNHS provides regular statistics on participation of persons aged 15 or more in education and training. It also carries occasional special modules such as in 2003. The principal results are published through Eurostat and made available to policy-makers and researchers in Ireland. FÁS has, for many years, received special tabulations of the results in respect of persons in employment and has published a report entitled 'Participation of the Employed in Education/Training' annually.

The CVTS3 survey was conducted by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) in respect of 2005 in accordance with the EU-wide regulation. The results were published by the CSO in December 2007. In addition, FÁS published a more detailed analysis of the results in 2008.

The CSO carried out the CVTS3 survey as part of its annual National Employment Survey in 2006. The CSO subsequently decided to continue to ask a number of questions about company training in their annual National Employment Survey. Thus, main results about company training will now be available annually in Ireland.

Another source of statistics on training by companies is the Earnings, Hours and Employment Costs Survey conducted by the CSO. This is a replacement of the former Labour Costs Survey and provides information on training costs.

In respect of individuals' participation in training, the Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) provides very detailed information on a sample of persons. This EU-wide survey is conducted in Ireland by the CSO.

The other source of statistics on VET in Ireland comes from administrative sources. Two important developments are under-way in this regard.

The establishment of the National Framework of Qualifications led to a desire to produce statistics on the number of persons acquiring qualifications at the various levels on the Framework. The two Awarding Bodies, FETAC and HETAC, have established systems which record such information. Over the last few years, these systems have been improved and expanded. The objective is that statistics should be available covering all awards, by level, type and field of study (linked to the EU fields of training and ISCED). Not available yet, however, is a process to link these pieces of information together to provide a comprehensive picture of flows between different levels of award or to differentiate between awards to full-time students and part-time (employed) learners. Work has also been underway to relate the (10) levels on the Irish framework to the ISCED levels and to the traditional levels of education in Ireland used by the CSO in its household surveys.

The second important development has been on the extent of recording of education and training in Ireland from administrative sources. Within the context of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, FÁS has established a Skills Database which aims to

gather all information on education and training outputs in Ireland. This, in turn, is put together in an annual Education and Training Supply Bulletin. More details of this initiative are presented in Section 8.2 below.

8.2 Examples of policies/ measures/projects for improving national VET statistics

<p>Title of policy/measure: The Education and Training Supply Bulletin</p> <p>Rationale: Previously, information on the supply of persons from the education and training system into the labour market was dispersed and was published, if at all, by different organisations. The aim of the Bulletin is to bring all such information together to provide a comprehensive picture of supply across all levels of the system. The Bulletin has been produced by FÁS and published by the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs since 2006.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objectives/measurable targets: The Bulletin is produced by the Skills and Labour Market Research Unit within FÁS. It draws on material from the Department of Education and Science in respect of school leavers and other education activities, the Central Applications Office in respect of higher education applications, the Higher Education Authority in respect of students in higher education, FETAC and HETAC in relation to certification, FÁS and various other educational institutions in respect of their own activities. • Target groups/educational level/educational sector: It covers the outputs of the education and training system from Lower Secondary to Post-Graduate degree qualifications. Separate chapters present both entrants and exits from each level. There is also a chapter on overseas education of Irish persons.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy/measure operation and delivery: • Level of operation: The Bulletin is continually evolving as further sources of statistics become available. One of the weaknesses of statistics in Ireland, as noted above, is the lack of data on the extent to which persons acquire qualifications at a higher level than they currently hold (i.e. moving up the qualifications' ladder). Ireland's National Skills Strategy is based on a considerable number of persons acquiring a higher level qualification and statistics are needed to monitor progress towards this aim. The various organisations are currently trying to find ways to develop suitable statistics for this purpose. • Key actors involved: FÁS, the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, Higher Education Authority, Dept of Education and Statistics, FETAC.
<p>Conclusions: The Bulletin has been welcomed by the various authorities in the field and especially the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs. In this regard, it complements the Expert Group's annual National Skills Bulletin report.</p>

9. VET beyond 2010

9.1 VET issues that should be on the national and on the EU policy agenda post 2010 and why?

The importance of VET, as a significant element of the broader human capital agenda, will remain over the next decades. A key aspect of national and EU development will be investment in education and training within the framework of lifelong learning. In this context, the distinction between education and vocational training is likely to become more blurred. This should have implications for policy and institutions.

Equality of access, relevance and quality assurance are cornerstones of Irish VET policy. Enhancing access to education and training, the development of new skills, the acquisition of recognised qualifications and progression to higher education are some of the key issues driving the lifelong learning agenda in Ireland. Lifelong learning can only be successful if it is fully-inclusive, participative, accommodating of diversity and focused on equality of outcomes for all.

VET should continue to play its dual role of supporting both economic and social development. EU-wide forecasts, such as those published by CEDEFOP, indicate important trends in occupational employment for the future. These suggest that the greatest growth in employment will be in occupations requiring higher levels of qualifications. An important question for the future policy agenda is does VET have a role in providing such qualifications or will VET be confined to low and medium-level qualifications?

The research conducted for the National Skills Strategy in Ireland identified other important trends in occupations which have implications for VET. Although the research particularly related to developments in Ireland, it is likely that these changes are also apparent across the EU. These changes are:

- Increasing breadth of knowledge.
- Increased share of knowledge work/reduced share of routine work.
- Rising qualification and technical skills requirements.
- Importance of continuous learning.
- Increased emphasis on regulation.
- Skills of dealing with others.
- Dependability/Reliability.

These types of changes have implications for the curricula of VET, especially in respect of the provision for ‘generic’ and ‘soft’ skills. They also support the need for mechanisms to provide VET on an on-going basis over the life-time to respond to new and changing skill needs.

Countries vary in the extent to which jobs and occupations are regulated. Such regulation usually takes the form of licensing which sets out the conditions that a person must meet to be able to work in a particular job. Such regulation is primarily developed because of concerns about safety (for example of dangerous materials, or child protection), health (most of the medical field) or consumer protection.

Regulation has costs in respect of inflexibility of labour markets. There are also mobility of labour issues in respect of regulation, whereby countries need to develop fair procedures in respect of individuals who acquire qualifications in a manner outside the normal national framework. Overall, there is a growing awareness that regulation will become more important in the future in Ireland and probably in the EU and VET systems need to find optimum ways of operating within it.

The emerging developments in regard to a European Qualifications Framework (EQF) are important, although they will take a considerable time to come to fruition. Ireland is well placed to meet the requirements of the proposed framework in terms of quality assurance principles and approaches, and the capacity to match the levels in the Irish framework against the 8 levels proposed for the EQF. (See Theme 7.2/7.3). There is a welcome for the inclusion of all awards in the EQF, including those in the school system. However, the Irish response has flagged the issue of quality assurance for schools as one where we do not consider it appropriate that the EQF three quality assurance requirements (self assessment, external monitoring and that the quality assurance, agencies should themselves be subject to external quality assurance), devised in the context of VET and Higher Education, should necessarily apply. Historically, the schools systems have developed their own national structures for curriculum, assessment and review, and for benchmarking through international student assessments.

In November 2006 the European Commission formally launched a consultation on the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) under the Copenhagen process and in the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme. In Ireland FETAC, as the national awarding body for further education and training in Ireland, carried out this consultation process (See Theme 7.3. above) and compiled a national response which was submitted to the European Commission. FETAC is representing Ireland on the EU Commission's ECVET Technical Working Group to prepare an Explanatory Memorandum on ECVET with recommendations for presentation to EU Council.

Addressing skills needs and shortages will remain an important aspect of VET policy for the future. In many countries a shortage of scientific-related skills is a matter of concern in Ireland. The 4th report of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs warned that there would remain a shortage in the ICT and Biotechnology industries in the future. Although, according to the Skills Strategy report, the country is producing a high number of science and engineering graduates, the EGFSN has advised that the supply of graduates in these areas remains a critical national priority. The need to maintain capacity in these areas, to improve the marketing of skills courses and the recruitment of students to these courses so as to reach the required level of output should continue to be prioritised.

Linked to this is the need to improve mathematics capability throughout society. A better universal understanding and ability in maths is required, along with a larger number of persons with higher-level mathematics knowledge.

Over the years the ESF has contributed a large amount of money in absolute terms, and has helped in particular to shape Irish vocational training policy, enabling the Irish Government to spend at significantly higher levels than they otherwise could

have done. The ESF has also played an important policy-influencing role in recent years, by emphasising the need for consistency with the targets and objectives set out in the European Employment Guidelines. Looking to the future, EU funding for VET is likely to remain important but at a lower level.

VET has an important role in addressing the ‘social-inclusion’ needs of disadvantaged groups in society. Experience in Ireland, and we believe elsewhere, is that increasingly unemployed persons are suffering from multiple disadvantages. A lack of qualifications and skills is one of these disadvantages. Consequently, there is an increased need to address needs in a holistic manner whereby the provision of VET is linked to other actions (e.g. in relation to health, housing or child-related issues).

An important development, reflected in VET provision as in other public services, is the increased demand for individualised, customer-centred, provision. The public is no longer satisfied with standard, ‘one size fits all’, provision. The challenge for VET providers is how to deliver such individualised provision at acceptable cost. Modularisation of curricula, e-learning and greater self-learning can all help to increase the flexibility of provision.

Apprenticeship is a common, and favoured, form of delivery of VET for young persons in many countries. However, the apprenticeship model is dependent on ensuring a balance of costs and benefits to all parties involved – in particular employers and young apprentices. Experience in Ireland has shown that it is difficult to maintain such a balance as economic conditions change. In some countries, where apprenticeship is found in large companies, the desire to ‘slim-down’ employment in such companies to a ‘core’ group of employees may result in a reduced willingness to invest in apprenticeship training. Another aspect of apprenticeship, which may become of greater importance, is the issue of mobility within the EU and the recognition of periods spent in apprenticeship in different countries.

A recurrent issue for VET is that of recognition of prior learning. This is essential in encouraging older persons to engage in lifelong learning. Over the years, efforts have been made to increase the extent of RPL in Ireland and elsewhere. However, little significant progress has been made. Most qualifications are still awarded on the basis of course attendance and examination rather than on the basis of prior experience.

9.2 How could these issues be addressed through national and EU policy and/or targets?

At a national level, Ireland has developed a National Skills Strategy to 2020 which helps set the direction for policy and established targets over the next decade or so. The Strategy (published in 2007), examined the existing supply of labour in Ireland in terms of quantity and quality (as per educational levels). It looked at existing provision of training and the benefits of investment in training for individuals, employers and the nation as a whole. It concluded that of the 1.4 million existing workforce still at work in 2020, half a million need to be up-skilled by at least one level on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). This would require very considerably higher levels of expenditure than currently being implemented.

In relation to young people, the aim should be to increase upper secondary progression for school students to 90% and third-level entrance to 72%.

The Strategy gave consideration to VET issues that need to be successfully addressed in the future. These include the need for:

- Better linkages to be established between education/training providers and regional/sectoral needs.
- Greater flexibility from VET providers.
- New approaches to funding mechanisms to encourage investment in education and training. An examination should be undertaken of mechanisms adopted elsewhere to encourage participation in continual learning, such as Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs), paid learning leave and co-financing, and the results used to guide policy.
- Procedures to identify those migrants who need English-language training and the extension of the provision of this training, with a distinction being maintained between adult literacy and migrant English-language proficiency.
- The importance of good career guidance with the development and piloting of a national system.

The Skills Strategy proposes that “Ireland’s ambition should not be to simply meet projected skills demand based on an extrapolation of current observed trends. If it is to develop competitive advantage in world class skills, education and training, and a transition to a knowledge economy, in which skills drive innovation, productivity, and entrepreneurial activity, Ireland requires a skills profile which substantially changes the equilibrium – skewed towards higher levels of skills attainment.” In summary, achieving the vision would mean that 48% of the labour force would have third-level qualifications in 2020 compared to 32% in 2005. Conversely, only 7% would have below upper secondary qualifications compared to 28% currently.

The National Skills Strategy looked at funding mechanisms to encourage investment in education and training. It stated that *“As a general principle, individuals who do not currently hold a qualification equivalent to NFQ Level 4 or 5 (Leaving Certificate equivalent), should be assisted to achieve such an award, through either full-or part-time study, without incurring tuition costs and with a level of subsistence, provided by the State, for full-time study where appropriate.”* However, for higher-level courses (levels 6 – 10), the report envisages a shared funding between individuals, employers and the State.

It noted that it *“has formed a tentative view that the most effective way to ensure flexible and responsive provision of training may be to empower individuals and enterprises through funding, rather than through direct support for providers. Such mechanisms require further research and analysis. An immediate examination of mechanisms adopted elsewhere to encourage participation in continual learning, such as Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs), paid learning leave and co-financing, should be conducted and the results then used to guide policy.”*

Ireland's three-year National Partnership Agreements involving the Government and the Social Partners have all included policies in relation to education and training. In recent years there has been some divergence of opinion between the Government, the Social Partners and outside commentators regarding the extent to which employers and individuals should pay for training that benefits them, and the amount of financial support that individuals should receive while in training. While there has been widespread support for the principle that vocational training should be provided by the state, at no cost, to young people and unemployed people, whether participants should also receive some form of income payment while undergoing vocational training, and the extent of such a payment, have been issues about which differing views have been expressed.

10. ANNEXES

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* ALL WEBSITES WERE ACCESSED IN JANUARY 2009

10.2 LIST OF ACRONYMS

AEGI	ADULT EDUCATION GUIDANCE INITIATIVE
APL	ACCREDITATION OF PRIOR LEARNING
EAP	EMPLOYMENT ACTION PLAN
BTEI	BACK TO EDUCATION INITIATIVE
CDP	COMPETENCY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME
CIF	CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY FEDERATION
CPD	CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
CSO	CENTRAL STATISTICS OFFICE
CTF	CUSTOMISED TRAINING FUND
CVET	CONTINUING VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING
DES	DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE
DETE	DEPARTMENT OF ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND EMPLOYMENT
ECVET	EUROPEAN CREDIT SYSTEM FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

EDC	EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE COMMITTEE
EEL	EDUCATIONAL EQUALITY INITIATIVE
EGFSN	EXPERT GROUP ON FUTURE SKILLS NEEDS
EHRD OP	EMPLOYMENT AND HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT OPERATIONAL PROGRAMME
ETP	EXCELLENCE THROUGH PEOPLE
ETW	EXPANDING THE WORKFORCE
FÁS	TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT AUTHORITY
FETAC	FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING AWARDS COUNCIL
HETAC	HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING AWARDS COUNCIL
HCI OP	HUMAN CAPITAL INVESTMENT OPERATIONAL PROGRAMME
HSP	HIGH SUPPORT PROCESS
IBEC	IRISH BUSINESS AND EMPLOYERS CONFEDERATION
ICTU	IRISH CONGRESS OF TRADE UNIONS
IDA	INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
IILT	INTEGRATE IRELAND LANGUAGE TRAINING
IITD	IRISH INSTITUTE OF TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT
ISCED	INTERNATIONAL STANDARD CLASSIFICATION OF EDUCATION
ISME	IRISH SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES ASSOCIATION
ITs	INSTITUTES OF TECHNOLOGY
IVET	INITIAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING
NAAC	NATIONAL APPRENTICESHIP ADVISORY COMMITTEE
NALA	NATIONAL ADULT LITERACY AGENCY
NAPS	NATIONAL ANTI-POVERTY STRATEGY
NCCA	NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT
NCGE	NATIONAL CENTRE FOR GUIDANCE IN EDUCATION
NCPP	NATIONAL CENTRE FOR PARTNERSHIP AND PERFORMANCE
NCTE	NATIONAL CENTRE FOR TECHNOLOGY IN EDUCATION
NDP	NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN
NESF	NATIONAL ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL FORUM
NFQ	NATIONAL FRAMEWORK OF QUALIFICATIONS
NQAI	NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS ASSOCIATION OF IRELAND
NTF	NATIONAL TRAINING FUND
NUI	NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND

OSCAIL	NATIONAL DISTANCE EDUCATION CENTRE
PLC	POST LEAVING CERTIFICATE
QNHS	QUARTERLY NATIONAL HOUSEHOLD SURVEY
RPL	RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING
SFA	SMALL FIRMS ASSOCIATION
SIF	STRATEGIC INNOVATION FUND
SILC	SURVEY ON INCOME AND LIVING CONDITIONS
SIPTU	SERVICES INDUSTRIAL PROFESSIONAL AND TECHNICAL UNION
SMEs	SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES
SSRR	SENIOR SELECT RETAIN AND RETRAIN
TESG	TECHNICAL EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT GRANT
VECs	VOCATIONAL EDUCATION COMMITTEES
VTOS	VOCATIONAL TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES SCHEME