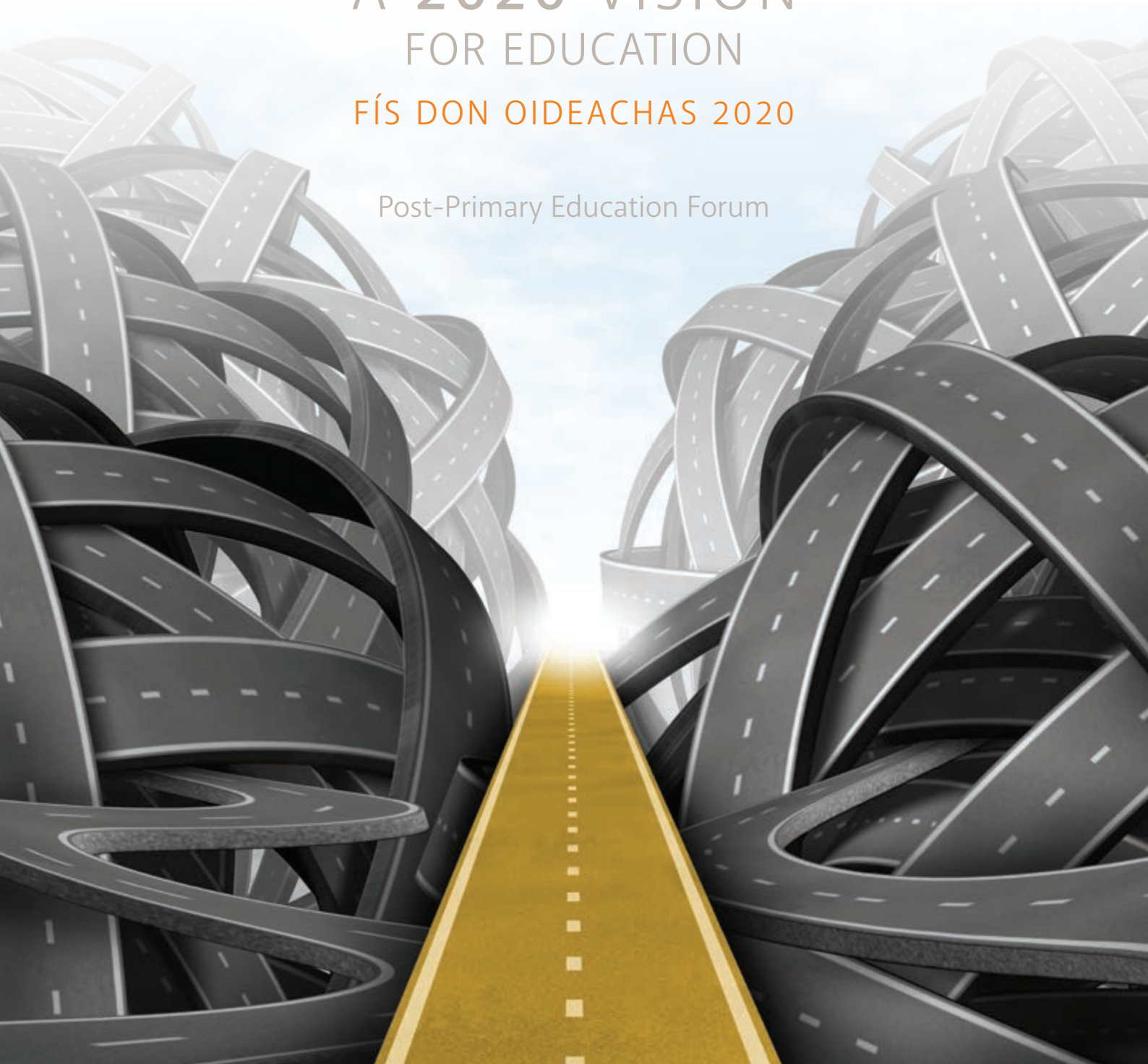


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A 2020 VISION FOR EDUCATION

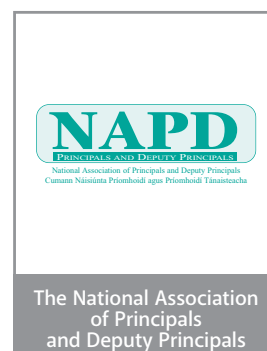
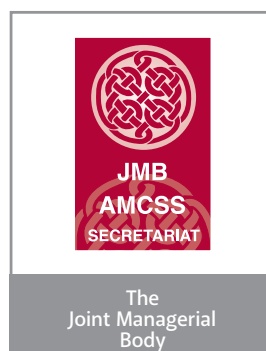
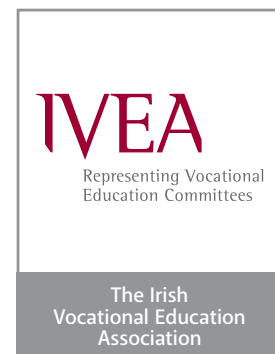
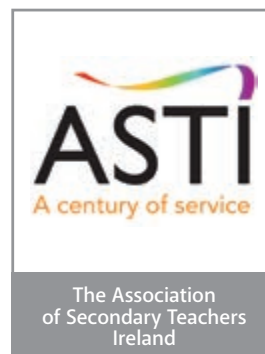
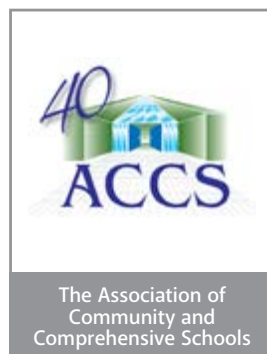
FÍS DON OIDEACHAS 2020

Post-Primary Education Forum





	Introduction	01
1.	Educational Vision	01
2.	Parents	01
3.	Students	01
4.	Teachers	01
5.	Learning Environments, Curriculum and Assessment	01
6.	School Leadership and Management	01
7.	Inclusion and Disadvantage	01
8.	Society and Economy	01
9.	Recommendations - Executive Summary	01
10.	Supplemental Information on Recommendations	01





a shared viewpoint
on priorities



Introduction

The Post-Primary Education Forum (PPEF) is an umbrella group comprising representation from parents, trade unions, school leaders and management bodies involved in the post-primary education sector in Ireland. Founded in November 2007, the PPEF seeks to address common issues and establish a shared viewpoint on priorities for the future development of second level education. The vision of the Forum reflects the distinct flavour and authenticity of a practitioner perspective.

This document presents a coherent and authoritative position of the future for education in Ireland, a position that articulates the Forum's common aims and ideals and that presents a view of the direction in which Irish education should be moving; a view that is shared by all the partners in education.

The editorial layout chosen identifies a number of key headings on which such a coherent and authoritative policy position can be articulated. The number of such headings could easily run to over twenty, but has been limited here to eight, in the hope that these might encompass the main issues and yet be easily enough recalled to mind. The essential points sketched under each heading are informed firstly by recurring themes that have been raised by members of the Forum, but also, insofar as possible, by practical research evidence from international and Irish sources. The focus is not centrally on the provision of resources. It is rather on the kind of educational thinking which seeks to show *why* the provision of particular kinds of resources, and their judicious use, is so crucial to enhancing the quality of learning and teaching.

A photograph of a Zen garden. In the foreground, a stack of five smooth, rounded stones is arranged vertically. The top stone is light grey, the second is a darker grey, and the bottom three are a reddish-brown. The stones are set on a bed of light-colored sand. In the background, the sand is ruffled into concentric, wavy patterns that create a sense of depth and movement. The overall lighting is soft and natural, creating a calm and balanced atmosphere.

securing a better
balance in policymaking,
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1. Educational Vision

This section deals with the question of a distinctive vision, and a distinctive voice, on the part of the PPEF. The bodies represented on the Forum each have a vision of education which is grounded in the fact that they have at least one foot within the domain of educational practice. Granted, parents and managerial bodies do not spend the bulk of their time within the class-room. Yet the heart of the vision they articulate comes from familiarity with daily accounts of the practices that teachers and students engage in; practices which, for their part, school leaders and management bodies try to advance. National policymakers in education tend to take a macro perspective, attuned to other realities than those of educational practitioners and their students. A preoccupation with strategic concerns, linked to national economic and social policies, can deflect the attentions of policymakers from the real heart of the educational matter. The macro perspectives of educational policymakers can put the quality of educational relationships, and the quality of learning environments, to the sideline of their vision. Their concern with quality, and quality assurance, is often seen in functional terms – as a performance management project,

rather than one of educational vision, commitment and renewed energy. An example would be the European Union policy documents on education and training. EU Education and Training strategy 2020 – a follow-on from the EU Lisbon Agenda – aims to make the EU region the most competitive knowledge-based economy in the world by 2020. While much good work is currently being done at EU level on the themes of school leadership, teacher induction, and quality of teaching, the perspective of economic policy underlying *Europe 2020* is unlikely alone to provide inspiration for an educational vision worthy of the enduring commitments of teachers and students.

An initial common theme is the aim of achieving full participation by the various partners to ensure a quality education for all students. Informing this common theme is a democratic conviction, stressing the necessity to bring about a greater equality of provision, and to strengthen mutual respect and trust between teachers, students and parents. Also evident is a concern that the experienced quality of teaching and learning in our post-primary schools, both for students and

teachers, is not as rich as it might be. A recurring note is that the experience of teaching and learning is too often dominated by externally generated pressures and conformist routines, and is too often hampered by shortages of teachers, sub-standard buildings, out-of-date facilities and inadequate maintenance. Notwithstanding some difference of emphasis, all partners are keen to advance environments of learning that are vibrant yet safe, that are focused on nurturing students' well-being in an authentically holistic manner, that embody the values of equality and inclusion, that manifest fittingly high expectations for *all* students, and that unearth and nourish the students' own potentials and capabilities.

We hope that this vision of education, put forward by the PPEF, can be a decisive influence in securing

a better balance in policymaking, ensuring that the human heart of all educational endeavours remains central. To put the challenges faced by a genuine vision of education in frank terms: Is education to be acknowledged as a practice in its own right, with its own enduring purposes and its own inherent but transparent standards? Or is it to be viewed as an essentially subordinate field of action, to be shaped and controlled in all important respects by the current imperatives of government and the economy? Ireland should rightly belong among the countries which lead the world where the quality of public education is concerned. But the countries which can unambiguously claim that distinction have also given to a practitioner perspective a more central place in the shaping and implementation of national educational policy. ¹

Substantial and lasting educational benefits are evident where parents are encouraged to participate continually in their children's learning





2. Parents

Agreement on putting the needs of the student first:

We cannot overemphasise the necessity for active participation by parents in matters distinct from fundraising. Among the areas that could be developed in this regard are: school attendance and support strategies; re-imagined parent-teacher meetings; schools' extra-curricular programmes. Attention is called to a particular challenge in making advances on these fronts, namely, widening the participation of parents, as distinct from increasing the engagement of those already engaged.

Well-informed participation:

Substantial and lasting educational benefits are evident where parents are encouraged to participate continually in their children's learning, where they become practised in doing so, and where a tradition of trust and co-operation with their children's teachers is built up. One might rightly say that this observation hardly needs support from educational research. But the research evidence verifies it strongly (e.g. from North America and Northern European

countries), highlighting the importance of things such as: knowing what questions to ask about students' experiences in school and about students' progress; monitoring and supporting students' homework efforts; being full partners in school decisions that affect their children; participating in parent-teacher meetings that are mutually relevant and meaningful.²

The most recent evidence of parental engagement in the Irish post-primary schools, carried out by the ESRI as part of their Post-Primary Longitudinal Study, confirms the traditional commitment of the individual parent to the child's educational welfare. The study further shows that the collaborating activity of parents collectively in the school community is weak. Furthermore, nationally parents have yet to establish a firm and consistent role in education policy development. To this end a National Parents Council post-primary (NPCpp), properly resourced, has an opportunity to participate effectively as set out in the Education Act 1998.





students as active
and responsible
participants
in their own learning



3. Students

Students' rights:

The debates of the 1990s (associated with Green Paper, National Education Convention, White Paper, etc.) established the principle that students should, as far as possible, have a voice in decisions that affect their life and work in schools. This principle is included in the Education Act of 1998³. The PPEF proposes to advance this principle further and calls for the establishment of a Learners' Charter, with minimum standards of entitlement for: class size, support for students with special needs, provision for students' particular curriculum needs, student welfare and counselling, ICT supports, qualified teachers who have regular opportunities for professional development available to them, and administrative supports. This stress on a body of minimum entitlements is a salutary reminder of the requirements that arise from teaching as a complex practice with its own inherent demands and necessities.

Student-teacher relationships:

In addition to this formal, rights-based view of students' participation in schools, there is also the necessity to stress a more pedagogical point, one often overlooked. That point is that teaching is *never* a one-way action of transmission – whether of information, skills, cultural inheritances or whatever. Teaching and learning constitute, from the start, an *interplay* of influences: an experience shared, from different cultural perspectives, by teachers and their students. The fact that the sharing might sometimes be in the form of a challenge, overt or tacit, to the other party, doesn't make it any less a shared experience. In fact this highlights the paramount importance of building fruitful relationships of learning between a teacher on the one hand, and on the other, a class of students in all their plurality and individuality. It also stresses the necessity of sustaining and enhancing such relationships through environments of learning that are stimulating and caring, and in well-judged ways, challenging.

Choosing subjects for the right reasons:

Under the leadership of an accomplished, perceptive teacher, such learning environments take on their own flavour, rhythm and energy. Such circumstances allow an uncovering of the potentials and limitations that are native to each student, thus setting their energies and their learning on pathways that are likely to be most fruitful and fulfilling. This point links the emergent sense of identity of students in their teenage years to what the various subjects and programmes on the curriculum seek to say to them. Few teachers fail to see the longer term educational importance of this point, particularly when it comes to picking subjects for which one has a real aptitude. Yet it is a point that is almost entirely overlooked by current widely-canvassed proposals to prioritise the study of mathematics and science above all other areas of knowledge. Such proposals are legitimately linked to overall Government strategy for economic development. However, they must also be considered from the perspective of overall educational objectives. There is a need for more a more informed discussion on the balance of knowledge areas in the curriculum.

Imagination and feedback in relationships of learning:

Relationships of learning are based on many forms of interaction. Assessment of learning is a key dimension of such interaction. Assessment of learning is part of the everyday work of teachers and students. It is the continuous process of generating evidence of learning, of making and sharing judgements about that learning, and in some instances, reporting that judgement to wider audiences. Based upon national research evidence and international best practice, a strong critique has emerged in relation to the place and practice of assessment in our schools and in the education system more generally. The current renewal of the Junior Cycle curriculum is based in considerable measure on such a critique.

International research studies support the observations just made; especially studies investigating pedagogical approaches that emphasise feedback to and consultation with students. These studies underline the point that healthy environments of learning are essentially *co-creations* by teachers and students. Such pedagogical approaches are most familiar under the umbrella term 'Assessment for Learning' (AfL). But the AfL label is probably a bit restrictive for the range of pedagogies that now focus on students as active and responsible participants in their own learning.⁴ What is especially promising about practical research initiatives of this kind is that they tackle the dullness of the kind of predictable routines that post-primary students have criticised. At the same time, it is important that we develop systems that have the support of teachers; that can provide solid and reliable evidence of progress of student learning and that, crucially, support student learning. We need new assessment skills to support the 21st century skill sets which include high standards of numeracy and literacy but also capacities such as initiative, participation, critical thinking, analysis and evaluation.



4. Teachers

Building on traditional strengths rather than seeking fix-it remedies:

Educational authorities in Finland in recent years have had to restrain the flood of visiting parties from other countries who are keen to find the secret of Finland's remarkable educational success and bring it back to their own countries. The Finns themselves maintain that their success is not attributable to specific items of policy reform that can readily be picked up and applied elsewhere.⁵ They point out that their success is due rather to a *tradition*, built up over a few generations, which places a major premium on the preparation and continuing renewal of teachers of the highest quality. The real lesson to be learned from Finland is that teachers are to be regarded as a major national resource, firstly for cultural and social reasons, but also for cultivating the initiative and innovation needed for advanced economic progress. The education partners there clearly give unqualified support and energies to ensuring that the environments of learning in their schools are second to none;

that they are venturesome, healthy and hopeful places for learners, including teachers, to be.

Ireland has reason to be proud of its traditions in teaching: a point that has been repeatedly commented on in some influential publications in recent decades.⁷ This should not be taken for granted however, nor be seen as any guarantee for the future. Ireland did not, it must be stressed, have an enviable tradition in the resourcing of teacher education, though some important advances were made in the last few decades, until the cutbacks arising from the current economic downturn. It is crucial that candidates of the highest calibre continue to be attracted to teaching, and that the selection and professional training of teachers in Ireland clearly set a pattern to be matched internationally. This is not an unrealistic ideal. Significant steps towards it are already evident in the collaborative and action-based training that is increasingly becoming the pattern in the education departments of universities and colleges of education. In addition, the establishment of the Teaching Council has

contributed much already to maintaining high standards of entry to the teaching profession. It is these kinds of initiatives that build a respected tradition, and they need to be actively affirmed and cultivated. Any policy measures which hamper such initiatives by canvassing budget-style forms of teacher education serve to discredit Ireland's educational record and to belittle the cultivation of a particularly valuable natural resource. The report of the International Review Panel on the Structure of Initial Teacher Education raises similar concerns.

Induction and Continuing Professional Development:

In the early 21st century we are continually reminded that we are in an era of lifelong learning. In this connection, not nearly enough attention has been given to the continuing professional development of teachers in Ireland. Even after the setting up of the Teacher Education Section in the DES in 2001, national policy on the continuing education of teachers focused largely on servicing the functional needs of the system, through what was commonly called 'in-service'. This was quite distinct from identifying and catering to the needs of schools as learning communities, or to the developmental needs of teachers themselves. The National Pilot Project on Teacher Induction provided much needed empirical data on the needs of newly qualified teachers. This should be drawn on by the Teaching Council as it develops an induction model for all newly qualified teachers from 2012 onwards. Even a basic understanding of the lifelong learning concept requires that a proper induction service should be available to all newly-qualified teachers, as a fundamental part of a national provision for continuing professional development.

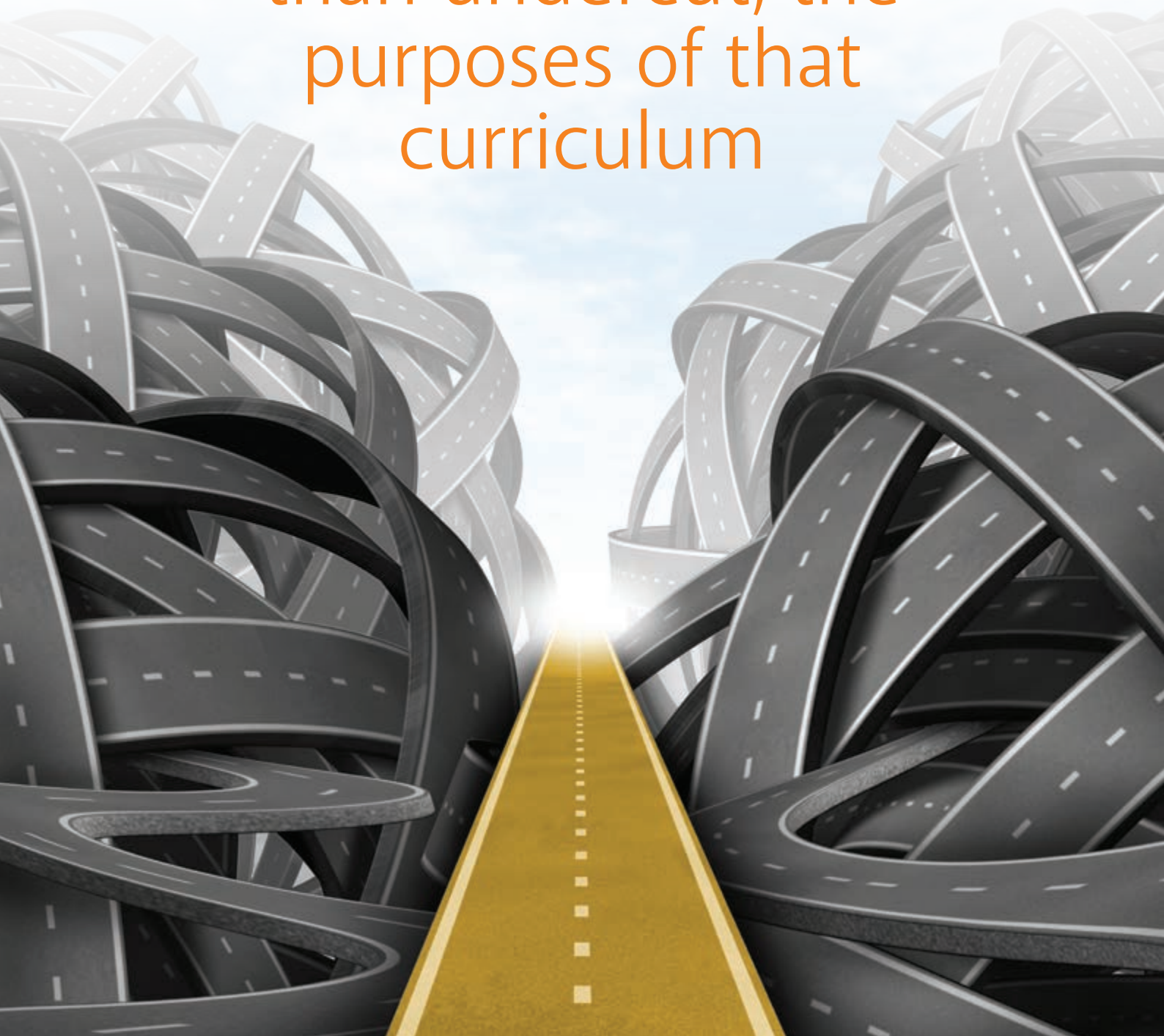
Teaching as a Secure and Attractive Career:

The Forum believes that teaching must remain a secure and attractive career. However, it often takes the best part of a decade for a newly-qualified teacher to get a permanent job. About a third of the teaching force at post-primary level is in career 'limbo'. The reasons why this situation developed can be traced to measures like the 'concessionary hours' system to allow schools to provide a diversified curriculum in response to students' needs. However opportune these measures might have been for dealing with difficulties of the moment, their unintended effects have allowed a situation to evolve that no one with a concern for professional standards can countenance. These effects work against the ideals of embracing newcomers to the teaching career and consolidating their professional strengths. Such ideals lie at the heart of induction and early professional development programmes for teachers in those jurisdictions with which Ireland may be fairly compared, for instance Scotland and Northern Ireland. Getting rid of the ad-hoc 'hours' system and providing proper systems for the employment, deployment, and progression of teachers, is now itself a major and an urgent concern for the education partners, and in particular for the DES. The 2005 OECD report, *Teachers Matter: Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers*⁸, underlines the necessity to ensure that the entrance conditions, and employment conditions, of the teaching career are made secure, if teaching itself is to remain (and in some countries to become) an attractive career choice. The 2009 TALIS report⁹ provides worrying data for Ireland in this regard. A very practical way forward for the Department of Education & Skills would be to revisit the many practical proposals contained in its commissioned report published in 2002: "The Allocation of Teachers to second level schools".



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curriculum



5. Learning Environments, Curriculum & Assessment

Where it all comes together: the quality of experience in the learning environment:

These might constitute three separate headings, but they are brought together under one here to stress a critically important point: Learning environments are where a curriculum is actually experienced by teachers and students – where a curriculum comes to life and engages both students and teachers, or where it fails to do so. Insightfully designed curricula for post-primary education rightly envisage new imaginative neighbourhoods into which the unfolding experiences of adolescent learners are drawn, and in which the learners become progressively more fluent, more assured, more venturesome and more at home. Yet, even the best such curriculum remains a largely ‘inert script’ unless, and until, the unfettered actions of a teacher make it a progression of vibrant learning experience for students.

Much the same point can be made about the most modern technological resources for

learning, including ‘always-on’ broadband in classrooms and school laboratories. That’s not to say that efforts to devise new curricula, or to provide new technologies in schools, are wasteful. It is rather to emphasise that such efforts are likely to be ultimately *frustrated*, to a greater or lesser degree, if the learning environments for which they are intended are constrained to follow imperatives imposed by curriculum and assessment structures that are largely obsolete.

The view that the curriculum for the established Leaving Cert seeks to cover too much is noted by the members of the Forum. Trying to fit the maximum amount of content into a school syllabus is a dated idea that disregards the concept of lifelong learning, or of learning *how* to learn or indeed the very idea of epistemology. It similarly discourages teachers from pursuing active learning approaches with their students in classrooms and school laboratories. There is a crucial point at issue here for post-primary education policy in Ireland. The education partners and policymakers must decide whether

to remain with conceptions of teaching and learning that are essentially those of the 19th and 20th century, or to develop seriously learning environments matched to the 21st century. These latter include new forms of learning relationships, generic skills sets typically referred to as 21st century learning skills, a decrease in the use of textbooks, a major increase in the use of electronic resources, and an embrace of new forms of crediting what students have learned.

Assessment and its purposes:

It is at this point that the question of assessment, clearly seen as a vexed issue, enters the picture. The established Leaving Certificate, and the points system attached to it, stands as a major controlling force of the environments of learning in Ireland's post-primary schools. It is a basic educational principle that an assessment system associated with a particular curriculum should properly serve and promote, rather than undercut, the purposes of that curriculum. An assessment system, on this understanding, should provide valid and reliable accounts of the benefits gained by learners from their experiences of a particular curriculum. The basic architecture of the Leaving Cert examinations dates back through the post-independence 1920s to the assumptions that informed the Intermediate Education Act of 1878. These assumptions furnished Irish second-level education with an examination regime that sought to reward conformity, predictable drill, dependence on memorised notes, and a self-preoccupied competitiveness in practices of learning and teaching. Systematically discouraged by that regime were learning practices that are now continually emphasised by the best evidence from both research and successful practice. Associated with such newer learning practices are higher-order qualities such as: analysis and evaluation, investigative and problem-solving capacity, a capacity for co-operative learning and team work, study

habits sustained by an inherent interest, self-improvement in the light of feedback, and so on. The NCCA have made renewed efforts to dislodge the dominance of the inherited regime, with some moderate successes, but the older architecture substantially remains in place. That this is largely the case is a direct result of the role which the examination plays in selection for third level education. The 'high stakes' nature of this selection role of the examination has a profound impact on the practices and attitudes of teachers, but also of students and parents.

The fortunes of a major policy shift:

The introduction of the Junior Certificate programme in 1989 was an attempt to make reform inroads on an unchanged curriculum and assessment system. It was stated by the then Minister for Education (Mary O'Rourke) that the underlying purpose was to continue the learner-centred focus of the primary school into second level and to extend it up to the senior cycle. In the succeeding decades, the influences of the older regime continued to assert themselves strongly. For instance, the final part of a three-part ESRI/NCCA study published from 2004 to 2006 found that by third year in post-primary school, significant numbers of students reported an increase in 'teaching from the text' and in boredom in class, a decline in constructive feedback from teachers, and a rise in feelings of negativity toward school.¹⁰

The Minister for Education & Skills published *A Framework for Junior Cycle* in October 2012, following submission of advice from the NCCA. The PPEF believes that with the necessary supports, especially in the area of teacher professional development and ICT infrastructure development, considerable progress can take place in embedding 21st century learning skills in teaching, learning, and assessment practice.

The points system and what it rewards:

The points system is a further pressure in this play of conformist forces. It has often been described as 'brutally fair'. The *Report of the Commission on the Points System* (1998) revealed that the system was largely unloved by Irish students, teachers and parents, but also that there was no credible and practical alternative forthcoming from the Commission's wide consultations. In this context, the PPEF welcomes the Minister's commitment to radically reforming the points system. The reports from the HEA-NCCA Transitions conference and the report from the Irish Universities Association on the reform of selection and entry to university have now provided the necessary research and analysis to enable evidence-based decisions to be taken in this complex policy area.

A wider and more diverse range of learning achievements could be included for credit, as could exercises completed during the course of the school year that make valid appraisals of more active and engaged forms of learning. Concerns are voiced by some teachers that such measures would involve teachers in assessing their own students.

In order to move this debate on, complex issues of assessment of learning, of certification and qualification need to be clarified.

Depending on the nature of assessment, what any particular points total would signify would be something quite different from, and more valid than, from what has been the case until now. It must be emphasised however, that until there is a significant shift in the kind of influence that the established Leaving Certificate holds over the attitudes and practices of teachers, change will be minor, at best. Indeed much of the good work done on other fronts to enhance the quality of learning environments will remain ultimately frustrating, even self-defeating. This is

probably the single most important point to be faced up to in developing the quality of learning in Ireland's post-primary education system at present.

It is absolutely critical that a reformed Senior Cycle and a reformed third level entry system have the confidence of students, teachers, parents and employers.

building and
sustaining vibrant
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for school leaders
who actively share
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their visions and the
tasks for pursuing
those visions



6. School Leadership and Management

Priorities:

Educational leadership is most productive when the quality of students' learning is placed at the centre of the school principal's and management's thinking and actions. This is a dominant theme in educational research internationally. This kind of proactive leadership involves the principal and deputy principal in promoting, and keeping in close touch with, various forms of teamwork among the teachers – e.g. planning in subject teams, sharing innovative ideas, engaging in new teaching initiatives, and carrying out self-evaluation with colleagues. On the face of it, this might be identified with school developmental planning. It should be emphasised however that this kind of educational leadership incorporates more than planning, and that it is to be distinguished from compliance with directives and regulations emanating from outside the school from outside the school. Properly viewed, it is a telling instance of the school taking professional ownership of its own developmental practices. Recent research studies from an Irish context, like

the TL21 project and NCCA research,¹¹ highlight the home-grown benefits to be gained from such practices, by both teachers and students. These benefits – more active involvement by students in their own learning, more imaginative approaches by teachers, better relationships in classrooms, higher achievements by students – mirror those reported by international research in recent years. Especially significant in this latter connection is the 2009 OECD report *Creating Effective Teaching and Learning Environments: First Results from TALIS*.¹²

Current challenges and re-focusing of energies:

The work of support agencies like LDS and agencies such as school management and leadership bodies over the last decade has been steadily cultivating this kind of leadership capacity within the Irish teaching profession. Significant advances have been made in how educational leadership is to be understood and carried out. Part of this advance is the readiness to embrace non-traditional notions

like shared leadership, or distributed leadership (to be distinguished from mere delegation), and teachers-as-leaders.¹³ In the 21st century school, all staff must undertake a leadership role. And the role of the principal and management authority is to facilitate this being both recognised and realised throughout the school community.

Here however, some challenges must be mentioned. The increased administrative burden that school principals have to deal with, not least arising from new education legislation, places serious constraints on the productive exercise of such leadership. Its cultivation in schools is also hampered by the dramatic drop in the number of Special Duties and Assistant Principal posts and by uncertainties about the future of such posts. Evidence from both research and practice internationally is, however, unambiguous: building and sustaining vibrant environments of learning in post-primary schools calls for school leaders who actively share with colleagues both their visions and the tasks for pursuing those visions; leaders who nourish energetic forms of collaboration that contrast sharply with the still-evident professional insulation and isolation of teachers in their own classrooms. This vision is well articulated in the work of leading educational thinkers, in particular 'The Fourth Way'.¹⁴ The necessity for school management to embrace this perspective, and to support and advocate it in their own work, can hardly be

over-emphasised.

While the establishment of the Leadership Development for Schools (LDS) programme was a significant development, much more needs to be done in the area of school leadership.

Bottom-up models of good practice in empowering class teachers to lead learning are emerging and these need to be proactively supported¹⁵. These models aim to initiate and facilitate systemic change, across all levels of education, by specifically encouraging and supporting teachers in consciously modifying their teaching in order to maximise student learning.

It is imperative that we put in place a school leadership programme that not only builds leadership capacity at all levels in our schools from the position of the classroom teacher to the position of the school principal but also engenders a school culture that understands and values leadership at all levels of a school's staffing hierarchy and critically, provides those aspiring to management roles with the technical (as well as generic) skills, knowledge and competences to fill those roles efficiently and effectively. If schools are going to thrive, they need a functioning middle management system - a system that facilitates the pastoral care of students, the day to day administration of the school and the leading of teaching and learning.



7. Inclusion and Disadvantage

Equality in practice:

The PPEF wishes to make an explicit statement of its commitment to equality and inclusion. Practices that are consistent with a commitment to equality and inclusion are particularly important where issues like entrance policies, grouping of students into streams or bands, providing for special educational needs, and meeting the needs of ‘New Irish’ students are concerned. In this context it is important to note the very real achievements of Irish teachers and schools in being among the best in the world at retaining students until the end of senior cycle and of producing a comparatively very high number of third-level graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds.⁶ We must caution however, against taking this achievement for granted, as cuts to education budgets often have the greatest impact on these same disadvantaged students.

In relation to entrance policies, the Forum places a strong emphasis on the transparency of entrance criteria, on shunning ‘cherry-picking’ and on removing any covert forms of

discrimination. This would mean that all post-primary schools would, to the best of their capacity and efforts, welcome students with diverse needs, from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, and with a variety of abilities.

Differentiated learning becoming the norm:

The streaming of students into ability groupings is a practice that has decreased very significantly in recent years, and this trend is likely to continue further in the future. One of its major consequences is the necessity for teachers to become more accomplished in various forms of differentiated teaching and learning. This is partly a matter of mastering new pedagogical strategies, but at a deeper level it marks a shift in the teacher’s understanding of the nature of his/ her role and professional identity. Reports by the Inspectorate have noted that considerable progress has been made in promoting new forms of grouping of students in schools. The national support services, including SLSS, SDPI and SLSS (now amalgamated into the PDST) have also

equity and
quality are
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compatible
and
mutually
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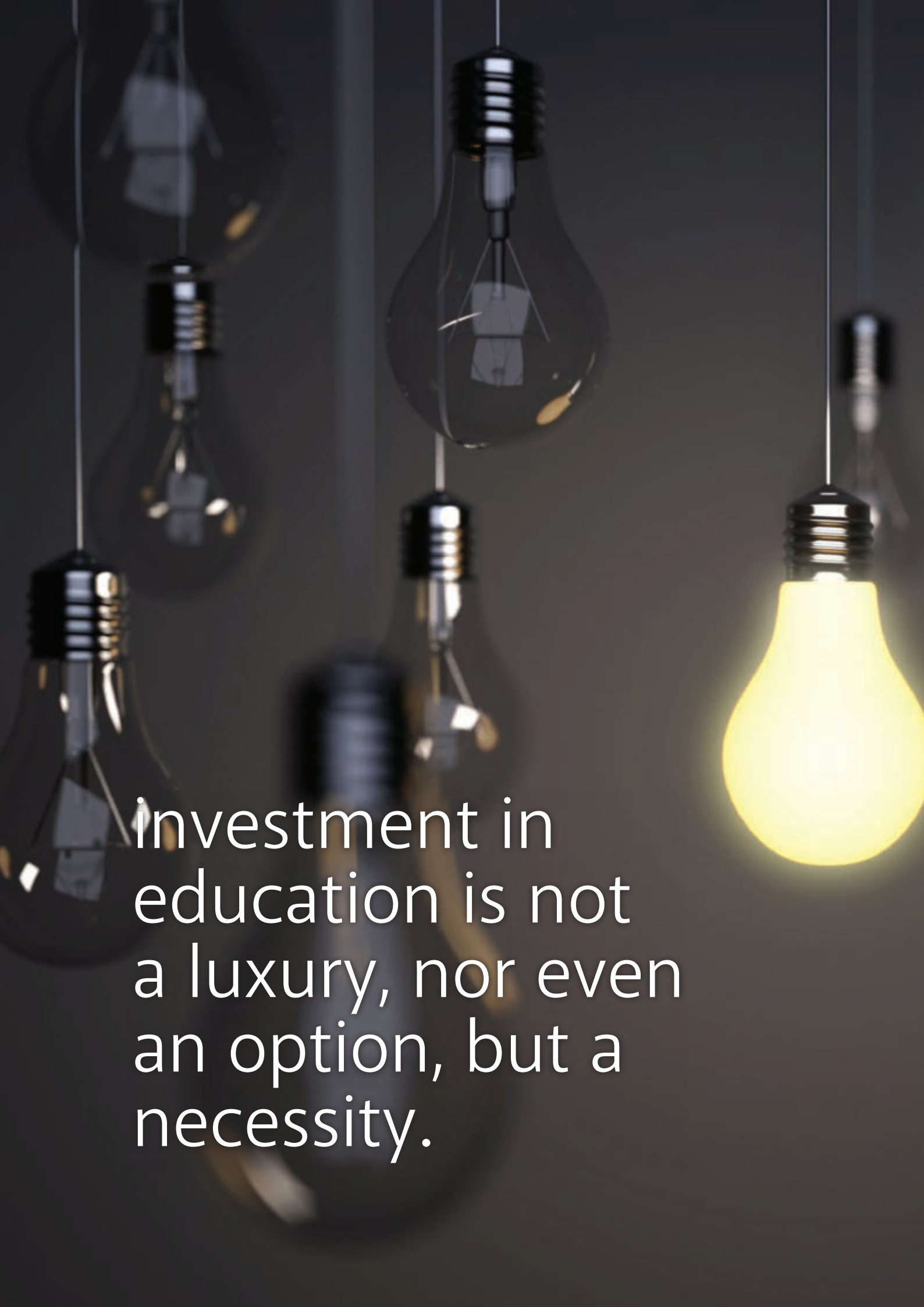
contributed significantly to these developments. The Inspectors' reports stress that more work remains to be done in achieving the integration of previously streamed students, and previous SEN students, into learning environments that are more diversely constituted. What needs to be recognised here is that the work to be done is not a form of 'up-skilling' accomplished through 'in-service', but a form of professional capacity building that engages and reorients the outlooks of teachers, in addition to enhancing their range of skills. Such capacity-building lies at the core of the more long-term work of continuing professional development, for which a proper structure remains to be thought about and planned. Again, the experience of jurisdictions with which Ireland may fairly be compared is very instructive here (e.g. Scotland, Wales, Finland).

In addition to becoming more diverse as regards to abilities of their students, post-primary learning environments have also become much more ethnically diverse. New forms of provision that were made for educational disadvantage and special educational needs, in the wake of education legislation, were followed by new initiatives for language support for students

whose first language is not English. But the recent cutbacks have had a very serious impact in each of these three areas. Ireland must learn from the experience of other countries and take proactive measures to avoid educational underachievement among our New Irish students.

The grounds for the case on equality and inclusion:

If the needs of the student are kept continually to the fore, and if the quality of learning environments is viewed primarily in relation to such needs, a strong and coherent case can consistently be put by the PPEF to government. A society is to be judged not just by the provision it makes for the strongest and most naturally able, but more importantly, by the aptness and quality of the supports it offers to those most in need. This is a case, then, not just for redress of the damage that has been done to the most vulnerable by recent cutbacks. More positively, it is a case for the development of the kind of services of which a developed country with a distinguished tradition in education should be justly proud before the world. In our vision, equity and quality are inherently compatible and mutually reinforcing.



investment in
education is not
a luxury, nor even
an option, but a
necessity.



8. Society and Economy

Education for a changing world:

Contemporary paradigms like 'knowledge economy', 'smart economy', 'learning society' and 'lifelong learning' have in recent years become central in the policy discourse and actions of government, in Ireland as elsewhere. All too often the tenor of policy is responsive mainly to economic consideration and commercial influences, to the comparative neglect of the actual learning practices which prepare and sustain learners as future citizens and participants in economic, social and cultural life. It is the quality of these practices that needs to be continually emphasised. This point applies equally moreover, whether learners' orientations are towards the sciences, applied sciences, humanities, practical arts, performing arts or any different combinations among these. As mentioned in the paragraphs on vision at the start, a preoccupation within national educational policy with the macro perspective of economy and society tends to bypass specifically educational insights. Crucial among such insights is that it is only through making the most of

the opportunities presented in each instance of teaching and learning that learners come to full possession of their capacities. Only thus are they best prepared to live a fulfilled life in each of the dimensions of educational development stressed by national policy itself: 'spiritual, moral, cognitive, emotional, imaginative, aesthetic, social and physical'.¹⁸

Looking at the matter from this practical perspective enables the spotlight to fall on areas of common ground between the aspirations of policymakers and the professional commitments and energies of teachers. Policymakers continually stress the necessity of advancing an economy where systematically developed human capabilities now have the kind of strategic importance that mineral resources and other raw materials had in previous times. Teachers, for their part, are interested in building environments of learning where students can venture ever more fluently, but also safely, into new imaginative neighbourhoods. Although the former standpoint springs largely from extrinsic considerations and the latter from inherently

educational ones, both have an interest in developing the work of schooling as a major national resource – strategic for the one, cultural for the other.

Toward shared views and actions on priorities in Irish post-primary education:

A proper recognition of this point would bring some important shifts in deliberation and decision-making on education in Ireland. In the first place it would highlight the necessity for educational expenditure in Ireland to remain equal to or above the OECD average.

The arguments surrounding the importance for our economic future of maintaining a high quality education system have been well-rehearsed. If we support our schools, our teachers, our parents, and above all our children at this crucial time in their lives, the consequences are positive and profound. If we fail to provide this support, the consequences are unthinkable.

The OECD has consistently reported that investment in education provides a significant economic return both to the individual and to society at large. It also points out that there is a significant social return from investment in education, pointing out that better educated people live longer, are healthier, more socially cohesive and are more informed and effective citizens. In its most recent report *Education at a Glance 2012* the OECD states:

'The financial benefits of completing higher levels of education motivate individuals to postpone consumption today for future rewards. From a policy perspective, awareness of economic incentives is crucial to understanding how individuals move through the education system. Large shifts in the demand for education can drive up earnings

*and returns considerably before supply catches up. This provides a strong signal, both to individuals and to education systems, of the need for additional investment in education*¹⁹.

The report stresses that the benefits accruing from investments in education are diverse and on-going.

'Educational attainment is positively associated with diverse measures of social outcomes, including life expectancy, life satisfaction, electoral participation and social engagement. The strengths of these associations are sometimes substantial.'

And further:

*'Education can enhance social outcomes by helping individuals make informed and competent decisions. Education imparts knowledge and information, improves cognitive skills and strengthens socio-emotional capabilities, such as conscientiousness, self-efficacy and social skills. As such, education can help individuals pursue healthier lifestyles and increase their engagement in civil society.'*²⁰

This analysis is not confined to the OECD. The Joint Economic Committee of the United States House of Representatives in a 2000 report on the public and private returns on investment in education concluded that there are 'enormous benefits' associated with increased education. The Committee goes on to conclude that:

*'In the information economy of the 21st Century, education will become increasingly important. Investment in education contributes to enhanced labour force productivity and enables individuals to become better citizens and parents in addition to being better workers.'*²¹

It is important to note that these, and many other, studies emphasise that the benefits of education accrue to the individual and to society.

In fact, investment in education is not a luxury, nor even an option, but a necessity. Ireland has a consistently low rate of investment in education. This low investment level is manifest, whether educational investment is measured as a proportion of GDP or as a proportion of overall public spending. If Ireland is to thrive economically and socially in the future then it is imperative that the share of our wealth that is invested in education of our children increases.

The Post-Primary Education Forum recommends that the Government should increase the proportion of our wealth that is invested in education system to 7.5% of GDP.

Secondly, it would highlight the continuing necessity for parties who have an enduring interest in the educational system to listen to and speak to each other, as distinct from developing their educational thinking and standpoints in isolation from each other. Countries that are frequently cited for showing 'best international practice' in educational matters already achieve this to a much greater degree than Ireland does (notably Finland). It should be added here however that the public deliberations that attended Ireland's National

Education Convention 1993-94 and the 1995 White Paper *Charting our Education Future*²², showed promising possibilities for such an approach here also. The Post-Primary Education Forum is itself a further important initiative to promote such a debate as a feature of public life, including a more discerning appreciation among the public of education's social, personal, cultural and economic benefits.

The time is right for the State to set out, through a Green Paper, the charting of education in Ireland for the next ten to fifteen years. Developing a roadmap for second level education and establishing what we want in realising an education system that is open, transparent, equitable and meaningful in its preparation for active citizenship, careers and further/higher education options by 2020, must be prioritised in its planning now. This will require a fresh approach informed by contributors both from within the education sphere and, equally importantly, from those in the business/industry sector, with a view to better matching future workplace requirements to the education experience offered through our second level schooling system.





Recommendations – Executive Summary

Recommendation 1: That a *Learners' Charter*, with minimum standards of entitlement for class size, support for students with special needs, provision for students' particular curriculum needs, student welfare and counselling, ICT supports, teacher competences, and administrative supports etc., be put in place, having particular regard to student voice and representation in its drafting.

Recommendation 2: The urgent need for a comprehensive review of all special needs and welfare supports currently available to schools, with a view to devising an appropriately resourced, coherent, comprehensive and integrated support service to support schools and students.

Recommendation 3: Every child is entitled to an education appropriate to their needs. Regard must be given to the individual student's welfare through alternative provision outside of mainstream to safeguard the student's right to an education.

Recommendation 4: Future investment should focus specifically on an integrated approach delivered on a rolling basis, of investment both in hardware and software and investment in teacher training and delivering the curriculum through ICT. At a minimum this integrated approach should comprehend:

- A nationwide programme of professional development to ensure that teachers and school leaders acquire the capabilities to make meaningful use of ICT in their work.
- A sufficient quantity of new and appropriately specified and configured ICT equipment delivered on a rolling basis as needs would warrant.
- The assurance and investment in a robust and appropriately specified cost-effective broadband service that is delivered to all learning and administration areas in a school.
- Technical support to ensure that the school's ICT equipment is appropriately maintained at all times

Recommendation 5: Schools and their students should have access to high quality and Irish curriculum-related digital teaching and learning materials.

Recommendation 6: The State should ensure that all schools should operate fully inclusive enrolment policies and practices.

Recommendation 7: Strategies need to be established for promoting the status of teaching with a view to attracting the brightest and the best to teaching careers.

High quality access to career long professional development is an urgent priority.

Recommendation 8: Selection for admission to teacher training courses needs to be based on suitability to the profession as well as on academic achievement.

Newly qualified teachers (NQTs) should not be required to teach a full timetable but rather should teach a restricted number of teaching hours per week while continuing their initial teacher training and participating in a compulsory NQT induction/mentoring programme.

Recommendation 9: All schools should operate to a national 'quality' assured standard for NQT induction/mentoring programme. The Forum believes that the model of internship for NQT teachers operated in Scotland offers a good practice model which should be replicated in Ireland.

Recommendation 10: That the critical importance of school leadership be recognised through on-going support and professional development programmes for the senior management team (SMT). In addition, schools need a functioning middle management system - a system that facilitates the pastoral care of students, the day to day administration of the school and the leading of teaching and learning. This would foster leadership capacity in the Education system.

Recommendation 11: That the State considers the preparation of a Green Paper on Education charting education for the next ten to fifteen years.

Recommendation 12: The resources required to implement curricular changes must be identified and provided for.

Recommendation 13: That the Government should increase the proportion of our wealth that is invested in the education system to 7.5% of GDP.

Supplemental Information on Recommendations

Recommendation 1

The Case for a *Learners' Charter*

The case for a Learners' Charter is both evident and urgent. Indeed, in a sense, it is an inevitable development as it would translate the provisions of the Education Act (1998), the Education Welfare Act (2000), the EPSEN Act (2004) and a variety of Departmental circulars into clear statements about what learners and those who care for them might reasonably expect from the education system. Furthermore, moves towards putting in place a learners' charter could be expected to move the education debate on to a new and constructive platform – to provide the education partners with a real opportunity to contribute, on the basis of their experience, to the strategic management of the education system.

Establishing a vision for education over the next ten years must encompass such an Education Charter establishing a set of minimum standards in relation to:

- Class size,
- Support for students with special needs
- Student welfare, counselling and mental health supports
- Each student's entitlement to a curriculum that meets his/her particular needs within reason
- The ICT supports necessary to support teaching and learning
- The knowledge, skills and competences our teachers need to maximize learner outcomes
- The administrative supports essential to the effective operation of schools
- The importance of student voice in developing such a charter must be comprehended to realise meaningful and sustained success
- Were such a charter to be put in place, it would ensure that teachers, school managements, parents and students would all have something to work towards collaboratively.

Recommendation 2

The urgent need for a comprehensive review of all special needs and welfare supports currently available to schools

There is an urgent need for a comprehensive review of all special needs and welfare supports currently available to schools, with a view to devising an appropriately resourced, coherent, comprehensive and integrated service – similar to that which is provided by the BELB and the two

Dublin VECs. Also, any such review would need to take account of what needs to be done to complete the implementation of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act.

There is one critical further dimension to supporting the special needs of young people, irrespective of whether or not they are in school, namely: the provision of a 24/7 social work service. The provision of a 24/7 service is essential to addressing the reality that difficulties in the lives of young people do not just occur during office hours and often these difficulties can reach a crisis stage in the dead of night when the young people and the family and friends who care for them are left to fend for themselves – often in literally life-and-death situations.

Recommendation 3

Every child is entitled to an education appropriate to their needs.

It is recognised internationally that not all young people thrive in schools and there needs to be regard for the individual student's welfare through alternative provision outside of mainstream to safeguard the student's right to an education.

Recommendation 4

Future investment should focus specifically on an integrated approach delivered on a rolling basis, of investment both in hardware and software and investment in teacher training and delivering the curriculum through ICT.

Acknowledging that capital investment in ICT has improved very significantly in very recent years, future investment should focus specifically on investment in teacher training and delivering the curriculum through ICT. The NCCA needs to address this issue in the syllabus. The Inspectorate needs to have some appreciation of the new technologies delivering the curriculum. Teacher training colleges should deliver compulsory modules to include this element. It is suggested that training of one hour per week should be provided for all teachers on the practical use of ICT in the classroom as part of the additional hours agreed under the Public Sector Agreement 2010-2014.

At a minimum this integrated approach should comprehend:

- A nationwide programme of professional development to ensure that teachers and school leaders acquire the capabilities to make meaningful use of ICT in their work.
- A sufficient quantity of new and appropriately specified and configured ICT equipment delivered on a rolling basis as needs would warrant.
- The assurance and investment in a robust and appropriately specified cost efficient broadband service that is delivered to all learning and administration areas in a school.
- Technical support to ensure that the school's ICT equipment is appropriately maintained at all times
- Access to high quality and Irish curriculum-related digital teaching and learning materials.

Recommendation 5

Schools and their students should have access to high quality and Irish curriculum-related digital teaching and learning materials.

Recommendation 6

The State should insist that all schools should operate fully inclusive enrolment policies and practices.

This to be supported through the establishment of *Local School Admission Fora* where there would be agreement that all schools in a catchment area would follow inclusive enrolment policy and practice. School Admission Forums (SAFs) shall comprise representatives of all second level school boards of management in the local catchment/cluster, all second level school principals in the local catchment/cluster, a nominee of the relevant local authority and the National Education and Welfare Board's local educational welfare officer (EWO). The involvement of the EWO might also be expected to contribute to the building of a better understanding between schools and EWOs.

Recommendation 7

Strategies need to be established for promoting the status of teaching with a view to attracting the brightest and the best, to teaching careers.

Recommendation 8

Selection for admission to teacher training courses needs to be based on suitability to the profession as well as on academic achievement.

This is particularly important at times of high unemployment. Teaching is a demanding profession that involves a huge amount of intense interpersonal relations with young people moving through a very turbulent period in their lives. It is in the interest of both the aspiring teacher and his/her prospective students that only those with appropriate aptitudes and interests enter the profession.

Recommendation 9

All schools should operate to a national quality assured standard for NQT induction/mentoring programme. The Forum believes that the model of internship for NQT teachers operated in Scotland offers a good practice model which should be replicated in Ireland.

Recommendation 10

That the critical importance of school leadership be recognised through

on-going support and professional development programmes for the senior management team (SMT). Schools need a functioning middle management system - a system that facilitates the pastoral care of students, the day-to-day administration of the school and the leading of teaching and learning.

The Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) should be strengthened to facilitate support to the SMT in leading learning, managing change and creating a climate of innovation.

As well as reforming the training and registration process, it would be important that a clear probation management system should be put in place and that such a process should be explicitly agreed between the management bodies and the second level teacher unions.

Recommendation 11

That the State considers the preparation of a Green Paper on Education charting education for the next ten to fifteen years.

Recommendation 12

The resources required to implement curricular changes must be identified and provided for.

Curricular changes must be properly resourced *in advance of* their introduction and implementation.

Recommendation 13

That the Government should increase the proportion of our wealth that is invested in the education system to 7.5% of GDP.

Footnotes

- 1 On this point, there are important findings presented in the international report *How the world's best performing schools come out on top*, published by McKinsey & Company 2007, and available at: http://www.mckinsey.com/App_Media/Reports/SSO/Worlds_School_Systems_Final.pdf
- 2 Relevant sources include: 'Parents' Participation in their Child's Schooling', by Hannu Rätty, Kati Kasanen, Noora Laine, in *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, Vol. 53, No. 3, 2009; also: 'What Research says about Parent Involvement in Children's Education', available at: http://www.michigan.gov/documents/Final_Parent_Involvement_Fact_Sheet_14732_7.pdf
Let's read them a story! The parent factor in education", PISA, available at: <http://www.oecd.org/pisa/letsread>
- 3 Apart from Section 27 of the 1998 Act, which deals with Student Councils, there are references to consultations with students, and accountability to students, in four other sections: 15 (2) f - Board of Management accountable to students; 21 (3) - School Plan, requirement for consultations with students; 23 (2) d - Principal, requirement for consultation with students; 26 (2) - Parents' Association, requirement for consultations with students.
- 4 *Working Inside the Black Box: Assessment for learning in the classroom*, by Paul Black & Dylan Wiliam, Bloomington, US: Phi Delta Kappan, 2004: http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_6952/is_1_86/ai_n28224628/
See also *Formative Assessment, Improving Learning in Secondary Classrooms*, Paris OECD/CERI, 2005; and also the NCCA reports on practical research initiatives on assessment for learning in Irish school contexts: <http://www.action.ncca.ie/en/af>
- 5 *Finnish Lessons: What can the world learn from educational change in Finland?* by Pasi Sahlberg, New York, 2011
- 6 'Focus on Schools Helps Finns Build a Showcase Nation' by Robert G. Kaiser, in *The Washington Post*, 24 May 2005 <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/05/23/AR2005052301622.html> . See also the McKinsey report referred to in Note 2 above. And : Finnish Lessons: what can the world learn from educational change in Finland by Pasi Sahlberg New York, 2011
- 7 *OECD Reviews of National Education Policy – Ireland* Paris: OECD, 1991, p.100; *Education for a Changing World – Government Green Paper on Education*, 1992, p.163; *Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers: Country Background Report for Ireland*, by John Coolahan, Paris, OECD, 2003, pp.6, 21. Available at <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/62/22/19196740.pdf>
- 8 *Teachers Matter: Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers*, Paris, OECD, 2005. Extended Overview of report available at <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/39/47/34990905.pdf>
- 9 Creating effective teaching and learning environments: First results from TALIS 2008, Paris, OECD, 2009. Available at <http://www.oecd.org/edu/school/43023606.pdf>
- 10 *Gearing Up for the Exam: The Experiences of Junior Certificate Students*, by Emer Smyth, Alison Dunne, Selina McCoy, Merike Darmody Dublin, Liffey Press, in association with ESRI, 2007
- 11 'Teaching and Learning for the 21st Century' was a research and development project jointly conducted by NUI Maynooth and 15 post-primary schools in Leinster, 2003–2007. Its final report, titled *Learning Anew*, was published in December 2007. A copy can be found at www.nuim.ie/TL21
- 12 *Creating Effective Teaching and Learning Environments: First Results from TALIS*, Paris, OECD, 2009. See also *Leadership for Learning: International Perspectives*, J. Macbeath & Y.C. Cheng, editors, Rotterdam, Sense Publishers, 2008

- 13 For further information on the application of such ideas in schools see *Teacher Leadership*, by Ann Lieberman & Lynn Miller, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 2004; *Distributed Leadership*, by James P. Spillane, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 2006; *Educational Leadership: Key Challenges and Ethical Tensions*, by Patrick Duignan, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- 14 In addition to the sources mentioned in notes 3 and 4, see *Teacher Professional Development: An International Review Of The Literature*", by Elenora Villegas-Reimers, Paris, UNESCO 2005; *Sustainable Leadership*, by Andy Hargreaves and Dean Fink, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 2006
- 15 For example, the IVEA's Instructional Leadership programme, see: <http://www.instructionalleadership.ie/>
- 16 *Chief Inspector's Report 2001-04* Department of Education and Science, 2005, p.9. Chief Inspector's Report for second half of the decade is not published.
- 17 *A Brief Description of the Irish Education System*, Dublin, DES 2004, p.9; *Introduction to Primary School Curriculum*, NCCA,1999, p.6
- 18 *Education at a Glance 2012*, Paris, OECD, 2012, p. 163.
- 19 *Ibid.* p.204/5.
- 20 <http://www.house.gov/jec/educ.htm>
- 21 <http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/Charting-Our-Education-Future-White-Paper-On-Education-Launch-Copy-1995-.pdf>





NPCpp – National Parents Council – Post-Primary

ASTI – The Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland

ACCS – The Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools

NAPD – The National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals

IVEA – The Irish Vocational Education Association

JMB – The Joint Managerial Body

TUI – The Teachers Union of Ireland

