

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

AGREED PROGRAMME FOR GOVERNMENT

PROGRESS REPORT

SEPTEMBER 2008

Extra Teachers and Teacher Training

Increase the number of primary teachers by at least 4,000. This will enable us to reduce class sizes. The staffing schedule will be reduced from a general rule of at least one teacher for every 27 pupils in 2007/08, by one point a year, to one for every 24 children by 2010/11.

Budget 2008 provided the Department of Education and Science with €380 million extra for teacher pay and pensions. That allocation provides for paying for over 2000 extra primary teachers more than the number in schools when the Government took office last Summer. This includes the additional teachers that went into schools in September 2007 for the previously announced reduction to a 27 to 1 based staffing schedule along with additional teachers in the last school year and in this school year to meet increasing enrolments, to provide for special needs and the language requirements of newcomer children.

This means that in terms of the overall commitment to provide at least 4000 additional teachers the Government in its first two years in office will be well ahead of target.

Where amalgamation is not possible, provide a classroom assistant to the one-teacher schools.

This commitment will be considered in the context of available resources and spending priorities within the education sector over the lifetime of the Government.

Prioritise reductions in the size of classes in the core subjects of Irish, English and Maths at second level.

Significant improvements have been made in the staffing of our second level schools in recent years.

In the 2001/2002 school year, there were approximately 24,477 wholetime equivalent teaching posts allocated to second level schools. For 2006/2007, the corresponding figure is 25,454 wholetime equivalent posts.

This increase in staffing has improved the pupil teacher ratio at post primary level in recent years. The pupil teacher ratio has fallen from 13.85:1 in the 2001/2002 school year to 13.13:1 in the 2006/2007 school year.

In line with Government policy, further reductions in the pupil teacher ratio, in particular in the core subjects of Irish, English and Maths, will be considered in the context of available resources and spending priorities within the education sector.

Reform the initial teacher-training programmes, ensure that all teacher-training colleges reserve places for students from disadvantaged areas, and prioritise high quality in-career professional development for teachers and principals.

Officials are engaging with the Teaching Council and with colleges of education and other pre-service education providers to review the quality and effectiveness of their courses.

The number of continuing professional development (CPD) places for special education related courses has increased by 2,700 since 2006. Funding has increased from €4.4 million in 2007 to €6.8 million in 2008. Two new Post-Graduate Programmes relating to special education have been introduced. Intensive CPD is being provided for teachers working in new Autism Units opened since 2007.

At post primary level a subject-specific support service for Gaeilge has been established since September 2007.

A new school leadership programme has commenced in September 2008 for Tóraíocht (Aspiring Leaders).

Increase the range of services provided by the education centres and expand the role of the regional offices in working at a local level with various groups and agencies.

The regional offices are now responsible for the co-ordination of the Department's response for the RAPID programmes. A review is due to commence shortly in relation to the current operation of the regional offices and their interaction with various local groups and agencies.

Improved Funding For Our Schools

Increase day-to-day funding for our schools in real terms and double the capitation grant for primary schools. Grants to schools for the employment of support staff such as secretaries and caretakers will also be increased significantly.

In 2008, approximately €167m will be paid to primary schools to meet their day to day running costs. In 2008, capitation increased by €15 per pupil. The improvements announced in the last budget mean that the combined day-to-day funding for primary schools will increase by €21 to €330 per pupil.

Enhanced rates of capitation funding are paid in respect of children with special educational needs who attend special schools or special classes attached to mainstream schools. The current rates range from €457.00 to €880 per pupil - an increase of 42% from the rate in 2006.

Extra financial supports are being provided to schools under the DEIS action plan for educational inclusion. In the 2007/08 school year, DEIS related grants totalling almost €19 million were paid to schools to meet the needs of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

With effect from January 2008, the standard per capita grant for voluntary secondary schools was increased by €15 per pupil and now amounts to €331 per pupil. In addition, voluntary secondary schools have benefited by the increase of €15 per pupil in 2008 in the support services grant bringing that grant to €204 per pupil.

The cumulative increase of €30 per pupil in a voluntary secondary school brings the aggregate grant to €535 per pupil. These grants are in addition to the per capita funding of up to €40,000 per school that is also provided to secondary schools towards secretarial and caretaking services.

Budget allocations for schools in the Community and Comprehensive school sector along with those in the VEC sector are increased on a pro rata basis with increases in the per capita grant. All schools are eligible for recurrent per capita grants towards special classes and curricular support grants.

Complete the process of equalisation of funding at second level within two years.

An estimated €18.4m per annum has been provided in equalisation funding to date. The issue of how best to complete the process of equalisation of funding at second level is currently being considered having regard to available resources and spending priorities within the education sector over the lifetime of the Government.

High Quality School Buildings & Planning For New Schools

Invest €4.5 billion in providing new schools and improving existing ones.

There are a total of 115 large scale primary and post-primary school projects in the construction phase of capital programme for 2008. Nearly €600m is being spent on school building projects in 2008.

In July 2008 the Minister announced that schools that have applied for grant aid to purchase prefabs will be offered the opportunity to use the same amount of money to build permanent buildings.

The second Bundle of six schools to be provided via Public Private Partnership was offered to the market in May 2008.

Ensure that no rezoning of land for residential development can take place without a prior commitment of an appropriate proportion of land for schools.

The Minister for Environment, Heritage and Local Government has published draft planning guidelines on Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas for public consultation in February 2008 which reinforces the need for new development to be phased in line with the availability and provision of essential social and community infrastructure such as schools, amenities and other facilities, and for timely consultation the Department in relation to new schools needs. Moreover, the draft guidelines state that:

"No substantial residential development should proceed without an assessment of existing schools capacity or the provision of new school facilities in tandem with the development."

In addition, the procedures to be adopted by planning authorities in integrating schools planning issues into their development planning processes are outlined in the Planning Guidelines on Development Plans.

Put in place clear procedures which local authorities must follow to ensure proper planning for new schools and extensions. Improve the arrangements for acquiring sites.

Ministers O’Keeffe and Gormley have jointly published a Code of Practice for planning authorities on the provision of schools and the planning system.

The Code of Practice is built around three core objectives:

- firstly, schools provision should be an integral part of the evolution of compact sustainable urban development and the development of sustainable communities;
- secondly, the provision of any new schools should be driven by and emerge from an integrated approach between the planning functions of planning authorities and the Department of Education and Science; and
- thirdly, planning authorities will co-operate and co-ordinate with the Department of Education and Science in ensuring the timely delivery of schools

The Code of Practice which was agreed between the two Departments, in conjunction with the City and County Manager’s Association, sets out the roles, responsibilities and specific actions to be taken in relation to forecasting future demand for school places and planning for schools provision through the development plan, local area plan and development management processes. The Code of Practice, which is issued as statutory guidelines under section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, has immediate effect.

Establish a Developing Areas Unit in the Department of Education to liaise with local authorities, identify where new schools are needed and ensure that they are delivered in the fastest possible timeframe.

Initial work on establishing and assigning staff to the Developing Areas Unit began in the latter part of 2007 and the section is now fully operational. During 2008, the Developing Areas Unit worked closely with relevant local authorities on the acquisition of sites and on general pre-planning issues for school building projects that were required for occupation for the current school year.

Ensure maximum use of the top-class standard designs for primary schools that have been developed to deliver new buildings in the fastest timeframe possible.

26 major building projects in developing areas were delivered this year providing accommodation for about 7,000 students. 20 of these buildings consist of eight-classroom units and the remainder are 16-classroom units. The schools are located in areas which have experienced rapid population growth over the past number of years. Twenty-three of these schools were recently handed over to the relevant school authorities, with the remaining three to be completed by the end of October.

To achieve this unprecedented level of accommodation provision in such a short timeframe the Department used a modern method of off-site construction to deliver buildings of first-class quality and design in the shortest possible timeframe. The method offers speed of construction on site, ensured level of cost, time predictability and guaranteed quality of product.

Prioritise energy efficiency and eco-design in new school buildings.

The performance of the Department in the area of low energy design has been recognised at both national and international levels with sustainable energy awards for excellence in Design and Specification. All schools built in accordance with the Department's Primary Schools technical guidance documents are capable of being 2.3 times more energy efficient than schools built to best International Practice.

One of the research projects currently underway, in conjunction with Sustainable Energy Ireland, is aimed at helping existing schools to meet the certification requirements of the Energy Performance Building Directive. This process will allow all schools to conduct an energy audit of their school and energy usage and to input specific information to the Department's energy website. The school will then not only receive information on their actual energy use and environmental emissions but will also be able to compare the schools energy performance relative to that of other school buildings in the form of an energy rating. They will also be able to receive energy saving advice from the website relevant to their school buildings and to view case studies of similar schools and how they achieve better energy savings.

The data gathering, energy auditing and benchmarking and website development aspects of the project are complete and validation of the system will be completed this year.

Promote and support the use of school facilities by community groups and other appropriate services and design new schools in order to facilitate multi-use.

The Department has progressed a number of school building projects within the Fingal and Adamstown areas of Dublin with local Authority/Developers to produce an integrated solution to education and community facilities that matches the delivery of new housing. In respect of PPP schools, the contract arrangements provide for school facilities to be available for community use when not required by the school.

Abolish the local contribution to building projects and to the rental of accommodation.

This issue is currently being examined.

Increase the Minor Works grant to improve funding to schools to maintain their buildings in good condition.

Over €27m was paid out to schools throughout the country in 2007 to enable thousands of small scale works to be completed without the need to interact with the Department. Individual primary schools received a grant in the sum of €5,500 plus €18.50 per pupil. A 100 pupil school received a grant of €7,350 and a 300 pupil school received over €11,000.

Ensure that where the State builds a new school on land which it owns, the building will be in the ownership of the Department of Education.

Where the Department acquires sites for school building purposes it will enter into a lease with the Patron in relation to the school. Ownership of both the land and the building will remain in the Minister's name. In the case of PPP projects the Minister also retains ownership of both the site and school building.

Empowering Principals as Leaders of the School Community

Seek agreement through partnership for a facility to allow those who have served as principals for more than a certain number of years to return to fulltime teaching duties, while maintaining some benefits.

This issue is under consideration in the context of the recommendations of the Commission on Public Service Pensions - Final Report.

Increase the number of release days for teaching principals at primary level and expand the pilot scheme of substitute cover for principals' release days.

This commitment will be considered in the context of available resources and spending priorities within the education sector over the lifetime of the Government.

Provide improved training options for principals, middle management and aspiring school leaders.

A new school leadership programme has commenced in September 2008 for Tóraíocht (Aspiring Leaders). The programme will cater for 160 teachers. The Programme is aiming to encourage potential school leaders who do not hold designated leadership positions but who aspire to provide school leadership as a principal teacher, as a deputy principal or as a teacher leader. This Programme will highlight the challenges which future leaders will face in the increasingly demanding environment of school leadership.

Review the role of middle management and put a new system in place

Discussions, in the industrial relations context, are continuing on a review of the role of middle management.

Reduce the threshold for the appointment of administrative deputy principals to primary schools.

This commitment will be considered in the context of available resources and spending priorities within the education sector over the lifetime of the Government.

Substantially increase funding the ancillary and support services grants so that principals have better administrative support.

The ancillary grant was increased by €6 per pupil with effect from January 2008 bringing the total grant per pupil to €151.50.

Maximise the use of IT to cut down on administration and put a database in place to track primary pupils.

The On Line Claims System was implemented for all Post-Primary Schools in November 2006. The roll out to primary schools commenced in April 2007 on a phased basis and the rollout was completed at the end of the 1st Quarter 2008. The system is now being used by 3,200 primary schools across the country.

Analysis of requirements has commenced in relation to the requirements for an Online Appointments system. This analysis will form the basis for a functional specification for the system. It is planned to have the functional specification finalised by the end of 2008.

A feasibility study on a single point of access for schools to make electronic returns of pupil data to the Department and education related agencies was undertaken in March 2008. The results of the study are currently being considered and will feed into the development of a database of learner information for primary pupils.

The Forward Planning Section of the Department has recently procured a Geographical Information System (GIS). The system will enable the Department to develop a digital picture of the country, using various sources of population related data that will give school locations and the location of potential gaps in current or future provision. The GIS system will utilise the Department's existing datasets of schools and their enrolments. The system can relate these to other datasets such as the Census 2006, the Geodirectory which will detail house completions since the 2006 Census, Local Authority Development Plans which detail future developments and the areas of planned population growth.

Supporting Parents and School Boards

Continue to promote parental involvement at all levels. Improve the information available to parents.

With effect from the 2007 calendar year, schools are required to implement standardised tests in English reading and Mathematics for all pupils at the end of first class or beginning of second class, and at the end of fourth class or beginning of fifth class. With effect from 2008, the results of these tests are to be reported to parents as part of a reporting template. The templates have been piloted and were made available on the NCCA website in Spring 2008. Feedback will be given to parents twice during the school year, with at least one written report.

The Inspectorate in the Department have used parental questionnaires in thematic evaluations of SPHE at primary level and are currently doing so in the Evaluation of English as an Additional Language.

Work commenced in late 2007 on the production of a 'Frequently Asked Questions' document aimed at providing information for parents of post primary school students. Information has been compiled in consultation with relevant sections in the Department, agencies such as the National Educational Welfare Board and the National Council for Special Education and the education partners, including teacher unions and the National Parents Council – Post Primary. The material is due to be translated in to a number of languages and will be published shortly.

Ensure that the new Boards of Management that will take up office in late 2007 have access to training and support on a wide range of issues.

A scheme has been developed for the provision of support to school management bodies for the purpose of training and development of boards of management in the discharge of their duties and consistent with national and DES priorities.

The essential core areas covered in the training are Financial Management, Child Protection Guidelines, Health & Safety and Employment and HR. Other areas to be covered in training include Background Information re: Education System, Role and Function of the Board, How a BOM Operates, Policies and Procedures. The representative bodies do provide training in additional areas which they identify pertaining to their respective areas.

The new boards of management appointed in late 2007 are predominantly in the primary sector. Consequently, two "Training the Trainer" sessions was held in the first half of 2008 by the School Development Planning Service, using materials and supports developed by the SDPS. These sessions were tailored for trainers selected by the various primary school management bodies to provide direct training to Boards of Management.

The two modules delivered to date are Role and Function of the Board(the Board as a corporate entity) and Employment and HR (including recruitment and appointments). Three modules on Child Protection, Financial Management and Legal Procedures will be delivered in the autumn by the Primary Professional Development Service (PPDS).

The manual in Irish and English languages will also be distributed at the autumn session.

The Post-Primary Sector are represented by the Association of Community & Comprehensive Schools (ACCS), Secretariat of Secondary Schools, Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA) and the National Parents Council - Post- Primary. Training and the provision of manuals is ongoing by all of the management bodies on a monthly schedule.

Develop a manual to support boards in their work and publish it on the web.

Copies of the revised Constitution of Boards and Rules of Procedure issued to all new primary school boards of management in December, 2007, ten copies of an Information Manual for Primary Boards of Management issued to the schools at the same time. The manual has also been made available on the Department of Education and Science website at www.education.ie.

Promoting Students' All-round Development

Increase the role of the arts as part of a well-rounded educational experience and provide funding for arts in education.

The Points of Alignment report highlights the importance of supporting arts in education practice through systematic collaboration between schools and local artists and through visits by schools to arts events and performances. The Department of Education and Science is working closely with the Department of Arts Sport and Tourism to explore how best a synergy can be promoted between in-school activity and the work of other agencies, and how best combined investment can be used to optimum effect within available resources.

Increase the number of guidance counsellors at second level.

This commitment will be considered in the context of available resources and spending priorities within the education sector over the lifetime of the Government.

Ensure that education is provided in road safety at different stages of the school system, including a specific transition year course.

A Road Safety programme for Transition Year, developed by the Road Safety Authority in collaboration with DES, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment and the Second Level Support Service was piloted in the 2007/08 school year and is being rolled out to schools in the current school year. Applications have issued to schools inviting them to participate in the programme from September next and over 200 schools have applied for the necessary in-service. The Department of Education and Science will continue to work with the Road Safety Authority to strengthen the role of schools in promoting road safety even further.

Develop a national sexual health strategy, update the sex education programme in schools, and involve community health professionals in the delivery of the programme. Involve Community Health professionals in the delivery of Relationships and Sexuality Education and provide greater support for teachers in this area through improved teaching resources and access to training.

To increase consistency in the delivery of the Relationships and Sexuality Education programme, work is under way on the development of lesson plans linked to a DVD resource on contraception, sexually transmitted infections and sexual orientation working in collaboration with the Health Services Executive and the Crisis Pregnancy Agency.

Require all primary schools to implement the Stay Safe child abuse protection programme.

Two additional primary school teachers were seconded to Child Abuse Prevention Programme (CAPP) in September 2007 to assist with targeted training which is being directed at those schools that had indicated they are not implementing the Stay Safe programme. In the 2007/2008 school year CAPP has provided training to approximately 615 schools, over 5,000 teachers and 1,100 special needs assistants. In addition to this targeted training, CAPP continues to provide in-service training and support to all primary schools on request.

Include the national anthem in the primary school curriculum, teach school children about the role and significance of our national flag, and instil in them respect for the place of other nations' anthems and flags.

Culture, traditions, festivals, including the national flag and anthem, are included in the primary school SPHE curriculum for third and fourth class.

Ensure that schools help to make our children environmentally aware and include the Green Schools Programme as part of any Whole School Evaluation.

"Green Schools" actions are now included in the criteria that inspectors use to evaluate the quality of the work of a school in Whole School Evaluation. Where schools have been involved in Green Schools activities, this has been noted in whole-school evaluation reports.

Encourage the establishment of student councils and provide for formal liaison arrangements between them and their school's board of management.

In post-primary schools where Student Councils have been established, the Department's Inspectorate meets with the representatives of the students during a whole-school evaluation. This meeting is intended to provide the students' representatives with opportunities to give an account of their participation in school life, their achievements during the year, how they manage meetings, who they communicate with and how and to talk about some of the issues that have been raised at meetings. Students' views are also sought on the atmosphere of the school and the extent to which students are involved in decision-making.

In September 2007 a Student Council Coordinator was appointed to design and deliver a programme of professional development to respond to identified needs and to support Student Council Liaison teachers and schools involved in establishing and developing effective Student Councils at second-level. The Student Council Co-ordinator works within the CSPE Support Service with specific responsibility for Student Councils.

The Second Level Support Service is providing training at national, regional, local and school level for both the liaison teachers and the Student Councils. The purpose of this training is to develop effective student councils. Support is also being provided to encourage the networking of Student Councils.

Resources are currently being developed to support the Liaison Teachers in their work with the Student Councils one of which will specifically address the practical needs of the Student Council in, for example, how to present and draw up plans, proposals, funding applications, the constitution, reports etc. to the Boards of Management. This resource will be presented to Liaison Teachers at national in-service for consultation and review, prior to dissemination to schools.

A policy template for developing a School Student Council policy, together with a sample policy, was made available on the Department's website in November 2007, along with links and references to relevant resources, to assist schools.

Curricular Change to Meet Skills Needs and Ensuring A Broader Range Of Educational Opportunities

Prioritise the introduction of new curricula in Maths and in Leaving Certificate Physics and Chemistry, supported by teacher training.

Reform in Mathematics at junior and senior cycle is under way. Project Maths has commenced in 24 selected project schools from September 2008. For schools involved in the initial implementation from September 2008, students will experience mathematics in a new way. Teachers will be provided with classroom materials to enable them to adopt the new approaches and will be supported professionally in embracing change. These materials and supports will include lesson plans, with teacher guides and student worksheets, online exemplars and a range of assessment materials. The changes will be phased over 3 years, initially in the project schools, starting this year. In mainstream schools, the changes will begin in September 2010, preceded by professional development for teachers the previous year.

Advice from the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment in regard to reform of science at senior cycle is expected shortly.

Complete the senior cycle review that is currently being undertaken by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.

The NCCA has been asked to concentrate on the reform of subjects, and their proposals for the embedding of key skills, the introduction of a second assessment component, the strengthening of project, practical and portfolio work, and a spread of assessment points. Work is under way in this area at present, particularly in relation to reforms of Maths, and Irish, and the advice of the Council in regard to Science is expected shortly. A revised syllabus in Design and Graphic Communications and a new syllabus in Leaving Certificate Technology were both introduced in September 2007 accompanied by an investment of €15m in technology for schools, and these subjects include provision for project/portfolio assessment as well as a written examination.

The NCCA have submitted draft short courses in Enterprise and Psychology and the implementation issues are being examined by the Department at present.

Review the format and content of transition year.

The proposals of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment for reform of senior cycle envisaged a re-structuring of programmes into subjects, short courses and transition units. The Council proposed the development of Transition Units as 45 hour units of study which would provide a broad range of experiences for learners, incorporating innovative methodologies and supporting the development of key skills. The Council proposed that school based assessment would be inbuilt into each transition unit, and models for the validation of schools to develop their own Transition Units would be explored. The units would cover such areas of learning as creative applications, skills, personal achievement, sampling of subjects, enterprise, civic and social education, and work and future.

The NCCA has established a network to undertake development work with schools. A standardised framework for Transition Unit descriptors has been developed, and organisations are using these as new programme options for TYP are being developed. The descriptors are designed to promote better planning and communication and provide for greater clarity and coherence in the implementation of the programme. They require schools to set out the aims of the unit, its learning outcomes, how key skills are being integrated, what methodologies and assessment approaches will be taken and how it will be evaluated.

New Transition Units have been developed and posted to the NCCA website in a range of areas and a guide has been produced to help schools to develop their own units in keeping with the descriptor format. Schools may forward their Transition Units to the NCCA for further feedback and support.

Ring-fence funding for science laboratories, improve science equipment in our schools, and ensure a greater focus on high quality science education at all levels.

This commitment will be considered in the context of available resources and spending priorities within the education sector over the lifetime of the Government.

Implement new Leaving Cert curricula in engineering, architectural technology, economics, agricultural science and art.

Work on the revised syllabus for Agricultural Science has largely been completed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). The assessment arrangements for the revised syllabus have yet to be finalised and will have to be considered in the context of the assessment of other senior cycle science subjects, including the introduction of a second assessment component.

Revised syllabuses for Leaving Certificate Art, Engineering Technology and Architectural Technology have been submitted to the Department by the NCCA. Implementation of the revised syllabuses will be considered in the context of available resources and spending priorities within the education sector over the lifetime of the Government.

Put in place a new senior cycle course in the area of politics and society.

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment are developing a draft syllabus on Politics and Society.

Increase resources and services for gifted children.

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), in collaboration with its counterparts in Northern Ireland, the Council for Curriculum Examination and Assessment, has produced draft guidelines for teachers of exceptionally able students. These guidelines issued to all Primary and Post Primary schools in November 2007 along with a questionnaire for feedback. Over the last few months the NCCA has sought feedback on the draft guidelines from teachers, school management and other interested individuals and organisations.

These draft guidelines are designed to raise awareness of the social, emotional and academic needs of exceptionally able students and to assist teachers in planning their teaching and learning. They feature ways in which teaching and learning can be effectively differentiated for such students, in particular how learning skills can be embedded in increasingly complex content. Case studies included in the guidelines present rich real-life contexts which consider the issues around exceptionalism through the eyes of teachers, parents and students.

Funding is provided to the Centre for Talented Youth at Dublin City University to support its work in delivering programmes, which are designed specifically for exceptionally able children of first and second level age. Of particular significance at second level are the International Olympiads in the science subjects, in information technology and in mathematics, in which the exceptionally able and highest achieving pupils compete.

Encourage more schools to offer alternative curricula such as the Junior Certificate Schools' Programme and the Leaving Certificate Applied course.

The DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) Action Plan for Educational Inclusion provides for extended access to the JCSP for second-level schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantage. The programme is being extended on a phased basis over three school years, to those schools which are participating in DEIS. The first phase commenced in September 2007 with an additional 30 schools selected to offer the Programme. A further 24 schools were selected to join in 2008. It is intended that all DEIS schools will be approved to offer JCSP by 2010.

Participation in the programme is supported by an enhanced pupil:teacher ratio and a once-off per capita grant. In addition, professional development support to schools and teachers offering the Programme is provided through the Second Level Support Service (SLSS) by the JCSP Support Service which is located in the Curriculum Development Unit of the City of Dublin VEC.

A circular is issued to schools each year inviting participation in the Leaving Certificate Applied programme. Some 380 providers are currently implementing the programme, including 49 out of school centres.

While encouraging higher rates of school completion, increase access to alternative educational provision for young people who do not wish to continue in the formal school system. Financial and other support for such centres will also be improved and put on a multi-annual basis. Increase the number of Youthreach places in line with our *Towards 2016* commitments and support the development of similar services for younger students who discover that the mainstream second level school is not suitable for them.

An additional 400 Youthreach places were approved in 2007 – bringing the total number of places to nearly 3,700.

Promoting the Irish Language In Our Schools & Colleges

Improve teacher training, reform the curriculum to place greater emphasis on the spoken language, and provide an enhanced support service for schools.

The Tús Maith initiative at primary level currently has thirty – one cuiditheoirí on the team. The dual purposes are to improve the teaching of Irish and to improve teachers competence and confidence in the Irish language. Tús Maith cuiditheoirí provide a range of support to teachers including in-class support, whole school support and after school workshops and language based activities. The team is currently working with 527 Spriocscoileanna, (Target Schools), providing intensive sustained support leading to high levels of impact.

At post primary level a subject-specific support service for Gaeilge has been established since September 2007. The service forms part of the Second Level Support (SLSS) which provides programme and subject specific curricular support, and support for teaching and learning generally in second-level schools.

The support service for Irish provides professional development support to second-level teachers of Irish generally and support for the teaching and learning of all aspects of the Irish syllabuses. The service has a dedicated team comprising a National Coordinator and six regionally-based development officers.

There are also a number of courses aimed at increasing proficiency in Irish through the "Cúrsai Samhraidh" programme run through the education centre network and a number of these take place in the Gaeltacht.

Officials are also engaging with the Teaching Council and with colleges of education and other pre-service education providers to review the quality and effectiveness of their courses with particular reference to proficiency in Irish.

Fund the development of a comprehensive range of materials and resources to support teaching through Irish.

We are investing in the provision of materials for use in schools. €1m per annum is being provided annually in the production of Séideán Sí materials to support Irish in Irish medium schools. The budget of An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta has been increased substantially for the provision of texts and teaching resources in Irish since it was established in 2002.

Provide a scholarship scheme for children from disadvantaged areas to attend courses in the Gaeltacht and funding for summer courses in the children's own local areas.

The Campai Samhraidh initiative is a week long summer camp "as Gaeilge" for primary schools in disadvantaged areas which commenced in summer 2007.

20 schools participated in the week long course held during July 2008. A range of activities were organised in the classroom for the students through the medium of Irish with the intention of building capacity within the school for the Irish language. Funding of €160,000 was provided for this initiative in 2008.

For post primary students a special Gaeltacht scholarship scheme is being funded by the Department. 112 students benefited from the scheme in 2007 and over 150 benefited in 2008. €83,000 was spent on this initiative in 2007 and over €120,000 in 2008.

Schools ICT

Implement a comprehensive Schools' ICT Strategy, supported by a dedicated capital investment programme and addressing schools' needs for technical support and maintenance. It will also cover the training needs of teachers.

The report 'Investing Effectively in Information and Communications Technology in Schools 2008-2013' prepared by the Strategy Group appointed to advise on priorities for investment in ICT in Schools was published in July 2008. This report highlights the need for an integrated approach across a range of areas covering teacher professional development, digital content, broadband, technical support and ICT infrastructure.

The National Development Plan envisages investment of some €252m in this area over the period of the Plan. While we face significant challenges in implementing some of the recommendations having regard to the current economic situation, the Government is committed to investing in this area as resources permit.

Give the opportunity to second level students to acquire an ECDL qualification in computers by the time they leave school.

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment has developed a draft ICT Framework as a practical tool to support teachers in planning and providing opportunities for students to develop their ICT literacy across the curriculum from primary to the end of compulsory education. Many schools offer ECDL as part of the Transition Year Programme. Transition Year capitation payments were increased from €63 to €100 per pupil with effect from September 2007. This additional funding will enable schools to provide more activities and programmes to benefit their students. This additional capitation grant is on top of the normal per pupil capitation funding provided to second level schools.

Tackling Disadvantage & Improving Literacy and Numeracy Skills

Complete the roll-out of the DEIS Action Plan to ensure a comprehensive package of targeted supports for schoolchildren in the most disadvantaged areas. This will include rolling out successful services such as school completion and home school community liaison to all schools involved in the new School Support Programme under DEIS.

Over 870 schools are participating in the School Support Programme (SSP) under the DEIS initiative. In addition to financial assistance which is provided to schools under the DEIS initiative amounting to almost €19m in the 2007/08 school year, a range of measures were rolled out under the action plan in the school year 2007/08 which include:

- A review of clustering arrangements for Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) was undertaken in all schools participating in HSCL to ensure that the level of service will be commensurate with both the size of the school, its relative level of disadvantage and schools are clustered with their feeder and associated schools.

- Templates for the three-year action plans have been completed and are currently being implemented in primary schools. The templates for three-year action plans are in advanced draft form for second-level schools in the DEIS programme following a pilot programme in selected schools. It is expected that they will be rolled out in second-level schools during the current school year.
- Further evaluation instruments for use in the DEIS evaluation process are currently being developed by the Education Research Centre (ERC) on behalf of the Department and these will be deployed over the coming 2 years.
- Leadership Development for Schools administers the Cumasú programme which provides leadership training for school leaders in the DEIS programme. This programme has been delivered to school leaders from Primary and Post Primary DEIS schools.
- There are 61 schools with a fully trained **Maths Recovery** tutor in place at present and a total of 190 tutors are to receive training during 2008.
- There were 31 teachers trained as **First Steps** writing tutors in February 2008 bringing the total amount of schools with a writing tutor to 82. There will be 60 First Steps reading tutors trained during 2008. Almost all DEIS schools now have support in the delivery of the programme based on the schools particular requirements.
- **Ready Set Go Maths** programme training courses were delivered in January 2008 for all infant teachers in Urban Band 1 and Urban Band 2 DEIS schools. All schools received a Ready Set Go Maths resource book.
- **Reading Recovery** training centres are now fully operational in Dublin West and Kilkenny education centres. 20 DEIS schools joined the Reading Recovery programme between January and June 2008, bringing the total number of DEIS schools participating in Reading Recovery to 147 schools.
- 8 additional literacy and numeracy tutors have been recruited to provide in-school support and guidance to all teachers in primary DEIS schools. This brings the total number of tutors (“Cuiditheoirí”) to 19 providing support for Maths Recovery, Reading Recovery, First Steps and Ready Set Go Maths.
- In February this year all second-level schools participating in the DEIS programme were invited to participate in the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP). 24 schools have been selected to join in 2008.
- 138 DEIS schools are currently providing the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme. It is intended to have all DEIS schools providing JCSP and LCA by 2010.

Ensure that all children are tested in literacy and numeracy at two stages during their primary school education.

Standardised testing commenced in 2007 and was supported by a national programme of teacher professional development in assessment for learning. Grants of €1.65m and €1.7m issued to schools in December 2006 and December 2007 for the cost of test materials, teachers' manuals, test scoring services or test-related software. It is intended that the implementation of standardised testing at school level will be complemented by a separate programme of national monitoring so that national trends in different categories of school can be tracked over time. Schools in the DEIS programme have already been sampled by the Educational Research Centre for this purpose, and the sample of non-DEIS English and Irish medium schools is planned for 2009.

Guidelines on assessment developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment were published in October 2007 to assist schools in developing and implementing a policy on assessment practice in classrooms and on reporting to parents.

Prioritise early intervention to improve literacy and numeracy skills in disadvantaged areas, with special intensive reading and maths programmes for children who are having difficulties and a focus on family literacy.

Additional literacy and numeracy tutors are being recruited to provide in-school support and guidance to all teachers in these schools. In addition, training in “Reading Recovery”, “First Steps” and “Maths Recovery” are being made available to all urban/town primary schools.

In 2008 a further ten post primary schools joined the Junior Certificate Support Programme (JCSP) Demonstration Library Project as part of the DEIS Action Plan (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools). There are now 31 second level schools that have benefited from this initiative. The JCSP Demonstration Library project puts in place high quality, fully stocked and equipped modern libraries and provides each with a professional librarian. As part of the induction programme into the Project each school receives funding, professional development and guidance in the setting up of a school library. While prioritising literacy development of JCSP students, the libraries also provide a service to the whole school including well stocked teacher resource sections. In addition, DEIS schools received an increased School Book Rental Scheme Grant for 2008/09 school year.

A new family literacy pilot scheme has been introduced to address poor literacy from an intergenerational family perspective. Seven projects across the country received funding totalling €140,000 in 2007. Funding of €200,000 has been approved for the scheme in 2008. An application process is currently under way for this funding.

The Schools Development Planning service supports schools in developing their plans and policies for teaching literacy and numeracy and in setting measurable targets for the reduction of serious literacy and numeracy difficulties.

Provide increased funding for school libraries and greatly improve the level of support provided for book loan schemes.

In 2008 a further ten post primary schools joined the Junior Certificate Support Programme (JCSP) Demonstration Library Project as part of the DEIS Action Plan (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools). There are now 31 second level schools that have benefited from this initiative. The JCSP Demonstration Library project puts in place high quality, fully stocked and equipped modern libraries and provides each with a professional librarian. As part of the induction programme into the Project each school receives funding, professional development and guidance in the setting up of a school library. While prioritising literacy development of JCSP students, the libraries also provide a service to the whole school including well stocked teacher resource sections. In addition, DEIS schools received an increased School Book Rental Scheme Grant for 2008/09 school year.

Funding for 1560 school projects to enhance school library facilities and parent rooms was provided under the Dormant Accounts and RAPID Leverage Funds in 2008.

Recruit extra staff to the Educational Welfare Board and the National Educational Psychological Service, both of which will prioritise disadvantaged schools.

Sanction was given to the NEWB for an additional 15 full time posts which now brings the staff complement to 109. As of mid-September 2008, 13 of these additional posts have been filled.

The number of psychologists operating in first and second level schools has increased from 128 in 2007 to a current level of 151. Offers of employment have been made to an additional 14 individuals most of whom, it is envisaged, will take up employment in the service by the end of 2008.

Special Education

Prioritise early assessment and increase the number of educational psychologists in the Department of Education's NEPS service to 200 by 2009.

The number of psychologists operating in first and second level schools has increased from 128 in 2007 to a current level of 151. Offers of employment have been made to an additional 14 individuals most of whom, it is envisaged will take up employment in the service by the end of 2008.

Expand pre-school provision around the country to ensure early intervention.

The Department provides access to the Visiting Teacher Service for pre-school children with a sensory impairment. The service provides guidance, support and information to parents for pupils who have difficulties resulting from Hearing Difficulties or Visual Impairment. There are currently 42 whole time equivalent Visiting Teachers posts in the service.

The Department also provides for early educational intervention for pre-school children on the autistic spectrum through the home tuition programme. Up to 3 years of age, a child is funded for ten hours per week early intervention home based programme. This increases to twenty hours per week once the child is 3 years of age. A total of 376 pupils were funded for home programmes in the 07/08 school year. In addition, the Department has established 35 pre-schools classes for younger children with autism.

Proposals to establish an early education advisory service to work with the HSE early intervention teams in the identification of special educational needs of pre-school children have been developed and are being considered in the context of the 2009 Estimates.

Provide each child with special needs with the right to an Individual Education Plan. This will ensure that each child has a tailored programme to meet their unique individual needs. In the case of children with autism, the Plan will enable them to benefit from a range of teaching approaches, including PECS, ABA and TEACCH, as appropriate.

In preparation for the statutory introduction of the education plan, the NCSE has published guidelines on the Individual Education Plan process and a copy issued to all primary and post primary schools at the commencement of the 2006/2007 school year. These guidelines provide advice and assistance to schools, teachers and parents on devising and implementing individual education plans. It is intended that schools will use these guidelines to develop school practices and procedures in relation to education plans in advance of the mandatory requirement for them to do so.

Proposals for the introduction of the remaining provision of the EPSEN Act, including those in respect of education plans, are now being considered in the context of the 2009 estimates process.

Commit to long-term funding for the 12 centres that are currently in the ABA pilot scheme, subject to agreement with the Department of Education on standards that will enable the Department to support them as primary schools for children with autism.

This issue is being actively progressed and officials from DES have met with the Irish Autism Action group on several occasions to advance the matter.

Implement the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act in full. Complete the roll out of the Education For Persons With Special Educational Needs Act, giving all children with special needs the right to an Individual Education Plan to ensure the best outcome for them, and putting in place a new appeals procedure.

Many sections of the EPSEN Act have already commenced, including those establishing the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) and those promoting an inclusive approach to the education of children with special educational needs. Specifically, the following sections have been commenced- 1, 2, 14(1)(a), 14(1)(c), 14(2) to 14(4), 19 to 37, 40 to 53.

Following consideration of the NCSE Implementation Report and consultation with the education partners, the Department has developed a series of proposals to facilitate implementation of the remaining sections of the Act. The Department has also engaged with the health sector to co-ordinate proposals for the development of services for children with special educational needs with the requirements of the Disability Act, 2005.

The proposals, which are currently being considered in the context of the 2009 estimates process, focus on the need to enhance the capacity of the education sector to support the inclusive school as the cornerstone of education provision. The time taken to finalise proposals reflects the complexities involved and the need for consultation across the wide range of people and sectors involved.

It is important to acknowledge that education supports and interventions for children with special educational needs continue to be provided in advance of the full implementation of EPSEN. The allocation of additional resources through the NCSE enables schools to appropriately support children with special educational needs.

Put in place a new appeals system.

An independent statutory Special Education Appeals Board was appointed in 2007 by the Minister for Education and Science under Section 36 of the EPSEN Act. The Board was appointed early to ensure that appropriate structures and processes will be in place once the relevant sections of the EPSEN Act are commenced. The Board is examining the resources and processes it will need to fulfil its role.

Continue to expand the number of special classes in our schools and open new special schools.

There is now a real choice of educational placement in our primary, post-primary and special schools available for children with special educational needs.

The New Schools Advisory Committee recommended the establishment of 3 special national schools in Galway for children with complex special educational needs in early 2008. These schools commenced operation in September 2008. The schools operate under the patronship of Ability West. Recognition was also recently granted to 2 new special schools for autism, one in Limerick and the other in Cork.

Develop special schools as centres of excellence and outreach facilities and allow for dual enrolment so that children can attend both a special school and a mainstream school as appropriate.

A review on the current and future role of special schools and special classes is currently underway. This review is exploring the potential for special schools to share their expertise with mainstream schools and examining issues in relation to dual enrolment. Some pupils are not capable of attending mainstream school full-time and inclusion may be best achieved in those cases by dual-enrolment in both mainstream and special school. The first phase of this review has been completed and the National Council for Special Education is due to complete the 2nd phase by year end.

Improve second level provision for children with special needs.

Schools are allocated extra teachers and special needs assistants to enable them meet the special educational needs of children. At present there are over 4300 adults working solely with students with special educational needs in second level schools, including over 2400 teachers and more than 1880 Special Needs Assistants.

The "Inclusion of Students with Special Educational Needs: Post-Primary Guidelines" were published in June 2007 and circulated to all second level schools. The guidelines provide practical advice and guidance to schools on the organisation and co-ordination of resources to maximise the support to each individual student.

Implementation of the EPSEN Act provides an opportunity to further develop the continuum of appropriate provision for post-primary age children. Specific proposals in this regard are being considered in the context of the 2009 estimates process.

Provide improved training for teachers. Ensure that all teachers and assistants have access to specialist training.

The number of continuing professional development (CPD) places for special education related courses has increased by 2,700 since 2006. Funding has increased from €4.4 million in 2007 to €6.8 million in 2008.

Two new Post-Graduate Programmes of training have been introduced:

- In 2007 the Special Education Department of St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, and the Institute of Child Education and Psychology, Europe (ICEP), jointly offered an online Certificate/Diploma in Education (Special/Inclusive Education). This provides an opportunity for up to 150 mainstream teachers at Primary and Post-Primary level per annum to undertake courses in SEN through online media, and
- 2008 sees the introduction of the Postgraduate Diploma of Continuing Professional Development in Special Educational Needs (SEN) (Autistic Spectrum Disorder) provided by St Angela's college in collaboration with the SESS. This allows up to 25 teachers at Primary and Post-Primary levels per annum receive accreditation for training provided through the SESS.

Intensive CPD is being provided for teachers working in new Autism Units opened since 2007. Delivery of this CPD begins prior to their entry to the units and continues following the opening of the unit with ongoing in school support as well as programmes of CPD.

A Special Educational Need Behaviour Team is being established with responsibility for the delivery of training and support for teachers around behavioural support, particularly in the area of Applied Behaviour Analysis.

DES has tendered for the provision of funding to an academic institution to develop and deliver an accredited course for teachers of children with hearing impairments. The course will up-skill teachers in the delivery of education through the medium of

Irish Sign Language. It is expected that this programme of training will be made available in 2009.

Provide a central database of suitably trained personnel seeking employment as home tutors to assist parents in finding a tutor for their child.

The Department is currently considering ways of developing and maintaining a central database of qualified tutors to assist parents in finding a tutor for their child.

Train more speech and language and occupational therapists. The HSE will ensure that there is much greater access to these services.

There has been a significant increase in the numbers of Speech and Language Therapists graduating from universities in recent years. Some 92 Therapists graduated in 2007 compared to 23 in 2000.

Ensure greater coordination between the education and health services in supporting children with special needs.

In recognition of the need for a cohesive cross-sectoral approach to the issues of disability and mental health, the Government appointed a Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children with responsibility for Disability and Mental Health. The Office for Disability and Mental Health was subsequently established in January 2008. The Office is required, *inter alia*, to focus in particular on facilitating the delivery of integrated health and education support services for children with special educational needs.

The NCSE Implementation Report identified the necessity for the implementation of the EPSEN Act 2004 and Part 2 of the Disability Act 2005 to be progressed in tandem. In this context, a Cross-Sectoral Group of the education and health sectors was established in October 2006 with a focus on the interaction required between the two sectors to ensure the synchronised implementation of both Acts.

The Group is working to determine how the assessment of need and education/health planning processes can be aligned in the best interest of the children and adults in question. Both sectors are committed to working in this way to deliver an efficient, transparent and effective service for people with disabilities and their families.

In many cases the successful delivery of appropriate education provision for children with SEN will require the co-ordinated availability of health supports, in particular speech and language and occupational therapy supports. It is essential that provision of educational and health supports is co-ordinated in these circumstances.

Promoting Successful Integration In Our Schools

Further increase the number of language support teachers from 1,450 to 1,800.

In 2008, there are almost 2,000 language support teachers in primary and post-primary schools compared to 997 in 2006.

Improve teacher training and give extra supports to schools with large numbers of students with different languages and cultures to improve home-school links.

All student teachers are given an awareness of inter-cultural issues, including the challenges of teaching students whose first language is not English. Language support teachers at Primary level are qualified to teach English.

In 2007/2008 Coláiste Mhuire Marino – in conjunction with the INTO - piloted a national on-line course on Teaching English as an Additional Language. Over 900 teachers participated in this course.

An English Language Support Teachers Association has recently been established under the Teacher Professional Network Scheme for post-primary teachers, which is funded by the Department. This network will assist post-primary language support teachers in the provision of peer professional development.

The Department has prioritised the issue of support for schools and teachers in relation to the teaching of English as an Additional Language (EAL). The Primary Professional Development Service now has a team in place to provide training and support to English-Language Support Teachers in schools in the current academic year.

A Primary School Assessment Kit was circulated by the Department to all primary schools last June. This kit will enable teachers to carry out initial and on-going assessments of the language proficiency of newcomer children. It is proposed to have an assessment kit for post-primary schools available later in the year.

Provide access to English language classes for adult immigrants.

Vocational Education Committees (VECs) provide a countrywide network of English language classes for adults. Numbers of students constantly increase. In 2007, there were approximately 13,000 students attending these English language classes at a cost of approximately €10m.

The Department, in conjunction with the Office of the Minister for Integration, commissioned an independent review to assist in the development of a national English language training policy and framework for legally-resident adult immigrants based on extensive stakeholder consultation. The findings of the report are currently being considered.

Ensure that our education system and personnel are well-equipped for a multi-cultural society.

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment has prepared guidelines for all teachers in primary and post-primary schools to assist them in creating a school that is inclusive and intercultural and in which diversity is the norm. The guidelines will provide teachers with examples of how they can enable all their students (Irish and migrant) to respect and celebrate diversity, promote equality and challenge unfair discrimination.

A north/ south project culminated in the publication of "Together towards inclusion - Toolkit for diversity in the Primary School" in December, 2007. This toolkit has been sent to all schools on the island. It provides advice to the whole school team on how to prepare for new students from different nationalities, on their early days in a school and on progression in an inclusive educational environment.

School Buses

Prioritise further investment in the school transport to ensure a high quality service.

The 2007 allocation for school transport was €165m. A further €7m was made available in 2007 bringing total expenditure to €172.1m. The allocation for school transport in 2008 is €175.2 million, an increase of 4.4% on the 2007 allocation. School transport is a significant operation, directly supporting 135,000 pupils and their families on a daily basis.

The 2008 allocation helped to maintain a high quality service on existing routes and allowed for the establishment of new services for new schools, route adjustments and extensions and the putting in place over 160 new services to provide transport for special needs pupils.

Review the school transport system, including the catchment boundaries.

Proposals are currently being finalised to progress this commitment.

Expanding Adult Education Provision

Expand the number of adult literacy training places by 4,000, on top of the extra 3,000 places being put in place in 2007, and provide dedicated funding for English language training for targeted groups.

Increase funding for adult literacy with the following priorities:

Outreach services to address the needs of the most vulnerable, including migrants, with more intensive and concentrated tuition. Improved provision for initial assessment, certification and progression. Continuing professional development for adult literacy tutors, volunteers and other Further Education staff working with learners at FETAC levels 1 – 4.

In 2007, funding was provided for 3,000 literacy places under the terms of *Towards 2016* and the Programme for Government. In 2002, the number of learners availing of adult literacy tuition was 28,000, this increased to over 44,000 last year. Funding has increased from €16.7m in 2002 to almost €30m in 2007.

The Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education Programme (ITABE), introduced in 2006 provides up to six hours of tuition per week to learners instead of the normal two hours. In 2007, additional funding of €1 million was provided for intensive literacy tuition which doubled the level of funding for intensive literacy tuition to €2 million. This level of funding has continued in 2008.

A new family literacy pilot scheme has been introduced to address poor literacy from an intergenerational family perspective. Seven projects across the country received funding totalling €140,000 in 2007. Funding of €200,000 has been approved for the scheme in 2008. An application process is currently under way for this funding.

To supplement the general adult literary service, a number of specially-targeted literacy programmes have been introduced for those in need of particular literacy services, for example deaf people, people with dyslexia and native Irish speakers in Gaeltacht areas.

To cater for the literacy and basic education needs of immigrant groups, VECs have been provided with funds to afford free access to literacy, English language and mother culture supports. Over 13,000 students availed of tuition in English under the ESOL programme in 2007, comprising almost 30% of participants in adult literacy programmes.

The Department of Education and Science, in conjunction with the Office of the Minister for Integration (OMI), commissioned an independent review to assist in the development of a national English language training policy and framework for legally-resident adult immigrants based on extensive stakeholder consultation (*Development of a National English Language Policy and Framework for Legally-Resident Adult Immigrants*). The report and recommendations was completed in Summer 2008 and is being considered by the Minister for Integration at the moment.

The Department has committed €325,000 over 3yrs (2008-2010, €100,000 in 2008) to fund the development of appropriate tool(s) for initial assessment and screening of adult literacy levels for use by further and adult education providers. There is currently no standard assessment tool to assess a learner's literacy levels on entry into adult education. This project is being overseen by a committee consisting of members from the Department of Education and Science, the IVEA, FETAC and FAS. In 2007, for the first time, accreditation for learners became available at Levels 1 and 2 of the NFQ.

Community education refers to education and learning, generally outside the formal education sector, with the aims of enhancing learning, empowerment and contributing to civic society. The Department provides annual grants to VECs for this purpose and last year provided grants totalling €10.1m. In 2008 this will increase to €10.4 million. Funding is usually allocated through the provision of teaching hours, or small grants, to a range of community and voluntary groups for educational activities.

Improved guidance and other ancillary supports, including child care and accommodation.

The Adult Educational Guidance Initiative (AEGI), which began in 1999, is being expanded as resources become available. €6,587,000 was provided for the AEGI in 2007 and it catered for the needs of approximately 30,000 people. €6,350,000 was available for Childcare in 2007. Grants are available to VECs towards the cost of childcare support for participants in the VTOS, BTEI, Youthreach and STTC Programmes. In all, over 2,300 children and 1,700 learners benefited from the Childcare scheme in 2007.

Provision for evaluation of existing programmes with particular regard to policy objectives and targets.

In April 2008, a Value for Money Review of Youthreach and STTCs was completed and published. It concluded that both programmes were effective in recruiting their target group and catering for their personal and social developmental needs, while being effective "to an extent" in achieving certification outcomes. The Review made 52 recommendations and work has already begun in the Department on implementing those recommendations. The Department is in discussion with the D/SFA in relation to their review of the Back to Education Allowance, which will have implications for the administration of the Vocational Training Opportunity Scheme.

Increase the number of places on the Back to Education Initiative to 10,000 and expand the VTOS scheme.

1,000 additional BTEI places were allocated in 2007 and a further 500 places were allocated in 2008. Bringing the total number of places to 9,500. Funding has increased from €6m in 2002 to €18m in 2007. With effect from 1 September 2007, BTEI eligibility criteria were amended to allow free tuition to any adult with less than an upper second level education. Originally only people with a social welfare entitlement or medical card were entitled to free fees.

Strengthening the Youth Work Sector

Provide extra resources to progress the implementation of the National Youth Work Development Plan and the Youth Work Act, on a phased and prioritised basis.

The 2008 provision of €52.45m for the Youth Affairs will enable the high level of provision achieved over recent years to be maintained as well as a continued focus on the further consolidation of existing provision.

Support a new Youth Work Development plan for the period 2008-2012.

As part of its workplan for 2008, the National Youth Work Advisory Committee (NYWAC) is undertaking a review of the 2003 - 2007 Plan. The outcomes of this review and any other relevant advice and information will help inform work on the development of a new plan.

Continue to increase support for youth clubs, particularly in disadvantaged areas.

Funding for the Local Youth Club Grant Scheme was increased by over a quarter from €1.27m to €1.6m in 2007. This scheme supports youth work activities at a local level. €1.6m has also been made available under the scheme in 2008.

An amount of €2.02 million was made available to the Youth Affairs Section of the Department of Education and Science in 2006/2007 from the Dormant Accounts Fund (Economic and Social Disadvantage Funding Measures) for small scale equipment grants for local youth groups/clubs.

Over €2m was made available from Dormant Accounts funding for 2007/2008 for local youth clubs and groups. Grants were made available in June 2008 to 1,343 local youth clubs and groups through local Vocational Education Committees.

Prioritise rigorous child protection standards in the youth work sector.

An expert working group was established in February 2007 to review the existing *Code of Good Practice - Child Protection Guidelines for the Youth Work Section* in light of the experience of the youth work sector and recent developments such as the introduction of Garda Vetting procedures for new youth work staff and volunteers in September 2006 and the review of *Children First*. This review is in progress.

Garda Vetting of new youth work employees and volunteers was introduced from 1 September, 2006. In December 2007, additional financial resources were made available to youth organisations to support their engagement with this process and this funding was included in their grant support in 2008. This process is supported by the National Child Protection Unit, located in the National Youth Council of Ireland and funded by the Youth Affairs Section.

Improved Opportunities in Further and Higher Education

Further increase third level participation rates, with a special focus on those from disadvantaged areas.

The national participation targets set in 2001 have now been achieved and indeed exceeded for students with a disability, for students facing social and economic barriers and for mature students in full-time higher education. A new National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education to cover the period 2008 – 2013 was launched in July this year. The plan will build on the achievements of recent years in increasing participation and delivering greater equity in higher education. This plan sets out a vision for higher education access policy over the next six years, concluding with a set of challenging targets, which are consistent with the National Development Plan and the National Skills Strategy.

Introduce a new system of means-tested free fees for approved part-time courses.

The implementation of the commitment in the Programme for Government to introduce a new system of means-tested free fees for approved part-time courses will be considered over the lifetime of the Government, having regard to the availability of resources.

Tax relief, at the standard rate of tax, is available on third-level tuition fees paid in respect of approved courses at approved higher education institutions including certain approved undergraduate courses in E.U. member states and approved postgraduate courses in E.U. member states and in non-E.U. countries.

In the context of the recent social partnership discussions the Government has reaffirmed its commitment to working with the Social Partners and relevant agencies to actively encourage and support those at work, who have not previously pursued a third level qualification up to level 8 on the National Framework of Qualifications, to take up part-time courses in publicly funded third level institutions.

Together with incentives for colleges to offer more flexible and diverse course structures, this will enable more people with work or family commitments to avail of opportunities at third level. Enable older people to go to College through the enhanced availability of mature student places and the introduction of a new system of means-tested free fees for third level education.

In the context of the recent social partnership discussions the Government has reaffirmed its commitment to working with the Social Partners and relevant agencies to actively encourage and support those at work, who have not previously pursued a third level qualification up to level 8 on the National Framework of Qualifications, to take up part-time courses in publicly funded third level institutions. The Strategic Innovation Fund provided specific targeted funding for the promotion of changes in teaching and learning that enable more flexible and student centred delivery. A number of specific initiatives have been supported under the fund.

Enable more students to qualify for the top-up grant.

In the 2008/09 academic year, the annual income threshold is being substantially increased by 11.6% from €18,055 to €20,147 for over 13,800 students in receipt of the higher, special rate of maintenance grant. This reflects increases in relevant social welfare payments, ensuring that students from families on the lowest incomes continue to qualify for maximum rates of grant.

Evaluate the success of the new alternative entry arrangements for medical education with a view to determining if similar changes should be made in the application procedures for other high-points courses.

The new entry arrangements for undergraduate medicine will be implemented in 2009 and will be evaluated following an appropriate period.

Promote more explicit arrangements for student transfer between institutes of technology and universities and open new routes of access from the further education sector to the third level sector.

In 2003 the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland launched the first National Framework of Qualifications. This framework provides a clear and coherent map of ten agreed levels of educational outcome and prioritises access, transfer and progression for learners between each of these levels. Links between further and higher education fit clearly into the national framework of qualifications and provide an important stepping stone for learners in progressing their education. These links are also critical to realising increased levels of education and training by the population that the National Skills Strategy envisage will be required to sustain economic growth in the future.

For a number of years now, the NQAI, HETAC, FETAC and the National Access Office and the wider HEA have, in their policy documents, discussions with partners and funding of institutions (HEA) promoted and supported increased progression and participation on the basis of awards linked to the framework of qualifications. The evidence of increased progression by FE graduates to HE, particularly over the last two years would indicate that the concerted efforts of all of these bodies are now bearing fruit.

In 2007, the HEA National Access Office, circulated a consultation paper, *Towards a new policy approach to higher education access courses*. This paper was drafted in consultation with the FE and HE (Equity of Access) sections of the Department of Education and Science. It outlines the current rationale and provision for access courses, identifies some of the issues arising with this model and suggests some questions as a starting point for further discussion. In response to this paper, the IUA, DIT and IOTI have proposed that a review of Access Course provision and progression from FETAC awards to those institutions is crucial to informing future decisions in this area of work. The Department have agreed to support this work.

Draft terms of reference for this review are being finalised and in February the first meeting of a working group took place.

Develop the further education sector to enable it to play a strong role in providing employment relevant education and training opportunities and to serve as a gateway to higher education. Increased investment will be provided to support improvements in the sector and priority will be given to addressing the capital and equipment needs of the PLC colleges.

The number of places on Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses has increased significantly in recent years to a current level of nearly 30,200.

Funding for further education in 2007 was €392 million representing an increase of over 50% compared to 2002. In terms of extending opportunity, this increased expenditure meant that in 2007, nearly 49,000 places were provided in further education courses compared with under 44,000 places in 2002.

In addition, 3,000 extra adult literacy places were created in 2007, providing for 44,000 learners. In Youthreach, an additional 400 places were approved in 2007 – bringing the total number of places to nearly 3,700. An additional 1,500 places were also provided on the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) in 2007 and 2008 – bringing the total number of places to 9,500. In 2007, fees were also abolished for all participants in the BTEI with less than an upper second level education.

Provide a multi-annual capital fund of €2 billion for higher education institutions to support investment in the development of modern campus facilities with leading edge teaching and learning infrastructure, and to ensure that institutions have the capacity to meet emerging needs while accommodating growing numbers of students accessing higher education.

Over €154m capital investment was provided in 2007. In 2008, the capital allocation for third level is some €184 million. Minister O’Keeffe recently approved the development of a new School of Law at UCD which will be part-funded under the National Development Plan. The Minister also announced the placement of a €17 million contract for the refurbishment of the Carroll’s Facility at Dundalk Institute of Technology. The Institute plan to accommodate skills programmes in Information and Communications Technology, Multimedia, Creative Media and Music Technology in the facility.

Significant funding has been provided for Research and Development in higher education. Specific measures introduced during 2007 and 2008 include the Research Equipment Renewal Grant Scheme introduced in 2007 and the Research Facilities Enhancement Scheme 2008 costing €28.14m and €58m. Cycle 4 of the Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions was also approved in July 2007 which will see capital investments running to €108m spread across a wide range of higher education institutions.

Prioritise quality assurance in our colleges and provide targeted funding to support the student role in the QA process. Appoint two student representatives to each of the HEA and the NQAI.

The commitment under the Programme for Government to appoint a further student representative to the HEA can be accommodated under existing legislation and will be considered when future vacancies arise. The HEA engages extensively with student interests as an integral part of its work. The USI plays an active role in this process and continues to ably represent its constituency.

The composition of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland is set out in Section 6 of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999, and provides for one representative of learners. The Authority is committed to working in a participative manner and engages extensively with student and other stakeholder interests as an integral part of its work, through a variety of consultative fora.

Fully examine Waterford Institute of Technology's case for university status.

This issue is under active consideration.

The Economy

Fully implement the *Strategy on Science Technology and Innovation*. Ensure a doubling of PhDs in Science, Engineering and Technology.

The implementation of the SSTI is ongoing under the oversight of a Cabinet Committee chaired by the Taoiseach. As well as participating in the work of the inter-departmental committee of officials established to co-ordinate the implementation process, the Department of Education and Science is chairing the Higher Education Research Group (HERG) which is responsible for implementing key elements of the strategy in the education sector. Investment for delivery of the strategy is continuing through, in particular, the Programme for Research in Third Level Institutes and the two Research Councils (IRCSET and IRCHSS).

Reforms and expansion of graduate education, in support of the established targets for PhD output, are being implemented through the structures and programmes outlined above.

Developing A Strong Fourth Level Research Sector

Continue to reshape, reform and strengthen undergraduate education to support the skills needs of society and the development of fourth level education. Dramatically increase the research capacity of our third level colleges. Double our output of PhDs by 2013 and sustain and enhance quality through the establishment of graduate schools to achieve structured quality PhD training and enhanced postgraduate skills. Ensure that the support for research in the humanities and social sciences is developed to also achieve a doubling of PhD numbers. Further develop the Programme for Research in Third-Level

Institutions (PRTLTI) to support the expansion of high-quality research places. Develop flexible and attractive career paths for researchers.

The implementation of the SSTI is ongoing under the oversight of a Cabinet Committee chaired by the Taoiseach. As well as participating in the work of the inter-departmental committee of officials established to co-ordinate the implementation process, the Department of Education and Science is chairing the Higher Education Research Group (HERG) which is responsible for implementing key elements of the strategy in the education sector. Investment for delivery of the strategy is continuing through, in particular, the Programme for Research in Third Level Institutes and the two Research Councils (IRCSET and IRCHSS).

Reforms and expansion of graduate education, in support of the established targets for PhD output, are being implemented through the structures and programmes outlined above.

Significant funding has been provided for Research and Development in higher education. Specific measures introduced during 2007 and 2008 include the Research Equipment Renewal Grant Scheme introduced in 2007 and the Research Facilities Enhancement Scheme 2008 costing €28.14m and €58m.

A further €260 million was approved in July 2007 under Cycle 4 of the Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions (PRTLTI) bringing total investment, both exchequer and private, under the PRTLTI to over €865 million.

Health

Use the education system and public awareness campaigns to highlight the damage caused by binge drinking.

At senior cycle, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment is developing a curriculum in Social and Personal Health Education. A draft curriculum framework has been published, and consultations have been completed on it. It is anticipated that the recommendations of the Council on the matter will be forwarded to the Department shortly. Substance Use will be one of the five areas of study planned for the programme. A policy template for developing a School Substance Abuse policy, together with a sample policy, has also been made available on the Department's website, with links and references to relevant resources, to assist schools

Ensure that primary schools educate children about bodily positive self-image.

This is an integral part of the Social Personal and Health Education Programme in primary schools. A full time support service provides professional development and training for teachers in implementing the programme.

Child Protection

Require all primary schools to implement the Stay Safe programme.

Two additional primary school teachers were seconded to Child Abuse Prevention Programme (CAPP) in September 2007 to assist with targeted training which is being directed at those schools that had indicated they are not implementing the Stay Safe programme. In the 2007/2008 school year CAPP has provided training to approximately 615 schools, over 5,000 teachers and 1,100 special needs assistants. In addition to this targeted training, CAPP continues to provide in-service training and support to all primary schools on request.

Disability

Provide for improved access to lifelong learning for adults with disabilities. Ensure that people with disabilities have full access to accessible vocational training. Offer people with disabilities further improved pathways to participation in employment or education, avoiding the benefits trap.

A **Handbook for Guidance and Information Officers** on Disability Issues in Further Education was launched in March 2008 by the National Office of Equity of Access & AHEAD.

An Equity of Access fund is available through the Higher Education Authority to provide grants for people with disabilities to assist them in attending Third Level and certain PLC courses. In 2007, 279 students with disabilities attending Further Education courses accessed this funding. The cost was €1.745m from a total of €9.987m. This fund provides for items such as assistive technology, personal supports and transport costs to assist people with disabilities to attend third level and PLC courses.

Work is ongoing in the Department in relation to the development of a policy to address the needs of adults with disabilities in further education.

Integration

Increase the number of language support teachers to 1,800 and review language requirements across government.

In 2008, there are almost 2,000 language support teachers in primary and post-primary schools compared to 997 in 2006.

Sports & Schools

Provide a dedicated fund of at least €100 million over five years from within the NDP allocation for school buildings. Provide a dedicated fund for investment in PE facilities for schools. Provide PE equipment grants to schools every 3 years.

€4.5 billion is to be invested under the current National Development Plan 2007-2013. Close to €600m of this will be provided this year alone. These capital allocations include provision for PE facilities as an intrinsic part of the design for new school buildings or refurbishment/extension projects in existing buildings. A PE grant issued to primary schools in 2006 and to post primary schools in 2007.

Make PE mandatory at second level, and put a revised PE curriculum for senior cycle students in place. Examine the potential to introduce second level examinations in PE.

The 'State of the Nation's Children' report published by the Minister for Children recently, found that children in Ireland are doing well on physical activity, ranking second across the 32 WHO countries in being physically active for at least 4 hours per week.

This commitment will be considered in the context of available resources and spending priorities within the education sector over the lifetime of the Government.

Islands

Maintain all existing second level schools where at all possible and carry out an assessment to ensure the most suitable educational services for islands without a secondary school.

There are 4 post-primary schools and one unit attached to a mainland school on the offshore islands, with an enrolment of almost 170 pupils. Where it is not feasible to provide a post primary school on an island, island families are eligible for financial assistance under the Remote Area Boarding Grant Scheme to facilitate a child's attendance at school on the mainland. Under the Scheme, grants are paid towards the cost of boarding in or near second level boarding schools in the Free Education Scheme for pupils whose homes are outside the range of public transport services to a day school providing suitable post primary education. This Scheme provides for the payment of grants up to €4,725 in each case towards the cost of boarding or lodgings. The maximum grant per pupil was increased from €4,500 to €4,725 for the school year 2007/08 in accordance with the cost of living index.

Border Counties

Support the significant upgrading of higher education capacity in the border region through strategic alliances between education institutions, North and South.

Letterkenny Institute of Technology (LYIT), on behalf of the North West Gateway Strategic Alliance, was successful in securing funding under Cycle II of the Strategic Initiative Fund (SIF). The SIF project encompasses a scoping study and the development of a blueprint for achieving significant additional capacity and is aimed at providing a complete specification for the delivery of additional higher education capacity through a strategic alliance between LYIT and the University of Ulster (UU).

Intensify our efforts to promote graduate mobility, graduate retention and access to people from disadvantaged areas to higher education.

The Student Support Bill 2008 will underpin a major programme of reform of the administration of student grants. The provisions of the Bill are designed to maintain the existing range of supports for students at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels who choose to study at institutions in Northern Ireland.

The Minister recently announced the new All Ireland Scholarship scheme for top-performing Leaving Certificate students from disadvantaged areas to assist them in accessing higher education. In a unique development, J.P. McManus is supporting the scheme which is set to run for at least 11 years and will benefit students from the 32 counties. He has contributed €24million to fund the provision of 100 of these Scholarships each year in the South. The Department of Education and Science will fund the balance and administer the scheme. He is also making €6million available to support the provision of similar scholarships for students in Northern Ireland. There is ongoing communication with the Department for Employment and Learning and the Department of Education to determine the manner in which the scholarships can be applied there.

The recently-published National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2008-2013, developed by the HEA in close cooperation with the Department of Education and Science, sets out challenging targets for increasing the participation rates in higher education of students from all disadvantaged areas and other underrepresented groups.

Growing the Use of Irish in Our Schools & Colleges

Protect the current position of our national language in all parts of the school curriculum and strenuously oppose any proposal to abolish its position in the Senior Cycle. Implement further changes in the Irish curriculum, with a focus on improving young people's command of the spoken language and move towards more marks for Oral Irish in the Leaving Cert exams as announced.

The development of assessment tests for Irish at the Educational Research Centre is underway and these tests are expected to be available for use in schools by 2009.

Officials are engaging with the Teaching Council and with colleges of education and other pre-service education providers to review the quality and effectiveness of their courses with particular reference to proficiency in Irish.

Build on the provision of in-service for primary teachers in teaching drama through Irish in the 2006/07 school year, by encouraging English medium primary schools to teach more subjects through Irish.

Teaching the Irish language and teaching through Irish continues to be fortified through the Tús Maith initiative. The purpose of the Tús Maith programme is to ensure that primary teachers are supported in the implementation of the Irish curriculum. Naturally, as part of this, teachers' skills in the language generally are improved. The team of designated Tús Maith personnel will continue to provide sustained support to schools throughout this school year. As well as in-school support, the team facilitate many other language initiatives such as localised workshops, activities through Irish outside of school hours, assisting teachers and schools in establishing conversation groups and so on. Weekend and Summer courses have also been organised in An Gaeltacht to allow capacity building as Gaeilge.

As well as the normal 'informal' usage of Irish in the classroom throughout the school day, the Tús Maith team encourage and provide ideas for teachers to further use Irish across the curriculum, for example in numbers activities in maths, or games in PE.

Establish a senior officials' group between the Departments of Education and Science and Community, Rural And Gaeltacht Affairs to enhance the actions of both Departments and their Agencies in addressing challenges in supporting the Irish language including strengthening the teaching of Irish throughout the Education system.

An Irish Language Coordinating Committee has been established with representatives from DES, D/CRAGA and relevant bodies. The committee are working to develop an integrated plan for Irish in the education system.

Build on the work done by the Dublin Institute of Advanced Studies and the universities in the development of research and teaching of Celtic Studies. We will make Ireland the world centre of excellence for such studies with particular emphasis on research in and the teaching of Old, Classical and Middle Irish.

The Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences funds cutting-edge research in the humanities, social sciences, business and law with the objective of creating new knowledge and expertise beneficial to Ireland's economic, social and cultural development. The Research Council operates a suite of interlinked Research Schemes, including pre- and post-doctoral levels and research projects grants. A number of projects in the areas of old, classical and middle Irish are supported by the Research Council.

As part of its current work programme the Research Council has recently commenced a national Foresight exercise to explore the contribution that the arts, humanities and social sciences make to the Irish economy and society. The overall objective of the Foresight exercise is to provide a comprehensive review of the contribution which a thriving humanities and social sciences sector can make to social and economic development; to review the current status, strengths and weaknesses of the arts, humanities and social sciences in Ireland and to chart a course for their future so that they can make the best possible contribution to social and economic development.

The exercise will make an objective assessment of the role of the arts, humanities and social sciences in interacting with current research and policy; map past and present research; identify strategic opportunities and the supports necessary for the development of the arts, humanities and social sciences research in Ireland.

It is expected that this Foresight exercise will be completed next year.

Arts and Education

Support training and professional development for the performing arts by creating, enhancing and extending modules of in-service training.

The PPDS continues to provide a service for music, drama and visual art through its advisors service which provides sustained support to schools in response to identified needs. Schools can request support in either/each of the three subjects as well as in integration across the arts. Advisors operate at local and regional level in co-operation with the Education Centre Network. They provide school visits and afternoon/evening workshops in Education Centres.

In addition, a seconded teacher has been provided to the Ark Cultural Centre since 2007. The activities provided by the Ark compliment the primary curriculum. Special briefing on events/initiatives is provided for teachers, who are admitted free to the centre when accompanying their pupils. The centre provides activities and events around the country on an outreach basis, and has interactive activities on its website.

Promote an appreciation of and engagement in arts and culture from early education through to all education levels through the implementation of a national comprehensive strategy.

The Points of Alignment report highlights the importance of supporting arts in education practice through systematic collaboration between schools and local artists and through visits by schools to arts events and performances. The Department of Education and Science is working closely with the Department of Arts Sport and Tourism to promote a synergy between in-school activity and the work of other agencies, and how best combined investment can be used to optimum effect within available resources.