

Report of the Taskforce on Lifelong Learning

October 2002

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The issue of Lifelong Learning has become very topical in recent times. Perhaps the main reason for this is the realisation that developed economies are moving into a post industrial phase where the emphasis is increasingly on the ability to continuously acquire knowledge, skills and competencies in an environment of constant change. The concept of “work for life” is increasingly supplanting that of “a job for life”.

The explosion in access to information brought about by the communications revolution and the internet is shifting the emphasis away from storing and memorising facts towards a more sophisticated view of learning which combines information *know what*, technique *know how* and understanding *know why*.

Where previously, Lifelong Learning might have been seen as the sole province of the professionals or knowledge workers, the need to continuously adapt and upgrade knowledge skills and competencies is now seen to apply across the gamut of jobs and workplaces.

The importance of Lifelong Learning has become all the more apparent given current demographic trends where, throughout Europe, there is a decline in new entrants to the labour force and a consequent need to rely more on an existing population of workers. Ireland is now beginning to experience this trend in substance with a decline in the numbers leaving second level education underway and set to increase substantially over the coming decade.

In addition to the economic imperative, there are a number of social concerns which are driving the Lifelong Learning agenda. Foremost amongst these is the interrelationship between employability and social inclusion and the view that access to more *and better* jobs is a fundamental underpinning of an inclusive society. This view is supplemented by the belief in the potential of Lifelong Learning to promote and develop active citizenship, whereby people are empowered to contribute proactively to the development of society, whether through politics, community development, business, the arts and sciences.

Lifelong Learning also brings the issue of individual personal development to the forefront and supports the individual’s right to grow and develop intellectually and holistically.

1.1 Background to the Taskforce

Lifelong Learning forms a major plank of the EU employment strategy and associated Employment Guidelines. More recently, the emphasis on Lifelong Learning has been further strengthened by the drive to create a “Europe of Innovation and Knowledge” launched at the 2000 Lisbon European Council and built upon at subsequent Councils.

Nationally, the Green and White Papers on Adult Education have substantially raised the profile of Lifelong Learning. The Programme for Prosperity and Fairness has also concentrated strongly on Lifelong Learning and upskilling. The establishment of the Taskforce derives from commitments in the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness.

Membership

The Taskforce was established by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment in collaboration with the Department of Education and Science.¹

Membership of the Taskforce was drawn from Government Departments, State Agencies, education and training representatives and the Social Partners. In addition, the Taskforce established two subgroups to identify the critical issues in two areas identified by the Taskforce as critical, namely Access/Barriers to Lifelong Learning, and Workplace Learning/Upskilling. Details of the membership of the Taskforce and subgroups is at Appendix 2.

Terms of Reference

The complete terms of reference of the Taskforce and its subgroups are at Appendix 1. Essentially, the Taskforce set out to develop a strategic framework for Lifelong Learning by mapping existing Lifelong Learning provision, identifying gaps in that provision and proposing solutions to fill those gaps. However, as the work of the Taskforce and its subgroups progressed, it became apparent that the mandate to develop a strategic framework required more than the simple mapping and gap filling exercise envisioned in the terms of reference since many of the systemic and structural issues which will underpin the framework for Lifelong Learning cannot be captured by such a reductionistic methodology.

The work of the Taskforce has also been conditioned by the European Commission's publication in 2000 of a Memorandum on Lifelong Learning. Subsequent to the publication of the Memorandum, the Commission asked each Member State to undertake a wide ranging national consultation process on the themes of the Memorandum. That consultation process and the Memorandum itself have made a valuable contribution to this report.

1.2 Definition and Scoping Issues

Lifelong Learning has been defined by the European Commission as:

“all learning activity undertaken through-out life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective.”

The Taskforce endorses this definition, but believes it must be seen in the context of individual development, active citizenship, social inclusion and the economic well being of society as a whole. The Taskforce believes that it is essential that Lifelong Learning policy be framed in this broad context.

¹ The final meeting of the Taskforce was held on 15th May 2002 where the Report was approved subject to some minor changes. The final Report was agreed by the Taskforce in July 2002.

The Taskforce has also found it helpful to take on board the component breakdown of Lifelong Learning under the headings of formal, non formal and informal learning. In framing its proposals for action, the Taskforce has concentrated on the first two categories of learning. While in no way diminishing the importance of informal learning, it is necessary to acknowledge that its very informality makes it difficult to measure and for the State to directly influence. Nevertheless, the Taskforce wishes to stress that tackling issues such as the basic skills of literacy and numeracy and creating a learning friendly culture, are important facilitators of informal learning.

A second important scoping decision made by the Taskforce was to focus primarily on adult learners. However, the Taskforce wishes to stress that both the State and its individual citizens alike must see Lifelong Learning as a process which extends from “cradle to grave”.

The Taskforce fully recognises the importance of the learning experience at primary and secondary level in building the foundations for Lifelong Learning. In that regard, the Taskforce wishes to underline its view that the effective inculcation at primary and secondary level of learning skills, social skills and the fundamental basic skills of literacy (including digital literacy) and numeracy is an essential foundation for learning through life. The structure of the curriculum and the pedagogical methods employed, also have an impact on ongoing capacity for Lifelong Learning.

The Taskforce acknowledges that there is substantial ongoing investment in and development of the primary and secondary education systems. In that regard, and mindful of the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness context within which the Taskforce is operating, the focus in this report is on adult learners and the issues facing them. However, the Taskforce also wishes to note that there remains a need to substantially improve attainment levels within first and second level education, to eliminate early school leaving (while in the meantime, improving participation in learning by early school leavers) and to ensure that all those completing second level education have, at a minimum, an adequate standard of basic skills.

1.3 The Vision

The Taskforce has formed the following vision for Lifelong Learning, namely that:

The State and citizens working in partnership should achieve: The skills, motivation, supports/ tools, resources and time to engage in learning on a lifelong basis and thus enrich lives and develop a more prosperous, more inclusive society.

It is recognised that this vision is aspirational. However, it encapsulates the essential elements which the Taskforce feels need to be addressed to make Lifelong Learning a reality as well as encompassing the social inclusion goal referred to earlier.

Achieving the vision requires a balancing of rights and responsibilities. While Government can create the framework conditions for Lifelong Learning, it requires a response from individuals and enterprises to make learning, and the potential benefits it can deliver, a reality.

This will require a significant cultural and attitudinal change on the part of providers, learners, employers, the public service and government. A core element of that cultural shift

will involve viewing learning not as a cost but as an essential investment which has tangible economic, personal and societal returns.

1.4 The Strategic Framework

Lifelong Learning is not simply about more provision of education and training. The recent report by Professor Malcom Skillbeck on behalf of the Higher Education Authority and the Conference of the Heads of Irish Universities: *The University Challenged* exemplifies the kinds of changes which need to take place in one part of the overall learning environment. The aim of the Taskforce is to highlight the fundamental issues which need to be addressed in the move from the traditional view of training and education to that of Lifelong Learning.

A long term strategic approach must be adopted if genuine success is to be achieved.

Essentially, the Taskforce has concluded that:

- Lifelong Learning requires a significant, systemic shift within the education, training and certification systems and the enterprise sector along with a change of culture on the part of society and individual citizens.
- It is not achievable with incremental or short term approaches;
- It requires a long term commitment on the part of government and citizens;
- Some of the building blocks to achieve it are already in place, but not all;
- There may be additional costs involved; there is a corresponding downside in terms of Ireland's long term economic and social well being if the necessary commitment is not made.

The Framework established by the Taskforce has the following essential elements:

- **Developing and implementing the National Framework of Qualifications;**
- **Ensuring Basic Skills for All;**
- **Providing Comprehensive & Coherent Guidance and Information;**
- **Addressing delivery, access and funding issues;**
- **Better learning opportunities in the workplace and for workers.**

These elements and their sub-components interconnect with one another to build the overall framework. The **National Framework of Qualifications** is of overarching significance. It has the potential to act as a powerful tool which maps the learning landscape in terms of awards and, through the work of the Authority (NQAI) and the two new Awarding and Certifying Councils, brings coherence and transparency to learning provision and outcomes.

Basic skills are a prerequisite for all further learning. The shortcomings in this area have been well documented in the White Paper on Adult Education — *Learning for Life*. Many positive developments have occurred on foot of the White Paper and are reflected in this report. However, more needs to be done and the Taskforce makes further recommendations in that regard.

Guidance and information are essential to providing better access and choice to learners. The key issue which the Taskforce has identified here is lack of coherence, with no single portal or point of contact through which learners can easily access information on the opportunities open to them.

Systemic change within the **delivery and funding system** is perhaps the biggest challenge to be faced in the move from “education and training” to Lifelong Learning. Opening up access to a much wider population of learners, covering a greater span of aptitudes, abilities and ages will involve some fundamental changes in how education and training institutions operate and how learning is funded and incentivised by the State. Over time, the realities of demographic change will create pressure for these changes. However, the Taskforce believes that we should act proactively to open up the system.

Finally, in line with its mandate under the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness, the Taskforce has focused on the specific issue of **learning in the workplace** and makes recommendations to enhance learning and upskilling opportunities for workers, particularly in regard to time for learning.

Taking the agenda forward

The third level institutions, the Higher Education Authority (HEA), FÁS, further education and training, community, workplace and further education providers have a central role to play in taking the Lifelong Learning agenda forward. Bodies such as the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, the National Training Advisory Committee, the National Qualifications Authority and the National Adult Learning Council will also continue to shape the agenda.

The Taskforce is concerned, however, that fragmentation of effort could significantly inhibit the achievement of the vision and strategic framework set out in this report. While recognizing that there are other actors involved at government level, the Taskforce particularly stresses the need for co-ordination between the Departments of Education and Science and Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

The Taskforce also wishes to stress the need for internal coherence in each Department. Consistent with its “cradle to grave” philosophy, the Taskforce believes that primary, secondary, further and higher education policy must all be driven by the Lifelong Learning imperative. Equally, the Taskforce points out that the analysis presented here demonstrates that the traditional conceptual and organizational divide between education and training is anachronistic.

These boundary issues must be tackled if Lifelong Learning is to become a reality.

Recommendations

1. The Taskforce recommends that Government establish an overarching structure to coordinate, review and report on the implementation of the framework set out in this report and the recommendations underpinning it.
2. A key role of the structure should be to develop implementation plans and associated costings for the recommendations contained in this report and to oversee their fulfilment.
3. The structure should report to both Government and to the national social partnership framework.

Main trends:**Table 1 — Labour Force trends 1993-2001**

Year	Labour Force (,000)	Employment (,000)	Unemployment (,000)	Unemployment Rate (%)	Long Term Unemployment (,000)	LTU Rate (%)
1993	1,403	1,183	220	15.7	125	8.9
1994	1,432	1,221	211	14.8	128	8.9
1995	1,459	1,282	177	12.2	103	7.1
1996	1,508	1,328	179	11.9	103	6.8
1997	1,539	1,380	159	10.3	86	5.6
1998	1,621	1,495	127	7.8	64	3.9
1999	1,688	1,591	97	5.7	42	2.5
2000	1,746	1,671	75	4.3	27	1.6
2001	1,782	1,717	65	3.7	21	1.2

Source: Central Statistics Office (data reflects situation in the Second Quarter of each year).

Ireland's labour market trends since the early 1990s must be seen against the background of a recovering and growing economy, net immigration and the return of many women to the work force.

The Labour Force grew by 27%, or 379,000 people, over the period 1993 to 2001.

The number of people in employment grew by 534,000, or 45% over the same period. Much of the employment growth is attributable to the number of women returning to the workforce.

Unemployment fell by 155,000 to 65,000 between 1993 and 2001 — a drop of 58% in the number of people unemployed.

The reduction in the numbers unemployed corresponds to 41% of the net increase in the labour force over the period 1993 to 2001 underlining the movement of people out of unemployment and into jobs.

The unemployment rate in 2001 had fallen to 3.7%, from 15.7% in 1993. While there has been some increase in overall unemployment recently, it is forecast to remain comparatively low into the medium term.

The drop in Long Term Unemployment (LTU) was even more dramatic — over the period 1993 to 2001, Long Term Unemployment fell by 104,000, or 83%.

The rate of Long Term Unemployment fell to 1.2%, from 8.9% in 1993. In spite of the economic slowdown at the end of 2001, recent figures from the CSO shows that the LTU rate for the 4th quarter of 2001 remained at 1.2%.

Table 2 — Educational attainment of unemployed persons 15-64 (percentages): Ireland

Year	Primary level	Secondary level	Tertiary level
1991	70.7	21.4	7.1
1992	68.1	23	8.2
1993	64.9	24.8	9.9
1994	63.4	26.3	9.9
1995	64.5	24.8	9.9
1996	63.7	24.2	11
1997	63.4	25.5	10.8
1998	64.4	23.8	10.9
1999	60.7	20.8	16.1

Source: Key indicators of the Labour Market 2001-2002, ILO, Geneva.

This table needs to be seen in the context of the overall reductions in unemployment described earlier. It shows that notwithstanding these reductions, a clear correlation remains between educational attainment i.e. the population of unemployed people continues to be dominated by people with low levels of formal educational attainment.

The growing proportion of unemployed people with tertiary level education who are unemployed also deserves comment and is presumably reflective of the increase in third level participation rates over previous years.

The link between educational attainment and unemployment can also be seen to be borne out in the following table of international comparative data. It shows that the proportion of unemployed people in Ireland with less than second level education is amongst the highest of the countries shown.

Table 3 — Educational attainment of unemployed persons — international comparison

Country	Year	Primary level	Secondary level	Tertiary level
Austria	1999	35.2	60.3	4.6
Belgium	1999	53.1	33.4	13.6
Denmark	1998	34.6	47.7	16.7(a)
Finland	1998	41.1	49.8	9.1
Germany	1999	28.9	57.5	13.6
Greece	1998	36.9	40.5	21.9
Iceland	1998	61	29.3	9.8(b)
Ireland	1999	60.7	20.8	16.1
Italy	1999	52.3	39	6.9
Japan	1999	23.3	51.2	25.6
Luxembourg	1999	56.2	33.8	9.8
Netherlands	1998	30.4	33	14.3
Norway	1999	25.3	54.7	17.3(b)
Portugal	1998	73.9	14.9	5.8
Singapore	1999	26.8	27.4	28.6
Spain	1999	52.3	19.1	21.5
Sweden	1999	32	50.6	15.8
United Kingdom	1999	9.3	43.4	12.1
United States	1999	22.2	35.6	42.1(c)

Notes: (a) Age coverage is 16-66 years, (b) Age coverage is 16-74 years, (c) Age coverage is 25+ years. In all other instances, age coverage is 15 or 16 years to 64 years.

Source: Key indicators of the Labour Market 2001-2002, ILO, Geneva.

Table 4 — Educational attainment* of the Labour Force (percentages): Ireland

Year	Primary level	Secondary level	Tertiary level
1995	43.6 (est)	31.8	24.3
1996	41.2	31.4	27.1
1997	41.4	31.4	26.9
1998	40.3	34.2	24.8
1999	34.5	27.7	33.8

*Highest Level Attained.

This table shows that the proportion of people in employment with higher level education is increasing. However, it also shows that the secondary education cohort is decreasing in size. This is likely to be reflective of increased numbers transferring to third level education. It is notable from the data previously presented that the fall in the proportion of people with only primary education who are unemployed is reflected in the fact that the proportion of people with only first level education who are in employment has risen. This gives rise to concern as to the vulnerability of such people to future unemployment in the event of a significant economic downturn.

**Table 5 — Highest education attained of population aged 15-64.
Quarterly National Household Survey June 2001**

	At Work	Unemployed	Not in Labour Market	Total	%
Below sec	220,500	19,400	289,200	529,100	20.44
Lr sec	294,900	16,300	225,100	536,300	20.72
	(30.6%)	(54.7%)	(61.2%)	1,065,400	41.16
Upper Sec	457,600	15,700	195,500	668,700	25.83
Further Ed/Trn	234,600	5,900	48,500	288,900	11.16
Third Level					
Non-degree	171,500	3,600	31,600	206,700	7.99
Degree	266,800	3,700	35,000	305,500	11.8
Not Stated	37,200	700	15,300	53,200	2.06
Total	1,683,000	65,300	840,100	2,588,400	

Source: CSO.

Table 6 — Educational attainment of the Labour Force (percentages): Country comparisons

Country	Year	Primary level	Secondary Level	Tertiary level
Austria	1999	21.9	68.9	9.2
Belgium	1999	33.6	35.7	30.6
Denmark	1998	22.8	52.2	24.7(a)
Finland	1998	0	50.4	21.5
France	1998	31.6	44.7	23.7
Germany	1999	17.9	58.4	23.7
Greece	1998	44.8	29.2	25.1
Iceland	1998	32.7	38.3	29 (b)
Ireland	1999	34.5	27.7	33.8
Italy	1999	48.8	38.9	11.1
Japan	1997	19.8	49.3	30.9
Luxembourg	1999	30.3	33.6	32
Netherlands	1998	22.8	42.8	25.5
Norway	1998	14.8	56.4	28.5(b)
Portugal	1999	69.8	11.5	8.9
Singapore	1998	23.3	28.4	33.9
Spain	1999	50.9	18.2	25.3
Sweden	1999	21.3	49.4	28.5(b)
United Kingdom	1999	6	47.1	25.4
United States	1989	17.1	39.5	43.3

Notes: (a) Age coverage is 15-66 years, (b) Age coverage is 15-74 years.

Source: Key indicators of the labour market 2001-2002, ILO, Geneva.

The international comparison shows that Ireland's levels of third level attainment are quite high and on a par with other fast growth economies such as Singapore. However, we still lag significantly behind the best performer — the U.S. By international standards, we continue to have a quite significant proportion of workers with only primary level education. Left unchecked, this militates against Ireland's drive to become a high skill, knowledge-based economy.

OECD International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS)-Results for Ireland.

The International Adult Literacy Survey conducted in 1995 and published in 1997 provided a profile of the literacy skills of adults aged 16-64 in Ireland. The headline finding from the survey was almost 25% of the Irish population, or at least 500,000 adults, scored at the lowest level of literacy (Level 1). The survey showed early school leavers, older adults and the unemployed as being most at risk of literacy difficulties, with participation in adult education and training being least likely for those with the poorest skills.

Training in the workplace

The recently published Continuing Vocational Survey² Results (for year 1999 — the latest year available) show that expenditure on in-company training is increasing.

The key results of the survey are summarised below:

Extent of training

Seventy-nine percent of companies carried out some training in 1999. Nearly all companies employing 50 or more persons undertook training. Training was most prevalent in manufacturing and financial/business services, whereas construction and transport/communication companies were less likely to train. Even taking account of size and sector, overseas subsidiaries were more likely to train.

Who undertook training?

About a quarter of a million employees attended formal training courses during the year; 41% of all employees. Employees in larger companies were more likely to receive formal training. Overall, a higher proportion of females than males attended training courses.

Employees spent 1.4 million days on training courses; the equivalent of 2.4 days per employee.

There was a tendency for managers/professionals and clerical/services workers to be more likely to receive training, whether formal or otherwise, than craft and other manual workers.

What sorts of training were provided?

Health / safety / environmental protection training was the most commonly provided type of training course. This amounted to 20% of all training course time. The other two major areas were computing/IT (17%) and machine operation/quality control (16%). Two-thirds of training course time was delivered through internally-managed courses. Of the externally-managed courses, private training organisations were by far the largest providers.

² Undertaken by FÁS on behalf of the European Commission.

Costs of training

Overall, companies spent €364 million on training courses in 1999 (including labour costs of internal trainers and participants). This represented 2.4% of their labour costs. This percentage was greater for companies employing 250 or more employees (2.9%), companies in the chemicals (3.3%), engineering (3%) and other services (5.4%) sectors. It was also greater for overseas companies (3.6%).

Average expenditure on training courses per employee was €600 and €1450 per person trained.

Training policies and practices in companies

Two-thirds of companies assessed the skills and training needs of their employees while just over half assessed the companies' future development and/or skill needs. Four in ten companies had a training plan. Those that did not have a plan were mainly smaller companies. Of those companies that provided training courses, under half had any formal means of evaluating them. The most common method of evaluation was by "measuring satisfaction levels of people after training".

Non-training companies — their views

One in five companies provided no (non-apprenticeship) training in 1999. The main reasons companies gave for this were that their employees' skills already met their needs, and that they always recruited people with the necessary skills. Relatively few cited reasons of cost or time for not training.

Comparison with 1993 survey

In general, the results of the 1999 survey were quite similar to the earlier 1993 survey. The percentage of companies providing any training remained nearly the same between the two surveys (77% in 1993, 79% in 1999) as did the percentage of employees attending training courses (43% and 41% respectively). The major changes between the two surveys were the increased duration of time spent on training and the increased cost of courses. Average duration rose from 1.7 days per employee in 1993 to 2.4 in 1999. The cost per day of training courses also rose from an estimated £139 in 1993 to £198 in 1999.

Conclusions

The survey showed that most companies in Ireland provided training for their employees. However, there were still many small companies that did not provide any training, particularly formal training courses. However, the 'training effort' has increased from the previous survey — especially due to an increase in the amount of time spent on training courses.

Recommendations

- 1. The absence of consolidated quantitative information on participation in Lifelong Learning is a deterrent to effective planning of provision. To address this, a regular Lifelong Learning report should be compiled bringing together statistical information from relevant bodies such as the Higher Education Authority, the Department of Education and Science, FÁS etc. To supplement existing statistical data, consideration should be given to including a specific periodic module on Lifelong Learning in the CSO Quarterly National Household Survey(QNHS).**

The National Framework of Qualifications

3.1 Overview

Qualifications are an essential element of a framework of Lifelong Learning. They are a currency which bestows a public value and recognition on learning and they can act as a gateway to additional learning. However, too often people may be learning rich but qualifications poor and can suffer as a result.

The development of Lifelong Learning in Ireland has been held back due to the absence of a coherent framework of qualifications. However, this is now being addressed as Ireland's new qualifications infrastructure is now coming into full operation.

That infrastructure involves the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) and two awarding Councils (the Further and Higher Education and Training Awards Councils FETAC, and HETAC, respectively) operating under the statutory remit defined in the National Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999.

Key objectives of the new structures are to provide for access, transfer and progression within a coherent overall framework.

The NQAI released a comprehensive discussion document (Towards a Framework of Qualifications [November 2001]) setting out the key issues on which the Authority wishes to focus the debate leading to the drawing up of the framework. Building on this in April 2002 the Authority published a document, "Towards a National Framework of Qualifications — Establishment of Policies and Criteria". This document sets out the policies and criteria for the development of the national framework of qualifications

The Taskforce welcomes these documents and highlights the following points:—

3.2 Defining principles

The Taskforce welcomes the overall approach taken which involves building the framework on a set of key principles, namely:

- Simplicity
- Transparency,
- Quality,
- Equality
- Flexibility
- Comprehensiveness and
- Relevance

The Taskforce believes that all of these principles are important and that they should be balanced within the overall framework.

3.3 Policies and Criteria for developing the Framework

The Taskforce welcomes the comprehensive discussion of this issue set out in Chapter Seven of the NQAI discussion document. The Taskforce particularly welcomes the acknowledgement that the basis for developing the qualifications framework needs to be more detailed than merely a system of hierarchical levels and considers that it is vital that a consistent framework is developed which differentiates between learning outcomes in a fair way and which relates such learning outcomes consistently to one another. The acknowledgement of best practice work undertaken by CEDEFOP in respect of its classification of vocational training is also welcomed.

While acknowledging that much work will have to be undertaken in the full development of the framework, the Taskforce wishes to stress the importance of valuing learning outcomes under the complementary headings of Knowledge, Skill and Competence as set out in the discussion document, and recognising these as the basis for establishing standards for awards.

3.4 Access, Transfer and Progression

The Taskforce considers that the goals of facilitating access, transfer and progression are absolutely fundamental both to the qualifications framework, but also to the overall strategic framework for Lifelong Learning. As the discussion document points out, the development of the awards framework will intrinsically contribute to the promotion of access, transfer and progression, in that it will make it clear how awards relate to one another. The Taskforce believes that to be judged effective, the overall framework must at a practical level make it possible for the learner to identify:

- “how and at what point they can enter a learning programme that will lead to an award;
- what possibilities there are for transfer to another programme and what recognition they will get for the knowledge, skill and competence they have already acquired;
- what possibilities there are for progression to higher level learning opportunities from their prior awards” (NQAI discussion document, p37)

The Taskforce welcomes the discussion document’s overall treatment of credits, portal awards, modular award structures and the facilitation of possibilities for updating learning. As the document points out: *“the concept of lifelong learning implies that learners should be able to undertake units of learning at varying rates of progress and perhaps not all in a continuous process. This implies that it should be possible for the learner to receive recognition for their learning achievements in units far smaller than awards.”*(p37)

The Taskforce is of the view that a system of learning credits is essential to the implementation of the Lifelong Learning framework.

The Taskforce notes that the NQAI has introduced the concept of a portal award in its Discussion Document as an award which can open access to multiple transfer and

progression possibilities. There has been much discussion of this concept in the process of consultation arising from the publication of the document and there are divergent views about whether the concept of the portal award is one that should be advanced with by the Authority. The Task Force considers that all awards within the framework should have some transfer and progression linkages and that some awards may have a more general portal recognition.

3.5 Modularisation

Third level education is currently most successful in catering to the needs of students who have just completed their second level education and enter third level to study on a full-time basis.

For many people in employment, part-time study (often in the evenings or at weekends) is the only realistic option open to them. In addition, many ostensibly full time students engage in part time work. While this brings a welcome measure of flexibility to the labour market, it has also been suggested as one of the contributory factors to the high rates of failure and drop out in third level.

Part time study can best be reconciled with work and family life if learning can be accessed at times and in ways which best fit with learner circumstances. The modularisation of courses can play a significant role in allowing this to be achieved.

The NQAI discussion document notes that *“there is a slow but definite trend towards modular formats, often accompanied by semesterisation. It may be that further development of modular approaches and structures will be a prerequisite for the fully integrated operation of a framework, and particularly for the realisation of access transfer and progression objectives.”* The Taskforce believes that there can be no equivocation on this point and sees modularisation as having an important part to play in facilitating access by learners to the widest range of formal learning opportunities.

3.6 Accreditation of prior and experiential learning (APEL)

Lifelong Learning requires that the qualifications framework espouses and encompasses prior learning. It is important that this approach extend as fully as possible and not be confined to formal learning which has already been the subject of existing awards and which can thus be easily valued. Many people have developed their skills through on the job learning, through uncertified community based learning and through self directed learning. The framework must allow for the accreditation of this learning. It should also be noted that for APEL to be a reality, it will place a concomitant onus on providers to allow easy access to syllabi and individual modules, whereby individuals can fill gaps in their learning before seeking certification.

3.7 Scope

The Taskforce welcomes the approach taken in the discussion document which highlights the desirability of having linkages between the National Framework of Qualifications and all relevant awards. The Taskforce considers it vital that the framework should be as

encompassing as possible and not confined to those awards which fall under the ambit of the FETAC and HETAC. The Taskforce therefore welcomes the fact that the framework itself is in no way limited to the awards of the two Councils. Awards to be included are those of public bodies in the State, namely the Further Education and Training Awards Council, the Higher Education and Training Awards Council, the Dublin Institute of Technology, the universities, and the Junior Certificate and the Leaving Certificate of the Department of Education and Science. The issues of the inclusion of awards from private bodies in the State, such as professional bodies, and from international bodies making awards to learners in the State, are also relevant. The Taskforce welcomes the discussion paper published by the NQAI in May 2002 on this issue.

3.8 Implementation Issues

It is essential that the framework of qualifications be developed as quickly as possible. However, the full realisation of the benefits of the framework will only become apparent if the positive developments facilitated by the framework are translated into practical reality. This will require vigour on the part of the two certification and awards councils, building upon developments such as those described in the preceding section.

It will also require substantive change on the part of providers. While recognising the critical role to be played by the qualifications framework and structures, there needs to be an equally strong drive by providers of education and training to recognise the opportunities offered by the framework, and to re-examine their own courses to consider how routes of access and progression can best be facilitated in the National Framework.

The issues of resourcing inevitably arise. The Taskforce considers the effective resourcing and operation of the new qualifications structures to be of vital importance. It is not sufficient that the structures have been put in place — they must be capable of moving to full operational status within a short space of time.

Recommendations

- 1. The Taskforce recommends that the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, in concertation with all relevant stakeholders, should move swiftly to develop and put in place a comprehensive framework within which there is provision for appropriate recognition of the knowledge, skills and competencies of all learners, irrespective of their age, background or abilities.**
- 2. In view of the centrality of access, transfer and progression to the implementation of the strategic framework for Lifelong Learning the Taskforce recommends that the Authority should publish an outline framework and procedures for access, transfer and progression no later than the end of 2002.**
- 3. The work of the Awarding and Certification Councils should include substantive provision for Accreditation of Prior and Experiential Learning. Specifically, measures should be taken to make APEL provision more transparent to all learners.**

4. The Councils should also ensure that they have regard to the diversity of existing and emerging providers of education and training, ranging from State-funded bodies to independent providers and from community education providers to in-company training provision and should ensure that their validation processes meet these needs.
5. Following the development of the framework and the initial operations of the Authority and Councils, a review of resourcing should be carried out to determine the level of resources required to address identified certification requirements. The Taskforce notes that it is essential that the fees charged by the awarding and certifying Councils do not stifle innovation and the increasing certification of learning.

4.1 Overview

Like the framework of qualifications, basic skills are an essential building block of Lifelong Learning.

There is much debate about what constitutes basic skills. However, there is general agreement that, at a minimum, basic skills encompass reading and writing, listening, speaking, and mathematics/numeracy for everyday life. Increasingly, the ability to use computers and communication technology and software is also being seen as part of the basic skills portfolio. Taking a slightly more expansive view, problem solving, managing information and learning to learn can also be seen as essential to a Lifelong Learning portfolio of basic skills.

The Taskforce is of the view that all of these skills are important and that Lifelong Learning policy should allow individuals to acquire and develop these skills throughout life. The Taskforce notes that the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs is currently having a study carried out on inter and intrapersonal skills which will help to providing clarification on the current position in Ireland in terms of demand and supply of these skills. For the present, the Taskforce believes that there is a case for prioritising literacy, numeracy and ICT skills in view of the identified deficiencies in these areas and the overall national priority attributed to the information society.

4.2 White Paper on Adult Education

The Government White Paper on Adult Education: Learning for Life was launched in August 2000 following an extensive consultation process. The White Paper sets out a range of recommendations to promote and expand access to adult education in the context of a continuum of educational opportunities on a lifelong basis. The recommendations cover:

- implementation of a national adult literacy strategy;
- expansion of part time options in further education through a Back to Education Initiative;
- improved opportunities for adult participation in third level education;
- a strengthened role for community education;
- the enhancement of supporting services such as guidance, counselling and childcare;
- enhancement of quality through dialogue, staff development, research, and the development of a national qualifications framework:

- and the establishment of a National Adult Learning Council and Local Adult Learning Boards for improved co-ordination, integration and planning, nationally and locally.

The recommendations are being implemented on a phased basis in the light of the resources provided in the National Development Plan and in the Multi-Annual Budgets.

4.2.1 Adult Literacy

In regard to adult literacy, since publication of the IALS survey the provision in the education sector for adult literacy has increased from a base of €1.1m in 1997 to €16.46m in 2002. €98m has been committed to this area in the National Development Plan 2000-2006, with a target of reaching 113,000 clients.

With the increase in funds to date:

- The clients catered for annually have increased from 5,000 to 22,733 between 1997 and 31 December 2001;
- A range of media e.g. local radio, posters, leaflets, past participants, outreach staff and referral networks are used to promote the programme;
- Provision includes night-time, morning and daytime classes;
- A continuum from one to one voluntary tuition to group work to progression to certified learning options is being developed;
- Referral networks with FÁS, Local Employment Services, Partnerships, Health Centres, welfare and community groups, playgroups, schools and school parent committees, libraries etc are being expanded and strengthened;
- Family literacy groups involving both adults and their children are running successfully, along with literacy groups for travellers, people with special needs and those for whom English is not the mother tongue and workplace literacy programmes;
- Nationally certified staff development programmes are underway on a modular inservice basis, as well as literacy awareness training for front line staff in employment services, Community Employment schemes, social welfare offices. A quality framework has been developed with international partners;
- FÁS/VEC Community Employment joint literacy programmes (Return to Education) are being expanded to all regions. There are now 46 in operation. These programmes enable participants on FÁS funded Community Employment to be released half time from their work experience programme to avail of intensive literacy tuition by the VECs. This enables them to combine work experience, and 10 hours per week literacy tuition to be combined with a training allowance;
- A national referral directory on adult literacy services has been published and disseminated showing where services are located, what options are offered and the contact points and phone numbers;
- National TV and radio programmes featuring literacy tuition and awareness are running successfully, supplemented by free learner packs and a freephone helpline organised by the National Literacy Agency and manned by trained tutors. The evaluation of the first TV READ WRITE NOW series showed it was addressing the

needs of those with basic and intermediate skills, and that learners improved their skills, willingness to practice and willingness to seek help. It also shows the main demand is from independent learners who wish to progress their skills in the privacy of their own homes. Videos of the series have been distributed free to literacy, education and training centres, public libraries and video outlets. The average weekly audience for the 2000 series was 155,000, with an average weekly audience for the 2001 series of 235,000;

- A radio numeracy series of 10 weeks was also broadcast, following a 10 week numeracy series in 2001. Free tapes are supplied on request by RTE; and
- Research has been commissioned on the development of an assessment framework for the literacy service to ensure national consistency in the diagnosis of learner's starting points, and so that their progress can be monitored in graduated steps at levels below FETAC Foundation/Junior Cert national certification.

4.2.2 Additional White Paper Developments

- The implementation of a Back to Education Initiative, starting in 2002 with 6000 extra part-time places under PLC, Youthreach, Traveller, and Vocational Training Opportunity Scheme(VTOS) programmes, including part time senior cycle or equivalent options, principally aimed at young people and adults in the population with less than upper secondary education. The applications for the school/VEC strand of the initiative (5400 places) are currently being processed. 10% of all expansion will be earmarked exclusively for community education providers, and discussions with the relevant interest groups will be initiated shortly to adapt the scheme to cater for this sector. An Adult ICT Skills programme will be implemented as part of the measure. The initiative will be expanded over time with a view to having 20,000 extra part time places per annum in place by 2006.
- The appointment of 35 Community Education Facilitators throughout the country. These posts will be based in the VECs, and their work programme will be determined initially by the ad hoc Adult Education Boards, and in future years by the Local Adult Learning Boards, when they are established. The role of the facilitators will be to support the development of new community-based learning groups, to network providers and help them access funding, to share good practice and monitor quality, and to promote the development of partnerships with the statutory sector, particularly in relation to outreach and referral.
- The further extension of the emerging adult educational guidance service, supporting students in literacy, VTOS and adult and community education programmes. Phases 1 and 2 are already under way, with a service now operational in 18 areas. Phase 3 has been approved in a further 8 areas and the projects are in the set up phase. The aim is to have a comprehensive national service in place by 2006. In addition, a feasibility study with an IT consultancy firm has been completed to develop a publicly accessible database of adult learning options, integrated with a national telephone helpline. This will help address difficulties in accessing information which is currently fragmented over a range of providers.
- The **National Adult Learning Council (NALC)** was set up on an interim basis in March 2002. It will become an executive agency of the Department of Education and Science. The Council will be resourced and staffed to act as an important catalyst for

change and development in adult education. It represents education, training, social partner, community and voluntary sector and learner interests to ensure a co-ordinated strategy in the provision of adult learning. The Council's role is to advise on policy, promote co-ordination and liaison, engage in research and staff development, and support international co-operation. It also has a specific remit to progress such issues as workplace learning, community education, an equality strategy, and to establish an advisory group on the integration of people with physical and learning disabilities into adult education.

4.3 FÁS Initiatives

In addition to the very significant increase in annual provision by the Department of Education and Science for expenditure on literacy/numeracy schemes, two pilot initiatives have been undertaken in FÁS's Community Employment Scheme. Community Employment (CE) is the largest state programme aimed at long term unemployed people, catering for approximately 30,000 participants per annum. Extrapolating from the OCED IALS survey findings on the literacy deficits of the population in general, it is likely that at up 7,500 participants on the programme at any one time may experience literacy problems. There is an opportunity to address these deficits for a significant number of people while they are engaged on Community Employment.

This is being addressed in the first pilot, the Return to Education Programme which has been developed by FÁS in conjunction with the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) and the VECs for CE participants with literacy difficulties. The second element has been the piloting of a Core Skills Programme for those on CE. This allows for progression for beneficiaries of the Return to Education Programme, but is not confined to these.

The Core Skills Programme has two aspects to it; the first relates to immediate training needs of participants, while the second caters exclusively for progression-related training and development. Discussions between the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment are in progress with FÁS on the inclusion of core skills on other of its programmes.

In addition to these existing pilots, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment plans to progress discussions with FÁS on the initiation of a Basic Skills Needs Initiative. This would involve FÁS putting in place diagnostic measures to identify client literacy and numeracy weaknesses at applicant or participation stages of all relevant courses. The intention would be to supplement NALA/VEC resources with in house tuition by FÁS staff, either as an element of individual programmes, or on a standalone basis.

4.4 Workplace Literacy

NALA, in collaboration with a number of VECs have piloted a number of workplace literacy initiatives, under the heading of "Return to Learning" projects, mainly among Local Authority (outdoor) staff, and to a lesser extent in the manufacturing sphere. On the basis of the successful outcomes of these pilot initiatives, NALA has established a working group (composed of relevant Government Departments, Social Partners and other interested bodies) with a view to codifying the learning from these pilots and establishing how this approach could be mainstreamed nationally.

4.5 ICT

The area of ICT is rapidly changing and developing. A knowledge of computing/communications technology and its application is now a prerequisite in most areas of education, training and work. Through the internet, computers are also vital portals in accessing knowledge and learning. Technological development also has an impact at social level where information processing and access to an increasing number of services rely upon information technology skills. A practical example of this can be seen in the expansion of Internet banking for personal account holders, which impacts on people of all age groups.

Adults need to be in a position to undertake ICT training either within the workplace to keep abreast of changing technologies or, for those who are outside the workforce, in education and training centres where they can train in order to access opportunities.

An important aim of the Back to Education Initiative is to provide Basic ICT Skills for adults. The number of places will increase on a phased basis to 20,000 extra per annum by 2006. In addition, a Community Access IT initiative (CAIT) administered by the Department of Public Enterprise, is providing some €5.7million in 2001/2002 to support community access to ICT facilities and training.

Major challenges remain, however, in progressing a national e-learning agenda, and this issue will be progressed in the context of the continuing work under the Action Plan on the Information Society.

4.5.1 IT for Older People

In year 2000, to mark the UN International Year of Older Persons, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment funded eight projects to provide basic IT skills to people over 55 years of age. Training was delivered by a variety of providers, including VECs. The VEC system, in particular demonstrated the capacity to deliver training in a very cost effective manner. More recently, the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs conducted research into employment and skills issues relating to older workers. The need for better levels of ICT literacy emerged as one of the key issues to be addressed in this work. The Taskforce notes and welcomes the intention to include older people in National ICT programmes.

Recommendations

- 1. The Taskforce welcomes the significant progress which has been made in the implementation of the agenda set out in the White Paper on Adult Education and recommends that the initiatives now underway should be built upon and strengthened to achieve the aim of ensuring that all adults have access to basic skills.**
- 2. The *Return to Education Programme* and the *Core Skills Programme* within Community Employment should be extended to all FÁS regions.**
- 3. FÁS should fully develop and implement its Basic Skills Needs Initiative as described above.**

4. The Taskforce recommends that additional support should be provided for workplace literacy initiatives, building on the Report from the Workplace Literacy Strategy Group established by NALA.
5. The Taskforce supports the increased provision in the Back to Education Initiative aimed at increasing the number of part time places to 20,000 by 2006.
6. The Taskforce recommends that the experience of the IT training programme for older persons be built upon as soon as possible with a specific initiative targeted at older workers. Such an initiative should have strong social partner involvement.

5.1 Overview

The National Framework of Qualifications will provide an important roadmap for people wishing to access learning. However it will not be sufficient by itself. At present, comprehensive information on specific learning opportunities is not easily accessible to individuals, especially those who are not currently engaged in formal learning.

In many areas of social and economic activity, timely, relevant and accessible information is an important driver of increased consumer choice. This principle is as relevant in the area of Lifelong Learning as in any other sphere of life.

OASIS, the public service information facility provides very general information about adult education, literacy and other learning opportunities; however, specific information on courses is not available from this source. Training providers and institutions make information available on an individual basis and advertise their courses in local newspapers. Local libraries and resource centres also carry information on available courses. While these information sources are useful, there is no single point of reference for Lifelong Learning opportunities. Such consolidated information as is available tends to come in the form of privately produced and commercially marketed directories.

The Taskforce considers that the provision of information alone is insufficient to generate a deeper commitment to Lifelong Learning. Guidance and assistance in making choices is also an important factor, particularly in the context of assisting individuals to choose a career path and in terms of meeting the skills needs of the economy.

5.2 Information needs

The current fragmentation of information is a serious block to Lifelong Learning. The key information needs identified by the Taskforce are as follows:

- **Information on education and training opportunities** in an easily understood, easily available format;
- Information on **costs and subsidies** available to support learning;
- **Job-related labour market information** on requirements and qualification routes for different careers, areas of job growth and development;

5.3 Guidance

The purpose of guidance is to assist people to make choices about their lives including addressing learning needs and opportunities. In this sense, guidance support is

complementary to the provision of information and can help individuals to utilise information effectively in their decisions about learning and its life applications.

A Career Guidance structure exists in the education system at Second and Third level. However, a key strategic issue to be addressed is the lack of independent guidance for adult learners.

FÁS employment services also provide an important source of guidance information, and many FÁS staff operating these services are qualified guidance officers. *Job Connect*, a pilot initiative operated by FÁS in four of its regions, allows jobseekers to use a Freephone number to get up to date information on current job vacancies. The experience of Job Connect could be drawn upon in developing the job related information aspect of a national guidance and information service.

Under the National Development Plan £35m has been earmarked for the period 2000-2006 to develop an adult guidance service and programme support for the further education sector. The aim is to have a comprehensive service in place by the end of the Plan period. This will aim to:

- Provide comprehensive information on adult learning opportunities in a format which is accessible to all. The wide range of providers in the field of adult education and training, and the frequency of emerging/changing course options, has contributed to fragmentation and considerable confusion in this area;
- Explore the scope for developing national specifications and standards for a national website of learning opportunities, which can be locally updated and accessed on a local, institutional, sectoral or programme basis;
- provide a telephone helpline service, as well as ICT information points in libraries and community education services;
- address issues of training and quality assurance;
- Provide a foundation level of guidance and counselling free for all participants, but charge fees for participants requiring more intensive levels of follow-up and support. All levels of the service would be free to participants on adult literacy, VTOS and Youthreach programmes, and for participants entitled to free fees or a reduction to 30% under the Back to Education Initiative;
- The developments will also provide a flexible budget for referral to psychological services as needed.

An Advisory Group which includes FÁS and the Employment Services, has been established representing key agencies to oversee the development of the overall project. Phases 1, 2 and 3 of the Initiative are now operational with a service in 26 areas.

A feasibility study has also been completed on the development of a publicly accessible database of adult learning options, integrated with those of other agencies, and incorporating a national telephone helpline service.

Guidance in Higher Education

The Taskforce welcomes the planned improvements in guidance in the further education sector. However, the Taskforce also believes that further improvements in guidance services

in higher education are needed in the context of an overall integrated approach, and that training within the sector for adult guidance professionals and front line staff needs to be expanded and funded as part of mainstream activity, and made available on a regional basis outside Dublin.

An **integrated strategy** for development is seen as vital with all relevant agencies participating in supporting co-ordinated actions — particularly through joint approaches by FÁS, the National Centre for Guidance in Education, second level, further and third level providers. Such integration could provide for joint web-based information systems, with hyperlinks between related web sites; development of an integrated database of learning options and co-operation with Northern Ireland Learn Direct guidance initiatives. The latter could build on the experience of FÁS to date in this area.

Recommendations

1. The Taskforce recommends that a single national source of learning information (the National Learning Line) should be developed, addressing the three priority information needs identified earlier. The service would compile information on Lifelong Learning, and provide it via a telephone service, the Internet and in disability friendly media. The learning website should also provide links to relevant Websites (e.g. FÁS, VECs, Institutes of Technology, etc.) The potential for developing appropriate services on an all island basis should also be explored.
2. The Taskforce recommends that an integrated guidance system be developed, linked to the National Learning Line. Among the elements to be addressed in the strategy would be:
 - Sharing of computer based diagnostic and assessment tools;
 - Joint inservice training for guidance practitioners;
 - Joint actions and sharing of good practice in regard to qualifications for front line guidance and advanced level skills.
3. This development of the guidance strategy should be progressed through a multi-agency consortium representing the Department of Education and Science, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, FÁS Employment Services, the National Centre for Guidance in Education, third level and community education interests.

In particular, it is vital that new developments in the provision of information and guidance for adults should link effectively with the existing FÁS Employment Service initiatives in this area, in order to ensure an integrated coherent service for learners.

The Taskforce recommends that an evaluation study be undertaken to assess the scope, scale and effectiveness of existing guidance and counselling services in the higher education sector, across all colleges, and to make recommendations on the future development needs of the service.

The role of the National Guidance Centre in Education in supporting best practice should be developed and resourced, working closely with appropriate interests, for higher education as well as the other levels of the system.

6.1 Overview

Current delivery systems are not optimally adapted to Lifelong Learning. With the exception of community education, the predominant delivery model remains that of full time attendance during “office hours”. The same tends to be true of those vocational training courses delivered by major state providers such as FÁS.

This approach has been effective in dealing with the historical realities of a large cohort of unemployed people and a third level system whose overarching goal was to provide the maximum number of places to a growing population of school leavers. It is less well suited to the conditions facing us now and into the future.

There has been little subsidisation of Lifelong Learning, and adult learning in particular. Fees for full time undergraduate education were abolished since the academic year 1996/7 and as a result, there is now a significant discrepancy between the costs of learning for full time students and part time students, with the latter paying full fees.

These factors have created substantial access barriers which have restricted learning opportunities for people whose work or family circumstances preclude them from accessing full time learning. In addition to factors relating to inflexible delivery, the cost of part time learning is also a substantial deterrent.

For disadvantaged groups, the absence of supports and modes of learning suited to their background and experiences is also a barrier. Clancy’s recently published survey of access to College (HEA 2002) indicates that although there is considerable evidence of increasing equity in access to higher education, marked differences in access on the basis of socio-economic background still exist. More generally, the HEA recently commissioned a review of international literature for the promotion of equity in higher education. That review drew together a series of objectives to be addressed. The Taskforce believes that all of these issues need to be addressed if the vision outlined in Chapter One is to be achieved.

In addition to these specific issues, the Taskforce’s Working Group on Access and Barriers also identified care responsibilities (both child and eldercare), transport, and time as being significant barriers to accessing learning. This serves to underline the wider environmental factors that need to be addressed to fully support the Lifelong Learning framework.

6.2 Flexible Opening Hours

The issue of modularisation and credits has already been addressed in the context of the framework of qualifications. The modular delivery approach needs to be supplemented with more flexible opening hours and forms of delivery to fully realise the strategic framework.

Night course provision is made by the State third level system and FÁS. However, in many cases, night courses are run on the initiative of individual colleges and training centres. Under the current structures, night learners are frequently denied the full developmental experience of attending college and do not have access to the full range of support structures available to full time day students.

The Taskforce notes that while there is difficulty in securing detailed data on provision in the sector, experience suggests that the private third level education institutions have made substantial efforts to attract part time and night students. Their success in providing a diverse range of night time courses is indicative of the demand which exists for this form of learning.

In addition to the above, some 147,000 students each year participate in part time classes provided by second level schools and VEC colleges. These range from courses of a hobby nature to literacy, computers, personal development, art and craft, vocational training and formally certified learning options. Detailed information on the breakdown of courses is not available.

6.3 Open and Distance Learning

Open and distance learning can ameliorate some of the geographical and time barriers faced by many potential learners by mobilising information and communication technologies, including internet access and video/telephone conferencing. Improvements in communications infrastructure, increases in the capabilities of personal computers and the widespread accessibility to computers at modest hourly rates, or free of charge in the case of public libraries, make it an increasingly viable mechanism for learning.

Barriers to increased use of open and distance learning include the fact that, notwithstanding the positive developments recorded above, many people do not have regular access to the internet. In addition, the development costs of creating suitable open learning programmes should not be underestimated. It is also important to recognise that to be fully effective, open and distance learning methods of delivery need to be supplemented by support mechanisms that allow direct teacher-learner contact.

The Taskforce has identified a need to further develop open and distance learning in the third level sector.

The Group noted that the Higher Education Authority and Oscail, the National Distance Education Centre, jointly hosted a Symposium on the Future of Open and Distance learning in Higher Education in Ireland on 29 and 30 March 2000 and that the report on the Forum was published in July 2000. The report sets out that Ireland should have a national centre for open and distance learning in higher education. A national centre should be structured in such a way that it was seen to be independent of any one institution and its mode of governance should include representatives of all key institutional interests, but also representatives of the Social Partners. The centre should be positioned so as to carry out a range of important functions. It should promote collaboration between institutions in the delivery of services and, in a sense, harvest expertise in the area. It should provide a national database on open and distance learning

6.4 FÁS Net College Initiative

FÁS Net College offers distance learning and development opportunities over the internet. It provides a range of course options, mainly in computer subjects, which are available for a fee, or free of charge to certain groups such as the unemployed. In its *Statement of Strategy 2002-2005* FÁS's has indicated an intention to invest in the development of its *Net College* as a vehicle to promote the increasing use of e-learning.

The issue of extending access to Net College to those in work is addressed in Section seven.

6.5 Role of the Libraries

The Report *Public Libraries 2000 — National Network, Local Service* highlights the role of the public library service as a resource for information and learning, supporting adult learners through bridging information gaps, supporting distance learning in practical ways, enhancing literacy and ICT skills and general self-directed learning, providing materials and study spaces, developing linkages with business, education, training and the community at large, and meeting general community information needs. The public library system is a key access point for information on education and training options at all levels. Many libraries offer courses at nominal cost or free of charge, in art subjects, computers, literary subjects and literacy and numeracy skills. However, these seem to be initiated on an individual library basis, rather than in a co-ordinated, strategic way.

6.6 Access for non traditional learners

Statistical evidence³ suggests that the main groups who suffer from poor access to education and training are those who are:

- Poorly educated;
- Older;
- Unemployed, or not in the labour force;
- Working in small, rather than large, companies, or
- Working in lower occupational groups.

Furthermore, certain other individuals and groups such as members of the Traveller community, people with disabilities and those living in rural locations also suffer from relatively poor access. In terms of overall statistics, there are no significant participation differences between women and men. However, certain groups of women, especially those with child or adult dependants face barriers.

It is widely recognised that non-traditional learners, whether on full-time or part-time courses, require much more dedicated support than school leavers in areas such as confidence building, study skills and guidance.

The Taskforce notes that the Department of Education and Science introduced a Student Assistance/Access Fund in 1994, the objective of which is to assist students who might

³ International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) results.

otherwise, because of financial reasons suffer severe hardship or be unable to continue their third-level studies. Provision for this fund increased from €2.49m in respect of the 2000/01 academic year to €7.49m in respect of the 2001/02 academic year. Funding was also provided to Institutes of Technology in 2000 to facilitate the appointment of Access Officers, to enhance access by disadvantaged, mature and disabled students.

With regard to students with disabilities, the Taskforce notes that the Department of Education and Science introduced a Special Fund for Students with Disabilities in 1994, which provides funding to students with disabilities attending courses in third level institutions. This scheme was extended to students pursuing Post Leaving Certificate courses in 1998. The purpose of the Fund is to provide students with serious physical and/or sensory disabilities with grant assistance towards the cost of special equipment, special materials and technological aids, targeted transport services, personal assistants and sign language interpreters. Provision for this fund increased from €1.565m in respect of the 2000/01 academic year to €2.619m in respect of the 2001/02 academic year.

In September 2000, a Millennium Partnership Fund for Disadvantage was established by the Department of Education and Science. The Fund is intended to build on the experience of the Support Scheme for Students from disadvantaged families, operated by the Northside Partnership, which assists students to participate in higher education. The report of the Action Group on Access to Third Level Education launched in July 2001, sets out detailed recommendations on the criteria which should apply in the disbursement of the Fund. The administration of the scheme was devolved to Area Development Management Ltd, with effect from the 2001/02 academic year, with a provision of €1.27m. Separately, the Northside Partnership and the Ballymun Initiative for Third Level Education (BITE) received direct funding from the Department.

Also, arising from the report on Access to Third Level Education, special rates of maintenance grant payable to disadvantaged grant holders were introduced in 2001. The special rates, effective from October 2000, are:—

- €3,809 (£3,000) for students residing over 15 miles from the college attended and,
- €1,535 (£1,200) for students residing less than 15 miles from the college attended.

The Taskforce also highlights the need to recognise the fact that Ireland is an increasingly multicultural and multi ethnic society. In that regard, more opportunities for intercultural learning are needed. In addition, increased supports are needed for language training for the increasing number of members of our society for whom English is not a first language.

However the Taskforce considers that, particularly within higher education, for non-traditional learners to become part of the culture of the institution there is a need for the staff in the learner's Faculty or Department to have a key involvement in supporting the learner. If this is not the case, this can lead to the situation whereby ensuring that the support needs of non-traditional learners are met can be perceived as not being a key role for those with whom the learner has the most important interaction. In this way the cultural norms and curricular content, particularly at third level, can become reflective of a diversity of cultural and class perspectives prioritising the inclusion of knowledge developed by, and in support of, marginalised groups. Furthermore, this also has the potential to develop a more inclusive

balance in the range of skills which are recognised and measured, to include skills such as those defined within models of multiple intelligence and personal intelligence.

The Taskforce considers that education and training providers need to develop a range of pedagogic methods to deal with the different expectations, attitudes and learning styles suitable to different Groups of non-traditional learners. A joint effort should be made by those responsible for training educators/trainers to assess best practice in this area and provide suitable in-service training for existing educators/trainers.

The Taskforce notes that the HEA has provided approximately €20 million over the last 6 years to provide for an Access targeted initiative fund in Universities. The purpose of the initiative is to increase participation of groups in higher education which are currently under-represented. Among the groups provided for are those from areas of socio-economic deprivation, travellers, mature students, and students with disabilities. The funding provided in these initiatives has addressed a range of strategies and methodologies to increase participation. These have included design of new access routes for learners, engagement with second level schools, provision of targeted financial, learning and peer supports for students in need.

More generally, in a review of international literature for the promotion of equity in higher education, Professor Malcolm Skilbeck has outlined a sequence of objectives to be addressed not just in higher education but also at second and first level education to ensure that all students have an opportunity to participate in and benefit from higher education. At higher level education, the recommendations include the need to target support to meet the needs of learners, provision of appropriate staffing structures, an inclusive physical environment and integration of policy for under-represented groups into all aspects of the institutional policy.

6.7 Disseminating best practice

The Taskforce identified the motivation of staff to be involved in innovations in learning as a potential barrier. The Taskforce noted that many recent innovations in learning have relied on core groups of motivated staff for development but that there is a need to encourage a greater number of staff to become involved. It is considered that this applies particularly in third-level institutions where reward systems have particular regard to research staff. The Taskforce recognised that many staff in higher education are involved in innovative developments and considered that there is a need for recognition within institutions for this work. In this regard the Taskforce noted the recent targeted initiative funding available from the HEA for universities which is providing some additional funds for institutions to support institutions in the development of teaching. Funding will be provided for activities which underpin the importance of teaching and learning as a core part of the institution's activities, such as rewarding of excellence in teaching and recognition of excellence in teaching in career development and promotion.

6.8 Funding for Learning

Funding for full time learners undertaking primary degrees, diplomas and certificates does not require the payment of tuition fees. The same is true of FÁS courses. While this has

reduced the cost of learning for many, it has created a significant anomaly for part time learners.

The Taskforce considered the fact that many education and training institutions are funded on the basis of full-time student provision and, thus, the funding bodies are providing a greater incentive for institutions to have full-time learners rather than part-time learners. The effect is to provide institutions with a greater incentive to bias provision in favour of full-time learners. The Taskforce recognises that there have been a number of innovative developments in the funding of institutions which have sought to assist in the education and training of part-time learners. However, the Taskforce considers that the fundamental issues of structures for resource funding must be addressed to assist institutions to undertake significant increases in part-time provision.

The Taskforce notes that it is difficult to understand how the difference between full-time and part-time learners is defined and how the difference between full-time and part-time courses is defined. For example, the OECD definition of part-time students in higher education is those enrolled in programmes organised in such a way that they are able to undertake another activity either full-time or part-time. The current policy is focused on duration, not employment status.

From the point of view of the learner, the Taskforce considers that, in principle, all learners have an entitlement to participate in education and training and that supports for learners and costs arising for learners should not have the effect of encouraging full-time education and training over part-time education and training.

The Taskforce welcomes the commitment in the White Paper on Adult Education for the development of the Back to Education Initiative and that higher education fees will not apply to part-time students who satisfy the residency clause and who are social welfare means-tested or unemployment payment recipients or dependants, medical card-holders or dependants, persons in receipt of Family Income Supplement or dependants. There are two generic options to address this: a — reform of the fees system or, b — fiscal measures, which the Taskforce considered as follows:

6.8.1 Fiscal Measures

The Taskforce notes that in the absence of a system of negative tax credits, the significant drawback with fiscal measures is that they favour the better off and, as such, may not benefit those who most need support for learning. In addition, indications from the Revenue Commissioners suggest that there has been a relatively low level of take up of the existing reliefs for part time courses in information technology and languages. This may be explained in part by the small number of courses which attract this relief and a low level of awareness on the part of learners about the availability of such tax relief.

6.8.2 Reform of the fees system

The Taskforce gave particular consideration to the anomaly in education and training whereby fees are payable by learners for courses undertaken part-time, while learners undertaking the equivalent courses full-time are not generally required to pay fees. A sub-group of the Taskforce was established to determine the costs of extending free fees to all part-time provision, and to set out criteria which might apply under such an initiative. The full report of the sub group is set out in Appendix 4.

The sub-group considered a range of issues in its deliberations for purposes of costings. These included:

- The broad thrust of national qualifications policy toward:
 - providing for more flexible learning opportunities, in modular formats which can be accumulated over time towards a full award;
 - valuing all learning, across education and training, irrespective of the learning site;
 - allowing an inclusive process which enables participants to learn at their own pace and combine learning with family and work responsibilities.
- the need to promote more flexible provision by providers of education and training in terms of access routes, timing and delivery;
- the need to encourage adults to re-enter the system, and the target in the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness to increase mature student intake in third level education to 15% by 2005;
- the need to minimise deadweight and displacement investment, particularly where it does not lead to a formal qualification;
- the need to ensure equity of treatment for full-time and part-time students insofar as is feasible;
- the need to ensure that the approach adopted does not deter those with the lowest skills and educational levels from accessing learning appropriate to their needs;
- the need to provide for an orderly and planned change in third level provision towards a wider student cohort, through more flexible delivery options, in the context of rapid demographic change.

6.8.3 Approach recommended

The Taskforce concluded that it is critical to remove the fee barriers which deter a return to learning, if the key objective is to be achieved of raising the qualifications of the adult population, thus improving competitiveness and social cohesion.

The data sources are inadequate to come up with definitive costings. However best estimates are that, under the conditions outlined below, to provide for free fees for existing part time students within the education sector would cost **€32.947m** per year, and that to limit provision to those aged 23 or over might reduce costs by some 30% to **€23.062m**

Costs are calculated on the basis of a grant in lieu of fees scheme for further and higher education and training which would apply to part time learners:

- Up to and **including first degree level**;
- Would only cover persons studying for a **higher level national award than they currently hold** i.e. lateral progression will not be funded;
- Would only apply in **publicly funded institutions**;
- Would only apply for **certified programmes** within a national framework of qualifications;

- Would only apply to a learner studying for a **full award** within a specified time frame, where the learner already holds at least a Leaving Certificate (i.e at least 5 Ds in a Leaving Certificate or equivalent) or gains entry to a part-time course leading to a full award without the normal admission requirements. Where a learner with less than Leaving Certificate wishes to pursue individual nationally certified modules, as opposed to a full award, they would be facilitated to do so through a grant in lieu of fees under the scheme; and
- The residency and citizenship requirements of the existing Free Fees Initiative would also apply.

Some of these costs would be offset by a reduction in tax relief.

This is the replacement costs of providing free fees for existing part-time learners within the education sector. It is assumed that the bulk of part time courses in the publicly funded training sector will not be eligible on the basis of not leading to *full* nationally certified awards.

The costs are for fee relief only, and do not provide for maintenance grants.

6.8.4 Future expansion

It is clear that removing the fee barrier will fuel increased demand for part time places. The Sub Group was unable to estimate what the likely impact of this would be on future costs. However, it is clear that changing demography (with the number of 18 years per annum decreasing from c 74,000 in 1998 to 47,000 by 2012) will have a dramatic effect on the profile of student intake into further and third level education and training in the future, and will call for a refocusing of provision towards adult clients. Therefore some of the increased costs arising from future demand will substitute for existing costs of full time places.

Recommendations

- 1. The Taskforce recommends that education institutions should develop formal plans to move towards flexible opening hours and put in place the necessary organisational arrangements to achieve this.**
- 2. In regard to FÁS, the Taskforce recommends that FÁS should develop a comprehensive system of provision outside standard opening hours, with this provision to be targeted primarily at those in employment.**
- 3. The Taskforce recommends that the funding for providers of education and training should be reassessed to ensure that there is a coherent structure for the funding of post-second level education, i.e. further and higher education courses.**
- 4. The Taskforce recommends that a specific initiative should be taken in distance education aimed at enhancing electronic delivery of further and higher level education and training.**

5. In relation to the Libraries, there is potential for the public library system to play an enhanced role in the delivery of Lifelong Learning through the provision of information on learning opportunities and the provision of material and study space. A strategic approach should be developed by An Comhairle Leabharlanna to ensure that the role of the libraries is promoted and maximised.

Information and service linkages with the library service need to be included as an integral aspect of the emerging adult educational guidance service. This should be progressed through discussions at national level between the Department of Education and Science and An Chomhairle Leabharlanna, and through the enhancement of links at local level between guidance providers and the library service.

6. The Taskforce recommends that the fee barriers which deter participation of adults in flexible part time courses should be removed, and that a grant in lieu of fees scheme should be introduced for part time participants in publicly funded further and higher education and training institutions along the lines set out in this Chapter.
7. Consultation should take place between the Department of Education and Science/ FÁS and employer representative bodies to address the learning needs of young people who leave school early and have taken up employment.

7.1 Overview

Waterford Glass in its publication, “Learning With Europe” sums up the workplace context for Lifelong Learning as follows:

“As work changes from manual, standardised production to knowledge based processes, workers are required to be flexible, multi-skilled, IT literate, business literate and lifelong learners. Enterprises are being transformed from hierarchical and complex organisations with simple jobs, to less hierarchical more customer oriented, more decentralised network oriented organisations with more complex jobs.

[In the current work environment], every employee has become an important link in the supply chain. All jobs have a strong skill element included. The function of general operative, traditionally the least qualified employee, has been transformed. The role has changed from one of passive, repetitive work subject to direction, to one of a more active, interventionist team role requiring high personal initiative. General operatives in the new work environment require a clear understanding of business, plant and department objectives. Their input and contribution is critical to the smooth management of the process of running the enterprise.”

As the above analysis points out, all jobs now have a strong skill element. Given the distribution of formal educational attainment in the workforce and the changing skills mix, upgrading the skills of people at the lower paid end of the spectrum must be a key priority. However, Ireland’s long term competitiveness will only be assured if workers at all levels have the opportunity to upgrade their skills.

Continuing professional development will be critical in this regard.

7.2 Work-based Learning and Occupational Qualifications

The changing demographic picture outlined earlier demonstrates that upgrading the skills of the population will increasingly have to happen in the workplace or in collaborative approaches between enterprises and learning providers. For many people, possession of a degree, diploma or certificate provides a qualification closely linked to a particular profession or sector and a level of status which translates into employment, remuneration and promotion opportunities.

Currently, many occupations have no formal qualifications attaching to them or any formal statement of the knowledge, skills and competencies which are required to perform the tasks associated with the occupation.

However, there are examples of good practice in this area which can be built upon. FÁS's Traineeship programme is a training initiative based on specified skills required for particular jobs. The curricula for Traineeship courses are drawn up in close collaboration with employers. FÁS's work with the Security industry is a case in point. The industry approached the Traineeship Unit in FÁS largely on foot of the intention of the Department of Justice, Equality & Law Reform to introduce legislation regulating the security trade, seeking the development of occupational standards for all security occupations in the uniformed security guard, alarm products, and alarm installation sectors of the security industry.

A Traineeship programme for alarm installation has now been successfully established, in conjunction with FÁS, and a Traineeship programme for uniformed security guards is currently being developed. The industry considers that an established APL-type mechanism could be applied to serving staff, with add-on modules provided through the Traineeship process, to bring them to established levels of competence.

Another example of good practice in this area can be found in a number of leading companies who incentivise to constantly improve their skills by linking pay rises to the attainment of skills specified for a particular job.

Positive developments in this area have also been taking place within the Skillnets *Training Networks Programme* (see also S7.6). Approximately half of the 48 training networks have worked, or are working with, FETAC (formerly NCVA) on piloting new approaches to industry certification. The *Irish Pharmaceutical and Chemical Manufacturers Skillnet* has developed a competence based professional career structure within the industry. IPCMP worked with Cork Institute of Technology to develop a National Diploma in First Line Management for FETAC recognition. The Diploma is focused on work based learning and training, APEL and work-based assessments. Other certification processes are used by other training networks, including City and Guilds, FÁS, ECDL, etc.

The Training Networks Programme has demonstrated a willingness on the part of accreditation and certification bodies to engage with industry to assist in the development of certification for work based learning. It has also demonstrated that these bodies are willing to be more flexible than heretofore in developing appropriate processes and systems for dealing with industry certification requirements.

These examples of good practice need to be built upon. One area where priority action has been identified is that of construction skills. The Construction Skills Sub Group of the EGFSN has identified that there are almost 14,000 people working in skilled construction occupations. The sub group identified the need to substantially increase formal skills training for workers in these occupations.

7.3 Supports for Early School Leavers

Ireland continues to experience the phenomenon of early school leaving. Indeed, the economic buoyancy of the past decade could be said to have contributed to this.

Provision has been made in the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000 to address the situation where young people leave school early with inadequate qualifications in order to enter the workforce. The Education Welfare Board provides a structure to ensure that, in relation to

early school leavers there is a balance between the desire to enter the work force early, and the need to continue appropriate education and training. This is done by requiring that a young person (under 18), who has left school without adequate qualifications, and is not engaged in education or training, must engage in such a programme of education and training if he/she wishes to engage in employment. The Act provides a framework that will ensure that all such young people under 18 years who have left school early are identified. Once identified, the National Education Welfare Board has a responsibility to assist the people in question with access to continuing education and training. Employers will have a role to play in the identification of the young people concerned by employing only such young people who have a certificate to show that they are registered with the Board and by informing the Board when they employ a young person.

The Taskforce considers it essential that the provisions of the Education (Welfare) Act be rigorously implemented to ensure that learning opportunities are available to working early school leavers which will allow them to upgrade their skills in a structured way and provide the basis for career progression.

7.4 The Role of Standards

Quality standards such as ISO 9000 have become a virtually mandatory requirement in industry. A similar quality standard has been developed for Human Resources Development — *Excellence Through People*. The standard covers a range of HRD practices in firms in regard to the development of training plans, provision of training, maintenance of records, communications systems etc. Currently the penetration of Excellence Through People is low. This low level of take up is principally caused by a lack of resources to promote the standard and, in particular, to fulfil the extensive auditing and assessment requirements.

The Taskforce believes that *Excellence Through People* should be significantly promoted and that companies in receipt of grant aid for training projects should, at a minimum, be working to achieve the standard. The Taskforce notes that FÁS has indicated a desire to work in partnership with employer representative organisations and the development agencies to promote the standard and significantly increase its uptake.

7.5 Continuing professional development

Excellence Through People deals with the overall systems approach of the company to HRD. This can be complemented by more “vertical” approaches to development in particular disciplines. The Institution of Engineers of Ireland (IEI) has undertaken innovative pilot work in this area with its Continuing Professional Development (CPD) protocol which is signed between IEI and the applicant company to the process.

In summary, the purpose of the scheme is to create conditions in the “acceding” company where engineering and non-technical employees can acquire specified skills/competencies to complement or augment their existing qualifications. The CPD model is based on a tripartite partnership between individual companies, their engineers and IEI. The company invests in and implements prescribed CPD policies. The individual takes responsibility for his/her own CPD, adheres to the Company’s CPD policies, and avails of the resources provided by the company to acquire the prescribed skills/competencies, while IEI promote and “mentor” the process.

The scheme has the potential for further expansion and uptake subject to additional resources being available.

7.6 IT and Science Upskilling

Earlier in this report, the issue of basic IT literacy has been addressed. In light of Ireland's aim to progress the information society and to promote economic growth based on the potential of the knowledge based economy, the issue of IT skills in the workforce is also of critical importance. The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) considered the demand for IT skills very carefully in light of the downturn in the US economy and the global high tech economy generally. Notwithstanding the conditions prevailing at the time of its analysis, it concluded that over the medium term, there would continue to be a substantial demand for IT skills in the economy. However, it also concluded that given Ireland's demographics, much of the supply side response would have to come from the upskilling of existing workers and though attracting non-traditional learners to IT.

Ireland also needs to strengthen its policies to attract students to the sciences and to improve attainment levels in key underlying disciplines such as maths and physics. The work of the Taskforce on Physical Sciences is relevant in this regard.

In its third report, the Group recommended that additional investment should be made in IT skills and that a particular focus of that investment should be on part time investment including in-company training.

7.7 Training Networks

The pilot Training Networks Programme, operated by Skillnets Ltd., has made a significant contribution to in-company training over the last few years. Since 1999, the Training Networks Programme has funded 40 Training Networks and 20 Research Networks. Over 2,300 companies have been involved in the Programme and in excess of 12,800 people have benefited from training.

A total of 456 courses were delivered through the Training Networks Programme. 129 of these were newly developed courses and 218 were significantly customised courses. Nearly 25% of all courses/modules were certified.

The programme has had significant impact in encouraging SMEs to invest in training — 73% of the companies in the programme had less than 50 employees and 38% of participating companies had less than 10 employees.

Over half of the networks had a high percentage of companies that were new to planned training and an independent evaluation of the programme found that all of the training networks were enterprise-led.

The evaluators also found that attitudes to training in participating companies were changed as a result of the programme and many companies intend investing in more training in the future. 87% of project managers and promoters said training would have an increased role, or more money would be spent on training in the future.

The Training Networks Programme was due to finish at the end of March 2002, but in the light of the positive evaluation of the programme a decision was taken to continue Skillnets until the end of 2005.

7.8 Enterprise Ireland

Following its establishment in 1993, Enterprise Ireland took over from FÁS, responsibility for HRD in its client firms i.e. indigenous manufacturing and international services companies and high potential indigenous startups. Concern has been expressed, in the case of Enterprise Ireland, that its strategic focus on growth companies has meant that HRD support has been restricted for other companies whose growth trajectory may be lower but whose staff nonetheless have upskilling needs.

The Taskforce is of the view that workplace upskilling has a public good element which requires different consideration to other company functions. Skills benefit the firm, but they are held by the employee and, as such, are fungible across firms. The Taskforce believes therefore that Enterprise Ireland needs to develop upskilling initiatives which go beyond the boundaries of its priority clients i.e. the firms with the greatest willingness and potential to grow sales and exports.

7.9 FÁS

FÁS has recently issued a new statement of strategy. In section 7 (priority goals) FÁS identifies three main client groups on which it will focus its programmes and resources. The third of these is: targeted sectors/companies and employees that will require upskilling and employees in companies in difficulty.

The second priority goal which FÁS has established is: to promote investment in training by employers and to accelerate the development and delivery of a comprehensive range of programmes and services for employers and those in employment, based on identified labour market needs.

The strategy statement goes on to say that: *“FÁS will make a significant increase in the level of activity it provides in this area, and in particular, for targeted sectors of the labour market. This will be done in cooperation with other relevant organisations and groups.”*

The Taskforce notes that, historically, the bulk of FÁS resources have been devoted to training for people who are unemployed and excluded from the labour market. While stressing the need to maintain a focus on the needs of unemployed and marginalised people, the Taskforce welcomes FÁS’s statement of intent to increase its activities in the training in employment area. The Taskforce also welcomes FÁS’s acknowledgement of the need for cooperation with other relevant bodies. In particular, the Taskforce stresses the need for a coordinated and comprehensive approach to be pursued by FÁS, Enterprise Ireland, and Skillnets.

As indicated in section six, FÁS’s statement of strategy has also indicated an intention to invest in the development of its *Net College* as a vehicle to promote the increasing use of e-learning. As part of that strategy FÁS is also developing a proposal to promote through Net College, and in collaboration with the Social Partners, a systematic up-skilling of workers in SMEs at risk of redundancy.

The focus of the initiative would be the use of a Personal Development Account (PDA) to provide an incentive for people to engage in the learning process in a sustained and meaningful manner.

A PDA allows specific groups to be targeted as part of the overall strategy of up-skilling the labour force, especially those most at risk.

7.10 Trainer development

The quality of training provision will a fundamental factor in the successful implementation of a Lifelong Learning strategy. It is important that trainers have not only the technical knowledge required to deliver training courses, but that they also have the ability to instruct effectively.

The Taskforce acknowledges the work of the Irish Institute for Training and Development in promoting the on-going professional development of trainers. It notes, also, development of the Trainers Network, initiated by FÁS under the EU's ADAPT Initiative, which brings together trainers and learning facilitators from the public and private sectors to share learning and experiences in relation to best practice, recent innovations, quality standards and continuing professional development.

In an industry context, the EGFSN Report on In-Company Training states that companies often have difficulty finding the training they need and being assured in advance that the training they are buying is relevant and of good quality. It also points out that there is no comprehensive system of accreditation of trainers.

The Expert Group recommended that a national register of approved trainers should be established and made available on an appropriate website. It suggested that this register should be established by FÁS in association with Enterprise Ireland and other appropriate bodies.

This recommendation has not yet been implemented.

7.11 Paid Learning Leave

Time is a significant barrier for people in employment who wish to engage in Lifelong Learning. This is recognised by many employers who provide learning leave for employees pursuing approved courses of study. In some cases, the Civil Service for example, learning leave to facilitate the sitting of exams and a maximum of five days study leave is available for approved courses.⁴ Some employers, while not providing educational leave, provide schemes to refund fees for employees undertaking learning which is relevant to the enterprises business.

The Taskforce notes that the issue of learning leave is a complex one which involves balancing costs and benefits to the individual and his or her employer, while also considering questions of the public good.

⁴ For example, in 2001, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, approved 40 individuals, out of approximately 987 total staff, for paid educational leave amounting to 223 days in total.

The Taskforce considered addressing learning leave by means of a code of practice which the Social Partners would promote. The Taskforce was of the opinion that this approach could have some benefit in codifying good practice and exerting moral pressure on employers. Overall, however, it concluded that the effects of a code of practice would, at best, be limited. Moreover, members felt that those most likely to adopt a code would be those who already had good practice in place, while less progressive employers (potentially, those with the least skilled staff) were least likely to do so. In this regard, most members felt that a voluntary code would do little to remove the skills gap which currently exists.

The Taskforce noted that implementation of its recommendations in regard to access are aimed at substantially increasing participation in learning by adults. The absence of learning leave creates a countervailing force which may prevent individuals fully availing of those opportunities. The issue of time to prepare for and sit examinations and assessments, was specifically adverted to by the Taskforce. This is a particular difficulty for those in employments with fixed vacation periods which may not coincide with examination timetables. The growing difficulties which individuals have in reconciling work and family life was also adverted to.

The Taskforce concluded that the question of learning leave must be seen in the context of the cultural shift discussed earlier in the report. Currently attitudes tend to be polarised. Learning outside of the workplace tends to be seen as benefiting only the employee, with the provision of learning leave being seen consequently as a cost. Given Ireland's drive to become a more competitive, knowledge-based economy, the Taskforce is of the view that a more expansive perspective needs to be adopted. As outlined in the introduction to this chapter, the growing sophistication of work and workplaces means that employees need to become more skilled and adaptable.

In this context, the Taskforce believes that learning needs to be seen as a partnership between employer and employee and the State. The employee gives a very substantial commitment in terms of personal time to their learning.

In providing paid learning leave, the employer would incur both direct and indirect costs, including in many cases paying for training and travel /accommodation, in addition to the productivity loss while the staff member is away on learning leave. The State's contribution is in the form of infrastructural provision and, based on implementation of the recommendations in this report, measures to increase flexibility and remit fees for qualifying part time learners. In the context of this partnership approach, it is also important to recognise that the benefits of the learning accrue to all the partners in terms of increased standards of knowledge, skill and competence which can be applied to grow productivity and competitiveness.

Based on these considerations, the majority of Taskforce members were of the view that a strong case exists in principle for the introduction of a learning leave entitlement which would be underpinned by statute.

Employer representatives on the Taskforce expressed strong opposition to the introduction of statutory paid learning leave for a variety of reasons including impact on costs and a particular concern regarding the impact of releasing staff members in terms of loss of efficiency, productivity and customer service. They noted that the impact on small businesses

would be proportionately greater. The employer representatives therefore considered that any Government decision on learning leave should not be taken in isolation and would have to be considered in the context of post-PPF arrangements. Should the policy be implemented, the employer representatives were of the view that state support to enterprises would be required to offset the costs incurred by businesses.

The Taskforce's recommendations in this area reflect the fact that the Taskforce is of the view that the precise implementation details of learning leave will require detailed negotiations on the part of employer and employee representatives and Government. However, the Taskforce highlighted the following issues as being of key importance:—

- The Taskforce noted that the imposition of a requirement to provide statutory leave for learning undertaken outside the workplace could have an adverse affect on the willingness of firms to provide in-company training. The Taskforce believes that the overarching imperative is to ensure that all individuals are provided with the opportunity to develop their knowledge, skills and competence and that companies have access to skilled and appropriately qualified employees. In that regard, the Taskforce is of the view that the provision of in-company training should be allowed to substitute for the learning leave entitlement. However, to avoid abuse it would be necessary to ensure that such training meets certain quality standards and provides genuine developmental opportunities for the individual in terms of their employment.
- While recommending that this substitution should be allowed, the Taskforce noted that a number of Irish employers provide both substantial amounts of in-company training along with learning leave and that this best practice model should be promoted.
- The overall philosophy of the Taskforce is that Lifelong Learning should be as broadly based as possible. However, in the context of paid learning leave, the Taskforce agreed that employers could not be expected to provide such leave on an unconditional basis. The majority of the Taskforce were of the view that the provision of leave should be linked to the employee undertaking learning which will enhance their skills and competencies in the context of their career development. Employer representatives expressed the view that leave entitlement should be limited to learning relevant to employees current career development.
- In terms of international practice, the Taskforce noted that diverse approaches have been adopted throughout the EU. Appendix 3 gives an overview of the approaches applying in the various Member States including the key issues of eligibility, relevance and duration. In taking the issue forward, the Taskforce noted that further examination of these approaches could yield useful insights.
- The Taskforce was not in a position to cost the provision of learning leave since this would be dependent on levels of take-up and the duration of leave provided. However, the Taskforce acknowledged that potentially significant costs could arise, especially in regard to pay/loss of productivity.

Recommendations

1. The Taskforce recommends that consideration be given to the development of a foundation qualification in workplace skills which would be available to all employees regardless of sector or occupation. The qualification would be available on a modular basis. Among the topics which the Taskforce envisages as relevant to this qualification are: Information Technology, Social Skills, Workplace and Personal Safety, Literacy, Numeracy and Communications, and Business Literacy.
2. The Taskforce recommends that employers and their representative associations consider setting out (in consultation with their employees where applicable) the knowledge, skills and competence necessary to execute the tasks associated with specific occupations within the organisation. This would facilitate access to Accreditation of Prior Learning, in addition to increasing transfer and progression opportunities for learners.
3. The Taskforce recommends that quality standards such as FÁS's Excellence Through People and the IEI's Continuing Professional Development Protocol should be promoted with a view to embedding best practice HRD standards in enterprises and organisations.
4. The Taskforce notes the importance of upskilling IT workers in the context of the skills requirements identified in the report of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs and recommends that specific initiatives be developed to achieve the upskilling of those in work, in collaboration with the third level education system.
5. The Taskforce welcomes the extension of the Training Networks Programme and recommends that information on best practice within the programme to date be more widely disseminated. The Taskforce recommends that Skillnets should give positive consideration to new networks aimed at addressing workplace literacy.
6. The Taskforce recommends that, building on the work of NALA in this area set out in Chapter 4, all workplace education and training initiatives should be "literacy-proofed" to ensure that due priority is given in policies and practice to those with the lowest levels of skills.
7. The Taskforce recommends that Enterprise Ireland develop, as a matter of priority, a coherent support mechanism for client companies who have identified upskilling needs and a willingness to address those needs in cooperation with the agency.
8. The Taskforce welcomes FÁS's strategic intent to devote increased resources to training for those in employment and calls on FÁS to publish concrete plans in this area as a matter of priority.

9. The Taskforce recommends that a register of approved trainers be established by FÁS as a matter of priority and that this register be made available to all publicly funded bodies involved in providing advice or funding in respect of training for people in, or for, employment, including the National Learning Line. The information should be widely available on the websites of all such bodies.
10. The Taskforce recommends that the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment examine the potential to build upon the work of the Trainers Network under the ADAPT Initiative, to promote the continuing development of trainers and facilitators of training in Ireland.
11. As regards the provision of paid educational leave, the Taskforce recommends that the Government commit to the introduction of statutory learning leave. The Taskforce recommends that the modalities of such leave should be developed in consultation with the Social Partners and reflecting the Taskforce's views on the key implementation issues as set out in this report.

APPENDICES

Extract from the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness

33. A Strategic Framework for Lifelong Learning will be developed through:

- Publication of a White Paper on Adult Education early in 2000.
- As a priority, and in the context of adaptation to continuing labour market change, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment will establish a Lifelong Learning Task Force in conjunction with the Department of Education and Science. The Task Force will have the full involvement of the Social Partners and relevant implementation bodies. The Task Force will draw on the resources of a Reference Group comprised of representatives of enterprise and the learning community. The Group will work intensively over a six month period and will have a strong focus on the development of proposals for consideration by Government.

Task Force on Lifelong Learning

34. Key steps to be followed by the Task Force will be:

- Identify existing Lifelong Learning providers and programme provision;
- Map existing provision in terms of its adequacy/coverage; and
- Identify, propose and cost priority actions on LLL, based on expanding or modifying existing provision or the development of new initiatives, with particular reference to the achievement of the objectives set out above and to the identification and resolution of implementation issues arising.

35. A key aim of the Task Force will be:

- The development, as a matter of priority, of specific initiatives to upgrade the skills of workers in low paid sectors and those facing the challenge of rapid technological change. These initiatives will focus on promoting and enhancing access to training, the development of new skills, the acquisition of recognised qualifications and progression to higher level qualifications. Within the context of the NDP, resources will be made available from the National Training Fund to finance these initiatives.

36. Key issues to be addressed by the Task Force will include:

- Supports, including information and advice, to assist people to identify learning opportunities appropriate to their needs and source suitable learning opportunities;
- Enhancement of access to education and training with particular emphasis on financial issues, such as fees and educational leave, and on measures to support the reconciliation of learning and family life;

- Increasing the diversity and flexibility of provision and promoting the responsiveness of education and training institutions to the needs of adults, with particular attention being given to those are disadvantaged;
- The further development of linkages between firms and training and education institutions;
- Initiatives to significantly increase training, learning and progression opportunities for people faced with the challenge of rapid technological change, taking due account of the work of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs; and
- Initiatives to help people currently outside the workforce to upgrade their skills and/or acquire new ones.

Membership of Taskforce and Sub-Groups

Taskforce on Lifelong Learning

FÁS	Roger Fox (Eddie Shaw)
Community and Voluntary Pillar	Martin Brady Mary Kelly
Chambers of Commerce IBEC	Simon Nugent (Carmel Mulroy) Aileen O'Donoghue Jackie Harrisson
ICTU	Peter Rigney Margaret Nolan
Forfas	Kay Hallahan
Higher Education Authority	Sean Ó Foghlú* (Fergal Costello)
CHIU (Universities)	Michael McGrath
Institutes of Technology	Venie Martin (Dolores Gilhooly)
Department of Enterprise, Trade & Employment	Ned Costello/Chairperson
Secretary	Eoin Ó Domhnaill (Barry O'Brien)
Department of Education & Science	Margaret Kelly
Department of Health & Children	Susan Reilly
Department of Social, Community & Family Affairs	Maeve Farrell
Department of Justice, Equality & Law Reform	Vera Kelly
Department of Tourism, Sport & Recreation	Kathleen Stack
Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht & the Islands	(Dr Conor O'Malley) Anne Grady
Department of Finance	Adrian Finneran

* Note Sean O'Foghlú remained a member of the Taskforce representing the NQAI following his appointment as CEO of that body.

Access & Barriers Sub-Group

Sean Ó Foghlú	Higher Education Authority (Chairperson)
Mike Egan	DCU
Roger Fox	FÁS
Margaret Nolan	ICTU
Carmel Mulroy	CCI
Bernie Brady/Fiona McCauley	AONTAS
Seamus Carroll	Equality Authority
Michael McGrath	CHIU
Maeve Farrell	Department of Social, Community & Family Affairs
Heidi Loughheed	IBEC
Venie Martin/Dolores Gilhooly	Waterford Institute of Technology
Margaret Kelly	Department of Education & Science
Pat A. Houlihan	Department of Enterprise, Trade & Employment
Fiona Hartley	IVEA
Mary Kelly/Triona Nic Giollacoille	NWCI
Theresa McCormack	CORI
Margaret Phelan	Higher Education Authority (Secretary)

Work & Workplace Learning Sub-Group

Peter Rigney	ICTU (Chairperson)
Gráinne Cullen	NCVA
Aileen O'Donoghue	IBEC
Lorraine Glendenning	CCI
Maura Hunt	Skillnets
Senan Cooke	Waterford Crystal
Tom Kelledy	Enterprise Ireland
Rose Wright	CIF
Des Carolan	FÁS
Pat McLaughlin	Institute of Technology, Tallaght
Helen Ryan	National Adult Literacy Agency
Kathleen Connolly	Department of Justice, Equality & Law Reform
William Parnell	Department of Enterprise, Trade & Employment
Martin Brady	NYCI
Peter Davitt	INOUE
Kevin Hurley	CHIU

Eligibility for Learning Leave in the EU

Country	Eligibility, duration
A Austria	After at least three years of continuous service with the same employer. For between three months and one year.
B Belgium	Employees in full-time employment under one or more contract. For minimum of 32 hours, with annual limit of 80, 120 or 180 hours, depending on programme.
DK Denmark	Any employee, 18 years or older to pursue preparatory or basic adult education. For 3-3½ years alternating with work. Employees over 25 with at least 2 years work experience to pursue advanced-level education and training, for up to one year full time.
D Germany	After six months of service. For five days a year or 10 days in two years.
E Spain	After at least one year in the same company. Right to training for up to one academic year, right to payment for 200 hours.
EL Greece	In the private sector individual employers decide. Up to 20 days a year are allowed for examinations. In the public sector, after a minimum of three years, for up to five years during working life.
F France	After 24 months of service (36 in SMEs), of which 12 must have been in the present company. For up to one year or 1 200 hours for part-time courses, repeatable at intervals of six months to six years depending on time-out taken.
FIN Finland	After a minimum of three months with the main employer, entitlement for a total of not more than five days. Employed with the same employer for at least one year, for a total of not more than two years. Repeatable after five years.
I Italy	At least five years service, for a maximum of 11 months during working life. '150 Hours': any employee as long as not more than 2% & 3% of employees are on leave at one time.
IS Iceland	Terms spelled out in the agreements for each sector.
IRL Ireland	No rules — at discretion of employers. Unpaid leave for up to three years is prevalent in the public service, particularly among teachers.

Country		Eligibility, duration
L	Luxembourg	After a minimum of six months in employment, for 20 days per two year period and a maximum of 60 days during working life.
N	Norway	After three years of service, two of which with the same employer, for a maximum of three years full or part-time.
NL	Netherlands	Conditions vary from sector to sector. Leave is for an average of five days per annum. A minimum of 12 months service is necessary to qualify for unpaid leave.
P	Portugal	No minimum service required except for teachers. For three to six hours per week, or in one block.
S	Sweden	Employed for at least six months or at least 12 over the last two years. From one hour per day, to two days per week and so on to a total of six years full-time.
UK	United Kingdom	Voluntary system at discretion of employers. Legislation stipulates that 17 to 18 year olds without a qualification are entitled to leave to prepare for a Level 2 qualification (one day a week recommended).

Report of the Sub Group on Implications of Free Fees for Part time Students Meeting held on 14/5/2002

Attendance: Peter Rigney, ICTU
Fergal Costello, HEA
Roger Fox, FÁS
Anne Mc Donnell, Third Level Student Support DES
Margaret Kelly, Further Education Section DES
Pat A Houlihan, D/ETE

Apologies: Jackie Harrison, IBEC.

Data Sources — see Annex attached.

Framework for costings.

Within **Further Education Section** some 147,000 adults avail of self-funded part time courses in second level/FE level schools and colleges, with fee income generated of approx £6.5m (€8.25m). These courses are unregulated and data is not available on numbers availing of different forms of provision. Content ranges from literacy, personal development and basic education to hobby, art and craft, language, vocational, computer courses, and certified learning options. While no data is available, a guesstimate is that only **10% of participant costs are in respect of nationally certified programmes**. At this rate, free fees for nationally certified programmes would cost approx **€0.825m** per annum for some 3700 people. If this is an under-estimate the costs will be correspondingly higher.

Within **State aided third-level institutions**, an estimated 24950 persons are following nationally certified part-time undergraduate courses and the likely cost of a grant in lieu of fees for these persons is **€27.458m p.a**

Within Oscail and distance learning options in other third level colleges, some 5500 students are pursuing self funded programmes. The likely cost of free fees for these is **€4.664m**

Within FÁS, some 13000 students are availing of self funded part time courses and the fee income generated is €2.5m per annum. In addition fee income from FÁS Net College is €0.3m. The net college is aiming to reach some 7000 students per annum. However, welfare categories and existing FÁS students supplementing their learning through distance learning get free access.

The sub-group considered a range of issues in its deliberations. These included

- The broad thrust of national qualifications policy toward

- providing for more flexible learning opportunities, in modular formats which can be accumulated over time towards a full award
- valuing all learning, across education and training, irrespective of the learning site
- allowing an inclusive process which enables participants to learn at their own pace and combine learning with family and work responsibilities
- the need to promote more flexible provision by providers of education and training in terms of access routes, timing and delivery
- the need to encourage adults to re-enter the system, and the target in the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness to increase mature student intake in third level education to 15% by 2005
- the need to minimise deadweight and displacement investment, particularly where it does not lead to a formal qualification
- the need to ensure equity of treatment between full time and part-time students insofar as is feasible
- the need to ensure that the approach adopted does not deter those with the lowest skills and educational levels from accessing learning appropriate to their needs
- the need to provide for an orderly and planned change in third level provision towards a wider student cohort, through more flexible delivery options, in the context of rapid demographic change.

Approach recommended

The key objective is to raise the qualifications of the adult population, thus improving competitiveness and social cohesion, and removing critical financial barriers which deter a return to learning.

Costs are calculated on the basis of a grant in lieu of fees scheme for further or higher education and training which would apply to part time learners

- Up to and **including first degree level**
- Would only cover persons studying for a **higher level national award than they currently hold** i.e lateral progression will not be funded
- Would only apply in **publicly funded institutions**
- Would only apply for **certified programmes** within a national framework of qualifications
- Would only apply to a learner studying for a **full award** within a specified time frame, where the learner already holds at least a Leaving Certificate (i.e at least 5 Ds in a Leaving Certificate or equivalent) or gains entry to a part-time course leading to a full award without the normal admission requirements. Where a learner with less than Leaving Certificate wishes to pursue individual nationally certified modules, as opposed to a full award, they would be facilitated to do so through a grant in lieu of fees under the scheme.

- The residency and citizenship requirements of the existing Free Fees Initiative would also apply.

Cost per annum

The data sources are inadequate to come up with definitive costings. However best estimates are that, under these conditions, to provide for free fees for existing part time students within the education sector would cost **€32.947m** per year, and that to limit provision to those aged 23 or over might reduce costs by some 30% to **€23.062m**

Some of these costs would be offset by a reduction in tax relief (latest figures available show the annual cost at €2.5m in totality but a breakdown over types of courses is not available. The figures would include FÁS language and IT programmes, post graduate courses and under graduate courses.)

This is the replacement costs of providing free fees for existing part-time learners within the education sector. It is assumed that the bulk of part time courses in the publicly funded training sector will not be eligible on the basis of not leading to *full* nationally certified awards. It is also considered that limiting the scheme to mature students only would have a further impact in limiting deadweight, and would serve to focus providers on offering flexible routes for part time learners towards the achievement of the 15% target in the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness.

The costs are for fee relief only, and do not provide for maintenance grants.

Future expansion

It is clear that removing the fee barrier will fuel increased demand for part time places. The Sub Group was unable to estimate what the likely impact of this would be on future costs. However, it is clear that changing demography (with the number of 18 years per annum decreasing from c 74,000 in 1998 to 47,000 by 2012) will have a dramatic effect on the profile of student intake into further and third level education and training in the future, and will call for a refocusing of provision towards adult clients. Therefore some of the increased costs arising from future demand will substitute for existing costs of full time places.

Arguments for

Globalisation and new technology demand rising skill levels, and maintaining competitiveness and employment in a knowledge society relies heavily on **increasing human capital**.

Demographic changes makes it imperative to **upgrade the skills of those already in the workforce or seeking to re-enter it**.

Social cohesion strategies demand that the key role of education and skills, and its consequent impact on earnings, employment, crime reduction, health, and participation and achievement levels of children in school, are addressed by allowing adults to re-enter learning, as part of a Lifelong Learning continuum

With unemployment at c 4.5%, the **problem of low skills is predominantly in the workplace, and only flexible (i.e part time) options allowing a combination of work, family and learning, will be effective in upgrading skills**

Education and training institutions must gear themselves towards **an orderly and planned response to demographic change**. They are constrained in moving towards more flexible adult friendly provision if the funding barriers and disincentives are not removed. The **PPF target of reaching a 15% level of mature student intake by 2005** cannot be realistically achieved, if the funding structures are not reviewed.

The thrust of **emerging qualifications and Lifelong Learning policy across Europe and the OECD is toward flexible, learner-centred Lifelong Learning**. Arbitrary barriers based on the timing of provision rather than the income and needs of the participants are no longer appropriate. To ensure equity of treatment:

- Means-testing could be introduced for full-time students, to determine eligibility for free fees. It has to be acknowledged in this regard, that in February 2002 the then Minister for Education and Science indicated his commitment to the retention of free fees.
- Free fees could be introduced for part-time undergraduate students.

Some **54% of full time third level students work part-time**, yet get access to free fees.

Member States are committed under the Lisbon Agenda to increasing investment in adult learning and promoting incentives to encourage Lifelong Learning.

Arguments against

There is a **high deadweight** effect. The cost of replacing existing fee income for the categories proposed is €30m per annum, even before any additional learners are admitted to the system.

The Euro Student Survey 2000 indicated that some **80% of part time students in third level are working**, and earn an average of €1,454 per month. An estimated **27.3% of all learners have their fees paid by employers**.

The **impact on future demand is virtually impossible to quantify**.

Overall **public spending is constrained**, and it makes sense to prioritise investment towards those most at risk. The cost of free fees for all up to degree level **may limit the availability of funds for expanding adult learning opportunities** particularly at FE levels and in adult literacy and ICT, and for developing and expanding support services such as guidance, counselling and childcare.

If free fees occurs at the expense of increased investment in lower levels of adult education and training, the **primary beneficiaries will continue to be from the higher socio economic groupings**

Department of Education and Science view

The importance and impact of funding arrangements is recognised in the light of the challenges facing education institutions and having regard in particular to issues such as equity, flexibility, competitiveness and demographic change.

The Department of Education & Science recognises however the scale of the challenges which remain to be faced in increasing Lifelong Learning opportunities, tackling educational disadvantage in initial schooling, addressing adult literacy, expanding adult learning opportunities particularly for those with the lowest skills, addressing the capital demands for building and ICT equipment, and developing and improving support services across the system. Additional expenditure on free fees at third level, has to be considered in the context of other demands in the education system (some of which are highlighted above).

Ultimately, however, there is ample research to show the clear benefits of investment in education and training to the individual, to society and the wider economy. Increased investment in adult learning, to which all Member States are committed under the Lisbon Agenda, will yield dividends in terms of social cohesion and competitiveness, as well as impacting on inter-generational poverty. The data on participation rates in adult learning clearly show that there are sizeable gaps to be addressed vis a vis Irish and European participation rates in adult learning (29.5% in Ireland vis a vis an average of 40% across the EU, with Sweden at 53%), and between the proportion of those who have completed upper secondary education in Ireland and that of our OECD competitors (51% (1998 data) in Ireland and the OECD country mean of 62%).

Annex to the Report of the Sub Group on Implications of Free Fees for Part time Students

Data Sources

Quarterly National Household Survey

The June survey is analysed each year showing the highest educational attainment levels of the population. The 2nd quarter of the 2001 survey shows 1.065m people have less than upper second level education, of whom 529,100 have not achieved lower secondary education. Of the total, 515,400 and 220,500 respectively are in the workplace.

Of the 2.588m adults aged 15-64, 0.359m have a third level qualification of at least degree level.

The QNHS does not as yet ask questions about participation in adult learning, although this issue is being addressed for the first time in the 2002 surveys.

International Adult Literacy Survey (Results for Ireland)

The survey was carried out in 1995 and results published in 1997. Respondents were asked whether they had participated in adult learning in the previous 12 months.

29.5% of all respondents availed of adult education/training. (28.5% male, 30.5% female)

Of this, 42.5% was self funded, and 27.3% was funded by the employer, with employers funding 34.4% for males, but only 22.1% for females.

The age bands for those availing of adult learning

16-24	47.9%
25+	52.1%

(This covers all learning, irrespective of duration, certification and level. The group considers that a much smaller proportion of under 25 students would be availing of part time certified third level education within the national framework of qualifications, and for this reason, providing free part time fees for those aged 23 or over, would be likely to yield only a 30% reduction in costs.)

32.8% of all adult learning took place in a State aided third level institution. 8.3% in a training centre, 18.5% in a school.

Continuing Vocational Training Survey

This was a study of investment by private sector firms in staff development in 1999. Overall such investment totalled approx €360m (including labour costs for those released from work) or 2.5% of payroll. Some 10m hours of training were provided. Of this, 3.6m was provided by external providers, of which 2m hours was by private training bodies, and 0.5m hours was by educational institutions. Fees paid to external providers (3.6m hours) amounted to €120m.

Enrolment in State aided third level institutions 20/01

Full-time

	Male	Female	Total
Universities	28,770	40,484	69,254
IOTs	25,497	22,863	48,360
Other colleges	577	1,800	2,377
Total Full-time	54,844	65,147	119,991

Part time — third level, excluding programmes of less than third level standing

	Male	Female	Total
Universities	4,581	6,732	11,313
IOTs	8,982	8,718	17,700
Other colleges	990	2,262	3,252
Total Full-time	14,553	17,712	32,265

Part-time numbers likely to avail of free fees up to first degree level only State aided sector

	No	Average fee
Universities	4,725	€ 2,400
IOTs	17,048	697
Other colleges	3,177	1,131
Distance learning in Oscail or Irish third level colleges	24,950	848

Possible cost of free fees for all part time students

		€
Third level colleges	24,950 students	27.458
Distance Learning	5,500	4.664
Further education	3,700	0.825m
Total		32.947m

Possible cost of free fees for part-time students aged 23 or over: €23.062m

