

## CHAPTER 5

### STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE

Earlier Chapters of this Report have shown the significant influence of education and training on economic performance at both the individual and aggregate levels. The pursuit of social justice and equality of opportunity is therefore closely related to issues of access to and performance within the education and training systems. The Council is strongly of the view that policies for education and training must address *simultaneously* the economic goal of supporting growth and development and the social goal of addressing the needs of those systematically disadvantaged in education and the labour market.

There is no conflict between these goals. The evidence presented earlier suggests that education and training policies succeed in supporting high levels of productivity and employment to the extent that they successfully equip the middle to low achieving pupils from the widest range of socio-economic backgrounds for the transition to adult life and to work.

While the relationship between educational disadvantage and social disadvantage persists there can be little doubt regarding the Irish State's commitment to tackling educational inequalities (see, for example, Green and White Papers since 1980, and also various current initiatives outlined below). It was most recently discussed in depth in the Green Paper on Education. The priority measures identified were: increasing the staff levels of schools in disadvantaged areas, increased resourcing and availability of training for teachers in disadvantaged areas, development of closer home/school links (particularly at primary level), development of appropriate curricula, and at post-primary level educational programmes designed to coax disadvantaged school leavers to participate (i.e., Youthreach, VTOS).

Convenient and frequently used yardsticks of educational disadvantage are: (i) leaving school without any, or with poor, qualifications; and (ii) having poor employment prospects. There is a clear link between poor qualifications and poor employment prospects (Hannan and Shortall, 1991; Breen, 1991; CMRS, 1988), and poorly qualified school leavers almost all come from very deprived social class and family backgrounds (Hannan, 1992).

The most widely used indicators of this educational failure are:

- (1) *Participation* rates (the percentage of a social group in a given level of education);
- (2) *Retention* rates (the number of those in (i) who remain in education over time);
- (3) Levels of *attainment* (how well students perform in State examinations).<sup>23</sup>
- (4) Post-school *employment* records (the likelihood of getting a job, and staying employed).

These indicators represent the effects of educational failure and are primarily relevant at the post-primary level. At the primary level, educational disadvantage is typically tackled on an area basis through special initiatives and positive discrimination. Additional resources are targeted at schools in areas identified using the criteria of unemployment, housing conditions and numbers with medical cards. This strategy recognises the link between social class background and potential educational difficulties and is more preventative in nature.

This Chapter reviews evidence regarding the extent of educational disadvantage in Ireland and the strategies and policies which have been pursued to counter it. As noted in Chapter 1, the report *Investment in Education* drew attention to the extent of educational inequality in Ireland. Although there was no clear discussion of what was meant by educational *equality*, the problems of participation and access were so stark that the necessary measures were immediately obvious. Subsequent to *Investment in Education* (1966), "free" post-primary education and transportation schemes were introduced in 1967. The result was a massive *expansion of opportunity*. Open access to second-level education and free school transport meant that larger percentages of the population could continue in second level.

Despite reforms, however, educational inequalities persist and the issue of class differentials in educational participation and attainment rates, and the question of the relationship between education and the labour market remain central concerns of present day commentators (Breen, 1984).

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<sup>23</sup> It is important to note that examinations are not necessarily the only measure of attainment.

Discussions about a policy response to "educational disadvantage" or "educational inequality" require careful consideration of what these terms mean. At present these terms ascribe homogeneity to large numbers of children which may not exist, and in this way often mislead more than they inform. Used generally, they can refer to children with physical or mild to moderate mental handicap, or children with learning problems. They can refer to disadvantage which is clearly linked to disadvantaged social class background. This latter category in itself contains varying types and degrees of disadvantage. At this point, then, it is appropriate to develop and clarify the nature of educational inequality or educational disadvantage.

## 1. THE NATURE OF EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITY AND EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE

The concept of inequality has been described as "complex, multifaceted and partially incomplete" (Temkin, 1986, p.121). It is rendered so by the myriad forms of inequality, the varying intensity of inequality and the variety of individuals affected (O'Higgins, 1987). The concept of *educational inequality* brings additional complexities of its own.

In the education debate, the terms inequality and disadvantage are most likely to be used interchangeably, while educational opportunity is seen as a remedial strategy. Various definitions of educational disadvantage and educational opportunity have been proposed over the past 30 years (Coleman, 1968; Pallas et al, 1989). Understanding of the issue has progressed over time and a brief review of this progression enhances an understanding of the various usages of these concepts. Prior to the development of industrial society, equality of educational opportunity and educational disadvantage had little meaning (Coleman, 1968). Children's horizons and station in life were largely determined by their family. After the industrial revolution, children became occupationally mobile outside their family and their education and training began to have implications for all the community — both in terms of potential employers and in terms of necessary economic support for dependants. Private education flourished during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and public education developed in Europe and America from early in the nineteenth century. The educational system was designed to provide differentiated educational opportunity appropriate to one's class position. Public schools became the common schools and private schools catered for the upper classes. There were sharp curricular and resource divisions.

Differentiated educational provision by class and colour was gradually replaced by a commitment to educational opportunity focusing on equality.

This included the provision of a free education up to a given accepted minimum standard, the provision of a common curriculum for all children regardless of background, providing children from diverse backgrounds with the opportunity to attend the same school and providing equality within and between localities. The transformation of the occupational structure with industrial society meant that educational credentials became an important criterion for recruitment decisions. If the means of achieving such educational credentials were widely available, then educational credentials could change patterns of inter-generational transfer of class position (Miller, 1991). Expansionist measures towards achieving these ends have ensued throughout the industrialised world. Investment in public education, particularly since the middle of this century, has accounted for an increasingly significant percentage of public expenditure. Secondary education has expanded almost to the point of universal participation. Direct costs of participation in secondary sectors have been either removed or attenuated and participation in the tertiary sector has also increased and in many cases is heavily subsidised by the State (Jonsson and Mills, 1991). Less attention has been focused on how employers use educational credentials for recruitment purposes (Muller, 1991).

It is generally accepted that these expansionary measures have done a great deal to increase equality of educational opportunity. It is not so clear that they have had equivalent success in reducing educational inequalities. One of the obvious deficiencies in the strategy included the implicit assumption that the existence of free access to schools eliminates economic sources of inequality of opportunity. In reality, the costs of pursuing an education rather than taking a job are different for different social classes. Another assumption was that equality of opportunity lay in *exposure* to the same, given curriculum. Crudely, the higher the level of the curriculum and the greater the general exposure to it, the greater the educational opportunity. In this scenario, the school's obligation is to provide an opportunity and the obligation to use the opportunity is on the child or the family (Coleman, 1968).

It is inadequate to tackle class differences in educational participation rates through strategies to attain equality of opportunity (Breen, 1990). Equality of opportunity proposes equality of treatment *within* the educational system, irrespective of differences in pupils' backgrounds. Yet it is known that pupils' home circumstances are of crucial importance in determining how well they do in school (Breen, p.44). Breen argues that if class inequalities exist in a society, it is too much to expect of the educational system and educational establishments that those class inequalities will not impinge on the educational process. Indeed, to try to compensate and correct for class

differences through the educational system would more than likely threaten the maintenance of the overall standard of education which is currently provided. Both the school and the home play a role in determining educational outcome. *This does not diminish the importance of the school's role*, but underlines that: (a) it should not, in isolation, be burdened with unrealistic expectations and (b) it must be realised that tackling educational disadvantage goes much further than educational policy: it has implications for unemployment/employment policy, health policy, housing policy etc.

Nevertheless, unequal educational provision is frequently desirable as a remedial measure. The understanding of educational inequality has moved from seeing it as a *deficiency* in the particular child, to seeing it as a *difference* between children because of social background, to seeing it as a problem which begins in the *community* and must be tackled at this level. Where the source of the problem is perceived to be located has determined the policy response (Kellaghan, 1993). The school, the family and the community have increasingly come to be seen as of equal importance in determining educational inequality. Education is now seen as a process which takes place both within and beyond the school. Educational experiences come from formal schooling, the family and the community and students who are educationally disadvantaged have been exposed to inappropriate educational experiences in at least one of these three educational domains (Pallas *et al.*, 1989, p.16). The need to tackle educational disadvantage in all three domains is widely accepted.

In general, education has become more accessible and has led to an enormous improvement in the educational level of the average citizen. It is not self-evident however that this development has benefited the disadvantaged classes more than the privileged. It is clear too that increased participation rates do not necessarily produce a reduction in inequalities of outcome. Educational qualifications increasingly determine one's class position and life chances. In this way class inequalities have remained stubbornly entrenched (Whelan, 1993; Hannan, 1992; Breen, 1984). In assessing equality of educational opportunity, the emphasis has moved from inputs (i.e. curricular provision, pupil teacher ratio, investment in equipment) to the *effects* of these inputs (i.e. to what extent have they altered the class link to educational attainment and outcome). Even if equality of opportunity is assumed, equality of educational outcomes cannot be expected, given differences in ability, preference, motivation etc. It is very noticeable, however, and this is clearly true in the Irish case, that differences in educational outcomes are related to class origins. Furthermore, the effects of failure are more pronounced in Ireland, since our higher levels of youth unemployment have increased the significance of educational qualifications.

Educationally disadvantaged young people are usually considered to be those who have difficulty acquiring numeracy and literacy skills, with low concentration and performance levels and who perform poorly in or fail exams, or drop out before sitting examinations. There is a general view that disadvantage refers to poor performers, low achievers or those who have not attained high grades. These young people subsequently have difficulties integrating into the labour market and making a successful transition to adulthood. The preparation of young people to perform well in examinations, however, is not the only aim or objective of formal education. The development and enhancement of social and life skills, the development of citizenship and individual and personal development are some of the other stated aims and also affect the successful transition to adulthood. There is not the same perception of educational disadvantage, however, if a young person who scores highly in examinations has very poor social skills and limited social interaction. The responsibility of the school is generally seen to be confined to educational attainment in a narrower sense. Insofar as recent educational strategies include the family and community to a greater extent, it is with the intention of improving school participation and performance.

Policy on educational disadvantage requires an assessment of the most appropriate and effective intervention strategies. The following sections detail a variety of initiatives and projects which target individuals, the home, schools and the community through a variety of measures including financial support, motivational incentives, additional resources and attempts to create a more favourable and positive educational milieu. The current favoured strategy is the home/school/community approach. There are many positive features to this approach, particularly the holistic view it takes of the child. In addition it treats the various parts of the process, from pre-school background to potential difficulties with education as part of the whole process. The approach is not without its critics and problems. A focus on disadvantaged areas will not reach many children who fail badly in education. Nor will it be able to tackle inter-school competition and selection policies (Hannan, 1992). There is a danger too that by focusing attention on the families and community, it will distract attention from the active role played by the school through its curricula, internal organisation, selection policies and pedagogical practice. A home/school/community linkage approach is most usefully seen as one aspect of an overall, diversified strategy to tackle educational disadvantage.

Policy decisions can be usefully informed by an assessment of previous strategies. This in turn can be helped by an understanding of the current policy objectives regarding educational disadvantage, set out in the next section.

## 2. POLICY OBJECTIVES REGARDING EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE

### (i) Primary Education

The aims and objectives of primary education are stated in the *Primary School Curriculum Teachers Handbook* (1971) and in the Department of Education's *Rules for National Schools*. Each will be briefly considered.

### (ii) The Primary School Curriculum

The launch of this curriculum heralded a radical shift in the ideological position and methodological approach to primary teaching (Coolahan, 1981) and it is still the reference point for practice today. The first chapter deals with the aims and functions of primary education. The aims of education are stated as:

1. To enable the child to live a full life as a child.
2. To equip him to avail himself of further education so that he may go on to live a full and useful life as an adult in society".<sup>24</sup>(p.12)

The aims neatly cover the twin objectives of the individual's development and enabling him/her to contribute to society.

*The Primary School Curriculum*, is in many respects a perceptive and far-reaching document. It makes the child, rather than the curriculum, the centre of education. It recognises that the manner and methods of teaching are at least as important as the subject matter of the curriculum. While concern has recently been expressed about the extent to which education seeks to develop citizenship (Lee, 1993, Hannan and Shortall, 1991) it is clearly discussed in *The Primary School Curriculum*.

It acknowledges too that "children of widely varying natural endowment and cultural background" (p.13) will have varying needs and capabilities. The conclusion from this is that "the curriculum should be sufficiently flexible to allow each child to progress at an appropriate pace and to achieve satisfaction and success at his own level" (p.19). It is recognised that the full development of the child does not take place in isolation (p.13). These observations are the basis of a discussion about

24 The Gender biased language of the *Primary School Curriculum* is noted by the Council. It is presumed that this bias reflects the time the handbook was written and it is presumed too that, like current education documents, future primary school documents will continue to correct this oversight.

educational disadvantage which is not developed. A flexible curriculum is seen as the means of addressing natural and social differences.

*The Primary School Curriculum* contains a specific discussion of the different approach necessary for infant classes, which are, technically, pre-school classes. The importance for this age group of learning through play, games, story-telling, drama and music is underlined.

### (iii) Rules for National Schools

The Department of Education's *Rules for National Schools* also contain some discussion of the aims and objectives of primary education. Essentially, this amounts to quoting Article 42 and 44. 2.4 of the Constitution. In pursuance of the provisions of these Articles the State provides for free primary education for children in national schools, and gives explicit recognition to the denominational character of these schools (*Rules for National Schools*, p.7/8). The primary role of the parent as educator is recognised, with the State assuming a guardian role to ensure that children receive a "minimum" education, moral, intellectual and social. It is not clear what constitutes a "minimum". Further insight into the aims and objectives of primary education can be deduced from the chapter on rules for teachers (see Chapter XIV, *Rules for National Schools*):<sup>25</sup>

*The Rules for National Schools* are mostly concerned with the technical and administrative details of running primary schools. Throughout, there is a general understanding that all children will receive fair and similar treatment in primary schools.

Both the *Primary School Curriculum* and *The Rules for National Schools* implicitly recognise that schools encounter children of varying ability and from varying socially disadvantaged backgrounds. There is however no overt discussion of how best to meet the needs of these children or of the demands they place on national schools.

25 4."Rule 121.

(2) Teachers should pay the strictest attention to the morals and general conduct of their pupils, to the development of a patriotic spirit and outlook and lose no opportunity of inculcating the principles of truth, temperance, unselfishness and politeness, and regard for property, whether public or private.

(3) Teachers should promote both by precept and example, cleanliness, neatness and decency. They must, therefore, set an example of cleanliness and neatness in their own persons, and in the state and general appearance of their schools" (p.71).

### (iv) Post-Primary Education

A discussion of the aims and objectives of post-primary education is more complex than for primary education since there are different school types which have different aims and objectives (Secondary/Vocational/Community and Comprehensive). This is further complicated by the fact that any one school type, i.e. Secondary, is not necessarily homogenous in its aims and objectives.

The aims and objectives of the Junior Certificate are stated as follows in *Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools 1987/88 to 1991/92*:

The purpose of the Junior Certificate course is to provide a well-balanced, general education suitable for pupils who leave full-time education at about 16 years of age or, alternatively, who wish to enter on more advanced courses of study.

The statement is both brief and vague. "Well-balanced" and "general" are not defined.

The aims and objectives of the Leaving Certificate are stated in a similar brief, and rather vague way:

The aim and purpose of the Leaving Certificate course is to prepare pupils for immediate entry into open society or for proceeding to further education. The examination is mainly a test of achievement. Employers and others wishing to use it for selection purposes are advised to institute their own supplementary tests, which should assess aptitude rather than achievement. High standards will be set in the Leaving Certificate Examination and it is strongly recommended that pupils should not be presented in too many subjects -not more than seven in any case.

It is primarily a test of achievement which is differentiated from aptitude, but how or why is not explained. The Leaving Certificate programme is considered adequate preparation for entry to open society, although it is emphasised that schools *do not* prepare or certify directly for employment. In the light of this brief review of stated objectives, the following sections review strategies at each level which address the problems of educational disadvantage.

### 3. PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION

Much research has suggested that pre-school and early school attendance are the most important target areas when addressing educational disadvantage. It has been argued that to enhance equality of opportunity, public intervention should concentrate on the pre-primary and primary levels. The consequences of inadequate schooling at these levels probably cannot be rectified and certainly cannot be rectified at any reasonable cost at later stages (Tussing, 1981). Addressing the problems of early and unqualified school leavers, Damian Hannan has pointed out:

While we have got very worried about these young people when they reach 15 or 16, we have continued to ignore the genesis of the problem as it arises at ages 4 to 8, or 9 or 14. It would in fact be cheaper, and is likely to be more effective in the long-run, to intervene at an early age (Hannan, 1986, p.45).

The OECD has observed that pre-primary education

may either be part-time or full-time and can cover young children participating in a programme intended to foster learning, and emotional and social development. Pre-primary education is not compulsory in most countries. Students enrolled in schools or programmes organised by ministries other than Education (for example, Health or Social Affairs) are included, if the educational development of the pupils is the main objective. Day nurseries, childcare centres and similar institutions that predominantly provide custodial care are not included. (*Education at a Glance*, OECD, 1992, p.141)

Total participation figures mask a variety of important factors, such as variations in the significance of private and part-time provision.

Ireland provides very well for her pre-school children in some respects. It is available to all children through public primary schools, hence private fees are not a barrier to participation. Indeed, junior and senior infant classes are so accepted in Ireland as part of the primary system of education that their pre-primary status is often overlooked. Pre-primary schooling is provided on a full-time basis through public schools by fully trained primary teachers. This latter factor is another feature which suggests the high quality of Irish pre-school provision.

Discussion of pre-school programmes in Ireland generally refer to programme before the child enters the formal school system, i.e. prior to entry to junior infants.

TABLE 5.1  
Percentage Enrolled in Pre-primary Education at Typical  
Starting and Ending Ages

	Starting Age		Ending Age	
	Typical Age	% of Children (NER)	Typical Age	% of Children (NER)
1 year duration				
Canada	5	71.4	5	71.4
Denmark	6	86.1	6	86.1
Norway	6	64.8	6	64.8
Sweden	6	98.1	6	98.1
2 years duration				
Ireland	4	53.6	5	97.5
Luxembourg	4	63.5	5	98.3
Netherlands	4	98.5	5	99.7
Switzerland	5	67.1	6	78.1
United Kingdom	3	40.0	4	59.0
3 years duration				
Austria	3	28.5	5	92.3
Belgium	3	93.4	5	98.2
France	3	96.3	5	99.8
Germany	3	32.3	5	85.4
Italy	3	—	5	—
Japan	3	17.4	5	64.5
New Zealand	2	8.9	4	71.8
Portugal	3	16.9	5	38.3
Spain	3	17.8	5	102.7
Turkey	4	—	6	—
United States	3	28.3	5	87.2
4 years duration				
Finland	3	19.4	6	54.6

**TABLE 5.2**  
**Ratio of Pre-primary Enrolment to Population in**  
**Typical Age Group (1988)**

	Participation in pre-primary education (in %) (GER)				
	Public & Private	Public	Private	Full-time	Part-time
1 year duration					
Canada	125.3	120.4	4.9	0.0	125.3
Denmark	96.8	88.1	8.7	96.8	0.0
Norway	208.5	133.6	74.8	98.4	110.0
Sweden	98.1	98.1	0.0	98.1	0.0
2 years duration					
Ireland	105.9	104.6	1.3	105.9	0.0
Luxembourg	98.1	98.1	0.0	98.1	0.0
Netherlands	99.2	30.9	68.3	99.2	0.0
Switzerland	88.4	83.8	4.6	88.4	0.0
United Kingdom	48.3	45.3	3.0	24.3	24.0
3 years duration					
Austria	70.8	52.3	18.5	70.8	0.0
Belgium	105.0	44.1	60.9	105.0	0.0
France	111.6	97.9	13.7	111.6	0.0
Germany	92.9	30.7	62.2	92.9	0.0
Italy	87.2	60.5	26.6	87.2	0.0
Japan	46.4	10.8	35.6	46.4	0.0
New Zealand	40.8	40.7	0.2	0.0	40.8
Portugal	28.8	12.9	15.9	28.8	0.0
Spain	72.6	45.7	27.0	72.6	0.0
Turkey	2.8	2.6	0.2	2.8	0.0
United States	60.5	39.1	21.4	21.6	39.0
4 years duration					
Finland	31.9	29.5	2.4	31.9	0.0

**Source:** OECD (1992), *Education at a Glance*. Ireland is quite unusual in that pre-primary education is provided as part of the formal primary system of education. Table 5.1 shows the typical starting and ending ages and percentages enrolled in pre-primary education in OECD member countries.

(i) **The Rutland Street Project**

In Ireland the recognition of the importance of pre-school intervention as an essential ingredient in long-term policy to combat a range of educational and social problems is deep-rooted (Holland, 1979, p.96). A pre-school was established in 1969 for children aged 3 to 4 years in Rutland Street, a disadvantaged inner city area. A major aim of the pre-school was to assist children in developing their cognitive skills and by so doing, prepare them for the work of primary school (Kellaghan and Greaney, 1993). The Rutland Street Area was chosen for this project, because teachers in the district had repeatedly claimed that existing educational procedures failed to meet the needs of children. Tests recorded low IQ scores and scholastic performance was several years below the norm. In response a pre-school was established which engaged in various types of special education, tried varied teaching strategies and aimed at increased parental involvement (Holland, 1979). While the evaluation only lasted 5 years, a pre-school is still in operation in Rutland Street.

The 5-year evaluation covered the 2 years children spent in pre-school and their first 3 years in primary school.<sup>26</sup> Findings indicated that children made good progress during their attendance at the pre-school centre but tended to drop back in primary school. In primary school there was not the same intensive effort to accommodate the socially disadvantaged backgrounds of the children. While early intervention may achieve some measure of success, sustained sensitivity and flexibility of teaching methods is necessary. At secondary school level curricula are dominated by public examinations and children who attended the Rutland Street project and got as far as secondary level, were unlikely to find any serious attempts to meet their special needs (Kellaghan and Greaney, p.25). The evaluation also underlined the limited value of a single intervention for children in an environment with a multitude of problems.

The Education Research Centre, which carried out the evaluation, remained in contact with the participants in the study and monitored their later educational careers, work experiences, leisure activities and social deviance (Kellaghan and Greaney, 1993). There were few differences in terms of work experience, leisure activities and social deviance compared to non-participants. There were however differences between programme participants and non-participants in two important areas:

<sup>26</sup> See Holland (1979), Kellaghan (1977) and Kellaghan and Greaney (1993) for complete accounts of the project and evaluations.

first, participants stayed longer at school and secondly a greater proportion of them took public examinations.

The potential for pre-school to impact on social disadvantage continues to be debated. Evidence suggests that the potential impact of pre-school is greatest when it is part of a wider and continuing strategy.

## (ii) Pre-School Playgroups

The Principal mode of provision of pre-school facilities at present is through the voluntary and community sector. The Irish pre-school Playgroups Association (IPPA) was set up in 1969 to "promote the value and importance of good quality play experience in the early years of a child's developments" (IPPA Response to the Green Paper on Education, February 1993). Some of the group's activities have included developing short training courses and seminars for playleaders, issuing recommendations on premises, equipment and a code of standards. Special provision is made for pre-schools catering for children of the travelling community. There are now 53 such pre-schools which are located in the voluntary sector, with tuition funded by the Department of Education.

The benefits of pre-school participation include the role of pre-school experience in developing concentration, self-confidence and self-esteem in young children, traits frequently underdeveloped in socially disadvantaged children. A community-based approach to pre-school provision encourages the involvement of parents in day-to-day provision of facilities for their children. This can provide an opportunity for a painless return to education for some adults. The arguments for pre-school provision include the knowledge that a child learns most during the first 5 years of life and learns best through experiment and experience. This potential requires an appropriate structuring and training to be realised in full. It is noteworthy in this regard that the pupil/teacher ratio for infant classes is considerably higher than that recommended for playgroups, where the maximum number is 20 with an adult/child ratio of 1:8.

The suitability of formal teaching practices and a classroom setting for infant classes has been questioned by teachers themselves. A survey of teachers of junior grades carried out by O'Rourke and Archer in 1980-81 revealed that infant education is a good deal more formal than many teachers consider desirable. Pressures to implement particular school policies (e.g. to cover set readers), class size, unsuitability of accommodation and the absence of suitable materials are factors

influencing the implementation of more informal teaching practice (O'Rourke and Archer, 1987, p.78).

## (iii) Discussion

Given that participation in pre-school is not compulsory, parents may choose to avail of it or not, they may prefer private to public (if available) provision or they may opt for child-care facilities when they are not providing this themselves. Frequently parents opt for a combination of all those options. Some parents, particularly those from socially disadvantaged situations, may not have any of these options. Selective provision to address disadvantage at the earliest juncture is necessary in these situations. New education structures, similar to those in the expanded home/school/community liaison project should be given this task, drawing on previous experience of addressing this kind of disadvantage at primary level.

The Council considers that there is a need for a more developed public policy position on pre-school provision and on the role of promotional bodies, such as the IPPA. While the IPPA does provide training, there is no recognised qualification for playleaders. In effect this means that, while the importance of pre-school education is widely accepted, there is no necessary recognised qualification. The Council believes that a basic requirement to facilitate progress in this regard is for the respective roles of the Department of Health and the Department of Education concerning pre-school facilities to be clarified, not least having regard to the relevant provisions of the Child Care Act, 1991.

## 4. PRIMARY EDUCATION

Research has clearly indicated the importance of targeting strategies to deal with educational disadvantage at this level, and discriminating positively in terms of resources and finances in favour of primary schools (Hannan, 1986; Breen, 1990; Tussing, 1981). For example, research has shown the level of maladjustment (emotional disorders, anxiety, depression, conduct disorders) of primary school children to be much lower in more affluent school settings, and this has obvious implications for educational attainment (McCarthy and O'Boyle, 1986). *The most effective distribution of resources between the various levels of education in terms of addressing educational disadvantage is a central policy concern.* This is a question which will be returned to below. It is sufficient to note here that the importance of a well funded primary system of education is well established.



Despite the relatively low comparative expenditure per primary student (OECD, 1992), there is evidence of both long-standing and more recent (albeit somewhat unco-ordinated) initiatives at the primary level which attempt to deal with educational disadvantage. There are some schemes intended to assist lower socio-economic groups with the cost of "free" education.

(i) Assistance Schemes

(a) School Books

While provision of school books is primarily the responsibility of parents, school books schemes have been in operation since the early 1900s. Schools get some funding from the Department of Education, to alleviate the cost of books to needy pupils, and the majority of schools raise additional funding privately. Applications for "free" books or book rental must be made to the principal of the school and she or he is responsible for distributing the grants to necessitous pupils in strict confidence. Recently some principals have requested applicants to obtain certificates from community welfare officers as evidence of means. Many principal teachers are uneasy about the administration of this scheme (Coolahan, 1981) and a study in Co. Limerick<sup>27</sup> showed that many eligible families in the study sample did not avail of it because of confusion or misinformation (PAUL Research Report, 1991). Claimants were also uneasy about the discretionary nature of the books scheme, school meals scheme and clothing and footwear scheme. The discretionary nature of the scheme appeared to evoke a sense of receiving charity in recipients.

Changes were proposed for the process by which schools receive allocations under the Grant Scheme for schools books for needy pupils for the school year 1993/94. This reflected the Department of Education's concern that the rather loose criteria in operation to date have led to a lack of uniformity of the interpretation by schools of which children are needy. As a result schools vary widely in the proportions of their pupils claimed for as needy pupils, even where schools serve the same or similar communities. In the event, the parameters of the scheme have remained unchanged. There remain, therefore, significant

<sup>27</sup> Research project carried out by PAUL (People Action Against Unemployment Ltd.), a Limerick city-based model action project in the third EC Anti-Poverty Programme. 99 low income families with school-going children were interviewed.

problems to be addressed in the future operation of this important provision of support for pupils from low-income households.

(b) School Meals

The school meals scheme reflects an awareness that adequate nutrition is essential to educational equality.<sup>28</sup> If children receive insufficient food, they may be unable to take full advantage of the education provided. Like the school books scheme, this scheme began in 1914. The Irish school meals service was closely modelled on the British statute. The policy and objectives of the Irish service were not clearly worked out in advance of the framing of the legislation and this is reflected in many current problems (Carney, 1985). The scheme, mainly available in urban and Gaeltacht areas, has remained virtually unaltered and is now widely regarded as out of date. Some confusion applies to the issues of responsibility for the provision of school meals, methods of identifying those in need of such provision and the most efficient and non-discriminatory system of delivery, yet these are some of the features essential to the success of this kind of scheme. In addition, the decision to avail of the scheme rests with the school authorities and parents may be unaware of the possibility of availing of such a provision and have no channel for the redress of grievances (Carney, 1985).

"School meals scheme" is a misnomer, since the food provided is not a "meal", rather it is meant to supplement meals and restore the children's energy at a time of the day when it may run low. The food provided is usually milk or cocoa, and a bun or sandwich. The Department of Social Welfare sanctions applications for school meals which are provided by local authorities. School principals circulate forms to pupils and parents are expected to return these to the local authority. Parents must provide details of school-going children and income and have their weekly income certified by an employer. The application process for school meals is administratively complex, and many recipients in the PAUL study consider the food provided to be inadequate and end up trying to provide full meals anyway (PAUL Research Report, 1991).

(c) Clothing

A "back to school" clothing and footwear scheme was introduced in 1990 for families who receive supplementary welfare allowance or

<sup>28</sup> In *The Rules for National Schools*, Chapter XXI deals with school health services and the provision of meals.

social welfare benefit or assistance payments. Applications are made to the Community Welfare Officer at local health centres.

(ii) **Pilot Projects**

Following the Rutland Street project described earlier, there were a number of studies of disadvantage at primary level. While these were not as extensive as the Rutland Street Project, they too suggest relevant policy considerations. One of these was carried out in Limerick in 1972 and involved a comparison of different types of educational treatment for disadvantaged children at the primary level. Forty-eight children with poor scholastic records were selected from the middle standards of a boys' school serving a disadvantaged area, and randomly divided into three groups of sixteen. One of these groups formed a special class with a full-time teacher. The members of a second group remained in their ordinary class, from which they withdrew at stated periods for special instruction in reading and mathematics. (The teacher was providing the same kind of instruction for 32 other children in addition to those included in the study). The third group adhered to its usual class, receiving no special help.

At the end of two years, no significant difference was found between the performance of the special class group and the withdrawal group, although both groups, as expected, performed better than the group which had not received any special treatment. If the results of the study vindicate the strategy of special educational provision they also, and more interestingly, demonstrate that there may be little to choose between the effects of providing additional help on the basis of short periods of withdrawal from the normal class and those of the much more expensive special class treatment (Kellaghan, 1974).

(iii) **Disadvantaged Schools Scheme**

One of the most significant recent developments addressing disadvantage at primary level was a scheme of special funding for schools in designated areas of disadvantage, initiated in 1984. This scheme now includes a total of 258 schools. It is interesting to note that identification at primary level is on an *area* basis. Children are too young to have "dropped out" and there are no public exams they can have failed. *Social disadvantage* is taken as the means of identifying *educational disadvantage*. At this stage it is the home and community context which is the primary determinant of educational success or failure and provides the indicators used to determine which schools should receive targeted support. Schools are designated to be in a disadvantaged area by a number of social indicators such as:

- (1) whether or not the children's families live in rented Local Authority accommodation;
- (2) the number of unemployed families with children in the school; and
- (3) the number who are covered by medical cards.
- (4) Assessment of need by school inspectors.

Under this scheme, per capita grants were paid to primary schools for the purchase of books and equipment and for home/school/community liaison, money was allocated to defray school management debts, and in-service training for teachers in designated areas of disadvantage was funded and organised. The scheme currently provides 275 ex-quota teaching posts on extra financial assistance at the rate of £17 per pupil. This scheme was surveyed by the Department in 1985/86 and again in 1987/88 and the results of the two surveys were very similar. Principals and Chairpersons of Boards of Management asserted that the grant for books and equipment had made a tremendous practical and psychological difference to the schools and they argued that the grants should continue. However, there was great disparity in practice in the area of home/school/community liaison. The wide diversity of schemes varied from the extremely sophisticated in some areas to barely discernible initiatives in others. The 1987/88 report recommended, *inter alia*, that a scheme of home/school/ community liaison be piloted.

(iv) **Home/School/Community Liaison Project**

In 1990 there was a 300% increase in the budgetary allocation to alleviate the educational effects of disadvantage in the primary sector. In the same year, a major home/school/community liaison project was launched. This was initially geared at primary school students in certain areas that suffer a high degree of disadvantage. The aims of the scheme are:-

- (i) to maximise active participation of the children in the project schools in the learning process, in particular those who might be at risk;
- (ii) to promote active co-operation between home, school and the relevant community agencies in promoting the educational interests of the children;

- (iii) to develop parents' awareness of their own capacities to enhance their children's educational process and to assist them develop relevant skills; and
- (iv) to disseminate the positive outcomes of the project throughout the school system generally.

Seven clusters with a total of 55 primary schools, which were already in the general grants scheme for designated areas of disadvantage, were chosen and 30 co-ordinators were assigned to them. The co-ordinators were replaced in their "base" schools with temporary teachers.

Initial planning of the scheme began in May 1990 and the first co-ordinators took up full-time duty on 1st November of that year. The co-ordinators have received significant training. It is not clear to what extent the teaching staff in the participating schools have received training or support. Schools are now allowed one half day staff meeting per academic year on the basis that home/school liaison will be the focus of the meeting. The project is overseen by a National Steering Committee (representing managers, teachers, parents, Garda Siochana and Departments of Education and Health).

The home/school/community liaison scheme has been extended horizontally and vertically. The horizontal extension at primary level was implemented in the same way as the appointment of the original co-ordinators and brings the number of co-ordinators in primary schools to 60, the number of primary schools in the scheme to 106, and the total enrolment in the schools now involved is in excess of 33,000 pupils. A number of schools at post-primary level, which serve the same families as are served by primary schools in the liaison scheme, were identified. Sixteen of these schools were invited to join the scheme by assigning a concessionary post for schools in disadvantaged areas to full-time liaison. Thirteen of the schools accepted the invitation and were given funding for an extra 14 teaching hours each per week on this basis. However, during their first year in the scheme, only four co-ordinators were assigned to full-time liaison work. This extension to post-primary level necessitated the extension of the National Steering Committee to include second level professional and administrative representation from the Department of Education and post-primary representation from teacher unions, management and the National Parents Council. Thirteen post-primary schools joined the scheme in November 1992 and a further 12 were invited to join in September bringing the total to 38.

This is a far-sighted project in its recognition of the crucial role played by family and home background in shaping the extent of educational opportunity. It aims to encourage active co-operation between the home, the school and other community agencies. It aims too at encouraging and equipping parents to support their children's education. Research suggests that the project should have great potential to tackle educational inequality. Initial evidence suggests, as might be expected, that there is some variance in the operation of the project in different areas. In the light of this, combined with the considerable resources an undertaking like this demands, it is essential to have close evaluation of the scheme at all stages. It is essential to identify and monitor the potential and limitations of this approach in order to capitalise on the benefits and to provide resources, training and support services where necessary. The Council notes that during the first three years of operation, the scheme has been evaluated by the Educational Research Centre.

(v) **Discussion of Policy Issues at Primary Level**

The effective identification of disadvantage is central to tackling the problem. Until quite recently, early school drop-out was the most frequently used indicator of educational disadvantage. By this stage the young person had passed through primary school. There is no formal assessment of primary school children which might provide an alternative basis for identifying pupils suffering disadvantage. The question of formal assessment raises issues concerning access to the assessments, whether curricula will become assessment oriented and the extent to which assessment can draw on what teachers know about children experiencing difficulties. The targeting of resources and the design of appropriate policy is rendered much more difficult without informative, reliable and standard yardsticks.

The Home/School/Community liaison project has been an important, far-sighted initiative. It is necessary to identify and follow up on some of the insights of this project:

- » The importance of *continuity* is evident. The broadening of the scheme to include second-level schools was seen as a major advance and the introduction of pre-school provision in the areas has recently been announced.
- » The importance of *support services* has been underlined by experience to date. Frequently families and young people have social and economic problems beyond the boundaries of education which nonetheless impinge on educational performance.

» Furthermore, appropriate *in-service-training* for staff is essential.

One of the most positive features of the Home/School/Community liaison project is its area-based approach, since it recognises the wide range of factors beyond the school walls which affect education; i.e., family environment, parental involvement, housing facilities, community attitudes etc. However, other Department schemes, such as assistance with books, meals, etc. are broader in scope than the area-based projects and implicitly recognise that disadvantage exists on a much wider scale than in the few targeted areas. The Council believes that future policy measures must apply the lessons learned from the area-based projects to address disadvantage on a structural basis. Care must be taken that the area-based projects do *not* result in the view that all the problems and solutions are rooted in the area. Area-based difficulties compound systematic problems and area-based strategies can achieve a great deal in tackling such difficulties. However, this strategy alone cannot address structural problems and they must be addressed by different means and in a forum beyond the local area.

The Council notes that the additional resources provided to schools have been key to the success of the initiative. Care must be taken, however, to identify the *relative* value of these additional resources. Are schools in the project now better funded than their middle-class counterparts, or does the additional funding simply put them on par? It is important to consider *total* school resources in this respect.

Continuity, support services and in-service training are elements of the home/school/community project which have been important in the success of the project to date. The Council believes that a local structure dealing with all levels of education would make it easier to facilitate the *continuity* of sensitive educational treatment of disadvantaged young people as they move through the system. It could also allow the wider availability of *support services* to schools. A number of schools in a given locality may individually have insufficient numbers of disadvantaged young people to receive specific school support and it may not constitute a disadvantaged area. However, if support services are co-ordinated at a local level, these schools and the particular students will benefit from such services. More widescale provision of *in-service training* for primary teachers in strategies for meeting the needs of disadvantaged children is essential in order to equip members of the teaching profession, who are the most important professionals in this instance, to deal with the problem.

## 5. POST-PRIMARY EDUCATION

### (i) Introduction

In this section the main policy initiatives addressing educational disadvantage at post-primary level are detailed. Special education provision (for pupils with disabilities) is also discussed. It is not appropriate to consider special education provision for primary and second level students separately since provision is not divided in this way. Hence it is addressed within the framework of the overall provision of special education. The variety of measures and strategies at post-primary level, some of very recent origin, is such that their scope and impact are not widely known. It is therefore useful to review them in some detail. The discussion here is confined to policies and services developed within the educational system only. Policy issues common to the various levels are evident and these will be addressed in Chapter 6, which outlines the Council's policy recommendations.

### (ii) Youth Encounter Project (YEP'S)

The Youth Encounter Projects were set up in the late 1970s and are funded by the Department of Education. There are four YEPs (two in Dublin, one in Cork and one in Limerick). Each YEP caters for roughly 25-30 students, aged between 10-16 years. The pupil:teacher ratio is much more favourable than in typical schools; for example in the Rutland Street YEP, there are 27/28 students and four teachers, which gives a PTR of 7:1. The students are young people who have not been able to cope in ordinary schools. Referrals usually come from the courts, social workers, school attendance officers or principals of other schools who may otherwise be required to suspend the student.

The YEPs operate in separate premises to the schools in the area. They have a board of management which includes a Department Inspector, and representatives of referral schools. YEP teachers are trained primary school teachers. Some have completed a one year Special Education Course in addition to their primary school teacher training, although this is not essential. Two years of special education experience as a permanent teacher is a requirement for entry to the Special Education Course. Schools or YEPs cannot therefore insist on teachers having special education training, since this would mean that teachers could not acquire the necessary teaching experience in order to be trained. The situation is even more complex for teachers employed on a temporary basis, who may have up to six years special education teaching experience, but are still ineligible for the course.

YEPs have the services of a full time community worker, who actively develops home/school links. The community worker is also responsible for the after-care programme. For two years following the YEP, contact is maintained with the young people. The curriculum is tailored to the special needs of the students, and the main emphasis is on literacy and numeracy. The YEPs are scheduled to be reviewed by the Department before the end of 1993.

### (iii) Youthreach

The 1983 EC Council Resolution on Vocational Training Policy guaranteed access for unemployed school leavers to full time programmes of basic training and work experience. This has come to be known as the "Social Guarantee" and was launched in Ireland in 1985. The Social Guarantee is aimed particularly at two groups of school leavers: those who leave without any qualifications, who are the main Priority Group (PG1) and those who leave at or about Junior Certificate standard, Priority Group two (PG2). Since 1985, all second-level schools have supplied their local FS office, twice a year, with the names and addresses of young people who have left school at the relevant stages. A register is maintained, the target group are identified from this and recruited accordingly.

YOUTHREACH, in operation since 1989, is aimed specifically at those early school leavers who are referred to as Priority Group 1 (PG1 of the Social Guarantee). YOUTHREACH is co-ordinated by the Departments of Education and Labour. It is implemented by the VECs and FS in designated areas. Areas for location of YOUTHREACH are chosen by identifying schools with a high incidence of early school leaving, within boundaries served by FS Employment Services Offices. The target group are young people who are typically at least six months in the labour market, are between 15 and 18 years of age, have left the school system without formal qualifications or vocational training and have not yet secured full-time employment.

YOUTHREACH is a two year initiative, with the foundation year and the progression year having separate sets of objectives. The programme content of the foundation year includes core elements of basic life skills, general education and practical work training. This year is intended to meet the personal and social development needs of the participants, and to provide some of the competencies necessary for work and adult living (O'Connell and Stokes, 1989). The programme reflects the particular area in which it exists and the needs of the participants, hence YOUTHREACH programmes may differ in content. The progression

year is for those who have not found employment after the foundation year. This year accommodates them by helping them move into a specific employable skills course, or into a temporary employment scheme or the Community Youth Training programme.

There are currently 101 YOUTHREACH Centres distributed between 50 VEC Centres, 45 Community Training Workshops and 6 FS-Department of Justice workshops. Programmes are located in a variety of settings: disused school premises, factory buildings and commercial premises. There is a consensus that school has not been a happy experience for the participants and that the YOUTHREACH programme should take place in a different setting. YOUTHREACH has been successful in attracting participants — in 1991 3,336 young people entered the programme while the total number of unqualified early school leavers for the same year is estimated at approximately 4,500.

While there can be little doubt about the value of the YOUTHREACH initiative, a number of problems have also emerged. One such issue is the existence of different resourcing arrangements for the VEC YOUTHREACH programmes and the Community Training Workshop (CTW) programmes. The YOUTHREACH Programme receives 65% of its funding from the European Social Fund and the remainder from the Department of Education (VECs) and the Department of Labour (CTWs). The CTWs are provided with funding for teaching of literacy hours in addition to the YOUTHREACH funding. The VEC YOUTHREACH programmes however, must pay for their literacy teaching hours from within their YOUTHREACH budget. Other problems have arisen from the differences in staff/trainee ratio between FS-funded and VEC-run workshops (and from the emergence of different pay scales for staff). The progression year has also turned out to be problematic. Concern has been expressed that more participants do not move into mainstream FS courses after the foundation year, with the implication that greater flexibility and adaptability is necessary to ensure that courses meet more effectively the needs of young people by the end of the first year. In practice, many trainees spend two years in the foundation programme.

There are also difficulties of certification and accreditation for YOUTHREACH. It is generally accepted that the certificate currently awarded to participants carries limited credibility, and that it should be more closely linked into a ladder of certification which would allow for more mobility and progression (NCVA Report, October 1992). However, participants may face a disincentive to return to education

following a YOUTHREACH programme. Unless these young people find employment, they have no source of income since they are too young to receive unemployment assistance. If they return to education after the YOUTHREACH programmes they lose the training allowance, which is a major incentive to enrol in a YOUTHREACH programme.

In 1990, 1,324 of the 3,245 young people who started the YOUTHREACH programme in 1989 dropped out. This is quite a substantial proportion. Table 5.3 indicates the reasons why a sample of these young people left the course.

The difficulties of interpreting the statistical reports are obvious when visiting a YOUTHREACH training centre. The young trainees have a myriad of problems. Many have been in trouble with the law, have engaged in drug and alcohol abuse, come from deprived home environments or are homeless. In addition they are a diverse group and vary widely in their degree and type of social and educational disadvantage. Any evaluation of the impact of programmes such as YOUTHREACH must take account of the great difficulties faced by the young participants and their trainers. If standard assessment criteria are used to evaluate the "success" of an initiative based on an entirely different philosophy and dealing with a very different clientele group, there is a serious danger of underestimating the success and value of the programme.

**TABLE 5.3**  
**Destination of Students Leaving Youthreach Programmes**

PLANS	TOTAL%	TOTAL
Start Employment	46	37.1
School	9	7.3
Training	7	5.6
Nothing	55	44.4
Looking for Work	1	0.8
Emigration	4	3.2
Jail Sentence	1	0.8
Not Stated	1	0.8
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: YOUTHREACH Annual Report, 1990.

**(iv) Vocational Preparation and Training (VPT) Programmes**

One of the first major initiatives *within* school aimed at young people experiencing difficulty moving from school to the world of work was the pre-employment course launched in 1977. This course was confined to vocational, community and comprehensive schools and was designed for students who would have left school on reaching the school-leaving age but who returned to school because of failure to find employment. Up to 1983, when the programme ended, about 120 schools had been involved (Kellaghan and Lewis, 1991).

Pre-employment courses extended into what are known now as vocational preparation and training programmes in 1984 and were extended to a number of secondary schools. VPT, directed at 15-18 year olds, was presented as part of the Department of Education's response to the social guarantee provision for early school leavers and was aimed at Priority Group 2 (PG2), those who leave at or about junior certificate standard. (This provision has also been discussed in Chapter 4). It is 65% funded by the European Social Fund, with the remainder paid by the Department of Education. It was introduced as a one-year full-time programme with three curricular areas: vocational studies, preparation for working life and general studies. In its first year of operation (1984-1985), a total of 322 schools serving approximately 15,000 students, participated in what is now known as VPT1 (Kellaghan and Lewis, p.11). By 1991-1992, this figure had fallen to 240 schools serving 5,879 students (NCVA, 1992). The decrease in participation is partly related to the increased retention of students in the senior cycle. Many VPT1 participants are students who have not performed well in the traditional educational system and have either not obtained or barely obtained the junior certificate. The changing youth labour market situation means far fewer VPT1 graduates find employment than those who completed the earlier pre-employment course. Many VPT1 students go into further training of some sort.

In 1985, a second year VPT2, was added to the vocational preparation and training programme. VPT2 serves older students at a higher educational level. In theory there can be movement from VPT1 to VPT2, but in practice VPT2 has become a post Leaving Certificate option and there is an expectation by providers that students will have sat the Leaving Certificate (Stokes and O'Dwyer, 1992). Table 5.4 shows the total number of VPT participants. Table 5.5 shows a breakdown for 1991/1992 of VPT1 students and VPT2 students.

**TABLE 5.4**  
**VPT Programme No. of Schools by School Type Offering VPT Programme and No. of Pupils per School**

	Community/ Comprehensive	Vocational	Secondary	Secondary Tops	Total
1988/89: no. of schools:	46	200	135	1	382
no. of pupils:	1,724	14,226	3,006	9	18,965
1989/90: no. of schools:	46	200	126	—	372
no. of pupils:	1,768	15,371	2,888	—	20,027
1990/91: no. of schools:	49	195	5123	—	367
no. of pupils:	1,730	16,05	2,691	—	20,476

**Note:** The Department is unable to provide a breakdown by VPT1 and VPT2.

**Source:** Department of Education, Statistics Division.

**TABLE 5.5**  
**VPT-1 1991/1992**

School Type	Number of Schools	Number of Participants	% of Participants
Vocational	115	3,176	54
Secondary	89	1,644	28
Community/ Comprehensive	36	1,059	18

**VPT-2 1991/1992**

School Type	Number of Schools	Number of Participants	% of Participants
Vocational	130	14,293	90
Secondary	31	786	5
Community/ Comprehensive	28	758	5

**Source:** National Council for Educational Awards (1992), *Preparing for the New Europe. A National Framework for Vocational Qualifications*, October.

Vocational schools are the main providers of the VPT programme and of VPT2 in particular. VPT2, also commonly known as PLCs (Post Leaving Certificate Courses) are intended to provide vocational education and training which will prepare young people for the world of work, and they are also frequently seen as a bridging course to further education.

Table 5.6 indicates the range of areas of study covered by VPT2. (It is important to note that the same course title in two different locations may constitute very different programmes).

**TABLE 5.6**  
**Summary of Participation in VPT-2 Programme 1991/1992 by Designation**

Designation	Secondary		Vocational		Comm/ Comp		Total		Total Overall
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Agriculture	12	223	92	67	0	0	104	290	394
Commerce	136	1185	1687	8581	37	945	1860	10711	12571
Computers	55	876	2355	6091	189	472	2599	7439	10038
Construction	44	9	314	105	0	0	358	114	472
Craft & Design	10	151	1014	1417	0	0	1024	1568	2592
Electronics	0	0	417	84	17	25	434	109	543
Engineering	27	0	823	153	34	12	884	165	1049
Media Studies	0	102	578	769	34	26	612	897	1509
Science	0	35	105	106	0	0	105	141	246
Services	29	256	1008	2946	22	90	1059	3292	4351
TOTAL	313	2837	8393	20319	333	1570	9039	24726	33765

**Source:** National Council for Educational Awards (1992), *Preparing for the New Europe. A National Framework for Vocational Qualifications*, October.

Some commentators have expressed concern at the confusion which has been generated by VPT2. The Establishment of the National Council for Vocational Awards (NCVA) in October 1991 was largely seen as a response to the wide range of vocational programmes which have emerged, and for which there is no comprehensive assessment and certification system. A recent NCVA report (*Preparing for the New*

Europe, 1992) details the problems and confusions. The PLCs are seen to represent an unofficial further education sector. However, there are no specific arrangements regarding teacher training or retraining for those who are engaged in new ways of teaching and assessing their students. Similarly there is no detailed information available about the structure of individual courses and there is a wide diversity in current practice (p.14). For example, although a VPT course is nominally 800 hours in duration, there is a wide variation in the duration of actual courses. Some do not run over a full 33 week school year, while others may be structured as two-year courses. There is no common approach to curriculum design, assessment or certification. As a result there can be no national system of quality control.

Another serious aspect is the level of student misunderstanding and confusion. The report points out that participants (and also parents and prospective employers) may have difficulty in measuring the relative worth of different qualifications within similar vocational areas. Because of this, many students may receive qualifications or certificates at the end of their courses which have little or no value in the employment market (p.15). A small number of mainly urban VEC areas account for about two thirds of the total participation in the VPT2 programme. This is considered to reflect a tendency for students at VPT2 level to travel to large urban centres to attend what they perceive as "college"-type further education. Another student problem which has emerged relates to gender. There is substantial evidence of sex-stereotyped choices in VPT2. This is evident in Table 5.6. Particularly noticeable are the high proportion of female participants in business courses and the high proportion of male participants in technology-based courses.

The VPT programme has, as Crooks (1990) points out, many positive and encouraging aspects. The massive response clearly indicates that it has tapped a need and desire for further training. It is important too because it has made a break with the manner in which, prior to this, post-primary level education has been presented. The policy adopted gave general guidelines and asked schools to respond with imagination and creativity and it encouraged differences at local level. In many respects, the response has been "outstanding" (Crooks, p.18). However, for the full value of the initiative to materialise, the perennial difficulties of striking a balance between pressures for centralisation and decentralisation must be addressed. Allowing greater regional and school flexibility will be most effective as part of a comprehensive overall framework of assessment and certification, accommodated by clear guidelines and common standards.

Many schools have sought external assessment and certification to supplement the Department's Certificate of Participation, which is seen as an inadequate record of achievement at the end of the course. As a response to these problems the NCVA has proposed a national system of vocational awards as outlined below and recently accepted by the Government. This framework is in line with current international practice and the awards will have recognition through EC arrangement for recognition of qualifications. Modular guidelines have been developed which allow for flexibility, ease of access and the possibility of progression and which proposes to develop high quality, standardised, nationally and internationally recognised systems of assessment and certification. The NCVA established five boards of studies covering the sectors of:

- » Art, Craft and Design;
- » Business and Administration;
- » Science, Technology and Natural Resources;
- » Services, Leisure and Tourism;
- » Communications, Performing Arts and General Studies.

The NCVA, through these boards, has developed a wide range of awards at National Vocational Certificate level 2 which will be conferred in Summer 1994. Candidates will have to reach a required standard in a minimum of 8 modules in order to obtain the award. The NCVA will make recommendations about the work experience component of level 2 awards later this year. Details of level 3 awards are expected in 1995.

(v) **Young Workers**

Ronayne (1993) draws attention to the position of early entrants to the labour market, those who leave after the junior certificate and who manage to get jobs. This group is much larger than those with no qualifications (13,000 : 4,500 (approx.)), yet they receive little attention because the type of problems they encounter as a result of their low level of education are less obvious than those of young people experiencing more obvious forms of disadvantage. For example, young offenders, truants, drop-outs, etc. are more visible groups at which to target provision. Ronayne indicates that in many circumstances early entry to the labour market leads to difficulties for young people: poor quality and unstable employment, low pay and unemployment. This group also have low participation in youth club and other youth service activities, since these tend to be targeted at school-going young people or those in more obvious high-risk groups.



**FIGURE 5.1**  
**Proposed Framework for Vocational Qualifications**

Access Routes	Programmes	Awards
<b>LEAVING CERTIFICATE</b>	LEVEL 5	NCEA or other Degree
	LEVEL 4	NCEA Diploma
	LEVEL 3 (Upper)	NCEA Certificate
<b>LEAVING CERTIFICATE</b>	LEVEL 3 (e.g. Extended VPT2 courses)	National Vocation Certificate Level 3
	LEVEL 2 (e.g. VPT2)	National Vocational Certificate Level 2
<b>JUNIOR CERTIFICATE (or equivalent)</b>	LEVEL 1 (e.g. VPT1)	National Vocational Certificate Level 1
<b>NO FORMAL QUALIFICATION</b>	FOUNDATION/ACCESS PROGRAMMES (e.g. Youthreach, Adult Education)	National Foundation Centre

Source: National Council for Educational Awards (1992), *Preparing for the New Europe, A National Framework for Vocational Qualifications*, October.

(vi) Systematic Disadvantage at the Post-Primary Level

(a) *Leaving Certificate Programme*

As noted in Chapter 1, a substantial proportion of the Leaving Certificate cohort can be regarded as disadvantaged. They have received an education with which they are dissatisfied, and which provides them with few employment and limited educational opportunities. Policy proposals must be sensitive to the particular problems of these groups, as well as those suffering more extreme forms of disadvantage.

It has been suggested that in the British system of education, egalitarianism was interpreted to mean that all students should be provided with the same educational diet (Bierhoff and Prais, 1993), despite the varying aptitudes and interests of students. It took the form of general academic education and Bierhoff and Prais comment on the extent to which straight-forward practical subjects have been transformed and intellectualised (p.65). Whether or not the same process has occurred in Ireland is debatable. However, it is true that, while the increased retention rates in the Dutch and Danish second level systems led to the growth of the vocational education sector, the reverse has been true in Ireland.

(b) *A New Curriculum at Senior Cycle*

Following NCCA proposals, a revised senior cycle programme is being introduced by the Department of Education. One of the objectives is to broaden the range of options available to young people. Increased retention rates have obliged the Leaving Certificate programme to accommodate a wider range of abilities and aptitudes than previously. Part of the rationale for the proposed changes is that the broader senior cycle will allow students to follow a new form of course within the Leaving Certificate programme. Students will now have the option of following an Applied Leaving Certificate programme. It has been stressed that the new programme is not a lower stream of the Leaving Certificate. Students will have the option of combining subjects from both programmes, although they are advised to take a selection of courses as an entire programme. A brief sketch of the antecedents of the new programme is useful in understanding recent developments.

*The Current Senior Certificate*

The new senior programme will subsume the current senior certificate and VPT1. VPT1 has already been discussed above. The

senior certificate was developed in the mid-1980s as part of an EC initiative. Its focus was on the transition from school to work, particularly for the weaker academic streams in secondary schools. It was very successful and was subsequently adopted by the Department of Education and continued as a pilot project. This programme was conceived as an *alternative* to the Leaving Certificate, not as a lower stream. The primary difference is not in the content, although it is quite different, but rather the teaching methodology and the approach to students. Subjects are not taught separately; rather the programme is based on a series of interlinked themes or topics. The programme includes one day of work experience per week. This is highly structured and attempts are made to provide work experience in three different settings. Neither students nor employers are subsidised for this. However, employers have been very co-operative and the smaller number of young people in year two of the senior cert is partly accounted for by the transition from work experience into employment by students in Year One (communication with the Department of Education). Where it is not possible to place a young person in work experience they work in "mini-companies", researching and making products which are then sold. The core programme comprises work and communication skills. Other elements include social and cultural studies, computer applications, food and agriculture, Irish, functional German and Spanish and general technology. Students work together in groups and take examinations administered by the Department of Education. Practical and oral assessment account for about 50% of the examination. Students are awarded a pass, pass with merit or a distinction. The following table shows the number in senior certificate during 1990/1991, 1992/93 (note that year one and year two are self-contained units).

No. of Participants in Senior Cycle Programme

	1991	1992	1993
Year One	938	839	1,152
Year Two	507	572	693

*The New Certificate*

The new programme will be introduced nationally as an interim provision in 1994 and following that as a longer term provision and will draw on the experience of the senior certificate. The senior

certificate courses differ from Leaving Certificate courses in a number of ways:

- (1) The Leaving Certificate will continue to be a two year programme, the present senior certificate courses are constructed on a one-year plus one-year basis, each year comprising a self-contained unit.
- (2) While it is possible to take a combination of senior and Leaving Certificate subjects, it is recommended by the NCCA that a selection of senior certificate courses should be taken as an entire programme, "with an ethos and integrity of its own" (NCCA, 1993, p.56).
- (3) The Leaving Certificate and senior certificate courses are graded differently and there is no equivalence. This means that students aiming towards university are unlikely to avail themselves of senior certificate courses since they will not provide the necessary points. There is a general recommendation by the NCCA that for the purposes of selection and the calculation of points, negotiations take place with appropriate colleges regarding the possibility of parity of certain senior course performance with certain Leaving Certificate course performance (NCCA, p.58).

It is not unusual that only particular post-primary streams lead to university education. This is clearly the situation in The Netherlands and Denmark, as shown in Chapter 4. The NCCA is very anxious that a new senior cycle programme does not become a poor relation to the Leaving Certificate and the Council is fully supportive of this view. However, it is the Council's view that there is a strong possibility that such will be the fate of an alternative programme to the Leaving Certificate, as experience with the pre-employment courses and the VPT programmes demonstrates, *unless it can be seen to lead to worthwhile employment prospects*. The Council is concerned that despite the availability of the new Applied Leaving Certificate programme, a substantial number of students will continue to choose mainly ordinary level Leaving Certificate courses. Research has shown the high dissatisfaction of these young people with their education and their restricted post-school options. This constitutes a major challenge for the new senior certificate programme.

It is the Council's opinion that non-university routes must be clearly, and possibly *exclusively*, linked into particular further education and training options. In other words, apprenticeships and further vocational education and training relevant to particular occupations might be accessible only to those students following this education path. This would help balance the appeal of the Leaving Certificate by mapping out particular employment opportunities for young people who follow a different course. To be fully effective, these opportunities *should not* be open to young people who follow the Leaving Certificate programme. If the Leaving Certificate programme is an academic stream, then non-academic students must have particular vocational education options after following a strand of education with a different emphasis. If Leaving Certificate students can avail of further education, training and employment options designed for vocational education students, but not vice versa, it will continue to undermine the value and significance of the latter. This is not to suggest that vocational education options should not be constantly upgraded and revised in order to ensure the highest attainable standard. The educational and training systems should continue to strive towards greater flexibility and increased opportunities enabling people to upgrade their education and skill level. The Council's views in this regard will be outlined below.

The Council is concerned about the difficulties of offering in parallel two courses with very different rationales, methodologies and approaches. Great care is necessary to ensure that the very successful pilot project is made available to a wider number of young people while maintaining the same success. Incorporation into a broader senior cycle programme is a challenging route towards this objective. However, if this is the route taken, it will require the support of schools, substantial in-service training for teachers, new equipment and the active participation and support of local employers. The pilot project has demonstrated that these objectives are feasible.

(c) *Home/School/Community Liaison Project*

As already discussed, in 1990 a major home/school/community liaison project was launched at primary level and was subsequently expanded to include post-primary schools. The total number of post-primary schools involved is now 26.

Home/school/community liaison is considered an important aspect of strategies to tackle educational disadvantage. The relevance of this approach is not, however, confined to special projects or areas; rather a general increase in home links and parental involvement is needed. A greater culture of parental involvement could be facilitated by simple measures such as circulating school handbooks which would outline curricula, names of subject teachers, explain school management and management policy (*The Irish Times*, June 4, 1992).

(d) *Entrance Examinations*

The way in which schools are organised and structured and their selection and certification procedures have a major impact on educational equality. At present it is arguable that the first point of selection is the entrance exam for second-level schools. Many primary students sit a number of entrance examinations and some receive coaching in primary schools to that end. Schools are not required to make public their criteria for accepting pupils, although some do, and it appears that schools generally select the brightest students presenting. It has been argued<sup>29</sup> that many schools are not serving their local communities adequately, that children from more socially deprived areas are faring worse, that they have difficulty in obtaining second-level school places, and that young people are deeply affected by this "rejection". The Green Paper makes a number of recommendations to deal with this problem. It proposes that State funding be subject to compliance with three criteria:

- » that schools have an admissions policy that will not discriminate on the basis of means, educational level or social background;
- » that schools provide a comprehensive system of education suitable for a wide ability range;
- » that schools provide for the educational needs of the local community (Green Paper, Dept. of Education, 1992, p.123).

The Council endorses this approach.

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29 A particular recent difficulty arose in Limerick where it is estimated that 120 children finishing primary school did not secure second-level school places in existing city schools.

### *Fee-Paying Schools*

The Council notes the apparent continued substantial state support for fee-paying schools alongside an increased commitment to tackling educational disadvantage and inequality, having regard to the criteria for state funding proposed in the Green Paper (quoted above). In recent debates about fee-paying schools it has been argued that the net cost of subsidising fee-paying schools is not substantial. The Council considers that the issue is not only one of efficiency, but it is also a distributive issue. The issue of state subsidisation of selective, fee-paying schools poses difficulties, particularly when it is accompanied by a clear commitment to educational equality.

The Council is aware that the question of fee-paying schools is of particular sensitivity to religious minorities. Schools for religious minorities are few in number and many children are obliged for reasons of distance to board to receive an education in accordance with their religious and cultural traditions, and consequently schools must charge fees. While at all times wishing to respect religious rights and differences, the Council is confident that in addressing the issues, state subsidisation of privilege can be distinguished from state subsidisation of the provision of second-level options for students from distinct religious communities.

#### (e) *Examination Fees*

While it is generally accepted that "free education" is a misnomer because of various hidden costs to families, there are increasingly overt costs which affect all families regardless of means. At present, for example, it costs £37 to sit the junior certificate examination and £40 to sit the Leaving Certificate examination. Increasingly, schools are charging a fee for mock' or internal examinations. The Department of Education has allocated funds to post-primary schools, on criteria similar to the school book grant scheme, to alleviate the cost of fees for needy pupils. The same policy issues therefore arise for this scheme as were identified earlier in respect of school books.

#### (vii) **Post-Primary Provision for Students with Special Educational Needs**

While young people whose *social* disadvantage translates into educational difficulties are arguably students with "special needs", the

term generally refers to those who have a *physical* or *mental* disability which prevents or hinders them from benefiting fully from the education which is provided in ordinary schools. It refers to young people with varying degrees of mental handicap, impaired vision, impaired hearing, physical disability, emotional difficulties and other disabilities which require intensive help.

### *History*

There is a continuum of provision of special educational services which reflects a continuum of special educational needs. The origins of provision for disabled children lie in the period before the founding of the state, when provision was minimal and generally provided by religious or voluntary groups (McGee, 1990). Major developments in bringing special educational needs to the fore were:

- (1) The establishment in the late 1950s of a special education inspectorate in the Dept. of Education, with specially trained personnel, which became an important influence in shaping the growth and direction of services;
- (2) The establishment of one-year, full-time postgraduate courses for teachers: a diploma for teachers of the deaf in 1957 and a diploma in Special Education in 1961;
- (3) A Government Commission on mental handicap in 1965.

The report of the Commission identified the special school as the preferred model for dealing with special needs. At the time, the conventional system seemed unwilling or unable to accommodate special needs (McGee, 1990). A parallel system seemed the only feasible alternative. By the mid-1970s, it was realised that this parallel system, arising from local initiative, was not guaranteed in every location. So for example, in expanding areas of Dublin city, provision for pupils with mild mental handicap lagged seriously behind need. By this time, educationalists had come to favour provision *within* the ordinary school, and most recent developments have comprised the establishment of special classes in ordinary schools or sessions with remedial teachers. The first remedial teachers were appointed in the 1960s, and their brief is to assist students with learning difficulties, particularly literacy and numeracy, by withdrawing them from the ordinary class for sessional help.

A resolution concerning the integration of young people with disabilities into mainstream systems of education was adopted at a meeting of the EC Council of Ministers of Education in May, 1990. This commits member states of the Council to "intensify" where necessary, their efforts to integrate or encourage the integration of pupils and students with disabilities, in all appropriate cases, into the ordinary education system within the framework of their respective educational policies and taking due account of their respective education system. Since this resolution, the Department of Education has increasingly favoured the policy of integration where possible.

#### *Current Provision*

At present, approximately 8,300 pupils attend special schools and about 3,250 are enrolled in special classes in ordinary schools (Department of Education, 1991). There are no precise figures for the number of pupils taught by remedial teachers at either primary or secondary level (McGee, 1990). It is difficult to discern how many of the pupils in special schools are primary or second-level students. The special schools were established under the aegis of the primary education system and special schools have remained part of this system, even though they provide for children and young people up to 18 years of age. Table 5.7 details special needs provision at primary and secondary level for 1990/1991. Table 5.8 gives a brief summary of the structural provisions for the varying groups.

Support for an integrated approach does not simply include the current *locational* integration represented by the special class, but also where feasible, integration into regular classes. However, care must be taken not to adopt a simplistic approach of equating integration with ordinary main-stream schooling. Special interventions and supports are almost always necessary. In addition, teacher-training would have to accommodate the kinds of demands which this situation presents, while schools would require additional resources to deal with the situation effectively. This is one of the issues on which a Special Education Review Committee, appointed in 1991, will report later this year.

In general, special schools are better resourced than special classes in mainstream schools, partly because special schools tend to have the support of an association or religious group which can raise extra funds, and partly because they receive targeted resources from the Department of Education. The pupil:teacher ratio in special schools and special classes is 15:1. The special class however, frequently accommodates a

wide age range of students. In many cases too, the special class operates as a self-contained unit with little integration into the mainstream school activities. Integration problems vary with the special needs of the child and integration per se is not necessarily the most desirable goal. The Council believes that the current continuum of provision could be expanded to include more options. For example, it has been suggested that the range of options might include:

- » Mainstream class, with support in the classroom;
- » Mainstream class, with withdrawal arrangements;
- » Special class part-time;
- » Special class full-time;
- » Special school with outreach programmes (that is partial and/or total physical and/or complete integration in a mainstream school);
- » Special school with liaison with mainstream school;
- » Special school (I.N.T.O., 1993).

For integration to be successful, schools must be adequately resourced, teachers properly trained, mainstream students prepared, and adequate support services provided to meet the educational needs of a child with special needs. The organisation of the support services must also be addressed. The visiting teacher service, where teachers visit the child in her/his home and meet with and advise parents, and the resource teachers proposed in the Green Paper, would probably be most effectively organised and administered on a decentralised basis.

Current training for special education and for teachers of the deaf is a one year post-graduate course open to qualified teachers who have two years permanent teaching experience in the area. Remedial teacher training for second level schools is a one year block-release course in remedial education which is organised by the psychological service of the Department of Education. Schools may appoint a remedial teacher only with the approval of the Department of Education. There is little doubt that current remedial provision is inadequate, particularly at post-primary level (McGee, 1990, Green Paper on Education 1992). In recent years remedial teachers have begun to work more in support of class teachers and less with individual pupils, a trend which has been encouraged by the Department of Education (Dept. of Education, 1988).

TABLE 5.7  
Special Schools 1990/91

	Number of Schools	Number of Classes	Total Boys	Total Girls	Total Enrolment	
1	Schools for Mildly Mentally Handicapped	32	245	2,101	1,407	3,508
2	Schools for Moderately Mentally Handicapped	33	216	1,332	94'	2,273
3	Schools for Young Offenders & Disadvantaged	10	38	267	92	359
4	Schools for Emotionally Disturbed	14	53	349	88	437
5	Hospital Schools for Physically Handicapped	6	9	73	50	123
6	Schools for Physically Handicapped	7	41	257	207	464
7	Schools for Hearing Impaired	5	94	287	294	581
8	Schools for Travellers	4	15	122	87	209
9	Schools for Multiply Handicapped	2	8	35	11	46
10	Schools for Blind/Partially Sighted	2	14	49	78	127
11	Schools for Children with Reading Disability	2	11	116	26	142
	<b>TOTAL</b>	117	744	4,988	3,281	8,269

Source: Department of Education.

Continued

TABLE 5.7 (continued)  
Special Classes 1990/91

	Number of Schools with Special Classes	Number of Special Classes	Total Boys	Total Girls	Total Enrolment	
1	Classes for Mildly Mentally Handicapped	112	158	989	660	1,649
2	Classes for Moderately Mentally Handicapped	3	4	29	17	46
3	Classes for Hearing Impaired	3	4	17	4	21
4	Classes for Language Impaired	4	7	42	15	57
5	Classes for Travellers	73	118	692	770	1,462
	<b>TOTAL</b>	195	291	1,769	1,466	3,235

Source: Department of Education, Statistics Division.

TABLE 5.8  
Special and Remedial Education Provision, Ireland, 1989

SPECIAL EDUCATION	SECOND LEVEL	COMMENTS/OTHER PROVISIONS
Pupils having Mild Mental Handicap	Normally continue in special school up to age 18. Usually transfer to second-level at 12/13 years. Second-level provision varies: 30 special classes, 230 remedial teachers.	
Pupils having Moderate Mental Handicap	Normally continue in special school up to age 18.	
Pupils having Severe/Profound Mental Handicap	Normally continue in special school up to age 18.	Pilot programme only - approx 1800 such children not yet serviced by education system.
Pupils having physical handicap	Intellectually less able remain in special school up to age 18. Four second-level schools in three cities designated to provide for more able.	Many children with physical handicap attend ordinary schools. Home-tuition service available for homebound children.
Pupils having emotional disturbance	Some remain in special school to age 18. Others may transfer as appropriate.	
Pupils having hearing impairment	Special schools have second-level departments. Also two community schools designated to make special provisions.	c.1500 children with hearing impairment attend ordinary schools. 27 visiting teachers.

Continued

TABLE 5.8 continued

SPECIAL EDUCATION	SECOND LEVEL	COMMENTS/OTHER PROVISIONS
Pupils having visual impairment	Special school for girls has second-level department. Pupils in special school for boys transfer to community school on same campus.	Three visiting teachers.
Pupils having multiple handicap	Normally continue in special school up to age 18.	
Pupils having specific language impairment	Has not arisen yet.	
Children of travellers	Junior training centres for pupils aged 12-15 years.	Six visiting teachers and national director.
Children with deviant behaviour	Second-level education available in special schools where appropriate.	
Youth encounter projects	Transfer to ordinary school if appropriate.	
<b>REMEDIAL EDUCATION</b>	<b>There are 230 remedial teachers. The remedial teacher at second level does not necessarily work same way as primary counterpart.</b>	

Note: The number of remedial teachers have been increased in accordance with the PESP agreement.

Source: McGee, P., (1990), 'Special Education in Ireland', *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, vol. 5, no. 1, pp.48-64.

The logic is that special class teachers and remedial teachers interact with only a minority of the country's schools. Pupils with special needs in other schools are dependent on class teachers. It has been suggested that there is a need to develop a module on teaching children with disabilities in pre-service education, combined with well-planned and well resourced in-service courses (I.N.T.O., 1993).

It has been argued that pupils with special needs require more support services, such as those provided by psychologists, occupational therapists, speech therapists and other appropriate professionals. Most of this support service is provided by the health service, which underlines the importance of close links between the health and educational authorities. The Council believes that the most effective way of accessing the relevant specialist supports would be to involve the relevant health and education professionals in case conferences concerning individual children. Case conferences, held on an annual basis, would allow all those involved in the education of the child (parents, teaching staff, health professionals, psychological assessment services) an opportunity to review placement and progress. Such a facility will become even more appropriate if class teachers, in the interest of greater integration, are to extend their involvement into special education.

A significant difficulty in developing policies to meet special educational needs is the lack of data on the extent of the problem. The recent Green Paper states that "a first step in the direction of comprehensive provision is to have accurate knowledge of the extent of disability. A survey in schools will be undertaken to provide this information" (Green Paper, 1992, p.51).

The Green Paper also refers to second level "where provision is on a very limited scale at present" (p.52). Special schools usually have a junior and senior section, but the basis on which the dividing line is drawn varies. There is some debate about the difficulties for students with special needs of not moving to a secondary school in the same manner as the generality of pupils. On the other hand, the transfer of special class primary students to second-level has been "a bone of contention" (McGee, 1990, p.54). Since appropriate provision is not mandatory, it is possible for a special class primary pupil to transfer to a local second-level school which is ill-equipped to meet his/her needs and the risk of early drop-out is increased. This type of problem reflects

the current lack of co-ordination between primary and second-level provision at local level.

The issue of assessment of needs also gives rise to difficulties. At present, pupils seeking a special education facility at primary level are required to have psychological assessment. This is likely to be carried out by a clinical team in the health service. Therefore assessment of special *educational* needs lies outside the educational system. There is a small educational psychological service for second-level schools but it does not provide psychological services to primary schools. (although a pilot scheme has recently been undertaken, with service provision in Tallaght and Clonmel).

Concerns have been expressed about variations in assessment procedures and a perception that in some areas, due to shortage of personnel or pressure of work in areas such as child abuse, educational assessment has a low priority (I.N.T.O., 1993, p.10). Proposals have been made for the development of an educational assessment service, to provide swift and appropriate initial assessment and continuing reassessment of the young person's special needs and the extent to which they are met in a particular educational situation. At present, because placements and progress are not reviewed regularly, there is a danger that initial placements become permanent, whether appropriate or not.

This discussion is not intended to be a complete appraisal of special education, but rather an indication of existing provision and of some of the difficulties. The Council considers that there is a need to address in a coherent fashion the needs of those children who face special difficulties in obtaining an education which will help them to achieve their full potential. The Council trusts that the Report of the Special Education Review Committee will provide a framework for action in this regard.

#### (viii) Post-Primary Provision for Travellers

At primary level there are 161 special classes attached to primary schools, four special schools and a number of special services, including a visiting teacher service. The schools cater specifically for travellers aged 12 to 15. Traditionally children of travellers have not progressed to second-level education. To overcome this difficulty, Training Centres were established to provide further educational facilities for them. Ten Junior Training Centres provide a form of second-level education, sufficiently attractive and relevant to encourage attendance between the ages of 12 and 15 years. Twenty-five Centres provide vocational training



for travellers between the ages of 15 and 25 years, although the majority attending are between 15 and 19 years. About 600 trainees take part in the 48-week programme. The Centres are funded and staffed through the Vocational Education Committees and FS (Department of Education, 1991). The Council believes that the special needs of the travelling community should continue to receive special emphasis in any strategy to enhance the effectiveness of the education and training system in combatting disadvantage.

#### (ix) Gender Inequality

Up to the end of second-level education, females significantly out-perform males in their levels of attainment, although this is not true for maths and science.<sup>30</sup> It is also striking that social class inequalities are much less marked amongst females, although in many respects the effects of failure are far more serious for females (Hannan, 1993). Female educational failure results in equally high unemployment rates as for males, but also in substantially higher rates of withdrawal from the labour force, as well as earlier marriages and single parenthood (Hannan, 1993). The trend towards qualification inflation means that poor educational achievers are facing a harsher environment and that the definition of a poor education is widening. When shifts in demand in the labour market have occurred, boys have been more willing or able to adapt, while girls have stayed disproportionately unemployed within narrower, occupation-specific boundaries (Hannan, 1986).

Serious inequalities continue to exist in the nature and type of education achieved by females compared to males, particularly in access to higher maths, physics and chemistry and vocational/technical education. There is now little difference in the take up of higher maths and science at junior cycle and there have been improvements in the numbers taking senior cycle higher maths and physics. However, inequalities persist. These gender differences are reflected in entry to the dominantly male professions such as engineering and the other applied sciences (Hannan 1993, p.6). Gender inequalities in education require a more complex response than increased subject provision. Cultural barriers and school practice are also important concerns (Hannan et al, 1983; Drudy and Lynch, 1993).

<sup>30</sup> For some discussion and debate about the studies from which these conclusions are drawn, see Drudy and Lynch (1993), pp.179-181.

The Green Paper proposes a number of strategies to tackle gender inequity. These include:

- » avoidance of gender bias in curriculum content;
- » integrating a greater recognition of the economic, social and cultural role of women into subject content;
- » avoidance of gender bias in career counselling;
- » action to correct the gender imbalance in management positions in schools, higher educational institutions and educational administration;
- » the encouragement of co-education as the norm at primary and secondary level (Green Paper, 1992, p.2.8).

The proposed strategies, with the exception of the emphasis on co-education which has been the subject of some debate, have all been widely endorsed in the responses to the Green Paper. This, coupled with the experience of projects under the NOW<sup>31</sup> initiative, suggests that it is a very favourable climate in which to implement measures to promote gender equality. The Council recommends that this opportunity be taken and that a comprehensive strategy to address gender inequality should be a high priority in the formulation of action plans arising from the Green Paper initiative.

#### (x) Discussion of Policy at Post-Primary Level

In addressing the question of special needs and educational inequalities at second-level, there are a number of policy recommendations which arise from the foregoing analysis. Some are specific to second-level, others are more clearly related to the overall structure and organisation of education and echo some of the issues concerning the primary school level discussed earlier.

The provision of counselling services and after care programmes are essential to the success of YEP initiatives, home/school liaison projects and YOUTHREACH. These projects highlight this need as one which is likely to be common to all young people experiencing educational and social problems, including those who are not currently directly involved in these projects. The provision of such services at a local level would

<sup>31</sup> New Opportunities for Women (NOW) programmes, an EC initiative to expand opportunities for women in a number of non-traditional areas.

ensure their availability to projects in the area and to individual cases which schools would identify.

The question of institutional commitment to initiatives tackling educational disadvantage must also be raised. If, as the experience of YEP and YOUTHREACH suggests, there is insufficient opportunity to avail of appropriate training and there is inadequate provision for the necessary co-ordination and administration roles required by these projects,<sup>32</sup> then the level of institutional commitment to these projects is questionable and must be addressed. Similarly, in the case of the integration of young people with special needs, the adequacy of provision for teacher training and support services, the availability of necessary teaching materials, aids and specially adapted physical conditions must be examined. The Council anticipates that these issues will be addressed by the Report of the Special Education Review Committee. Finally, measures to deal with gender inequality, as outlined in the Green Paper, must be systematically pursued.

General issues of assessment and evaluation arise. The central concern is methods of identifying those in need, especially before young people have dropped out. Similarly, difficulties arise in the evaluation of the effectiveness of initiatives. Some initiatives, such as YOUTHREACH, are significantly different in their input group, process and methodology to more formal education and training programmes. Uniform methods of assessment and evaluation cannot sensibly be applied to both. Evaluations of initiatives like YOUTHREACH must be sensitive to their approach so as not to understate their achievements. More generally, the lack of appropriate information is a serious impediment to the devising of successful initiatives. Measurement of educational disadvantage is difficult since, as noted above, there are many different, often overlapping categories and definitions of disadvantage. However, the Council attaches central importance to the search for ways of improving the quality and quantity of such information.

Statements of policy objectives reviewed above identify educational disadvantage as one dimension of general disadvantage. This implies that successful educational initiatives must involve close co-operation with other services and policies. This approach is well established in special educational provision for the disabled. The implications and application of this approach to measures addressing *social* disadvantage must be pursued. In particular, the Council believes that the implications

<sup>32</sup> Problems also faced by VTOS staff as the next section will illustrate.

of entrance exams, examination fees and funding for private fee-paying schools must be carefully considered. It would seem that all have the potential to accentuate educational disadvantage.

Social class inequalities in school attendance have reduced over time. The greatest social class inequalities now remain in attainment rates and in the successful transition to work. The potential to upgrade our vocational education options at all levels, and the positive implications of a higher quality of training for vocationally minded students of all aptitudes must not be lost in debates about the necessity of a predominantly general education for all students. In particular, the Council concludes that it is vital that alternatives to the Leaving Certificate be linked to post-school and employment routes in order to be successful. The policy implications of analysis of those issues will be outlined in Chapter 6.

## 6. POST-COMPULSORY EDUCATION AND TRAINING

### (i) Introduction

This section considers post-compulsory education and training in the context of educational disadvantage. It considers participation in third-level institutions, adult education and mainstream training by those from a background characterised by educational disadvantage.

It may appear anomalous to consider educational disadvantage at the post-compulsory level, since the educational sector is only obliged to service people until they reach the minimum school-leaving age. The reality however is that many students pass beyond the minimum school leaving age (fifteen years) without acquiring basic skills and this places them in a disadvantaged category in the labour market. A forthcoming ESRI report examines the transition to adulthood on the part of young people in Ireland (O'Riain and Hannan). The basic indicators of successful completion of this transition are securing paid employment, establishing a household separate to that of the primary family and marriage/parenthood. The personal difficulties and psychological effects of failing to complete this transition successfully are documented in the study. While the transition process is complex and various stages are intertwined with cumulative effect, the authors nonetheless conclude that education is of crucial importance and determinative of every aspect of the transition. Those with poor educational qualifications have greatest difficulty in making a successful transition to adulthood.

Other work has indicated that education predicts the ability of people to link successfully into the labour market. How successfully this link is

forged is an important indication of the likelihood of poverty (Whelan, 1993). Those with poor educational levels are more likely to experience poverty. It is clear therefore, that low educational attainment continues to be a disadvantaging factor long after the end of compulsory education. This Chapter reviews the main education and training facilities available after post-compulsory education. It considers how disadvantage is addressed within general provision and also considers special provisions for the educationally disadvantaged.

(ii) **Higher Education**

The high retention rates to leaving certificate level which have developed since the mid-1960s have generated a growing demand for third level places. Table 5.9 shows increasing participation rates in full-time education between 1971 and 1991.

**TABLE 5.9**  
**Trends in Age Specific Participation Rate, 1971-91**

	1971	1981	1991
15 yr olds increased from:	71%	87%	99%
17 yr olds increased from:	40%	53%	71%
18 yr olds increased from:	20%	28%	45%
19 yr olds increased from:	11%	16%	29%

Source: Annual Statistical Reports of Dept. of Education.

Quoted in: D. Hannan (1993).

Third level enrolments have increased almost three-fold between 1970-1990 (Clancy, 1990). Between 1984/85 and 1989/90 alone, the number of full-time participants increased by 20.6%, from 31,425 students to 37,910. Part of this increase can be accounted for by the developments at Dublin City University and the University of Limerick (HEA, 1990).

While this expansion of *participation* is striking, the continuing *social inequities* within this participation give rise to concern. The most comprehensive analysis of social class participation at third level is Clancy's work for the Higher Education Authority (HEA (1982, 1988)). The last Report used 1986 data and this work is now being updated. It showed that little substantial change had occurred in participation rates between 1980 and 1986 (Table 5.10). The results have been outlined in

Chapter 1. There has been no great change in the socio-economic background of full-time students between 1984/85 and 1989/90, with almost 50% of all full-time students belonging to the professional, employers, managers and salaried group (HEA, 1992), as shown in Table 5.11.

**TABLE 5.10**  
**Socio-Economic Status of 1986 Entrants to Higher Education<sup>+</sup> & National Population Under 15 Yrs in 1981 with Participation Ratios by Socio-economic Group For 1986 and 1980**

Socio-Economic Groups	Higher Education Entrants in 1986	National Population Under 15 yrs in 1981	Participation Ratio 1986	Participation Ratio 1980
	%	%		
Farmers	20.8	14.3	1.45	1.04
Other Agricultural Occupations	1.4	2.9	0.48	0.21
Higher Professional	12.0	4.0	3.00	3.93
Lower Professional	9.2	4.3	2.14	2.29
Employers & Managers	18.2 *(15.8)	9.2	1.98 *(1.72)	2.75
Salaried Employees	6.2	2.7	2.30	2.93
Intermediate Non-Manual Workers	9.8 *(12.3)	10.2	0.96 *(1.21)	1.11
Other Non-Manual Workers	5.7	12.8	0.45	0.50
Skilled Manual Workers	12.9	25.4	0.51	0.51
Semi-Skilled Manual Workers	2.5	5.9	0.42	0.49
Unskilled Manual Workers	1.3	8.2	0.16	0.11
TOTAL %	100.0	100.0		
	14,388	969,951		

\* These percentages and participation ratios have been adjusted to take account of possible bias in classification of certain occupations (see text for details).

+ Higher education refers to all designated third-level institutions under the remit of the Higher Educational Authority (HEA). (See Clancy, 1982, 1988).

TABLE 5.11  
Social Economic Background of Full-Time Students  
1989/90

SOCIAL GROUPS	TOTALS			GRAND		1988/89		1984/85	
	M	F		TOTAL		TOTAL		TOTAL	
Farmers	11.9% (2144)	15.4% (2764)		13.6% (4908)		14.1% (4828)		12.8% (3795)	
Agricultural Workers	0.9% (155)	0.8% (135)		0.8% (290)		0.8% (289)		2.6% (759)	
Higher Professionals	16.0% (2885)	14.1% (2543)		15.1% (5428)		15.2% (5207)		14.5% (4296)	
Lower Professional	10.5% (1891)	10.3% (1856)		10.4% (3747)		10.2% (3502)		0.9% (2686)	
Employers & Managers	16.3% (2936)	16.3% (2930)		16.3% (5866)		16.0% (5502)		15.2% (4515)	
Salaried Employees	7.7% (1391)	7.2% (1292)		7.5% (2683)		7.3% (2503)		8.8% (2608)	
Intermediate Non-Manual	10.0% (1800)	9.6% (1718)		9.8% (3518)		10.6% (3646)		12.3% (3665)	
Other Non-Manual	3.8% (677)	3.5% (624)		3.6% (1301)		3.5% (1190)		4.0% (1176)	
Skilled Manual	8.1% (1457)	7.7% (1382)		7.9% (2839)		7.8% (2690)		7.0% (2088)	
Semi-Skilled Manual	1.5% (276)	1.4% (257)		1.5% (533)		1.6% (550)		2.3% (670)	
Unskilled Manual	0.8% (140)	0.6% (103)		0.7% (243)		0.7% (241)		2.1% (636)	
Unknown	12.5% (2254)	13.2% (2376)		12.9% (4630)		12.2% (4187)		9.4% (2795)	
Totals	18006	17980		35986		34335		29689	

Source: HEA, 1992, p.74.

Student support schemes were revised at the beginning of the academic year 1992/1993. The revisions occurred *within* the scheme, that is within the boundaries of a scheme to provide means tested maintenance grants, with full fees paid. The changes provide a substantial increase in the income eligibility limits, and appear to benefit families who would previously have experienced difficulties sending their children to third-level. Table 5.12 indicates the changes under the new arrangement.

This is only one of a number of possible methods of financing higher education, ranging from private financing to income-contingent loans. It has been argued that, given the class bias in take up of third level places, and the enhanced employment opportunities of third level graduates, subsidies at this level are of greatest benefit to higher socio-economic groups (Barlow, 1981; Callan and Nolan, 1992; Tussing, 1981). However, it has also been argued in the Northern Ireland context that students from *manual backgrounds* and Roman Catholics were most likely to be deterred from entering higher education by a loans policy (Cormack et al, 1986). The effects of a switch in funding policies on equitable access to third level are complex and it is by no means clear that a policy of transferring costs to higher income participants would induce participation by lower-income groups.

TABLE 5.12  
Improvements In Student Grants  
To Qualify for Full Fee and Full Maintenance Grants

Family	Income Limit Before	Income Limit After
1/2 Children	£10,787	£15,000
4 Children	£12,403	£16,500
8 Children	£15,506	£18,000

To Qualify for Maximum Fee Grant and Half Maintenance Grant

Family	Income Limit Before	Income Limit After
1/2 Children	£13,214	£16,000
4 Children	£14,832	£17,500
8 Children	£17,079	£19,000

Source: Department of Education.

Another notable revision is in the assessment of mature students (over 23 years) on their own or their spouse's income, rather than their parents' income. The grant application form has been revised and is more searching on details of income. This is in response to criticism of the surprisingly low proportion of PAYE families in receipt of a grant compared to the self-employed. Applications must now be accompanied by tax forms P21, P60 and P45 and authority from the Revenue Commissioners to access tax files.

In 1989/90, the number of grant and scholarship holders as a proportion of full-time students was 39.5%. Approximately 75% of those receiving assistance were receiving means-tested assistance, bringing the total of full-time students receiving means-tested aid closer to 30%. At the announcement of the revised student grant scheme, the then Minister for Education stated that the scheme would result in 60% of all third-level students receiving grants of one form or other. Before the recent changes, European Social Fund (ESF) grants were not means-tested. These grants are available to students attending two year certificate or three year diploma courses in RTCs and the DIT. Fees are automatically paid, but in order to qualify for maintenance assistance students must now apply to their local VEC which will apply the same means test as for higher education grants. However, minimum leaving certificate results are not required to qualify: the offer of an ESF course is sufficient.

The points system, the Central Applications Office (CAO) and the means-tested grants scheme are all testimony to attempts to correct for social inequities in access to third level education. However, a number of stipulations within the grant scheme continue to restrict access to third-level education for those who are socially and educationally disadvantaged:

(a) While mature candidates are now assessed on the basis of their own income, the Higher Education Grant Scheme only covers full-time degree students. The cost of returning to education as a mature student goes beyond that of fees and maintenance costs. There are also the costs of foregoing employment. It is likely that people with jobs who wish to return to education may prefer to do so at night or on a part-time basis. However, both courses must be self-financed and therefore they are restricted to those who can afford this option. Courses are not structured to allow for easy part-time participation. A modular system, where students may take a number of courses over a long period of time and accumulate credits which will

ultimately lead to a degree or diploma as appropriate, would allow for greater ease of part-time participation. This system, which is well established in North America, allows for "second chance education" to a much greater degree than our heavily cumulative process: unless our students perform well throughout their academic lives, it is difficult to re-enter the education system.

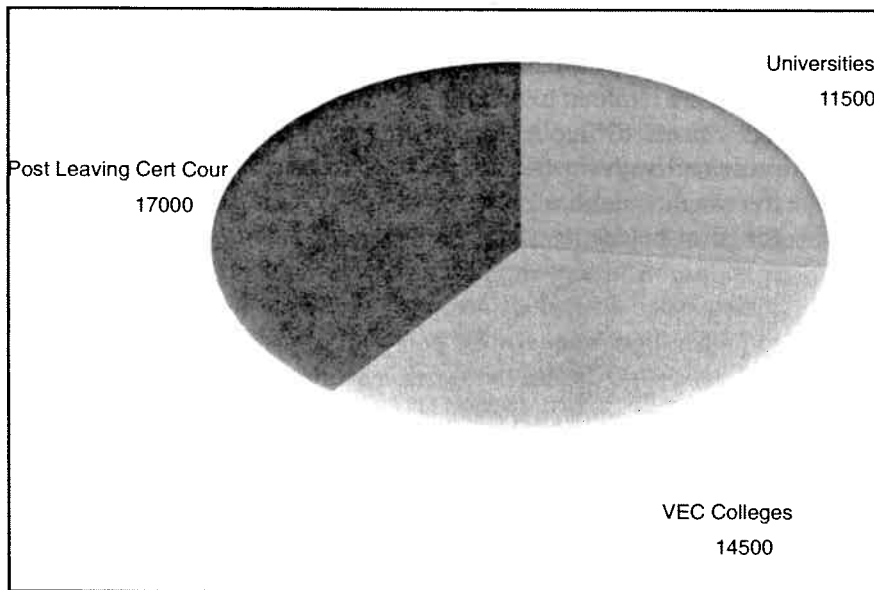
- (b) Another anomaly, which disadvantages those from lower economic groups with poor initial qualifications, is the arrangement for transfer from ESF funding to HEA grant funding. Unlike ESF grant recipients, HEA course grant holders must have attained a minimum standard in the leaving certificate. Most of the ESF funded courses are certificate and diploma courses in the RTCs. It is possible for some students who reach a certain standard in diploma and certificate courses to transfer to a degree course in a University. Clearly such students are the best of their cohort. In making this transfer, they must apply for HEA course funding. If they do not qualify on the leaving certificate criteria they are ineligible, despite subsequent academic achievements. This rather specific example indicates the gaps in grant schemes arising from their disjointed nature.
- (c) Difficulties arise for low income families as a result of deposits which are required to secure third level places. Raising this money has caused difficulty for many parents. Similar problems are presented by the matriculation fee which must still be paid although the examination has been abolished. Further problems are caused for grant-holders by delays in grant payment. In some cases first instalments are not paid until November. As well as the maintenance difficulties this presents, delays in fee payments lead to registration problems for grant holders and restricted access to facilities.

Many of these issues are likely to be addressed by an expert advisory group established by the Minister for Education in April 1993 to review the operation of third-level student support schemes. The debate about inequality in higher level education tends to focus on the representation of socio-economic groups in 3rd level and grant-maintenance schemes. While these are extremely important, there are other issues concerning the link between third level education and educational disadvantage. For example, it is necessary to consider the implications of the changing role of the

RTCs. Given that RTCs were previously more locally, technically and vocationally orientated, and had a larger proportion of students from lower socio-economic groups than the Universities, it is necessary to consider the implications for the student body of changes in this orientation. With the exception of The Netherlands, Ireland now has the largest population of higher education students taking sub-degree level courses (Clancy, 1990). The implications for equity in education of this, including the student profiles of participants in these courses and their employment prospects on completion, are highly significant issues for policy.

Further education is undergoing rapid restructuring. The RTCs only came into being in the early 1970s, and are now a larger provider of higher education places for new entrants than the universities. In the past few years there has been an explosion in the number of post-leaving certificate (PLC) courses and these now provide more places than the RTCs, as the following pie chart illustrates:

**FIGURE 5.2**  
**Third Level College Places 1992/3**



Source: *The Irish Independent*, Saturday, August 20, 1992.

The striking expansion of private third level colleges and PLC courses not only raises questions about quality and accreditation, it also presumably reflects increased demand for higher education. Among the policy issues which arise are the implications of private rather than public provision to meet this growing need, and the provision to be made for financial support for students. The argument has been made that a more rational approach to student support would imply that grant maintenance schemes should begin at the earliest school-leaving age and distinguish between compulsory and non-compulsory schooling, rather than between second and third-level (Barlow, 1981). Another aspect of developments at third level is the continuing preference for university education over more vocational training in other settings. There can be no doubt about the continuing high status of university education and recent developments in educational provision reflect this. The transfer of the best RTC diploma students to University degree programmes indicate the belief that the university is the place to receive the most complete training. Many of the PLCs are seen as preparation for third level; for example, DIT colleges will credit additional points to leaving certificate points for certain courses if an applicant has completed a PLC. An Bord Altranais, the national nursing board has recently published a report which advocates university training for nurses so that their status, pay and position within a health care team will not be compromised by their apprenticeship training rather than a university degree.

A "shadow education" sector has developed in Ireland. Shadow education is a set of educational activities that occur outside formal schooling and are designed to enhance the student's formal school career (Stevenson, 1992). Data from Japan indicate that it is mostly students from higher socio-economic backgrounds who participate in shadow education. Furthermore, participation tends not to be a remedial strategy for students who have difficulty in meeting the academic school standards of a formal school setting. Rather it is a practice strategy used primarily by students who have already accumulated significant advantage in the formal education system. It allows parents who have the means, to enhance their children's chances in the education allocation contest (Stevenson, p.1655). One of the reasons for the development of this system of shadow education is the importance of the transition to University in Japan. The growth of private (and expensive) institutions in Ireland which prepare students for university reflect a similar trend and again underline the perceived importance of university education. The cost of participating in these intensive preparatory courses ensures that they remain middle class phenomena.

The National College for Industrial Relations (NCIR) has recently started two pilot courses, funded by the private sector, *Access to Education* and *Foundation Studies*. These two courses are designed for people over 21 years who wish to develop the skills to go on to third level. In addition to preparing students to meet the entry requirements, the courses also provide guidance and counselling and aim to enhance self-confidence. Students pay a small fee. The day time nature of the courses mean they are most suited to people not in employment. The unemployed who participate are entitled to retain their social welfare allowance. There are approximately 60 students in any given year and while this is an important provision, it is only reaching a very small number and it is largely confined to Dublin residents.<sup>33</sup>

Two other six year pilot programmes, one based in Ballymun and the other in Southhill, Limerick, aim to encourage young people from those areas, which tend to have high drop-out rates, to continue on to third level education. One of the programme's aims is to develop a partnership between local schools, a local university and the community. The programmes are funded for four years by the Irish American partnership and they have received some assistance from the Department of Education.<sup>34</sup> The main thrust of the programmes is to provide supervised evening study for pupils in third, fifth and sixth year in second level schools and to provide scholarships to pupils who gain third level places. Scholarships are available for high achieving second level students, intended to motivate their continuance in education, and there are prizes and awards for high achieving primary students. The Ballymun scheme also offers special tutoring in a subject of the student's choice and scholarships to enable bright students to remain at school. The rationale is to tackle the problem at an individual level rather than at a structural level, and to provide incentives and motivation to individual students. The study sessions are supervised by senior pupils and students from the area who have gone on to third level. One of the objectives of the initiative is to create a change of attitude towards education in the communities. The projects are significant, since they are tackling social and cultural aspects of disadvantage which translate into educational difficulties through the provision of study facilities in areas where housing facilities may not provide conducive study atmospheres, and through the fostering of attitudes and aspirations which make further

33 The NCIR will, in the near future, also provide this course through distance education.

34 For a more detailed description of the projects and the differences between the two, see Morgan (1993).

education an acceptable option. The projects clearly define their objective as individual student motivation and make no allusions to tackling systematic problems.

The importance ascribed to University education needs careful consideration. It may be unrealistic to expect to develop high quality complementary systems of vocational or apprenticeship training if they continue to be perceived as being of lower status or merely as feeders to the universities. The Council advises the development of clear routes into the labour market or further education, with both, over time, providing the opportunity for further career enhancement, as a means of altering the perception of such courses.

Furthermore, in the context of a large labour surplus there is a trend of employing over-qualified applicants who have training and skills beyond the requirements of particular jobs (Hannan and Shortall, 1991). Such practices are undesirable because given the link between social background and educational attainment, an over-emphasis on educational qualifications will tend to limit systematically the employment prospects of children from lower income backgrounds.

Kennedy (1993) suggests that one of the reasons for the failure of a greater social consciousness and reaction to unemployment to emerge is the concentrated class basis of unemployment. It follows that if higher socio-economic groups are more likely to have university level training than apprenticeship, diploma and certificate level training, employment opportunities will continue to be class biased. Pressures against the employment of inappropriately qualified employees would help to restrain this effect. The implication of this approach is not that the educational levels of the workforce be reduced, and it is not envisaged that it would have this effect. However, linking well-trained people to *appropriate* employment should have many beneficial effects, such as improved employee quality and increased job satisfaction. In other words, the proposal is *not* to advocate the employment of under-skilled people, but rather to advocate the correct match between skill level and employment. It would also mean that unemployment would become more class-dispersed. Firstly, this might initiate the kind of social response which Kennedy deems necessary to stimulate a concerted response to unemployment. Secondly, University graduates with a higher level of training combined with their more favourable social and cultural backgrounds are more likely to have greater resources to develop enterprise and create self-employment.



### (iii) Mainstream Training and Educational Disadvantage

The principal authority providing training for the labour force is FÁS which, in performing its functions under the Labour Services Act, 1987, aims to give priority to those with the greatest difficulties in the labour market, particularly the long-term unemployed and early school leavers.

Courses are provided for unemployed or redundant workers, for those wishing to upgrade their skills or change jobs, and for school leavers unable to find employment. They are designed to equip participants with skills which will assist them in securing employment following their training.

FÁS has a network of 20 training centres throughout the country, as well as many contracted training facilities and community-based training locations. It has a staff of approximately 2000 and a network of 48 Employment Service Offices. In 1991 FÁS ran training and employment programmes for over 55,000 persons. FÁS has overall responsibility for apprenticeship training in designated trades (Stokes and O'Dwyer, 1992, p.7).

Internationally, there has been a rapid expansion of youth education and training courses. In most parts of Europe, North America and Japan most young people are now in education or training until 18 years of age. However, it could be argued that much post-compulsory education and training is a reflection of the evolution of the labour market as much as a development of education and training opportunities (OECD, 1989). Many of the jobs previously taken by poorly skilled young people have been eliminated by changing economic structures, leading to rising youth unemployment and a consequent widespread introduction of labour market programmes. Participation in extended education and training, then, may not be by choice but rather due to the lack of employment opportunities that young people could otherwise have pursued. It has been observed that many training courses leave young people better qualified, but do little to reduce financial dependence (OECD, 1989, p.23).

Concern at the impact of such interventions has led some Irish commentators to caution against any presumption that an underlying rationale "was always worked out carefully in advance of design and implementation" (Kellaghan and Lewis, 1991, p.13). Programmes have tended to be reactive rather than creative, usually being a response to economic crisis and high levels of youth unemployment rather than any commitment to rectifying educational disadvantage as it translates into

employment prospects. Indeed Kellaghan and Lewis go further and suggest that the incentive of EC funding as a means of responding quickly to immediate and pressing problems precluded any extended consideration of rationale, objectives or organisation of such training courses (p.81). Similarly, Hannan and Shortall (1991) note that a lot of this "training" was provided to take care of unemployed youngsters, and may not have substantially contributed to their labour market chances. In fact, research has found a slightly negative relationship between the number of training courses taken and employment prospects (Breen, 1991). Participation often initially led to employment, but in the longer term neither training nor temporary employment schemes were found to have a significant impact on the probability of being in a job one year after finishing the programme (Breen, p.83). The likelihood of finding a job after participating in a state training programme has been found to have been increased by approximately 20% in the short term, but one year after participation there was little or no difference between participants in programmes and similar unemployed non-participants.

It is clear that youth training courses, in their current format, have had *a limited impact in correcting for educational under-achievement and its impact in the employment sphere*. Whatever limited impact such courses may have, however, is increased *if they are school interventions rather than post school programmes*. School interventions reach greater numbers of "at risk" young people. There is an under-registration of school leavers with no, or poor, qualifications in the post school vocational training programmes (Breen, 1984). This is not to suggest that training agencies are indifferent as to who receives training. Many initiatives are tailored for the most disadvantaged groups, e.g. YOUTHREACH, VTOS, programmes for women who wish to re-enter the labour force and travellers' community workshops. Despite this however, a systematic problem remains.

Following his study *Education, Employment and Training in the Youth Labour Market*, Breen (1991) concluded that the evaluation of the effects of training and work employment schemes should become more central to policy development. It is important to disaggregate measures of the effectiveness of particular schemes. For example some schemes which may have a low placement rate, for example, travellers' workshops, actually have a high effectiveness measure because those for whom they cater have such very low probabilities of finding a job (Breen, 1991). However, if the rationale for participation in such programmes is increased job prospects, policy must address the



evidence which suggests that participation in a number of FÁS courses may *reduce* the likelihood of employment (Breen, 1991). This could be related to the stigma attached to participation in designated programmes for "low achievers". No matter how well students perform in such programmes, they are categorised for having attempted it and the label may defeat the programme's purpose (OECD, 1989). O'Riain and Hannan's work (1993, forthcoming) suggests that, while participation in a training course reduces the psychological distress levels of a young unemployed person *during* the course, psychological distress levels may *rise* if the young person remains unemployed on completion of the course. The authors suggest that this may be related to raised expectations. Furthermore, given their findings about the importance of a successful transition to adulthood for the psychological well-being of young people, it would seem that training programmes which do not enhance employment opportunities do not in any way assist young people with this transition.<sup>35</sup>

#### (iv) The Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS)

In 1986 a pilot programme was introduced which gave long-term unemployed people over 25 years of age the opportunity to attend a leaving certificate course run by their local VEC, while at the same time retaining their entitlement to a weekly allowance equivalent to their unemployment payment. This scheme, the Educational Opportunities Scheme (EOS) was co-ordinated by the Department of Social Welfare and the Department of Education. Following the success of the pilot programme, it was decided to extend and restructure the EOS, and in September 1989, the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) was launched. VTOS is an adult education course for the long-term unemployed. Adults must be unemployed for at least one year and over 21 years of age in order to participate. Participants continue to receive their social welfare entitlements. The aim remains one of providing an opportunity for adults to update their general education on a full time basis with an increased emphasis on vocational training (IVEA Seminar proceedings, 1991). Participants range in age from early twenties to late fifties, and also range in educational abilities. Students are facilitated to sit or resit subjects in the Leaving Certificate either at the end of the first year or, as most people choose, at the end of the second year. Some students have literacy difficulties and the scheme also tries to address this problem. Students also have the option of doing the Junior Certificate, where appropriate. Other students participate in post-leaving

certificate courses (VPT2). There is, however, no pressure on students to enter for examinations. Participants are awarded a VEC certificate of satisfactory completion at the end of each year.

The VTOS is administered by the VECs. Programmes are run in local post-primary (mostly VEC) schools, in adult education centres or rented premises. The scheme is 65% funded by the European Social Fund, with the remainder funded by the Department of Education. Centres receive a non-pay budget (cost of renting premises, light, heat, etc.) and a pay budget (trainee allowances, teaching hours etc.) Tutors on the scheme come from a variety of backgrounds. Some are fully trained post-primary teachers, some are university graduates, others have diplomas in personal development training or some other aspect covered by the VTOS. The school principal or the VEC's Adult Education Organiser frequently doubles as the VTOS co-ordinator, but usually it is one of the tutors who combines teaching hours with carrying out the tasks of the co-ordinator.

There are currently 2,060 allocated VTOS places in approximately 80 VTOS centres and 100 VTOS groups (some centres have more than one group). There are approximately 20 students per group. In some cases this is a "core group", that is, the VTOS participants have their own room and a structured VTOS day. In other cases it is a "dispersed group". The dispersed group participate separately, some in VPT1, others in VPT2, some in Leaving Certificate subject classes. Finally, in some cases there is a "core/dispersed group", where the VTOS participants meet together as a core group, but are also dispersed into other activities at other times. The structure adopted depends on the needs and abilities of the group.

Methods of recruitment include advertisements in social welfare centres, in local newspapers, on local and national radio, in FÁS offices, church announcements, word of mouth and contact by previous participants. There is general recognition of the success and achievements of the VTOS. Many of the VTOS annual reports include unedited letters and responses by participants in which the increase in self-esteem is palpable. The good staff relations and the fact that VTOS is perceived as "education" and not "training", with an increased number of options for students at the end, are also frequently mentioned as positive aspects of the course. This response is probably to be expected, given that students are self-selected and can therefore be presumed to be interested in furthering their education. The importance of retaining their social welfare entitlements is also frequently mentioned.

<sup>35</sup> The apprenticeship scheme, under the aegis of FÁS has been discussed in Chapter 4.

The success of the initiative is also evident in the "successes" of the participants; they have been very successful in leaving certificate and junior certificate examinations, some have continued in further education and others have gone on to third level. In some situations co-ordinators negotiate with the PESP area-based partnership companies and provide an employment route through that channel.

There are a number of areas of the VTOS which require further consideration, including staff development, especially adult education skills. A major gap in the VTOS is perceived to be the lack of a counselling service to address the many personal difficulties of long-term unemployed adults including feelings of low self-esteem and the need to renegotiate family roles as a result of returning to education. The VTOS arrangements reflect a more general lack of provision in Irish education services for effective co-ordination and administrative structures. There is, for example, no structured provision in the VTOS for the role of co-ordinator. The co-ordinator is paid from the funding for teaching hours. This means that in a few extra juggled hours, a tutor-cum-co-ordinator has to combine a wide variety of tasks, which tends to place a strain on the successful co-ordination of the whole scheme.

Another difficulty arises in respect of the group of young people who fall between YOUTHREACH (15-18 years old) and VTOS (21+ years). There is no provision for educationally disadvantaged young people between 18-21 years. *The Council recommends that the needs of this age group should be addressed in the further development of compensatory/second-chance education for the educationally disadvantaged.*

#### (v) Adult Education

There are a large number of bodies providing adult education courses in some form. According to Bassett et al (1989), the main statutory providers are the Vocational Education Committees and a number of the Community and Comprehensive Schools established since the early 1970s. Voluntary secondary schools, universities, regional technical colleges, and colleges of technology also provide adult education courses. A wide range of agencies provide specific types of adult education courses at national, regional and local levels. Finally, there are a number of informal, voluntary groups, ranging from women's study groups and creative writing groups to travellers' education and unemployment action groups, which are engaged in providing adult education courses (Bassett et al, 1989). It is estimated that up to 200,000 people take part in adult education courses annually.

Most short-term courses last approximately ten weeks, deal with a specific subject and do not lead to any recognised qualification. These are the more traditional hobby, leisure and commercial type courses. Other courses involve some kind of examination, either at second or third level, leading to certificates, diplomas or degrees. Another important element of adult education has been the provision of literacy and basic education courses which vary in length depending on the needs of the individual. More recently, there has been a growth in social and personal development type courses (Bassett et al, 1989).

The main bodies who promote adult education amongst the educationally disadvantaged are Aontas (The National Association of Adult Education), NALA (The National Adult Literacy Agency), the Dublin Institute of Adult Education, the Department of Education through the home/school liaison scheme and the NCIR through its parent education programme. The particular problem of literacy was "rediscovered" internationally as a widespread social problem during the 1970s (Du Vivier, 1992). The initial response to adult literacy needs in Ireland at that time was largely voluntary. NALA was established in 1980 to campaign for increased funding and improvements in practice and it has received a grant-in-aid from the Department of Education since 1985. It is estimated that, as in other European countries, between 5% and 10% of the adult population in Ireland have significant difficulties with reading and writing.

There are a number of issues within the area of adult education which need further consideration. Firstly, adult education provision does not have a coherent structure. In comparison with other sections of education, it receives very limited public support. While this reflects the particular demographic pressures on the Irish education system, it contrasts with many other European countries where the contribution of adult education to social and economic development is well recognised and where there is a commitment to the concept of lifelong learning (Bassett et al, 1989). The need for increased adult education and training for the future is likely, given that many adults have been trained for declining occupations (OECD, 1989). Often these adults will also require general remedial education as well as advice, orientation and an environment which improves self-confidence<sup>36</sup>.

36 The need for counselling services for adults returning to education and training has been discussed earlier with regard to the VTOS scheme.

However, many adult education courses take place in an environment which has been designed for children. The skills required to teach adults are very different from those required to teach children and, although the work of NALA and others has led to a significant increase in the number of trained tutors, many have still not received adequate training. A particular feature of literacy programmes is that many tutors are unpaid; NALA estimate this to be the case for 95% of tutors in locally organised literacy schemes. While this is a remarkable effort and an important expression of social solidarity, it may be difficult to guarantee the continuity of service provision with such a heavy dependence on the goodwill of volunteers. It also means that provision tends to be confined to a few hours a week. Another limiting factor is that few adult education courses in Ireland are linked into a system where they count as a unit or credit towards a nationally recognised certificate or diploma.

Further problems arise over the cost of adult education. Most hobby and leisure pursuit courses are self-financed and this, along with their orientation and image, means they are more suited to the middle-class than those who need to improve life chances (Bassett, et al, 1989). Anomalies exist in provisions for disadvantaged groups: for example, an unemployed person on a VTOS course doing leaving certificate English pays no fees, whereas an unemployed person or low waged person following an ordinary night class for the same subject is normally required to pay a fee (Staunton, 1992).

There are points of high motivation when adults are more likely to return to education (Du Vivier, 1992). One such point is when parents have school-going children who require help with homework. This time may be an important one in reducing parents who have low levels of education. The perception that educational opportunities should be provided for both parents and children in tandem with increased parental involvement must be fostered. The home/school/community liaison project underlines how this approach will benefit children and also benefit parents previously marginalised from the education system. The NCIR has done some formative work developing training programmes, one aimed at schools the other at parents, to facilitate parents' participation in supporting their children's educational development. This has been responded to by the Department of Education, in particular through its home/school/community liaison project, the NCIR, through its parent education programmes and a number of Youth Centres around the country are responding to this need. The necessity and feasibility of expanding these initiatives require further attention.

In Chapter 4, the relatively higher percentage of the Irish population in the 25-64 year age group with little formal education was described. Their situation is frequently not discussed in the context of general debates about educational issues because it is seen as something separate from the formal system of education (Drudy and Lynch, 1993). What is required, however, is the development of comprehensive adult training and learning. Continuing education as a common feature of adult life and of formal education is necessary to allow these adults ease in re-entering the educational system. A development of this kind does not simply demand structural provision, it also requires flexibility in the work place and the expansion of some system of paid educational leave for employees. This particular aspect of adult education, increasing the general education level of older age groups who may be in employment, is one which the Council feels requires further attention.

#### (vi) Discussion of Policy Issues

This brief review of provision in the post-compulsory school period has highlighted a number of issues which merit further consideration. These include the implications of the disjointed funding system and the disjointed accreditation system in the third level sector, the changing role of the RTCs, the growth in PLC courses and private third level colleges and the State's role in determining the types of training and education which are developed. The focus of this Chapter, however, is more specific, in considering the provision made for and the impact on educational disadvantage.

The inequalities in the representation of the social classes at third level outlined above are not surprising, given that it represents the end of a cumulative process of inequality. The Council believes that there is a need for further study to address the links, and the potential to develop links, between initial and further education, between formal and informal education, between general and vocational education, and between training for youth and training for adults. It is likely that strengthening continuity and facilitating transfer between these areas will be an important component of any strategy which attempts to dismantle current inequalities at third level.

The analysis of trends in educational attainment and labour market performance raises questions about the future direction of specific skill training. A comparison of labour market outcomes between the typical FÁS course for young people and the much more successful apprenticeship system reveal significant differences. The benefits of

expanding apprentice type training, with employer commitment, more detailed and skilled on-the-job training, combined with general education, would appear to be demonstrated by this material and by international experience.

The Green Paper proposals to extend and promote adult education are significant. However, the Council believes that scope exists to develop an understanding of, and approach to adult education which goes beyond providing basic skills for very disadvantaged adults on the one hand, and leisure and hobby pursuits on the other. Continuing education as a common feature of adult life would also make it less difficult for disadvantaged adults to re-enter the system.

The Council believes that local education structures could enhance access to necessary resources for disadvantaged young people. If counselling, literacy, psychological and other support services were organised at this level, VTOS and youth education initiatives, and the various adult education groups could avail of them. This is particularly important for the latter groups, since many of them operate in the voluntary sector and are more difficult to resource than school- or project-based initiatives.

The Council's recommendations to address these and related issues are set out in Chapter 6.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 1. BACKGROUND

This report is concerned with the relationship between the education and training policies and economic and social development. Human capital, nurtured by education and training policies, is an important ingredient in economic progress in an era characterised by rapid technological change and the development of a knowledge-based society. It is also clear that the labour market prospects of individuals are strongly linked to their educational attainment. This in turn is strongly linked to socio-economic background. It follows that education and training policies must address a range of goals simultaneously: to provide the knowledge base for society as a whole; to equip people with the skills and attitudes they need for a fulfilled and productive life and with the capacity for life-long learning and development; and to ensure that all members of society receive education and training which enable them to develop their talents and become productive members of the community. It follows that education and training policies should be addressed together, and that administrative and institutional structures should reflect, rather than dictate the analysis of policy and performance.

The Council believes that the economic and social dimensions of education must also be considered together and that policy must reflect both concerns. The Council is satisfied that there is no conflict between strategies to promote skill development and economic growth, on the one hand, and strategies to tackle educational disadvantage, on the other. On the contrary, international evidence suggests that strong economic performance is associated with effective provision for the middle-to-low achieving pupils for the widest variety of socio-economic backgrounds. Against this background, the Council has prepared this Report as its contribution to the debate initiated by publication of the Green Paper. The particular themes of the Report are the analysis of the actual and potential role of education and training, and vocational education in particular, in improving economic performance, and analysis of the extent to which access to education and training for the disadvantaged has widened and equalised over recent decades.

Society and public policy require that the education system address a number of objectives. These were well expressed by the National Industrial Economic Council<sup>37</sup> more than 25 years ago:

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<sup>37</sup> Report No. 16. *Comments on Investment in Education*.

"The *first* and by far the most important objective of education is the development of the individual person. The educational system is a mechanism by which one generation transmits to the next the basic elements of the ever-increasing fund of human knowledge, the common culture of the society, the social habits, customs and national attitudes on which the health and cohesion of the society depend, and its religion, morality and ethics which in a fundamental sense determine the essential quality of the society and of the people who constitute it. In these ways, education gives to those who participate in it more knowledge and understanding of the world, and more of the means of developing their own potentialities as individuals. In these ways also, education develops sounder judgement and finer discernment, improves the manner of living, the quality of life and the individual's capacity to participate wisely and fully in social and political decisions...

*Second*, the educational system can develop a receptiveness to new ideas, and a capacity to organise, assess and apply them in all fields of human endeavour. It can develop the capacity to think clearly, creatively and critically, rather than the mere facility for remembering mechanically...

If the educational system performs these first two functions properly, then all its participants will be provided not only with the essential basis for a fuller and better life both individually and socially, but also with the potential for making a more productive contribution in economic activity. The *third* function of the educational system is to enable the individual to realise this potential by giving him the facts, arts, skills and attitudes that he will require to make his work productive."

The Council therefore recognises that the primary role of education is in developing the qualities of integrity, reliability, a sense of justice and other moral attributes in every student. This Report of the Council, however, is devoted to two specific aspects of the education system, namely its capacity:

- (i) to overcome the educational disadvantages currently suffered by some sections of the community; and
- (ii) to improve the contribution of education to the economic and social development of the community as a whole.

The Report reflects three strands of specific research: (a) a comparative analysis of the link between productivity and economic performance in Irish industrial companies, in comparison with their Dutch and Danish counterparts; (b) an analysis of the Irish vocational education and training

system compared to the systems in The Netherlands and Denmark; (c) a detailed examination of the developments in educational policy since 1966 regarding equality of opportunity and an assessment of the effectiveness of policies in attaining stated policy objectives.

The Council believes that the *comparative* nature of the study is important, given the general lack of comparative analysis of the Irish education and training system. The Netherlands and Denmark were chosen because they have some structural similarities to Ireland (size, EC membership, presence in certain sectors) while having a generally superior economic performance. Furthermore, both have vocational education and training systems which differ from Ireland's and which also differ from each other.

As with previous comparative studies carried out by NESC,<sup>38</sup> the Council seeks to support its policy recommendations by observing other practices and institutional arrangements. The Council is firmly of the view that systems of education cannot be replicated or transported from one society to another. National education systems are complex structures, reflecting the history, culture and values of each society. The Dutch and Danish systems, together with Ireland's own educational developments have been carefully considered as a basis for NESC's policy recommendations on the Irish system of education and training.

Various aspects of this Report illustrate that systems of education and training cannot be considered in isolation. The impact of vocational education and training on economic performance must be viewed in the context of the nature and state of the economy, national economic strategies and the structure of employment. Furthermore, the effectiveness of educational policies in attaining the stated objectives of equality of opportunity and extended access to education and training are affected by general policy strategies addressing social and economic disadvantage. Housing policy, employment policy, health policy are thus key instruments which facilitate or impede the success of educational policies in addressing educational disadvantage. Despite the importance of these broader policy issues for educational performance, the Council is convinced of the need for a clearly developed educational strategy which identifies key objectives and the most appropriate way to achieve them. The specific educational concerns which should be addressed in such a strategy have been addressed throughout this Report. This Chapter summarises these issues and identifies what the Council sees as key strategic objectives for educational policy.

<sup>38</sup> For example NESC (1993), *The Irish Economy in a Comparative Institutional Perspective*, Report No. 93.

The first part of this Chapter briefly summarises each of the earlier Chapters of the Report. The next section discusses the proposals contained in recent policy documents, especially the Education Green Paper, on the issues which arise and presents the Council's conclusions on these issues. The final part of the Chapter discusses what the Council considers to be the strategic considerations which it believes should govern the development of education and training policies: the scope of education policy; the teaching resource; local education structures; the school/work nexus; and training in the work place.

## 2. PRODUCTIVITY AND ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE

### (i) Comparative Positions

The relatively low level of GDP per capita in Ireland is associated with both a comparatively low participation rate in employment and uneven labour productivity levels across many sectors of the economy (e.g. farming, energy, retail and financial services). While Irish manufacturing productivity is superior to many European countries, this advantage is almost entirely accounted for by the high productivity levels of the foreign owned firms. The comparatively low productivity of indigenous industry suggests the possibility that Ireland is characterised by some of the features of the so-called "British disease", by which it is argued that competitive performance is disadvantaged by the poor quality of human capital.

Recent theories of economic growth<sup>39</sup> have emphasised how human capital may be a far more important factor in accounting for economic well-being than was formerly accepted. However, a more detailed, micro-level method is required to explain the specific mechanisms through which skills improve competitiveness at the level of the firm and ultimately enhance macroeconomic performance. The Council therefore asked Dr David Hitchens and Mr J.E. Birnie to prepare a paper on the links between productivity and economic performance, focusing on Ireland in comparison with Denmark and The Netherlands. Their report is summarised in Chapter 3.

They demonstrate that, given that productivity in the UK — both physical productivity and value added — has been intensively researched (e.g. by matched plant studies) it is possible to identify the mechanisms through which skills affect both the levels of physical

<sup>39</sup> (e.g. Romer, 1986; Lucas, 1988).

productivity and product quality. Particular emphasis is placed on the results of matched comparisons between UK and West German plants, since these indicate how high levels of skills (at operative, supervisory, technician, graduate engineer and manager levels) can be translated into high levels of value added per head and the maintenance of competitive advantage, in spite of high and rising labour costs. They show that adaptive or incremental innovation in West Germany enables continuous improvement in both products and processes in the existing stock of medium sized enterprises. This in turn generates continued productivity improvement and hence allows the German firms to push back continually the frontier of best practice and so maintain a productivity superiority relative to firms in the UK. The matched plant studies also demonstrate that the ability to innovate is closely linked to the levels of training and experience of the labour force and management. They hypothesise that these relationships are also relevant to Ireland.

Ireland resembles the UK in having a large proportion of unskilled/semi-skilled personnel in the labour force and in having no equivalent to the well developed German apprenticeship system. The output of graduate and technician engineers is high, but so is the level of emigration, i.e. firms in Ireland in aggregate are unwilling or unable to realise the potential which Ireland's output of higher skills offers. Evidence is presented which provides a prima facie case that, as in Britain and NI, deficiencies of technical skills amongst the existing work-force (at operative, supervisory and management levels) in indigenous manufacturing industry, lead to a competitive disadvantage relative to best practice performance through slower innovation, poorer quality of products, and lower remuneration of labour.

Notwithstanding evidence of increasing convergence, Ireland is shown to be characterised by a longstanding and substantial shortfall in levels of GDP per capita compared to other European countries. It is also notable that, whereas in 1921 the total population of Ireland was similar to that of Denmark and about 40 per cent of that of The Netherlands, 70 years later the population of Ireland was less than 70 per cent of the Danish level and less than one-quarter of the Dutch. The Irish economy is also characterised by a much lower rate of participation of the population in the working labour force and lags the comparator economies in terms of structural adjustment. In particular, the share of agriculture in total employment is still relatively high. Moreover, Ireland has had problems in terms of long run employment creation. Sectoral

productivities were compared and Ireland was shown to have generally lower labour productivity, except for those parts of manufacturing where foreign owned firms predominate. Dairy products and clothing manufacture (the two sectors selected for the case studies presented in Chapter 3) were shown to have substantial productivity shortfalls in Ireland relative to Denmark and The Netherlands, respectively.

Hitchens and Birnie report on specific research which they carried out for this Report, comprising analysis by managerial experts from Denmark and The Netherlands of productivity in a small number of Irish firms, which were considered to be amongst the strongest indigenous firms in their sector. The visiting foreign managers chosen had knowledge of markets and products which were similar to those of the Irish firms. A previous study found that visits to a low productivity economy by industrial experts from a higher productivity economy could yield a range of useful insights (Hitchens, *et al* Wagner and Birnie, 1991). In particular, these observers could identify and explain any gaps in productivity performance.

Notwithstanding the small size of the sample, 3 companies with 5 plants (and the restricted range of sectors considered), certain notable conclusions were drawn from the visits of the international managers:

- (i) There was a shortfall in terms of Irish comparative physical productivity (i.e. the volume or number of units of output per worker) at two out of the five plants considered (in the three other cases Irish productivity was considered to be similar to that of the continental counterpart).
- (ii) All three Irish companies were indicated to have lower value added per head than their continental counterpart. This result was consistent with the aggregate statistical comparisons.
- (iii) The products of the Irish firms were generally of a lower quality than those of the Danish/Dutch counterpart (i.e. commodity as opposed to consumer focus, older products, or selling to a subsidised market). The product problems identified in this sample survey were similar to those identified in earlier matched firm comparisons involving plants in NI and Great Britain. It was also consistent with the findings of earlier surveys of small firms in Ireland which suggested relatively low product quality.

- (iv) Linked with their problems of product type was the fact the Irish companies were characterised by a weaker capacity to innovate. This result was also consistent with the findings of earlier studies.
- (v) At these Irish companies the levels of formal skills were similar to those in the continental economies (the activities were mainly semi-skilled or unskilled and on-the-job training was most important). In the comparisons in food processing, Danish in-company training was superior to that of the Irish counterpart plants. In clothing, there were indications that the Irish workers needed more supervision and were more variable in their attention to detail than their Dutch counterparts.
- (vi) There were also constraints on the supply of certain specialised and higher skills in the Irish firms (e.g. maintenance, laboratory and design). On paper, Irish managers were as well qualified as their counterparts, but the international counterparts judged that there was an undue reliance on seriously out-dated product and company strategies (higher engineering skills were under-represented at the clothing plants).
- (vii) Apart from higher skills and management, certain other constraints were identified as applying to the Irish firms (e.g. in food, the seasonality of the input supply, and in clothing, distance from the market). Perhaps most importantly, the relatively low levels of labour costs associated with low marginal productivity meant that the Irish firms could survive for the time being with the current strategies.

It was considered that management would currently face difficulties in instituting change, and even if they tried to change, would probably face certain constraints on the shop-floor, e.g. variability of quality and poor standards of machine maintenance.

The conclusions drawn by the consultants are complicated by the fact that the Irish companies being considered are probably amongst the stronger Irish owned firms in their sectors. As a result, they would not have been expected to be characterised by gross inefficiency and overmanning and it was indeed the case that levels of physical productivity were sometimes broadly similar to those in the continental economies. Nonetheless, even for these "good" Irish firms the results are disturbing because they appeared to be stuck at a lower level of performance relative to their Dutch and Danish counterparts. Product



quality was lower and yet the Irish management were not oriented towards strategic change. To the extent that learning by doing is significant, and at these firms it appeared to be at least as important as formal qualifications, then the current performance of the Irish firms is self-reinforcing.<sup>40</sup>

Although it would be beneficial to widen such comparisons to other sectors of Irish manufacturing, it is nevertheless significant that these conclusions applied to some well-established indigenous firms. The situation of many other firms is likely to be less favourable.

(ii) **Implication for Education and Training Policies**

It is difficult to discern the particular effect of education and training on economic performance, and the comparisons clearly demonstrate the cumulative nature of industrial competitive success. The quality of the labour force and of management are linked to particular cultural, institutional and political factors. For example, investment in research and development, business investment in education and training and product development and innovation are related to the state of the economy, industrial relations, industrial policy, educational policy and many other factors. In other words, comparisons are not easy or straight-forward. Nonetheless, this aspect of the Report gives a clear indication of some of the ways in which Irish training and skill levels differ from best practice. It demonstrates too that *competitive performance is adversely affected by poor quality human capital*.

Skill differences are noticeable at all levels; shop floor worker, supervisor and manager. The findings from the matched plant studies are in line with the conclusions of the Industrial Policy Review Group: *there is a skills gap between Ireland and best practice firms in competitor countries*. Our shop floor workers tend to have far less formal training than their counterparts, who are usually apprenticeship trained. Dutch/Danish supervisors are also more formally trained and carry out a range of tasks which are usually undertaken by management personnel in Ireland. Irish management tends to focus heavily on the financial side of business, while their Dutch/Danish equivalents focus more on technological matters and developments in product and process. The important question is whether or not the different skill levels arising from

40 The corresponding Dutch and Danish advantage is likely to be cumulative - such a conclusion would be consistent with the newer growth theories, such as those of Romer (1986) or Lucas (1988), which see increased output which is driven by investment in human capital as becoming endogenous or self-perpetuating.

different training practices affect performance. The matched plant studies suggest that they do; poorer quality skills, less attention to detail, inadequate supervision and quality control procedures, lower skilled management with poorer marketing and financial skills have all affected the quality and marketability of the Irish product. In particular, supervisor and management training needs to be improved. This led the Industrial Policy Review Group to recommend the linking of the provision of some publicly-funded services and aids to the willingness of firms to undertake management training.

Recent Irish education and training debates have identified flexibility and adaptability as key skills. Flexibility and adaptability emerge as key competencies which have been acquired by our competitors to a greater extent. Flexibility has various positive and practical implications; for example, it (1) it allows for greater innovation in product type and product process; (2) flexibility promotes the addition of other skills throughout a person's working life; (3) it is shown in a practical way as it results in fewer machinery breakdowns, because operators understand the basic mechanics of their machines, how to maintain them and how to carry out basic repairs. By contrast, the comparisons suggest that Irish indigenous industry is caught with a mismatch of skills. It can function, however, as long as relatively low costs, and labour costs in particular, are maintained. Greater competition from newly-industrialising countries suggests that this is not likely to prove viable for much longer. At present the simple, low quality, standardised product range in many indigenous firms in Ireland does not demand higher skill levels. However, this type of product does not guarantee long-run survival, expanded employment or higher living standards. To address this problem our relative under-training, which in turn stems from less investment in training and retraining, has to be remedied.

The study suggests that technical and vocational education and training are quantitatively and qualitatively different in Ireland. The qualitative difference has led to comparability problems as, for example, the fact that the proportion of workers qualified to technician level is reported to be equivalent to overseas competitors. Closer analysis reveals significant differences in the level of skills actually available. The recent changes in the Irish apprenticeship training system, from time-served to standard based training, moves us closer to practice in Denmark and The Netherlands. The success of the revised apprenticeship scheme will demand significant retraining and upgrading of skills for the current stock of employees, particularly those who will be involved with



on-the-job training for new apprentices. The differences in vocational education and training patterns are considered in more detail in the following section.

It is striking that the availability of skilled personnel has not constituted a barrier to the development of the largely foreign-owned high-tech sector in Ireland. On the contrary, the availability of such skills is one of the main attractions of Ireland as a base for such activities. This suggests that it is not enough to provide the skills necessary for efficient production. Skill shortages and emigration of skilled workers (in particular, engineering graduates) occur simultaneously. The pattern of demand for and use of skills reflects market and product characteristics. It follows that product ranges and corporate and management strategies are key both to a firm's long-run success and to its demand for skills. The available evidence, confirmed by the study for this Report, suggests that **management development is the strategic priority in the development of education and training policies for economic development**. Unless senior managers are capable of taking the right strategic decisions on products and markets, they are unlikely to create the demand for, or use effectively the skills which the education and training system is capable of providing. Their knowledge of market trends, their technical capacity to identify necessary developments in products and processes and their knowledge of and capacity to use international best practice all need to be strengthened. In summary, the capacity of managers to initiate and manage change — in products, processes and markets — is central to overall economic performance. This in turn implies the capacity to identify to opportunities and mechanisms to increase the skill base of the workforce, and changes in the organisation of work to enable the skills to be applied to best effect. The upgrading of human resource management skills and the development of a positive role for trade union representatives in the change process are important aspects of this approach.

**There are, however, particular categories of skills on the part of both management and the work force generally whose development should be pursued as a priority, in parallel with an emphasis on management development generally.** These include design, basic product and process R&D, and plant and machine maintenance. More generally, the development of technical competence on the part of first-line supervisors is likely to represent a significant contribution to productivity. It follows that **the Council endorses proposals to shift the emphasis in public support to firms from general grant**

**assistance to providing incentives for greater use of research and development, design and other business services and the development of in-house skills.**

**The Council believes that the methodology of the matched plant analysis should be applied across other sectors of the economy as a means of identifying the priorities for those providing and supporting management development programmes.** Equally, the Council believes that individual firms and trade associations should take the initiative to ensure access to first-hand experience of the comparative strengths in products and processes of their best-practice counterparts in countries such as Denmark and The Netherlands.

### 3. VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE: IRELAND, DENMARK AND THE NETHERLANDS

This section summarises the main points of the comparative analysis contained in Chapter 4 and identifies the relevant policy implications. The issues which arise are discussed by reference to the relevant provisions of the Green Paper.

With the exception of science, the material presented in Chapter 4 shows that the performance of Irish, Danish and Dutch students is comparable during primary school and junior cycle second level. Beyond this stage, the provision for science, technical subjects and vocational studies is quite different.

The Green Paper on Education reflects a concern about the study of science at primary level. It proposes the general integration of scientific principles of exploration, observation, recording and reporting in other aspects of study. It also proposes a greater emphasis on the science element in the social and environmental studies section of the curriculum. Given the comparatively poor performance of Irish primary students in science tests, a more rigorous response may be necessary. **The Council considers that the development of a specific and separate elementary science subject would improve the relative performance of Irish primary students.** In addition, there is a need to extend the facilities for primary teachers to take science as a degree subject in their teacher training programmes. At the moment teachers do not have this option.

The provision of comprehensive general junior second level education is similar in Ireland and Denmark and it is the direction in which the Dutch are

moving. The major differences in provision emerge at the end of compulsory education. The very distinctive feature of Irish education is that, despite a background of a sharp distinction between vocational and academic schools, provision for academic and vocational education is now made in the same schools. While Irish schools differ in their emphasis and subject choice, they are all basically teaching the same curriculum towards the same end goal. In Denmark and The Netherlands students are separated into different types of schools depending on whether they will follow an academic, general education programme or a vocational education programme. The percentages involved in technical vocational courses at this stage also underline the differences: 60% of Danish students and 50% of Dutch students compared to 20% of Irish students. These percentages are somewhat deceptive, since vocational education in Ireland is more pre-vocational and less job-specific than in Denmark or The Netherlands. These patterns in turn form the basis for the differences in skill levels found in the operative, supervisory and management functions outlined in Chapter 3.

This description of the differences between the Irish, Dutch and Danish systems is not intended to suggest that the way forward is a simple emulation of the Dutch and Danish systems. Ireland has clearly moved away in recent years from this type of binary provision and the Green Paper advocates the expansion of technical subjects *within* the senior cycle of the general post-primary system. Given that the provision of options at senior cycle in a single, overall framework is the approach to be taken, **the Council believes that it is essential that there are adequate support services and careful monitoring and evaluation of the provision of vocational subjects.** The Green Paper asserts the need for quality assurance in the educational system and the Council believes that the expansion of technical subjects is one area that would clearly benefit from such careful attention.

The low proportion of Irish students enrolled in technical vocational courses is partly due to the large number in the pass general Leaving Certificate stream. The Council believes that this is one of the most serious problems facing the Irish education system. The proposed availability nationally on options within the senior cycle programme is seen as a response to this problem. The Council is concerned that those who currently opt for the pass general stream may not choose more vocational or applied options within the Leaving Certificate and that it may come into being alongside the continued existence of the pass general Leaving Certificate stream. The Council is aware that developing an alternative programme is a long-term exercise. It recommends careful planning and a longer time commitment to alternative programmes than are appropriate for ad hoc pilot projects. **The Council**

**believes that the prospects for success of alternatives to the present general Leaving Certificate programme would be enhanced by linking such programmes, through structured and possibly exclusive routes to further training and into the labour force.**

The proposals in the Green Paper for modular courses which would facilitate progression on a part-time and second chance basis through a "ladder" structure of education and training is in keeping with Dutch and Danish practice. The recent introduction of standard-based, as opposed to time-served apprenticeships is also in line with Dutch and Danish procedure. The Dutch and Danish apprenticeship systems are, however, far more extensive. It is widely accepted in Ireland that apprenticeship training should be expanded to provide vocational education and training for a wider range of occupations. In the past a major problem with vocational preparation courses in Ireland has been the lack of systematic formal assessment and certification producers. **The Council therefore welcomes the proposal to establish a single National Education and Training Certification Body as detailed in the Programme for Government.**

The social partners in Denmark and The Netherlands are more involved in various aspects of vocational education and training than is the case in Ireland. Involvement is more decentralised, with committees operating at regional and local level. This reflects the Dutch and Danish political and institutional cultures, which facilitate this type of approach. **The Council believes that there is scope for the increased involvement of employers and trade unions in determining conditions of training, curricula and in the external certification of standards of achievement.** The Council welcomes the various recommendations in the Green Paper in this regard.

Dutch and Danish practice would support the stated commitment in the Green Paper to introducing structure of managements for quality assurance. While Denmark and The Netherlands may be considered examples of good practice in vocational education and training, they are not complacent about their vocational education and training systems and constantly review their provision. Specific, widely-based groups and committees have this particular responsibility and they review course content, the quality of instruction, teacher qualifications, teacher training and methods of assessment. Vocational education and training demand constant attention, updating and revision in order to respond quickly to changing skill demands. Constant review and monitoring of quality are essential features of plans to upgrade the provision of vocational education and training. The Green Paper's recommendations in this respect are welcome.

project are its recognition of the need for *continuity* throughout the educational system to tackle disadvantage (i.e., at pre-primary, followed by primary, followed by second level), its recognition of the importance of appropriate *in-service training* for the teaching staff involved and the recognition of the need to provide for a *co-ordinator's* role. The project takes a holistic view of the child and of disadvantage and recognises a wide range of factors in the home, the community and the school which impinge on the child's educational performance. These positive features must be developed beyond the confines of the current project, which is limited to designated areas. In particular, **the Council recommends that the central focus for such development should be the strengthening of the role of parents as educators and as crucial influences on participation and performance up to the end of compulsory schooling and beyond.** The provision of appropriate support and development opportunities for parents should be central to the operation and evaluation of the programme. The Council emphasises that care must be taken not to perceive the home/school/community project as a solution, but rather as a *strategy*. Other strategies such as provision of school meals, school book schemes etc. are indicative of disadvantage beyond the confines of a limited range of identified disadvantaged areas. Nevertheless, concerted efforts must continue to tackle the problems of these disadvantaged groups.

A number of features of the educational system reflect inconsistencies in the development of equitable policy responses to educational disadvantage. Alongside innovative and far-sighted projects such as the home/school/community liaison project and YOUTHREACH, there is the continued existence of support from public funds for private fee-paying schools, selective entrance examinations and examination fees at second level. **The Council welcomes the criteria proposed in the Green Paper, with which schools would be required to comply in order to obtain state funding.** Another manifestation of an apparently ad hoc nature of the response to educational disadvantage in public policy is the variety of pilot projects, many of which exist on an uncertain basis, on unstable **funding and which operate in isolation.** YEP's and the operation of school meals service were discussed as examples of this approach. **The Council recommends thorough assessments and evaluation of pilot projects following which positive decisions are taken either to extend them on a nationwide basis where appropriate, or to pursue a more appropriate strategy.**

The Council welcomes the Green Paper's commitment to quality assurance in educational provision. The Council is concerned that procedures for the

assessment of programmes and projects take account of the distinct client groups, ethos and methods of social programmes such as YOUTHREACH. Standard methods of assessment are not appropriate for such programmes and if used, may understate considerable achievements.

Chapter 5 reviews existing provision and practice with regard to students with special needs arising from disability. The Council is concerned at the lack of quantitative data on young people with special needs in education and welcomes the Green Paper's recognition of this problem. The Council is concerned, too, at the lack of assessment and monitoring of educational placements for young people with special needs, whether in special or integrated educational settings. **It recommends that such placements and the educational needs of such young people be reviewed systematically on an annual basis with the full participation of parents and the relevant educational and health care personnel.** The Council has identified other issues, including the implications of the growing trend towards integration of children with special needs into the standard school system, which it anticipates will be addressed by the expert Special Education Review Committee, whose report is expected shortly.

The Council has identified the large number of young people in the pass general Leaving Certificate stream as one of the most serious issues of educational disadvantage. These young people are disadvantaged because they pursue a course which does not suit their abilities and they are consequently dissatisfied with their education. They are disadvantaged, too, by their limited further education and labour market opportunities. The Green Paper recognises that the senior cycle is now unsuitable for a significant number of students. It cautions against the development of programmes outside the Leaving Certificate programme for fear they become stigmatised as streams for the less able.

The Council recognises that these are well-founded concerns. The Council believes that the approach to creating new options in the senior cycle would be to create structured paths from such alternative programmes to labour market positions and apprenticeships, and to further education and training opportunities. These routes should also provide the opportunity to avail of further education and training through a ladder type structure. **The Council believes that it is only through direct and structured links with particular post-programme opportunities that these new programmes will attain the desired credibility.**

The Green Paper describes the educational system as overly centralised and recommends decentralisation through devolving power to Boards of

Management. The Programme for Government has subsequently proposed democratic intermediate structures as the vehicle of devolution, with responsibility for the management of first and second level education. While acknowledging the different views on the matter, **the Council is of the view that the latter system of devolution provides the greater possibilities for using available resources to develop more efficient and effective methods of supporting the educational process, while providing a suitable framework for tackling educational disadvantage.** Provision of support services through a local intermediate structure would reduce the risk that schools would compete wastefully for scarce resources. Support services, if organised in this way, could be provided efficiently to support school based and non-school based, formal and informal initiatives addressing disadvantage. Support and evaluation services could operate at this level and quality assurance could be part of the mandate. Given demographic changes, the need to deliver a wider curriculum and the consequent necessity to restructure education provision in the future, the Council believes that devolution to local education structures is a requirement for rational, sensitive and responsive educational provision.

Chapter 5 has detailed the changing role of the RTC's, the growth in private colleges of further education and the explosion in the provision of post-Leaving Certificate courses. The Council shares the concern expressed in the Green Paper about aspects of these developments. The Green Paper acknowledges that these ad hoc developments must now be rationalised. The registration of private colleges is proposed as a means of assuring quality. The Green Paper is also concerned that sub-degree diplomas and certificates retain their value in their own right. While the expansion of further training is beneficial, post-secondary qualifications must not simply become a further rung on a ladder leading to university or third level courses. The Green Paper proposed that accreditation and certification problems which have arisen be addressed through establishing a single Education and Training Certification Body, which will incorporate the functions of the current NCEA and NCVA. **The Council welcomes all of the above recommendations.**

Some recent amendments to the third level student support scheme relate specifically to the needs of mature students and the revised scheme is more facilitative of their entry to third level. Similarly, proposals in the Green Paper for more modular courses would facilitate part-time attendance, again facilitating adult education and participation in third level. In addition, the Green Paper recommends an increased number of reserved places for mature students at third level. All of these are welcome, but there is a need for a wider range of policies to address the scope for enhanced second-chance

educational opportunities, together with encouragement for life-long learning as an intrinsic element in personal and economic development.

The Green Paper asserts a continued commitment to tackling the problems of educationally disadvantaged adults, particularly those who experience literacy and numeracy difficulties. Information, guidance and counselling arrangements are stated to be under review. **While this focus on adult education is welcome, it is the Council's view that the focus must be expanded.** Adults returning to third level and seriously educationally disadvantaged adults with literacy and related problems represent either end of a spectrum. While both extremes require specific policy responses, the Council believes that an approach which promotes continuing education as a common feature of adult life would have more impact. Adults in unstable or changing employment would benefit from a variety of education and training approaches. Adult education structures must be sensitive to the needs of these adults and facilitate their participation in appropriate courses. The Council believes that a developed system of accreditation is necessary to develop linkages between the various strands of adult and continuing education, and thus to encourage adults, as well as young people, to progress through the education and training system at their own pace and in accordance with their own requirements.

## 5. PRINCIPLES FOR EDUCATION POLICY DEVELOPMENT

The Council has reviewed a wide range of issues in this Report. It has outlined in the preceding sections of this Chapter its conclusions and recommendations on a number of issues raised by the Green Paper on Education in the light of that review. In this section, the Council sets out its conclusions on the general principles which it believes should guide the development of education policies. These relate to the parameters of educational policy, the teaching resource, the role of local education structures and the school/work nexus. These are discussed in turn below.

### (i) Educational Policy

Ireland is unusual in not having an extensive legislative basis for the delivery of educational services. Whether for this or other institutional reasons the review of policy and performance over the long-run suggests that educational policy has tended to lack a certain rigour and coherence. **It is the Council's view that a more rigorous approach to the formulation of educational policy would result in more successful attainment of stated objectives.** This is manifest at all levels of education. For example, despite frequent statements about the importance of pre-school education, particularly as regards educational

disadvantage, there is, as noted above, no formally expressed public policy on pre-school provision and no formally recognised qualification for pre-school teachers. At primary level, the evidence suggests that there have been many specific innovative projects but that these have amounted, in effect, to a series of unco-ordinated initiatives to tackle disadvantage, many of a discretionary nature. There are, in addition, problems with the implementation of policy, expressed for example in a number of contradictory features of related schemes, e.g. Youth Encounter Projects for young people with particular needs are funded on an annual basis, which must be negotiated. Such a basis for funding makes it difficult to appoint staff on a permanent basis; yet the arrangements for entry to in-service training stipulate that staff must be permanent. Such contradictions, while they can be easily rectified, appear to be a common feature of Irish educational policy. Another example of such anomalies in the approach to policy on disadvantage are the various fees which exist throughout the system, such as examination fees, which are levied on all students by the same institutions which operate book assistance schemes and meal supplement schemes for children of lower income families.

In addition to such specific difficulties the record suggests that, in the past, educational policy has not been based on a complete or coherent view of the educational process. Ad hoc initiatives and schemes exist at all levels, but there has been little linkage or continuity between the various initiatives. In particular, there is a need to reflect a more complete view of the education process in policy and practice, rather than treating each level as a self-contained unit.

Some have suggested that, in the past, some educational initiatives and programmes were developed as a response to available European funding. Many of these developments which have occurred are positive and to be welcomed *and generally represent effective responses to educational or labour market needs*. However, ad hoc responses to specific problems or to available funding cannot substitute for a coherent national education policy with clearly identified priorities.

At a micro level it appears that many initiatives and schemes have suffered from the lack of clearly defined arrangements for co-ordination and administration, especially at the point of delivery of services. The importance of such arrangements, and of ensuring that adequate provision is made in personnel and other arrangements has tended to be overlooked, resulting in increased pressure on professionals involved

who assume the administrative role alongside their primary responsibilities, in what are often innovative projects. Such issues cannot be ignored in developing policies, structures and programmes in an appropriately diversified educational system.

(ii) **The Teaching Resource**

The most important resource in formal education is the teaching profession. New initiatives and programmes, as well as the successful implementation of educational policy, demand a well-prepared teaching staff. The success of educational policy and of planned changes in policy depend on the capacity and co-operation of the teachers in the classroom. Similarly, the quality of the education received by children is heavily dependent on the performance of teachers, which in turn reflects the organisation and culture of schools. The qualifications and performance of the teaching profession in Ireland are widely respected as reflecting very high standards. Educational policy must ensure that this valuable teaching resource is developed and deployed to continue to provide a quality service and that effective mechanisms exist to support such quality.

In the past, the immediate response to tackling educational disadvantage was to lower the pupil/teacher ratio. More recent experience has shown that, within the range of reasonable class size, lowering the pupil/teacher of itself is of little benefit, if the teaching methods and content are inappropriate. In this regard the recognition of the centrality of the teaching profession in the Green Paper is welcome. The importance of in-service training is also emphasised. However, the Council is concerned that provision for in-service training as described in the Green Paper will continue to deliver this training on an irregular and ad hoc basis.

It is the Council's view that in-service training should be an institutionalised, regular component of teacher training. Rather than viewing it as a facility provided at times of dramatic change, in-service teacher training should be an accepted, regular constituent part of teacher education. Given the continual change which occurs in the educational environment and the adoption of new educational approaches, the absence of more regular in-service training reduces the capacity of teachers to perform to their full potential. Necessary changes in organisational and other arrangements must be effected to enable this to happen. This is of particular importance given the relatively low level of turnover in teaching staff. The teaching profession cannot be expected

to continue delivering a quality service, especially to educationally disadvantaged young people, if they are not equipped with the necessary skills to do so.

### (iii) Local Education Structures

The suggestion that there is a need for an additional organisational tier, operating at a local or regional level and reflecting a new division of labour between individual schools, local educational bodies and the Department of Education has led to much debate. Much of this debate has centred around the changed distribution of power involved in a development of this kind. The Council supports the view that there is a need for local education structures. The Council has decided to support local education structures not in terms of any particular reallocation of power, but rather on the basis of more effective service provision and more efficient use of available resources.

It is envisaged that local education structures would cover both primary and post-primary levels. International variations in the length of education at each level, and in the point at which transition occurs, confirm that the boundaries between the primary and post-primary systems are not "natural" divisions, but rather the result of national practice and tradition. There is therefore no necessary division or distinction in many of the supports and services required by students in the different stages of education.

A particular criterion of importance to the Council in establishing any new structures is their likely impact on the effectiveness of measures to deal with disadvantage. The appropriate level at which to target disadvantage and educational inequality has been the subject of much discussion. An area-based approach, as illustrated by the home-school community liaison project, has been commended for acknowledging and seeking to address the sources of disadvantage that occur in community and home life and which impinge on educational success. Concern has however been expressed that, while an area-based approach is valuable, problems of inequality and disadvantage persist outside heavily disadvantaged *areas*, at individual school and family levels. Tackling the problem on a common basis in all schools is one alternative, and very expensive, approach. Policy must also address the needs for support of many established initiatives to tackle disadvantage, i.e. YOUTH-REACH, which operate outside the school system. For example, this programme requires the support of counselling services for participants. The number of participants in any one scheme and their location outside

school make it difficult and expensive to provide this service. Equally, any one school might only have a small number of students in need of similar counselling facilities — too few to justify the allocation of such resources to the individual school, despite the real needs of the students involved. The organisation of services, in this example counselling services, on an area basis would circumvent these problems and allow for more efficient use of resources across a range of schools and services, as students' needs require. Given the established role of positive discrimination in education policy, particular geographical areas with greater needs could be more generously supported. The organisation of resources at local level would mean they could service all of the various initiatives and needs in that area. The size of a school project, or the numbers involved in individual schools or programmes, would no longer constitute a barrier to access to specialist services. The argument can be generalised from the particular example of counselling to include the important areas of in-service training and professional development.

Local education structures would also be of benefit in the face of demographic changes and falling student numbers. Schools may end up competing with each other for students and providing an inadequate service if the response to the demographic changes and the scope for integration or amalgamation are left to individual schools alone.

Each school is a unique organisation and its behaviour and reaction to new initiatives and programmes can be quite distinctive individual and specific to its traditions and culture. Liaising with schools at this individual level is the key to the successful implementation of policy changes. A support and evaluation service could be provided through a local education structure to provide a structured basis for effective liaison with individual schools.

External support is especially necessary for vocational education and training. Schools require a great deal of support and advice when they embark on the provision of new vocational subjects and new programmes. For example, the necessary reorganisation required by the new options with the Leaving Certificate programme will be substantial for some schools. A support and evaluation service would be of particular assistance in these circumstances. It is imperative for the success of new programmes that schools provide adequate facilities, quality staff and resources and avail of in-service training. The Irish educational system, unlike many of its European counterparts is now geared to the provision of academic and vocational education in the same

educational setting. Through regular and structured contact with schools, a local education structure could monitor this process within schools.

Work experience and work placements are going to become a stronger feature of second level education with the introduction of the new options in the senior cycle. Through local education structures, this important new element of educational provision could be monitored and assessed. The educational and skill development aspects of the work placement could be monitored and schools could benefit from an understanding of the practice of other schools. Systems of vocational preparation require continuous review, as is evident from the practice of our European counterparts as described in Chapter 4. This kind of review at local level should aim to ensure a consistently high standard and should enable policy decisions at national level to be better informed by performance and problems at the point of delivery of programmes.

#### (iv) **The School/Work Nexus**

Beginning earlier this century and particularly since the 1960s, the link between education and work has been frequently debated and has been the subject of numerous policy strategies. A number of educational programmes, such as the senior certificate and VPT programmes, developed as responses to the needs of lower achieving students in making the transition from school to work. The difficulties of the transition are well documented. These relate not only to the personal difficulties experienced by young people, particularly students with lower academic ability, but also to the most appropriate locus of training. The Council is of the view that, in addition to developing appropriate school based educational strategies, greater emphasis must also be placed on the workplace as the other part of the school/work equation.

One of the most strikingly distinctive features of the Irish vocational education and training system from an international comparative perspective is the limited amount of structured training which occurs in the workplace and the peripheral role of employers in the education and training system. Apart from the apprenticeship system, employers in Ireland have had limited involvement with the design of course material, the development of appropriate assessment, accreditation and even work placements. The recent NCVA proposals for employer involvement in the various stages of level 2 qualifications represent a significant departure.

The fear is often expressed that greater employer involvement will compromise our system of general education, symbolised by the Leaving Certificate. This system is renowned for good reason and future policy must continue to protect the most positive aspects of Irish education. It is time nonetheless to reconsider the extent to which equality of opportunity can be equated with uniform access to the same examination and the same programme of education for all students. The admirable expansion of educational participation over recent years has had the unintended, but inevitable consequence that the Leaving Certificate programme is failing many students for whom it is not suited.

A number of programmes have developed alongside the Leaving Certificate over the years. In general, they have tended to become lower status alternatives and many young people continued to opt instead for general pass level Leaving Certificates. The senior certificate has been an important development at senior cycle. During the pilot project stage it successfully combined school-based education and work-based education. Participants were very positive about their learning experiences during the programme. The Council is of the view that it is necessary for a senior cycle option based on the senior certificate to emphasise and structure a link with employers and the labour market in order to ensure that the programme will not become a poor relation to the Leaving Certificate. Carefully designed and well planned programmes of study are essential, but they are not enough. Agreement amongst the social partners must safeguard the movement of young people with specific levels of education and training into appropriate positions in the labour market. Such an agreement would have a number of important beneficial effects: (1) it would recognise the value of all forms of education and training; (2) it would motivate employer interest and involvement in vocational education and training; and (3) it would restrict to some degree the rise in credentialism, which shuts off jobs to the least educated and underuses skills acquired through the education system. The Council remains concerned about the large number of young people in the pass general Leaving Certificate stream. There must be a commitment and effective action to ensure that their unsatisfactory situation does not continue alongside the proposed new programmes.

#### **Training in the Work Place**

As already stated, Ireland is unusual in terms of the limited amount of structured training that occurs in the work place. This under-training permeates all skills levels: shop floor workers, crafts people, technicians,



supervisors and management. Product ranges and corporate and management strategies are key to a firm's demand for skills. In the light of the evidence reviewed in this Report, **the Council recommends that public support for the development of indigenous enterprises should give priority to the development of managerial capacity in the areas of marketing and product and process development.** The Council therefore endorses the proposal of the Industrial Policy Review Group that appropriate commitments to undertake management and supervisory training should be a prerequisite for access to state services and aids.

Ireland is in a different position to Denmark and The Netherlands at present in that it is now attempting to provide formal vocational training for a wider range of occupations. This provides the opportunity to learn from best practice internationally. The benefits of employer involvement have been demonstrated elsewhere. A knowledge of, and input into, course content, the structure of work placements, assessment procedures and standards of achievement encourage employers to value vocational education and training as an investment. **The Council recommends a strategic emphasis on building high-level skills and knowledge for work from a solid basis of general education.**

## 6. CONCLUSION

In Ireland, many of those who are currently in the labour force have spent most of their formative experience in a relative rigid economy. They have received little encouragement for entrepreneurship or innovation and limited opportunities for the acquisition of advanced skills. Consequently, the current labour force has low levels of qualifications and is weak in management skills. It is thus not well prepared for the sweeping changes in the economic environment which have been facing us over the past decade. The skills that are required include the ability to apply changing technologies in a fast moving economy, manage firms in ways that improve productivity, and build markets in overseas economies. The questions for policy are whether new arrangements will encourage the development of new skills and whether both on and off-the-job education systems can meet the changing needs of our people, especially those who are most vulnerable to the effects of educational disadvantage.

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NOTE: The date on the front cover of the report refers to the date the report was submitted to the Government. The date listed here are the dates of publication.

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