A bridge to the future

European policy for vocational education and training 2002-10

National policy report - Ireland

This report is one of a set of European country reports on VET policy development prepared within Cedefop's ReferNet network. ReferNet is a European network of national networks providing information and analysis on national VET to Cedefop and disseminating information on European VET and Cedefop work to stakeholders in the Member States, Norway and Iceland. The report has been produced by ReferNet Ireland as a contribution to Cedefop's fourth policy report which reviews progress in VET towards the policy goals of the Copenhagen process. The opinions expressed in this national report are not necessarily those of Cedefop.

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1.1 Impact of Globalisation on VET

Ireland has a very open economy and therefore is impacted by the globalisation of the world economy. As a result, the worldwide economic recession over the last two years has had a significant detrimental affect on employment trends in Ireland, where after over a decade of unprecedented job creation the numbers in employment have fallen from 2,117 million persons in 2007 to under two million in the middle of 2009, (employment fell 9% in the twelve months to September 2009). The last two years and in particular 2009, were years of unprecedented job losses and rising unemployment for the Irish labour market. The unemployment rate rose from 8.5% to 12.5% over the course of 2009[1] compared to 5.9% in the middle of 2008. In response to the lack of job opportunities, labour force participation has fallen particularly sharply for teenagers and those aged 20-24 years. Aside from lower labour force participation amongst young people, the main labour supply response to weaker demand has come via the migration channel, removing 20,000 from the labour force during 2009. Until recent years there has been little public or policy attention paid to how globalisation might affect VET provision in Ireland. The Government-sponsored reports *'Ahead of the Curve-Ireland's Place in the Global Economy'* (2004), and *'Tomorrow's Skills -Towards a National Skills Strategy'* (2007), were the first policy reports to highlight the need to invest in higher skill training strategies to ensure future competitiveness in a global economy. The *National Skills Strategy* in particular, set targets to achieve a significantly improved educational profile for the Irish labour force through the proposed up-skilling of 500,000 employed people,, as it is estimated that over 70% or 1.43 million of the current workforce will still be in employment in 2020. The Skills Strategy also identified the need to encourage higher rates of school completion, and increased access to alternative educational provision for young people who may find mainstream second level school is not suitable for them

Ireland's future economic prosperity and job creation is dependant on increased productivity to underpin job retention in current manufacturing and international services activity. Recently, mainly in response to the economic downturn, the Irish Government has looked at the need for greater competitiveness, productivity and innovation in the economy and outlined a strategy to tackle this in the government's 2008 report *'Building Ireland's Smart Economy- Framework for Sustainable Economic Renewal'.* This report also included some immediate VET strategies to tackle the growing unemployment problem. At initial and higher education levels, the aim is to foster a greater concentration on mathematical and science learning in schools, and increase the number of VET programmes at higher levels where job opportunities will exist in the future. The strategy also advocates a greater emphasis on lifelong learning in order to increase the competency levels of the existing workforce to service the 'smart economy'. It calls for a greater promotion of entrepreneurial expertise and skills, (even before the economic downturn, Ireland ranked fourth across OECD countries and second in Europe for the number of early stage entrepreneurs, with 8.2% of adults engaged in entrepreneurial activity in 2007). The strategy encourages the country's enterprise promotion agencies to continue to carry out sectoral analyses to identify further key industry sectors that Ireland should target for the future.

In recent years, Irish universities and Institutes of Technology have become more internationalised as they build alliances with similar organisations overseas, and attempt to attract an increasing number of overseas students. The strategy underpinning the 'Smart Economy' agenda *"is to position Ireland as a destination of choice in the international education market"*. Ireland has also been enjoying some success in attracting world class researchers into its' higher education institutions and the government's *Strategy for Science Technology and Innovation (SSTI) 2006-13* published in 2006, has provided a foundation to drive this agenda. Changing economic circumstances which are creating

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[1] FÁS Quarterly Labour Market Commentary, Winter, 2009-10.

demand for new and higher skills, will also pose both challenges and opportunities for the third level sector. In particular, universities and Institutes of Technology will have to deliver more flexible, labour market orientated qualifications, as the National Skills Strategy has predicted that in the future many jobs will require third-level qualifications.

In 2008 the Government set up a Steering Group to look at a new *'National Strategy for Higher Education'*. This Group will examine the roles and relationships of institutions in the higher education sector , in order to increase greater inter-institutional collaboration, so that the Irish higher education system can deliver the levels of efficiency, performance, innovation and growth that will optimize Ireland's economic recovery and social development in future years, and enable it to reach new levels of research and innovation. The Government's Strategic Innovation Fund, set up in 2006, should provide the funding catalyst to bring about much of this change in higher education. (See Policy Example Section: 8.1.1.).

People's skills and capabilities remain a country's core economic asset even during a period of economic recession and the quality of these skills and learning are becoming increasingly important to an international public that includes individuals, companies and governments. One of the main consequences of this trend will be a need for transparency in terms of what qualifications mean and how they can be compared across borders. The re-orientation of the system of qualifications in Ireland to meet the needs of learners in the context of lifelong learning, has been a key objective for government. Progress towards this objective was significantly enhanced with the establishment of a National Framework of Qualifications in 2003. This Framework covers all awards in the State from initial schooling to higher doctorate level, and aims to improve access, transfer and progression between and within the education and vocational training systems.

 Qualification frameworks reflect a pattern in educational policymaking worldwide and the last two decades has seen a growth in the number of countries developing frameworks. In June 2009, Ireland completed the process of referencing its National Qualification Framework to the European Qualifications Framework[2] (EQF). This should contribute to increased learner mobility and mutual recognition of qualifications between Ireland and other EU member State countries.

In recent years there has been increased development of VET tools such as curricula, to equip learners for a more globalised economy; the emphasis in Ireland has been mainly on designing VET tools to meet national needs, not international ones. However, in some cases international products or systems are so universal that they drive national courseware provision. An example of this is in aircraft maintenance, where VET is oriented to the (few) international manufacturers and internationally-approved maintenance standards. Other examples of VET provision which cross national boundaries are found in the ICT sector, where training courseware is often closely associated with the products of multinational companies.   In Ireland, where there are a high percentage of multinational companies in the ICT sector, training for employees is usually carried out within the companies themselves, using their own internal courseware.

Ireland has recently accessed financial support from the European Globalisation Fund to increase its' VET provision in two regions, as a means of overcoming significant unemployment brought about by the effects of globalisation on some of its main industrial sectors. An example of how this fund is been applied is provided overleaf.

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[2] European Qualifications Framework, Information Bulletin, No.2. 2009.

1.1.1 An Initiative Example

1. Title of policy/ measure : *European Globalisation Fund (EGF)*
2. Outline of Policy/Measure **(a) Rationale.** This fund was established in 2007 by the EU to assist in the process of re-structuring faced by some EU companies because of the globalisation of certain industrial sectors. **(b) Objectives/measurable targets.** Irish VET programmes receiving funding from the EGF will provide personalised supports such as occupational guidance, job search assistance, tailored training courses, start your own business advice and progression opportunities which will provide accelerated routes into further and third level education. FÁS, the national Training and Employment Authority will co-ordinate these programmes. **(c) Target groups.** Displaced workers. **(d) Status of implementation.** This Fund was first utilised in Ireland in 2009 in the Limerick region.
3. Policy/measure operation and delivery: **(a) Level of operation.** Ireland applied for and was approved for funding from the EAG to tackle significant unemployment caused by the closure of three large multinational company installations, Dell Computers in Limerick, Waterford Crystal in Waterford and SR Technics, an aircraft maintenance company in Dublin. In January 2010 the Government announced it had received approval for the application of the fund in the Limerick region. This will provide financial support for VET activities for 2,400 workers made redundant from Dell and associated local sub-contracting companies. **(b) Is it an isolated policy/measure or part of a larger policy approach?** The EGF policy approach complements national programmes of VET for unemployed persons as well as existing ESF funded VET programmes in the Limerick region, such as those provided by FÁS and other VET institutions. **(c) Key actors involved.** FÁS, Enterprise Ireland and County and City Enterprise Boards, the local Vocational Education Committees and third level institutions in Limerick and the surrounding region.
4. Evaluation: **(a) Assessment of effectiveness, efficiency or impact.** The EGF will provide support for an important new initiative to ensure that VET provides assistance to workers affected negatively by globalisation. **(b) Indicators of success.** The numbers placed into employment and education or training**.** **(c) Integration of outcomes into larger policy/ies.** See 3.b above.
5. Conclusions: **(a) Obstacles encountered.** None to date **(b) What issues remain to be addressed?** Development of further VET programmes to tackle unemployment. *6. Source.* Press Release, 8/1/10, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. *Legend: www.entemp.ie*

The following is another example of a VET programme which seeks to equip Irish graduates with the skills to work in a globalised economy.

1.1.2 An Initiative Example

1. Title of policy measure: *European Orientation Programme (EOP)*
2. Outline of Policy/Measure: **(a) Rationale.** Through its international placement programme, this programme is designed to increase the supply of persons with the skills and experience of working overseas and thereby support individual career prospects. It also assists Irish exporting companies develop their international marketing and export capacity. **(b) Objectives/measurable targets.** The programme offers graduates of all disciplines, a unique opportunity to develop practical skills and to gain hands-on experience in an international business environment. **(c) Target groups.** Young graduates and Irish exporting companies. **(d) Status of implementation.** Ongoing since 1983.
3. Policy/measure operation and delivery: **(a) Level of operation.** The EOP is of twelve months duration, with a minimum of six months spent outside of Ireland and covers all industry sectors. The Programme provides accreditation by the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC), for a Postgraduate Diploma in International Business Development at level 9 on the National Framework of Qualifications and can lead to a potential MSc in International Business Development. Candidates are mentored by the programme co-ordinators who secure a suitable company placement. Once placed, the EOP brings the following benefits to participating graduates: • Access to export marketing positions in companies. • Experience in an international business environment • A well structured, funded and secure placement. • An excellent career start. **(b) Is it an isolated policy/measure or part of a larger policy approach?** No. **(c) Key actors involved.** IBEC (Irish Business and Employers Confederation) and participating companies.
4. Evaluation: **(a) Assessment of effectiveness, efficiency or impact**. Since 1983 more than 2,000 Irish graduates have successfully completed the EOP programme, with retention rates in the placed companies in excess of 86%. Graduate participants have used their experience to launch successful careers across all sectors of industry and sponsoring companies have experienced a significant rise in their export revenues. **(b) Indicators of success.** Number of persons supported**.** The Programme has found an important niche in helping graduates and also Irish companies. **(c) Integration of outcomes into larger policy/ies.** Stand-alone programme.
5. Conclusions: **(a) Obstacles encountered.** Obtaining placements and host companies in the current economic downturn. **(b) What issues remain to be addressed?** N/A *6. Source*. IBEC website. *Legend* www.ibec.ie/eop

1.2 Impact of Technological Progress on VET

The technology industry in Ireland has grown over the past years to account for one-third of all exports from the country   If Ireland is to maintain growth in this area, it will need a steady stream of high quality graduates and skilled workers for the technological sector, which currently employs approximately 80,000 people. It is therefore important for the future that school and university students take a greater interest in higher level mathematical and science subjects. To foster awareness about careers in the sector, the government has encouraged various exhibitions and promotions such as the *'BT Young Scientist'* Exhibition, the *'Scifest'* festivals, hosted by the Institutes of Technology, the *'Steps to Engineering'* programme and the annual *'Science Week Ireland'* organised under the auspice of the Discover Science Programme. All these events provide a platform to give information to young people on careers in ICT, electronic engineering and science research generally

The *'Discover Science and Engineering'* (DSE) Programme was developed in response to a recommendation of the Taskforce on the Physical Sciences, which called for a co-ordinated effort to increase awareness and interest in science and technology generally among the population, and to encourage teachers and young people in schools and those participating in initial vocational education and training, to consider science and engineering as a viable career. At higher education level, the government launched its *Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation* in 2006, and this strategy includes a proposal to double the output of PhDs by 2013. Under the *National Development Plan 2007-2013* it is proposed to invest €13 billion in Higher Education Programmes supported through the Strategic Innovation Fund, in order to promote the organisational transformation of Higher Education Institutions to deliver excellence in research across all their activities.

Technological progress is also impacting on the development and delivery of VET curricula and pedagogy.   All VET organisations need to regularly up-date the curricula of their training courses to take account of new technology and new ways of working, as technological changes will drive new areas of skills and work, or simply bring different needs within an existing area. In Ireland the 2007 *'Programme for Government'* gave considerable attention to *"curricular change to meet new skill needs and ensure a broader range of educational opportunities"*. In particular increased emphasis has been placed on the introduction of new curricula in subjects such as engineering, economics and technology in second level schools, with a greater focus on maths and science education at all levels, supported by increased investment in teacher training in order to increase and improve outputs and throughput into higher education levels.

 In the report *'Investing in ICT in schools: 2008-13'* the Minster for Education and Science stated that *"the prevalence of ICT requires us to ensure that all citizens are capable of full participation in this digital world"*. In the report '*The Next Leap Forward – Competitive Ireland in a Digital Era*[3,4], the author noted that stakeholders in the sector regarded education as the key to Ireland's digital competitiveness, in particular*, "It offers an opportunity to negate the advantage of far larger competitor nations by allowing us, through educational reform to produce a generation capable of competing with their global peers"*. In response to these needs, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) has developed a framework for the use of ICT in schools which has been favourably benchmarked by international standards.

 The increased use of e-learning either in a stand-alone way or as a complement to traditional trainer-centred methods has significantly impacted on traditional pedagogical approaches in VET. The modularisation of curricula, the advent of e-learning and greater emphasis on self-learning, can all help to increase the flexibility of VET provision. The future challenge for VET providers however, is how to deliver such individualised provision at acceptable cost.

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[3] The Next Leap Forward – Competitive Ireland in a Digital Era by John Ryan. Published in 2008 for the Irish Institute of European Affairs.

The example below illustrates how new training approaches are aimed at ensuring that Ireland has the skills required for a growing technologically-based industry sector. The FÁS Centre of Excellence was set up to assist firms to train and recruit workers into the Biopharmaceutical/ Pharmaceutical sector in the Cork region, which has a significant concentration of these manufacturing plants.

1.2.1. An Initiative Example

1. Title of policy/measure: *FÁS Centre of Excellence for training in the Biopharmaceutical and Pharmaceutical Sector*
2. Outline of Policy/Measure: **(a) Rationale.** Ireland's future economic prosperity and job creation is dependant on increased productivity to underpin job retention in manufacturing activity. The Bio-Pharma sector is a key area for future employment growth and it is essential that Ireland has the necessary education and training infrastructure to support employment in this sector. **(b) Objectives/measurable targets.** The FÁS Bio-Pharma facility in Cork was set up in 2007, in response to an identified need for operator training in this sector. **(c) Target groups**. Trainees typically are those involved in manufacturing and maintenance and existing operators and craftspeople who require updating or cross-skilling, also redundant workers from related industries and new labour market entrants. **(d) Status of implementation.** Commenced operation in 2007.
3. Policy/measure operation and delivery: **(a) Level of operation.** FÁS has developed a high technology training facility where learners can gain the practical hands-on skills required for process operators and technicians working in the Bio-Pharma sector and related process industries. Although located in South-West region of Ireland, the Centre also provides for the industry's training needs nationally. The Centre includes a training area with a range of industry specific process equipment, it is fully webcam enabled to allow the delivery of courses and the use of blended learning approaches, to facilitate learners from other parts of the country access its programmes. The facility mimics a fully regulated manufacturing environment and is also available on an ongoing basis to directly support industry needs as required. **(b) Is it an isolated policy/measure or part of a larger policy approach?** The Centre complements other provision currently available within the Higher Education sector such as the *National Graduate Enhancement Programme in (Bio) pharmaceuticals and Pharmacological Sciences*. **(c) Key actors involved.** FÁS –the national Training and Employment Authority.
4. Evaluation: **(a) Assessment of effectiveness, efficiency or impact.** Since its' launch in 2007, over 400 FÁS jobseekers have received training for entry into the industry, together with 1,100 other persons already engaged in the sector. **(b) Indicators of success.** The number of persons trained and satisfaction of employers with trainees. The Centre of Excellence was awarded the prestigious Taoiseach's (Prime Minister) Public Service Excellence Award in 2008. **(c) Integration of outcomes into larger policy/ies.** The project represents an important response by the national training authority to new developments in the area of technological manufacturing.
5. Conclusions: **(a) Obstacles encountered.** None. **(b) What issues remain to be addressed?** The further development of the Centre. *6. Source.* FÁS, Training Services, Cork. *Legend:* www.fas.ie

1.3 Impact of Demographic Change and international migration on VET

During the last decade, Ireland experienced a steady inflow of non-Irish workers to meet the demands of an expanding labour market. The 2006 census found that the Irish population had increased by 322,000 or 8% since the last census in 2002[5]. By 2008 the population had increased by 520,000 or 13% since 2002, and stood at 4.42 million. Since than due to the economic downturn and the rise in unemployment, a considerable number of migrant workers have returned home and emigration has commenced again, particularly among the younger element of the Irish workforce. If the migrants who have remained in Ireland are to achieve the desired levels of integration they will have to be afforded the same access to education, employment and enterprise as Irish citizens. This process can only be successful if it is fully-inclusive, participative, accommodating of diversity and focused on equality of outcomes for all. A recent report on *'Migrants and Higher Education'* produced by the Cork Institute of Technology[6], identified barriers faced by migrants in Ireland attempting to access third level education. It found that the main barriers to educational advancement for this group were the lack of:-

- Information provision,
- English language skills,
- Recognition of qualifications and prior leaning (RPL),
- Fees and financial considerations.

The report recommended that information on educational programmes should be more easily available, as well as information on entitlements, fees and access for learners. Standardized entry level guidelines for competence in English should be set out for all third level colleges and there should be clear and accessible policies on Recognition of Prior Learning across the third level sector, as well as clear equivalences for international awards mapped to National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) standards. (For further information on this report see Initiative Example in Section 5.1.4).

To assist in the recognition of non-Irish qualifications and facilitate learner mobility, the Irish National Qualifications Authority set up the *'Qualifications Recognition Ireland Service'* in 2003. While this Service can facilitate access to education and training and the labour market generally, as each foreign qualification is compared to an Irish qualification placed on the National Framework of Qualifications, it does not have a direct recognition function. In June 2009 Ireland completed the process of referencing its' National Qualification Framework to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). This alignment of the NFQ to the EQF is crucial to and will greatly facilitate the recognition of foreign qualifications between Ireland and other EU countries. The example below sets out the role and functions of the Qualifications Recognition Service

1.3.1 An Initiative Example

1. Title of policy/ measure: : *Qualifications Recognition-Ireland*
2. Outline of Policy/Measure
(a) Rationale. The service aims to promote international mobility of labour by providing an opportunity for persons with qualifications from another country to receive greater recognition of their value in Ireland.

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[5] Central Statistics Office, Census 2006, Government Publications Office, Ireland 2007

[6] Migrants and Higher Education, edited by Dr Margaret Linehan and Eileen Hogan, Cork Institue of Technology ,2008.

(b) Objectives/measurable targets. The 'Qualifications Recognition-Ireland' service facilitates the recognition of international qualifications under the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention While the decisions of the Qualification Recognition Service do not have any legal effect, as the Service itself does not have a direct recognition function, it can facilitate access to education and training and the labour market generally.

(c) Target groups. Overseas students, trainees, employees and potential entrants to the Irish labour market.

(d) Status of implementation. The service was established in 2003. From a figure of 324 applicants in 2003 the service has grown steadily to 2,027 applicants in 2008. More general enquiries amount to about 10,000 per annum.

3. Policy/measure operation and delivery:

(a) Level of operation. The service is delivered nationally and it provides;-

- Advice on the recognition of international qualifications in Ireland;

- Represents Ireland and facilitates access to the NRP (National Reference Point-Network of Centres), which promote the recognition of international qualifications throughout Europe and other countries, and acts as an International Qualifications Database containing information on foreign qualifications and education and training systems.

- Consults with awarding bodies in Ireland, e.g. FETAC, HETAC and the Department of Education and Science as well as professional bodies, to assess a learner's qualifications and to determine their comparability with the Irish education system.

The Service links with the European Network of centres ENIC/NARIC (European National Information Centre/National Academic Recognition Information Centre).

(b) Is it an isolated policy/measure or part of a larger policy approach? It is part of a national effort to facilitate the international mobility of labour and learners.

(c) Key actors involved. National Qualifications Authority of Ireland

4. Evaluation:

(a) Assessment of effectiveness, efficiency or impact. The majority of applications are dealt with within a 12 week time-frame

(b) Indicators of success. The Centre processes applications from EU and Non-EU countries alike. This means that the recognition service may be conducting research into any number of education systems. For example, in higher education in 2008, 1,288 applications were received and these concerned awards from 95 countries.

(c) Integration of outcomes into larger policy/ies. The Service is part of the functions of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland.

5. Conclusions:

(a) Obstacles encountered. There is a major resource effort required to understand the education and training system of other countries sufficiently to make fair comparisons of levels. Given current public sector constraints in Ireland, acquiring sufficient resources will remain a difficulty.

(b) What issues remain to be addressed? On-going improvements in the service. Applicants who are dissatisfied with the advice issued by the recognition service can avail of the reassessment process. In 2008 14 applications for reassessment were received

6. Source. National Qualifications Authority of Ireland.

Legend: *http://www.qualificationsrecognition.ie?recognition/prof_rec/index.html*

1.4 Impact of the Greening of the Economy on VET

In recent years much consideration has been given by the Irish authorities to the environment and how it will affect policy in a wide range of areas. In 2009 the government issued the *'Report of the High Level Group on Green Enterprise Opportunities'*[7], and an investigation was commenced to identify the future skills needs arising in 'green skills' areas, under the auspices of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs. VET and education providers have already developed a large number of new or modified training courses in this area. The following is an example of such a training initiative developed by FÁS.

1.4.1 An Initiative Example

1. Title of policy/measure: *Training in Sustainable Energies Technologies*
2. Outline of Policy/Measure   **(a) Rationale.** New energy efficiency standards in buildings have led to an increased demand for sustainable energy technologies and improved insulation. In response to this demand a series of new FÁS courses have been established aimed at helping those in construction convert or upgrade their skills to take advantage of the new wave of green and clean-technologies coming on-stream nationally.   **(b) Objectives/measurable targets.** The aim of these courses is to supplement apprenticeship training for plumbers, electricians, fitters and other suitably qualified people, with the necessary skills, knowledge and competence to enable:-   • Course participants design, install and commission domestic solar hot water heating, Bio-mass and Heat-pump systems in a safe and competent manner.   • Assist SEI (Sustaining Energy Ireland) meet a specific training need to ensure appropriate qualifications and training for people working in the area of sustainable energy technology and installation.   **(c) Target groups.** Plumbers, Electricians, Fitters and other suitably qualified craftspersons.   **(d) Status of implementation.** Building work for the project began in two FÁS training centres, Ballyfermot in Dublin and Cork in 2007 and training commencing in January 2008.
3. Policy/measure operation and delivery: **(a) Level of operation.** This project involved developing learning resources and facilities for three courses in the installation of Sustaining Energy Technology systems i.e. Solar hot water, Heat-pump and Bio-mass system installation and maintenance. Each of these new courses required FETAC validation and certification at level 6 on the National Framework of Qualifications. An important consideration in designing these programmes was to include a high proportion of practical work in the courses, which allows the learners to practice and develop their skills in a safe and controlled environment. Each course builds on a level of prior knowledge in related fields.   **(b) Is it an isolated policy/measure or part of a larger policy approach?**   Part of the overall effort by VET providers to increase Green Skills training.   **(c) Key actors involved.** FÁS and SEI (Sustaining Energy Ireland), worked in partnership to develop and deliver the resources for the three programmes.
4. Evaluation: (a) **Assessment of effectiveness, efficiency or impact.** All of the goals set out at the start of the project have been completed. To date, the two training centres have trained over two hundred skilled installers on solar systems and over 50 in bio-mass and heat pump system installations. A multi-disciplinary training team was essential to provide learners with the necessary skills, knowledge and competence to install these systems. Providing sustainable

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[7] Developing the Green Economy in Ireland, Departments of Enterprise,Trade and Employment and Communications Energy and Natural Resources, November 2009.

energy courses for installers and craftspersons will ensure that the quality of installation of these systems is enhanced and that the training is FETAC certified. All three of the programmes can be replicated in any FÁS training facility.

(b) Indicators of success. This project was awarded the *Vodaphone Innovating in Government Award,* in 2008 given for excellence and creativity for innovative projects in the public sector.

(c) Integration of outcomes into larger policy/ies. Introducing this type of leading edge technology training in Ireland creates a momentum and an opportunity for workers in the sector to drive innovation in construction technology. It also creates demand for similar training and qualifications in areas such as domestic and light industrial Wind Turbines and Photovoltaic systems. Significantly the initiative will accelerate Irish efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and reduce building carbon footprints.

5. Conclusions:

(a) Obstacles encountered. Relevant FÁS instructors had to be retrained to deliver these courses.

(b) What issues remain to be addressed? FÁS intends to develop Sustainable Energy Centres of Excellence within its Training Centre network, and has developed a number of instructors to deliver the programmes in other centres depending on regional demand.

6. Source. FÁS. *Legend:* *www.fas.ie*

1.5 Other Challenges for VET

Experience in Ireland (prior to the recent downturn) has indicated that increasingly unemployed persons are suffering from multiple disadvantages and crucially, a lack of qualifications and skills are some of these disadvantages. VET therefore has an important role in addressing the 'social-inclusion' needs of disadvantaged groups in society. As noted in the Governments' National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2017 (See example Section 5.1.1), there is an need to address these disadvantages in a 'holistic manner', with the provision of VET linked to other actions, (e.g. in relation to health, housing or child-related issues. The National Skills Strategy also looked at existing provision of training and the benefits of investment in training for individuals, employers and the nation as a whole and concluded that of the 1.4 million workforce still at work in 2020, half a million need to be up-skilled by at least one level on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).   To achieve this aim, higher levels of expenditure will be required in the future.

However, due to the economic downturn and retrenchment in public spending, some areas of VET expenditure may have to be reduced in the short term and the need for higher levels of VET expenditure could become a matter of more urgent debate in the future between the Irish Government and employers. Already it has been suggested that the governments' embargo on public service recruitment has begun to manifest itself in the area of adult education, and that a shortage of education officers within the Vocational Education Committees (VECs) service, is having an impact on the provision of programmes in this sector. In view of the progress made recently in Ireland in this area, and the need to increase competencies among those with low educational qualifications, particularly in the area of literacy and numeracy provision, this will be crucial challenge to be overcome in the next few years.

While Ireland's three-year National Partnership Agreements involving the Government and the Social Partners, have all included policies in relation to education and training, in recent years there has been some divergence of opinion between the Government, the Social Partners and outside commentators, regarding the extent to which employers and individuals should pay for training that benefits them, and the amount of financial support that individuals should receive while in training. While there has been widespread support for the principle that vocational training should be provided by the State at no cost to young people and unemployed people, whether participants should also receive some form

of income payment while undergoing vocational training, and the extent of such a payment, have been and will continue to be an issue about which differing views have been expressed.

Another area where there may be upcoming challenges relates to apprenticeship systems. Apprenticeship is a common and favoured form of delivery of VET for young persons in Ireland (although its occupational coverage is more limited than in some other countries). However, the apprenticeship model is dependent on ensuring a balance of costs and benefits to all parties involved – in particular employers and young apprentices. Experience in Ireland has shown that it is difficult to maintain such a balance as economic conditions change. As employment in the construction industry contracts sharply in Ireland due to the economic downturn, the recruitment of new apprentices by employers in this sector has fallen dramatically, and many existing apprentices have been made redundant. As a result one aspect of apprenticeship training which may take on much greater significance in the future, is the issue of labour mobility within the EU and the official recognition of periods of work placements and expertise gained by apprentices, who due to the recession, may seek work experience in different EU and non-EU countries.

In recent times an important development, reflected in VET provision is an increased demand for individualised, customer-centred, provision. The public is no longer satisfied with the 'one size fits all' provision. The future challenge for VET providers is how to deliver such individualised provision at acceptable cost. The modularisation of curricula, e-learning and greater emphasis on self-learning, can all help to increase the flexibility of VET provision. The growing interest in online and blended learning, as illustrated by the increasing use in Ireland of elearning resources such as FÁS eCollege, is indicative of this trend and FÁS has recently responded to this demand by expanding the provision of these types of courses for unemployed people.

2. ECONOMIC CRISIS – VET POLICIES AS RECOVERY MEASURES

2.1. Initiatives for recovery
In response to the economic downturn, the Irish Government has greatly increased the number of VET opportunities for the unemployed. This has been achieved through additional measures introduced in a Supplementary Budget in April 2009 and further provision announced in the December 2009 Budget.

The varying sectoral impact of the employment downturn in Ireland has affected different occupations in very different ways. While unemployment has risen across all occupations, craftspeople and manual workers have been hardest hit with unemployment in these groups rising to 25%or more, whereas the unemployment rate for professional occupations remains below 5%. One key challenge when the downturn commenced in 2008, focused on the need to develop employment and training opportunities for those being made redundant in the construction industry, in particular apprentices. Four separate initiatives were established for this sector by FÁS working with large employers to seek additional opportunities for redundant apprentices.

- Ireland's electricity utility, the ESB, agreed to recruit up to 500 redundant apprentice electricians who were unable to complete their craft qualification because of the economic downturn.
- The Apprenticeship Rules were amended to permit redundant apprentices to progress immediately from one the off-the-job phase to the next, without having to do the next on-the-job phase first.
- The FÁS "Employer Based Redundant Apprentice Rotation Scheme" was introduced to assist employers to provide on-the-job training for redundant apprentices while their own apprentices were attending off-the-job training in FÁS or in the Institutes of Technology. The scheme provided over 450 redundant apprentices with on-the-job training on a rotation basis during 2009.

- An 11-week certified training programme for up to 700 redundant apprentices per year has also was established to facilitate redundant apprentices to progress to higher education and training programmes.

Some of the "green skills" programmes referred to under section 1.4 can also be seen as responding to the needs of this group of unemployed workers.

More generally, FÁS has also reviewed how its training course mix should be altered to respond to the growing unemployment and the changing profile of unemployed clients. Since 2008 a range of customised and flexible supports have been provided to facilitate re-entry into the workforce, for those recently unemployed. The numbers of training offers on the Technical Employment Support Grant (TESG) scheme were increased considerably. This is scheme provides access to a small grant for unemployed persons who are experiencing difficulties in entering and re-entering the workforce, for short term training or financial assistance in job searching.

In order to further increase the numbers of flexible training options to address the rapid rise in unemployment, further initiatives were implemented by FÁS in 2009. These included:-
- The opening-up, and expansion, of FÁS evening courses which were provided free for unemployed people.
- The provision of a range of free new short full-time training courses.
- The provision of a range of free on-line blended learning courses for the unemployed.
- A pilot training scheme for workers on short time working, providing 2-days a week training and income support to workers in companies who have placed staff on a 3-day week, to up-skill these employees.
- Start-your-own-Business training was increased to assist redundant workers.

In the area of vocational education, 'second chance' and further education is seen by the government to have a major role to play in tackling the current unemployment problems, in particular, it supports individuals achieve their full potential and assists them find work in an increasingly technology-driven economy. In 2009, the Minister for Lifelong Learning announced the allocation of an extra 1,500 Post Leaving Certificate places in the Vocational Education sector. These courses, although principally directed at school leavers, are also an important re-entry route to learning for adults. (See section 6.4.1 for a description of these courses).

The following (overleaf) is an example of a recent VET initiative to facilitate progression opportunities for unemployed adults with valuable work experience but low educational qualifications, to progress to higher qualifications levels.

2.1.1 An Initiative Example

1. Title of policy/ measure. *Accelerated Technician Programme*
2. Outline of Policy/ measure. **(a) Rationale**: Due to the recession, increased unemployment has led to a large number of persons considering returning to education. These people can have valuable work experience and they are often quicker learners than recent school leavers. To meet this need the government agreed with a proposal of the Institutes of Technology to establish an Accelerated Technician Training Programme. **(b) Objectives/measurable targets**. The initiative is part of a range of Government supported programmes to address the up-skilling needs of those recently made unemployed so that they can more easily access future employment opportunities. **(c) Target groups:** Adult unemployed second-chance students, non0standard entrants. **(d) Status of implementation**: In 2009 the Government made funding available for 280 places on this programme and a number of Institutes of Technology have now started to provide these programmes.
3. Policy/measure operation and delivery: **(a) Level of operation:** Each Institute of Technology is responsible for developing its own programmes. For example, the Institute of Technology in Tralee provide Precision Engineering and Manufacturing Technology programmes which last 18 months instead of the traditional two year (academic) programme. The Institute of Technology in Letterkenny runs a Pharmacy Technician Accelerated Programme. This is also of 18 months duration, but involves 2 days a week work placement in a pharmacy. All the above programmes lead to a Higher Certificate qualification at Level 6 on the National Framework of Qualifications. **(b) An isolated policy/measure/part of a larger policy approach?** Part of the governments' initiatives to up-skill those recently unemployed. **(c) Key actors involved**: *The third level Institutes of Technology.*
4. Evaluation: **(a) Assessment of effectiveness, efficiency or impact**: Too early to assess. **(b) Indicators of success:** Too early to assess **(c) Integration of outcomes into (a) larger policy/ies**: *Part of the Governments' strategy to tackle unemployment by up-skilling the workforce to facilitate their re-entry into the labour market.*
*5. Conclusions***:** **(a) Obstacles encountered**; measures (planned) to overcome them: Too early to assess **(b) What issues remain to be addressed?** Too early to assess. *6. Source.* Tralee and Letterkenny Institutes of Technology. *Legend : www.lyit.ie/courses/science/lysphrmc,*

3. IMPACT AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE JOINT WORK ON EUROPEAN PRINCIPLES AND TOOLS

3.1. Impact of joint work on European principles and tools on national LLL policies and practices and VET developments

Ireland has participated fully in the European education and training agenda to facilitate greater access to Lifelong learning (LLL), notably in the Bologna and Copenhagen processes. A major goal for the Irish qualification system has been to improve access, transfer and progression and to progress this goal, the government introduced a National Framework of Qualifications in 2003, covering all awards in the state from initial schooling to further education and training including higher doctorate level. This framework provides a system for co-ordinating and comparing awards, thereby facilitating progression and mobility for learners irrespective of the point of entry or the education or training path followed.

The general approach in the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) has many parallels with the Irish Framework approach, as both systems are based on the principle of learning outcomes, and are linked to credit systems and to arrangements for the Recognition of Prior Learning. In June 2009, Ireland completed the process of referencing its' National Qualification Framework to the European Qualifications Framework. (For a description of this process see the example at section 3.1.1). As illustrated in the Table 1 below the EQF comprises eight qualification levels described through learning outcomes (knowledge, skill and competence), the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) has ten award levels.

Table 1: NFQ and EQF Levels

NFQ (Ireland) Levels	EQF Levels
1 & 2	1
3	2
4	3
5	4
6	5
7 & 8	6
9	7
10	8

In 2001 the Irish Government set up the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) which has overall responsibility for all awards in the State. Among the functions of the NQAI is that of liaising with bodies outside the State for the mutual recognition of awards and it has established a 'Qualifications Recognition Service' which facilitates international comparisons between awards. (See a description of this service in the example at section 1.1.1). Ireland has co-operated in recent years, with other EU countries on the development of qualification recognition agreements, and in 2006 the NQAI published policies and criteria on the inclusion in, or alignment with the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) of the awards (or the learning outcomes associated with them), of certain international and professional awarding bodies. These national policies on alignment and the alignment of the NFQ to the EQF are crucial to and will greatly facilitate the recognition of foreign qualifications between Ireland and other countries. The National Qualifications Authority is the National Co-ordination Point for the EQF and as such is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the EQL in Ireland.

In November 2006, Ireland became the first European country to verify the compatibility of its' National Framework of Qualifications with the Bologna Framework, i.e. a Framework for Qualifications for the European Higher Education Area. In 2004 the NQAI published the *'Principles and Operational Guidelines for the implementation of a national approach to credit in Irish Higher education and Training'*. These Guidelines provide a framework for learners to accumulate credits

towards awards, including for prior and experiential learning. This builds on and is compatible with the developments under the Bologna process and in particular the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), a key component for the development of the European Higher Education Area. Introduced originally to support international student mobility and international curriculum development, in so far as it aims to facilitate a flexible system that will allow a transfer between further education and training and higher education, the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), is becoming a generalised and common basis for credit systems in higher education in many European countries including Ireland.

Ireland also participated in and actively contributed to the debate concerning the development of a European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET), an EU initiative to improve the transparency of vocational qualifications within and between Member States. The proposed approach to ECVET has many parallels with the Irish approach to qualifications frameworks, credits and VET in general. The NQAI and its partners the awarding Councils FETAC[8] and HETAC[9] are currently working towards a national approach to credit that will facilitate a seamless transfer between further education and training and higher education and training, similar to the approach proposed for the ECVET system. The credit system being introduced in the context of the Irish Common Awards System has the capacity to be fully integrated with ECVET.

In November 2006, the European Commission formally launched a consultation process on ECVET, and FETAC, as the Irish awarding body for further education and training, was nominated to carry out consultations with relevant VET stakeholders regarding the future implementation of ECVET in Ireland. As part of this consultation process FETAC organised a seminar in 2007 attended by a broad range of public and private national and sectoral organisations concerned with developments in education and training, to discuss the Commissions proposals.

The results of this consultation process were published in a Paper entitled, *'Towards a European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training-Irish Response'*. The consultation process concluded that in broad terms the objectives and functions of ECVET were welcomed by Irish stakeholders who supported its objectives. However, there was a need for the alignment of ECVET and ECTS (the European Credit Transfer System), in order for a seamless transfer of learners between further and higher education as well as transnationally. The lack of transparency and the non recognition of qualifications in VET between member states in the EU were identified as a real barrier to the mobility of people, and the added value of ECVET would be the enhanced mobility of learners within the further education and training sector in Europe. Stakeholders noted that the new VET systems proposed at EU level should bring increased opportunities for recognition of Irish VET awards aboard and recognition of other similar awards here in Ireland and increase the mutual knowledge and understanding of different systems of education and training among European states.

A Recommendation on a European credit system for VET (ECVET) was adopted by the European Parliament on 18 December 2008 and by the Council on 11 May 2009, and the credit system is now available to be implemented by the member states. As the above consultations have shown, in principle Ireland is ready to participate in ECVET and is in a good position to facilitate learners to avail of ECVET, given the existence of the National Framework of Qualification, and the HETAC and FETAC awards systems. FETAC, as the competent body through the implementation of its Common Awards System, will eventually play a key role in the future facilitation of ECVET in Ireland.

The extent and how ECVET and Europasscould complement each other to enhance learner mobility was referred to in the FETAC consultation Paper as an important issue to be addressed at national and

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[8] Further Education and Training Awards Council.
[9] Higher Education and Training Awards Council.
[11] The National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE) is funded by the Department of Education and Science and operates under the aegis of Leargas.

EU level. The Paper noted that the relationship between the Europass portfolio and ECVET needs to be carefully worked, out as Europass mobility is not validated and ECVET may become a more useful tool within the Europass learner Portfolio leading to a merging of these tools.

 ECVET proposes an approach whereby learning outcomes acquired abroad can be taken into consideration for the purposes of issuing a qualification in a learner's country of origin. VET stakeholders in Ireland therefore view ECVET as 'another tool' to support learners engaging in mobility activities, as it will be part of a package of tools to assist in the transfer and recognition of their learning, whether already acquired or to be acquired in a host country. While ECVET will offer recognition to learners, the debate in Ireland about its implementation does not suggest that there would be a significant increase in learner mobility as a result of its implementation rather that the support structure would be there for those who need and who wish to travel abroad for educational reasons. There was general consensus among Irish VET practitioners that the implementation of the EQF will greatly support and facilitate the implementation of ECVET.

The following example outlines the process that was undertaken to reference the EQF to the Irish NFQ.

3.1.2 An Initiative Example

1. Title of policy/measure: *Referencing of the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) to the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning*
2. Outline of policy/measure **(a) Rationale.** The formal adoption by the European Parliament and Council of the recommendation establishing the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) was completed in 2008, and member states were invited to relate their national qualifications levels to the EQF by 2010. This process is to be undertaken by referencing in a transparent manner, their qualifications levels to the EQF levels as set out in the recommendations of the EQF Advisory Group, which was established to co-ordinate the implementation of the EQF at European level. In Ireland the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) had already established a National Qualifications Framework (NFQ) which covers all awards in the state from initial schooling to higher doctorate level, and provides a system for co-ordinating and comparing awards at national level. This Framework also provides the tool by which international qualifications can be compared against national qualifications. **(b) Objectives/measurable targets.**   EQF Advisory Group recommended that the referencing process was required to demonstrate: • a clear and demonstrable link between the national qualifications framework or system and the level descriptors of the EQF. (See Table 1. above); • that national frameworks and their qualifications, are based on learning outcomes; • that the processes for including qualifications in NFQ are transparent; • that national quality assurance systems refer to the NFQ and • there is the agreement of Quality Assurance bodies. **(c) Target groups.** All VET providers, policy makers and learners. **(d) Status of implementation**. The referencing process was completed in June 2009.
3. Policy/measure operation and delivery: **(a) Level of operation.** The NQAI is the National Co-ordination Point for the EQF and as such is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the EQF in Ireland. Communicating EQF developments to national stakeholders is also a key part of this responsibility. In undertaking this referencing process the NQAI was responsible for:
- Promoting the participation of stakeholders in the process. - Co-ordinating referencing of the Irish Framework levels to the EQF, using a transparent

methodology.
- Providing access to information and guidance to stakeholders on the referencing process.

The NQAI convened a Steering Committee to assist it in this process. This included three international experts and representatives of the Irish Awards Councils FETAC and HETAC, the Irish Universities Association (IUA) and the National Council for Curriculum Assessment (NCCA). The Steering Committee used as guidelines the ten 'Referencing Criteria and Procedures' agreed by the EQF Advisory Group. Draft versions of the referencing report were discussed by a NQAI Consultative Group and by wider stakeholders at a national EQF seminar and the draft report was also published on the NQAI website for comments. The final referencing report was adopted by the NQAI in May 2009 and in June 2009; the bodies responsible for quality assuring qualifications in the NFQ gave their agreement to the process.

(b) An isolated policy/measure or part of a larger policy approach? EQF is an overarching framework to facilitate comparison of qualifications and qualification levels to promote citizens' mobility between countries and to facilitate their lifelong learning. It acts as a translation device to make qualifications more readable and understandable across countries and systems in Europe. The core of the EQF consists of 8 qualifications levels, which are described through learning outcomes (knowledge, skill and competence). The EQF will relate different national qualifications systems to a common European reference framework-

(c) Key actors involved. The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland and the European Qualifications Framework Advisory Group. The NQAI participates on this Advisory Group.

4. Evaluation:
(a) Assessment of effectiveness, efficiency or impact. The referencing process established that there was a clear and demonstrable link between the levels in the NFQ and the level descriptors of the EQF. (See Table 1. above), also that:-
- The NFQ and the qualifications within it are based on the principle and objective of learning outcomes and are linked to credit systems and arrangements for prior learning.
- There are transparent criteria and procedures for the inclusion of qualifications in the NQF, which are implemented progressively by different awarding bodies and providers of education and training.
- The different quality assurance systems operating in Irish education and training underpin the NQF and its implementation, and that the relevant quality assurance bodies have been consulted on the referencing process and have given their agreement to it.

(b) Indicators of success. The alignment of the NFQ to the EQF will greatly facilitate the mutual recognition of qualifications between Ireland and other EU countries, and will benefit employers by enabling the recognition of appropriately qualified overseas applicants for jobs in Ireland.

(c) Integration of outcomes into larger policy/ies. The EQF is likely to interact with other national frameworks either as a source of information and methodologies or as an international reference point.

5. Conclusions:

(a) What issues remain to be addressed? The second stage of the EQF implementation in Ireland, introducing a reference to the EQF in all new Certificate and Diploma supplements, should be completed by 2012.

6. Source: European Qualifications Framework. Referencing of the Irish National Framework of Qualifications to the European Qualifications Framework. A National Report, June 2009.
Legend: *eqf@nqai.ie*

The Irish government and VET organisations have also been involved in discussions and decisions regarding the development of several other EU initiatives to progress the European LifeLong Learning agenda These include: -

- the adoption of common European principles in the field of quality assurance;
- the adoption of common European principles on the identification and validation of non formal and informal learning outcomes.

Ireland was a founding member of the European Network on Quality Assurance in VET (ENQA-VET), which aims to promote co-operation on quality assurance among member countries, to exchange information and experience and to provide a forum to develop common criteria and principles for quality within VET. The main tool of ENQA-VET has been the Common Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF), developed by the European Commissions' Technical Working Group on Quality Assurance in VET in 2004. In 2008, a recommendation on a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework (EQARF) was adopted by the European Parliament and by the Council of Ministers in May 2009. The Commission has now called on member states to implement the Framework by 2011. The Irish Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC), was one of the first awarding Council in Europe to be reviewed in terms of compliance with the standards and guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area.

Regarding the validation of formal and informal learning outcomes, the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland worked with the Department of Education and Science (DES) on drafting the (EU) Council conclusions on Common European Principles on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (2004).

Other areas where Ireland has implemented measures to support European education and training initiatives includes government actions to increase participation of young people in VET and to enable early school leavers access the labour market, reflecting policies in the European Youth Pact to address the labour market challenges facing young people. The EU Commission has acknowledged guidance as a key component to advance the European policy objectives of Lifelong learning. Arising from the EU Guidance Resolution 2004, the Commission set up two pilot European Networks of National Forums for Lifelong Guidance and has Ireland participated in one of these forums. The Irish National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE) [11], which provides information and advice to persons wishing to study or train in another member state, participates in the European network of Euroguidance centres funded by Lifelong Learning Programme.

3.2 Promoting geographical mobility of learners/apprentices and teachers/trainers in VET
Until the advent of the economic downturn in 2008, the take-up of mobility opportunities by Irish people in general was quite small and the movement of learners until recent times has been mainly inwards with less outward movement. However with the return of high unemployment, there has been an increase in emigration particularly among young people, and apprentices in particular, have found it difficult to the find the necessary work experience in Ireland to complete their apprenticeships, (see initiative example below Section 3.2.1).

The EU-wide Europass programme, (www.europass.ie), which helps people make their skills and qualifications more easily understood in Europe and promotes geographic mobility for learners, was officially launched in Ireland in November 2005. The National Europass Centre (NEC) was established in the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI). The role of the NEC is to promote and develop the Europass programme in Ireland, and to act as an information point for both learners and employers looking for access to mobility documentation on VET qualifications and

experience. The provision of this mobility documentation has from this year become an obligatory requirement for those who receive funding for exchange visits

and study and work placements under the Leonardo da Vinci Mobility programmes. With this provision in place, NEC expects a significant increase in the number of mobility documents issued to learners from 2010. The table below sets out the number of learners who have been issued with mobility documents since 2006.

Table 2: Learners issued with mobility documents from 2006-09

Year	Number of mobility documents issued
2006	173
2007	174
2008	147
2009	339

Within Ireland, the Qualifications Recognition Service of the NQAI (See initiative example section 1.3.1), facilitates access to the NRP (National Reference Point-Network of Centres). This Network promotes the recognition of international qualifications throughout Europe and other countries and acts as an International Qualifications Database which contains information on foreign qualifications and education and training systems. The higher and university level sectors have developed independent recognition and evaluation processes for the admission of international students into their institutions. However in order to co-ordinate this provision throughout the Irish education and training sectors, a Recognition Implementation Group has recently been formed with representatives from the NQAI, the Department of Education and Science, the awarding councils HETAC and FETAC, and the universities. This group will co-ordinate the implementation of a national policy for the recognition of international awards.

There has for some time been arrangements for transnational VET partnerships and networks for the exchange of 'best practices' between training providers in Ireland and other European countries, and several new VET processes been jointly developed, utilising EU funding for these partnerships.   There have for instance been co-operative developments and partnerships in areas such apprenticeship, trainer development (see initiative example below Section 3.2.1.), curriculum and the transparency of qualifications.   Many partnership projects have been facilitated under the EU Lifelong Learning Programme 2007-13 (LLL), whose aims are to foster exchange, co-operation and mobility between education and training systems within EU member states through its Leonardo da Vinci, (LdV), Grundtvig, Comenius, Study Visits and Erasmus programmes. The former four programmes are managed at national level by Léargas, the Irish the Exchange Bureau. Many Irish students in higher education have spent a period of time overseas as part of their degree programme under the Erasmus Programme and school students, who participated in the Comenius Programme, have spent some time in a European country to improve their language skills. Ireland has been allocated €11,118,000 for the duration of the current EU LLL programme.

Due to the funding available from the EU LLL programme, the geographical mobility of Irish learners has generally increased between 2002 and 2010, and the trend has been upwards from 224 learners in 2002 to 270 in 2006, with significant increases in recent years to 435 learners in 2009. While the range of countries involved, has shown some variation, the number remains at about 12 or 13 during this period.

A number of other inter-related factors have influenced this upward trend in mobility of learners from Ireland. More VET programmes and courses now incorporate a period of work placement and provide opportunities for this to be undertaken in a company located in Europe with the financial

support from LLL-LdV programme. The majority of these work placements are fully accredited by the sending institution and eligible for Europass certification. Also with the economic decline in recent years, it has become more difficult to find suitable work experience at home and Irish people are more motivated to locate this experience abroad. The main obstacles to mobility for Irish learners are limited foreign language skills, the pre-departure language and cultural preparation that has to be undertaken, and reluctance on the part of some learners to travel abroad for training or education purposes.

Under LLL LdV programme the number of teachers and trainers undertaking transnational mobility programmes has averaged 38 each year from 2002 to 2006. However since the start of the LLP-LdV-V programme the numbers have significantly increased. In 2007, 150 teachers and trainers participated in study programmes usually for the minimum period of one week, and the numbers contracted for in 2008 (346 teachers/trainers) and 2009 (316 teachers/trainers), show significant increase in recent years[13]. The obstacles to mobility for teachers and trainers are due to several reasons, the Government embargo on staff recruitment has resulted in lack of substitution cover to go abroad even for the minimum of one week, limited foreign language skills, finding suitable 'host' organisations and a crucial lack of time and resources on the part of the sending institutions to set up and manage these transnational projects and study visits.. Notwithstanding these obstacles, a growing European focus in some VET courses, (see FÁS example below in Section 3.2.2), has motivated an increasing number of teachers and training providers, to participate in transnational mobility opportunities in order to develop and the design courses with EU VET partners.

Other Irish participation in transnational projects has included cross-border, co-operative initiatives in VET between the North and South of Ireland and with Wales, funded under the EU INTERREG Programme. A non-EU funded mobility programme *Wider Horizons,* funded by the International Fund for Ireland (IFI), targets disadvantaged unemployed people between the ages of 18 and 28 in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, and aims to promote mutual understanding and reconciliation between the two traditions in Ireland. It involves training and work experience both at home and abroad with most overseas placements in the USA and Canada. Approximately 200 young people participated in this programme in 2009.

The initiative examples below, describe two recent FÁS[14] mobility programmes undertaken with German VET partners, one for work experience for redundant apprentices in the construction industry and the other for the up-skilling of FÁS instructors.

3.2.1 An Initiative Example

1. Title of policy/ measure: *FÁS (the Irish Employment and Training Authority) Apprentice Mobility Programme*
2. Outline of the policy/measure.   **(a) Rationale.** Due to the economic downturn many apprentices in the construction industry were finding it difficult to either complete their apprenticeship as their employer have ceased trading, or could not find an employer who would offer them an apprenticeship.   **(b) Objectives/measurable targets.** This Programme offers redundant apprentices the opportunity to gain overseas work experience, complete their apprenticeship and also experience another work culture.   **(c) Target groups.** Redundant apprentices.

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[13] www.leargas.ie/leonardo
[14] National Training and Employment Authority.

(d) Status of implementation. The programme has now been extended to Finland where six redundant apprentices were hosted by the City of Helsinki Education Department for an eight week programme.

2. Policy/measure operation and delivery:
(a) Level of operation. After an initial pilot, in 2009, thirty Irish redundant apprentices successfully completed phase 7 of the off-the-job phase of their apprenticeship, through their participation in this programme in Germany in the following disciplines:- electrical, bricklaying, plumbing, plastering and carpentry/joinery. The training manuals and assessments for phase 7 of the Irish apprenticeship programme were translated into German for the German host employers supervising the training, and on their completion these assessments were sent back to FÁS in Ireland. The programme duration was 12 weeks. Each apprentice, prior to travelling Germany, participated in a German language and culture programme and each apprentice group was visited by a FÁS representative during the programme to monitor their work experience and meet with their host organisation.
(b) Is it an isolated policy/measure or part of a larger policy approach? This project was in part funded under the Irish Leonardo da Vinci Mobility Programme.
(c) Key actors involved. The programme is based on a transnational partnership between FÁS and the German Handwerkskammer of Koln.

*3. Evaluation***:**
(a) Assessment of effectiveness, efficiency or impact. Feedback from both the apprentices and their German employers has been very positive. In particular the apprentices found that their experiences of training with new employers from another country and culture will help them in their future careers.
(b) Indicators of success. To date 36 redundant apprentices have completed this programme in Germany and Finland and the programme will continue into 2010.
 (c) **Integration of outcomes into larger policy/ies.** Not applicable.

4. Conclusions:
(a) Obstacles encountered. The main obstacles to date to increasing mobility for learners and in particular apprentices, concerns the difficulty of achieving 'formal' recognition of the learning and experience acquired by trainees and apprentices who participate in training or work experience outside the country.
(b)What issues remain to be addressed? Too early to assess.

*5. Source***.** FÁS, Cork Training Services**.** *Legend:* www.fas.ie

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3.2.2. An Initiative Example

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1. Title of policy/ measure: *German Meister Programme for Irish Instructors in the FÁS Cork Training Centre*

 2. Outline of policy/measure
(a) Rationale. In 2007 the National Apprenticeship Advisory Committee advised FÁS that it should explore the concept of progression qualifications for craftspersons. An expert group was convened with industry representatives and lecturers in key subject areas associated with the trade of carpentry and joinery, and a document was presented to FÁS for approval for the development of course materials for a BSc Degree course in Wood Technology.
(b) Objectives/measurable targets. The aim of this initiative was to raise the technical ability of selected FÁS trainers by facilitating their attendance on an appropriate Meister Programme in Germany, so that they could provide training courses designed to provide progression opportunities for craftspersons in wood technology, and to ensure that the level of

this training met the requirements of the awarding Council HETAC, at level 7 on the National Framework of Qualifications..
(c) Target Groups. FÁS instructors facilitating the proposed course.
(d) Status of implementation. In 2008 HETAC validated a FÁS pilot programme in Wood Technology which will be run in partnership with University College Cork (UCC).
3. Policy/measure operation and delivery:
(a) Level of operation. In 2007 there was a visit by the German Handwerkskammer Zu Koln to the FÁS Cork Training Centre to brief two nominated instructors on the 'Meisterbriefung' (German Meister Qualification). Both instructors travelled to Koln to see the 'Meisterschule' in operation and in 2008 the instructors successfully participated on a course run by the Koln Handwerkskammer to train for Parts 1-4 of the German Meister Examination.
(b) An isolated policy/measure or part of a larger policy approach? See above.
(c) Key actors involved. FÁS, Cork Training Centre, TrainingAdvisory Service and the German Handswerkskammer of Koln.
*4. Evaluation***:**
(a) Assessment of effectiveness, efficiency or impact. Too early to assess.
(b) Indicators of success. The success of this initiative will depend on the number of potential trainee craftspersons who successfully complete this progression programme in Wood Technology.
(c) Integration of outcomes into larger policy/ies. Not relevant.
5. Conclusions:
(a) Obstacles encountered; measures to overcome them. The course has yet to be implemented in Cork training centre.
(b) What issues remain to be addressed? Available funding and the role of FÁS in designing progression training at this level.
6. Source. FÁS, Cork Training Services. **Legend: www.fas.ie**

4   STRENGTHENING LINKS BETWEEN VET AND THE LABOUR MARKET

4.1 Identifying and anticipating skill needs

Irish VET organisations use a mixture of formal consultation, informal feedback and research, to identify skill needs and there are several key players involved in this process. These include the Expert Group on Future Skill Needs (EGFSN) which provides a national research and co-ordination mechanism that includes representatives of the social partners, government departments, industrial development organisations and education and training bodies. Its objectives include:-

1. Identifying the skills needs of different occupational and industrial sectors and advising on the actions to address them;
2. Considering strategic issues in developing partnerships between business and the CVET sectors to meet skill needs at national and local levels;
3. Advising on how to improve the career awareness of job seekers about areas where the demand for skills exist, of the qualifications required, and of how they can be obtained.

Until recently, FÁS, the Training and Employment Authority, has had a Board and advisory committees representing a number of sectors, to inform it of sectoral and general training needs. Under the Labour Services (Amendment) Act 2009, the structure of this FÁS Board has been re-configured and the number of members reduced, although it still includes representatives from the

public and private sectors. FÁS also has a Planning and Research Department, which undertakes studies and observations on employment trends and skills needs in order to inform VET provision, for example the FÁS Quarterly Labour Market Commentary. The FÁS Skills and Labour Market Research Unit regularly produce studies on different occupations and provide a research facility for the EGFSN. The unit has recently established a National Skills Database which acts as an electronic database, gathering all the data which is collected by FÁS and other public bodies in Ireland including the Central Statistics office, which are relevant to the issue of skills demand and supply.

The Expert Group on Future Skill Needs in co-operation with FÁS has also published reports on the skill needs of a range of sectors or occupational areas which include ICT, engineering, the digital media, financial services, life sciences, languages, innovation/creativity skills, management, construction and Healthcare. In 2007 FÁS, together with the EGFSN, commenced the publication of annual National Skills Bulletin. The objective of the Bulletin is to highlight key labour market statistics in order to assist policy formulation in the areas of employment, education, training, and immigration. Another publication on the 'Monitoring of Ireland's Skill Supply; Trends in Education and Training', is also published annually by the FÁS Skills and Labour Market Research unit.

As a significant stakeholder in the provision of VET, FÁS consults with Advisory Committees representing sectoral groups such as the Engineering, Construction and Film/TV sectors, and carries out regular reviews of national skills and training needs. As a result of these consultation processes, the FÁS has developed and co-funds programmes for specific sectors such as management training for owner-managers in the services sector and the Construction Skills Certification Scheme, designed to raise standards of safety among construction industry employers.

In recent years there have been many research reports on skills and labour market surveys published by the Irish Government and its agencies. These have included assessments of the skills and competence needs of employees in specific sectors of the labour market. In many instances these reports have led to the introduction of new national programmes and strategies for VET provision to meet identified needs, for example the research undertaken by the EGFSN has underpinned the development of a National Skills Strategy (NSS) on the future skills needs in Ireland up to 2020, and this Strategy is described in the example below.

4.1.1 An Initiative Example

1. Title of policy/ measure: *'Tomorrow's Skills - Towards a National Skills Strategy'*
2. Outline of Policy/Measure
(a) Rationale. This national skills strategy (NSS) published in 2007, set out to identify the education and training provision required over the longer-term to meet Ireland's economic and social development goals.
(b) Objectives/measurable targets. It findings included the following recommendations.
• To up-skill an additional 500,000 people by at least one level on the National Qualifications Framework by 2020.
• Increase participation rates in upper secondary level to 90% and progression rates to third level to 70%.
• Address the skills needs of the immigrant population and those re-entering employment.
(c) Target groups educational level(s)/ educational sectors. Workers, school leavers, jobseekers and migrants.
(d) Status of implementation. The future policy priorities for the Government will be on

implementing the recommendations contained within the NSS, including identifying the precise mechanisms that will be used to implement these recommendations. The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs will report annually on progress in relation to these recommendations and the National Framework of Qualifications will provide the framework to benchmark progress in the implementation of the Strategy.

3. Policy/measure operation and delivery:

(a) Level of operation. The Skills Strategy is directed towards the Irish labour market in general, as well as examining future VET needs and the adequacy of existing provision. It also examined areas within the Irish economy which had potential for future growth, identifying in particular the information and communications technology (ICT) sector, pharmaceuticals, biotechnology as well as high value engineering.

(b) An isolated policy/measure or part of a larger policy approach: The strategy has been accepted by Government and incorporated into National Development Plan 2007-2013.

(c) Key actors involved. The Government, the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, FÁS and the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland.

4. Evaluation:

(a) Assessment of effectiveness, efficiency or impact. The recommendations in the report will provide the framework for addressing the potential skills needs of the Irish economy over the next decade. In particular, its forecasts for the likely supply and demand for skilled labour, and the key policy issues required to address these needs, as well as its examination of the existing provision of training and education and the benefits of investment in VET, will all remain relevant.

 (b) Indicators of success. The latest National Skills Bulletin produced under the auspices of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs in 2009, indicates that progress is being made towards the NSS targets. Already in response to the strategies recommended, FÁS has developed two initiatives, one in respect of 'Paid Learning Leave' which provides assistance to employers towards the wage cost of releasing low-skilled employees to attend training programmes. The other, 'Individual Learning Options', provides individual support to meet identified training needs of low-skilled employees.

(c) Integration of outcomes into larger policy/ies. This Strategy will have an important influence on Government labour market policies for the future and has been incorporated into the National Development Plan for 2007-2013.

5. Conclusions:

 (a) Obstacles encountered; measures (planned) to overcome them. The downturn in the Irish economy, and the consequent restrictions on Government expenditure, has curtailed public expenditure on training for the employed.

(b) What issues remain to be addressed? How to encourage additional investment from the private sector for training of the employed.

6. Source. National Skills Strategy, EGFSN, Forfas, 2007. ***Legend.*** *www.skillsireland.ie*

A series of Manpower Forecasting Studies, carried out by FÁS in co-operation with the Economic Social Research Institute (ESRI) forecasts the occupational and employment trends in approximately 40 different occupational groups for 5-7 year periods. This example outlines this process.

4.1.2 An Initiative Example

1. Title of policy/ measure. *FÁS/Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) Manpower Forecasting Studies*

2. Outline of Policy/Measure
(a) Rationale. These studies aim to provide guidance to policy-makers, career advisers and the general public about medium-term occupational employment trends.
(b) Objectives/measurable targets. To provide forecasts of employment across the economy for about 40 occupational groups over a 5-7 year time horizon.
(c) Target groups. Policy-makers, education/training providers, career guidance advisers.
(d) Status of implementation, including statistical data. Studies commenced in 1991 and are ongoing.

3. Policy/measure operation and delivery:
(a) **Level of operation.** Studies are produced by FÁS and the ESRI, for distribution nationally.
(b) **An isolated policy/measure/part of a larger policy approach?** One of several forward looking research studies in the area of labour market forecasting.
(c) Key actors involved. *FÁS* and the ESRI.

4. Evaluation:
(a) Assessment of effectiveness, efficiency or impact. The Studies provides useful policy and planning guidance which has been accepted by policy-makers.
(b) Indicators of success. Continued demand for forecasts**.**
(c) Integration of outcomes into (a) larger policy/ies. Studies were used in developing the National Skills Strategy.

5. Conclusions:
(a) Obstacles encountered; measures (planned) to overcome them. On-going need to reflect changes in economy. Statistical continuity.
(b) What issues remain to be addressed? None in particular**.**
6. Source. FÁS**.** *Legend* *www.fas.ie.*

4.2   Integrating skill needs of the labour market into VET provision

Measures have been taken in Ireland during the last decade to facilitate the linking of the skill needs of the labour market with VET strategies.. Notable among these are:

1. The introduction of the National Framework of Qualifications in 2003 which has facilitated progression routes within the formal and informal VET system.
2. The establishment of a National Guidance Forum in 2004, to ensure that the delivery of guidance by labour market and education providers is co-ordinated and delivered effectively.
3. The 2007 'Programme for Government' which in response to identified[15] low literacy levels among some of the Irish adult population, proposed not only to continue to expand adult literacy training, but also to provide funding for English language training for other groups such as migrants.
4. The broad range of Government-funded VET programmes, mainly provided by FÁS, the National Training and Employment Authority, which are available for both employed and unemployed people and in particular those vulnerable to exclusion in the workforce, to help them enter, re-enter or upgrade their skills within the labour market.

At secondary school level the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) has been engaged in the review and revision of the Leaving Certificate (upper secondary) examination subjects to ensure:

- An outcomes-based approach to expressing course and assessment objectives;
- Increased focus on the vocational aspects of subjects; and
- The broadening of the basis and methods for the assessment of achievement.

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[15] -Literacy Skills for the Knowledge Society. An OECD International Adult Literacy Survey, 1997

The 2007 'Programme for Government' in particular, gave considerable attention to the need for *"curricula change to meet skill needs and ensure a broader range of educational opportunities"*. Under proposals in this Programme, the Government aim is to introduce new curricula at secondary school level in subjects such as engineering, economics and technology, and there will be a greater focus placed on maths and science education. The 2006 Government *Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation* also included a range of measures to further strengthen science teaching and learning.

At IVET and CVET level, FÁS training programmes are based on the following criteria.
- Demand by persons who register for training with FÁS,
- Research studies (e.g. sectoral studies),
- Expected recruitment from new or expanding companies,
- The success of existing courses in terms of job placement and
- The views of various local organisations.

FÁS regularly introduces new programmes to respond to new skill needs identified in the labour market; for example for the Bio-Pharmaceutical industry, (see example in section 1.2.1), the Sustainable Energy sector (see example in section 1.4.11) and for the Financial Services sector. FÁS, in its role as the national training authority, develops curricula for all its courses, including for apprenticeship training. It is also responsible for the quality assurance and conformance of its training materials with the requirements of the National Framework of Qualifications.

In the past one of the gaps in the provision of education and training in Ireland was the absence of a unified framework for the validation and certification of qualifications. The establishment of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI), which has overall responsibility for all awards in the State from initial schooling to further education and training including higher doctorate level, was designed to fill this gap. The NQAI has an over-arching role in regard to the development and implementation of a National Framework of Qualifications, and in the future it is planned to set up panels of subject experts to identify new qualification areas and the knowledge and skill levels required therein. Regarding qualification design, both Awarding Councils - FETAC and HETAC, must inform themselves of the education, training, skills and qualifications requirements of industry, including agriculture and the professions, the level of knowledge, skill and competence to be acquired by learners, and promote practices in education and training which meet those requirements.

4.3 Involving labour market actors in VET
Labour market actors have always played a role in VET in Ireland. The setting up of the National Training Fund (NFT) in 2000 gave the social partners, and in particular employers, a policy consultation forum regarding the allocation of funding for skills training for the employed. Employers and unions were represented on the Board of FÁS, although recent the changes introduced in 2009 have removed the statutory basis for this representation. Employers and unions are represented on the EGFSN to assist in the identification of specific skill and qualification needs. They also have representation on the Awards Councils FETAC and HETAC.

The social partners, through their participation in National Partnership Agreements up to 2009, have played an important role in policy development for VET. For example, under the last agreement, *'Towards 2016'*, the social partners agreed on the need to increase the levels of workplace learning and up-skilling.

Employer organisations such as IBEC (Irish Business and Employers Confederation), ISME (Irish small and medium-sized enterprises), and the Construction Industry Federation (CIF), all provide either financial or other incentives to promote training practices among their membership. They also make a contribution to enterprise-based continuing vocational

training (CVT) activities through their participation in the industry-led 'Skillnets' Training Networks Programme.

The trade unions have been particularly active in supporting non job-related training. The People's College, a voluntary adult education institution working closely with the Irish Congress of Trades Unions (ICTU), provides a range of courses from basic education to personal development. The ICTU has a network of Centres for the Unemployed, which offer training to unemployed workers seeking to re-train or to up-skill. SIPTU, the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Trade Union, operates a training facility for its members; providing courses ranging from health and safety at work to employment rights.

At the CVET level, FÁS has developed a Strategic Alliances Programme in partnership with relevant industry and VET stakeholders, to progress skills training at higher levels for the workforce. (See example below). The industry-led Skillnets agency and the Strategic Alliance Programme, are examples of co-operative partnerships between the public and private sectors to promote CVT within enterprises. At higher education level, the Programme for University Industry Interface was established to forge greater links between the learning needs of industry and third-level institutions. These are all examples of collaboration between the Government, education and training organisations, and industry and the social partners generally, to encourage and promote CVT within enterprises.

FÁS consults with specialist Advisory Committees, representing the Engineering, Construction and Film/TV sectors, and in co-operation with these sectors carries out regular reviews of national skills and training needs. FÁS also manages the Workplace Basic Education Fund, in association with the National Adult Literacy Association, to develop the literacy and numeracy levels of employees. This project is overseen by a National Steering Group which includes representatives from the education, business and trade union sectors.

4.3.1 An Initiative Example

1. Title of policy/ measure : : *Strategic Alliances Initiative (SAI)*
2. Outline of the policy/measure: **(a) Rationale.** This is an approach to training of the employed, whereby FÁS contracts with national organisations such as employer, trade unions organisations and Chambers of Commence, to deliver suitable training courses for employees. Such organisations often have close links with companies and employees and therefore are in a better position to provide more relevant training for them.   **(b) Objectives/measurable targets.** By entering strategic alliances with large national umbrella organisations such as ISME-Irish Small and Medium-sized Enterprises, the Small Firms Association, (SFA), and the Irish Congress of Trades Unions (ICTU), FÁS is in a position to deliver strategic training based on real industry needs identified by representative groups   **(c) Target groups.** Managers in SMEs and low skilled workers.   **(d) Status of implementation.** Agreements were made between FÁS and strategic partners at national level, to deliver specified training; however, delivery may be at regional or local level. The initiative commenced in 2005 and the final contracts are now in operation.
3. Policy/measure operation and delivery: **(a) Level of operation.** Following a national tendering process, contracts are agreed to organise and deliver training in areas agreed between FÁS and the strategic partner

organisation(s). The identification of training needs is based on a number of Expert Group Reports on Future Skills Needs and the National Skills Strategy.   At least two of the SAI projects relate to the development of innovative training approaches based on new technologies e.g. the 'KNOW-IT' and 'KESP- Knowledge Economy Skills Passport' programmes. The former is an IT skills development programme, designed to support learners in the workplace taking their first steps in using IT, the latter provides learners with the key skills required to be highly productive in the knowledge economy,. Both of these projects are accredited, self-directed and/or blended learning programmes, that have the added value of developing skills associated with lifelong learning and independent learning, as well as problem-solving and research. Another of the SIA's innovative projects supports the infrastructure for the Workplace Learning Representative. This project represents collaboration between FÁS, and two trade unions - ICTU and SIPTU, for the recruitment and training of volunteer learning and mentoring representatives in the workplace.

 (b) Is it an isolated policy/measure or a larger policy approach? This SAI approach is part of a wider effort by Government, through FÁS and other bodies, to increase CVT for the employed.

(c) Key actors involved. FÁS, employer bodies such as the Small Firms Association, Irish Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (ISME), the Chambers of Commerce, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and other educational bodies such as the National College of Ireland.

4. Evaluation:
(a) Assessment of effectiveness, efficiency or impact. These training alliances have provided a useful mechanism for closer contact and greater understanding between employers and trade unions on new perspectives for CVT for the employed.
(b) Indicators of success.   The programmes have been evaluated and feedback obtained from trainers, participants and, in some cases, from participating companies. Take-up has been variable. Some CVT courses have been in stronger demand than others.
(c) Integration of outcomes into larger policy/ies. Not an issue.
5. Conclusions:
(a) Obstacles encountered: Despite the involvement of the social partners, the take-up of some courses has been moderate.
(b) What issues remain to be addressed? Due to the recession, government priorities have moved away from the public funding from CVT for the employed to CVT for the unemployed. As a result no new contracts are being issued under this initiative.
6. Source. FÁS Annual Reports and Accounts 2006-08. ***Legend:*** *www.fas.ie*

4.4 Promoting workplace learning
Government policy has long been that CVET for persons at work is primarily the responsibility of employers, who are the main source of funds for training for the employed, both through their direct funding of in-company training and their financial contributions to the National Training Fund (NTF). During the last decade policy-makers in Ireland began to take a greater interest in continuing vocational training (CVT) for the employed and additional public resources were devoted to this area. However, the recent down-turn in the Irish economy has resulted in a reversal of this approach, and since 2009, Government priority is being given to CVT for the unemployed rather than for the employed.   The National Competitiveness Council in its' Statement on Education and Training in 2009, noted that *"a balance must now be struck between repositioning the skills of the newly unemployed, with the longer-term objective of up-skilling the entire workforce. The provision of workplace based training, which is fitted around working hours, needs to be actively promoted"*.

The increased focus on CVT for the employed arose from the recognition that much of the Irish workforce would remain at work for many years, but during this time the skills required would change

on a regular basis. The Enterprise Strategy Group in its 2004 report *'Ahead of the Curve[16]'* identified the need to increase skills training for low-skilled and unskilled employees. It was recognised that educational disadvantage among adults was not solely found among the unemployed, but existed also among workers in low-paid, low-skilled employment. According to the National Economic and Social Forum[17] *"Ireland has a high proportion of low-skilled workers compared to other best performing countries, and our level of lifelong learning remains low"*. Government programmes, including those receiving funding from the European Social Funding, supported a significant increase in CVT for the employed.

New strategies to meet the skill needs of the workforce were published in the 2007 *'National Skills Strategy'* which concluded that there was a need to up-skill 500,000 employed people to the next level within the National Framework of Qualifications. (See example section 4.1.1). It also called for adult literacy programmes to deliver basic skills training to employees in low skilled employment, (one in five of the Irish workforce is lacking in functional literacy skills[18]). The FÁS managed Workplace Basic Education Fund is a response to this need

In addition to CVT for the employed, Ireland has a well-established apprenticeship system providing initial vocational training (IVT) in a combination of work and off-the-job learning. The structure of this system was established in the 1990s and the last decade saw a very large increase in the number of apprentices trained, as employers increased recruitment during the Celtic Tiger boom years. This demand placed considerable strains on the education and training system to deliver the required off-the-job training and education. Subsequently, the collapse of the building industry led to a large number of redundant apprentices and very low levels of new recruitment. These rapid changes pose serious challenges to the apprenticeship system.

The principal programmes supporting workplace CVT in Ireland are:

- The *FÁS Competency Development Programme (CDP)*. This encourages the training of employed people by subsidising the cost of approved training programmes covering a wide range of competencies including:- management, IT, retail, contract cleaning and caring. The Programme supports training programmes, based on local and national needs, agreed after consultation between FÁS and the relevant industry organizations. In 2008 a total of 32,000 persons[19] received training interventions under this programme which aims to provide the participants with portable, accredited and transferable skills.

- The *FÁS Excellence through People Programme (ETP)*. This is Ireland's national standard for human resource development, designed to improve a company's operational performance through staff training. It is a voluntary initiative to encourage companies to identify and plan their staff training activities. (See description of this scheme in example section 6.2.1)

- *Fáilte Ireland* operates a national training subsidy scheme known as RETAIN to train employees in the tourism and hospitality sectors.

- *Enterprise Ireland* is a publically funded body which advises and provides grants towards management development and training within indigenous companies involved in manufacturing and internationally-traded services.

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[16] Ahead of the Curve, Report by the Enterprise Strategy Group, Ireland. 2004.
[17] National Economic and Social Forum, Report No. 33, 'Creating a More Inclusive Labour Market' January 2006
[18] Irish Times report 22nd October 2009).
[19] FÁS Annual Report 2008.

- *Skillnets* is an increasingly important promoter of training within companies. It is State-supported and employer-led, and receives most of its funding from the National Training Fund. The programme provides financial support of up to 75% of the cost incurred by enterprise-led training networks, with the possibility of higher support for certified training and training for low skilled workers. In 2008 the agency launched its Training Networks Programme (TNP), with the setting up of 123 networks which included 22,724[20] companies.

Over the past number of years, new informal and non-formal learning routes have offered a variety of learning opportunities for adults and in 2006 Skillnets set up a collaborative Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) forum which includes the National Qualifications Authority, the awarding Council FETAC and two higher education institutes, to support and develop RPL in the workplace. Skillnets continues to encourage its enterprise training networks to use this approach to accrediting learning in the workplace and has set up an internal taskforce to develop expertise in the area.

FÁS, in co-operation of the Institutes of Technology, has developed protocols and procedures for the RPL for the apprenticeship process, thus facilitating increased access to apprenticeship. Other FÁS initiatives to accredit prior learning have taken place in the retail, construction and childcare sectors including the co-funding of the 'Lenora - Accreditation of Prior Learning' (APL) project, 2006-07, which sought to accredit prior learning for those working in the Information Technology (IT) sector.

The following are some examples of recent initiatives to promote workplace learning

4.4.1 An Initiative Example

1. Title of policy/ measure: *Learning @ Work*
2. Outline of the policy/measure: **(a) Rationale.** This project was developed to provide a locally-based initiative to train poorly qualified and low skilled young employees. The project is co-ordinated by the Dublin Employment Pact, a partnership company. It is an innovative scheme that gives employers the opportunity to train their staff for free. All courses are accredited by the Further Education and Training Awards Council–FETAC, and are offered at Level 3, (the secondary school Junior Certificate equivalent), and at levels 4 and 5, (the secondary school Leaving Certificate equivalent), on the National Framework of Qualifications. **(b) Objectives/measurable targets.** Provision of FETAC-certified qualifications for young low skilled employees. **(c) Target groups.** Poorly qualified young employees. **(d) Status of implementation**. The initial project took place during 2001-04, a second round took place from 2005-06, and a third round started in 2008.
3. Policy/measure operation and delivery: **(a) Level of operation.** Training can be provided either at the locally accredited training providers' premises, the Partnership company's premises, or in the employers company if that is suitable. In addition to free nationally-recognised training for employees, there is advice for employers and ongoing support for both employees and employers. There are a variety of modules offered to suit the needs of the company and its' employees these include:- 1. Communications and personal and interpersonal skills. 2. Computer literacy and computer applications such as ECDL. 3. Manual & computerised accounts and office procedures. 4. Forklift truck driving and warehousing operations & logistics. 5. Health & safety in the workplace.

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[20] Skillnets Annual Report 2008.

(b) Is it an isolated policy/measure or a larger policy approach? The scheme operates under the umbrella of the National Development Plan**.**
(c) Key actors involved. The project is centrally co-ordinated by the Dublin Employment Pact, and locally by Area Partnerships. The scheme is supported by FÁS and the Department of Education and Science.

4. Evaluation:
(a) Assessment of effectiveness, efficiency or impact. The first round of the project was evaluated positively and supported by the social partners in the national partnership agreement *'Sustaining Progress'.* A second round of the initiative (2005-6) was implemented in three areas of Dublin, Wicklow and Kildare. The third round of the project started in early 2008. The latest report on the project is *'Upskilling Vulnerable Workers in a Time of Recession: Evaluation of the Dublin Employment Pact Skills for Work and Learning @ Work Programmes 2008-10'.*
(b) Indicators of success. An interesting and well evaluated, local initiative to reach a difficult-to-train group.
(c) Integration of outcomes into larger policy/ies. Currently this is a pilot project.

5. Conclusions:
(a) Obstacles encountered. Government policy priority at present has moved from training employed to unemployed persons**.**
b) What issues remain to be addressed? Future funding is uncertain.
6. Source. Dublin Employment Pact. *Legend*: *www.dublinpact.ie*

4.4.2. An Initiative Example

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1. Title of policy/ measure: *Education in Employment*

2. Outline of the policy/measure:
(a) Rationale: The 2004 OECD[21] Review of higher Education in Ireland recommended the need for reform of the sector, in particular the need to increase and promote access and participation in higher education for those already in the workforce.
(b) Objective/Measurable Targets: 'Education in Employment' is one of the initiatives funded under the first cycle of the Higher Education Authority's (HEA), Strategic Innovation Fund, which aims to promote organisational transformation and collaboration between third level institutions. The project, which has several sub-strands, focuses on the learning needs of those already in the workforce, and includes lifelong learning as a central aim by placing significant emphasis on continual professional development and up-skilling in the workforce.
(c) Target Groups: All adults and in particular**,** workers and migrants.
(d) Status of Implementation:, The project consortium responsible for this measure, has already published a number of reports on different aspects of learning for the employed.

3. Policy/measure operation and delivery
(a) Level of operation: The 'Education in Employment' Consortium is led by the Cork Institute of Technology. The overall project aims are to support higher education institutions in providing more flexible opportunities for learning for the employed. The project sub-strands has examined four areas: - work-based learning; recognition of prior learning, progression opportunities for craftspersons and the learning needs of migrants. (See example section 5.1.1 for a description of the latter project).
(b) Isolated policy/measure or part of larger policy approach: This project is one of a number of initiatives being taken to promote inter-institutional co-operation within the higher education system funded under the HEA '*Strategic Innovation Fund'.*
(c) 3 Key actors: Cork Institute of Technology, Dublin Institute of Technology, Galway-Mayo, Dundalk, Sligo, Letterkenny and Athlone Institutes of Technology, University College

Cork and Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC). The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) is also involved in an advisory capacity.

4. Evaluation:
(a) Assessment of effectiveness or impact: The National Competitiveness Council in 2009[22] noted that inter-institutional collaboration was critical to the continuing success of Ireland's Higher education system. In particular value for money could be enhanced by reducing duplication through rationalising courses. This project is designed to encourage this type of co-operation for the benefit of learners in employment and higher education in general.
(b) Indicators of success: The project provides important cross-organisational development in the following areas: - the development of guidelines for the implementation of RPL processes and practices within educational establishments; the development of a framework for progression of craftspersons to higher education levels (see example section 6.3.1); awareness of the needs of migrants in higher education (see example section 5.1.4) and innovation in work-based learning.
(c) Integration of outcomes: The project has made a significant contribution to date in promoting work-based and blended learning, progression opportunities for craftsmen, the development of frameworks for the Recognition of Prior Learning and a greater understanding of the challenges in meeting the learning needs of migrants.

5. Conclusions:
(a) Obstacles encountered; measures (planned) to overcome them. The need for greater inter-institutional co-operation in Higher Education.
(b) What issues remain to be addressed? Further projects to be identified on learning strategies in employment.
6. Source .Cork Institute of Technology. *Legend:* www.eine.ie

5. ADDRESSING EQUITY, SOCIAL INCLUSION AND ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

5.1 Addressing equity in VET

Government strategies to increase access to VET for the unemployed and socially-excluded are set out in policy documents which have been incorporated into the National Development Plan (NDP) 2007-13. These include the annual Reform Programme, developed within the framework of the European Employment Guidelines, and the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS). Both of these programmes target major investment for individuals with inadequate literacy and numeracy skills, and have identified education and training as central to addressing poverty. Strategies to overcome problems causing obstacles to accessing employment and VET for marginalised adults with low qualifications or with disabilities, were also outlined in the 'National Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016', (see example below). Social Inclusion was one of the key policy contexts within which the former Irish Employment and Human Resources Development Operational Programme (EHRD OP) 2000-06 was prepared in terms of the needs to be addressed and the strategies and policies to be put in place at a national level. Legislation such as the Disability Act 2005, the Employment Equality Act 1998, the Equal Status Act 2000, the Education Welfare Act 2000 and the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004, have all reinforced Government policy to ensure equity of access to VET for specific target groups traditionally subject to marginalisation from mainstream vocational education and training provision.

5.1.1 An Initiative Example

1. Title of policy/measure. *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion: Building an Inclusive Society 2007-2016' (NAP Inclusion)*

2. Outline of the policy/measure:

(a) Rationale. The Government's current National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (NAP) aims to reduce poverty in Ireland to between 2%-4% by 2012, and ultimately to eliminate it by 2016. The plans' actions and interventions are designed to address long-standing and serious social deficits. In the area of VET they focus on:

- ensuring children reach their true potential;
- supporting working age people and people with disabilities, through activation measures and provision of services to increase employment participation.

(b) Objectives/measurable targets. The commitments in the NAP are underpinned by a number of high level goals, with over 150 other targets and actions, and a series of initiatives provided for in the National Development Plan.

The high level VET goals in the National Action Plan aim at:

- The provision of targeted pre-school education.
- Reducing literacy difficulties and tackling early school leaving.
- Introducing an active case management approach to support those on long term social welfare into education, training and employment.
- Increasing the employment and participation of people with disabilities.
- Developing a strategy aimed at achieving the integration of migrants into Irish society.

(c) Target groups. All vulnerable persons who are experiencing marginalisation and social disadvantage, including migrants.

(d) Status of implementation. The first Annual Report on Social Inclusion for 2006-07, was launched in 2008. This report outlined the progress made over this period in implementing the first NAP. Some examples of progress achieved in the area of education included the recruitment of additional literacy and numeracy tutors to provide in-school support and a new Family Literacy Project was implemented.

3. Policy/measure operation and delivery:

(a) Level of operation. The NAP operates at national level and has established new institutional structures to underpin its implementation. A multidisciplinary Technical Advisory Group with representatives of government departments, statutory agencies and the social partners advises on issues related to a data collection strategy on social inclusion. The Government Office for Social Inclusion has overall responsibility for developing, co-ordinating and driving the NAP.

(b) Is it an isolated policy/measure or part of a larger policy approach? Together with the National Development Plan and the current Social Partnership Agreement *'Towards 2016'*, the Government has put place an agenda for social change with which it intends to make a decisive impact on poverty in the years ahead.

(c) Key actors involved. The Office for Social Inclusion, The Social Inclusion Forum, the Department of Social and Family Affairs, Department of Education and Science, FÁS and other relevant Government Departments and bodies, representatives of the Social Partners and interested stakeholders.

4. Evaluation:

(a) Assessment of effectiveness, efficiency or impact. Among the achievements of NAP as set out in the first Annual Report on Social Inclusion 2006-07 are the following.

- A High Level Group on Facilitating and Promoting the Activation of People into Employment has been set up to ensure better integration of activation, income and other supports, and to progress the activation of people into employment and training.
- A Policy for the inclusion of migrants was developed and the government has established the Office of the Minister for Integration with responsibility for the development of migrant integration policy.
- A Local Government Social Inclusion Steering Group to promote and support the

embedding of social inclusion in local government was set up.
 (b) Indicators of success. One objective of the 'Lifecycle 'approach taken in NAP, is to promote an integrated approach to policy development and implementation across a variety of areas including VET.   Indicators will assist in monitoring progress in policies and programmes implemented in various areas at local and regional levels within the country, and in comparisons made to other EU countries.

5. Conclusions:
(a) Obstacles encountered. The severe economic downturn since 2008 has meant that some key assumptions on which these plans are based, may have to be adapted. The surplus in the public finances of recent years has turned into a major deficit.   The significant growth in unemployment since 2008 also means that the challenges of preventing and reducing poverty and social exclusion are likely to be much greater than had been the case over the period since the Plan was put in place in 2007.
(b) What issues remain to be addressed? Availability of relevant data will be essential for monitoring the progress and evaluating the outcomes of the NAP. Data strategies will be further developed over the period of the plan, specifically in relation to the vulnerable groups experiencing poverty and social exclusion.
6. Source. Government of Ireland. Stationery Office, Dublin 2007.
Legend. http://www.socialinclusion.ie/documents/NAPinclusionReportPDF.pdf

5.1.2. Target Groups
- *Early School Leavers*
A specific policy focus of government policy over recent years has been alleviating educational disadvantage, with particular attention being given to young disadvantaged persons with low educational attainment. In 2002 an 'Educational Disadvantage Committee' (EDC) was set up by the Minister for Education and Science (DES). It included representatives from schools and the DES, as well as representatives from adult education and the youth services. The Committee's report, entitled *'Moving Beyond Educational Disadvantage'* published in 2005, attempted to look at disadvantage on a lifelong curve, making specific recommendations, for example, in relation to adult and community education. It acknowledged the inter-generational nature of disadvantage, and that this needs to be tackled in families and in communities as well as in schools.

Statistics show that there continues to be a problem in Ireland with early school leaving, despite the large amounts of money that has been invested in educational disadvantage initiatives at school level. However, in recent years the proportion of early school leavers has fallen from 14.7% in 2002 to 11.5% in 2007, overall this is a lower percentage than the EU-27 average of 14.8% for 2007. In recent years several strategies have been put in place to address the VET needs of those who drop-out of school without any qualifications, as well as the other transition or progression issues associated with this group. A variety of measures and legislation have been introduced to tackle early school leaving, such as the 'Education Welfare Act 2000' and the 'Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004'. The School Completion Initiative combining the Early School Leaver and the School Retention Initiatives, are among a number of other measures to enhance support for the continued participation of young people in school.   Both the 2007 National Skills Strategy and the National Anti-Poverty Strategy have a specific target to reduce the number of early school leavers so that the percentage of those who complete upper second level or equivalent will eventually reach 90% from a baseline figure of 81.6 % in 1999.

Over the last few years, there has been an expansion of FÁS programmes paying trainee allowances, to try to encourage a greater take-up or return to education and training of disadvantaged persons, in

particular early school leavers with low qualifications. A FÁS IVET intervention which targets young people is the Local Training Initiative (LTI) programme, which aims to provide community-based training and work experience opportunities. The main target group for this initiative are people aged between 16-25 years who are unable to access other FÁS interventions for social, personal or geographical reasons. A total of 2,665 participants completed training on LTIs during 2008[23].

A number of progression interventions are available to meet the needs of early school leavers to access higher skills training. These include foundation and bridging training programmes, mainly provided by FÁS in co-operation with the Department of Education and Science, as well as advisory supports to assist progression and flexible part-time and work-based options. FÁS, Foundation Training Programmes include courses for people who have left school early. These courses can be flexible in delivery and concentrate on basic personal skills development, career direction and skill sampling, with a view to progression to Specific Skills Training programmes or entry into the labour market.

Other such interventions include the Youthreach and Young Traveller Programmes which assist young people who have left school with no qualifications, benefit from further education and training. At the end of 2007-08, there were 3,133[24] young persons attending Youthreach programmes and 1,089[25] attending Traveller training centres, while 1,790 early school leavers completed FÁS programmes delivered mainly in 41 Community Training Centres, as well as those completing other initial training courses. The following example is a description of the Youthreach Programme.

5.1.3 An initiative example

1, Title of policy/measure: ***The Youthreach Programme***
2. Outline of Policy/measure   **(a) Rationale:** The Youthreach Programme is designed as part of an integrated strategy to ensure that young early school leavers with no or few qualifications have a second chance to gain access to, and benefit from, education of sufficient quality to allow them to find employment, or to progress to further education and training.   **(b) Objectives/measurable targets:** The programme offers a variety of courses designed to help those whom the regular school system has left behind either through social difficulties, learning disabilities or a need for a system more geared to the individual than the mainstream system can provide.   **(c) Target groups.** Early school leavers.   **(d) Status of implementation:** Youthreach was introduced in 1989. It is defined as an IVET programme at lower secondary school level. Certification is provided by the awarding Council FETAC and progression options to the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate Applied programmes are available.
3. Policy/measure operation and delivery: **(a) Level of operation:** Youthreach provides a two year, full-time integrated education, training and work experience programme for young people between 15-20 years, who have left school early without educational qualifications or vocational training. It consists of two distinct phases. A foundation phase to help overcome learning difficulties; develop self-confidence and the provision of a range of competences essential for further learning. A Progression phase which provides more specific development through a range of education, training and work experience options. An example of this option is FÁS 'Linked Work Experience' which is an employer-supported training and work initiative intended for trainees who have completed the Foundation phase of Youthreach, or who do not require foundation training and can benefit from structured on-the-job training. A training allowance is paid to participants.   Youthreach centres offer core subjects like maths, literacy and computing through to training in skills such as woodwork, metalwork, art, graphic and web design, childcare and communications skills. An Advocacy Service managed by FÁS, provides a tailor-made approach to career planning,

designed to meet the guidance, training and work experience needs of disadvantaged early school leavers moving from Youthreach centres to mainstream training, education or employment. Mentoring facilities are also available, providing Youthreach participants with: - (a) help to identify the best way forward; (b) negotiates on their behalf with VET providers and (c) supports and tracks their progress.

(b) Key actors involved: This programme is a joint initiative between the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. The programme is managed locally by Vocational Education Committees (VECS) and FÁS regional management.

(c) Is it an isolated measure or part of a larger policy approach? Programmes such as Youthreach and the FÁS Foundation (Bridging) Programme, aim to facilitate labour market access for young, educationally disadvantaged young people.

4. Evaluation:
(a) Assessment of effectiveness, efficiency or impact. A survey of outcomes from the Youthreach programme in Vocational Education centres, found that 71% had obtained employment or had progressed to further education or training. A value for money review of the Youthreach Programme undertaken by the Department of Education and Science in 2008, stated that that *"not only did Youthreach achieve its aims but it did so with modest resources"* – confirming Youthreach's professionalism and success.

(b) Indicators of success. Many have joined the programme with little confidence or qualifications, but left with their futures more assured and with a portfolio of skills and experience that has seen most move back into further education, training or into employment.

5.Conclusions
(**a) Obstacles encountered.** Attracting and keeping young people on the programme.
(b) What issues remain to be addressed? Youthreach is now a well-established programme.
6. Source. FÁS Annual Report 2008.**Legend.** *http://www.education.ie*

- Migrants

During the last decade, Ireland experienced a steady inflow of non-Irish workers to meet the demands of an expanding labour market, however due to the economic downturn and growing unemployment this has abated somewhat in the last two years. If the migrants, who continue to live in Ireland, are to achieve the desired levels of integration, they will have to be afforded the same access to education, employment and enterprise as Irish citizens. However, this can only be successful if it is fully-inclusive, participative, accommodating of diversity and focused on equality of outcomes for all. To progress this agenda the government has established the Office of the Minister for Integration with responsibility for the development of Integration policy. In 2005, the Department of Education and Science (DES) established a Steering Committee to co-ordinate its' response to the educational needs of migrants in Ireland, and it has consulted extensively on the development of an intercultural education strategy to assist with the integration of migrant students into education and through this into wider society. The strategy is currently being drafted with a view to completion at the end of 2009.

Some of the key issues involved in removing barriers to access to VET for migrants were addressed in the NAP for Social Inclusion, outlined above in section 5.1.1. One of the actions proposed was the provision of teachers for language support for migrant children and better access to other public services through translation of information. Since 2005 the numbers of language support teachers at primary and post primary levels has risen steadily to 1,175, well in excess of the 550 teachers proposed in the NAP Inclusion target. However due to the cuts announced in the Budget in October 2008, there will be a reduction in the numbers of language support teachers in schools from September 2009. In relation to translated material, the DES website (http://www.education.ie) provides links to VET documents in German, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish, Russian and Spanish. The National Education Welfare Board has also made material available for parents in 18 languages. To meet the language needs of non-EU immigrants residing in Ireland, Integrate Ireland Language

Training (IILT) was established to co-ordinate the provision of English language training for adult refugees and asylum seekers, by the Vocational Education Committees (VECs) and other agencies.

Migrants from EU member states participate on many courses run by FÁS and with the economic downturn it is expected that these levels will increase. In 2007 a number of steps were taken to progress this matter:-

- Language interpreters were made available for a number of FÁS courses.
- Two generic English language modules were developed and three sector-specific modules in the Hospitality, Construction and Security Industries were developed.

In order to make VET services more accessible to EU nationals residing in Ireland, FÁS has a telephone interpretation line service available in all European languages. The FÁS 'Know before you go campaign', launched in 2006 in the new EU Member States, provides relevant information to jobseekers before they come to Ireland. A DVD in five languages has also been produced.

The Social Partners also launched an Action Strategy in 2008 to support Integrated Workplaces. This was organised by the Office of the Minister for Integration which funded the strategy, which includes a range of initiatives to assist employers and trade unions to respond effectively to the challenges of a culturally diverse workforce and to create integrated workplaces. Another initiative is the EPIC Scheme[26] 'Employment for People from Immigrant Communities', set up in 2007 through collaboration among the Dublin business community, which resulted in nearly 500 people from both the EU and non EU immigrants being placed in either education and training (36%) or jobs (64%).

A report on a survey of 'Migrants and Higher Education'[27] produced in 2008 by the Cork Institute of Technology, identified barriers faced by migrants in Ireland when they attempted to access third level education. This report, which was part of the Education in Employment Programme, is detailed below.

5.1.4. An Initiative Example

1. Title of policy/ measure. *Migrants and Higher Education in Ireland*
2. Outline of policy/measure,   **(a) Rationale**. During the last decade Ireland has experienced a steady flow of non-Irish workers and the majority have come for economic reasons. Research has shown that without migrant labour, certain sections of the Irish economy would not have functioned successfully over the past few years. The new arrivals are a diverse group. If they are to achieve the desired levels of integration they have to be afforded the same access to education, employment and enterprise as Irish citizens. This group of potential learners face additional barriers in their efforts to access higher education.   **(b) Objectives/measurable targets.** The aim of this project was to identify barriers faced by migrants working or looking for work in Ireland, when they sought to access third level education.   **(c) Target groups**. Non-Irish learners and asylum seekers.   **(d) Status of implementation**. Project was completed and a report published in 2008.
3. Policy/measure operation and delivery: **(a) Level of operation.** This was a collaborative project conducted through a series of migrant focus group surveys and interviews with third level college staff and stakeholders such as employers.   **(b) Is it an isolated policy/measure or part of a larger policy approach?** The project was funded through the Higher Education Authority's Strategic Innovation Fund as part of its 'Education in Employment' project, (see example section 4.4.2), which focuses on the

lifelong learning needs of those in employment.
 (c) Key actors involved. The project Consortium was led by Cork Institute of Technology, and included Sligo, Dublin, Athlone, Dundalk, Letterkenny and the Galway-Mayo Institutes of Technology.

4. Evaluation:
(a) Assessment of effectiveness, efficiency or impact. Research found that the four main barriers to educational advancement for this group were:-

- Lack of clear consistent information provision for potential third level migrant students on entitlements, entry requirement and educational rights.
- Low levels of English language skills.
- Lack of recognition of international qualifications and of prior leaning (RPL).
- Inconsistent information regarding fees and fee structures together with high fees charged to non-European Union citizens.

The report recommended that information on higher educational programmes should be more easily available, as well as information on entitlements, fees and access for learners. Standardized entry level guidelines for competence in English should be set out for all third level colleges, and there should be clear and accessible policies on Recognition of Prior Learning across the third level sector, as well as clear equivalences for international awards mapped to National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).
(b) Indicators of success. The role of third level education, and further training and up-skilling was identified by all interviewees as essential to combating racism and for developing a more inclusive, integrated and intercultural society in Ireland.
(c) Integration of outcomes into larger policy/ies. It is intended that the findings of this project will inform national policy, as well as facilitating higher education institutions to address more effectively the needs of this diverse group of learners.

5. Conclusions:
(a) Obstacles encountered. Overcoming language barriers was identified as critical to successful integration. Barriers to third level education was particularly pronounced for asylum seekers who identified the inadequate levels of financial support they received coupled with unrealistic high fees.
(b) What issues remain to be addressed? The project found that there was a lack of co-ordination and cohesion with regard to social and educational policies and procedures for migrants, issued by various relevant Government Departments and third level colleges. While net inward migration and an expanding labour market were current at the time of the project's initiation, the changed economic circumstances and current negative growth projections, brings the issue of integration, education and up-skilling of the 'new Irish' into even sharper focus. If conditions are not improved for greater integration of migrant workers into employment and education, social exclusion and segregation will result.
6. Source. Strategic Innovation Projects Unit, Cork Institute of Technology. **www.eine.ie**

- Training for the Long term unemployed
After over a decade of unprecedented job creation, Ireland's unemployment rate has risen rapidly in the last two years, from 101,000 in 2007 to 279,800 at the end of 2009, mainly due to a contraction in the construction industry. Building craft jobs fell by 71,000 or 38% between the years 2007-09 and unskilled building jobs fell by 37,000 or 42%. Despite considerable inroads made into reducing the number of long term unemployed people during the last decade, where numbers fell from 148,000 in 1999 to 93,000 in 2006, there still continues to be a considerable number of long term young and older unemployed people seeking to enter or re-enter the labour market after an absence due to unemployment, disability or other reasons. In many cases this group are now encountering increased barriers to accessing employment due to low education and skill levels and jobs competition from

those recently unemployed.   There are a broad range of Government-funded VET programmes available for this group of unemployed people and those vulnerable to exclusion in the workforce, to help them re-enter or upgrade their skills within the labour market. Government priorities for publicly-funded training programmes for the unemployed are set out in the annual Reform Programme, formerly the National Employment Action Plan (NEAP), and these were developed within the framework of the European Employment Guidelines.

In 2005, the Educational Disadvantage Committee (EDC), in its' report on *'Moving beyond Educational Disadvantage'*, looked at disadvantage on a lifelong curve and made specific recommendations in relation to the provision of adult and community-based education for disadvantaged people encountering barriers to further VET. The National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016*, 'Building an Inclusive Society'*, (see example section 5.1.1 above), also set out a wide-ranging and comprehensive programme of action to address poverty and social exclusion, including the need to increase access to education and training as a means of tackling this problem.

Both the education and training systems run bridging courses to facilitate progression onto mainline education and training programmes for the long-term unemployed and for those who have become marginalised due to disabilities or other social problems. FÁS, the National Employment and Training Authority, provides a broad range of CVT programmes for both short and long-term unemployed people who have become excluded from the workforce.   The following is an outline of the range of the agency's training programmes which cover a wide variety of skill levels and areas. They include 'Foundation Training for Jobseekers' which comprises:

- Alternance (Return to Work) training;
- Local Training Initiatives;
- Linked Work Experience and the
- Skills Bridging/Foundation Programme.

These courses are open to all age groups and concentrate on basic skills development. They are seen as bridging courses with a view to progression to specific skills training, the latter comprises employment-orientated courses that lead to qualifications which offer learners both generic and advanced skills. In 2008, over 5,701[28] persons completed this type of training. Traineeships run in co-operation with employers, concentrate on occupational skill development, targeting new labour market entrants and unemployed persons. FÁS Community Training Centres also offer the opportunity for trainees to improve their basic skills, targeting in particular, early school leavers. The Community Employment Programme (CE) which contains an element of basic training, also targets long-term unemployed and socially excluded persons. In 2008, approximately 20,500[29] unemployed persons and jobseekers completed training courses in FÁS.

- Returnees to the Labour Market
Since the economic downturn in 2008, FÁS has provided a range of customised and flexible supports to facilitate re-entry into the workforce for those recently made unemployed. (See section 2.1). The Technical Employment Support Grant (TESG) scheme for example, provides a range of speedy and flexible supports to clients who are experiencing difficulties in re-entering the workforce, as it facilitates access to a small grant for unemployed persons who would benefit from a short term training course or financial assistance in job searching. Due to the recession the numbers of training offers on this scheme have been increased considerably. An integrated support service is also provided by FÁS for people made redundant because of company restructuring or closures. This involves skills analysis, training and retraining courses and job placement.

Expanding the Workforce (ETW) is another FÁS initiative aimed at persons who for various reasons, such as family responsibilities, have become excluded from the workforce.   It is a tailored and

flexible response to the training needs of lone parents and women returnees seeking a gateway into the labour market and assists them to progress to higher level positions once they are in employment.

- Education and training opportunities for the low-skilled

The Department of Education and Science (DES) is responsible for a number of programmes to assist people with low or no qualifications progress to further or second chance education opportunities. These include the following programmes.

(a) The 'Back to Education Initiative' (BTEI), Part-Time and Community Options. Introduced in 2002, this initiative has resulted in a major expansion of second-chance education for young disadvantaged people and adults with low education qualifications, as it provides flexible learning opportunities to gain qualifications and specific skills that enable progression to further education and training. A high priority of the BTEI is to target individuals and groups that experience particular and acute barriers to participation in the labour market, and there is considerable emphasis on engaging with "hard-to-reach" groups—those who are more difficult to engage in the formal learning process. Another important function of the BTEI is to ensure that learning progression opportunities are available to persons progressing from the Adult Literacy Service.

When the BTEI- Part-time options was initiated, there was a clear intention to target the skill needs of those in employment, particularly those with low education qualifications. However, until recently financial eligibility criteria acted as a disincentive to this group, as those in employment, even the low skilled, and some categories of the unwaged (e.g. women in the home), were required to pay fees for part-time courses. Recently as a result of proposals in the 2007 'Programme for Government', eligibility criteria were amended to allow free tuition to any adult with less than upper second level school education. In total there were 27,104[30] participants on courses under the BTEI Part-time strand in 2008.

Increasingly, community and voluntary groups are also seen as important providers of CVET for low skilled adults. These groups operate mainly in disadvantaged areas and facilitate access to training and employment opportunities. In 2002 the government introduced a Community Strand under the BTEI, ensuring that a proportion (i.e.10%) of all funding for this initiative should be given to education activities organised by local community groups. Many of these part-time and community-based activities are now publicly-funded and co-ordinated by public authorities such as the Vocational Education Committees (VECs).

The Guidelines for the BTEI Part-time and Community strands, advocate strategies to promote- accessibility; inclusiveness and the recognition and accommodation of diversity, as well as local consultation and an area based approach to learning. The following example illustrates this approach.

5.1.5. An Initiative Example

1. Title of policy/ measure: *Guidelines on Increasing Men's Participation in Adult Education – a report on case studies examining VET initiatives undertaken through support from the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI)*
2. Outline of the policy/measure: (a) **Rationale.** The White Paper on Adult Education acknowledged the contribution of community and adult education providers in formulating new and effective bottom-up educational strategies with marginalised groups, and the potential contribution of these strategies to engage with highly marginalised persons such as men with low educational

qualifications. While at EU level there is no significant gender imbalances in participation in in adult education, a report on Life long Learning in Ireland in 2008 identified men as under represented in adult and community education generally. This poses a significant challenge to the education system, made all the more critical by the downturn in the Irish economy where extensive job losses took place particularly among males in the construction industry, and demonstrates the urgency of attracting more men, particularly the low skilled, back into education and training.

(b) Objectives/measurable targets. Men are significantly under represented in BTEI programmes and this trend is intensifying and highlights the need for specific strategies to attract men with low skills or few qualifications back to education.

(c) Target groups. Low skilled and poorly educated men.

(d) Status of implementation. This was a pilot project.

2. Policy/measure operation and delivery:

(a) Level of operation. These guidelines summarise case studies of five VET pilot projects funded under the BTEI that were run in both rural and urban locations. These training projects included:- a PC maintenance course for unemployed men; a multi-skills course which included developing horticulture and business skills, where the majority were men from farming backgrounds; a back to education pre-apprenticeship course targeting young male early school leavers; a course for men who wished to become professionally involved in the community education as tutors, facilitators or outreach workers; a course for traveller men and for those who were drug dependent, and the training needs of men involved in the fishing industry.

(b) Is it an isolated policy/measure or part of a larger policy approach? These projects were all funded under the BTEI.

(c) Key actors involved. The Further Education Development Unit of the Department of Education and Science, Aontas- the Adult Learning Organisation and the Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA).

3. Evaluation:

(a) Assessment of effectiveness, efficiency or impact. The case studies identified a number of common themes regarding the challenges facing men wishing to access education and training, these included negative memories of school experiences and financial barriers to participation in VET. The motivating factors to become involved were to improve job and career prospects and to keep up-to-date with their children's educational development**.**

(b) Indicators of success. The report recommendations emphasised the need for access to supports such as guidance, peer support and the tailoring of VET activities to the specific needs and interests of a diverse group of men

(c) Integration of outcomes into larger policy/ies*.* The BTEI is funded under the National Development Plan 2007-13

4. Conclusions:

(a) Obstacles encountered. The case studies found that men from working class backgrounds with poor education standards were difficult to attract into a structured learning environment, in particular the formal education system, due in some cases to negative experiences in initial schooling, poor literacy skills or cynicism about second chance education.

(b) What issues remain to be addressed? The most significant findings of this exercise were the identification of the need for a positive, organisational and management commitment to the inclusion of men in second chance education with explicit policies backed-up by action.

5. Source. Further Education Development Unit, Department of Education and Science.
Legend*: wwwirgov.ie/edu*

(b) The Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS). This education programme provided by the DES, facilitates full-time, work-related second-chance VET for unemployed adults aged 21 or more, who have been receiving specific social welfare payments for at least six months. Lone parents and persons with disabilities who satisfy these criteria are also eligible. The courses are education-led and vocationally-oriented, they are free of charge, and can last up to two years. This scheme has proved successful in opening up learning and progression opportunities for people who have been marginalised by unemployment. VTOS trainees can pursue subjects in the Junior or Leaving Certificate programmes, or other modules certified by the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) at Levels 1-3 on the National Framework of Qualifications.

(c) *The National Adult Literacy Strategy.* This strategy which addresses the low literacy levels of some of the Irish adult population, identified in the 1997 OECD International Adult Literacy Survey, was one of the principal policies underpinning the Government's *White Paper on Adult Education*. The strategy was implemented by the setting up of the 'National Adult Literacy Scheme' co-ordinated by the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA). The scheme provides free tuition to those who wish to access literacy programmes and it is available nationwide It is open to individuals, family groups, travellers, ex-prisoners, migrants, non-Irish nationals and unemployed people participating in FÁS employment programmes. Since 1997, investment in the adult literacy service increased from €1 million to €30 million in 2008. In the same period, the annual number of participants increased from 5,000 to 49,000[31].

Other agencies which support or provide vocational training for those who lack qualifications or have low skills include the following.

- FÁS, who together with the DES operate the Youthreach programme (See example section 5.1.3 above), and the *'Skills4u'* initiative for early school leavers, to support the learning and progression needs of this group and to facilitate access to further education and training. Through its Community Training Centres (CTC) network, FÁS also provides basic skills courses for those with low skills who have become marginalised from the workforce. Individual learning plans are organised for every learner and these are regularly reviewed during their period in training. A progression strategy is provided when learners leave CTCs and this includes a minimum of 6 months support together with structured work experience which is a key component of the individual learning plan, especially for early school leavers.

- The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform who in conjunction with FÁS, provide training workshops for people with low educational attainment who have been in prison, to help them re-entry the labour market and improve their literacy and numeracy skills.
- The Department of Social and Family Affairs who operate, a Community Development Programme which includes training programmes for urban and rural disadvantaged communities throughout the country.

- Training for the low skilled in the workforce
It is recognised that educational disadvantage among adults is no longer concentrated among the unemployed, but exists also among workers in low-paid, low-skilled employment. According to the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) *[32]* approximately 39% of all Irish persons of working age have less than upper second level qualifications. The Enterprise Strategy Group in their 2004 report *'Ahead of the Curve'*, identified the need to increase skills training for low-skilled and unskilled employees, and support for lifelong learning has been prioritized in the National Development Plan for 2007-2013. New strategies to meet the low skill needs of the workforce were addressed in the 2007 National Skills Strategy, which concluded that there was a need to upskill 500,000 employed

people to the next level within the National Framework of Qualifications. As a result there has in recent years, been a significant increase in state funding for schemes to encourage in-company training and training for people in employment.

The FÁS *One Step Up Initiative* launched in 2005, gives up to 100% funding support to employers to train low skilled and vulnerable workers. All FÁS programmes and initiatives for training for the employed are now aligned to this initiative in order to encourage employers to train their staff and to promote an ethos of lifelong learning in the workplace.

The National Skills Strategy also called for adult literacy programmes for employees. In 2007, 2,054 employed persons participated in courses related to literacy and numeracy, funded through the Workplace Basic Education Fund (WBEF). FÁS in association National Adult Literacy Agency operates this scheme, which is designed to deliver basic skills training in the workplace to employees in low skilled and low paid employment. Other recently introduced workplace literacy schemes include the 'Return to Learning' scheme[33] set up in all the local authority areas, which targets outdoor workers

-Older People and VET
The current Social Partnership Agreement '*Towards 2016'*, contains specific commitments to increasing the participation of older people in the labour market, and to progress this agenda FÁS participated in a '*Senior Select, Retain & Retrain'* project, to improve the employment situation of older workers. The project was funded under the EQUAL Initiative during 2005-07, and aimed to assist in the training, recruitment and retention of older workers, i.e. those over 50 years old. Older people are also encouraged and supported in actively involving themselves in family literacy projects and a literacy project to address poor literacy from an intergenerational family perspective was started in 2007 under the 'Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools – DEIS' Initiative.

- Learners with special needs
The National Disability Authority surveys on Disability and Employment and the FÁS Disability Customer Survey of 2005, have indicated that people with physical and intellectual disabilities have experienced barriers to, and in some instances exclusion from, mainstream training and employment opportunities. Legislation such as the Employment Equality Acts of 1998 and 2004, and the Disability Act, 2005, were introduced by the Government to ensure equity of access to VET for this group of people. Strategies to overcome marginalisation from the workforce experienced by persons with disabilities have been outlined in the National Plan for Social Inclusion. These strategies, together with government plans to further mainstream employment and training for people with disabilities, form key elements of a new National Comprehensive Strategy for People with Disabilities[34] published in 2006.

The FÁS 'Vocational Training Strategy for Persons with a Disability' issued in 2006 sets out to address the barriers to training for people with disabilities, through increased access to mainstream training and employment programmes. To overcome these barriers FÁS has put in place a 'High Support Bridging Process' for persons with the requisite skills, to progress from rehabilitative training to mainstream vocational training.   In 2007 a number of other steps were taken to further assist those with disabilities to access mainstream courses.
- Specialist classroom equipment and assistive technology were made available as required.
- Accessibility to FÁS training centres was significantly improved.

FÁS also subcontracts the delivery of some training programmes for persons with disabilities who require a greater level of support than may be available in their mainstream programmes. These programmes are delivered by specialist training providers who can award FETAC certification similar to that available in FÁS mainstream training programmes. The organisation also administers grant

schemes designed to assist those with a disability to access employment. These include the Disability Awareness and Training Support Grant Schemes, which are aimed at increasing support for the employment of persons with a disability and the Adaptation of Training Equipment and the Employee Retention Grant Scheme, designed to help employees who acquire a disability, to continue at work.

- *Access to Higher Education*

While most entrants to third-level and higher education are school leavers, government policy is to encourage greater participation at this level by mature and second-chance learners. In particular, priority has been given to increasing participation from persons from traditionally under-represented groups, such as students from disadvantaged backgrounds, Travellers[35] and people with disabilities. To achieve this, special arrangements have been put in place in various universities, including alternative entrance qualification requirements and special foundation or preparatory courses. An important financial aid for this category of second chance learner is the Third-Level Access Measure (Fund), which provides financial support for students with disabilities, mature students and those from disadvantaged backgrounds, to access higher education. The Millennium Partnership Fund, a community-based initiative, provides support for students from disadvantaged areas, who wish to participate in further and higher education. The following describes current government plans to increase access to higher education.

5.1.6. An Initiative Example

1. Title of policy/ *measure:* *The National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2008-2013.*
2. *Outline of the policy/measure.*   **(a) Rationale.** In 2003 a National Office for Equity of Access to Third-Level Education was established within the Higher Education Authority (HEA), to implement measures to increase access to third-level education for those who had traditionally experienced barriers to learning at this level. In 2008 the HEA published a *National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2008-2013* which followed on from a previous action plan covering the period 2005-2007 [36]. One of the key outcomes of the 2005-07 Plan was the publication of the first national evaluation of higher education access programmes, which provided a practical framework for policies and initiatives for a successful access programme. A number of other initiatives were established, including special links with second-level schools to encourage increased access for students facing social and economic barriers, and students with disabilities were supported with technical education aids and supports.   **(b) Objectives/measurable targets.** Current analysis has shown that the expansion of educational opportunities has not benefited all sections of Irish society equally and suggests that there is significant potential demand for further and higher education among the adult population and particularly from those who went directly into employment when they left school. The key objective of the 2008-13 Plan is to improve access to higher education among this group, in particular, to encourage the broadening of entry routes to higher education institutions to reflect the fundamental changes to learning progression routes brought about through implementation of the National Framework of Qualifications. The emphasis in future will be on the development of institution-wide strategies to address the complex challenges at the centre of inequality in education by for example, the provision of more flexible learning opportunities at third level. (See example at section 4.4.2).   **(c) Target groups**. Students with a disability, mature students and those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds including Travellers and other minorities.   **(d) Status of implementation.** During 2007-08 the HEA began the collection of data on the

social, cultural and ethnic background of new entrants to higher education, including collecting information on disability status. In 2008 a website giving information on the range of financial supports available for students was launched www.studentfinance.ie.
3. Policy/measure operation and delivery: **(a) Level of operation**. The Plan envisages that practical assistance will be provided to institutions to develop and implement access plans and to mainstream access in their activities. The National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education will set goals and targets and develop baseline data for the participation of students with a disability, mature students and those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds over the period 2007-13. Grant support to students will be provided through the Third-Level Access Measure which includes funding for Students with a Disability, the Student Assistance Fund, the Millennium Partnership Fund, and the financial resources of higher education institutions. **(b) Is it an isolated policy/measure or part of a larger policy approach?** This is part of the government's policy to increase participation in higher education for those from disadvantaged backgrounds and to enhance collaborative approaches across the higher education sector, to address this challenge. (c) **Key actors involved**. The Higher Education Authority (HEA) and the National Access Office for Equity of Access to Third-Level Education.
4. Evaluation: **(a) Assessment of effectiveness, efficiency or impact.** Current analysis shows that the expansion of educational opportunities has not benefited all sections of Irish society equally[37]. **(b) Indicators of success.** Meeting the needs of those who wish to return to education at this level will require integrated, joined-up approaches to the multi-dimensional needs of this diverse group of individuals and communities. **(c) Integration of outcomes into larger policy/ies.** This plan sets out a vision for higher education access policy over the next six years which is consistent with the National Skills Strategy. (See section 4.1.1).
5. Conclusions: **(a) Obstacles encountered.** See above. **(b) What issues remain to be addressed?** See above *6. Source.* The Higher Education Authority. ***Legend:*** *www.hea.ie*

5.2   Support services for groups at risk

Support is provided from the National Educational Welfare Board and the National Educational Psychological Service for young people at risk at secondary school level, to address absenteeism, early school leaving and special needs. In the budget for 2009, the Department of Education and Science was allocated €10 million[38] to further enhance services to children with special needs. Included as part of this investment, is the expansion of the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) to cover all schools in the country by the end of 2009.

 In 2008 the Department of Education and Science conducted a targeted programme to encourage young people between 18 and 25 years who were signing on the live register for more than six months, to gain additional skills and qualifications under the Back to Education Initiative. Facilitators arranged meetings with clients under the age of 25 years in an attempt to raise awareness of the education opportunities and supports available.

 The Youthreach Programme, referred to in the example in section 5.1. 3, provides a two year, full-time integrated education, training and work experience for young people between 15-20 years, who have left school early without qualifications or vocational training. A training allowance is paid to participants. This programme also has measures for guidance and counselling as well as psychological services. An Advocacy Service managed by FÁS, provides a tailor-made approach to career planning designed to meet the guidance, training and work experience needs of disadvantaged early school

leavers, as they move from Youthreach centres to mainstream training, education or employment. Mentoring facilities are also available, providing Youthreach participants with (a) help to identify the best way forward; (b) negotiating on their behalf with VET providers and (c) supports that track their progress.

In the context of the labour market, FÁS, the Training and Employment Authority, is responsible for the provision of career guidance, advice and information in respect of employment and training opportunities. These services are provided countrywide through the organisations' National Employment offices and its' Local Employment Service. Job and training information is also available to migrant jobseekers living in Ireland through this service. An integrated support service is also provided by FÁS for people being made redundant because of company restructuring or closures. This involves skills analysis, training and retraining courses and job placement.

Other groups at risk who need special support services include lone parents, Travellers[39], former offenders and those in treatment for substance abuse. A Lone Parents Initiative, jointly co-ordinated by the Department of Family and Social Affairs and FÁS, aims to facilitate the labour market integration of lone parents, the majority of whom are women. *Expanding the Workforce* (ETW) is a FÁS tailored and flexible response to the training needs of lone parents and women returnees seeking a gateway into the labour market, and assists them in progressing to higher-level positions once they are in employment.

In 2006 a five-year Strategy for Education for Travellers was developed by FÁS. One of the issues it addresses is how existing educational supports for Travellers and their children might best be integrated into mainstream IVET provision. The Strategy recognises the importance of creating a training environment which can facilitate working with the Traveller community in the context of equality and anti-discrimination and it is described in the following example.

5.2.1. *An Initiative Example*

1. Title of policy/measure: *The FÁS Traveller Strategy 2007-2010 and Training and Employment Programmes for Travellers[40]*
Outline of the Policy/Measure: **(a) Rationale:** In 2006 a comprehensive five-year Strategy for Education for Travellers was developed by FÁS with the assistance of the Educational Disadvantage Committee and the Advisory Committee on Traveller Education. One of the issues it addresses relates to how existing educational supports for Travellers and their children might best be integrated into mainstream IVET provision.   **(b) Objectives/measurable targets:** The Traveller Strategy implemented in 2007, aims to improve labour market provision for Travellers. It recognises the importance of altering the cultural context of the organisation in ways that are welcoming of the Traveller culture and history, as well as the importance of creating a training environment which can facilitate working with the Traveller community in the context of equality and anti-discrimination. To achieve this aim, FÁS has introduced intercultural awareness training for its staff. FÁS is also aware that Travellers, as a group, may need additional supports to attend mainstream training and employment programmes. Fundamental to the achievement of the recommendations of the Strategy is the setting up of networks with representatives of the Travelling community, to create links and manage expectations between FÁS and the Traveller community.   **(c) Target groups/educational level/educational sector:** The strategy is aimed at Travellers, both young and older, with low levels of educational qualifications (i.e. below Leaving Certificate level). The Young Traveller Programme is defined as an IVET programme at lower secondary school level.   **(d) Status of implementation.** An ongoing strategy within FÁS that is being implemented countrywide.

3. Policy/measure operation and delivery:

(a) Level of operation: The training programmes developed under this strategy place emphasis on the core skills of literacy and numeracy. The Senior Traveller Training Programme provides Travellers with the skills to successfully make the transition to work and to participate fully in their communities. Certification by the Further Education Awards Council (FETAC) of courses provided in Traveller Training Centres ensures a range of progression opportunities for participants.

(b) Is it an isolated measure or part of a larger (education/training/employment/social) policy approach? This is part of a comprehensive five-year strategy for the education of Travellers developed by Government agencies. The FÁS strategy aims to give a range of skills to the trainees and endeavour to break the cycles of illiteracy and social deprivation.

(c) Key actors involved: Department of Education and Science-Education Disadvantage Committee; Advisory Committee on Traveller Education, Vocational Education Committees; FÁS, the Training and Employment Authority; Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

4. Evaluation

(a**) Assessment of the effectiveness, efficiency or impact. policy**: The outcomes of this FÁS strategy and the special training initiative below, has demonstrated the willingness of Travellers to move into mainstream employment and develop their business ideas.

(b) Indicators of success. The numbers of Travellers participating and completing mainstream training programmes.

(c) Integration of outcomes into (a) larger (national, sectoral, regional, local) policy/ies: In 2007 FÁS participated in another Special Initiative for adult Travellers to expand the employment prospects of this group. The initiative had three aims:

- o To redress the imbalance in Traveller unemployment;
- o To support Travellers already engaged in the Traveller Economy;
- o To provide a special training fund to address the specific training needs of adult Travellers across all regions.

5. Conclusions:

(a) Obstacles encountered. The importance of altering the cultural context of the organisation in ways that are welcoming of the Traveller culture and history, as well as the importance of creating a training environment which can facilitate working with the Traveller community in the context of equality and anti-discrimination.

(b) What issues remain to be addressed? The project has demonstrated the need for on-going support and mentoring for this group of trainees.

6. Source. FÁS. *Legend*: *www,fas.ie*

The Educational Equality Initiative (EEI) supports education for very disadvantaged men and women such as those in treatment for substance dependence. EEI projects have piloted a range of innovative approaches designed to attract the most disadvantaged adults through active outreach work, neighbourhood worker schemes, buddy schemes and a range of other activities. The main facilitators of all the above courses are the Vocational Education Committees (VECs).

The Probation Service also provides initiatives designed to address patterns of criminal behaviour associated with social exclusion, with an emphasis on restorative justice initiatives. A 'Linkage Programme' was set up between the probation service and other relevant state agencies, to increase the number of offenders successfully placed in employment, education or in FÁS Community Employment schemes.

The Adult Educational Guidance Initiative (AEGI), following recommendations in the White Paper on Adult Education, originally set out to target learner participants on Vocational Training Opportunity Schemes (VTOS), Adult Literacy courses, Community Education Programmes and those engaged on the Back to Education Initiative. In 2006, the remit of the service was expanded to

include former residents of educational institutions. The Service is staffed by professional Guidance Counsellors and Information Officers who provide a range of guidance supports including:
● a 'drop-in' information service for learners and the general public;
● one-to-one guidance counselling;
● referral to welfare, health and other appropriate services and supports;
● the provision of outreach services to client groups who are hard to reach and
● identifying gaps in educational provision for adult learners in order to inform future planning.

The services adopt a client-centred approach and offers impartial and independent advice, information and guidance on educational and vocational options, which can include advocacy to educational providers and other support organisations. Evaluations of the AEGI have shown that contact with professional, impartial and client-centred guidance services has a positive impact on clients, by promoting changes in their attitudes to learning and prompting them to consider possible progression opportunities in education and training.

 The AEGI services work closely with local education and training providers to identify needs and plan provision for guidance support for learners. Since the inception of the programme, over 30,000 individuals have accessed AEGI services including significant numbers of adults from outside the designated target groups e.g. people with learning difficulties, physical disabilities and/or mental health problems, unemployed people and foreign nationals.

With the advent of the recession and the increase in unemployment, adult education Guidance has a vital role to play in helping unemployed people decide the steps they need to take to create new employment opportunities and career progression. The increase in public awareness of educational opportunities in the current climate, and the rising number of unemployed seeking education and training opportunities has resulted in a huge increase in the demand for Adult Educational Guidance services nationally.

5.3   Active citizenship

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment is the body which advises the Minister of Education and Science on matters relating to the curriculum for early childhood education in primary and post-primary schools. The aim of this curriculum is to ensure that all children are provided with learning opportunities that develop their full potential and to prepare them to meet the challenges of the 21st century. The school curriculum aims to foster the development of key skills in communication, problem-solving, critical thinking, inquiry, investigation and analysis, and social and personal awareness and interaction.

The social, personal and health education (SPHE) curriculum in primary schools provides particular opportunities to foster the personal development, health and well-being of children, to help them create and maintain supportive relationships and become an active and responsible citizen in society. The SPHE plays an important role in developing an understanding of the democratic way of life and individual and group rights and responsibilities. It provides opportunities for children to learn about, and actively participate in, the various communities to which they belong and to develop a sense of a shared commitment. It can also help them to value and take pride in their national, European and global identities and to come to an understanding of what it means to be a citizen in the widest sense.

In recent years Léargas- the Irish Exchange Bureaux, which operates under the aegis of the Department of Education and Science and manages the EU 'Youth for Europe Programme', has partnered *'Generation Europe'* a Brussels-based organisation, in the production of *Europa Diary,* a practical classroom tool which aims to provide information for young people on issues relating to their role as European citizens, as well as on topics such as the environment and consumer issues. The Diary is free of charge to almost 22,000 transition year students across Ireland. It includes a teachers

guide that it can be used as a classroom tool, with lesson plans and worksheets, and the content in every edition is localised so that the information within it are relevant to the students in different countries. In 2007 the Diary was available in a bilingual format in both English and 'as Gaeilge' (Irish).

Regarding measures for the integration of new migrants into Irish civic life, in May 2008, the Minister for Integration published a Statement on Integration Strategy and Diversity Management called "Migration Nation". This Statement recognised that a key challenge facing the Government and Irish society is the need to integrate people of different cultures, ethnicity, language and religion so that they become the new Irish citizens of the 21st century. This Statement of Policy includes the following key actions in relation to access to education and training.
• Citizenship and long-term residency to be contingent on proficiency of skills in the spoken language of the country.
• More targeted support for teachers and parents dealing with diversity in the classroom or in the school setting.

Much of the available research by way of public opinion polls shows that the Irish people are adapting well to what has been, by international standards , a very rapid transformation from a comparative homogeneous people to a country with a much more diverse population,.

6. QUALITY, EXCELLENCE AND ATTRACTIVENESS OF VET

6.1   Improving the quality of VET

The principal legislation underpinning quality assurance (QA) in Irish initial, further and higher education and training is the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 and the Universities Act 1997. The National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), set up under the Qualifications Act, requires that all awards included in the National Framework of Qualifications are quality assured, and a key objective of the NFQ is to promote and maintain standards*.* The Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC), and the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC), set up under the Qualifications Act in 2001, are each responsible for agreeing quality assurance procedures with providers delivering VET programmes that use their awards, as well as the monitoring of standards of these awards (See examples 6.1.1. below).

The 1999 Qualifications Act also led to the establishment of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI), and this body also has a role in monitoring the quality assurance of VET. This involves the review of the performance of the Awards Councils and the review of the effectiveness of the Quality Assurance procedures of Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT). These institutions must agree their QA procedures with the NQAI, and are subject to quality assurance arrangements, which include regular evaluation by national and international experts and evaluation by learners of their VET programmes and ancillary services. A review of the effectiveness of the QA procedures in the Dublin Institute of Technology was undertaken, on behalf of the NQAI, by the European University Association in 2005. The subsequent report, published in 2006, made a range of recommendations in regard to ongoing enhancements and concluded that the Institute was "a dynamic institute." The NQAI must consider the findings arising out of such evaluations and may make recommendations to both the Awarding Councils and Dublin Institute of Technology which they must implement. The effectiveness of the NQAI itself was reviewed in 2007.

An evaluation of the effectiveness of The Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) was completed in 2006 by an international review panel commissioned by the NQAI. HETAC was one of the first agencies in Europe to be reviewed in terms of compliance with the standards and

guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area. The process concluded that HETAC has performed effectively its principal statutory functions, and had developed policies and procedures for each function which are being implemented. HETAC and the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in the UK, signed a Memorandum of Understanding in June 2006 to co-operate and collaborate on quality assurance matters in higher education. One of the areas of co-operation selected relates to the identification of fraudulent award bodies, which have the potential to damage the reputation of both Irish and UK higher education institutions.

The Universities Act, 1997**,** specifically requires each university "*to establish procedures for quality assurance aimed at improving the quality of education and related services provided by the university*", and to carry out evaluations, and review the effectiveness of its QA procedures. In 2002, the governing authorities of the seven Irish universities established the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB), which has delegated authority to organise periodic reviews of the effectiveness of the QA procedures in place in universities. The Higher Education Authority (HEA), which has a statutory role under the Act to assist the universities achieve their objectives, also has an overarching role with regard to reviewing quality assurance procedures within the third-level sector and may publish a report on the outcome of any such review – a process which is conducted in consultation with the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland. The first such review of quality assurance procedures in the universities was undertaken by the Higher Education Authority in conjunction with the IUQB, and the outcome of the review was published in early 2005.

The Irish Higher Education Quality Network, which comprises the main organisations with a role or interest in quality assurance in higher and education and training in Ireland, was established in October 2003. Membership includes the Universities, the Institutes of Technology, the Higher Education Colleges Association, the Higher Education Authority, HETAC, IUQB, Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT), NQAI and the Union of Students in Ireland (USI). The network provides a forum for discussion of QA issues among the principal national stakeholders involved in the quality assurance of higher education and training. It is working towards the development of a common national position on key QA issues, in order to contribute and inform the debate on those issues at the European level, as well as facilitating the dissemination of 'best practice' in QA amongst practitioners and policy makers involved in Irish higher education and training.

 The following example outlines the QA procedures developed by FETAC for the further, non-tertiary education and training sector.

6.1.1. An Initiative Example

1. Title of policy/ measure: *Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) Quality Assurance Process*
2. Outline of the policy/measure: **(a) Rationale.** In Ireland, the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act of 1999, created a new legislative framework for a more coherent, high quality VET system. Under this Act FETAC is responsible for quality assurance (QA) and the setting of standards for VET programmes at non-tertiary further education and training level, in co-operation with HETAC which is concerned with QA procedures for tertiary level VET programmes.   **(b) Objectives/measurable targets.** FETAC makes awards to learners completing a broad range of programmes offered by a variety of VET providers, and has developed a comprehensive strategy to quality assure the programmes leading to its' awards. This strategy involves three co-ordinated separate functions, including quality assurance, formal accreditation and continuous monitoring of standards.

5. Conclusions:

(a) Obstacles encountered. The large workload involved in monitoring QA standards in Irish VET programmes.

(b) What issues remain to be addressed? The proposed amalgamation of FETAC, HETAC and the NQAI was announced in the government budget in October 2009. The new organisation will also be responsible for the external QA review of the Universities, a function which is currently performed by the Irish Universalities Quality Board and the Higher Education Authority. The proposed amalgamation was welcomed by FETAC, and will bring a more coherent approach to qualifications and quality assurance across all areas of further and higher education and training in Ireland. The current date for amalgamation is late 2011.

6. Source. FETAC. *Legend:* www.fetac.ie

offer awards from the National Framework of Qualifications (at levels 1 to 6). In March 2006, FETAC adopted and published its policies on 'Quality Assuring, Assessment, Validation and Monitoring of Programmes' for providers who wish to become recognised by them. The validation process examines how a programme meets the specifications for an award. This involves the evaluation and review by FETAC of the VET providers' published QA criteria and procedures, and the implementation of any findings which may have arisen through the application of these procedures.

The providers on their part must implement any findings arising from this evaluation by FETAC. To ensure this is carried out, FETAC will review provider registration agreements within a period of five years from the date of the initial agreement.

(b) Is it an isolated policy/measure or part of a larger policy approach? The National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), set up under the 1999 Qualifications *(Education and Training)* Act, requires that all awards included in the NFQ are quality assured.

(c) Key actors involved. FETAC, the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) and all providers of VET courses at non-tertiary level in Ireland.

4. Evaluation:

(a) Assessment of effectiveness, efficiency or impact. In 2008, FETAC commenced the monitoring of its' registered providers to evaluate the effectiveness of their QA procedures and to assure the integrity of their awards. Monitoring is based on the providers own self-evaluation of their policies and processes. FETAC published its first annual QA Monitoring Report in June 2009.

(b) Indicators of success. The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland has responsibility for the QA review of the performance of both the awarding councils FETAC and HETAC, and a review of FETACs' own performance and functions commenced in 2007. Since FETAC achieved ISO90001 in 2007, it has been audited regularly. Each surveillance audit has confirmed that FETAC continues to maintain the required quality standards.

(c) Integration of outcomes into larger policy/ies. In 2008 FETAC was awarded the contract for a two year programme to act as secretariat to the European Network for Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (ENQA-VET). This network, established by the European Commission in October 2005, aims to promote co-operation in quality assurance among member countries in the EU, to exchange information and experience and to provide a forum to develop common criteria and principles for quality within VET across the EU. The ENQA-VET network also intends to serve as a bridge linking developments in higher education to those in VET. FETAC is currently developing a website to make information available nationally and internationally on all matters related to quality assurance in Irish further education and training, and also to support the work-plan of ENQA-VET, as well as assisting in the national implementation of the EU European Quality Assurance Reference Framework.

In its' Statement of Strategy for 2006–09, FÁS committed the organisation to equality proofing the services it provides, and how it provides these services, and to evaluate their effectiveness and efficiency in meeting the changing and increasingly diverse customers' needs and demands. The following example describes how this QA strategy is implemented in the organisation.

6.1.2. An Initiative Example

1. Title of policy/measure: *FÁS, the National Training and Employment Authority, Quality Assurance Strategy*
2. Outline of the policy/measure: **(a) Rationale:** The FÁS Statement of Strategy for 2006-09 specified that it will "*provide higher quality, and more innovative and flexible services to customers by embracing a culture of quality and service excellence, by providing programmes and services that are approved and accredited by the Awards Councils, and by seeking customer feedback and continuous improvement*". As the national training and employment authority, FÁS also has an important role in the implementation of the National Framework of Qualifications, and a basic principle of the National Framework is that all awards which are included in it, or aligned with it, are quality assured. **(b) Objectives/measurable targets:** Building on good practice, FÁS has developed a Quality Assurance (QA) Policy Framework which:- (a) interprets and reflects the awarding councils, HETAC and FETAC QA requirements in an organisational context, (b) incorporates FÁS's own QA requirements, and (c) augments existing organisational quality assurance policies and practices. A senior Management Quality Assurance Group was set up to oversee the harmonisation and alignment of FÁS QA procedures with those of the Awards Councils' criteria **(c) Target groups**.The FÁS QA strategy relates directly to the operation of good practices in the provision of initial and further vocational training for jobseekers and those already employed in the workforce. **(d) Status of implementation:** In 2007, FÁS reached agreement with FETAC which sanctioned the compliance of its quality assurance (QA) policy for its' training programmes with those standards set out by FETAC. FÁS has also reached agreement in principle with HETAC, in relation to a formal agreement which will be concluded following successful validation of relevant training programmes currently under development. In 2008 FÁS incorporated QA requirements into contracts for all Community Training Centres courses and Local Training Initiatives funded by FÁS, thereby ensuring that QA standards are implemented for example, for all early school leavers programmes.
3.Policy/measure operation and delivery: **(a) Level of operation:** The FÁS QA policy is based on the following keys points. ● There are QA procedures for all training that it provides, organises and/or procures, thereby ensuring a consistent approach to QA across the organisation. ● Builds on organisational good practice. ● Incorporates a learner focus which identifies and meets learner needs. ● Ensures the continuous development of FÁS training programmes and related services. FÁS has also established QA policies for the following areas:- 1. Communications with stakeholders; Equality i.e. facilitating diversity; staff recruitment and development; information and arrangements on access, transfer and progression. 2. Systematic approach to programme development, delivery and review; fair and consistent assessment of learners. 3. Clarity in sub-contacting/procuring programme delivery and internal monitoring and evaluation of programmes to ensure continued relevance and effectiveness. In future FÁS learning provision will be externally approved and monitored and the findings will be published by the Awards Councils.

(b)Is this an isolated measure a larger policy approach: FÁS has contributed to the shape and form of the National Framework of Qualifications and to the manner in which the Framework operates, and it continues to influence developments through its nominated representation on the Board of the Qualifications Authority and FETAC.

(c) Key actors involved: FÁS, FETAC and HETAC, the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland.

4. Evaluation:

(a) Assessment of effectiveness, efficiency or impact. FÁS clients are the primary beneficiaries of its QA policy as they will have access to an increasing range of awards on the National Framework of Qualification, (The 1999 Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, requires that all awards included in the National Framework of Qualifications are quality assured.

(b) Integration of outcomes into other policies: FÁS also implements the quality management systems, Q-Mark and 1SO9000 awards. These systems play an important role in improving the delivery of training services for all FÁS clients. FÁS, through its Services to Business provision, also has a national scheme to promote quality excellence in training for employed workers, (see example 6.2.1 below).

Conclusions:

(a) Obstacles encountered. Time taken to negotiates agreed QA procedures with stakeholders and FETAC.

(b) What issues remain to be addressed? Public recognition as a quality-assured organisation ensures a number of key advantages for FÁS, in particular the quality of its programmes are enhanced in an increasingly competitive training and education environment. Also learners' confidence in the quality and relevance of FÁS programmes will be further developed.

5. Source. FÁS. *Legend:* www.fas.ie

6.2 Promoting excellence in VET

FÁS has for several years had a policy of designating certain training locations as Centres' of Excellence, such as the Centre of Excellence for training in the Biopharmaceutical and Pharmaceutical Sector in Cork, (see Initiative Example Theme1.2.1). Another such training facility was recently established for construction skills in Mount Lucas in the midlands. This centre specialises in training for construction plant operators and training in sustainable energy installation to meet the anticipated market demand for installers. FÁS also won three awards in the 2008 'Vodafone Innovating in Government Award' Scheme, which recognizes excellence and creativity for innovative initiatives in the public sector. The Awards were given for the FÁS *Electronic Database on Skills Demands and Supply*, a FÁS Local Training Initiative *Coxes Demesne*, targeting training for young unemployed people in a highly disadvantaged area where only 7.7% of the inhabitants derived their primary income from employment. Another award was given to FÁS for its training in '*Sustainable Energy Technologies*'.

In a number of countries including Ireland, self-assessment reports written by VET providers are used as a starting point for external evaluation. There is usually no imperative that the accreditation body carries out the assessment on its own; in most cases this task will be delegated to a group of VET experts in the field of vocational training and education. If the result of the evaluation is negative, accreditation will be denied and the VET provider will have to apply again after having improved its organizational structures and the quality of its training. This is the model described below, for the FÁS *Excellence Through People Standard,* an approach introduced by FÁS to improve HR excellence and promote continuous skills development for employees in industry and organizations providing services, whether in the public and private sectors.

6.2.1 An Initiative example (see over)

5. Conclusions:

(a) Obstacles encountered. The time taken to raise awareness among companies of the benefits of achieving the Standard.

(b) What issues remain to be addressed? To increase the numbers of organisations applying for the Award.

6. Source. FÁS. *Legend:* www.fas.ie

unions and the government.

(b) Objectives/measurable targets. The scheme aims to encourage the development of employees to their full potential so as to maximise their contribution to the specific needs of the organisation, and to show recognition to organisations that have achieved the standard**.**

(c) Target groups. All types of organisations are eligible to apply for this FÁS Standard including manufacturing and service companies and the voluntary and the public sector.

(d) Status of implementation. The Standard has been in operation for several years and is ongoing. In 2008 two new programmes at FETAC level 6 were developed to train advisors in supporting the implementation of the standard.

3. Policy/measure operation and delivery:

(a) Level of operation. Applications for the award of the standard are considered and assessed according to the following:-

- A review of the organisations plans and objectives.
- The preparation of their training plan.
- Review of their training strategies.
- Implementation of training and development records.
- Employee communications and involvement.

 Points are given for each criteria and to achieve the standard, organisations must score 80% in each section and 80% overall The certification is given for one year during which the organisation can use the ETP logo for marketing and recruitment purposes. There is an annual reassessment by FÁS to keep the award, and a fee is charged for the assessment process with a special reduction for SMEs. In order to apply for the Standard, an organisation conducts a self-assessment, takes action to meet the Standard requirements and applies for accreditation. (a) It is then assessed by FÁS and an independent Approvals Board, which may include representatives from the social partners, HR professional and associations and other selected companies. Then if appropriate the award of Excellence Through People is granted.   FÁS has produced a CD–Rom which describes the assessment process and includes interviews with staff in organisations who have achieved the Standard.

(b) Is it an isolated policy/measure or part of a larger policy approach? The Standard is part of FÁS' Quality Assurance strategy and demonstrates its' public commitment to learning in the workplace and standards of excellence therein.

(c) Key actors involved. FÁS and Irish organisations generally.

4. Evaluation:

(a) Assessment of effectiveness, efficiency or impact. Achievement of the Standard should benefit an organisation by: - (a) increasing its ability to attract and retain high quality staff; (b) show improved organisational performance; (c) contribute to greater employee job satisfaction and better skills; (d) promote the provision of better quality products and services and (e) benchmarks the HR function.

(b) Indicators of success. There are currently over 350 Irish organisations accredited with 'Excellence through People' and an increased number of public sector organisations are availing of the standard including local authorities.

(c) Integration of outcomes into larger policy/ies. It is critical for their success that Irish organisations have their human resource development strategies aligned with their business plans.

At national level it is critical that all VET awards are developed to the highest standards to protect the integrity of the Irish awards system. The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland promotes the maintenance of standards of awards in both the further and higher education and training sectors, and through the alignment of these awards with the National Framework of Qualifications, which has now been referenced the European Qualifications Framework, there is a growing link with European developments in this area.

The Further Education and Training Awards Council-FETAC in partnership with key stakeholders, aims to build a responsive and quality assured awards system for this VET sector, through the development of national standards which will ensure that these awards are relevant and responsive to the requirements of the labour market, provide clear employment, progression and personal opportunities for learners, and have national and international status. The following example describes how these standards were developed.

6.2.2 An Initiative Example

1. Title of policy/ measure: *The Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) Standards Development Process and Criteria for VET Awards*
2. Outline of the policy/measure: **(a) Rationale.** Set up in 2001, under the 1999 Qualifications Act, FETAC is responsible for monitoring and determining the standards of the awards given by providers delivering VET programmes at non-tertiary, further education and training levels. In future the development of new standards and awards for further education and training will follow the FETAC Standards Development Process described below. **(b) Objectives/measurable targets**. One of FETAC's specific functions is to determine the standards of knowledge, skill and competence to be acquired by learners who gain awards for VET courses, which are in accordance with the criteria of the National Qualifications Framework, at levels 1–6 (See Diagram at Section 6.4 below). **(c) Target groups.** All VET learners and providers participating in further non tertiary education and training. **(d) Status of implementation.** Until 2003, the most common award system in further VET was that developed by the National Council for Vocational Awards (NCVA), and bodies such as FÁS and other State industry agencies providing VET had each developed separate systems for the recognition of learning taking place under their responsibility. In 2003 the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) requested FETAC to place all the existing and former awards of these awarding bodies, on the new National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). Consultation on a policy for determining new standards for awards commenced in 2004 with the establishment of the Standards Forum, which included a wide range of stakeholders from industry, the social partners and VET providers. When the process was completed and agreed with the NQAI in 2005, all existing and former awards were placed at appropriate levels on the NFQ. FETAC has now assumed these awarding functions, bringing together all certification under one banner. A three year awards development plan has been implemented in partnership with the former awarding bodies, which provides for the review of existing award standards and the development of new standards for the period 2006 -2009.   In 2006 a range of entities were established to play key roles in the migration of existing awards and the development of new award standards. At national level these comprise: - *Standard Development Groups* whose role is to undertake the development and review of standards of knowledge, skill or competence for named awards from levels 1–6 in the NQF in

accordance with published FETAC criteria, guidelines and procedures. These Groups involve industry and sectoral bodies, with a significant remit for developing standards in specific occupational fields, for example FÁS, Teagasc (agriculture), Fáilte Ireland (tourism), and other relevant statutory and non-statutory bodies. The first Standards Development Group submitted proposals in November 2007 and a register of these Groups is now kept by FETAC. - *A Standards Advisory Board* was also established to advise FETAC in relation to the development of standards and to quality assure and systematically review this process. At local level the following entities were also set up.

- Groups of local providers and
- Subject Matter Experts.

FETAC undertakes to review standards for named awards every five years or earlier, in response to particular changing needs and requirements. All FETAC awards are now included on the National Framework of Qualifications and all new awards will be developed in the context of the Framework. Over 135 proposals for the development of new awards in a range of areas have been received since May 2008, and 50 of these proposals have been approved for further development.

2. Policy/measure operation and delivery:
(a) Level of operation. Standards are a necessary pre-requisite to VET programme development and before programmes can be developed for a named award, the standard for the award must first be developed. The validation process is how FETAC evaluates a programme submitted by a provider, to ensure that it is consistent with the standards of the award(s) named in the programme.

As described above, FETAC has built the process and accompanying procedures to initiate new award development and the migration of all current awards of the former awarding bodies, and it has published a range of policies and criteria to ensure the quality and standards of its awards.   These standards are statements of knowledge, skill and competence which are expressed as learning outcomes and communicated by way of award specifications. The FETAC process for developing standards is participatory one, which enables the active involvement of all appropriate stakeholders. When developing an award, FETAC informs itself of the education, training and qualification requirements, as well as the level of knowledge, skill and competence of the relevant industry sectors, which includes agriculture, business, tourism, the professions and the public services.

Providers are responsible for the assessment process i.e. learner assessment, authentication, results approval, appeals and certification requests to FETAC. All assessments within the FETAC system are now criterion referenced. Each assessment technique has assessment criteria which details the range of marks to be awarded for specific standards of knowledge, skill and competence demonstrated by candidates.   Providers also responsible for the statements of knowledge, skill and competence expressed for an award. The agreement by FETAC on the efficacy of providers' QA procedures is a prerequisite for gaining and retaining registration to offer FETAC awards.

FETAC is primarily responsible for awards at levels 1-6 on the National Framework of Qualifications. Major awards are the principle class of awards placed on the NFQ and these are divisible into minor awards. The recently introduced 'Common Award System' will ensure awards are relevant to both employers and learners needs, and coherent with the National Framework of Qualifications. Over time all existing awards will be harmonised (reviewed) into the Common Awards System, which will enable FETAC and VET providers to enter into arrangements for credit transfer based on competences.

(b) Is it an isolated policy/measure or a larger policy approach? Part of the overall approach by FETAC to establish standards for the national VET award system.

(c) Key actors involved. Key stakeholders include industry representatives employers, trade unions, learners, the public and private sectors including the community sector, former awarding bodies, statutory bodies, education and training (including further and higher education and training), and international VET experts..

4. Evaluation:

(a) Assessment of effectiveness, efficiency or impact. The infrastructure is now in place, resources have been identified and initial methodologies have been tested. The needs of learners will continue to be a guiding principle for FETAC.

(b) Indicators of success. The principle of keeping the learner as a key focal point will continue to be embedded in the outputs and indicators for all goals. All activities will continue to be checked for learner impact.

(c) Integration of outcomes into larger policy/ies. Part of the national awards development process linking into the NFQ.

5. Conclusions:

(a) Obstacles encountered. Considerable resources were required to migrate former awards into the Common Awards system.

(b) What issues remain to be addressed? FETAC published in 2008, a process for proposing and developing new awards and interested stakeholders can now, through the FETAC website, propose new awards for development.

6. Source. FETAC. *Legend*: A copy of the policy for determining FETAC standards may be downloaded from http://www.fetac.ie/standards.

6.3 Higher level qualifications in VET

Changing economic circumstances are creating demand for new and higher skills which will pose both challenges and opportunities for the third level sector. In particular, universities and Institutes of Technology will have to deliver more flexible, labour market orientated qualifications, (the National Skills Strategy predicted that in the future many jobs will require third-level qualifications). In 2008 the Government set up a Steering Group to look at a new 'National Strategy for Higher Education' and examine the roles and relationships of institutions in the higher education system. The Group will seek to increase greater inter-institutional collaboration, so that the Irish system can deliver the levels of efficiency, performance, innovation and growth that will optimize economic recovery and social development in future years, and enable it to reach higher levels of research and innovation. Under the 'Education in Employment' initiative, (see example section 4.4.2), in which several third level Institutes of Technology have played a significant role, a project was undertaken to develop a framework for the development of progression for craftspersons to level 7 and beyond on the National Framework of Qualifications. The following is a description of this project.

6.3.1 An Initiative Example.

1. Title of policy/ measure: *Framework for the Progression of Craftspersons*

2. Outline of the policy/measure:

(a) Rationale. The FÁS standards-based apprenticeship is a structured system of skills development for craft workers across a wide range of activities. Most of the people in apprenticeship represent a quarter of all young males leaving school, and half of those who do not continue to full-time third level education. Some craftspersons have undertaken further academic studies taking advantage of existing progression opportunities in the Institutes of Technology, (ITs), but it is recognised that this number could be increased by the provision of more flexible diverse and accessible learning progression opportunities.

(b) Objectives/measurable targets. This progression framework sets out for learners, employers and higher education providers, an overall progression route to facilitate holders of Advanced Craft Certificate awards progress to Level 7 and beyond on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). It shows that there are already a number of programmes available in many different formats i.e. full time, part time and flexible learning – in which craft certificate holders are currently progressing in Institutes of Technology.

(c) Target groups. Apprentices and craftspersons holding Craft Certificates.

(d) Status of implementation. The project was proposed in 2006, however since then the economic climate has changed significantly, particularly for those working or apprenticed in companies connected with the construction industry. This could be a significant factor in the future engagement of a greater number of craftspersons in higher education.

3. Policy/measure operation and delivery:

(a) Level of operation. The project set out to illustrate and quantify the need for progression opportunities for craftspersons. Three different surveys were undertaken of the following groups.

- Apprentices in a number of partner educational institutions, of whom 75% had achieved Leaving Certificate level at secondary school.
- Craftspersons currently undertaking undergraduate programmes in Cork Institute of Technology and Dublin Institute of Technology and
- Employers of craft certificate holders.

The surveys confirmed the desire of many apprentices (94%) to progress to higher education and the planned outcomes were:-

(1) Investigation and recommendations of generic principles for the development of 'user-friendly' and appropriate progression routes for craftspersons to degree level in engineering and related craft areas.

(2) Publication of a framework for progression of craftspersons in disciplines related to their specialised craft areas.

(3) Progression of 40 students to degree programmes in electrical engineering in collaborating Institutes.

(4) Establishment of a bespoke business course for owner-mangers of companies providing services to the building sector.

(5) Establishment of a programme for craftspersons working in the construction industry to meet the needs of those wishing to move into management/supervisory roles in construction companies.

(b) Is it an isolated policy/measure or part of a larger policy approach? This project is part of the 'Education in Employment' initiative funded under the Higher Education Authority 'Strategic Innovation Fund'.

(c) Key actors involved. Athlone, Dundalk, Galway-Mayo, Sligo and Dublin Institutes of

Technology with Cork Institute of Technology as the lead partner.

3. Evaluation:

(a) Assessment of effectiveness, efficiency or impact. The proposed framework indicates that to make progression available, irrespective of geographic location, there is a need for innovative provisions on the part of the Institute of Technology (IT) sector. This could include collaboration between ITs, the sharing of programme delivery, franchising of programmes, the sharing of module delivery and the use of distance learning.

(b) Indicators of success. The specific targets with regard to progression to engineering degree programmes have been achieved.

(c) Integration of outcomes into larger policy/ies. A report by the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs has noted that it will be necessary by 2020 that 48% of the labour force should have qualifications at levels 6-10 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

4. Conclusions:

(a) Obstacles encountered. The main obstacles for apprentices wishing to take part in further education were identified as lack of financial support and time for self study, distance from education centres and the failure to recognise past work and learning experience.

(b) What issues remain to be addressed? Exemption is a key aspect of this proposed framework, and ITs are encouraged to include exemption information in their degree and diploma information brochures. Also, where the learner has gained formal or informal learning this should be submitted through the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) procedures and processes of the ITs, in order to be considered for further exemptions.

In 2008 following a survey of the ITs, FETAC published a guide to the progression arrangements available for holders of a range of named craft awards. The guide is available on the FETAC website. The next step in this work will be to develop a more systematic approach which would provide learners with clear and transparent progression pathways.

5. Source. Education in Employment Initiative**. *Legend:** www.eine.ie*

6.4   Improving horizontal and vertical permeability of education and training systems

Education in Ireland has traditionally comprised three strands; primary, secondary and third level and higher education. Higher education comprises Universities, Institutes of Technology, National Institutions and other approved third level colleges.

At IVET and CVET levels, both the education and training systems run bridging courses to facilitate progression onto mainline training programmes for the long-term unemployed or those who have become marginalised due to disabilities or other social problems and who have little or no qualifications or skills   In 2002 the Government expanded 'The 'Back to Education Initiative' (BTEI), providing a Part-Time Options Strand, which has facilitated an expansion of second-chance education for young disadvantaged people and adults with low education qualifications, by providing them with flexible learning opportunities to help them increase their qualifications.

At post-secondary level, Post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses are an important area of second chance education which, although principally directed at school leavers, are also an important re-entry route to learning for adults, with 30% of all participants in 2004-05 over 25 years of age**.** The following (overleaf) is a description of this Programme.

6.4.1 An Initiative Example

1. Title of policy/measure: *Post-Leaving Certificate Programme*
2. Outline of Policy/measure **(a) Rationale:** In recent years there have been several initiatives to increase progression from the IVET sector into further and higher education. The introduction of Post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses, originally with aid from the European Social Fund, has increasingly provided a pathway and a link into third-level programmes. Several higher education institutions, including universities, have a range of schemes to facilitate direct progression from PLC courses to degree level courses, and third level colleges such as the Institutes of Technology (ITs), now reserve a number of places for those with Further Education and Training Awards (FETAC) under the Higher Education Links Scheme. **(b) Objectives/measurable target:** Post-Leaving Certificate courses aim to provide a bridge between school and work for those who need further initial vocational education to enhance their employment opportunities**.** These courses were introduced in 1985 to provide integrated general education and vocational training and work experience for young people who had completed upper second-level education or equivalent. The purpose was to enhance the prospects for these young people to gain employment and this still remains the priority objective of PLC provision. **(c) Target groups/educational level/educational sector:** Young people and adults wishing to increase their educational qualifications. Some 40% of all participants are over 21 years of age; accordingly PLC courses are an important re-entry route to learning for adults, as well as catering for some 18% of all school leavers each year. The PLC programme is for those who have completed the senior qualifications cycle or equivalent. **(d) Status of implementation:** The courses have grown considerably and the programme now offers over 1,000 courses in over 60 disciplines in some 230 centres around the country. They are delivered in both second level schools and further education colleges, mainly in the Vocational Education (VEC) sector. PLC courses are now the largest non-tertiary, post second-level, initial vocational education programme in Ireland.
3. Policy/measure operation and delivery: **(a) Level of operation**: The PLC programme options are designed to be broadly based to allow entry into a series of possible occupations, and provide a foundation for lifelong learning. The courses have been developed in a wide range of disciplines supporting industry and community needs, these include Business Studies, Electronics, Engineering, Computing, Catering, Sport and Leisure, Community Care, E-commerce, tourism, Theatre, Childcare, Equestrian Studies and Multi-Media. PLC courses are (usually) of one to two years duration and can be taken on a full or part-time basis. The courses adopt an integrated approach, focusing on technical knowledge, core skills and work experience and lead to accreditation typically at levels 5 to 6 on the NFQ, from the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETEC). **(b) Is it an isolated policy/measure or part of a larger policy approach?** Through the gateway of the Higher Education Links Scheme, PLC courses also provide an alternative route to higher education in the Institutes of Technology for those who have completed the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme, or who were unable to enter third-level education after leaving school. For example, FETAC level 5 PLC courses in community and heath services subjects, have progression links to nursing degree courses in universities and Institutes of Technology. **(c) Key actors involved:** Vocational Education Committees: Department of Education and Science.

3. Evaluation:

(a) Assessment of effectiveness, efficiency or impact.   The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) Report 'The Post Leaving Certificate Sector in Ireland – A multivariate Analysis of Educational and Employment Outcomes' published in 2006, highlighted how the PLC sector has been growing in importance since its inception in 1985. Most participants have been female, outnumbering males by about two to one. The analysis has also pointed to the changing profile of PLC participants, since the early 1990s, the bulk of the growth has been among those over age 21. This highlights the emerging role of the PLC sector in providing a route to 'second chance' education and lifelong learning. The report also indicates that approximately 90% of those students completing a PLC course progress to further education and training or directly to employment.

(b) Indicators of success. Post-Leaving Certificate courses are an important source of supply of skilled people for the Irish economy, with courses aimed at preparing students for employment and for progression into other areas of education and training. For young people looking to enhance their qualifications and employment prospects, for those seeking an alternative route of entry into higher education and for adults wishing to return to learning, the PLC route offers an invaluable opportunity.

(c) Integration of outcomes into larger policy/ies. Part of the Back to Education Initiative.

4.Conclusions:

   (a) Obstacles encountered. Restrictions on numbers of students in PLC colleges.

   (b) What issues remain to be addressed? Ongoing programme.

5. *Source:* Department of Education and Science. ***Legend:*** *www.education.ie*

While in Ireland has been a lack of a sharp distinction between initial and continuing VET, in contrast, there has been in the past a much clearer separation between further non-tertiary and higher education with until recently, few progression routes facilitating transfer between these areas (See Initiative example 6.3.1 above). Performance in the Leaving Certificate examination (which takes place on completion of upper secondary education), is the main route for entry into higher university education. However, progression routes into the third level Institutes of Technology sector from Level 5 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NQF) under the Higher Education Links Scheme, has been in operation for several years (see initiative example above regarding progression into nursing degrees). The introduction of the National Framework of Qualifications in 2003 has provided a system for co-ordinating and comparing awards, thereby facilitating progression and mobility for learners irrespective of the level of entry point or the education or training path followed. Under the Framework strategy, all IVET and CVET programmes must have provision for access, transfer, and progression. The following link shows the various awards and levels within the NFQ.

http://www.nfq.ie/nfq/en/public_resources/documents/NFQFanPosterA1.pdf

Specific policies, actions and procedures have been defined by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland in relation to access, transfer and progression. They are set out under four themes and the respective roles of key stakeholders (the Authority, the national awards councils FETAC and HETAC, and providers) are specified for each theme. The four themes are:

- Credit
- Transfer and progression routes
- Entry arrangements
- Information provision

Credit

The key policy on credit is the development of a national approach to credit which will meet the needs of learners in a lifelong learning context, by allowing for credit accumulation, credit transfer and will introduce processes for the recognition of prior learning.

Transfer and Progression Routes
The policy on transfer and progression is based on the principle that learners achieving an award are eligible to progress to a programme leading to another award at the next level up where there is such an award in the same or related field of learning, and may be eligible to progress to a higher level than that. Procedures are also set out for providers in relation to:

- Identification of transfer and progression routes.
- Specification of requirements for transfer and progression.
- Support for learners to enable transfer and progression routes to operate.

Entry Arrangements
Policy approaches are designed to extend accessibility and to focus on the concept of access on the achievement of an award (rather than on entry to a programme). A further policy concerns the issue of entry arrangements to higher education and training by adult learners.
Procedures are set out for providers in relation to:
- Clear, fair and consistent arrangements for entry.
- Appeals processes.
- Statements of the knowledge, skill and competence needed as a basis for successful participation.
- Clarity about awards demonstrating eligibility for entry.

Over the past number of years, new informal learning routes offer a variety of progression learning opportunities for adults. Until recently mobility within the Irish education system has been strictly vertical and confined to traditional, mainly academic based progression routes, from the formal school system to further or higher education, and only in limited circumstances was informal and non-formal learning accepted for entry into higher education. In recent years, policies regarding non-formal and informal learning organised on a sub-tertiary basis, and with particular reference to community-based education and workplace learning, have been given formalised accreditation, and these will allow for greater access, transfer and progression in learning.

Included in the remit of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) are the following functions.

- To establish and maintain a framework of qualifications based on standards of knowledge, skill or competence to be acquired by learners regardless of where, when or how such learning takes place.
- To facilitate lifelong learning through the promotion of access, transfer and progression for all learners including those who have special needs.

The introduction of the National Framework of Qualifications in 2003, to provide for all awards in the State within a 10 level framework (see diagram in section 6.4 above), from literacy and basic education to post-doctorate level, has further facilitated progression routes to be developed from the community education sector into formal education. In future it is intended that awards will become more flexible to fit with the non-linear way in which adults progress through education, and will be more relevant to work and community-based learners. All awards issued since 2005 by the two Awarding Councils HETAC and FETAC, fall under the new national framework. The remit of FETAC includes the validation and assessment of prior and experiential learning and work and community based learning. It is therefore possible for a learner to achieve an award without having participated in a specific formalised programme of learning.

In 2005 the NQAI issued 'Principles and Guidelines on the Recognition of Prior Learning in Ireland in Further and Higher Education'. These established policies to ensure that non-formal learning is recognised and accredited. Under these guidelines, providers of further and higher education and training leading to awards, must follow a set of procedures which include the following statements concerning informal learning.

- A statement of arrangements for recognition of prior learning for entry to their programmes.
- Possibilities for transfer and/or progression associated with these programmes, including any relevant specific progression linkages.
- Details of learning support available for specific learners such as for learners with disabilities.

These guidelines aim to encourage the development and expansion of processes for RPL so that providers and awarding bodies may remove any difficulties confronting an applicant wishing to transfer within and between the different education and training systems . In 2007 FETAC completed a pilot project[41] with a number of providers, who facilitated learners to progress through a range of RPL processes in accordance with FETAC's own Policy on the Recognition of Prior Learning launched in 2005. Among the comments arising from an evaluation of that project were that *"FETAC supports the recommendation of the Expert Group on Future Skill Needs in their report 'Tomorrows Skills: Towards a National Skills Strategy', to develop new initiatives to support flexible and responsive training provision and adequate funding to ensure learners move one step up the framework of qualifications"*.

Recently FÁS, in co-operation of the Institutes of Technology, has developed protocols and procedures for the recognition of Prior Learning for the apprenticeship process, thus facilitating increased access to apprenticeship. Other FÁS initiatives to accredit prior learning have taken place in the retail, construction and Childcare sectors, including the co-funding of the 'Líonra - Accreditation of Prior Learning' (APL/PPL) project, 2006-07, which sought to accredit prior learning in Information Technology (IT).

6.5 Teachers and trainers

Traditionally the roles and responsibilities for the education system, including vocational education, have been separate from the vocational training system in Ireland, which is the responsibility of the labour market authorities.   Teachers are primarily concerned with the education of young people within the formal school system at either primary or secondary level, while trainers are involved in skills training and development of trainees of all ages outside of the formal education system. This training is provided at both initial and continuing vocational training levels, and is generally provided either by private companies or within semi-state organisations such as FÁS, the Training and Employment Authority.

Teachers and their education and training provision are regulated by the Department of Education and Science (DES), primary school teachers for instance are trained in Colleges of Education and this consists of a four-year degree course, while second level teachers pursue a degree course (or equivalent), at a university or at a relevant third level institution in the subjects that they intend to teach, followed by a one year course, which includes supervised practical classroom work leading to a Postgraduate Diploma in Education. Teachers participating in CVET programmes in non-tertiary Centres and Colleges of Further and Continuing Education managed by the Vocational Education Committees (VECs), must have properly authenticated skills qualifications together with a Diploma or Degree in the theoretical dimension of their subject.

There is however, no similar state organisation regulating vocational trainers nor is there any requirement for them to have any educational qualifications or pedagogical skills. These trainers may operate as independent practitioners, or private training consultants, who offer training to companies.

However trainers who wish deliver training on FÁS funded courses must now be registered on the FÁS Register of Trainers. The minimum educational qualification to register as approved trainer, is a Certificate in Training and Development awarded by a recognised awarding body.

The table below lists the types of teachers operating in the formal second level education system and trainers at IVET and CVET levels.

Table 4 : Categories of teachers and trainers in the second level education system and at IVET and CVET levels

OCCUPATIONAL TYPE	TYPE OF LOCATION
Teachers in the second level school education system*	Secondary schools; Community schools or colleges Vocational schools; Comprehensive schools.
IVET teachers	Non-tertiary Education Centres, Colleges of Further Education.
CVET teacher	VTOS (Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme for unemployed persons), which is delivered in vocational education schools and centres. Also adult education courses in Colleges or Institutes of Further Education.
CVET lecturer	Institutes of Technology; universities; privately run professional colleges and other private institutions.
CVET trainer or instructor**	FÁS and other state training agencies in specific industry sectors e.g. for the tourism and agricultural sectors.
CVET private trainer or training consultant	In-Company training centres in all types of enterprises and private training companies.

*The types of secondary level schools differ on the basis of administration and sources of funding, but the same curriculum applies to all these schools. Community schools and colleges operate the same curricula but differ only in that the schools are operated by local committees and the colleges are operated by the city and county VEC's. **The terms trainer and instructor are used interchangeably. Trainers are generally persons providing training on an independent basis or within private companies, while persons providing training within state organisations such as FÁS are usually referred to as instructors.

The Teaching Council Act, 2001, led to the establishment of a Teaching Council in 2006. The Council seeks to promote and develop teaching as a profession at primary and post-primary levels, and to ensure that priorities are set for the professional training of an adequate number of teachers in various subjects. The following is an outline of the role and functions of the Council.

6.5.1 An Initiative example.

1.Title of policy/measure: *The Teaching Council*

2. Outline of Policy/measure:(a) **Rationale:** The Department of Education and Science recognises the importance of high quality teacher education and it is committed to the improvement and updating of teachers' skills and competences at all stages of their career. To progress this agenda the Teaching Council Act was passed in 2001 and this led to the establishment of a Teaching Council which was established on a statutory basis with the passing of the Teaching Council (Amendment) Act 2006.

(b) **Objectives/measurable targets:** The Teaching Council implements policies relating to teacher education and training, probation, qualification, professional conduct and standards of teaching.

(c) **Target groups:** Professional development of teachers at primary and post primary levels.

(d) **Status of implementation:** Since its establishment, the Teaching Council has undertaken work across a wide range of responsibilities as set out in the Teaching Council Act. During 2006, significant progress was made in developing a national Register of Teachers, and in 2007 the Council published Professional Codes of Conduct for Teachers which include standards of teaching, knowledge, skill and competence. These codes will be influential in determining future initial teacher education provision.

3. Policy/measure operation and delivery:
(a) **Level of operation**: The Council seeks to promote and develop teaching as a profession at primary and post-primary levels, and to ensure that priorities are set for the professional training of an adequate number of teachers in various subjects. Its functions are :-
- To promote teaching as a profession.
- To promote the continuing professional development of teachers.
- To provide for the establishment of standards, policies and procedures for the education and training of teachers.

(b) **Is it an isolated policy/measure or part of a larger policy approach?** This is a one off policy measure.
(c) **Key actors involved:** Department of Education and Science and teachers.

4. Evaluation:
(a) **Assessment of effectiveness, efficiency or impact.** The Council provides a forum for presenting the views of the profession on all aspects of teaching as a career, from initial recruitment to in-career professional development.
(b) **Integration of outcomes into other policies:** To provide for the registration and regulation of teachers and to enhance professional standards and competences.

5.Conclusions:
(a) **Obstacles encountered**. Not all sections of the 2001 Act have been implemented by the Minister of Education and Science[42].
(b) **What issues remain to be addressed?** Greater recognition and increased influence for teachers in relation to relevant education policy issues.
Source. The Teaching Council. *Legend. www.teachingcouncil.ie*

Outside the establishment of the Teaching Council there have been no recent major reforms relating to the education and training for teachers and trainers, although the Department of Education and Science is currently assessing the provision of initial teacher education in Ireland, in particular whether this provision remains relevant to meeting the emerging challenges facing schools and teachers. These challenges include increasing cultural diversity in the classrooms, enhanced provision for children with special needs, preparing school students for the knowledge economy and the use of ICT

In response to the Report of the Expert Group for Future Skill Needs on future requirements for high level ICT skills, it is proposed to enhance the professional (mathematical) qualifications of primary and second level teachers through the introduction of a Professional Masters Degree course. The National Centre for Technology in Education (NCTE) also provides a range of ICT professional development courses for teachers (See description of the NCTE in the example section 7.3.1).

The In-Career Development Unit of the Department of Education and Science funds and develops a national programme of in-service training and continuing professional development (CDP), for teachers, tutors and school managers at all levels in the education system. A Leadership Development Programme has recently been developed for principals and deputy principals at primary and post-primary levels. A nationwide network of Education Centres, are key partners in the provision of teacher CDP. These centres host the national Programmes of Curriculum Reform, and offer support services on a range of issues relating to teaching and learning, in particular the identified needs of teachers and schools in their various catchment areas.

The various teacher trade unions also provide support for the professional development of teachers. The Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO), have a professional development unit known as INTO Learning which offers development courses for primary school teachers.

At third level, while there is no formal recognised course of training for those who pursue a career as a teacher, i.e. tutor or lecturer, there are however, minimum entry requirements in terms of education. There are also opportunities for teachers and lecturers working in third-level education to avail of further education and training. In response to the broadening of higher education opportunities, the 'Training of Trainers' Measure for third-level education in the Employment and Human Resource Development Operational Programme (EHRD OP) 2000-06, provided funding for development programmes for staff in this sector. These programmes were designed to enable staff to adapt to new technology, while also focusing on pedagogical training, teacher evaluation and appraisal and the development of management skills. The Centre for Teaching and Learning in University College Dublin (UCD), has a website to support their academic staff develop and improve their skills and knowledge in the areas of teaching, curriculum design and student assessment. The website also acts as a research centre for study and support for third level teachers and lecturers generally.

Trainers working in the areas of IVT and CVT in state-funded institutions and in industry and commerce are usually experienced in their trade or commercial sector, but do not necessarily have to have any formal qualifications or pedagogical skills. Recently FÁS decided that it would be beneficial for its own trainers and instructors to have access to formal qualifications in training and development, whether they were providing either initial or continuing vocational training. A series of programmes from Foundation, Certificate to Degree and Master level, were set up in co-operation with Maynooth and Galway Universities and accredited by the National University of Ireland (NUI). These programmes were initially designed for FÁS instructors, but are now available to those practicing or planning a career as trainers in vocational colleges as well as the commercial, voluntary and community sectors. Programme delivery combines open learning and self-instructional modules, along with attendance at workshops and practical assignments.

Other state organisations involved in occupational training for specific industry sectors such as: - Fáilte Ireland (for the tourism and hospitality sector); Bord Iascaigh Mhara (Irish Fisheries Board); Coillte (Irish Forestry Board) and Teagasc (Agriculture and Food Development Authority), all have their own training programmes for their employees, and trainers delivering these programmes at both initial and continuing levels would be skilled in their own occupational areas.

The Irish Institute of Training and Development (IITD) is a professional body which develops and monitors standards in the continuous training and development of trainers in Ireland, although its membership would mainly be drawn for the private sector. The IITD organises Certificate and Diploma part-time courses in training and development in co-operation with a number of Institutes of Technology. In 2006 the IITD, in association with the National College of Ireland, launched a part-time three year BA Degree in Training and Development, aimed human resource practitioners or consultants working in small, medium and large enterprises. The Further Education and Training Awards Council – FETAC, has now assumed the awarding and accreditation function for the training of trainers at non-tertiary level, for different sectoral areas including FÁS, awarding a FETAC Special Purpose Award at Level 6 on the National Qualifications Framework for recognised training of trainer courses.

A 'Trainers Network' which also includes regional networks, was set up in 2002 to provide a forum for trainers to share experiences in relation to best professional practices, quality standards and continuing professional development. The Network acts as an 'umbrella' organisation for trainers from the public, private and community sectors and in 2009 it produced a report on 'Assuring World Class Competencies for Trainers'

The staffing of the adult and community-based education sector reflects its complexity, and increasing number of people are working in roles that could roughly be classified under the following three categories:

- *Those Working Directly with Learners*
These include volunteers in the literacy and community education sectors i.e. teachers who work with the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS); the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI); Post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses; the Youthreach service; adult education teachers and tutors who work with community education groups, as well as guidance personnel.

- *Organisers and Co-ordinators of Services*
Staff whose role is to organise and co-ordinate the development of programmes and those involved in their delivery. These include:- Community Education Facilitators (CEFs); Adult Literacy Organisers Guidance Coordinators; BTEI Coordinators; community group leaders, as well as a range of personnel within the higher education system such as Access Officers.

- *Management Personnel*
Personnel, whose role is to develop the strategic thinking and planning for adult education services such as, Adult Education Officers; Education Officers and Chief Executive Officers within the VEC system; managers and management committees of community groups, as well as directors of adult and community education services. (See example below).

Support services for CVET teachers across the adult vocational education sector are varied in their quality. Within the Vocational Education Committee (VEC) service, adult education staff have developed their own support services, while the Department of Education and Science has funded Certificate and Diploma programmes, on an in-service basis, for staff involved with the Youthreach, Senior Traveller Training and Adult Literacy programmes. The National Adult Literacy Agency provides training for literacy personnel within the VEC service.

Training for community education staff is provided through a variety of sources. Maynooth University, offers students a Higher Diploma and MA Degree in Adult and Community Education. The National Collective of Community-based women's networks, also provides support for community learning strategies and the Community Education Facilitators' Training Support Programme, is delivered by AONTAS-The National Association of Adult Education. The following example outlines the role and function of the Adult Education Officer within the VEC service.

6.5.2 Initiative Example

1.Title of policy/measure: *The role of the Adult Education officer (AEO)*
2. Outline of the policy/measure: **(a) Rationale**. The role of the Adult Education Officer (AEO) is a pivotal one in the management and delivery of Adult Education services by Vocational education Committees (VECs). In the current context of lifelong learning, the VEC Adult Education Services comprise a myriad of programmes targeted at second chance learners and also lifelong learning within the wider local development and social inclusion agendas. **(c) Target groups**. Mainly second chance learners and those from marginalised communities. **(d) Status of implementation**. The service is ongoing and in recent years received additional funding and support under the back to Education initiative-Community Strand.
3.Policy/measure operation and delivery: **(a) Level of operation**. The Adult Education Service employs full, part-time and contracted teaching staff. Education programmes are delivered in a variety of learning centres and include both outreach and area partnership programmes. Typically Adult Education Officers (AEOs) manage annual budgets of several million euro, as well as managing the delivery and development of the Adult education Service on a county and citywide basis. Frequently the demand for this type of education provision emanates from disadvantaged urban or rural communities. Adult education programmes include: Youthreach, the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme, the Back to education Initiative, Adult Basic Education, Community education, Adult Guidance and self-financing Adult Education programmes. (**b) Is it an isolated policy/measure or part of a larger policy approach?** In recent years, and particularly as Ireland enters a period of economic downturn, lifelong learning is at the centre of national and EU policies, and, in this context, the role of the AEO is critical in facilitating this policy agenda. **(c) Key actors involved**. Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA), Vocational Education Committees (VECs) and the Department of Education and Science
4. Evaluation: **(a) Assessment of effectiveness, efficiency or impact**. The delivery of up-skilling programmes and the inclusion of adults and the newly unemployed within lifelong learning will be a challenge for the future. **(b) Indicators of success**. Greater involvement of low skilled people in lifelong learning, particularly those with low literacy and numeracy levels from disadvantaged backgrounds. **(c) Integration of outcomes into larger policy/ies**. The service is part of the Government Lifelong Learning agenda.
5.Conclusions: **(a) Obstacles encountered.** Recent cutbacks in public funding and restrictions in recruitment of staff in the public sector due to the economic downturn, may have an impact on the development of the adult education service**.** **(b)What issues remain to be addressed? Part of the role of the AEO is to facilitate progression routes for adult learners through the National Framework for Qualifications in response to the National Skills Strategy (2007) to upgrade the skill levels of those with low educational qualifications. This will be a key challenge for the Adult Education Service.**
5. Source. IVEA News, Winter 2009. *Legend*: www.ivea.ie

7 ENHANCING CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION

7.1 Creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship in VET

In 2009 the Irish government launched the policy document *'Innovation in Ireland'*, which formed the first national policy statement on innovation. This statement sets out 10 key policy areas that underpin the government's approach to promoting and supporting innovation and also identifies opportunities where innovation can be better exploited.

This policy recognises workplace partnership as one of the ten critical components that must be nurtured and grown to promote innovation. It also highlights the progress that has been made so far in areas such as linking education and research with industry, the deepening of a culture of lifelong learning, and the fostering of industry and business networks and clusters in Ireland and abroad that are such fertile ground for innovative thinking and practices. The document notes that by putting innovation at the core of policies, competitive advantage and productivity can be increased in the face of growing global competition. Innovation is as vital to the services sector as it is to the manufacturing sector, and there is an eagerness in these newer sectors to embrace innovative approaches.

In 2009, the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs published a report on '*Skills in Creativity, Design and Innovation'* which provides a broad perspective of the situation in Ireland at present (see example below). The National Framework of Qualifications also identifies creativity as one of the main contextual competences to be associated with higher education qualifications. Under this Framework, the scope for creativity and autonomy is limited at Levels 1 to 3, becomes significant at Level 4, and is more pronounced at Levels 5 and 6.

The Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) Award Standards, describe higher education awards under three broad headings: Knowledge – Breadth and Kind; Know-how and skill; and Selectivity; and Competence – Context; Role; Learning to learn; and Insight. Within the context heading, creativity is seen as a central contextual competence as shown in the table overleaf.

Table 5: HETAC Level Indicators for Competence - Context

Level	Level Indicators for Competence - Context
Level 6	Act in a range of varied and specific contexts involving creative and non-routine activities; transfer and apply theoretical concepts and/or technical or creative skills to a range of contexts
Level 7	Utilise diagnostic and creative skills in a range of functions in a wide variety of contexts
Level 8	Use advanced skills to conduct research, or advanced technical or professional activity, accepting accountability for all related decision making; transfer and apply diagnostic and creative skills in a range of contexts
Level 9	Act in a wide and often unpredictable variety of professional levels and ill-defined contexts

In the publication 'The Next Leap forward - Competitive Ireland in a Digital Era[43]' the author noted that *"recent developments on the internet had lowered the bar for entry to the software and creative industries and reduced the expense of starting from scratch. Provided the educational and infrastructural requirements are in place, more and more micro-entrepreneurs, relying on fewer resources and acting at a younger age, will introduce commercially viable innovations and content*

from Ireland to the global market". The author also examined the role of VET in encouraging the emergence of innovative and creative entrepreneurs in Ireland and recommended:-

- A speedy roll-out of a curriculum capable of inculcating "digital instincts" during also examined the role in VET primary education.
- The introduction of a commercial context into computer syllabi to emphasise the viability of a career in the digital sector and
- New approaches to recruiting and compensation high quality teachers in these areas.

The following example outlines the principle skills and competences which are necessary to promote 'Skills in Creativity, Design and Innovation' in Ireland in order for the country to improve its' competitiveness in this area.

7.1.1 An Initiative Example

1. Title of policy/ measure: *Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN)- Report on Skills in Creativity, Design and Innovation*
2. Outline of Policy/Measure **(a) Rationale.** The concepts of creativity, design and innovation, as essential ingredients for economic success, are well established and accepted. However, they can sometimes seem to be rather nebulous in terms of what they actually mean in the reality of the workplace. **(b) Objectives/measurable targets.** The aim of this report is to help education and training policy-makers and practitioners, focus on what actually is needed for Ireland to become a competitive, innovation-driven, knowledge-based economy, and to recommend any changes that might help improve creativity, design and innovation. **(c) Target groups.** People who are, or seek to be employed in the creative enterprise sector. **(d) Status of implementation.** Report completed and published in November 2009.
3. Policy/measure operation and delivery: **(a) Level of operation.** The report has national implications and provides a useful focus on important skills for Ireland's success. It found that assessment systems in education and training are oriented to knowledge and technical skills rather than softer characteristics such as creativity. **(b) Is it an isolated policy/measure or part of a larger policy approach?** It complements other EGFSN reports on generic skills as well as specific occupational and sectoral skills. (See example Section 4.1.2). **c) Key actors involved.** Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, Higher Education Authority, and the Department of Education and Science
4. Evaluation: **(a) Assessment of effectiveness, efficiency or impact**. None yet. **(b) Indicators of success.** Adoption of recommendations. **(c) Integration of outcomes into larger policy/ies.** This report will inform national policy on future measures required to develop the skills required for creativity and innovation in the workplace.
5. Conclusions: **(a) Obstacles encountered.** None. **(b) What issues remain to be addressed?** On-going process of changing standards, curricula and assessment methods to promote innovation and creativity among learners. **5.** *Source.* The Expert Group on Future Skills *Legend***:** www.skillsireland.ie

7.2 Improving quality of teaching

The Department of Education and Science recognises the importance of high quality teacher education and it is committed to the improvement and updating of teachers' skills and competences at all stages of their career. To progress this agenda the Teaching Council Act was passed in 2001 and this led to the establishment of a Teaching Council which was established on a statutory basis in 2006. (See example section 6.5.1).

The In-Career Development Unit of the Department of Education and Science (DES) funds and develops a national programme of in-service training and continuing professional development (CDP) for teachers, tutors and school managers at all levels in the education system. These programmes are provided in Teacher Training Colleges, universities and by other agencies and include support for teachers in schools in the context of changes in curricula and school programmes at first and second levels. A nationwide network of Education Centres, are key partners in the provision of teacher CPD. Under the remit of the DES, the centres host the national Programmes of Curriculum Reform and support services on a range of issues relating to teaching and learning, in particular the identified needs of teachers and schools in their various catchment areas. There are also programmes for teachers in specific areas of learning support, student behaviour and special education needs, for example the Substance Misuse Prevention Programme. Integrate Ireland Language Training Ltd. provides training for teachers in primary and post-primary schools responsible for the English language development of non-English speaking school students

The Department of Education and Science is currently assessing the provision of initial teacher education in Ireland, in particular whether this provision remains relevant to meeting the emerging challenges facing schools and teachers. These challenges include increasing cultural diversity in the classrooms, enhanced provision for children with special needs, preparing school students for the knowledge economy and the use of ICT.

 The role of the teacher is critical in integrating ICT into teaching and learning. In response to the Report of the Expert Group for Future Skill Needs on future requirements for high level ICT skills, it is proposed to enhance the professional (mathematical) qualifications of primary and second level teachers through the introduction of a Professional Masters Degree course. The National Centre for Technology in Education (NCTE) provides a range of ICT professional development courses for teachers, and together with the regionally-based ICT advisory service, it provides advice on the integration of ICT into teaching and learning, (see description of the NCTE in the example, section 7.3.1 below). The NCTE also operates a *'Teaching Skills Initiative'* to meet the specific needs of teachers in their use of ICT in the classroom, including internet, web design and digital media courses and provides on-line teaching resources via the Scoilnet Portal.

With regard to continuous professional development for vocational trainers, the Irish Institute of Training and Development (IITD), a professional body which develops and monitors standards in training and development in Ireland, organises Certificate and Diploma part-time courses in training and development in co-operation with a number of Institutes of Technology. In 2006 the IITD, in association with the National College of Ireland, launched a part-time three year BA degree in Training and Development, aimed at human resource practitioners working in small, medium and large enterprises as employees or consultants. The degree aims to develop skills and knowledge in specialist training areas such as the design and delivery of training. The Further Education and Training Awards Council – FETAC, has now assumed the awarding and accreditation function for the training of trainers at non tertiary level, for different sectoral areas including FÁS, awarding a FETAC Special Purpose Award at Level 6 on the National Qualifications Framework for recognised training of trainer courses.

7.3 Innovation-friendly institutions

There has a been increased financial investment by both the commercial and public sectors in alternative modes of learning such as open, distance and e-learning. *FÁS*, the Training and Employment Authority, has established *FÁS eCollege* to provide online courses for adults who wish to avail of a more flexible learning approach. There are currently a number of public and private providers of this type of learning in Ireland.

The increased use of e-learning either in a stand-alone way or as a complement to traditional trainer-centred methods has significantly impacted on traditional pedagogical approaches in VET. The future challenge for VET providers is how to deliver such individualised provision at acceptable cost. The modularisation of curricula, e-learning and greater emphasis on self-learning, can all help to increase the flexibility of VET provision. The growing interest in online and blended learning, as illustrated by the increasing use in Ireland of learning resources such as FÁS eCollege, is indicative of this trend.

In 2007 the Minister for Education and Science announced the appointment of a Strategy Group to advise on the prioritisation of measures under a planned Government investment of €252 million in Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in schools. The new Schools ICT Initiative will aim to develop an e-Learning culture in schools that will ensure that ICT usage is embedded in teaching and learning across the curriculum. It will address teacher professional development, the maintenance of a national broadband network for schools, technical maintenance and support requirements, and the upgrading and renewal of hardware along with the provision of software and digital content for learning. In advising on priorities for investment, the Group will take account of the full range of educational supports and funding available to further the integration of ICT into teaching and learning and the critical success factors of those schools that are successfully integrating ICT into their teaching and learning.

The National Centre for Technology in Education (NCTE), whose role is described in the example below, in collaboration with other educational partners, provides a range of ICT professional development courses and support groups for teachers, and in 2007 it produced an online course on the Internet as a teaching and learning resource for teachers who wish to learn how to integrate the Internet into their teaching. These courses are fully funded and available through the Department of Education and Science, Education Centre network they include an 'Introductory Course for Primary and Post Primary Teachers in ICT Teaching & Learning; Digital Media & New Technology; The Internet as a Teaching & Learning Resource; ICT & Special Need and Website Design & Development for Learning. These centres also host regular teacher focus and support groups which provide informal training and support in the area of ICT for teachers.

7.3.1 Initiative Example

1. Title of policy/ measure. *National Centre for Technology in Education (NCTE)*
2. Outline of Policy/Measure   **(a) Rationale**. To promote and support the use of ICT in the education system   **(b) Objectives/measurable targets.** The National Centre for Technology in Education, in collaboration with other educational partners, provides a range of ICT professional development courses and support groups for teachers   **(c) Target groups**. Teachers in all areas of primary and second level education.   **(d) Status of implementation**. In existence since 1998.
3. Policy/measure operation and delivery: *(a) Level of operation.***:** The principal activities of the NCTE are:-   • Providing relevant and up-to-date ICT advice and support to schools on a range of

> technology related areas to assist in achieving a high quality ICT infrastructure to support learning and teaching.
> - Coordinating the Schools Broadband Programme to support the delivery of online content and learning resources.
> - Designing and implementing a programme of continuing professional development in ICT for teachers.
> - Developing and maintaining the educational website portal - Scoilnet, which provides access to teacher-reviewed resources.
> - Developing and evaluating educational software .
> - Developing resources and providing support in relation to ICT education.
> - Undertaking research on the best uses of ICT in education.
>
> **(b) Is it an isolated policy/measure or part of a larger policy approach?** The NCTE is part of the support available to the Department of Education and Science in best utilising ICT in schools.
>
> *(c) **Key actors involved**. The NCTE and Department of Education and Science.
>
> *4. Evaluation:*
>
> **(a) Assessment of effectiveness, efficiency or impact.** The role of the NCTE has developed and expanded considerable since it foundation.
>
> **(b) Indicators of success.** An important agency supporting successful usage of ICT in the education system.
>
> **(c) Integration of outcomes into larger policy/ies.** The Centre will have a role in advising on the Government recent investment in ICT in schools.
>
> *5. Conclusions:*
>
> **(a) Obstacles encountered.** Up to recently access to funding for investing in ICT resources in schools.
>
> **(b) What issues remain to be addressed?** Continued development of ICT course ware as a tool for teachers in the classroom.
>
> *6. Source.* NCTE. *Legend* www.ncte.ie

7.4 Encouraging partnership

Employee involvement in the workplace has been shown in various studies and research such as that undertaken by the National Centre for Partnership and Performance (NCPP), to improve a wide range of organisational performance in areas such as communications, management and employee relations, workplace adaptability and organisational effectiveness.

All of the key principles of supporting workplaces are outlined in the *'National Workplace Strategy'*. This is the Government's blueprint to help transform Ireland's workplaces into *Workplaces of the Future*, by promoting greater levels of partnership-led change and innovation in our places of work, regardless of size or sector. As Ireland continues its economic and social transition, the Strategy's underlying premise is that all companies and organisations can achieve improved performance and an enhanced quality of working life by improving their capacity to manage change and innovation within the workplace. A major public awareness campaign managed by the National Centre for Partnership and Performance was launched in 2007, targeting Ireland's two million-strong workforce, employers and employees, to raise their awareness about the Strategy,

A Workplace Innovation Fund has also been set up to help Irish firms improve their productivity and performance through greater levels of employee involvement and engagement. Strand I of the Workplace Innovation Fund (WIF) provides approximately €6 million to support workplace innovation initiatives in private sector SMEs. This fund is administered as a new strand of Enterprise Ireland's Productivity Improvement Fund (PIF), and is delivered in collaboration with the National Centre for Partnership and Performance.

Partnership between learning institutions and the creative industries arises in several ways. For example, FÁS Screen Training Ireland is a state-funded national training and development resource, specifically created for Ireland's film and television industry. It was established in 1995 to provide training and career development opportunities for professionals in the independent film and television sector. It works with industry professionals, both locally and internationally, to identify, design and deliver training programmes which are offered to practitioners and companies to enhance their expertise in Film, Television, Animation and Digital Media.

The key objective of FÁS/Screen (FÁS/STI) is to offer training for the changing needs of the Irish film and media industry. To achieve this objective FÁS/STI consulted with a large network of industry interests and has forged relationships with a variety of industry representative organisations, employer and union groups, broadcast and sectoral agencies both at home and abroad. At every stage of the training process, FÁS/STI involves a wide range of training partners from the industry, including production companies, facility houses, film resource centres and training agencies, who contribute to the development, design, delivery and evaluation of FÁS/STI training courses. These links have ensured the training provided by FÁS/STI is relevant to changing industry needs.

The Digital Media Forum is an enterprise network that develops and administers enterprise resources for companies in the digital media industry. It aims to unify the Digital Media industry by creating cross-platform content programmes with a focus on innovation and commercial enterprise. To date the Forum has successfully administered two Skillnets Training Networks, and has raised significant funding to develop its enterprise training network on an all-island basis. This Skillsnet training network is funded under the employer-led national Skillsnet Programme, which promotes training partnerships and networks among private sector companies, higher level education institutions, government agencies and independent professional and trade union associations.

The Digital Media Forum Skillnet network includes Screen Producers Ireland and the representative body for independent film, television and animation producers in Ireland. It aims to continually build best practice through initiatives in training and education, with particular emphasis on enterprises that can become global players in the Digital Media industry. Training courses (at subsidised rates), are run in a variety of skill areas including basic skills, executive development, IT skills, managerial skills and professional skills.

Craft skills have traditionally played an important role in the creative design industry in Ireland and the majority of those working this area are either in SMEs or self employed. The Crafts Council of Ireland (CCoI) is the national design and economic development organisation for the craft industry in Ireland. Its activities are funded by the government and education and training are one of the core concerns of its remit. The Crafts Council recognises the critical role that education and training play in the future growth of the Irish craft industry and in the preservation of our cultural heritage. The Council works as an independent service provider, for the sector and together with other VET providers, facilitates the development of education and training programmes to meet the needs of the crafts industry. In July 2009 the Crafts Council of Ireland launched the first ever comprehensive study into craft education and training in Ireland.

The example below is illustrative of a successful partnership between the creative industry sector and the local community to develop training in the digital media sector.

7.4.1 An Initiative Example

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1. Title of policy/ measure. *The Digital Hub – Elevate*

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2. Outline of Policy/Measure

(a) Rationale: The Digital Hub is an Irish Government initiative to create an international centre of excellence for knowledge, innovation and creativity focused on digital content and technology enterprises. The centre is located in the historic Liberties area of Dublin. The project is managed by an Irish government agency, the Digital Hub Development Agency (DHDA), which was established in July 2003.

(b) Objectives/measurable targets: The *Elevate* project is spearheading a new approach to community learning. The focus is on engaging, exciting, and empowering both learners and tutors through using the very latest digital media technology.

(c) Target groups: Some activities are directed at local communities (e.g. school pupils) and others focus on providing training for digital content professionals**.**

(d) Status of implementation, including statistical data: Since 2002 the programme has worked with 16 primary and secondary schools in the Dublin Liberties area, which has considerably high rates of unemployment.

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3. Policy/measure operation and delivery:

(a) Level of operation: The Digital Hub's support for learning arose out of consultations with the local community, who view the Digital Hub as a means of increasing the employment and educational prospects of local residents Dublin, and in particular the local (disadvantaged) community of the Liberties in Dublin. Learners from across the local community, enterprises, local schools and third level institutions, are given the confidence and knowledge to reach new potential. The initiative also acts as a test-bed for innovative learning programmes in digital technology which inform policy makers and enterprise developments.

(b) An isolated policy/measure/part of a larger policy approach? Complements other approaches to educate and train persons in ICT and in particular the digital media.

(c) Key actors involved: The Digital Hub and its learning function 'Elevate'.

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4. Evaluation:

(a) Assessment of effectiveness, efficiency or impact: The project works with local teachers to bring digital learning into their classrooms and it has focused on assisting schools to integrate ICT across the curriculum, particularly in the areas of Literacy and Maths.

(b) Indicators of success: In 2008 an independent evaluation of learning activities up to 2007 conducted by consultants Farrell Grant Sparks showed that:

- Students and teachers in schools involved in The Digital Hub's learning programmes had significantly higher levels of digital literacy than the national average.
- 46 per cent of participants in The Digital Hub's community learning projects expected to go on to seek employment in the digital media sector.
- 44 per cent of participants expected to progress to further education.

(c) Integration of outcomes into (a) larger policy/ies: See above

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5. Conclusions:

(a) Obstacles encountered: Access to funding.

(b) What issues remain to be addressed? Future development of the project.

5. Source. Digital Hub Development Agency. *Legend*: www.thedigitalhubelevate.com

8 FINANCING VET

8.1 Improving efficiency, equity, levels of VET funding

Central Government funding for VET in Ireland has become more structured in recent years, as it is allocated within the framework of the National Development Plan (NDP) to the various publicly-funded VET providers. Human resource development (HRD) continues to be an important element of National Development Plan and this is illustrated by the investment of €25.8 billion, allocated to HRD programmes in the current EU Human Capital Investment Operational Programme (HCI OP) 2007-2013[44].

In response to the economic downturn, the Irish Government has greatly increased funding provision for VET for the unemployed. This has been achieved through additional measures introduced in a Supplementary Budget in April 2009 and further provision announced in the December 2009 Budget. A key challenge within the VET sector is to prioritise investment in favour of those most at risk in the current recession, in particular to optimise access, participation and outcomes at every level of the VET system, for people with low skills and little or no qualifications, who are particularly vulnerable to both short term and long term unemployment in the current economic crisis. This approach has been prioritised in national strategies such as in the current Social Partnership Agreement '*Towards 2016*', the National Development Plan 2007-2013[45] and the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion, (see example in Section 5.1.1 summarising the latter Plan).

Expenditure on initial vocational education and training (IVET) is considerable, and has been growing over the last two decades as young people stay longer at secondary school and a greater proportion attend post-school education and training. Recent statistics however, show that early school-leaving continues to be a problem in Ireland, despite the large amounts of money invested in special educational initiatives at school level. Over the last few years there has been an expansion of VET programmes paying allowances, to encourage a greater take-up or return to education and training of disadvantaged persons, particularly early school leavers with low qualifications, (e.g. the expansion of the Youthreach Programme (see example section 5.1.3). and Post-Leaving Certificate courses under the Back to Education Initiative-BTEI.

There have also been a number of financial incentives and measures to support CVET for adults, targeting, in particular, those with low skills and educational qualifications. CVET for adult learners is now more accessible since the Government provided funding under the 'Back to Education Initiative' in 2002 for part-time and community-based education, (see example section: 5.1.5). as well as providing increased public funding for childcare costs, which are now recognised as a potential barrier to participation in CVET, particularly for women. In 2006 the Department of Education and Science provided €5.7 million to the Vocational Education Committees (VECs) to assist with the childcare expenses of participants in the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS), Youthreach and Senior Traveller Centre programmes. The aim is to attract people whose attendance is currently prevented by childcare responsibilities to enrol on these programmes.

In 2000 a National Training Fund (NTF) was established, resourced by a levy on employers of 0.7% of earnings of employees. The levy applies to all the main kinds of employment and covers approximately 75% of all employees. The monies collected can be used to fund training schemes and programmes for the employed (including apprenticeship training) and for those seeking employment. The Social Partners have a role to play in the allocation of the NTF as they are consulted by the government in relation to the allocation of NTF funds for training programmes. The Government-sponsored Expert Group on Future Skill Needs is the forum used to fulfil this requirement.

Training for employed people is seen as essential for the building of a skilled workforce and there still remains a significant number of employed people who are poorly-qualified and vulnerable to

unemployment. To overcome this problem, in recent years, there has been a significant increase in state funding for training for employees. Under the 2007 'Programme for Government', over €7.7 billion has been earmarked for training and skills development for the employed, with a particular focus on the low-skilled in SMEs, where 40% of the Irish workforce are employed. Total expenditure for instance on the FÁS managed 'Workplace Basic Education' Programme to tackle numeracy and literacy deficiencies in the workforce was €1.1 million in 2008 for the training of approximately 925 employees[46].. The FÁS 'Competency Development Programme', which aims to raise the skills level of employees particularly the low skilled, provides a training subsidy to reduce the costs of training for employers, and is one of the principal state-funded vehicles to achieve this objective. However due to the recent severe economic down and the sharp rise in unemployment, funding priorities are now been redirected towards programmes for the unemployed and those in workplaces vulnerable to restructuring in the globalised economy. (See example in section 1.1.1 describing the utilisation of the European Globalisation Fund).

One of the major priorities of the government is to increase access to further education and training for those with low skills and few or no qualifications, so as to improve their future employment opportunities in the knowledge based economy. A total of €1 billion will be invested in the post-leaving certificate sector over the period 2007-2013, to provide participants with specific vocational skills to enhance their prospects of securing employment and support progression to other studies. Since 1997, investment in the adult literacy service increased from €1 million to €30 million in 2008. In the same period, the annual number of participants increased from 5,000 to almost 50,000[47].

When the Back to Education Initiative-BTEI (Part-time) was initiated there was an intention to target the skill and educational needs of those who had left school with little or few qualifications but in particular, the needs of those in employment with low educational qualifications. However, until recently, cost barriers and the financial eligibility criteria acted as a disincentive to this group, as those in employment, even the low skilled, and some categories in full or part-time employment, including the unwaged (e.g. women in the home), who wished to access courses to gain further qualifications, were required to pay fees for part-time courses. In 2007, as a result of proposals in the new 'Programme for Government', the BTEI eligibility criteria were amended to allow free tuition to any adult with less than upper second-level education. This change encompassed those who were previously eligible (people with a social welfare entitlement or medical card), and extended eligibility for free tuition to unwaged people and those in employment. In making this change, the key priority was to remove barriers to access for adults who did not have the Leaving Certificate or its equivalent, and so increase participation by this group in further education without the fear of incurring tuition costs. In particular, this change in eligibility criteria extends access to free tuition to women in the home and men in low-paid employment. Under the National Partnership Agreement 'Towards 2016 priority was given to expanding the BTEI (Part time) Strand by 2,000 places and the funding allocation for this Strand, amounted to €18,7 million for 9,500 places in 2009.[48]

The National Skills Strategy predicted that in future many jobs will require third level qualifications. In order to increase the skills base at higher levels, the government, under the *'Strategy for Science, Engineering and Technology'* Programme, allocated €7.5 billion for school programmes in maths and science and for the education of third and fourth level science, engineering and technology graduates, essential for the future of the knowledge economy. In 2006 a seven year 'Strategic Innovation Fund' for Higher Education was put in place (See example below), with €510 million in funding allocated from 2006-2013[49], to promote organisational reform and quality improvement in the higher education sector. In the 2010 due to the economic down turn this funding was reduced by €8 million for 2010 in the government Budget[50].

8.1.1. An Initiative Example

1.Title of policy/measure: The Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF)

2. Outline of Policy/Measure

(a) Rationale: The strength of Irish higher education institutions, which consist of a relatively large number of institutions with diverse missions, will only be fully realised through institutional collaboration. The aim of this Fund is to build world class quality and capacity and to enable these institutions to form partnerships across sectoral and other areas.

(b) Objectives/measurable targets: The Strategic Innovation Fund extends over seven years. It was established in the 2006 Government Budget and it is managed by the Higher Education Authority. It supports innovation in Irish higher education institutions, and is intended to be a major catalyst in bringing about substantial change and quality improvement in higher education by incorporating the use of existing resources more effectively and by promoting institutional collaboration.

(c) Target groups: Higher education institutions and other stakeholders in the third-level and university sector.

- **Status of implementation:** In 2006, as part of the first cycle of funding 12 major projects received funding of over€42 million This funding was aimed at enhancing collaboration between higher education institutions, improving teaching and learning, supporting institutional reform, promoting access and lifelong learning and supporting the development of fourth level education.

In 2008, as part of the second cycle of funding, a further €97 million was allocated for 31 projects which included:

- €35 9 million to enhance the systems of teaching and learning in higher education.

- €20 7 million to extend research capacity in the sector, in line with the Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation.

- €15 7 million for lifelong learning and up-skilling.

- €13 million for institutional restructuring.

- €11 8 million to increase access for under-represented groups.

3.Policy/measure operation and delivery:

(a) Level of operation: The SIF is a multi-annual fund with an allocation of €510 million extending from 2006 to 2013. It is directed to support innovation in third-level institutions. In particular, it aims to enhance quality, effectiveness and research within higher education by promoting collaboration, organisational reform and quality improvement in the sector. Due to the collaborative nature of the projects approved, all seven universities, thirteen Institutes of Technology and the Dublin Institute of Technology will be involved.

(b) Key actors involved: Higher Education Authority and the Department of Education and Science.

4. Evaluation

(a) Assessment of effectiveness, efficiency or impact. The development, through the allocation of the SIF, of strategic alliances among third level institutions creates new synergies and potential for the higher education system. Of the funding announced to date, 13 projects involve alliances between universities and Institutes of Technology. Examples of some of the projects funded through the SIF are given in Sections 4.4.2 and 5.1.4.

(b) Indicators of success. Through the range of initiatives being supported, the Fund is driving reform of structures and systems within and across institutions to cater for growing student numbers at all levels, improved teaching and learning, ensuring graduates are equipped for a lifetime of innovation and change in the workplace, and enhancing research

and innovation capacity.

(c) Integration of outcomes into (a) larger (national, sectoral, regional, local) policy/ies:
The Institutes of Technology Act, 2006, facilitated the development of a strategic approach to higher education within a unified policy framework, leading to greater opportunities for collaboration between third-level institutions. The funding and the projects which will be implemented under the Government's Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation, launched in the National Development Plan 2007-2013, will provide a complementary resource to further progress innovatory activities in the third-level sector.

5. Conclusions:

(a) Obstacles encountered. See below**.(b) What issues remain to be addressed:** In the 2010 government budget, due to the current economic downturn, funding for the SIF was reduced by €8 million for 2010 and there may be some further reduction in future funding.

6. Source. Higher Education Authority website. **Legend**. *www.hea.ie*

Another major priority at third-level concerns broadening access to further education for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. In 2003 a 'National Office for Equity of Access to Third Level Education' was established to progress the third-level access agenda for those who had traditionally not accessed third level education, such as those persons with disabilities, together with a proposal to financially support these groups as well as mature students in part-time education. Since then an important financial aid for second-chance learners attending further and higher education was established in the form of the Third Level Access Measure (Fund). This Fund promotes and facilitates social inclusion and equity in education through its financial support for students with disabilities and for mature students and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. A total allocation of €11.7 million was utilised in 2008-09, from the Fund for Students with Disabilities, benefiting 3,843 students, and over 7,840 lower income students benefited from the Student Assistance Fund in 2008-09[54]. Another source of funding was the Millennium Partnership Fund[55], a community-based initiative, which provided support for students from disadvantaged areas, who wished to participate in further and higher education. While this fund has ceased from 2010 onwards, a gross allocation of €2.18 million was approved for 2008-09 from this fund with a total of 3,532 students benefited from this financial assistance.

8.2   Use of Lifelong Learning Programme funds

Enhancing access to education and training, the development of new skills, the acquisition of recognised qualifications and progression to higher education, are the key issues driving the lifelong learning agenda in Ireland. Due to the funding available within the EU Life Long Learning (LLP), in particular the Leonardo da Vinci Programme, the geographical mobility of Irish learners has generally increased between 2002 and 2009.. Also under this programme the number of teachers and trainers undertaking transnational mobility programmes has increased from an average of 38 per year from 2002-06 to 316 in 2009. (See Section 3.2). Ireland has been allocated E11118,000 for the duration of the current EU Life Long Learning programme from 2007-13[56]. Léargas, the national agency in Ireland for the management of national and international exchange and cooperation programmes in education, youth and community work, and vocational education and training, manages a wide range of LLL programmes within Ireland.

8.3. Use of other EU funds

Over the past decades the European Social Fund (ESF) provided significant co-funding for VET in Ireland. The Employment and Human Resources Development Operational Programme 2000-2006 (EHRD OP) was Ireland's largest ESF-supported programme in the 2000-06 round of Structural Funds, with €901 million in ESF aid allocated to the Programme. It was also one of the largest national Operational Programmes under Ireland's National Development Plan 2000-06, with a total investment of almost €15 billion. While the amount of funding is now much less, ESF support is still a factor in shaping VET policy in Ireland, and EU funding priorities continue to be reflected in the recently published National Development Plan (NDP) 2007-2013, together with the complementary Human Capital Investment Operational Programme (HCI OP) 2007-2013. The latter is Ireland's only ESF-supported programme in the 2007-2013 round of Structural Funds, with a total of €375 million in ESF aid allocated to the Programme. The overall funding for the programme, including the State's contribution, will total €1,36 billion.

Human Capital is one of the five strategic investment priorities in the new NDP for 2007-2013, and some €25.8 billion will be invested in the following three programmes under the complementary Human Capital Investment Operational Programme (HCI OP) 2007-2013:-
•   Training and Skills Development (€7.7 billion)
•   Schools Modernisation & Development (€5.1 billion)
•   Higher Education Programme (€13 billion)
The Training and Skills Development Programme has been allocated €7.7 billion funded through the Exchequer (€4.8 billion); the National Training Fund (€2.8 billion) and State bodies (€100 million). This Programme is divided into two main sections.

- *'Upskilling the Workforce'* - €2.8 billion will be invested in training for people in employment, for new skills for those affected by industrial restructuring, and the expansion and enlargement of the apprenticeship system and for early school leavers.

- '*Activation and Participation of Groups outside the Workforce'* - €4.9 billion will be provided for employment and training services to promote opportunities for a wide range of socially-excluded groups, i.e. the unemployed, people with disabilities, lone parents, Travellers, ex-offenders and women.

8.4 Improving VET governance
In March 2010 the Government took a significant step in promoting greater horizontal and vertical permeability within the Irish education and training systems with its announcement of the re-allocation of FÁS from its' current labour market orientation under the Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment, to a new government Department of Education and Skills. In proposing this change the government aims to foster closer linkages and synergies between all the various VET sectors, and encourage closer alignment with the further education and training activities of the Vocational Education Committees, the Institutes of Technology and programmes such as Youthreach, which the organisation currently operates jointly with the Department of Education and Science, now to be renamed the Department of Education and Skills.

Changing economic circumstances are creating demand for new and higher skills which will pose both challenges and opportunities for the third level sector. In particular, universities and Institutes of Technology will have to deliver more flexible, labour market orientated qualifications.   In 2008 the Government set up a Steering Group to look at a new 'National Strategy for Higher Education'. This Group will examine of the roles and relationships of institutions in the higher education system, and will seek to increase greater inter-institutional collaboration, so that the Irish higher education system can deliver the levels of efficiency, performance, innovation and growth that will optimize economic recovery and social development in future years, and enable it to reach higher levels of research and innovation. The Institutes of Technology Act, 2006, began the structural reform process in the third-

level education sector when it designated the Institutes of Technology (ITs) as institutions of higher education within the remit of the Higher Education Authority. This will provide for greater autonomy for the Institutes, improved governance and will facilitate the development of a strategic approach to higher education within a unified policy framework.

Ireland's three-year National Partnership Agreements, involving the Government and the social partners, have all included policies in relation to education and training. The social partners are represented on VET bodies such as the National Qualification Authority, the FETAC and HETAC Awarding Councils and the Boards of state agencies such as FÁS, Enterprise Ireland and Fáilte Ireland, (the tourism and hospitality development agency). The 'Expert Group on Future Skills Needs' also includes representatives from the social partners among its members and they have a major consultative role in the relation to the distribution of funds from the National Training Fund.

9 PROGRESS IN MODERNISING EUROPEAN VET SYSTEMS IN THE COPENHAGEN PROCESS AND PRIORITIES FOR FUTURE COOPERATION

9.1 Impact of European cooperation in VET on development of national VET policies

In recent years there has continued to be significant progress in progressing the agenda for the development of common principles for greater European co-operation in the modernisation of education and training throughout the EU member states. Quality assurance for instance, can play a decisive role in modernising European VET systems by improving its performance and attractiveness, and achieve better value for money. As in many national VET systems in Europe, Ireland is undertaking the modernisation and transformation of its systems, towards more effective management and 'value for money' outputs from the education and training system. This is characterised by a change in management both at systems and at provider level, away from input steering and control and towards output orientation and recognition of achievements. Quality assurance is used to steer this transformation and accreditation is a complementing tool, allowing assessment of compliance with (nationally) agreed standards and regular examination of progress achieved.

A major goal for the Irish qualification system is to improve access, transfer and progression both at national and international level. To progress this agenda, in 2003 the Government introduced a National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), which covers all awards in the State. In developing the framework approach, the Irish authorities aimed to ensure compatibility where possible with developments in Europe, and in June 2009, Ireland completed the process of referencing its' National Framework of Qualifications to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). (See example section 3.1.1 for a description of how this referencing process was achieved). The second stage of EQF implementation, introducing a reference to the EQF in all new Certificate and Diploma Supplements, should be completed by 2012.

In 2004 the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI), published the 'Principles and Operational Guidelines for the implementation of a national approach to credit in Irish Higher education and Training'. These Guidelines provide a framework for learners to accumulate credits towards awards, including for prior and experiential learning. This builds on and is compatible with the developments under the Bologna process and in particular the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), a key component for the development of the European Higher Education Area, as well as facilitating student mobility and international curriculum development. In November 2006, Ireland became the first European country to verify the compatibility of its National Framework of Qualifications with the Bologna Framework.

Ireland is also participating in and actively contributing to the debate concerning the development of a European credit system for vocational education and training (ECVET). FETAC- the Irish Further Education and Awards Council, will play a key role in the eventual facilitation of ECVET in Ireland, as the Irish credit system being introduced in the context of a Common Awards System, has the capacity to be integrated with ECVET.

Relevant Irish organisations continue to be involved in discussions regarding VET developments, at EU level, for example the NQAI worked with the Department of Education and Science (DES) on drafting the (EU) Council conclusions on Common European Principles on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (2004). This has resulted in:-

- The adoption of common European principles in the field of quality assurance and
- The adoption of common European principles on the identification and validation of non formal and informal learning outcomes.

The building of sustainable quality assurance in the delivery of VET within and across countries is a key component to improving the mobility of learners and workers. Ireland is a founding member of the European Network on Quality Assurance in VET (ENQA-VET). This network aims to promote co-operation in implementing quality assurance policies within the participating countries, to exchange information and experience, and to provide a forum to develop common criteria and principles for quality within EU VET systems. The main tool of ENQA-VET is the Common Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF), developed by the European Commissions' Technical Working Group on Quality Assurance in VET in 2004. The Irish Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC), was one of the first agencies in Europe to be reviewed in terms of compliance with the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area.

Other areas where Ireland has implemented measures to support the European Commissions' education and training policy include promoting and facilitating mobility for learners within the member states. In 2005, following a European Council decision, the Europass programme was officially launched in Ireland.

In many EU countries the financial support of the European Social Fund could be a potential resource to build up institutional capacity for accreditation and quality assurance, as a part of the reform and modernisation of national VET systems. According to Article 3, (d) of the regulation for the new funding period of the European structural funds 2007-13, one of the priorities of the ESF is to improve human capital, in particular by promoting: the design and introduction of reforms in education and training systems (European Parliament and Council of the European Union, 2006). Despite the current economic downturn, enhancing access to education and training, the development of new skills, the acquisition of recognised qualifications and progression to higher education continue to be the key issues driving the lifelong learning agenda in Ireland, which has participated fully in the European Unions' education and training policy agenda, and notably in the Bologna and Copenhagen processes.

9.2 Governance, cooperation and ownership of the different actors in the Copenhagen process at European level
There has for some time been arrangements for transnational partnerships and networks for the exchange of 'best practices' between training providers in Ireland and other European countries, and several new VET processes been jointly developed, utilising EU funding for these partnerships. There have for instance been co-operative developments and partnerships in areas such apprenticeship, trainer development (see initiative example in Section 3.2.1 which describes a co-operative partnership between Ireland and Germany in these areas), curriculum and the transparency of qualifications.   Many partnership projects have been facilitated under the EU Lifelong Learning

Programme 2007-13 (LLL), whose aims are to foster exchange, co-operation and mobility between education and training systems within member states, through its' Leonardo da Vinci, (LdV), Grundtvig, Comenius, Study Visits and Erasmus programmes.   Many Irish students in higher education have spent a period of time overseas as part of their degree programme under the Erasmus Programme and school students, who participated in the Comenius Programme, spent some time in a European country to improve their language skills

9.3 External dimension of European cooperation in VET
A non-EU funded mobility programme *Wider Horizons,* funded by the International Fund for Ireland (IFI), targets disadvantaged unemployed people between the ages of 18 and 28 in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, and aims to promote mutual understanding and reconciliation between the two traditions in Ireland.   It involves training and work experience both at home and abroad, with most overseas placements in the USA and Canada. Approximately 200 young people participated on this programme in 2009.

'WorldWise' is the Irish Aid Schools Linking and Immersion Scheme. It provides grants to second-level schools and colleges to establish and develop learning partnerships with schools in the Global South. Funding is available to support the setting up and maintenance of the partnerships, teachers' visits from each of the partner schools, mutual learning projects with a development education focus, and networks of schools involved in partnerships. Limited funding is also available to cover a portion of the travel costs of students in schools. 34 schools were involved in the two years 2007/8 and 2008/9.

The International Association for the Exchange of Students for Technical Experience (IAESTE), of which Ireland has been a member since 1962, is a non-profit, non-political, independent organisation representing academic, industrial and student interests. It operates in 87 countries worldwide and has arranged technical traineeships for well over a quarter of a million students since its inception. In Ireland, IAESTE is managed by Léargas. As well as supporting Irish students to travel abroad, Léargas works with Irish employers to find placements for students coming from outside Ireland.

The Youth in Action Programme, which is also managed by Léargas in Ireland, supports some educational and training activities with eligible countries outside of Europe and the European Voluntary Service action, for instance, can now include countries outside of Europe. In 2008, 226 Irish participants were supported under the Youth in Action programme.

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AEGI	ADULT EDUCATION GUIDANCE INITIATIVE
APL	ACCREDITATION OF PRIOR LEARNING
BTEI	BACK TO EDUCATION INITIATIVE
CDP	COMPETENCY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME
CIF	CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY FEDERATION
CSO	CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
CTF	CUSTOMISED TRAINING FUND
CVET	CONTINUING VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING
DES	DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE
DETE	DEPARTMENT OF ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND EMPLOYMENT
EAP	EMPLOYMENT ACTION PLAN
ECVET	EUROPEAN CREDIT SYSTEM FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING
EDC	EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE COMMITTEE
EEI	EDUCATIONAL EQUALITY INITIATIVE
EGFSN	EXPERT GROUP ON FUTURE SKILLS NEEDS
EHRD OP	EMPLOYMENT AND HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT OPERATIONAL PROGRAMME
ETP	EXCELLENCE THROUGH PEOPLE
ETW	EXPANDING THE WORKFORCE
FÁS	TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT AUTHORITY
FETAC	FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING AWARDS COUNCIL

HETAC	HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING AWARDS COUNCIL
HCI OP	HUMAN CAPITAL INVESTMENT OPERATIONAL PROGRAMME
HSP	HIGH SUPPORT PROCESS
IBEC	IRISH BUSINESS AND EMPLOYERS CONFEDERATION
ICTU	IRISH CONGRESS OF TRADE UNIONS
IDA	INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
IILT	INTEGRATE IRELAND LANGUAGE TRAINING
IITD	IRISH INSTITUTE OF TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT
ISCED	INTERNATIONAL STANDARD CLASSIFICATION OF EDUCATION
ISME	IRISH SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES ASSOCIATION
ITs	INSTITUTES OF TECHNOLOGY
IVET	INITIAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING
NAAC	NATIONAL APPRENTICESHIP ADVISORY COMMITTEE
NALA	NATIONAL ADULT LITERACY AGENCY
NAPS	NATIONAL ANTI POVERTY STRATEGY
NCCA	NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT
NCGE	NATIONAL CENTRE FOR GUIDANCE IN EDUCATION
NCPP	NATIONAL CENTRE FOR PARTNERSHIP AND PERFORMANCE
NCTE	NATIONAL CENTRE FOR TECHNOLOGY IN EDUCATION
NDP	NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN
NESF	NATIONAL ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL FORUM
NFQ	NATIONAL FRAMEWORK OF QUALIFICATIONS

NQAI	NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY OF IRELAND
NTF	NATIONAL TRAINING FUND
NUI	NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND
OSCAIL	NATIONAL DISTANCE EDUCATION CENTRE
PLC	POST LEAVING CERTIFICATE
QNHS	QUARTERLY NATIONAL HOUSEHOLD SURVEY
RPL	RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING
SFA	SMALL FIRMS ASSOCIATION
SIF	STRATEGIC INNOVATION FUND
SILC	SURVEY ON INCOME AND LIVING CONDITIONS
SIPTU	SERVICES INDUSTRIAL PROFESSIONAL AND TECHNICAL UNION
SMEs	SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES
SSRR	SENIOR SELECT RETAIN AND RETRAIN
TESG	TECHNICAL EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT GRANT
VECs	VOCATIONAL EDUCATION COMMITTEES
VTOS	VOCATIONAL TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES SCHEME