ANNUAL REPORT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS 2015

Achieve your full potential through learning

Published by Department of Education and Skills, Marlborough Street, Dublin 1
© Department of Education and Skills 2016

Contents

Foreword by the Minister i

Statement from the Secretary General ii

1 Review of the Year 1

1.1 Early Years Education 1

1.2 Reform in Schools 1

1.2.1 Curriculum Primary Level 1

1.2.2 Curriculum Post-Primary Level 1

1.2.3 Junior Cycle Reform 1

1.2.4 Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in Schools 1

1.3 Promoting Inclusiveness and Student Well-being in Schools 1

1.4 Inspection and Quality Assurance in Schools 2

1.5 Building Programme 2

1.6 School Patronage 2

1.7 School Transport 2

1.8 Central Applications Office (CAO) 2

1.9 National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2

1.10 School Autonomy 3

1.11 Payrolls – Serving and Retired school staff 3

1.12 Teacher Pensions 3

1.13 Increasing the Numbers of Special Needs Assistants 3

1.14 Teacher Training 3

1.15 Teaching Council (Amendment) Act 2015 – Vetting of Teachers and Fitness to Teach 3

1.16 Education (Admissions to School) Bill 4

1.17 Universities (Amendment) Bill 4

1.18 Expansion of the Apprenticeship System 4

1.19 Springboard 4

1.20 Public Service Reform 4

2 General Corporate Information and Data 6

2.1 Our Mission 6

2.2 Our Vision 6

2.3 Our Values 6

2.4 Our Approach 6

3 Our Goals 7

3.1 Supporting the Parliamentary Process in 2015 7

3.2 Information Services 7

3.3 Annual Programme of Inspection in Schools and Centres for Education 8

3.4 Table of Prompt Payments in 2015 9

Progress on our High Level Goals in 2015 10

4 Goal 1 – Learning for Life 10

4.1 Supporting a High Quality Early Years Education System 10

4.2 Curriculum and Assessment in Schools 10

4.3 Curriculum Reform at Primary Level 10

4.3.1 Integrated language (Irish and English) curriculum for the first four years of primary school 10

4.3.2 New primary maths curriculum for first four years of primary school 10

4.4 Improving our Literacy and Numeracy Skills 10

4.5 Teaching and Learning of Irish and through Irish in Schools 11

4.6 National Assessments 12

4.6.1 Trends 12

4.7 Standardised test data for primary schools 12

4.8 Interim Review of Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 12

4.9 Transition from Primary to Post-Primary 12

4.10 Curriculum Development at Post-Primary Level 13

4.10.1 Review of Senior Cycle 13

4.10.2 Mathematics 13
4.10.3 New Foreign Languages in Education Strategy 13
4.10.4 Junior Cycle Reform 13
4.10.5 EU Folio Project 13
4.11 Educational Research Centre (ERC) 14
4.12 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 14
4.13 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) 14
4.14 Supporting the Examinations Process 14
4.15 Education for Sustainable Development 14
4.16 Lifeskills Survey 15
4.17 National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE) 15
4.18 Music Generation 15
4.19 Entrepreneurship in Education 15
4.20 Decade of Centenaries 1916/2016 16
4.21 Arts in Education Charter 16
4.22 School Transport Scheme 16
4.23 Progress on Reform of the Further Education and Training Sector in 2015 16
4.24 Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019 17
4.25 Reform of the Apprenticeship System 17
4.26 Engagement with Employers and other relevant stakeholders 17
4.27 National Skills Strategy 17
4.28 European Social Fund (ESF) 18
4.29 European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF) 18
4.30 Higher Education System 18
4.30.1 Innovation 2020 18
4.30.2 Teaching and Learning Forum 19
4.30.3 Regional Clusters 19
4.30.4 Technological Universities 20
4.30.5 Technological Universities Bill 20
4.30.6 Transitions 20
4.30.7 HEInnovate 20
4.31 Springboard+ 20
4.31.1 ICT Skills Action Plan 21

5 Goal 2 – Improving Quality and Accountability 22
5.1 Síolta Quality Framework 22
5.2 Inspection and Quality Assurance in Schools 22
5.3 School Self Evaluation (SSE) 22
5.4 Development of New and Improved Models of Inspection 22
5.5 Policy and Curriculum Reform 23
5.6 Gaeltacht Education 23
5.7 Review of Exemptions from Irish 23
5.8 School Autonomy 23
5.9 Leadership 23
5.10 Teacher Education 24
5.11 Initial Teacher Education Programmes - Centres of Excellence for Teacher Education 24
5.12 Teacher Supply 24
5.13 Teacher Allocations in 2015 24
5.14 Teaching Council (Amendment) Bill 25
5.15 Dealing with Past Abuse 25
5.16 North South Cooperation 25
5.17 Code of Practice relating to the International Education Mark (IEM) 26
5.17.1 Interim List of Eligible Providers 27
5.18 Strategy to Enhance the Internationalisation of Irish Education Services 27
5.19 Erasmus+ 27
5.20 Expert Funding Group 28
5.21 National Employers Survey and Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE) 28
5.22 Higher Education Performance Framework 29
5.23 Appointments to Boards of Higher Education Institutions 29

6 Goal 3 – Supporting Inclusion and Diversity 30
6.1 Inclusion in Early Years Settings 30
6.2 Transition Reform Steering Group 30
6.3 Equity of Access to Higher Education 30
6.4 National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 31
6.5 Student Grants 31
6.6 Student Grants Appeals Board 31
6.7 Scholarships 31
6.8 Pilot Support Scheme 31
6.9 Promoting Inclusiveness in Schools 32
6.9.1 Action Plan on Bullying and the Development of Anti-Bullying Procedures 32
6.9.2 Suicide Prevention 32
6.9.3 Transgender Issues in Schools 32
6.9.4 Active School Week 32
6.10 School Admission Processes 32
6.10.1 Education (Admission to School) Bill 32
6.10.2 Parent and Student Charter 32
6.10.3 Section 29 Appeals 32
6.11 Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector 33
6.11.1 Patronage Process for New Schools 33
6.12 Cross-Departmental Issues 33
6.13 DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) Programme 33
6.13.1 Home School Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL) and School Completion Programme (SCP) 33
6.13.2 DEIS Evaluation 34
6.13.3 Inspectorate Evaluation of DEIS 34
6.13.4 ESRI Consolidated Report – Learning from DEIS 34
6.14 Catering for Pupils with Special Educational Needs 34
6.15 New Inspection Model 35
6.16 Targeted Supports for Pupils with Special Educational Needs 35
6.17 Home Tuition Scheme 35
6.18 July Education Programme 35
6.19 Resource Teaching Allocations 35
6.20 Increasing the Numbers of Special Needs Assistants 36
6.21 Teacher Training 36
6.22 Teachers, SNAs 36
6.23 Middletown Centre for Autism Project 36
6.24 The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) 36
6.24.1 2015 Indicators 36

7 Goal 4 – Building the Right Systems and Infrastructures 38
7.1 Building and Accommodation Programme in 2015 38
7.2 Using Diverse Methodologies for the Construction of Major Projects 38
7.3 Completion of Higher Education Projects 38
7.4 Enhancing Financial Management, Audit, Appraisal and Asset Management Systems 38
7.5 Memorandum of Understanding with Local Authorities 38
7.6 Publication of Project Information on the Department's Website 39
7.7 On-Line Application System for the Summer Works Scheme 39
7.8 Energy Efficiency in Schools 39
7.9 Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Schools 39
7.9.1 ICT connectivity in ETBs improved through connection to Government Networks 39
7.9.2 Digital Strategy for Schools 39
7.9.3 Broadband in Schools 40
7.10 Higher Education Research and Finance 40
7.11 Higher Education Governance Bill Heads of Bill 40
7.12 Universities (Amendment) Bill 40
7.13 Improving our Information and Communications Technology 40
7.13.1 ICT Strategy 2015-2019 40
7.13.2 Development of the Primary Online Database (POD) 41
7.13.3 Further Development of Post-Primary Online Database (PPOD) 41
7.13.4 Internal Departmental ICT Upgrades 41

7.13.5 School Employee Payrolls 41
7.13.6 Student Grant Appeals 41
7.13.7 Inspections Management Information System (IMIS) 41
7.14 Data and Knowledge Management....42
7.15 Expenditure by the Department in 2015....42
7.16 Monitoring our Systems and Processes....42
7.17 Human Resources (HR)....42
7.17.1 Recruitment 43
7.17.2 Staff Training and Development 43
7.18 Haddington Road Agreement....43
7.19 Business Planning....43
7.20 Business Process Improvement....43
7.21 Overview of the Department's Energy Usage in 2015 and Actions Planned for 2016....43
Appendix A – Organisation Chart – December 2015....45
Appendix B - Bodies under the Aegis of the Department....46
Appendix C – Direct Links to our Website....47

Foreword by the Minister

I welcome the publication of the Department's Annual Report for 2015, which outlines the significant work undertaken by the Department in meeting its strategic goals and objectives during the year. I was hugely honoured to be appointed Minister for Education and Skills in May 2016 and I am looking forward to the challenge ahead.

This Report reflects the breadth of the remit of the Department's work and the extent to which the Department worked in 2015 towards achieving the changes set out in the ambitious reform agenda for the education sector.

Significant progress took place in delivery on reform in early years educational settings and at Junior and Senior Cycles including though a mixture of curriculum development, commencement of early years inspections, and the launch of the Digital Strategy in Schools and strategies for the promotion of diversity and wellbeing amongst students.

Progress was also made in the programme divestment of patronages and in the provision of school buildings and accommodation in 2015 and will continue to be accelerated and prioritised under the Department's forthcoming Statement of Strategy 2016-2018.

During 2016, there is much more we will achieve together. The Programme for a Partnership Government aims to advance the transformation of the education system to support the principles of the Programme in developing a strong economy so as to support fair and compassionate society. We will have a renewed focus on prioritising early years education, tackling disadvantage, delivering greater diversity and choice for parents, promoting excellence and innovation in schools, promoting creativity and entrepreneurial capacity in students, making better use of educational assets within communities, improving special educational needs provision and meeting the skills needs of the future.

I would like to thank all of the staff of the Department and all those working throughout the education and training sector for their work in 2015 towards achieving our objectives and I look forward to working collaboratively with you into the future and I would like to pay tribute to my predecessor in this Office, Jan O'Sullivan T.D. for her achievements in her role as the Minister for Education and Skills.

Richard Bruton, T.D.
Minister for Education and Skills

Statement from the Secretary General

I am pleased to introduce the Department's Annual report for 2015, which affords us all the opportunity to reflect on what we have achieved over the last year.

This report highlights the significant progress made by the Department in 2015 in progressing the programme of change and reform to all levels of the education system in the areas of Learning for Life, Improving Quality and Accountability, Supporting Inclusion and Diversity, and Building the Right Systems and Infrastructure and in support of the Department's mission to facilitate individuals to achieve their full potential through learning to enable them to contribute to Ireland's social, cultural and economic development.

The Department worked hard to progress our goals in 2015 as we continued to implement a comprehensive programme of reform. In doing so, the Department adopted a "whole system" approach to strategic planning and implementation across the education sector as we believe this is the most effective way to deliver meaningful change and to achieve the best outcomes for all.

The Department plays a key role in ensuring that early years education delivered in pre-schools funded through the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme, and in Early Start pre-schools, supports children in their learning through the implementation of the Aistear curriculum framework. Significant and substantial developments were made in 2015 in early childhood education which will support quality within the sector.

During 2015, significant progress was made on the development of the new Junior Cycle framework, and roll out of the Leaving Cert reform programme, both of which offer rich opportunities for improving the teaching and learning experience of students and for building on the quality and professionalism of teachers.

The launch of the new Digital Strategy for schools in 2015 will also build on earlier work and it links with other strategies, curriculum and otherwise, including the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, the National Skills Strategy and the Framework for Junior Cycle. It also links with the National Digital strategy which has improved broadband connectivity as one of its main aims.

In 2015, work continued to support the major reform of the further education and training sector. This included the ongoing implementation of the Further Education and Training (FET) Strategy 2014-2019 to ensure the systematic delivery of high quality programmes which are integrated, flexible, value for money and responsive to the needs of learners and ensure the labour market.

An Implementation Plan for the reform of the transition between second level and higher education was published and a number of reforms to the student immigration system for international education were progressed in 2015. Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) commenced its fourth year of operations in 2015. Each year there has been an ongoing focus on work to continually improve the system, particularly relating to the processes and systems in operation.

In 2015, the Department continued to further strengthen its governance and accountability structures both within the Department and for the sector and commenced a scoping exercise of governance arrangements in bodies under the aegis of the Department in accordance with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform's Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the contribution staff in the education sector have made in the last year to the work of the Department in providing a quality education system for all our learners. I am aware of the work pressures all staff are under in providing the services we deliver and it is therefore satisfying to note that Irish residents continue to display a very high level of satisfaction with the educational system with a score of 83% being the second highest of all European countries (Public Sector Trends 2015, IPA). Your part in this is something you should all take pride in given the impact it has on the quality of life of all our citizens.

Seán Ó Foghlú,
Secretary General

1 Review of the Year

On-going significant progress was made by the Department in many of its priority areas in 2015.

1.1 Early Years Education

In 2015, the Department liaised with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs on a range of measures, including, the development of an early-years education-focused inspection model to inspect the quality of education provision in early-years settings participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. Nine early-years inspectors with qualifications in early childhood education and experience as early-years educators were appointed in November 2015 and 22 pilot inspections were carried out by the end of December 2015. Further information in relation to early education initiatives is available at paragraphs 4.1, 5.1 and 6.1.

1.2 Reform in Schools

1.2.1 Curriculum Primary Level

At primary level, the Department worked closely with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) in relation to the implementation of significant reform. This included the development of a new language (Irish/English) curriculum which will be implemented from September 2016. In addition, work has also commenced in relation to the overall structure of the primary curriculum itself and to primary mathematics. Further information on curriculum development at primary level is available at section 4.3.

1.2.2 Curriculum Post-Primary Level

At post-primary level, work continued on the development of new specifications for a number of subjects as part of Senior Cycle reform. This included the launch of a new Politics and Society subject for senior cycle students. The new subject will begin, under Phase 1, in 41 schools in September 2016 and be rolled out to all schools by September 2018. Assessment for the new subject will see 80% of the marks awarded for a final written exam with 20% of marks awarded for a report on a citizenship project. Further information on curriculum reform at post-primary level is available at section 4.10.

1.2.3 Junior Cycle Reform

The Junior Cycle involves a dual approach to assessment that supports student learning through regular classroom-based assessment conducted by teachers and through a State examination at the end of the three-year cycle. The 2015 Junior Cycle Framework was published in August 2015. The first subject to be implemented is English. Classroom Based Assessments will commence in 2016. A terminal examination in English, organised by the SEC, will take place in June 2017.

A comprehensive professional development programme to support Junior Cycle continued to be rolled out in 2015. This included seminars for school leaders, whole-school CPD, subject-specific seminars, teacher-led CPD and school visits. Resource materials are also available.

1.2.4 Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in Schools

The new Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020, Enhancing Teaching, Learning and Assessment was launched by the Department in October 2015. Further information on developments in the area of ICT in schools is available at section 7.9.

1.3 Promoting Inclusiveness and Student Well-being in Schools

The Department provided on-going support to tackling bullying in schools through the continued implementation of the Action Plan on Bullying, including launching a new national anti-bullying website www.tacklebullying.ie which provides information, support and advice for students, teachers and parents on how to recognise and address bullying behaviour and allows teenagers to share experiences with their peers online.

The ***Well-Being in Primary Schools Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion*** were launched in 2015 following a collaborative process between the Departments of Education and Skills and Health, and the Health Service Executive. The Guidelines provide practical guidance on how primary schools can promote mental health and well-being in a whole school way and build on the existing good practice already in place.

In October 2015, the Department also hosted round table discussions of education partners and NGOs working with young transgender people in collaboration with the Minister of State for Employment, Community and Social Support.

The Department, in conjunction with the Department of Health and Children, also launched a number of initiatives to promote well-being amongst young people including the third schools' *Lifeskills* survey and the *Active Schools Week 2015* to take place in all schools, primary and post-primary and Youthreach centres.

1.4 Inspection and Quality Assurance in Schools

A total of 4,550 inspections or advisory visits to schools were completed in 2015. A range of tools to support the quality assurance of its inspections and to improve its customer service were developed in 2015.

1.5 Building Programme

In 2015, a total of €506.5m was spent on schools' infrastructure. Outputs from this investment include the completion of 50 large-scale projects; 33 in the primary school sector and 17 in the post-primary school sector. A total of 7,672 permanent school places, of which 6,048 were additional permanent places, were provided in 20 new primary schools and 2,100 additional permanent places were provided in 13 existing primary schools.

1.6 School Patronage

Seven new schools opened in 2015 to provide additional school places required to cater for the continued increase in primary and post-primary school enrolments. The Department continued to advance the patronage divesting process during 2015 with three new primary schools opening under this process in September 2015.

1.7 School Transport

Some 113,000 children, including 10,000 children with special educational needs, transported safely to school in the 2014/15 school year. 82 million Kms are travelled, covering 42 million journeys using some 6, 546 routes in 2015. Over 2,000 families received some €21 million in grant payments during 2015. The outturn for the service amounted to €173 million.

1.8 Central Applications Office (CAO)

During 2015, the Department launched a reform of Leaving Certificate grades and CAO points which will be used for entry to higher education from 2017. The main changes are: a reduction in the number of grades from 14 to 8; proposals for a common points scale for entry into higher education; and analysis of predictability in the Leaving Certificate.

1.9 National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education

The third National Access Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education (2015 – 2019) was launched in December 2015. Developed by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) in partnership with the Department, the approach taken in developing the Plan involved data collection and analysis relating to access and participation, and wide consultation with stakeholders in higher education and the wider community.

The Plan contains more than 30 actions that include evaluation of existing access measures such as the Student Assistance Fund and the Fund for Students with Disabilities, the establishment of a group to make recommendations to address the issue of student retention at third level, direct

engagement with communities, parents and students in disadvantaged areas to promote the benefits of higher education, and measures to facilitate more students from under-represented groups to train as teachers.

The new Plan also contains a number of key targets to increase participation in higher education by groups that are currently under-represented including students from disadvantaged backgrounds, Travellers, students with a disability and mature students. To facilitate measurement of progress towards achievement of these targets, the Plan provides for the development of an 'access' data implementation plan.

1.10 School Autonomy

A research paper on advancing school autonomy in Ireland was published in December 2015. It was accompanied by a consultation paper, which set out key questions arising from the research paper and invited submissions on these issues from education partners, with a view to promoting a policy debate on this issue.

1.11 Payrolls – Serving and Retired school staff

The Department of Education and Skills manages the largest individual payrolls in the State. The payrolls are unusual in having up to 11,000 payments to substitute staff – in effect having up to 11,000 starters and leavers per payroll cycle. In addition, the type of contract (casual, non casual, fixed term, CID, permanent) must be taken into account to apply the correct rates of payment and details of employment history have to be maintained to calculate incremental credit where applicable. Schools enter absences and substitute claims through the Department's on-line systems and the information is transferred to the payrolls for processing. All teaching, non-teaching and retired teaching and non-teaching staff are paid fortnightly.

In 2015, the payroll division made approx. 2.4 million payments to primary and post primary teachers, non-teaching staff including SNAs, retired teaching and non-teaching staff, and casual and non-casual staff. The annual expenditure was €4.4 bn.

1.12 Teacher Pensions

In 2015, the Department processed over 1,300 retirement applications for teachers and non-teaching staff in the education sector. The gratuity lump sums processed for these retired staff was circa €106 million and their ongoing pension payments are made through the Department's retired teacher payroll. In addition, the Department provided statements of benefits to approximately 2,000 scheme members as well as dealing with family law cases. The Department's Pension Modeller went 'live' during 2015.

1.13 Increasing the Numbers of Special Needs Assistants

In July 2015, an additional 610 SNA posts were made available to the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) for allocation to schools in the 2015/16 school year, bringing the total number of SNA's available for allocation in 15/16 to 11,940 posts. As part of Budget 2016, a further increase of 100 posts was announced to meet additional demand arising from January to June 2016, bringing the total number of SNA posts available for allocation in the 2015/16 school year to 12,040. This is an increase of almost 14% over the number of posts available in 2011 which was 10,575.

1.14 Teacher Training

19,084 places were provided for Continuing Professional Development for teachers of children with Special Educational Needs by the Special Education Support Service in 2015. 338 places were provided on college based programmes in Learning Support and Special Education.

1.15 Teaching Council (Amendment) Act 2015 – Vetting of Teachers and Fitness to Teach

In January 2015, the Government approved the publication of the Teaching Council (Amendment) Bill. The Teaching Council (Amendment) Act, 2015 was enacted in July 2015. The purpose of the

Act is to underpin the central role of the Teaching Council in the vetting of teachers and to allow, on a statutory basis, the Teaching Council to implement fitness to teach provisions.

1.16 Education (Admissions to School) Bill

The Education (Admission to Schools) Bill was published on 8th April 2015.

1.17 Universities (Amendment) Bill

Work on the publication of the Universities (Amendment) Bill, to ensure compliance with government guidelines on remuneration, allowances, pensions and staffing numbers in the University Sector, continued during 2015 with assistance from the Attorney General's office.

1.18 Expansion of the Apprenticeship System

Following a call for new apprenticeships by the Apprenticeship Council, over 80 proposals were received, of which 25 were assigned Category 1 status, meaning that they were both sustainable and at an advanced stage of design and were agreed to be developed into new apprenticeship programmes. These new programmes are part of the ongoing work to ensure that the system remains responsive to economic and employment needs.

The new programmes are focussed on a wide range of skills and sectors, including Manufacturing and Engineering, Tourism and Sport, Financial Services, Information Technology, Transport Distribution and Logistics, and Business Administration and Management. They range in duration from two to four years, and will be offered at Levels 5 to 9 on the National Framework of Qualifications. It is envisaged that a number of programmes moving to enrolment in 2016.

Further information on developments in the Further Education and Training sector is available at section 4.23-4.29.

1.19 Springboard

In 2015, the ESF co-funded Springboard was rebranded Springboard+ to incorporate the ICT Conversion Courses under the ICT Skills Action Plan. Springboard+ 2015 was launched in May and provided for 9,000 places on 285 courses in 42 colleges throughout Ireland over the academic year 2015/16, the largest ever provision under the programme. Courses approved for funding focused on areas such as ICT, high-end manufacturing, international financial services, skills to trade internationally and entrepreneurial/business start-up skills.

Further information on developments in the Higher Education sector is available at section 4.30-4.31.

1.20 Public Service Reform

In 2015, the Department continued to manage and implement the reform agenda across the Education and Training Sector, through the development and implementation of the Integrated Reform Delivery Plan (IRDP) 2015, and the Shared Service and External Service Delivery (ESD) Plans 2014 – 2016. In late 2015, the IRDP was reviewed and a draft of IRDP 2016 was developed.

The Department promoted the development of strong governance structures, in addition to the use of Programme and Project Management structures and methodologies across the Department and the sector.

The governance arrangements for reform initiatives have been further embedded over the course of 2015 through the active efforts of the Education and Training Reform Board, the Higher Education Programme Board and the ETB/SOLAS Programme Board.

In 2015, the Department progressed the implementation of the Shared Service Plan 2014 – 2016 with the approval of Business Case for Finance and this project together with the Payroll shared services project for the ETB/SOLAS sector have progressed to the design and implementation

stage. A Business Case for Higher Education Payroll Shared Service was completed in 2015 and is being progressed through the appropriate governance channels.

Another significant development in Shared Services during 2015 was the migration of the Department's Staff Payroll and T&S functions to a Civil Service Payroll Shared Services Centre managed by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. The Department also actively engaged during 2015 in the D/PER Financial Management Shared Services Centre project which will see all Departments and other public sector bodies migrate to a shared financials centre over a three-year period from 2017.

The Department established the Education Procurement Network in 2015, to co-ordinate the work on procurement across the sector, while continuing to support the growing role of the Education Procurement Service, the designated sector hub, and the Schools Procurement Unit.

2 General Corporate Information and Data

This section of the Report provides general corporate data. Data in relation to specific initiatives can be found from paragraphs 4.1 to 7.21 of the Report. Key education statistics can be found on the statistics page of the Department's website via the following link:
www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/

2.1 Our Mission

Our mission is to facilitate individuals to achieve their full potential through learning to enable them to contribute to Ireland's social, cultural and economic development.

2.2 Our Vision

Our vision is to have an internationally recognised education and training system based on evidence-informed policies designed to anticipate and respond to the changing needs of learners, society and the economy.

2.3 Our Values

- We value **learning** as a public good and recognise its role in the development, cohesion and well-being of society
- We value all of our **learners** and their place at the centre of policy development
- We value **relationships** and working in collaboration with the education sector and the wider community
- We value **quality** and are committed to the principle of continuous improvement and being open to external ideas, challenges and debate
- We are committed to the implementation of the civil service **renewal** plan and the public sector **reform** plan

2.4 Our Approach

We take a "whole-of-system" approach to strategic planning and implementation across the education and training sector. This "joined up" approach enables us to plan and implement an extensive programme of reform while continuing to meet the demands of supporting and sustaining the operation of our education and training system.

3 Our Goals

3.1 Supporting the Parliamentary Process in 2015

Supporting the Parliamentary Process in 2015
➢ **3657** Parliamentary Questions were responded to
➢ In the region of **7330** new ministerial representations were received, along with on-going correspondence related to existing case files and constituency matters.
➢ **36** Topical Issue Debates were replied to in the Dáil and **41** Commencement Debate motions were replied to in the Seanad.

3.2 Information Services

Information Services in 2015
➢ **6168** emails were received through info@education.gov.ie
➢ **2.18 million** visitors viewed over **6.8 million** page views on our website www.education.ie.
➢ The Department continued to use social media as a platform to communicate with external stakeholders and the Department's followers on Twitter increased from over **14,000** in January 2015 to over **20,000** at the end of 2015.
➢ **420** requests under the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act 2015 were received and **400+** decisions were made on FOI requests.
➢ The Press Office published **126** press releases and **33** speeches

3.3 Annual Programme of Inspection in Schools and Centres for Education

The Inspectorate completed a total of 4,550 inspections or advisory visits to schools in 2015 as outlined in Tables 1 to 5 below.

Table 1: Summary of inspections and evaluations, 2015

Summary of inspections	2015
Inspections of Early Years settings participating in the ECCE programme (pilot)	22
Inspections in primary schools (including inspections of the work of teachers on probation)	2751
Inspections in post-primary schools and centres for education	589
Other inspections and evaluation activities	401
Total inspections in schools and centres for education	**3763**
Total school self-evaluation advisory visits	787

Table 2: Inspections of Early Years settings participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme, 2015

Early Years Education-focused Inspections (EYEIs)	2015
Pilot EYEIs	22
Total of setting inspection visits	**22**

Table 3: Inspections and evaluations in primary schools, 2015

Primary Inspection/evaluation activity	2015
WSE: Primary	220
Incidental inspections	345
Follow-Through inspections	85
DEIS evaluations	10
Total of school inspection visits	**660**
School self-evaluation advisory visits to schools	653
Inspections of newly qualified primary teachers: probation of teachers (primary) for the school year 2014/15	**2091**

Table 4: Inspections and evaluations in post-primary schools, 2015

Post-primary Inspection/evaluation activity	2015
WSE-MLL (Post-Primary)	65
Subject Inspection	231
Programme Inspections	31
Evaluation of Centres for Education (Youthreach, Senior Traveller Training Centres)	5
Incidental inspections	184
Follow-Through inspections	65
DEIS evaluations	8
Total of school inspection visits	**589**
School self-evaluation advisory visits to schools	134

Table 5: Other inspection activities, 2015

Other inspections/evaluations of provision for students and young people	2015
Evaluation reports on Irish Gaeltacht (Summer/Easter) Colleges (Coláistí Gaeilge)	32
Evaluation of special schools attached to High Support Units, Special Care Units, and Children Detention Schools	7
Inspections conducted for the purpose of school recognition	6
Inspections of literacy summer camps for children	5
Inspections of campaí samhraidh for children	5
Evaluation of summer CPD courses for primary teachers	40
Pilot of Curriculum Evaluation in Primary Schools	24
Pilot of Evaluating SEN provision in Mainstream Primary Schools	28
Research visits to explore schools' provision for students' wellbeing	27
Evaluation of Teagasc Colleges	2
Inspections in European Schools	25
Quality Assurance of the administration of PISA and TIMMS	200
Total other evaluation activity	**401**

3.4 Table of Prompt Payments in 2015

Prompt Payments[1] Summary January to December 2015			
Details	**Number**	**Value €**	**Percentage (%) of total payments made (Number)**
Number of payments made within 15 days	11,391	376,243,253.34	89%
Number of payments made within 16 days to 30 days	1,158	4,086,588.99	9.05%
Number of payments made in excess of 30 days	250	819,580.94	1.95%
Total payments made in 2015	**12,799**	**381,249,423.27**	
Total Disputed Invoices in 2015	28	148,554.36	

Source: Summary of 2015 Quarterly reports for the Department pursuant to Government Decision No.S29296 of 19th May 2009

[1] Payments made on or before the date on which payment is due under the terms of a written contract, or where there is no written contract, or if the written contract does not specify a payment date, within 45 days of receipt of the invoice or delivery of the goods or services, whichever is the later.

Progress on our High Level Goals in 2015

4 Goal 1 – Learning for Life

4.1 Supporting a High Quality Early Years Education System

Through the implementation of the Aistear curriculum framework, the Department plays a key role in ensuring that early years education delivered in pre-schools funded through the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme, and in Early Start pre-schools, supports children in their learning. In 2015, the Aistear/Síolta Practice Guide, an online tool for early years practitioners, was developed and launched by the NCCA.

4.2 Curriculum and Assessment in Schools

During 2015, the Department continued its work with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) and the State Examinations Commission (SEC) in relation to curriculum and assessment development and prioritised the continued implementation of the National Strategy for Literacy and Numeracy, Maths and Junior Cycle Reform.

4.3 Curriculum Reform at Primary Level

The Department worked with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) to initiate a significant programme of curriculum reform at primary level. This included the finalisation of a new language curriculum for junior infants to second class inclusive. Work has commenced on the language curriculum for 3rd to 6th classes. In addition, work has also commenced in relation to the overall structure of the primary curriculum itself and to primary mathematics initially for junior infants to 2nd class.

4.3.1 Integrated language (Irish and English) curriculum for the first four years of primary school

The requirement for a new language curriculum for primary schools is articulated in the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy. It will focus on the development of oral language, reading and writing skills. It is specifically designed for young children in junior infants through to 2nd class. A comprehensive professional development programme has commenced in order to support teachers in their implementation of this new curriculum with a view to beginning roll out to schools by September 2016.

4.3.2 New primary maths curriculum for first four years of primary school

The requirement for a new mathematics curriculum for primary schools is articulated in the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy. As part of the development of a new maths curriculum at primary level, the NCCA has held a series of focus group meetings which are now largely complete and it is anticipated that a background paper to inform the work of the development group is expected in 2016.

4.4 Improving our Literacy and Numeracy Skills

The National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy drives the implementation of a programme of reform focused on curriculum, assessment and teaching practices to underpin a high quality, relevant learner experience and to enhance learning outcomes in early years settings, primary and post-primary schools. A number of targets were met ahead of schedule and a decision was made to bring forward the interim review of the strategy, which had been originally scheduled for 2016.

The interim review will identify the future direction of the strategy. The review includes extensive consultation with a wide variety of stakeholders through questionnaires and meetings. A stakeholder engagement event is planned for January 2016 and it is anticipated that the review will be published during 2016.

4.5 Teaching and Learning of Irish and through Irish in Schools

The teaching of Irish and teaching through Irish, both in the primary and post- primary sectors, is a priority in the work of the Department, in particular for the Inspectorate and the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Unit.

The new primary language curriculum for infants to second class will be introduced in schools from September 2016. It addresses the teaching and learning of English and Irish together. It also provides for the implementation of a period of total early immersion in the Irish language for the first two years of schooling in primary Gaelscoileanna and Gaeltacht schools. Focused Continuing Professional Development is currently being provided to school leaders and teachers to prepare them for its introduction. The NCCA is currently working on the primary language curriculum for the senior classes. It is due to be implemented from September 2019. There are two versions of this primary language curriculum, one for Irish medium schools and another for English medium schools

At Junior Cycle, there are two new specifications for Irish being prepared. Following intensive consultations, it has been decided to follow the primary model and prepare separate Irish specifications for the Irish and the English-medium schools. The new specifications are due to be implemented from September 2017.

At Senior Cycle, the Leaving Certificate examination has been allocating 40% of marks to the oral component of the examination since 2012. This is an increase from 25%. The impact of this increase in allocation is being considered by the NCCA.

In addition, and to respond to the Government's 20 Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010 – 2030, the Department is preparing a Policy on Gaeltacht Education. Following intensive consultations. The policy should be presented to Government by the Minister in the expectation that it will be published before the end of 2016. Implementation of the Gaeltacht Policy will require considerable resources and this is currently under consideration.

A review is also being concluded on the provision of "exemptions" from Irish that schools can provide. A report is due in the near future.

The duration of Initial Teacher Education for both primary and post-primary teachers has been extended by up to a year. This, particularly at primary level, gives additional time for the Irish component of their programme and allows for additional time to be spent in the Gaeltacht improving their proficiency not only in speaking and communicating through Irish but in also teaching through Irish.

The Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) continues to support teachers in the delivery of Irish-language curricula at both primary and post-primary levels. Particular emphasis is placed on in-school support and provision of support materials online. A range of relevant continuing professional development (CPD) events are provided based on national education priorities.

Published research:

Ó Duibhir et al
Review of Education Provision through Minority Languages

Ó Grádaigh, Seán
Soláthar Múinteoirí Ábhar do na hIar-bhunscoileanna LánGhaeilge & Gaeltachta

4.6 National Assessments

National assessments in reading and maths have been carried out since the early seventies and eighties respectively. The performance report of the 2014 national assessments was published by the Department in 2015.

4.6.1 Trends

The overall performance on reading and maths in Second and Sixth classes in National Assessments 2014 was significantly higher than in National Assessments 2009. The National Assessments 2014 was administered three years following the introduction of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (2011). Key improvements were noted in performance on:

- reading in 2nd and 6th classes, which were higher by 14 score points and 13 score points respectively.
- maths in 2nd and 6th classes, which were higher by 14 score points and 12 score points, respectively.

Other improvements included a reduction in the proportion of lower-achieving students and an increase in the proportion of higher achievement students in both English reading and maths. The improvements noted between 2009 and 2014 are the first significant improvements in standards in reading and maths recorded by the national assessments in over thirty years.

4.7 Standardised test data for primary schools

The collection and analysis of standardised test data provides a valuable opportunity to review the effectiveness of standardised tests. Together with data provided by national assessments (five-year cycle) and international assessments such as PIRLs (five-year cycle) and TIMSS (four-year cycle), the standardised test data will help individual schools and the Department to monitor standards of achievement in literacy and numeracy. In contrast with the national and international assessments which are based on a sample of schools, all primary schools return data on standardised tests to the Department.

An advanced draft report on the analysis of standardised test data returned by primary schools for 2011/12 and 2012/13 school years was completed in 2015 and submitted to the Department for consideration and publication in 2016. Standardised test data for 2014/2015 has been returned for 3,000 primary schools. This information will allow an examination of the national picture of literacy and numeracy achievement to 2015 and to review the effectiveness of the assessment tools that are available.

4.8 Interim Review of Literacy and Numeracy Strategy

The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011 to 2020 was published in July 2011. Following the publication of the National Assessments of English Reading and Mathematics it was decided to bring forward the Interim Review of Literacy and Numeracy from 2016 to 2015. Work on this interim review was on-going in 2015.

Standardised tests were conducted in 2nd, 4th and 6th classes for the fourth year in May and June 2015. The aggregated results of these tests from each primary school were returned to the Department for analysis.

4.9 Transition from Primary to Post-Primary

A suite of materials was developed by the NCCA to support the reporting and transfer of pupil information from primary to post-primary schools. The materials were presented under the umbrella title of Education Passport and are available at www.ncca.ie/transfer.

From 2014/15 the Education Passport has become the template that primary schools are required to use when reporting to parents and transferring pupil information to post-primary schools once their enrolment has been confirmed.

4.10 Curriculum Development at Post-Primary Level

4.10.1 Review of Senior Cycle

Work continued on the development of specifications for existing Leaving Certificate subjects in the sciences, Economics, Art, PE, Applied Mathematics and Agricultural Science. A new Leaving Certificate subject Politics and Society was developed and is to be trialled in over 40 schools. CPD commenced in 2015 in their schools as they prepare to implement the new subject for September 2016.

4.10.2 Mathematics

All five strands of Project Maths were rolled out to mainstream schools in September 2012. In June 2015, Leaving Certificate and Junior Cycle students sat examinations which covered the new curriculum (strands 1-5) Due to both the introduction of a new Leaving Certificate Mathematics syllabus, and also the provision of bonus points by the CAO, there has been a significant increase in the number of students presenting for the higher level Mathematics paper over the past five years. Some 27% of the Mathematics cohort presented for higher level in 2015, similar to 2014. This participation has increased from approximately 16% in 2011.

Improvements are also being noted in the Junior Certificate, where 55.3% of Mathematics students took the higher level paper in 2015 up from 45.6% in 2011.

The target participation rates, as set out in the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy are Higher Level participation of 30% at Leaving Certificate and 60% at Junior Certificate by 2020.

4.10.3 New Foreign Languages in Education Strategy

The Department's intention is to develop and publish a foreign languages strategy which covers post-primary, further education and training and higher education. Following a consultation phase a forum was held in 2015 which allowed those who made submissions to discuss their views. A stakeholder's forum was also held in 2015 to discuss the findings of the submissions. The New Foreign Languages in Education Strategy is at an advanced stage and is due for publication in 2016.

4.10.4 Junior Cycle Reform

New specifications in Science and Business Studies were completed in 2015 and teachers are being provided with CPD to familiarise themselves with the new specifications which will commence in September 2016. Work continued on the Irish specification.

Intensive negotiations on implementation of Junior Cycle continued with all stakeholders, in particular, teacher unions who opposed aspects of the reform, particularly as they related to school based assessment. In May, an agreement was reached between the Minister and the two teacher union on Junior Cycle. In July further clarification was provided and the "Framework for Junior Cycle" was published at the end of August.

Full information is available at www.juniorcycle.ie and www.education.ie

4.10.5 EU Folio Project

Under the EU Commission's Creative Classrooms call for proposals, the Department was a lead partner in an international consortium in the development of a project proposal centred on piloting the operational use of ePortfolios in Irish classrooms. The NCCA, PDST (Technology in Education), Junior Cycle Team for Teachers participated in this project, alongside industry partners - 26 schools were elected to participate in the pilot phase of the project.

The project commenced in May 2013 and was completed in April 2015. The learning from the project will inform the Department's policy on the utilisation of the ePortfolios for assessment and learning purposes in schools particularly in the context of Junior Cycle Reform. The further development of ePortfolios for student and teachers is provided for in the new Digital Strategy.

4.11 Educational Research Centre (ERC)

The ERC was established as an Agency of the DES in September 2015 to:

- Support the provision of a programme of national monitoring in primary schools in English reading, Irish reading and Mathematics
- Support the Educational Research Centre to participate in international tests including the Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA), the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study TIMSS.

In 2014 the Educational Research Centre carried out the National Assessments of English Reading and Mathematics on a representative sample of over 8,000 pupils in 150 primary schools, using secure tests. The previous baseline tests were carried out in 2009. The 1st report of the 2014 study was published in early 2015.

A further 'context' report on the 2014 assessment has been worked on throughout 2015 and will be available in 2016. All reports, studies, assessment tests produced by ERC are available on www.erc.ie

4.12 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)

The 6th cycle of PISA took place in Ireland in 2015. The main focus of the 2015 PISA was Science but English and Mathematics were also tested. This is a follow up of the 2009 and 2012 PISA. Field work in post-primary schools for PISA 2015 was completed in 2015. Department inspectors led the administration of tests in 164 post-primary schools. PISA 2015 assessment tested fifteen-year old students in science, reading, mathematics and collaborative problem solving. The report is due for publication in December 2016.

4.13 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)

The 2015 TIMSS's (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) target group is 4th class Primary students and 2nd year Post-Primary students with the focus being on Mathematics and Science. The due publication date for the main international and summary national reports is November 2016. The due publication date for the national report is Autumn 2017.

4.14 Supporting the Examinations Process

In 2015 the Department continued to oversee the funding and governance arrangements in relation to the SEC which:

- Provided examinations to candidates across all examination programmes;
- Arranged for examinations in curricular and non-curricular (language) examination subjects.
- Provided a range of measures to facilitate candidates with particular special educational needs to participate in the state examinations.
- Examined individual test items including written examination scripts, art and craftwork pieces, project and practical pieces, oral tests, coursework, journals, research, reports and portfolios.
- Awarded examination results and processed appeals
- Predictability Report on Leaving Certificate examinations, for "Transitions" agenda was agreed in 2015.

4.15 Education for Sustainable Development

An Advisory Group for the implementation of the National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) was established in 2015. A forum on ESD was also held in November 2015 with

over 60 attendees representing a broad range of stakeholders. Professor Daniella Tilbury who internationally recognised for her research in the areas of sustainability leadership and organisational change in higher education as well as in education and learning for sustainability delivered the keynote address. The ESD Strategy will complement the UN Sustainable Development Goals which were agreed in September 2015.

4.16 Lifeskills Survey

The Department conducted the third "Lifeskills" survey of all primary and post-primary schools. This survey provides data on a number of important life skills related issues within schools, including physical activity and healthy eating, aspects of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE), as well as anti-bullying, substance use, and road safety. The 2015 survey also included questions for the first time on the links between primary schools and early years settings, schools' engagement with Education for Sustainable Development, and their links with local enterprise. At post primary level, the survey is also being used in 2015 to support an evaluation of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) by the Crisis Pregnancy Programme/HSE. Youthreach and Community Training Centres have also been involved in the survey for the first time.

4.17 National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE)

A Service Level Agreement was signed between DES and NCGE in 2015. The Department supported the development of the agreed NCGE Strategic Plan 2015-2017.

4.18 Music Generation

Music Generation is a non-mainstream music education initiative which commenced in 2010. It is currently established in 11 locally run Music Education Partnerships led by Education and Training Boards and Local Authorities across 12 counties. $7million in philanthropic donations from U2 and the Ireland Fund along with locally raised funding enabled the first 5 years of the initiative (Phase 1). Since 2014, Department of Education and Skills funding has, on a phased basis, replaced the original philanthropic funding. By January 2016, the philanthropic funding for Phase 1 will have ceased and the Department will be providing funding of up to €200,000 to each of the 11 Phase 1 Music Education Partnerships annually.

During 2015 a further €3million philanthropic donation by U2 and The Ireland Fund enabled Music Generation to begin planning for a second phase which will expand the initiative to other areas of the country over the period 2016 to 2020. In 2015, the Department committed, subject to exchequer funding, to replacing the philanthropic donations for this second phase and will begin funding the Phase 2 Music Education Partnerships from 2020 in the same way as the Phase 1 group.

4.19 Entrepreneurship in Education

Our commitment to Entrepreneurship in Education has been most recently stated in the Framework for Junior Cycle. Innovation and Creativity is prioritised as one of its eight Principles. Entrepreneurship is specified as one of the Statements of Learning, which will require that each junior cycle student "takes initiative, is innovative and develops entrepreneurial skills". In addition, the development of key skills, such as communicating, being creative, and working with others, are core to the quality of learning in the Junior Cycle experience of our students. Currently, enterprise is embedded in senior cycle particularly in Transition Year and through the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme and the Leaving Certificate Applied.

Consultative forums on the theme of 'Entrepreneurship Education in Schools' were held in September 2014 and September 2015. Following on from these, a paper is being prepared to articulate the Department's vision for entrepreneurship education.

4.20 Decade of Centenaries 1916/2016

As part of its commitment to the Decade of Centenaries, the Department launched its 2016 commemorative programme in September 2015. Although this anticipated the bulk of the relevant activities taking place in 2016, the latter part of 2015 saw substantial activity, including the delivery of the National Flag to primary and special schools all over the country, the commencement of a range of projects and competitions, the generation of a significant bank of resources on Scoilnet and training opportunities for teachers through the Education Centre network.

4.21 Arts in Education Charter

The Arts in Education Charter, launched in 2013, is an initiative of this Department and the Department of Arts Heritage and the Gaeltacht working in association with the Arts Council. In 2015, progress was made on implementation of the Charter objectives including particularly the launch of the Arts in Education online portal (www.artsineducation.ie) in May. Also progressed were the 'Teacher – Artist Partnership' model for Continuing Professional Development (CPD), the 'Artists in Residence' initiative in Higher Education Institutions, a review of the Artists-Schools Guidelines, Nationwide Mapping of Arts Education Provision, 'ARIS – Arts Rich Schools' and Research in Arts in Education

Implementation of the Arts in Education Charter is overseen by an Implementation Group, chaired by Professor John Coolahan. The group presented its fourth bi-annual report in April 2015.

4.22 School Transport Scheme

The Department aims to provide a safe, efficient and cost effective transport service for eligible children to and from school. It also aims to ensure timely payment of grants to assist eligible families with school transportation costs, in circumstances where it is not feasible or economic to provide school transport services.

Approximately 113,000 children, including 10,000 children with special educational needs, availed of school transport services in the 2014/15 school year. A total of 82 million kilometres were covered in this period, comprising 42 million journeys via 6,546 routes. Over 2,000 families received grant payments totalling €21 million during 2015. The total cost for the service in 2015 was €173 million.

4.23 Progress on Reform of the Further Education and Training Sector in 2015

In 2015, work continued to support the major reform of the further education and training sector.

The ETB/SOLAS Programme Board continued to actively support and enable the implementation of the overall reform programme for the ETB sector. This Programme Board is chaired by the Secretary General of the Department and its membership includes members of the Department's senior management team along with the General Secretary of Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI), the Director General of SOLAS and the Chief Executives of two ETBs.

The Programme Board is assisted by a Project Management Office (PMO) which supports the implementation of long-term strategic objectives as well as immediate, operational matters arising from the change agenda for both ETBs and SOLAS. During 2015, the Programme Board oversaw the development and implementation of 23 sector wide reform initiatives.

During 2015, a new organisational structure for the ETB sector was agreed and sanction was obtained from DPER for the proposed senior management structure on the basis of 3 streams of functions in the sector – Schools, FET and Organisation Support & Development.

Also in 2015, a review of the current quality assurance policies and processes across the ETB sector was initiated, this work will continue in 2016 with the plan to produce an updated Quality Assurance vision and strategy for the ETB sector.

4.24 Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019

Work continued in 2015 on the implementation of the Further Education and Training (FET) Strategy 2014-2019. The implementation of the Strategy is supported by SOLAS and overseen by an Advisory Committee chaired by the Department. The Strategy sets out a range of actions across 5 strategic goals aimed at delivering skills for the economy, supporting the active inclusion of a wide range of learners, improving the quality of provision, developing a better model of planning and funding and enhancing the overall standing of FET.

Major milestones in 2015 included the publication of the first fully integrated FET Services Plan and the commencement of a major review of PLC provision.

4.25 Reform of the Apprenticeship System

The reform of apprenticeship training system continued with the ongoing implementation of the Apprenticeship Implementation Plan, its focus being the renewal of existing apprenticeships along with the expansion of apprenticeships into new sectors of the economy. There was an upward trend in the number of those participating in the existing 27 craft based apprenticeships in 2015 with forecasts of further growth in coming years.

A major review of the existing apprenticeships was undertaken and new curricula for five high volume trades were submitted to QQI for validation. Accelerated arrangements for reviewing the remaining trades were agreed between QQI and SOLAS.

In addition, the Apprenticeship Council issued a call for proposals for new apprenticeships from consortia of industry and education and training providers. More than 80 proposals were received from a wide range of sectors, 25 of which were assigned Category 1 status meaning that they were both sustainable and at an advanced stage of design and planning and industry/education collaboration. The Council has been working closely with consortia within this group to develop their proposals into national apprenticeships. It is envisaged that a number of these proposals will be in a position to move to enrolment in 2016.

These proposals will see an expansion of the existing range of programmes offered under the apprenticeship system and are part of the ongoing work to ensure that the system remains responsive to economic and employment needs.

4.26 Engagement with Employers and other relevant stakeholders

The Department initiated the process to create a new network of regional skills structures as a mechanism for employers and the further and higher education sectors to work together in building the skills needs of their regions.

“Collaborating for talent and growth: Strategy for Higher Education – Enterprise Engagement” was published by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) in June 2015. The strategy is now being implemented by the HEA. This strategy will support and accelerate the education and training reform currently underway, building on innovative partnerships already in place and set out in the first report on the performance of the higher education system in 2014.

Review of the coordination mechanisms for Further Education and Training, and Higher Education providers to engage with industry at national, regional and local level to ensure alignment of provision to skills requirements, was completed in 2015. A decision was taken to establish regional skills structure and consultation is underway with regional stakeholders in tandem with the development of the regional Action Plan for Jobs. The regional structures will be a new feature which will form part of the national skills infrastructure in the new national skills strategy.

4.27 National Skills Strategy

Work commenced in 2015 on the development of a new National Skills Strategy. A public consultation was launched in November 2015 to gather the views of stakeholders on the

development of the strategy. As well as the call for written submissions, meetings were arranged with a range of relevant stakeholders.

4.28 European Social Fund (ESF)

The 2014-2020 ESF Operational Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning (PEIL) sets out a framework for the allocation of a total of € 1.153 billion over the period 2014-2020, comprising €542.4 million from the European Social Fund (ESF), and equal amount from the Exchequer and just over €68 million from the EU Youth Employment Initiative.

Building on the positive contribution made by the earlier Human Capital Investment Operational Programme (HCIOP) 2007-2013, the PEIL focusses investment in a number of key areas. These areas revolve around reducing unemployment levels, improving social and labour market inclusion, enhancing education attainment, and tackling youth unemployment. It is expected that the allocated funding will help to provide our labour force, and in particular the unemployed, with the skills, experience and qualifications necessary to avail of job opportunities as we emerge from the financial crisis.

The Programme supports a wide range of activities across a number of Government Departments and agencies. Specifically within the education sphere, the ESF co-finances ETB Training for the unemployed; Springboard+ (including the ICT Conversion Courses); Momentum; Youthreach; Third Level Access; the Back to Education Initiative and Adult Literacy.

4.29 European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF)

A tenth programme of support under the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF) was approved in respect of 108 aircraft maintenance workers made redundant at PWA International, Rathcoole, Co. Dublin and a similar number of young people under 25 years of age who are not in employment, education or training (NEETs). The 60% EU co-financing of €442,294 will support services for those concerned over a 2 year period. The EGF supports workers made redundant due to the adverse effects of globalisation or the global economic and financial crises. The other EGF programmes that were operational during 2015 were those dealing with the closure of the Andersen Ireland jewellery manufacturing plant in Rathkeale, Co. Co. Limerick and the Lufthansa Technik Airmotive Ireland (LTAI) aircraft maintenance facility also located in Rathcoole, Co. Dublin.

4.30 Higher Education System

The Higher Education System in Ireland is undergoing a programme of unprecedented modernisation and reform. Through implementation of the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030, the aim is to develop the higher education system to equip people with the knowledge and skills necessary to live fulfilled and rewarding lives, and to meet the social and economic challenges facing Ireland.

Key elements of the Higher Education Reform Programme include the introduction of the System Performance Framework aligned with performance funding, which sets out national priorities and seven key system objectives for the higher education system against which higher education institutions (HEIs) will be monitored and which forms the basis for the agreement of compacts between the HEA and the HEIs which provide for targets and actions related to enhanced teaching, learning and engagement; system development and restructuring including; mergers; regional clusters and reform of the initial teacher education system.

Changes to the system infrastructure to support and drive change across the sector have also been progressed. The key system developments are the establishment of the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning and the Regional Clusters of HEIs.

4.30.1 Innovation 2020

In December 2015, the Government published Innovation 2020, Ireland's 5-year strategy for research and development, science and technology. A key ambition of the Strategy is to increase total investment in R&D in Ireland, led by the private sector, to 2.5% of GNP. This would mean that

over €5billion will be invested per year in R&D by the private and public sectors by 2020, which will represent almost doubling current levels of investment. Among the DES research targets to be delivered by the strategy are:

- research masters and PhD enrolments will be increased by 30% to 2,250;
- a new Programme of funding for Frontier Research will be introduced by the IRC,

An Implementation Group, which this Department is a member of, will be responsible for overseeing implementation of the various actions under the Strategy.

4.30.2 Teaching and Learning Forum

The National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning is a key system-level infrastructure for the enhancement of teaching and learning in Irish higher education. The National Forum is engaged in a range of activities aimed at providing students with the highest quality teaching and learning experience. Its focus is on 'adding value' by providing a structure through which institutional and network initiatives can be synergised and leveraged to support a vibrant community of grass-roots' activity. The Forum developed an initial roadmap for enhancing digital learning in the sector. The roadmap was published in May 2014 and a €2 million fund was put in place to support institutions in developing digital capacity.

The Forum published in 2015 its "Roadmap for Enhancement in A Digital World 2015–2017", enhancing the skills base for engagement with digital technologies and pedagogies. Work commenced on the formulation of a professional development framework for those who teach in higher education, which is to be published in 2016.

4.30.3 Regional Clusters

Regional clusters of institutions in identified regions have been established and the clusters were requested to focus on shared academic planning and access, progression and transfer pathways in Dublin/Leinster, the South/South East and West/Mid/West. All seven universities, colleges of education and 14 institutes of technology are grouped as follows:

- Dublin I (University College Dublin (UCD), Trinity College Dublin (TCD), Institute of Art, Design & Technology (IADT), National College of Art and Design (NCAD), Marino Institute of Education (MIE));
- Dublin II (Dublin City University (DCU), Mater Dei Institute of Education (MDI), St Patrick's College, Dublin (SPD), The National University of Ireland, Maynooth (NUIM), Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT), Dundalk Institute of Technology, Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT), Institute of Technology, Tallaght, Institute of Technology, Blanchardstown (ITB))
- Mid-West (University of Limerick (UL), Limerick Institute of Technology (LIT), Mary Immaculate College (MIC));
- West/North-West (National University of Ireland Galway (NUIG), Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT), Letterkenny Institute of Technology (LKIT), Institute of Technology Sligo, St. Angela's College);
- South (University College Cork (UCC), Cork Institute of Technology (CIT), Institute of Technology Tralee, Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT), Institute of Technology, Carlow).

The HEA has recently led on a consultation process regarding progressing in developing the regional clusters and future priorities, particularly in the context of the development of the new Regional Skills Fora being led by DES and also in the broader context of economic and enterprise policy which has a strong regional development focus (e.g. Regional Action Plans for Jobs and Innovation 2020). Further work will be undertaken in 2016 in reviewing and developing policy in this area.

The Strategy also provides for the reconfiguration of the HE system and this includes the establishment of Technological Universities, establishment of centres of excellence for teacher

education and consolidation of a number of smaller institutions (e.g. Shannon College was incorporated into NUIG in 2015).

4.30.4 Technological Universities

With regard to the institute of technology sector, the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 recommended significant reforms to position the sector to meet national strategic objectives. In particular, the Strategy recommended consolidation within the sector and a pathway of evolution for those consolidated institutes of technology, to allow them to demonstrate significant progress against robust performance criteria and to apply to become technological universities.

4.30.5 Technological Universities Bill

The Technological Universities Bill was published in December 2015 and this Bill was at Report Stage at the time of dissolution of the previous Dáil in February 2016. The first Government Legislative Programme of the new Partnership Government was published on 8 June 2016, and the Technological Universities Bill has been restored to the Dáil Order Paper at Committee Stage.

4.30.6 Transitions

The Department is working closely with relevant stakeholders, including the HEA, the NCCA, the SEC and the higher education institutions, to develop a range of measures designed to support the transition of second level students into higher education as part of a Transition Reform Steering Group. In addition, universities and institutes of technology are working to broaden entry routes into higher education, which should serve to reduce the pressure on students to achieve very high points scores, and allow them time to more informed choices about their studies. These reforms, together with further work on transitions and related reforms in curriculum and assessment at post-primary level, will hopefully serve to increase popularity and competence in STEM subjects - science, technology, engineering and maths.

In April 2015 a report was published entitled “Supporting a Better Transition from Second Level to Higher Education – Implementation and Next Steps”, which set out a package of reforms developed by the stakeholders involved and which are designed to improve the transition experience of students moving from second level to higher education.

4.30.7 HEInnovate

In late 2014, the Department sought to participate in a country-level review of entrepreneurship in Higher Education, led by the OECD and EU Commission as part of the HEInnovate initiative. The objective of the review is to provide independent assessment of areas for improvement in the national framework and at the level of individual higher education institutions, together with a set of recommendations for policy action by HEI and government stakeholders. The country review process started in 2015 with the selection of HEIs to participate in a detailed study visit. This was followed by a kick-off workshop in April 2015 and a detailed study visit which took place from 12-21 October 2015. The final report arising from the country review will be published in 2016.

4.31 Springboard+

The ESF co-financed Springboard is a specific initiative that strategically targets funding of free, flexible reskilling opportunities at higher education level for unemployed and previously self-employed people in areas of emerging skills needs. All courses approved for funding under Springboard are selected by an independent panel with industry and educational expertise following a competitive tendering process.

During 2015, 5,600 participants were supported on Springboard courses under both Springboard 2014 and Springboard+ 2015. The total overall spend in respect of Springboard in 2015 was €22.3m.

A trend analysis of Springboard published in July 2015 showed that:

- Within two years of completing a Springboard course 60% are employed or self-employed, with progression to employment steadily increasing over time
- Of those who withdrew early from their course (24%) more than half do so to take up employment
- Self-employment is a significant feature of Springboard. 740 participants (15%) 2011-2014 report being self-employed
- Participants' outlook on their career prospects shows steady improvement. A survey of participants six weeks after finishing their course showed 68% of 2012 graduates feeling their career prospects were better. This rose to 71% among 2013 graduates, and 73% among 2014 graduates.
- 98% of 2014 graduates recommend Springboard to others wishing to reskill for employment

In addition, an analysis undertaken in 2015 by the Department of Social Protection indicated that 74% of all Springboard and ICT Conversion Course participants 2011-2014 are no longer on the Live register.

In 2015, Springboard was rebranded Springboard+ to incorporate the ICT Conversion Courses under the ICT Skills Action Plan. Springboard+ 2015 was launched in May and provided for 9,000 places on 285 courses in 42 colleges throughout Ireland for the academic year 2015/16.

4.31.1 ICT Skills Action Plan

During 2015, implementation of the ICT Skills Action Plan 2014 – 2018 continued. The plan sets out a collaborative, system-wide response, across Departments, agencies and the education and enterprise sectors. Its aim is to build the domestic supply of graduates from the education system and ensure Ireland maintains a strong ICT talent pool thereby promoting Ireland internationally as a centre for high-level ICT skills.

As part of the plan a further round of the ICT skills conversion programme was announced, under the Springboard+ rebranding. During 2015, 1,012 participants were supported on ICT Skills conversion courses. The total spend in respect of these programmes in 2015 was €4.8m.

5 Goal 2 – Improving Quality and Accountability

5.1 Síolta Quality Framework

Síolta, the quality framework for early years education, continued to be implemented across the sector during 2015. The Department works closely with DCYA and with the Early Years Support Service, Better Start and other organisations to disseminate the quality principles more widely throughout early years settings.

A key part of improving quality in early years is workforce development. As part of this wider objective, the Department advises DCYA, as part of a qualifications advisory board, on qualifications that are to be included on a qualifications database, used by DCYA to assess contractual and future regulatory criteria.

In 2015, surveys of employers and practitioners in the early years sector were completed on the quality of further and higher education training programmes in early childhood education. The results of those surveys have been considered by the Early Years Advisory Group and will feed into a second phase of the Review of ECEC education and training programmes in 2016.

5.2 Inspection and Quality Assurance in Schools

A total of 4,550 inspections or advisory visits to schools were completed in 2015. A range of tools to support the quality assurance of its inspections and to improve its customer service were developed in 2015. These tools include: the ongoing piloting of quality assurance surveys of principals and teachers following a whole-school evaluation in a sample of schools at primary and post-primary levels; the use of a personal reflection sheet by inspectors following evaluation or advisory activities and ongoing participation by the management of the Inspectorate in inspection and advisory work.

5.3 School Self Evaluation (SSE)

School self-evaluation was formally introduced in primary and post-primary schools in 2012. School Self-Evaluation Guidelines were published in that year, to support schools' engagement in SSE, with a focus on teaching and learning.

The Department continues to support the school self-evaluation process in a variety of ways. Four regional seminars were held for school principals, advisory visits were conducted, and two primary and two post-primary newsletters were published. The dedicated website was updated to include further samples of reports and school improvement plans, and video clips to illustrate effective self-evaluation practice.

Work has commenced on a new set of SSE guidelines, setting out a draft quality framework for leadership and management. The inspectorate has completed consultation with education partners on draft domains and standards for SSE of leadership and management. Work will continue on this draft into 2016.

The findings of a survey of all schools about engagement with the self-evaluation process were analysed and the education partners were consulted on the direction of the next phase of school self-evaluation.

5.4 Development of New and Improved Models of Inspection

The Department aims to continually improve its coverage of schools and centres for education and the quality of its inspection work. In 2015, a pilot of a focussed model of inspection of SEN provision in primary schools was completed and piloting of a model for the evaluation of specific aspects of the primary curriculum was commenced. This pilot will extend into early 2016. Consultations with education partners will get underway in 2016 with a view to implementing both

new models.

In 2015, a significant review of the range of documents which underpin the work of the inspectorate in schools was undertaken and inspection reports that arise from these inspections were published. Following consultation with education partners, revised versions of the following three documents were implemented from September 2015:

- Code of Practice for the Inspectorate (Revised February 2015)
- Guidelines for Publication of School Inspection Reports (Revised February 2015)
- Procedure for Review of Inspections (Revised February 2015)

Following on from these, revisions were made to the full suite of guides to inspection models used in schools and centres for education and consultations with the education partners is underway with a view to implementing the revised guides in 2016.

5.5 Policy and Curriculum Reform

The Department's inspectorate continued to contribute to curriculum reform in 2015, including in relation to the development of the new primary language curriculum, the drafting of the revised Framework for Junior Cycle 2015 and the development of new specifications for a number of subjects, including those for Science, Business, Irish, Art Craft Design, and Modern Languages. The development of CPD programmes to support the introduction of the new language curriculum at primary level and the implementation of the new junior cycle also continued in 2015.

The Department conducted an interim review of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy in 2015 and continued the preparation of a Foreign Language in Education policy. The Department also supported the delivery of its teacher education and continuing professional development objectives.

The Department's inspectorate also contributed to a number of other policy areas including work on issues related to teacher education, special education provision, school autonomy and social inclusion.

5.6 Gaeltacht Education

The Department completed work on a review of Gaeltacht education in 2015 and prepared a number of research reports. It also prepared Policy Proposals on Gaeltacht Education that formed the basis of consultation with education partners.

5.7 Review of Exemptions from Irish

The Department completed its work on reviewing exemptions from Irish in 2015. The review included analysis of data held by the Department and case studies of practice in a sample of schools. A draft report has been prepared.

5.8 School Autonomy

A research paper on advancing school autonomy in Ireland was published in December 2015. It was accompanied by a consultation paper, which set out key questions arising from the research paper and invited submissions on these issues from education partners, with a view to promoting a policy debate on this issue.

Publication: Consultation Paper and Research Paper on Advancing School Autonomy in Ireland

5.9 Leadership

As part of the Department's strategic approach to the development of leadership skills, a set of standards for school leadership and management was developed. The standards are intended to inform the work of the Centre for School Leadership and will form the basis of the leadership section of a revised quality framework for schools. Following consultation, the standards will be

revised and published in 2016 as part of a new quality framework for use in school self-evaluation and external inspection.

The new Centre for School Leadership (CSL), located in Clare Education Centre, involving the Department, IPPN and NAPD, has been established on a partnership basis for an initial 3 year pilot period. DES has committed to an investment of €3m for this pilot.

The CSL will become a centre of excellence for school leaders, and the partnership will have many benefits for the profession in terms of the quality of training programmes, coordination of provision, and increased accessibility.

The Centre's responsibilities will cover the continuum of professional development for school leaders, from pre-appointment training and induction of newly appointed principals, to continuing professional development throughout careers.

Priorities for the Centre include:-

- a new post graduate qualification for aspiring school leaders, drawing on best international practice and research in the professional development of school leaders
- a mentoring programme for newly appointed school principals
- coaching support for serving principals who experience professional difficulty
- a review and alignment of leadership programmes with Department standards and the continuum and
- the development a quality assurance framework for leadership provision.

5.10 Teacher Education

The Department continued to support the Teaching Council's Droichead induction and probation process in 2015. Department Inspectors attended cluster group meetings and shared learning days, and provided support to the National Induction Programme for Teachers.

Droichead is being piloted in a number of schools over three years (2013/14, 2014/15, and 2015/16). An ESRI publication "Review of Droichead Programme" is expected to be published in 2016. As of December 2015 there were 320 schools (178 primary and 142 post-primary) participating in the project.

5.11 Initial Teacher Education Programmes - Centres of Excellence for Teacher Education

Initial teacher education structures are being consolidated in line with the Report of the International Review Panel on the Structure of Initial Teacher Education Provision in Ireland. Phase 1 of the DCU Incorporation project is complete with the registration of first year undergraduates in St Patrick's College, Drumcondra and Mater Dei Institute, as DCU students.

5.12 Teacher Supply

A Technical Working Group was established following agreement between the Department and the Teaching Council that an analysis of teacher supply should be undertaken. An Interim Report of the technical working group on teacher supply was received and welcomed by the Minister in January 2015. The Final report of the technical working group on teacher supply has been received and will be considered in 2016.

5.13 Teacher Allocations in 2015

Teaching posts are allocated to schools in accordance with published criteria. The table below details the allocation of teaching posts during 2015.

Table 3. Number of Teaching Staff (Full-time Equivalent Posts Allocated)

	2014/2015	2015/2016
First Level	33,613	34,576

All Second Level	26,174	26,804
Second Level Excluding PLC	24,455	25,123
PLC	1,719	1,681

The redeployment process in 2015 involved the redeployment of 282 permanent teachers at primary level and 86 permanent teachers at post-primary level.

After the permanent teachers are redeployed, the redeployment process at primary level involves the supplementary redeployment panel for filling any remaining permanent posts. In 2015 there were over 2,040 teachers on the supplementary redeployment panel.

5.14 Teaching Council (Amendment) Bill

In January 2015, the Government approved the publication of the Teaching Council (Amendment) Bill. The Teaching Council (Amendment) Act, 2015 was enacted in July 2015. The purpose of the Act is to underpin the central role of the Teaching Council in the vetting of teachers and to allow, on a statutory basis, the Teaching Council to implement fitness to teach provisions.

5.15 Dealing with Past Abuse

Ireland submits biannual action plans to the Council of Europe detailing the individual and general measures that are being taken to implement the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) Judgment in the Louise O'Keeffe case.

Ms O'Keeffe brought proceedings against Ireland before the ECtHR claiming violations of Articles 3, 8, 13, 14 and Article 2 of Protocol No. 1. In its Judgment, delivered on 28th January 2014, the Grand Chamber determined that there had been a violation of Articles 3 (prohibition of inhuman and degrading treatment) and Article 13 (right to an effective remedy) and awarded the applicant €30,000 in respect of pecuniary and non-pecuniary damages and €85,000 in costs and expenses.

The 2015 action plans submitted to the Council of Europe note the legislative developments in relation to the National Vetting legislation, the Teaching Council (Amendment) Bill, 2015 and the Children First Bill, 2014.

The Government also approved proposals to offer ex-gratia payments to those who initiated legal proceedings in case of school child sexual abuse against the State but who subsequently withdrew their claims against the State where the circumstances of the claims come within the terms of the ECtHR decision in the Louise O'Keeffe case and where the claims were not statute barred prior to the proceedings being discontinued.

The Government agreed that the records of the Residential Institutions Redress Board, the Residential Institutions Redress Review Committee and the Commission to enquire into Child abuse should be retained on dissolution of those bodies. In March 2015, the Department published a draft General Scheme for a Retention of Records Bill which provides that, on the dissolution of these bodies, their records will be deposited with the National Archives where they will be preserved for a period of 75 years. This bill was submitted to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education for pre-legislative scrutiny in April 2015.

5.16 North South Cooperation

The Department continued to participate in North South Ministerial Council meetings in in 2015 in Plenary and bilateral formats. Meetings between the Education Ministers addressed cross-border cooperation in the areas of: combatting underachievement and improving educational attainment; joint initiatives in special educational needs; teacher education; and school, youth and teacher exchanges.

Cooperation between the Department and the Department of Education, Northern Ireland included joint cross-border initiatives to promote literacy and numeracy, including:

- the joint publication in 2015 of good practice guides to the teaching of numeracy and literacy in second-level schools; and

- the launch of Maths Week 2015 which took place in October and in which an estimated 270,000 people participated.

In responding to the challenges posed by educational underachievement/disadvantage, both Departments agreed that there should be a wider dissemination of the considerable learning to date.

The Department continued to actively engage with the Department of Employment and Learning, Northern Ireland in 2015 to share insights and explore possibilities for further cooperation in a wide range of policy areas including: legislative and institutional reform; funding of higher and further education; access/student mobility issues; cross-border student flows; research; and collaboration on EU funding programmes. In 2015, a joint paper was published on cross-border undergraduate and post graduate flows in higher education and further education in 2013/2014.

The European Commission adopted the PEACE IV programme in late 2015. PEACE IV aims to deepen reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border region of Ireland and tackle remaining challenges through investments in shared education, shared spaces and services and projects that will bring people together. Objective 1 of PEACE IV on 'Shared Education' is intended to contribute to the creation of a more cohesive society by increasing the level of collaboration between schools representing different sectors, and direct, sustained and curriculum-based contact between pupils and teachers from all backgrounds across the Programme area (the six counties of NI plus the six border counties).

A funding allocation of €30 million has been assigned to the education objective of the new programme. Matching funding is being provided by the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive.

The total Department expenditure in supporting North/South activities in 2015 amounted to €624,024.

Participants	2015
Total No. of Schools	1895
Total No. of Youth Groups	31
Total No. of Teachers/Trainers	2339
Total No. of Students	245,022
Total No. of Young People	4,230
No. of 3rd Level Institutions	58

5.17 Code of Practice relating to the International Education Mark (IEM)

A Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of Education and Training to International Learners was published by QQI in July 2015. The Code highlights for education and training providers the key areas of their activities which are of particular significance in their interactions with international learners and includes a number of requirements such as the protection of enrolled learners, transparency of fees and refunds processes and the provision of pastoral care services to international learners. Education and training providers are encouraged to give due attention to the Code of Practice when developing their quality assurance procedures and processes for the provision of international education.

Implementation of the related International Education Mark (IEM) policy has been impacted by legislative difficulties. There is a need for legislative amendments to the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 before the IEM can be introduced. Government

approval will be sought in 2016 to initiate a Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Amendment) Bill.

When the IEM is introduced, the Code of Practice will become a statutory requirement for all providers seeking to access the Mark.

5.17.1 Interim List of Eligible Providers

A number of reforms to the student immigration system for international education were approved by Government in May 2015. These reforms, which are being implemented by the Department of Justice and Equality in conjunction with the Department of Education and Skills, include the restriction of the list of education programmes considered to justify the granting of permission to students to live and work in Ireland (known as the Interim List of Eligible Programmes – the ILEP).

As part of this new process all providers of English language training wishing to recruit non-EEA students are required to apply to the Department of Justice and Equality for inclusion on the ILEP. All English language providers seeking inclusion on the ILEP have to comply with certain new requirements including declaration of ownership, shadow directors, physical infrastructure and teaching capacity. They also need to have compulsory learner protection arrangements in place and a separate account facility to safeguard student advance payments. The first full iteration of the ILEP was published by the Department of Justice and Equality on 20th January 2016. The ILEP is updated at regular intervals by that Department.

The ILEP process is an interim measure until the introduction of the International Education Mark (IEM) for the provision of education to international learners, which will provide a full quality framework in the future.

5.18 Strategy to Enhance the Internationalisation of Irish Education Services

Work has continued on the implementation of the strategy to enhance the internationalisation of Irish education services. Key performance indicators on the roll-out of the strategy include a 60% increase in the number of international students in our publically and privately funded higher education institutions, a 16% increase in the number of students participating in our high quality English language sector and a 38% increase in the number of students coming to Ireland as part of the Erasmus+ programme.

Following a public consultation exercise, supplemented with a call for submissions from the education sector, the Department reviewed the International Education Strategy (2010-2015) in the form of a discussion paper which was presented to and agreed by the High level group on International Education in February 2015.

The first draft of the new Strategy (2016-2020) was circulated to and discussed with the High Level Group on International Education in November 2015. It included an assessment of the economic trends and value of international students to the economy. It is clear from this initial draft that international student numbers have increased substantially in recent years and that the financial benefit to the economy is growing substantially.

The Department is currently in the process of finalising the Strategy and aims to present it to the Minister and Government, during the first quarter of 2016.

5.19 Erasmus+

Erasmus+ is the EU Programme for Education, Training, and Sport for 2014-2020. It aims to contribute to meeting the key challenges facing Europe by boosting growth and jobs and fostering social equity and inclusion. Erasmus+ will provide opportunities for around 62,000 Irish citizens, to study, train, gain work experience and volunteer abroad. The allocation for Ireland for the seven-year Programme is expected to be €169m. The Higher Education Authority and Léargas are the

National Agencies responsible for the management of Erasmus+ in Ireland. Funding is provided for mobilities, organisational partnerships and policy work.

Under the Programme in 2015, the European Commission provided funding to beneficiaries and project promoters and partners. This funding was administered by the national agencies in the member states. This Department, and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, are the national authorities which oversee the administration of the programme by the agencies. Both Departments are represented on the Board of Directors of Léargas. Léargas is an agency of this Department and the Department exercises roles in such matters as the appointment of the Board, providing funding for operational activities and reporting arrangements.

2015 project funding from the European Commission for Erasmus+	
Erasmus+ schools:	€2,863,261
Erasmus+ VET:	€3,904,761
Erasmus+ adult education:	€931,820
Erasmus+ youth:	€3,036,979
Erasmus+ higher education:	€9,430,206
Total Erasmus+ project funding for 2015	€20,167.027

5.20 Expert Funding Group

An Expert Group chaired by Peter Cassells was established in summer 2014 to examine future funding requirements for higher education and to present options for developing a sustainable long term funding strategy for the sector. During 2015, the Group engaged in a thorough process of analysis and consultation at both national and international level. It published three consultation papers in 2015[1]:

- The Role, Value and Scale of Higher Education in Ireland
- Optimising Resources in Irish Higher Education
- Funding Irish Higher Education – A Constructive and Realistic Discussion of the Options

It held a range of stakeholder consultations and discussion fora with higher education institutions (HEIs), students, staff, employers, other parts of the education and training system, Government Departments and agencies, community and voluntary groups and public representatives. The Group completed its work in March 2016 and its report is under consideration.

5.21 National Employers Survey and Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE)

The accountability of the system is also being increased by the implementation of the new National Employer Survey and the new National Student Survey (ISSE).

A report on the findings of the first National Employers Survey was published in May 2015. Overall, in terms of satisfaction with FET and HE graduates, employers were very satisfied with recent recruits across a range of workplace and personal attributes. These included ICT skills; teamwork; communication; adaptability and flexibility; positive attitude and energy. A lower level of satisfaction was noted for foreign language capability, entrepreneurial skills and business acumen/awareness.

In addition, the results of the Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE) published in November 2015, showed broad satisfaction among HE students with their experience. 68% of all participating students reported positive relationships with teaching staff, finding them to be available, helpful and sympathetic (a score of 5 or greater on 7 point scale) and 79% of all participating students selected good or excellent, when asked how they would evaluate their entire educational experience at their institution. 63% of all participating students selected often or very often, when asked if they were improving knowledge and skills that will contribute to their employability.

[1] All available here: http://www.education.ie/en/The-Education-System/Higher-Education/

5.22 Higher Education Performance Framework

The implementation of the System Performance Framework, Strategic Dialogue and agreement of compacts between the HEA and HEIs underpins a changed relationship between the State and the higher education system and provides for a new level of accountability for public funding against national objectives for the public funded higher education system.

The first System Performance Report was published in June 2014 and the second Systems Performance Report is currently being drafted by the HEA and it is expected that it will be ready for publication in 2016. There will be a review of the Systems Performance Framework during 2016 with a revised framework developed for the period ahead.

5.23 Appointments to Boards of Higher Education Institutions

In 2015, in line with Government policy on the filling of vacancies on State Boards, a new process was initiated for the filling of vacancies on boards and governing bodies of higher education institutions. The Department sought expressions of interest from suitably qualified persons by way of public advertisement on the Department's website in February – March 2015. A link to the Department's advertisement was also made available on www.stateboards.ie and persons registered with PAS were notified of the existence of the advertisement.

The advertisement included a list of known vacancies that would arise on boards and governing bodies over the period to March 2017. Applicants were also able to indicate if they wished to be considered for other positions which might arise in other institutions and organisations in the higher education sector over the next 24 months.

Information on vacancies arising and appointments are now available on the Department's website.

6 Goal 3 – Supporting Inclusion and Diversity

6.1 Inclusion in Early Years Settings

In 2015, the Departments of Children and Youth Affairs, Education and Skills and Health developed a model to support access to ECCE (free universal pre-school) centres for children with a disability. Implementation of the model began in 2015 and the Department of Education and Skills is playing its part in the steering and implementation of aspects of the model. A call for proposals was launched for a consortium of higher education providers to provide a national programme for a higher education special purpose award, which will be available free of charge, to one staff member in each early years setting. The qualification will upskill these practitioners to function as Inclusion Coordinators, a key role that has been identified to help support children with a disability in pre-school. The initiative will be funded by this Department and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and it will allow for 900 practitioners per year for four years to undertake and complete the flexibly delivered programme.

6.2 Transition Reform Steering Group

An Implementation Plan for the reform of the transition between second level and higher education was published in April 2015. The reform consists of four changes that will impact on students sitting the Leaving Certificate in 2017:

- The extent of predictability in the Leaving Certificate examinations;
- A new grading scale for the Leaving Certificate examinations;
- Proposals towards a revised common points scale for entry into higher education; and
- Broader undergraduate entry to higher education programmes.

From 2017 all students' results will be graded in eight grade bands at both higher and ordinary level. A revised common points scale has been finalised and was published by the Higher Education Institutions in September 2015.

6.3 Equity of Access to Higher Education

In 2015, the Department continued to provide targeted access supports to facilitate greater levels of educational participation by under-represented groups in 2015. The high level objective is to support students with a disability, mature students and those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds to access opportunities to progress to higher education.

The Third Level Access Measure, managed on behalf of the Department by the Higher Education Authority, comprises two sub-priorities, the Student Assistance Fund, and the Fund for Students with Disabilities. The measure is co-financed by the European Social Fund.

The Student Assistance Fund is administered on a local basis by participating higher education institutions and targets those students most in need. It provides institutions with additional resources to support full-time students who experience circumstances of hardship. A total of 14,000 students benefited from the Student Assistance Fund in the 2014/15 academic year.

The Fund for Students with Disabilities provides funding to both further and higher education institutions for the provision of services and supports to full-time students with serious sensory, physical and/ or communication disabilities. The Fund aims to support students in participating fully in their academic programmes and to ensure are not disadvantaged by reason of a disability. A total of 10,370 students benefited from the Fund for Students with Disabilities in 2014/15 academic year.

In total, expenditure on the Third Level Access Measures amounted to €16.2m in the 2015 financial year.

Legislation:
The Student Grant Scheme 2015 (S.I. No. 155 of 2015)
The Student Support Regulations 2015 (S.I. No. 154 of 2015)
Student Grant (Amendment) Scheme 2015 (S.I. No. 323 of 2015)
Student Support Act 2011 (Prescribed Persons) Regulations 2015 (S.I. No. 149 of 2015)

6.4 National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education

The new National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education Access 2015 – 2019 was published in December 2015. The Plan contains more than 30 actions that are intended to strengthen participation in higher education for target groups. The Plan also contains a number of key targets to increase participation in higher education by groups that are currently under-represented: students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, mature students, part-time/flexible learners, students with disabilities, Further Education award holders, and Irish Travellers.

6.5 Student Grants

The Department provides funding to City of Dublin Education & Training Board for the administration of student grants by Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI).

Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) commenced its fourth year of operations in 2015. Each year there has been an ongoing focus on work to continually improve the system, particularly relating to the processes and systems in operation.

The 2015 scheme opened earlier than previous years. SUSI received just over 108,000 applications for the 2015/16 academic year, of which circa 80,000 will qualify for grant support. Expenditure on student grant supports in 2015 amounted to approximately €388m.

SUSI met or exceeded the performance metrics and targets outlined in the Management Framework Agreement between the Department and CDETB in relation to the processing and payment of student grants for 2014/15.

In 2015, the maximum standard rate of maintenance grant was €3,025. Students qualifying for the special rate of grant received a maximum of €5,915.

6.6 Student Grants Appeals Board

In 2015, the Student Grants Appeals Board sat on 25 occasions and heard over 700 appeals from students on determinations made by appeals officers.

6.7 Scholarships

There were 81 beneficiaries of Scholarships and 386 beneficiaries of Bursaries in the 2015/16 academic year and a total expenditure of €1.7m in the 2015 financial year.

6.8 Pilot Support Scheme

The Report of the Working Group on the Protection Process was published on 30 June 2015. The Working Group recommended the extension of existing student supports for third-level and Post Leaving Certificate students, to students in the asylum seeking process who have been in the Irish school system for five years of more.

In accordance with this recommendation, the Department introduced a new pilot scheme for the 2015/16 academic year. The scheme provides supports, similar to those in the Student Grant scheme, to students in the protection system, or at the Leave to Remain (but not deportation stage) stage to enable them to attend undergraduate or PLC courses.

The new scheme is being operated on a pilot basis for one year. It will be reviewed in 2016, particularly in the context of progress made on the implementation of the International Protection

Act 2015 by the Department of Justice and Equality and other recommendations from the Working Group.

6.9 Promoting Inclusiveness in Schools

6.9.1 Action Plan on Bullying and the Development of Anti-Bullying Procedures

The Department provided on-going support to tackling bullying in schools through the continued implementation of the Action Plan on Bullying, including launching a new national anti-bullying website www.tacklebullying.ie which provides information, support and advice for students, teachers and parents on how to recognise and address bullying behaviour and allows teenagers to share experiences with their peers online.

6.9.2 Suicide Prevention

The Department also contributed to the development of a new national strategy for suicide prevention entitled Connecting for Life: Ireland's National Strategy to Reduce Suicide 2015-2020 and in collaboration with the Department of Health published new guidelines developed by the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), on promoting positive mental health in primary schools entitled Well-Being in Primary Schools – Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion.

6.9.3 Transgender Issues in Schools

In October 2015, the Department also hosted round table discussions of education partners and NGOs working with young transgender people in collaboration with the Minister of State for Employment, Community and Social Support.

6.9.4 Active School Week

The Department, in conjunction with the Department of Health and Children also launched a number of initiatives to promote well-being amongst young people including the third schools' *Lifeskills* survey and the *Active Schools Week 2015* to take place in all schools, primary and post-primary and Youthreach centres.

6.10 School Admission Processes

6.10.1 Education (Admission to School) Bill

The Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2015 has been developed to underpin school enrolment practices and aims to bring about a more open, fair and transparent system of enrolment. A key objective of the Bill and its associated regulations is to see improved access to schools for all pupils. The Education (Admission to Schools) Bill was published on 8th April 2015.

6.10.2 Parent and Student Charter

Amendments to the Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2015 will enable the Minister, in consultation with the education partners, to publish guidelines for a Parent and Student Charter. The purpose of the Charter is to strengthen the position of parents within the school system and to bring about a culture change in how schools engage with and involve parents (and students in an age related manner).The necessary amendments will be made to the Admissions Bill as it passes through the Dáil and Seanad in 2016. Once this legislation is enacted, the detailed work of the setting out of statutory guidelines and underpinning principles of a Parent and Student Charter will be undertaken.

6.10.3 Section 29 Appeals

In 2015, the Department received a total of 384 Section 29 appeals. 231 of these appeals went to a full hearing. Of those appeals that went to a full hearing 80 (35%) were upheld and 151 (65%) were not upheld.

6.11 Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector

The NCCA launched a consultation paper on Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics in 2015, as part of the work towards implementing the recommendation of the Forum Report regarding the development of a curriculum in ERB and Ethics for primary schools.

Eight new primary schools, all of which are multi-denominational, have opened under the patronage divesting process to provide for greater choice for parents in these areas of relatively stable population growth. Of these, three new schools opened in 2015, two under the patronage of Educate Together and one Gaelscoil under the patronage of An Foras Pátrúnachta. Two new schools will open under this process in 2016, both under the patronage of Educate Together. The Programme for a Partnership Government reflects the Government's objective of strengthening parental choice and further expanding diversity in our school system, specifically by increasing the number of non-denominational and multi-denominational schools with a view to reaching 400 by 2030. Work is continuing within the Department to accelerate the provision of additional multi-denominational schools under this process. The Minister has also engaged in a series of meetings with the main stakeholders to advance alternative Patron choices for 2016 and beyond.

6.11.1 Patronage Process for New Schools

When the need for a new school has been identified, a process is conducted to allow for different patrons bodies to be considered as the patron of the new school. It is open to all patrons and prospective patrons to apply under this process. Parental preferences for each patron, together with the extent of diversity currently available in the area, are key to decisions in relation to the outcome of this process. In this regard, as part of the application process, prospective patrons must submit completed parental preferences. Under this process, 24 new primary schools and 18 new post-primary schools have opened. 39 of these 42 schools have a multi-denominational ethos.

6.12 Cross-Departmental Issues

During 2015, the Department continued to contribute to a significant number of cross-departmental committees dealing with economic and social issues including the National Drugs Strategy, the National Women's Strategy and the National Disability Strategy.

6.13 DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) Programme

In the 2015/16 school year there are 836 schools participating in the DEIS Programme serving a total of 169,500 pupils. This total comprises of 330 urban primary schools, 316 rural primary schools and 190 post-primary schools. The overall cost to the Department of all the elements of the DEIS Programme in 2015 was €110.69m.

The report on the *Retention Rates of Pupils in Second Level Schools for the 2008 Entry Cohort WAS* published in February 2015 and shows that 90.6% of these students sat the Leaving Certificate Examination in either 2013 or 2014. This compares to 84.7% for the 2001 entry cohort. The report also shows that the improvement in DEIS schools' retention rates in recent years has been significantly higher than the overall improvements nationally, up 13.9 % from 68.2% for the 2001 entry cohort to 82.1%. This compares to an increase of 7.6% from 85% to 92.6% for non-DEIS schools over the same period.

6.13.1 Home School Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL) and School Completion Programme (SCP)

The HSCL and SCP, which are key elements of DEIS, are delivered by the Educational Welfare Service of the Child and Family Agency. In the 2015/16 school year there are 520 DEIS Urban Primary and DEIS Post-Primary schools included in the HSCL Scheme availing of the services of 400 HSCL Coordinators.

While operational responsibility for the HSCL scheme rests with Tusla, the Department of Education and Skills remains responsible for the allocation and funding of teachers assigned to the HSCL Coordinator role.

6.13.2 DEIS Evaluation

Evaluation of the programme is a critical aspect of DEIS. The Educational Research Centre (ERC) and the DES Inspectorate have conducted a series of evaluations on aspects of the DEIS programme and findings of this work are contained in a series of reports published since 2009.

Evidence from this research demonstrates that the DEIS programme is having a positive effect on tackling educational disadvantage. Longitudinal research carried out by the ERC in DEIS urban primary schools in 2007, 2010 and 2013 show consistent improvement in both literacy and numeracy levels of pupils, while findings of ERC research of DEIS implementation at Post-Primary level also show encouraging trends in terms of attainment levels and of pupil retention rates. There is a significant upward trend from 2009 onwards in attainment levels in both English and Mathematics at Junior Cert level.

A further phase of testing for the longitudinal study in Urban Primary schools will be conducted by the ERC by the end of the 2015/16 school year.

6.13.3 Inspectorate Evaluation of DEIS

The Inspectorate published two composite reports Action Planning for Improvement in DEIS Schools, one primary and one post-primary, on the Department's website in January 2015. Further inspection of action planning for improvement in DEIS schools took place in 2015.

6.13.4 ESRI Consolidated Report – Learning from DEIS

The DEIS Action Plan has now been in place for more than 10 years and a review is appropriate to ensure that the additional supports being provided to address educational disadvantage continue to reach those most in need of them. In April 2015, 'Learning from DEIS' – a Report by the ESRI on the implementation over 10 years of Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools was published. The Report brings together learning from evaluations of DEIS conducted to date by the Educational Research Centre and the DES Inspectorate as well as related Irish and International research on educational disadvantage together with examples of best practice. The Report assesses the main findings of this research and provides advice to inform future policy direction in relation to educational disadvantage including DEIS.

Following the publication of this Report a process for a review of the DEIS Programme commenced in September 2015. The majority of the review work programme is scheduled for completion by the end of the 2015/16 school year.

The overall scope of the review is to assess the existing DEIS Programme in the context of evaluations to date and any relevant policy and other developments, in order to inform future policy on educational disadvantage.

6.14 Catering for Pupils with Special Educational Needs

The Department is committed to ensuring that all children with special educational needs can have access to an education appropriate to their needs, preferably in inclusive mainstream school settings through the primary and post-primary school network. Where children with special educational needs cannot be provided for in mainstream settings, the Department provides for specialised special class and special school places

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible for processing applications from schools for supports for children with special educational needs.

The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) provides support to schools in identifying pupil strengths and needs and in planning for, and reviewing, interventions appropriate to those needs.

6.15 New Inspection Model

A new inspection model to evaluate and report on the quality of education provision in mainstream settings for learners with special education needs has been developed. A pilot of the model took place in 2015.

6.16 Targeted Supports for Pupils with Special Educational Needs

As at end December 2015, there were 11,800 whole time equivalent learning support/resource teachers in mainstream primary and post-primary schools. In addition, over 1,100 teachers provided education to children attending special schools with reduced pupil teacher ratios ranging from 6:1 to 11:1 depending on disability categorisation.

Children with special care needs are also supported by Special Needs Assistants. 11,940 whole time equivalent Special Needs Assistants posts were provided for to the end of 2015, with a further 100 SNA posts provided to the end of June 2016 to provide for the care needs of children with special educational needs attending primary, post-primary and special schools over the course of the 2015/16 school year.

Approximately 1500 grants issued to primary and special schools in 2015, which is up from in excess of 1,100 in 2014, for the purchase of specialist equipment to assist children with special needs in the classroom. The type of equipment provided includes soundfield systems for children with hearing impairment or software and computer facilities for children with communicative disability.

In the 2015/16 school year, 153 additional special classes/units have been established providing a total of 1,008 such classes/units.

6.17 Home Tuition Scheme

The Home Tuition Scheme supports the provision of education at home for children who, for a number of reasons, experience a delay in accessing a school place or whose attendance is disrupted for maternity related reasons. In the 2014/15 school year, the Department approved 285 applications for Home Tuition under the PLDS schemes.

In 2015, the Department changed the payment method of the Home Tuition Grant from direct payment to parents to direct payment to tutors. This change took effect for the 2015/16 school year. The new arrangements better facilitate compliance with statutory deduction provisions including taxation and associated provisions. The Department acts as payroll agents only on behalf of the parents/guardians.

6.18 July Education Programme

The July Education Programme provides for special classes to cater for children with autism who choose to extend their education services through the month of July. The Department also provides for a July Programme for pupils with a severe or profound general learning disability. Where school-based provision is not feasible, home-based provision may be grant aided through the Home Tuition Scheme. A total 191 schools participated in 2015 with 4,758 pupils availing of the home-based July Programme provision in 2015.

6.19 Resource Teaching Allocations

The overall number of resource teaching posts available has also increased in recent years. An additional 480 resource teaching posts have been made available to the NCSE for the 2015/16 school year over that provided for in 2014/15. The total number of posts allocated in 2015/16 is 6,832, which is an overall increase of 29% in the number of posts allocated since September 2011 which was 5,265 posts.

Over 11,800 Resource Teaching and Learning Support posts are available to schools for the 2015/16 school year which is the highest number of posts that has ever been made available,

compared with over 11,000 posts for the 2014/15 school year, over 10,100 posts for the 2012/13 year and approximately 9,950 posts for the 2011/12 school year.

A Pilot of a New Model for allocating resource teachers for school, as recommended by the National Council for Special Education, was also established in 47 primary and post primary schools in 2015, and took place over the course of the 2015/16 school year.

6.20 Increasing the Numbers of Special Needs Assistants

In July 2015, an additional 610 SNA posts were made available to the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) for allocation to schools in the 2015/16 school year, bringing the total number of SNA's available for allocation in 15/16 to 11,940 posts. As part of Budget 2016, a further increase of 100 posts was announced to meet additional demand arising from January to June 2016, bringing the total number of SNA posts available for allocation in the 2015/16 school year to 12,040. This is an increase of almost 14% over the number of posts available in 2011 which was 10,575.

6.21 Teacher Training

19,084 places were provided for Continuing Professional Development for teachers of children with Special Educational Needs by the Special Education Support Service in 2015.

338 places were provided on college based programmes in Learning Support and Special Education.

6.22 Teachers, SNAs

In 2015 we regulated the employment terms and conditions governing Teachers and Special Needs Assistants in recognised schools, developed policy in the area and monitored compliance in order to promote effective utilisation of human resources across the primary and post-primary schools sector.

6.23 Middletown Centre for Autism Project

The end of March 2015 marked the completion of the two year phased expansion of services at the Middletown Centre for Autism. Alongside increasing the number of users that have benefited from the Centre's services, an important aim of the expansion of services was to further embed the Centre as an essential delivery body of the range of services available to support children with autism on an all-island basis.

The expansion of the Centre's services in the south have enabled the Centre to pilot the provision of direct support to children, the completion of targeted research projects in order to inform future policy development and an increase in the number of training places offered to both parents and professionals, particularly highlighting key life stages for a child with autism.

6.24 The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)

All mainstream primary and post-primary schools have access to a NEPS psychologist who provides a consultative service to address the schools' priority needs. This service is supported by provision of assessments through the Scheme for Commissioning Psychological Assessments (SCPA).

In common with many other psychological services and best international practice, NEPS has adopted a consultative model of service. The focus is on empowering teachers to intervene effectively with pupils whose needs range from mild to severe and transient to enduring.

6.24.1 2015 Indicators

To date assessment services have been extended to school either by the assignment of a NEPS psychologist or access to the SCPA. In 2013/14 following an earlier piloting of the process a NEPS psychologist was assigned to every primary and post-primary (with the exception of those Special schools receiving service from other sources) and where necessary will provide assessment service

though the SCPA. This allows for a more homogenous service generally to schools. The process was continued in 2015/16 with NEPS psychologists available to 98% of schools (99.3% of pupils).

During the 2015/16 academic year, NEPS psychologists were involved in casework (assessment and intervention) in relation to over 8,064 named students, and provided advice to teachers regarding interventions for approximately a further 15,000 un-named students. Additionally, some 1,711 assessments were funded under the SCPA in the period.

In addition, NEPS psychologists made recommendations on some 5,000 pupils under the Reasonable Accommodation in Certificate Examinations scheme (RACE) on behalf of the State Examinations Commission and attended on-site at some 127 critical incidents in schools at the request of school authorities.

NEPS psychologists provide training for teachers to implement evidence-based programmes and practices that promote resilience and social and emotional competence in children and young people. The service has prioritised the delivery of two programmes, in particular:

- The Incredible Years Teacher Classroom Management Programme (TCM) is a classroom-based prevention and early-intervention programme designed to reduce conduct problems and promote children's pro-social behaviour. In 2015 NEPS as accredited trainers provided training to some 400 teachers nationally.

- The Friends programmes are school-based, anxiety prevention and resilience-building programmes that enable children to learn effective strategies to cope with and manage all kinds of emotional distress – worry/stress/change/anxiety. NEPS psychologists in 2015 provided training to some 1,000 teachers nationally.

The ***Well-Being in Primary Schools Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion*** were launched in 2015 following a collaborative process between the Departments of Education and Skills and Health, and the Health Service Executive. The Guidelines provide practical guidance on how primary schools can promote mental health and well-being in a whole school way and build on the existing good practice already in place.

During 2015, NEPS completed its review of its Critical Incident guidelines and support materials for schools and published them online for the information of and use by schools whose update included a new element on the effect, influence and use of social media.

During 2015, NEPS participated with the Department in the development of the Pilot Project for the New Resource Teacher Allocation Model and actively supported the 47 primary & post-primary schools involved. The aim of the pilot is to enable the Department and the NCSE to assess the practical application of the new allocation model in a designated number of schools. It is also designed to enable the Department to work in partnership with schools to identify best practices in the use of the resources to improve outcomes for pupils with special educational needs and to finalise guidance for all schools to support the revised model for allocating additional teaching resources to schools.

Publications in 2015:

Well-Being in Primary Schools: Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion (2015)
Well-Being in Primary Schools: Resources for Mental Health Promotion (2015)
Critical Incidents Guidelines and Resource Pack for Schools (update 2015)
NEPS Service explanatory Leaflet for (1) Children and (2) Teenagers

7 Goal 4 – Building the Right Systems and Infrastructures

The Department aims to provide appropriate infrastructure for learning environments so that all learners have access to a modern learning environment. A primary focus of the Department's is the provision of accommodation to meet demand for school places in areas where enrolments are rising.

7.1 Building and Accommodation Programme in 2015

In 2015, a total of €506.5m was spent on schools' infrastructure. Outputs from this investment include 50 large-scale projects that were completed; 33 in the primary school sector and 17 in the post-primary school sector. A total of 7,672 permanent school places, of which 6,048 were additional permanent places, were provided in 20 new primary schools and 2,100 additional permanent places were provided in 13 existing primary schools.

In the post-primary school sector, 7 new schools and 10 large scale extension or refurbishment projects were completed in 2015. These projects delivered a total of 6,580 permanent school places, of which 5,245 were additional permanent places, as well as providing enhanced facilities for 4,840 pupils.

179 projects were completed under the Additional Accommodation Scheme and Prefab Replacement Initiative and provided 5,914 permanent school places.

7.2 Using Diverse Methodologies for the Construction of Major Projects

The Department's five year plan includes alternative methods of delivering projects including through the public private partnership process. Agencies such as the Office of Public Works, the Education and Training Boards, the National Development Finance Agency, and the Grangegorman Development Agency, as well as a number of Local Authorities, are all assisting with the delivery of 69 major school projects.

7 sites were acquired in 2015. Sites acquired in 2015 will facilitate the provision of school accommodation for 5 primary schools and 2 post-primary schools.

7.3 Completion of Higher Education Projects

Capital expenditure on higher education infrastructure in 2015 was €52.6m. This funding envelope was used to progress a number of higher education projects including the consolidation of Dublin Institute of Technology at Grangegorman and the delivery of the new Human Biology Building at NUI Galway. In addition, the funding enabled the purchase of the All Hallows College Campus to accommodate the additional student numbers arising from DCU Incorporation as well as the purchase of a site for NUI Maynooth. The payment of a devolved grant to the country's 13 Institutes of Technology was also made possible with this funding which permitted the Institutes to discharge costs on a range of projects such as small-scale building works, refurbishment of existing facilities and upgrading of equipment.

7.4 Enhancing Financial Management, Audit, Appraisal and Asset Management Systems

A range of Frameworks for consultancy appointments are in operation for larger, complex and urgent projects. At the end of 2015 the Department commenced inspections on 120 schools that had received devolved funding and completed their projects by the end of 2014 to see if works were carried out in accordance with Department guidelines.

7.5 Memorandum of Understanding with Local Authorities

Department officials continued to work with officials across the local authority sector to progress the acquisition of sites in relevant areas during 2015 under the Memorandum of Understanding between the Department and the County and City Managers' Association. The interactions that develop from the implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding provide the Department

of Education and Skills with greater certainty in relation to planning outcomes associated with sites.

7.6 Publication of Project Information on the Department's Website

Lists of projects approved for delivery are published on the Department's website on a monthly basis. In the case of major projects, updates are provided on the progress through the various stages of delivery. In the case of smaller devolved projects information is published on a weekly basis listing the name of the school, the type of project and dates of approval.

7.7 On-Line Application System for the Summer Works Scheme

During 2015 a total of 559 applications were approved under the Summer Works Scheme and 467 applications were approved under the Emergency Works Scheme.

7.8 Energy Efficiency in Schools

The Department is at the forefront of design with respect to sustainable energy efficiency in school buildings. The Department's Technical Guidance Documents (TGDs) sets the benchmark for sustainable design in school buildings with a clear focus on energy efficiency which is supported by a strong energy research programme with forty seven research projects at various stages.

These projects include research into the next generation of low energy school designs including the Near Zero Energy Building Project, the Colaiste Choilm Project and the Passive schools Project.

All schools built in accordance with the TGDs are capable of achieving as a minimum an A3 Building Energy Rating (BER).

The Energy in Education programme, a partnership with the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, offers Energy Management training workshops and an Advice, Mentoring and Assessment Service to schools. As part of this programme the on-line portal www.energyineducation.ie offers best practice advice and case studies, to date over 400 schools have engaged with the programme. A network of stakeholders in the education sector including the General Synod Board of Education and Education Officer (RI), Catholic Primary School Management Association, the Joint Managerial Body, Education and Training Boards Ireland, the Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools, the National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education and Educate Together are consulted on programme development and delivery and also assists with communication to member schools. Schools that engage with the Energy in Education Programme can access, robust, practical advice and are realising savings through low and no cost measures.

7.9 Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Schools

7.9.1 ICT connectivity in ETBs improved through connection to Government Networks

In order to meet ETBs' business needs, each ETB requires a fit for purpose IT network infrastructure and connectivity. ETB ICT Government Networks Rollout Project is at an advanced stage. 24 of 25 ETB sites have been connected to Government Networks. Work has commenced on connections for the remaining group.

7.9.2 Digital Strategy for Schools

The ICT in Schools Programme is focused on the integration of ICT into teaching and learning and promotes the development of pupils' digital literacy. The programme addresses four broad areas which are the provision of essential ICT infrastructure and networking within schools, the provision of access to broadband connectivity to schools, up-skilling teachers' ICT skills and integrating ICT within the curriculum and providing curriculum relevant digital content and software.

Strategies are pursued through the work of the Department and the PDST Technology in Education, in collaboration with other agencies, support services and representative bodies as appropriate.

In October 2015 the new Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020, enhancing Teaching, Learning and Assessment was launched. The strategy provides a rationale and a Government Action Plan for integrating ICT into teaching, learning and assessment practices in schools over the next five years. This strategy focuses on primary and post-primary schools and the proposed actions are designed to embed ICT more deeply across the system to enhance the overall quality of Irish education.

The strategy sets out a clear vision for the realisation of the potential of digital technologies to enhance teaching, learning and assessment so that our young people, including those with special needs requirements, emerge from school with the skills necessary to participate fully in the society and the economy. The Strategy is developed around four main Themes namely: Teaching, Learning and Assessment using ICT, Teacher Professional Learning, Leadership, Research and Policy, ICT Infrastructure.

7.9.3 Broadband in Schools

Under the Schools Broadband Access Programme, the Department provides for the supply of internet connectivity for all recognised primary and post-primary schools. At post-primary level all schools now have high speed broadband. At primary level under the current programme the Department continually reviews the availability of services and upgrades schools where the opportunity arises.

The recently published Digital Strategy for Schools, confirmed the Department's commitment to improved connectivity for primary schools as a primary objective. In this regard, the Department will collaborate with the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources to provide enhanced broadband services through the National Broadband Intervention Strategy.

7.10 Higher Education Research and Finance

The Department allocates recurrent funding to the Higher Education Authority (HEA) for direct disbursement to the Universities, Institutes of Technology (IoTs) and designated colleges. The Department also funds a small number of higher education institutions directly.

Recurrent funding to the Universities, IoTs and other HEA designated institutions amounted to nearly €923 million in 2015. This funding includes the grant in lieu of the cost of undergraduate tuition fees which, overall to the sector, amounted to some €263 million in the 2014/15 academic year covering nearly 131,000 full-time students.

The Department also provides support for the development of research capabilities across the broad range of disciplines in third level institutions through the funding of human capital by the Irish Research Council. The provision also funds underpinning e-infrastructure for the research system. Nearly €38 million was provided in 2015.

7.11 Higher Education Governance Bill Heads of Bill

Implementation of Institutes of Technology governing body reform is provided for in the Technological Universities Bill. University governing body reform and Reform of the HEA will be provided for in a Higher Education Reform Bill, the General Scheme of which will be published in 2016.

7.12 Universities (Amendment) Bill

Work on the publication of the Universities (Amendment) Bill, to ensure compliance with government guidelines on remuneration, allowances, pensions and staffing numbers in the University Sector, continued during 2015 with assistance from the Attorney General's office.

7.13 Improving our Information and Communications Technology

7.13.1 ICT Strategy 2015-2019

The Department's ICT Strategy for the period 2015-2019 was published in 2015. This strategy articulates a vision of how the Department can harness prevailing technologies trends to effect

real business transformation by delivering a new genre of digital services to our customers. The strategy also builds on the Public Service Reform Plan and the Public Service ICT Strategy that positions Digital Government around five central themes:

- Build to Share
- Digital First
- Data as an enabler
- Improve Governance
- Increase Capability.

7.13.2 Development of the Primary Online Database (POD)

Following on the initial roll-out of POD to primary schools in 2014, POD was further extended to Special Schools in 2015. Further phases of POD were implemented in 2015, to facilitate the transfer of pupil data from one primary school to another, when a pupil moves schools and the roll-over of pupil data from one school year to the following year. POD provides information for schools and the Department to inform policy through statistical analysis and evaluation. Information gathered in POD will become the basis for the allocation of teachers and capitation grants to schools from the2016/2017 academic year onwards.

7.13.3 Further Development of Post-Primary Online Database (PPOD)

In 2015, P-POD was made available in both Irish and English to schools. Further enhancements to the system now allow schools to identify errors or incomplete student data before generating their annual return of students/October Returns to the Department. This led to an improvement in the timely submission of returns and a reduction in the number of queries which need to be referred back to schools by the Department.

7.13.4 Internal Departmental ICT Upgrades

Progress was made on a number of significant projects including the completion of the Oracle and CorePay upgrades by mid-2015, along with the migration of Oracle databases from the old AIX servers to new Windows servers. Work continued on upgrading ICT infrastructure in the Department's regional and local offices.

7.13.5 School Employee Payrolls

There were a number of important developments to the school employee payrolls and OLCS (On Line Claims System) during 2015, including the take-on of payments to tutors through the school employee payrolls, separate payments for holiday pay to casual staff, discounting of pregnancy related illness from sick leave calculations etc. A School Employees Pensions Modeller was also made available through the Department's website in late 2015.

7.13.6 Student Grant Appeals

Planning commenced in 2015 for the development of a Student Grants Appeals application. Phase 1 went live in 2015, with the implementation of a student grant appeals database, which allows validated data entry and more efficient extract of data in response to PQs/queries etc. With effect from the next college year, appellants wishing to appeal student grant decisions, will be able to apply online and upload supporting documentation, for consideration by the Appeals Board. A number of the administrative processes supporting the appeals processes (such as acknowledging receipt of appeal, requesting documentation from SUSI etc.) will be automated as part of this application, thereby making this process more efficient and effective.

7.13.7 Inspections Management Information System (IMIS)

Work continued during 2015, on the development of a mobile application for Inspectors, to capture school inspections data, in the course of inspections. The administrative work flows supporting the school inspection processes, will also be automated as part of this application, which will make this process more efficient and effective. IMIS is due to go live at the start of the 2016/17 school year.

7.14 Data and Knowledge Management

The Department aims to maximise the use of data and enhance its analytical and research capacity to support the development and evaluation of policies and service delivery. A Data & Knowledge Management Unit (DKMU) was established in 2015 to focus on the development of a Data Strategy and to co-ordinate a work programme directed and overseen by the Data, Evaluation & Research Management Board Sub-committee (DERMS). It is intended that the role of the Data & Knowledge Management Unit will be developed to provide a corporate data and knowledge management function.

7.15 Expenditure by the Department in 2015

No new savings measures were included in the determination of the Department's budget for 2015. The budget allocation did take account of the impact of a small number of savings measures announced in previous budgets. The allocation provided for an increase in teacher numbers of 1,400, in response to demographic pressures and demand for additional resource teachers, and for an additional 365 Special Needs Assistants (the number of SNAs was subsequently increased by a further 610 in response to demands). Provision was also made for an initiative to support the further extension of book rental schemes to cover all primary schools, for the continued rollout of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, Junior Cycle reform, the provision of high-speed broadband to second level schools and support for the Music Generation Project. Funding was also provided for the recruitment of additional inspectors for Early Years education settings. The focus of the allocation for capital expenditure continued to be on the provision of additional permanent places to meet demographic demands at both primary and post-primary levels.

A supplementary expenditure estimate of €175 million was agreed for the Department for 2015, mainly to cover increased pension costs, student support payments and capital spending on the Schools Summer Works scheme. Provisional net Voted expenditure of €8.178 billion for the year came in some €9 million under the allocation of €8.187 billion, including the supplementary estimate.

7.16 Monitoring our Systems and Processes

The Internal Audit Unit at the Department is responsible for providing assurance to the Accounting Officer on the adequacy, efficiency and effectiveness of the Department's risk management, internal control systems and governance processes.

The European Social Fund (ESF) Financial Control Unit ensures that Ireland complies with the regulatory requirements of the European Union in relation to the audit of ESF, promotes best practice in the management, control and audit of ESF in Ireland and ensures that audits are performed in accordance with international auditing standards in order to provide high quality, fair and balanced reports.

Annual audit programmes are prepared under the auspices of the Audit Committee and both the Internal Audit Unit and the ESF Audit Authority report to the Committee on the conduct of these programmes and the finalisation of audit reports. A total of eight reports were finalised in 2015 and both areas track, on a quarterly basis, progress on the implementation of recommendations arising from audit reports.

7.17 Human Resources (HR)

The Department supports the Public Service Reform initiative in a number of ways by, for example, the retention of reduced staffing numbers, the reassignment of staff on both a temporary and permanent basis to areas of critical need ensuring the continued delivery of key services. It collaborates with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in relation to developments in the Workforce Planning process and co-ordination of activities under Civil Service Renewal including an Employee Engagement Survey, the Whodoeswhat website and the Civil Service Excellence Awards.

7.17.1 Recruitment

Following sanction from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) in 2014, the Department commenced the process of establishing internal panels across all the administrative grades for the first time since the introduction of the moratorium on recruitment and promotion. During 2015, an internal Principal Officer panel was established, along with Executive and Staff Officer panels.

The Department received delegated sanction in November 2015 to recruit and promote staff up to and including Principal Officer level subject to a number of conditions and in particular, within the overall pay ceiling.

7.17.2 Staff Training and Development

Training was facilitated in areas including project management, IT, Governance and preparation for Business Process Improvement as well as management training which was provided to enhance capacity to adequately meet new and evolving challenges through provision of training opportunities for middle and senior managers.

Tailored training was also provided for the Department's Inspectorate, the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) and the IT Unit to meet their specific professional and technical training requirements.

7.18 Haddington Road Agreement

Agreement was reached with the Public Service trade unions in May 2015 in relation to a two year extension of the Haddington Road Agreement (to be known as the Lansdowne Road Agreement). In essence the Haddington Road Agreement will now continue until September 2018. Several trade unions in the education sector carried out ballots of their members and accepted the proposals, including the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO), IMPACT, the Irish Federation of University Teachers (IFUT) and SIPTU, following which this Department prepared and issued Circulars to give effect to this extension. By year end, some unions had not definitively accepted or rejected the Lansdowne Road Agreement.

7.19 Business Planning

The Department's annual business planning process is central to the timely and successful achievement of our goals. Each year, sections are requested to identify their critical tasks for the coming year with reference to documents such as our Statement of Strategy and to plan for their implementation via the business planning process. In addition to identifying critical tasks, the business planning process also provides an opportunity for staff to consider business process improvement and workforce planning which leads to greater efficiency and cost-effectiveness and improved customer services, all of which are key elements of the Government's Public Service Reform Plan.

7.20 Business Process Improvement

The implementation of a structured approach to streamlining and improving business processes using the Business Process Improvement (BPI) Lean Six Sigma methodology was further developed during 2015. Four new projects were carried out across the Department in the Building Unit, Higher Education Section, Inspectorate and Finance Unit. The project teams, comprising staff within the relevant business unit, were trained on the tools and techniques of process improvement and equipped with the skills for managing change in the workplace. Staff were also coached through the projects.

7.21 Overview of the Department's Energy Usage in 2015 and Actions Planned for 2016

Since 2011, actions have been undertaken to eliminate energy wastage and to promote energy efficiency within the Department. The campaign is focused on our main sites in Dublin, Athlone and Tullamore.

Actions undertaken in 2015 included:

- installation of movement sensors in communal areas in Tullamore and Athlone
- plug-in timers on drinking water boilers in Athlone
- reduction in size of comms room in Athlone to effect savings by reducing the area to be cooled by air-con unit
- electricity sub-meters installed in the three building in Athlone
- the installation of a new air-con unit in the comms room and the tinting of south-facing windows to reduce the requirement for cooling air temperature
- installation of automated door in the atrium

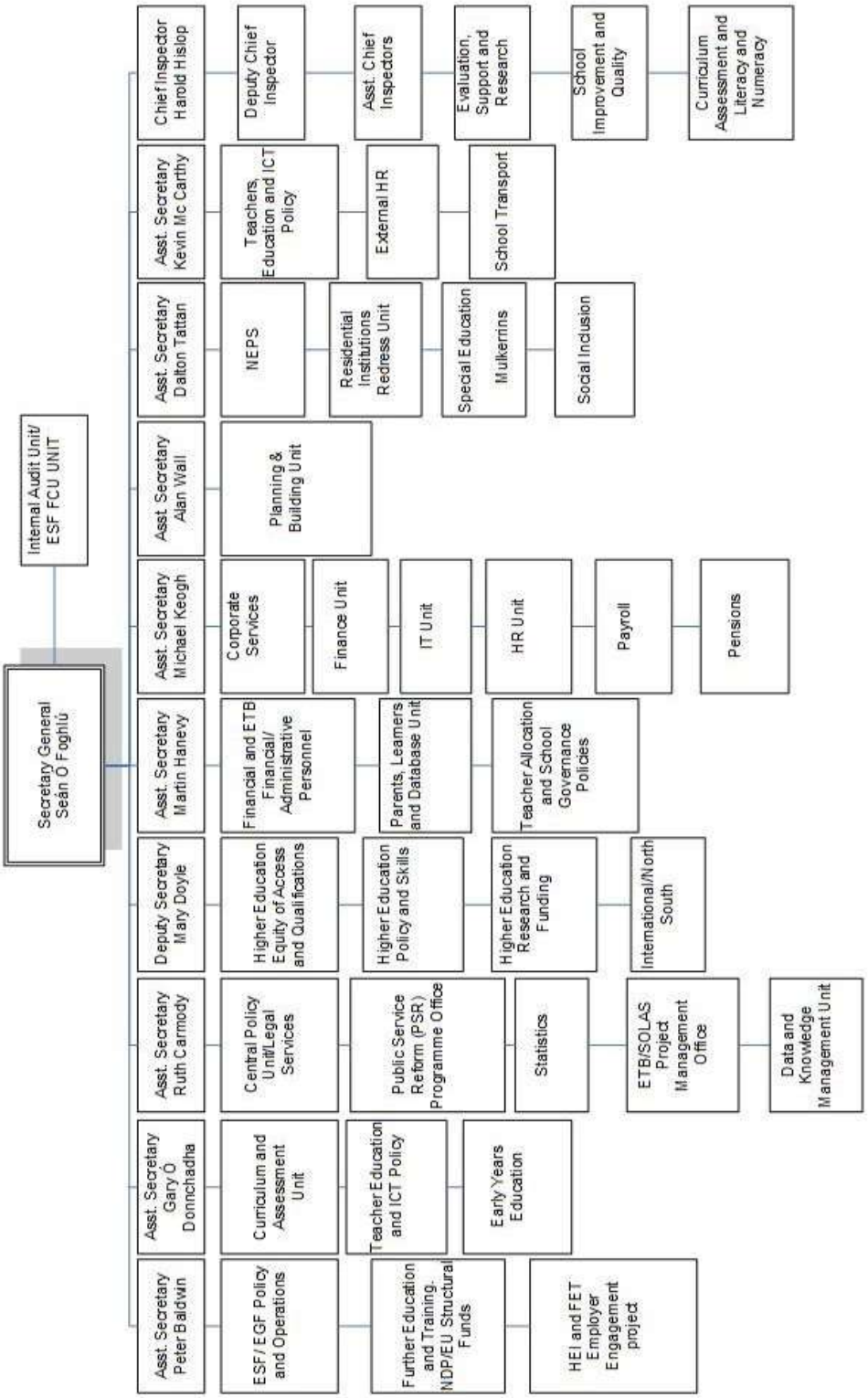
Our Energy Consumption Progress to date:

Year	Total kWh consumed	Progress to Date
2009	19,465,880.59	Baseline
2010	19,738,612.41	1.4 % over baseline
2011	18,931,538.44	2.75% below baseline
2012	18,624,536.99	4.32% below baseline
2013	17,739,371.02	8.8% below baseline
2014	16,715,580.18	14% below baseline
2015	15,847,231.28	19% below baseline
2020	TARGET = 13,042,140.00	TARGET = 33% below baseline

The table below outlines the expenditure by the Department on energy in 2015.

Expenditure by the Department on energy in 2015	
Electricity	€425,039
Gas	€131,518
LPG and Oil	€21,936
Total	€578,493 (incl. VAT)

Appendix A – Organisation Chart – December 2015



Appendix B - Bodies under the Aegis of the Department

Non-Commercial Bodies Under Aegis
➔ An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG)
➔ Education Research Centre
➔ National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE)
➔ National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA)
➔ State Examinations Commission (SEC)
➔ The Teaching Council
➔ Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (CICA)
➔ Residential Institutions Redress Board (RIRB)
➔ Residential Institutions Review Committee (RIRC)
➔ Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Board (RISF) Caranua
➔ National Council for Special Education (NCSE)
➔ Irish Research Council
➔ Higher Education Authority (HEA)
➔ Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)
➔ Léargas - The Exchange Bureau
➔ Grangegorman Development Agency
➔ An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna (SOLAS)
➔ Skillnets Ltd

Further information on our agencies including contact details and board details can be found on our website www.education.ie through the following link: Agencies

Appendix C – Direct Links to our Website www.education.ie

Statistical Information	http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/
Inspectorate Reports	http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Inspection-Reports-Publications/
Education Legislation	http://www.education.ie/en/The-Education-System/Legislation/Education-Legislation.html
All Publications	http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/
Circulars and Forms	http://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/
Special Education	http://www.education.ie/en/The-Education-System/Special-Education/
School Design	http://www.education.ie/en/School-Design/
Press and Events	http://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/
Services and Information for Parents	http://www.education.ie/en/Parents/
National Educational Psychological Service	NEPS Link
Services and Information for Education Staff	http://www.education.ie/en/Education-Staff/
Services and Information for Learners	http://www.education.ie/en/Learners/