Career Guidance

2019


The objective of this review was to examine aspects of career guidance in the Irish education and training system in order to improve the existing career guidance tools and information and to enhance engagement with enterprise.

The report contains 18 recommendations under four themes: improvement in career guidance tools and career information, better engagement with enterprise, inclusion and enhanced governance structures.

The recommendations emphasise the need for evidence-based reform and the involvement of all stakeholders.

Other recommendations in the report include:

- Establish a support organisation with a new approach to guidance services which makes best use of digital and online technology.

- Strengthen and promote a user-friendly centralised careers portal.

- Initiate supports for employers to facilitate career guidance such as visits to industry and schools, guest lectures and quality work experience.

- Provide access for special education and adult learners to the proposed enhanced central career support services, including information on labour market opportunities.

- Promoting inclusion by prioritising the allocation of resources, including guidance teachers for learners most in need of assistance.

Teacher Sharing Initiative

2019

In February 2019, the Minister announced a new scheme to allow post-primary schools to share teachers in priority subjects. The scheme will start from the beginning of the 2019/20 school year and will be reviewed after the first year of operation. The aim of this scheme is to alleviate some of the
challenges schools have faced in recruiting teachers. This new approach to filling posts is a solution for principals who are seeking teachers and graduates who are looking for full-time employment and more options for work.

The teacher sharing initiative is one of a range of actions contained in the Action Plan for Teacher Supply, published by the Minister in November 2018. The aim of this initiative is to provide more options to ease recruitment pressures in some specific subject areas such as STEM, modern languages, Irish and home economics.

The teacher sharing scheme will allow two schools to work together to recruit a teacher for a job and employ them on more hours than if they were teaching in just one school. It will optimise the use of teaching time. It will allow a teacher to teach as many hours as possible in a high-demand subject.

**Masters in Irish-Medium and Gaeltacht Education**

**2018**

A new Masters in Irish-Medium and Gaeltacht Education (M.Ed.) was launched in October 2018. This innovative postgraduate programme for primary and post-primary teachers was announced in order to add to the provision of teachers in the education system who teach through the medium of Irish. This teacher education programme represents another step in the implementation of the Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022 and encompasses part of a greater national plan to tackle issues related to the supply of teachers.

This part-time M.Ed. degree is at Level 9 of the National Qualifications Framework, and is accredited by the University of Limerick. The Minister signed a six-year contract, worth €2.1 million, for this postgraduate degree between Mary Immaculate College and the Department of Education and Skills.

**Languages Strategy**

**2018**

A Foreign Language Advisory Group (FLAG) was set up early in 2018 to bring together key stakeholders to provide advice from a range of perspectives in order to support the implementation of Languages Connect - Ireland’s strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017 - 2022. The group is chaired by the Department of Education and Skills and membership includes representatives nominated by relevant stakeholders.

In August 2018 the Minister for education announced a 25% increase in Foreign Language Assistants (bringing the total number available to schools from September 2018 to 140) as a support for targeted measures towards improving fluency, immersion and the number of languages taught in post-primary schools and as the government prioritizes teaching of foreign languages in context of Brexit.

These additional Foreign Language Assistants are being provided to schools to enhance and support the teaching and learning of Spanish, German, French and Italian in the classroom. The government have committed to doubling the number of Foreign Languages Assistants available to schools by 2026 under their Foreign Languages Strategy.

In the context of the increasing importance globally of non-English speaking countries and recognising that once the United Kingdom leaves the European Union, Ireland will be one of only two English speaking countries in the Union. The Minister is taking action to ensure Ireland is well prepared for the
challenges that lie ahead. The government is committed to ensuring Ireland is prepared for a changed European dynamic.

The role of the Foreign Language Assistant is to support foreign language teachers in promoting a communicative approach to the teaching of the language. The scheme is reciprocal, also allowing Irish students or qualified teachers to act as English language Assistants to spend time teaching in other countries.

The fluency and authenticity of the Assistants as native speakers should enable them to:

- Help students to understand the spoken language;
- Encourage students to speak the foreign language (suggested activities: pair-work, role-play, games, competitions etc.) and to improve their pronunciation;
- Encourage and assist students in reading authentic and fictional written texts appropriate to their level;
- Give students a better understanding of the way of life and customs of the foreign country.

The Foreign Languages Strategy commits to encouraging more schools to take part in the scheme and to seek to expand the range of languages to which the scheme will apply. Schools who are not currently participating in the scheme are strongly encouraged to consider applying for an Assistant in the future.

2017

In December 2017, Languages Connect – Ireland’s Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017-2022 [3] was launched with the vision to promote a society where the ability to learn and use at least one foreign language is taken for granted, because of its inherent value for individuals, society and the economy.

The Plan sets out a roadmap to put Ireland in the top ten countries in Europe for the teaching and learning of foreign languages, through a number of measures targeted at improving proficiency, diversity and immersion. The delivery of the Strategy is a key action in the Minister’s Action Plan on Education.

The Foreign Languages Strategy [4] will:

- Increase the number of post-primary schools offering two or more foreign languages by 25%;
- Increase the number of students sitting two languages at Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate by 25%;
- Increase the number of students in higher education studying a foreign language, in any capacity, as part of their course, by 20%;
- Increase the number of participants in Erasmus+ by 50%;
- Double the number of teachers participating in teacher mobility programmes;
• Double the number of foreign language assistants in schools;

• Improve learners’ attitude to foreign language learning;

• Improve the quality of foreign language teaching at all levels.

There are 100 actions in the Strategy, including:

• Introduce Mandarin Chinese as a Leaving Certificate subject;

• Introduce curricular specifications for heritage speakers for Polish, Lithuanian and Portuguese;

• Develop a range of short courses in languages for Junior Cycle;

• Explore the potential for introducing bonus points at Leaving Certificate for studying foreign languages in cases where students apply for higher education courses in language-related areas;

• Enhance employer engagement in the development of new trade languages;

• Increase the opportunities for short-term teacher exchanges for post-primary teachers;

• Carry out periodic surveys of students’ attitudes and experiences of foreign language learning;

• Incentivise schools to diversify their language offer, including by means of concessionary hours, where appropriate;

• Progress pilot programme for co-operation with foreign-owned companies, or indigenous companies with a foreign presence, to enable students in Further Education and Training and Higher Education to do work placements in the parent country;

• Implement the newly developed Junior Cycle short course in Lithuanian;

• Appoint “language champions” from business and other sectors to demonstrate the opportunities available for graduates with foreign language competences;

• Develop new models of delivering language teaching, such as shared classes and blended learning. This will allow students who are part of small immigrant communities, within specific schools, to develop their heritage language skills.
Implementation of this ambitious strategy will require significant changes to how foreign languages have been taught in the past and will require extra resources. The Minister is confident that the correct policies will be put in place under this strategy to increase the number of foreign language teachers. The strategy also contains a number of actions to ensure we have a steady supply of teachers to deliver on the targets of the strategy.

Addressing Disadvantage

DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools), the Action Plan for Educational Inclusion [5], first published in 2005, remains the Department of Education and Skills' policy instrument to address educational disadvantage. It focuses on addressing and prioritising the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities, from early childhood through second-level education.

Enhancing attendance, progression, retention and attainment are central elements of DEIS. Interventions focus on a school action plan with a concentration on literacy and numeracy from an early stage; strong links between the home, school and community; strong links between schools working co-operatively; and added value from links between education and other services.

Among the key issues and needs addressed by DEIS are:

- Improved identification of disadvantage enabling resources to be targeted more effectively;
- Targeted reductions in pupil teacher ratios and additional non-pay allocations for schools based on level of disadvantage;
- Access to additional literacy/numeracy supports and programmes;
- Access to Home/School/Community Liaison and School Completion Programme (SCP) services;
- Enhancing research and evaluation of outcomes.

2018

School Excellence Fund-DEIS (SEF-DEIS) is an innovation of the DES which enables schools to apply for funding to implement innovative programmes which are context specific and aimed at improving learning outcomes. Access to the SEF-DEIS is designed to ensure that some of the barriers frequently cited by school personnel as being impediments to improvements can be removed. The SEF-DEIS is designed to ensure that innovative approaches and proposals to tackle educational disadvantage will be supported and rewarded.

The overarching aim of the initiative is to improve learning outcomes for young people. In order to achieve improved outcomes, schools in the SEF-DEIS will be challenged to promote innovation by adopting new evidence-based approaches to tackling under-performance in literacy and in the STEM subjects or in the Arts subjects. The development of teacher subject knowledge and teaching approaches through peer collaboration and observation is at the heart of the SEF-DEIS. This is best achieved through effective networking and the development of communities of practice. The School Excellence Fund-DEIS programme is specifically targeted at schools within the DEIS scheme because
of the priority attaching to increasing student attainment within these schools. However, consideration may be given to the inclusion of non-DEIS schools in the project where a proposed cluster of schools comprises a mix of DEIS and non-DEIS schools.

There are ten clusters, comprising thirty-five schools, currently involved in the first phase of the SEF-DEIS. They are working on a diverse range of themes including:

- A cluster comprising one post-primary school and its two main feeder primary schools working towards ensuring that students learning English as an Additional Language (EAL) develop sufficient higher order language skills to access the full curriculum and to achieve at the level of their ability.

- A cluster comprising one post-primary school and three feeder primary schools collaborating with a local third level institute and local industry to improve student attainment in Science. The schools are working towards improving student attitudes to and attainment in the subject.

- Teachers in a cluster comprising four primary schools and three pre-schools collaborating with each other and with external agencies to ensure improved outcomes in language. This will involve the development and delivery of an evidence-informed programme at the level of the classroom and in the home.

2017

A new Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools - DEIS Plan 2017 [6] was published in February 2017. This builds on the approaches adopted in the previous plan and sets out new targets for literacy and numeracy, school completion and progression to further learning. A new model has been developed to identify schools in need, which relies on centrally held Department and Central Statistics Office data, covering schools' socio economic background and profiles, and results in standardised testing.

110 additional schools and 20,000 extra pupils will benefit under the new Plan. Operation of a book rental scheme will be a mandatory part of the Plan, and schools will plan and set targets for literacy and numeracy, continuing professional development and school leadership. A School Excellence Fund will be provided, encouraging pilot initiatives to test new approaches, encourage school clustering and dissemination of good practice. Additional psychological services will be provided, and the Schools Business Partnership programme will be expanded. The Education and Training Boards will provide formal outreach arrangements with DEIS schools to encourage greater progression to further education pathways. Robust planning, key attention to literacy and numeracy, prioritisation of those at risk, using assessment data to effectively target pupils and guide learning, and inter-agency collaboration all form key elements of the programme.

As part of the new Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools - DEIS Plan 2017 [6] published in February 2017, the Incredible Years Teacher Classroom Management Programme, and the Friends programme are being extended to all DEIS schools in disadvantaged areas. The Incredible Years Teacher programme which supports teachers, working with parents, to reduce behavioural difficulties and strengthen social and emotional competence of early primary school children. The Friends programme is designed to reduce anxiety and promote coping mechanisms, resilience and school connectedness among pupils aged 4 to 18.
Two new reports on those who left post primary education in 2010/11 were published in March 2016. These reports show that of those who completed upper secondary education, 52.3% progressed to higher education, 28.2% went to further education or training, 7.3% were employed and 6.9% were welfare recipients. Of those who left school early, 66.6% were in further education or training (of whom 15.7% were outside the State). 4.4% were in employment, and 6.6% were welfare recipients.

These reports relate to school leavers generally, and are not confined to leavers from DEIS schools. As part of the Budget 2016, a modest improvement in the pupil teacher ratio for DEIS schools was announced, together with improvements in pupil:teacher ratios across all schools.

The Action Plan for Education 2016-2019 [7] launched by the Minister for Education and Skills in September 2016 includes a specific goal to "improve the progress of learners at risk of educational disadvantage or learners with special educational needs." It provides for the publication of a new DEIS programme building on existing strengths. It includes a target to improve school completion rates in DEIS schools to bring them up to the national norm of 92% by 2025 (from 82% at present).

**Literacy and Numeracy Strategy**

Ireland’s National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People [8] was launched in July 2011. The Strategy runs from 2011 – 2020. It responds to areas of weakness identified in recent national studies and sets ambitious targets covering early childhood, primary and secondary education. All primary and post-primary schools are participating in the implementation of the strategy, and are required to set targets for the improvement of literacy and numeracy skills in the framework of a School Improvement Plan. Significant early progress has been made on the curricular and teacher education reforms set out in the Strategy.

The key elements of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy focus on:

- Enabling parents and communities to support children's literacy and numeracy through public awareness measures, supporting ECCE and school/parent/community links;

- Improving practitioner skills in literacy and numeracy teaching and assessment;

- Building the capacity of school leadership;

- Improving the curriculum and learning experience for students, and ensuring that literacy and numeracy permeates all areas of learning within a balanced curriculum;

- Supporting those with learning needs to achieve their potential;

- Improving assessment and evaluation at both school and system level.

2018

At the beginning of 2018, the Minister for Education and Skills announced the development of two
new Irish-medium teacher education programmes to deliver up to 60 new places for teacher education through Irish annually. These new places are in addition to the 380 extra places on initial teacher education courses announced recently to fulfil a key commitment in the Policy on Gaeltacht Education. The new places are an important measure to ensure Irish medium schools in both Gaeltacht and non-Gaeltacht areas have an adequate supply of Irish medium teachers.

The two new Irish-medium teacher education programmes represent an investment of up to almost €7m, depending on uptake and will be delivered by the Marino Institute of Education and Mary Immaculate College. Marino Institute of Education will deliver a 4-year Irish-medium Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) for primary teachers commencing in 2019 and Mary Immaculate College will run an Irish-medium Masters in Education (M.Ed.) for primary and post-primary teachers, including principals, commencing in 2018.

2017

In the 2017 Budget, 2400 extra teaching posts were announced, to be put in place from September 2017, to address demographic needs, to partially address guidance and other staffing cuts made during the recession, support school leadership, and to provide extra professional time for teachers in the context of junior cycle curriculum reform.

Given that the targets set out in the Strategy 2011-2020 have already been achieved, a revised Strategy was published in March 2017 building on the existing approaches and priorities across six pillars:

- Enabling parents to support their children's learning;
- Improving teachers and ECCE staff practice;
- Building the capacity of school leadership;
- Improving curriculum and the learning experience;
- Helping students with additional needs;
- Improving assessment and evaluation to support better learning.


Priority actions in the new Strategy include:

- Prioritising the development of maths curricula at primary and post-primary, including the redevelopment of the primary maths curriculum, encompassing the introduction of computational and creative thinking skills and coding;

- The Professional Development Service for Teachers refining its literacy and numeracy supports
for teachers;

- Reviewing the time allocation for maths at primary to ensure that the allocation reflects learners’ requirements;

- Implementation of new curricula in Irish at both primary and post-primary, which aim to improve Irish as Language 1 in Irish medium schools and Irish as Language 2 in English medium schools;

- Supporting ECCE practitioners and teachers in Early Start centres with comprehensive implementation of the Aistear curriculum framework, in particular development of early literacy and numeracy skills;

- Support for the transitions between educational settings, e.g. the move from early years settings to primary schools, by developing reporting templates-for use by ECCE practitioners, schools and parents-based on research and trialling;

- Carrying out research on creative and innovative ways to support parents in their role as educators.

The strategy will also be supported by the new DEIS Plan 2017 and a forthcoming National Policy Statement on Science Technology Mathematics and Engineering.

A new Post Graduate Programme in School Leadership for teachers will begin in September 2017, to be delivered by a consortium of universities working closely with the Centre for School Leadership. In addition 4600 coaching hours will be provided for 400 school leaders across the country.

2016

2260 additional teaching posts were announced in the budget 2016 reversing some of the cuts made during the Recession, effective from the school year 2016/17. 300 additional posts were provided in primary schools to reduce average class size from 28:1 to 27:1. There were 440 primary teachers to address increased enrolment, and 445 to provide extra resource posts. At post primary level, 550 additional posts were provided, to partially reverse the guidance cuts (300 posts), to enhance the role of deputy principals and improve pupil:teacher ratios. Post primary schools also got 155 additional resource posts and 370 posts to deal with increased enrolment.

Assessment

In December 2016, the results of the OECD PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) study of attainment of 15 year olds in 70 countries in science, mathematics and reading were published in *Future Ready? The Performance of 15 year olds in Ireland in Science, Reading Literacy and Mathematics in 2015* [10]. The results show:

- In reading, Irish students ranked 3rd out of 35 OECD countries, 2nd among EU countries, and 5th out of all countries participating in PISA 2015;
In science, Irish students ranked 13th out of 35 OECD countries, 6th among EU countries and 19th out of all countries participating in PISA 2015;

In mathematics, Irish students ranked 13th of 35 OECD countries, 9th among EU countries and 18th out of all countries participating in PISA 2015;

All three test domains (reading, maths and science) showed some gender differences in results, with girls performing better than boys in reading and boys performing better than girls in mathematics and science.

The spread of attainment was lower in Ireland than the OECD average, with fewer students scoring at the lowest levels, but also at the highest levels. While this clearly indicates the need to better challenge high achieving students, it also indicates a good level of equity across the system.

In November 2016, TIMSS in Ireland: Mathematics and Science in Primary and Post Primary Schools [11] was published, setting out the results of international testing in Maths and Science which was undertaken in 2015 as part of the Trends in International Mathematics and Science study. The study covered 31 countries, and involved primary pupils in 4th class (year 6) and post primary pupils in second year. The results show improved performance in science and mathematics at primary level over previous years (ranked 9th for Maths and 10th for Science). At second level, pupils were ranked 9th for Maths and 10th for Science, with improved performance in science over earlier years.

In October 2016 the Department of Education and Skills published Standardised Achievement Tests: An Analysis of the Results at Primary School Level in 2011/12 and 2012/13 [12]. This focuses on the results of norm referenced tests in literacy and numeracy of pupils in 2nd, 4th and 6th classes which are undertaken at school level and are now an ongoing part of the literacy and numeracy strategy. The aggregate results are submitted to the school boards of management and reported to the Department, and are used for evaluation purposes and to identify students who need additional support. The Report shows that in literacy and numeracy and in the Irish language, schools are reporting performance above what would be expected in a normal Bell curve. While an improvement in performance has also been evidenced in other externally administered tests, the results suggest that the tests used are in need of updating, and that familiarity with the test instruments is also contributing to improved results.

Ireland participated in the PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) in June 2016.

Policy

In October 2016, the Department of Education and Skills published a Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022 [13] to promote excellence in Irish medium schools, and to support the strengthened use of Irish as a community language in Gaeltacht areas. It is the first Gaeltacht specific education policy in the history of the state. The overarching goal of the Policy is to ensure the provision of high quality Irish-medium education in Gaeltacht schools to support the use of Irish as the main language of Gaeltacht communities. The Policy actions span the whole spectrum of education from early years to third level.

Gaeltacht schools face particular challenges in delivering all of the curriculum through Irish in a context where those entering school (and their parents) have varying abilities in the language. The strategy provides for additional teachers, extra resources and supports, enhanced professional development, strengthening school leadership, encouraging schools and early learning settings to
deliver all, or more of their programmes, through Irish, a Gaeltacht Schools Excellence award scheme, curricular reform, sharing of best practice and promotion of research and development. A dedicated Gaeltacht unit within the Department of Education and Skills is also being established.

Professional development, curriculum and quality support

In March 2016 the Economic and Social Research Centre published a Review of the Droichead Teacher Induction Pilot Programme[14] in primary and post primary schools. The evaluation showed that newly qualified teachers, principals and professional development staff were highly satisfied with the effectiveness of the programme in providing a structured approach to mentoring, professional support and performance assessment. The programme also helped to introduce a more collaborative culture within school staff generally.

The review of entry requirements to initial teacher education undertaken by the Economic and Social Research Institution, Entry to Programmes of Initial Teacher Education[15], was published in November 2016, and indicates little evidence to justify the need for changed entry criteria.

In March 2016, the Teaching Council launched Cosán, the first National Framework of Teachers Learning setting out the professional standards required in terms of values and principles, dimensions of teachers learning, learning processes, learning areas, standards to guide learning and reflection. The intention is that the framework will be implemented by 2020. The next stage is a development process which will allow space and time for the teaching profession to work out how the framework can best support and recognise their ongoing learning.

The new primary language curriculum is being phased into schools for infants to second class with effect from September 2016, with a focus on the oral strand. In 2017/18, this will extend to reading and writing strands, with all strands being implemented from 2018. Professional development for teachers and schools leaders is currently under way. A revised language curriculum for pupils in 3rd to 6th class is under development, together with a review of other areas of the curriculum.

Junior Cycle Reform

At post primary level, the Department of Education and Skills published an updated Framework for Junior Cycle 2015[16] for the reform of the curriculum in lower secondary education. This builds on earlier proposals by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, which were followed by extensive discussions between the Department and the partners in education.

The new Junior Cycle is designed to encourage greater innovation, student engagement and active learning, to provide an inclusive educational experience for all students, to embed key skills, to reform assessment and promote greater professional collaboration between teachers.

A dual approach to assessment will provide for formative and summative feedback. For subjects, assessment will incorporate:

- Ongoing assessments by the school;

- To Classroom Based Assessments devised by the NCCA, and marked by the teacher (in years 2 and 3);

- A written Assessment Task and "end of junior cycle" examination set and marked by the State
For short courses, assessment will be based on formative assessment and completion of no more than 2 Classroom Based Assessments, based on national descriptors developed by the NCCA, which are marked by the class teacher.

Subject teachers will participate in Subject Learning and Assessment Review Meetings. At these meetings, teachers will share and discuss representative samples of students’ work and build a common understanding about the quality of their students’ learning. The Subject Learning and Assessment Review meetings will play a key role in developing a collegial professional culture and build up expertise about the judgements that teachers make about student achievement.

At the end of the 3 year cycle a Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement to a standard template will be issued by the school.

The JCPA will capture the different assessment elements undertaken over the three years of junior cycle, including:

- Descriptors of Classroom-Based Assessments in subjects and short courses completed by students and assessed by teachers;
- Grades achieved by students on the final examinations marked by the SEC (and, as appropriate, incorporating the outcomes of the Assessment Tasks) completed by students in schools and submitted to the SEC for marking;
- Outcomes achieved by students in Priority Learning Units (for the relevant students);
- Achievements of students in other areas of learning.

Up to now, formal assessment of achievement at the end of junior cycle has been based on performance in examinations run by the State Examinations Commission. The changes in assessment are designed to ensure that that assessment for learning is integral to the work of schools, and that students continually receive structured feedback on their own learning. In addition, school based approaches provide for greater flexibility in the modes of assessment which can be used, ensuring that they are appropriate to the learning objectives being promoted and the needs of students.

The new framework provides for the implementation of subjects and short courses, and sets out 24 statements of learning which all students should be offered as part of their programme. These can be achieved through a combination of subjects, or subjects plus short courses.

Short courses are being developed by the NCCA as exemplars, but schools and other organisations also have the flexibility to develop their own.

The eight key skills being embedded in subjects and short courses are:

1. Being literate;
2. Being numerate;

3. Communicating;

4. Managing myself;

1. Staying well;

2. Being creative;

3. Managing information and thinking;

4. Working with others.

Certification will generally be at Level 3 of the National Framework of Qualifications but Priority Learning Units are being developed at Level 2 and Level 1 to facilitate the recognition of achievements for students with special needs.

All subjects and short courses will be offered at a common level (up to now both ordinary and higher level were offered). However, Irish, English and Mathematics will be offered at ordinary and higher levels. All classroom based assessments will be at a common level.

The revised programme in Junior Cycle English began in September 2014, for final examination in 2017.

2018

In the 2018 Budget, further provision was made to support the roll out of Junior Cycle Reform with Home Economics, History, Music, Geography and Mathematics, commencing in September 2018.

2017

Negotiations continued throughout 2016 to resolve a range of outstanding industrial relations issues. However, the ASTI voted again in February 2017 to reject the proposals, and their directive to teachers to refuse to take part in school based assessment and professional development associated with the reformed junior cycle still stands. The Minister indicated that no further offer would be made. Pay increases have been agreed in respect of the other teacher unions who are co-operating with the national industrial relations framework. These increases do not apply to ASTI members.

In the 2017 Budget, an additional 550 additional teaching posts have been announced to provide for extra professional time for teachers in implementing the reforms.

In March 2017 the State Examinations Commission announced that having the second Classroom Based Assessment marked by the school would not be a pre-requisite for submission of the Assessment Task which is marked by the State Examinations Commission. The deadline for completion of the Assessment Task was extended to facilitate schools. It is now likely that in ASTI schools, pupils will complete the Assessment Tasks and Final Assessment which are marked by the
State Examinations Commission, but that their Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement will not include Classroom Based Assessments.

From September 2017, revised programmes are being implemented in junior cycle in Irish, modern languages, and Visual Art. There will be a separate subject specification for Irish in schools where Irish is the medium of instruction for all subjects, or a number of subjects. In addition new Priority Learning Units at Level 1 (EQF level 1) for pupils with special needs will be available for use by schools. In addition, a new area of learning, Wellbeing, will be introduced. This will provide for a minimum threshold of 275 hours in all schools over the three year cycle, covering subjects or short courses in Physical Education, Social Personal and Health Education, and Civic Social and Political Education, allied with guidance and other areas of learning which support the achievement of wellbeing.

2017 marks the first year that English was examined under the new Framework for Junior Cycle. The grading system for English is different to other subjects this year in that, rather than the old ‘A, B, C’ grade format, students will be awarded one of six grade descriptors, from ‘Distinction’ to ‘Not Graded’.

Changes to Junior Cycle subjects are being implemented on a phased basis with both grading systems appearing together until 2021 at which time the last of the revised Junior Cycle subjects will be examined.

2017 will also mark the first year that students will be awarded a Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA), arising from the new Framework. The JCPA will replace the current Junior Certificate which students receive. The JCPA, which will be issued to students by their schools towards the end of this year, will report on all elements of assessment and will record students’ achievements both in State Examinations and in Classroom Based Assessments, Short Courses, Priority Learning Units and Other Areas of Learning.

Junior cycle reforms in Mathematics Home Economics Music, History and Geography will begin in September 2018.

The short courses developed to date by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment for use in junior cycle now include:

- Computer Coding;
- Civic Social and Political Education;
- Physical Education;
- Digital Media Literacy;
- Caring for Animals;
- Social Personal and Health Education;
- Artistic Performance;
- Exploring Forensic Science;

- Chinese Language and Culture;

- Philosophy.

Schools are also free to develop their own programmes in accordance with a template published by the NCCA.

**2016**

Students began studying the new English programme in 2014, and will receive their Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement in 2017. New programmes in Science and Business Studies began in September 2016. Irish and modern languages subjects will start in 2017 and the remaining subjects will be phased in over the period to 2018-2019.

The reforms are being supported by:

- Subject specification and teacher guidelines, exemplars for short courses, assessment toolkits and examples of student work being developed on an ongoing basis by the NCCA;

- A national programme of professional development for school leaders and teachers;

- Additional teacher time for planning, assessment and Subject Learning and Assessment Review Meetings;

- Management resources.

Efforts continued throughout 2016 to resolve a range of industrial relations issues with the teacher unions, including the Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland's objections to junior cycle assessment reform.

**Senior Cycle Curriculum Reform**

At senior cycle, reforms are under way to update curricula, to provide for short courses as well as subjects, to embed key skills (information processing, being personally effective, communicating, critical and creative thinking, and working with others), to provide for a greater range of modes of assessment, to encourage active learning and innovation, and to address issues concerned with rote learning and the predictability of examinations. These changes are being included on a phased basis as subject syllabi are revised. For a high stakes examination such as the Leaving Certificate, which is a key determinant of progression to employment or further study, there are no plans to move away from assessments externally set and marked by the State Examinations Commission.

A number of syllabi have been revised by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, but further development work is under way before implementation commences in schools. It is considered important to implement the changes at junior cycle first in order to provide an appropriate
2018

Computer Science

In January 2018, it was announced that 40 post primary schools around the country will start studying Leaving Certificate Computer Science from this September and will be the first to sit an exam in the subject in 2020.

The introduction of Computer Science as a Leaving Certificate subject is part of the Government’s overall commitment to embed digital technology in teaching and learning. It also complements other curricular changes being implemented such as introducing coding and computational thinking as part of the new maths curriculum for primary schools.

Computer Science for Leaving Certificate focuses on how programming and computational thinking can be applied to the solution of problems, and how computing technology impacts the world around us.

Students will learn:

- Computational thinking;

- How to analyse problems in computational terms;

- Programming languages and how to read, write, test and modify computer programs;

- Creative design;

- Design computational artefacts such as web pages, digital animations, simulations, games, apps and robotic systems;

- The ethical, historical, environmental and technological aspects of Computer Science, and how it impacts the social and economic development of society.

Physical Education

In February 2018, the Minister announced that schools across the country will be partaking in the first phase of the implementation of the new Physical Education for Senior Cycle programmes. 80 schools will implement either the examinable Physical Education Leaving Certificate subject or the new Senior Cycle Physical Education Framework which is not for examination, or both.

Students taking the new Leaving Certificate subject from September 2018 will sit the first Leaving Certificate Physical Education (LCPE) exam in 2020. The subject can be taken at both higher and ordinary levels. The new Senior Cycle Physical Education (SCPE) Framework, will provide a new modern curriculum for teachers to teach P.E. to all students at senior cycle.

The specification for Leaving Certificate Physical Education (LCPE) will provide learners with an
opportunity to study physical education for the Leaving Certificate examination, providing an additional optional Leaving Certificate subject.

2017

The NCCA is continuing its work to revise subjects in senior cycle, but no revisions are being implemented/introduced in schools at present. The new subject, Politics and Society, which began for 41 schools in 2016, will be extended to more schools from September 2017, with a view to being available for all schools in 2018.

2016

A new Leaving Certificate subject "Politics and Society" began in September 2016 in 41 schools. This will be expanded to all schools over the following 2 years. The new subject has four main strands of study – power and decision-making, active citizenship, human rights and responsibilities, globalisation and localisation. This builds on what is already a mandatory area of learning for all students in junior cycle.

Maths Reform, STEM Education and ICT in Schools

Ireland’s future economic growth and competitiveness will increasingly depend on the extent to which it can support high value knowledge based industries. The availability of an adequate number of graduates skilled in the fields of mathematics, physical sciences, biological sciences, technology and engineering will be a critical factor in supporting this, and these areas are seen as the drivers of growth and innovation in the Smart Economy. Mathematics is an essential skill for disciplines such as science, technology, engineering and finance. It also promotes the ability to think rationally, analyse and solve problems, and process data clearly and accurately.

A major programme of reform of Mathematics is under way in second level schools, colloquially known as Project Maths. Its overall aim is to teach mathematics in a way which promotes real understanding, where students can appreciate the relevance of what they are learning and its application to everyday life, and how mathematics can be used to solve problems.

2019

In March 2019, a further €50m investment in ICT infrastructure for all primary and post-primary schools was announced.

Grant funding for the purchase of ICT infrastructure will issue to all eligible primary and post primary schools in the country to enable them to embed the use of digital technology in teaching and learning.

The latest tranche of funding is made up of an initial pot of €45m – up €15m on the allocations in previous years.

The grants will be allocated through a standard lump sum and additional per-capita sums based on the size of the school. At primary level, the grant is worth in the region of €5,900 for a 100 pupil school and almost €22,000 for a 500 pupil school. At post-primary, a 500 student school can receive a grant of almost €27,000 rising to some €52,000 for a 1,000 student school.

A further €5m pot of funding is also being set aside in this year’s tranche to recognise and support schools’ efforts to engage with digital technologies in teaching and learning. Schools are being invited to apply for the additional fund by demonstrating evidence of effective embedding of digital
technologies and Digital Learning Planning.

The grant funding for schools is expected to complement the objectives of a school’s Digital Learning Plan, which the Department of Education and Skills has provided considerable resources and supports to under the Digital Strategy.

The funding can be spent on technology including:

- Desktop PCs, laptops, tablets or hybrid devices.
- Projectors
- Cloud based tools and software applications to support learning.
- Learning platforms - these are generally cloud based applications used to support the teaching and learning process.

2018

In February 2018, the Minister for Education and Skills announced a €30m investment in ICT infrastructure for primary and post-primary schools.

Thousands of primary and post primary schools around the country will receive a grant to purchase equipment which will enable them to integrate digital technology in teaching and learning.

The grant, which will be received by all schools built before 2014, is allocated according to the size of the school plus a standard lump sum amount, is worth in excess of €4,100 for a 100 pupil school and almost €13,000 for a 500 pupil school at primary level. At post-primary level, the grant is worth almost €18,000 for a 500 student school, and over €33,000 for a 1,000 student school.

2017

Project Maths is continuing. In March 2017, the 2 day national conference on teaching mathematics at post primary level, featured world renowned Professor Akihiko Takahashi delivering Maths lessons to Irish second level students. It also showcased the work of over 100 schools and 52 research groups involving 250 teachers who came together to engage in Lesson Study. The conference also featured three live structured problem solving lessons focused on topics in the Junior and Leaving Certificates, together with lesson observation and post lesson discussion, as part of a Lesson Study cycle. Lesson Study is an approach which has been very successful in Japan in developing teachers' capacity to use problem solving approaches in Mathematics.

In January 2017, an ICT infrastructure grant of €30m was announced for primary and post primary schools. The funds can be spent on teacher/student computers, tablets or hybrid devices, projectors or interactive flat screens, cloud based tools and applications to support learning, or learning platforms.

Promoting Inclusion and Diversity in Schools - Special Education
A new School Inclusion Model, supported by €4.75m funding allocated in Budget 2019, aims to build schools’ capacity to include children with additional needs and to provide other supports for pupils.

The achievement of better education and life outcomes for all children including those with special needs is a key element of Government policy with €1.75 billion - 19% of the total education budget - funding a range of supports including additional special needs teachers and Special Needs Assistants (SNAs).

Seventy-five schools, both primary and post-primary, in Kildare, Wicklow and South Dublin will be invited to participate in this new research-based package of education and health supports to be piloted and evaluated in the 2019/20 school year.

Key features of the School Inclusion Model are:

- A new frontloading allocation model for SNAs. A profiling system for Special Education Teaching will be used to allocate resources, breaking the link with the need for an assessment. An appeals mechanism will be included to deal with exceptional cases in schools.

- National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) will be expanded to provide more intensive support. Additional psychologists will be recruited for the pilot, giving greater access to the full range of in-school supports for students with complex educational needs.

- SNAs will be offered a new National Training Programme. It will be designed to equip them with the skills and knowledge to support students with additional care needs arising from significant medical, physical, emotional/behavioural, sensory, communication and other significant difficulties that pose a barrier to participating in school life. The training will emphasise the need for students to develop independence and resilience.

- A new national nursing service for children with complex medical needs in schools. A cross agency planning group is to be established to develop the scope for the scheme, develop an application procedure for schools and plan for how the service is to be delivered. The new service will complement current provision provided through community based services.

- A Regional Support Team will be set up for schools in the pilot, under the auspices of the NCSE. The team will include 4 Speech and Language Therapists, 2 Occupational Therapists and 4 Behaviour Support practitioners. A further 19 Speech and Language Therapists and 12 Occupational Therapists will deliver supports within schools.

- Consultation with schools, teachers and parents.

2018

In the 2018 Budget, provision has been made for:
• 1,091 Special Needs Assistants;

• 230 new teachers in special classes and special schools;

• 100 new Special Education teachers;

• 100 teaching posts for guidance;

• 10 NEPS psychologists will be recruited in 2018.

2017

In the 2017 Budget, provision was made for a further 900 extra resource teachers and 115 extra special needs assistants from September 2017.

A new model for allocating teaching resources in respect of special needs to mainstream schools was announced in January 2017, to come into effect in September 2017. The previous model resulted in delays while children were waiting for a diagnosis of their disability, and provided a standardised allocation for each type of disability, irrespective of the spectrum of needs. The new model is based on the recommendations of a working group established by the National Council for Special Education following engagement with stakeholders. It was piloted successfully in 47 schools.

The new staffing model provides a baseline allocation for all schools to support inclusion and address learning difficulties, allied with a specific additional component based on the school's profile, socio-economic status, gender context and standardised test scores. The Department, working with the Educational Research Centre, has developed profiles for all schools. The model has been welcomed as moving away from unnecessary labelling of pupils with special needs for resource purposes.

Bullying in Schools

An Action Plan on Bullying [18] was published in January 2013. Revised procedures on anti-bullying, including cyber bullying, and homophobic or identity based bullying, were implemented in all schools with effect from 2014. Each school is required to develop its anti-bullying policy in consultation with parents, students, and all school staff, and aim to create a positive school culture and climate that is inclusive and welcoming of difference.

Key elements of the procedures are:

• A strong emphasis on prevention of bullying behaviour through the fostering and development of a positive school culture and climate that is based on inclusivity and respect;

• A school-wide approach to preventing and tackling bullying behaviour;

• A requirement that all schools must adhere to a standardised policy template for developing their anti-bullying policy;
• Greater transparency for parents and pupils through the requirement for schools to publish their 
anti-bullying policy on the school’s website and give it to the parents association;

• Making clear that the definition of bullying includes cyber-bullying and identity based bullying 
(such as homophobic and racist bullying);

• Practical tips for building a positive school culture and climate that is based on inclusivity and respect;

• Clear procedures for investigating, recording and dealing with bullying;

• Oversight arrangements that involve the School Principal reporting regularly to the Board of 
Management and a requirement for the Board to do an annual review of the school’s anti-
bullying policy and its implementation.

This issue is also examined as part of school inspection reports.

In May 2014 a National Anti-Bullying Centre was re-launched, based in the School of Education 
Studies within Dublin City University. The role of the Centre is to undertake research, to work with 
schools to create a safe learning environment, and to act as a national resource centre relating to 
bullying in schools, on-line and in the workplace.

Wellbeing in Post Primary Schools: Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention [19] 
were issued to all post primary schools in 2013.

The work of schools in this area is supported by the Professional Development Service for Teachers, 
the National Behaviour Support Service, the National Educational Psychological Service and the school 
guidance service in post primary schools.

2018

Best practice guidance for primary and for post primary schools in the use of programmes and/or 
external facilitators in promoting wellbeing consistent with the Department of Education and Skills’ 
Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice were sent to schools in July 2018.

The Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice recognises the unique position of schools 
in promoting the wellbeing of students. This policy requires that a Wellbeing Promotion Process is 
developed and implemented, through the use of the School Self-Evaluation (SSE) process, in all 
schools by 2023. School management, principals and teachers have a duty to provide the best quality 
and the most appropriate education in order to promote the wellbeing of their students. They also 
have a duty to protect students in their care at all times from any potentially harmful, inappropriate 
or misguided resources, interventions or programmes. The Department advises management 
authorities of the necessity to adhere to best practice when implementing the Wellbeing Policy 
Statement and Framework for Practice.

The circular offers best practice guidance in selecting wellbeing promotion programmes and/or 
external facilitators (both once-off speakers and those delivering programmes over a period of time), 
to support the implementation of the Wellbeing Promotion Process including, in particular, the 
selection for social, personal and health education (SPHE), and relationships and sexuality education
The Department’s Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice assists schools in ensuring that wellbeing promotion is embedded within the school’s existing practice. The school’s review and development process using the Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice provides guidance and practical resources to assist in the further enhancement of whole school approaches to wellbeing promotion in the areas of:

- Culture and environment;
- Curriculum (teaching and learning);
- Policy and planning;
- Relationships and partnerships.

To ensure effective implementation of a whole school approach the school needs a structure such as a student support team which has wellbeing promotion as part of its responsibility.

The responsibility of Schools is recognised under The Education Act (1998) through: A recognised school shall promote the moral, spiritual, social and personal development of students and provide health education for them, in consultation with their parents, having regard to the characteristic spirit of the school.

**2017**

As part of the junior cycle curriculum reforms, a new area of learning, Wellbeing, is being introduced in all post primary schools from September 2017. This will provide for a minimum threshold of 275 hours in all schools over the three year cycle, covering subjects or short courses in Physical Education, Social Personal and Health Education, and Civic Social and Political Education, allied with guidance and other areas of learning which support the achievement of wellbeing.

As part of the new Delivering Equality of Opportunity and Inclusion in Schools: Deis Plan 2017 [6] published in February 2017, the Incredible Years Teacher Classroom Management Programme, and the Friends programme are being extended to all DEIS schools in disadvantaged areas. The Incredible Years Teacher programme which supports teachers, working with parents, to reduce behavioural difficulties and strengthen social and emotional competence of early primary school children. The Friends programme is designed to reduce anxiety and promote coping mechanisms, resilience and school connectedness among pupils aged 4 to 18.

**2016**

Being LGBT in School: A resource for Post Primary Schools to Prevent Homophobic and Transphobic Bullying in Support LGBT Students [20] was launched by the Minister for Education and Skills in January 2016. The resource was developed by GLEN, the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network, working in partnership with educational interests, the Department of Education and Skills and the Child and Family Agency

The Action Plan for Education 2016-2019 [21] provides for the introduction of Well Being as an area of
learning in Junior Cycle (lower second level education) from the 2017/18 school year.

**Admissions Policy in Schools**

An Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2015 was published, designed to provide a regulatory framework to ensure that the criteria laid down by schools for enrolling pupils are consistent, reasonable and applied equitably across the board.

**2018**

The [Education (Admission to Schools) Bill](#) passed the final stage in the Oireachtas, in July 2018. This new law will deliver a number of broad ranging reforms, including removal of religion as criteria in school admissions, fees relating to admissions and waiting lists that will make it easier for a child to access their local school. The passage of this Bill fulfils a key action in the Minister’s *Action Plan for Education*, which aims to make Ireland’s education and training service the best in Europe by 2026.

Among other things the new law will:

- Remove the role of religion in school admissions for virtually all primary schools;

- Ban waiting lists, thus ensuring parents who move to a new area, or parents who rent, are not disadvantaged;

- Ban fees relating to admissions in non-fee charging schools;

- Require all schools to publish their admissions policies, which will include details of their arrangements for pupils who decline to participate in religious instruction;

- Require all schools to consult with and inform parents where changes are being made to their admissions policies;

- Ensure that where a school is not oversubscribed (approximately 80% of schools) it must admit all students applying;

- Provide for a situation where a child (with special needs or otherwise) cannot find a school place, and allow the National Council for Special Education or Tusla (Child and Family Agency) to designate a school place for the child;

- Provide for the Minister to require a school to open a special class for children with special educational needs where the National Council of Special Education deems it necessary;

- Provide for Irish medium schools to give priority to Irish speaking children;

- An oversubscribed school, for the first time, will not be permitted to allocate more than 25% of their places to the children of past pupils (currently there is no such restriction in place so in
theory a school could allocate all of their places to the children of past pupils).

The reforms in the Bill are aimed at increasing the transparency and fairness of school admissions and will eradicate any soft barriers which may have inadvertently acted as a deterrent for some children previously.

2017

The Bill passed third Stage (Committee Stage) on 28th June 2017 where a number of amendments were made. The Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2016 [23], as amended, is continuing to progress through the legislative process.

2016

The Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2015 was not finalised in the life cycle of the 2011-16 Government. An updated Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2016 [24] was published in July 2016, passed second Stage on 17th November 2016 and will be progressed through the Oireachtas (Irish Parliament) as quickly as possible.

The new Bill includes measures to:

- Ensure that where a school is not oversubscribed (80% of schools) it must admit all students applying;

- Ban waiting lists, thus ending the discrimination against parents who move in to a new area;

- Ban fees relating to admissions in non-fee paying schools;

- Require all schools to publish their admissions policies, which will include details of the provisions for pupils who decline to participate in religious instruction;

- Require all schools to consult with and inform parents where changes are being made to admissions policies;

- Explicitly ban discrimination in school admissions;

- Provide for a situation where a child (with special needs or otherwise) cannot find a school place, and allow the National Council for Special Education or Tusla (Child and Family Agency) to designate a school place for the child.

**Patronage of Schools**

Irish society as a whole is in the process of major social, cultural and demographic change. One of the most complex and challenging aspects of reform in our school system is how best to deal with changes in school ethos and religious and moral education. There are very strong opposing views on these matters and the Minister for Education & Skills is endeavoring to provide the most reasonable
and inclusive reforms in this area. The Government is committed to progressing the development of a
dynamic and innovative education system that reflects the diversity of twenty-first Century Ireland.

Since 2011, new schools are generally only established in areas of demographic growth. The
Department uses a Geographical Information System (GIS) to identify where the pressure for school
places across the country will arise. In order to plan for school provision and analyse the relevant
demographic data, the Department divides the country into 314 school planning areas. The GIS uses
data from a range of sources, including the Central Statistics Office, Ordnance Survey Ireland, the
Department of Social Protection and the Department's own databases. With this information, the
Department carries out nationwide demographic exercises at primary and post-primary level to
determine where additional school accommodation is needed.

The patronage process for new schools is overseen by the New Schools Establishment Group (NSEG).
This independent advisory group was set up in 2011 to advise the Minister on the patronage of new
schools following its consideration of a report prepared by the Department on the applications
received.

Once it has been established from the demographic exercises that a new school, primary or post-
primary, is required to meet the demographic need in a school planning area, a separate process is
conducted to establish who will run the school.

It is open to all patron bodies and prospective patrons to apply for patronage of a new school under
the patronage process. Parental preferences for each patron, together with the extent of diversity
currently available in the area, are key to decisions in relation to the outcome of this process. The
patronage process also incorporates consideration of, and the potential for, Irish-medium provision.

Prospective patrons at either primary or post-primary level must show evidence of parental demand,
from the area to be served, for the model of provision proposed. Patrons and prospective patrons
must therefore include a completed parental preference template as evidence of parental demand
with each application for patronage.

Following consideration of all of the above, the results of the assessment are incorporated in a report
for consideration by the NSEG. The NSEG review the contents of the patronage assessment report and
then compile a report of its recommendations for consideration and final decision by the Minister.

Since the current arrangements were introduced in 2011, 30 new primary schools and 31 new post-
primary schools have been established.

2018

In early June 2018, the Minister for Education and Skills invited school patron bodies/prospective
school patron bodies to apply for the patronage of four new post-primary schools due to be
established in September 2019. This follows on from the Minister’s recent announcement for the
establishment of 42 new schools over the next four year period from 2019 to 2022.

The planned new schools were decided following on from a nationwide, forward-planning exercise
carried out by the Department into the future need for primary and post-primary schools across the
country. The four-year horizon will enable increased lead-in times for planning and delivery of the
schools.

A new Online Patronage Process System (OPPS) was launched on June 22 2018 to provide
objective information to all parents and guardians which will allow them to make an informed choice
in expressing a preference for their preferred model of patronage for their child’s education. This
recognises that parental preferences for each patron, from parents/guardians of children who reside in the school planning areas concerned, together with the extent of diversity currently available in these areas, are key to decisions in relation to the outcome of this process.

The patronage determination process for new schools is overseen by the independent New Schools Establishment Group (NSEG). This Group was set up in 2011 to advise the Minister on the patronage of new schools following its consideration of a report prepared by the Department on the applications received.

The schools will be established in line with the requirements and criteria originally announced in June 2011 for the patronage of new schools. Applicants must confirm they will comply with each of the requirements and criteria in order for their application to be processed.

The Department will subsequently compile a patronage report for the consideration of the New Schools Establishment Group (NSEG) and the NSEG will submit a report with recommendations for consideration by the Minister.

**Patronage commitments**

The Applicant Patron(s) will have to be satisfy the following requirements, by confirming to:

- Operate by the rules and regulations laid down in various Department of Education and Skills circulars and operating procedures and to follow the prescribed curriculum;

- Operate the school within the resourcing and policy parameters established by the Department of Education and Skills;

- Prioritise enrolment of children in the area(s) for which the Department has identified the need for a school;

- Accept and open special education facilities;

- Grow enrolment to the long-term projected enrolment identified by the Department;

- Establish an Aonad where there is a demand for it (for a school where the primary medium of instruction is to be English);

- Enter into the appropriate standard lease agreement with the Department of Education and Skills;

- Share school buildings with other schools as may be determined by the Department should the building not be in full use;

- Be part of a campus development with other primary or second-level schools as identified by the Department; and
• Identify and source suitable interim accommodation, where deemed necessary by the Department, within the parameters set by the Department.

2017

• 29 of the 30 new primary schools established are multi-denominational, and one is inter-denominational.

• 26 of the 31 new post-primary schools have multi-denominational ethos, 3 have Catholic ethos and one has a Church of Ireland ethos.

• These outcomes are reflective of parental preferences in the areas where the schools are being established.

Multi-denominational patronage has been awarded in relation to 6 schools (1 primary and 5 post-primary) scheduled to open in 2018.

2016

• 26 of the 27 new primary schools established are multi-denominational, and one is inter-denominational.

• 23 of the 27 new post-primary schools have multi-denominational ethos, 3 have Catholic ethos and one has a Church of Ireland ethos.

• These outcomes are reflective of parental preferences in the areas where the schools are being established.

Patronage Divesting Process

On foot of the report of the Advisory Group to the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector in 2012, surveys of parental preferences were undertaken in a number of areas of stable population to establish the level of parental demand for a wider choice in the patronage of primary schools within these areas.

Surveys were undertaken in 2012 and 2013. Analysis of the parental preferences expressed in each of the 43 areas surveyed indicated that there was sufficient parental demand supporting immediate changes in school patronage in 28 areas.

Following on from publication of the reports, the main patron (Catholic Bishop or Archbishop) in each of these 28 areas was asked to consider divesting options that would free up school accommodation for provision by the first choice alternative Patron.

Final reports on the options available were submitted by the existing Patrons, which enabled a targeted focus on areas where there were real possibilities for 2014 and 2015.
From 2013 to 2016, ten new schools have opened under the patronage divesting process.

**Schools Reconfiguration for Diversity Process**

The Government is committed to progressing the development of a dynamic and innovative education system that reflects the diversity of twenty-first Century Ireland. The Programme for a Partnership Government reflects the Government’s objective of strengthening parental choice and further expanding diversity in our school system. The desire of parents for diversity in education is primarily being pursued by increasing the number of non-denominational and multi-denominational schools with a view to reaching 400 by 2030.

In this context and given the modest pace of progress with the Patronage Divestment process (see above), the Minister for Education & Skills announced on 30th January, 2017 new plans aimed at providing more multi-denominational and non-denominational schools across the country, in line with the choices of families and school communities and the Programme for Government commitment in this area.

The new Schools Reconfiguration for Diversity process supporting transfers of schools to multi-denominational patrons in response to the wishes of local families is based around principles of transparency and cooperation. Therefore, there will be a very substantial level of consultation of local communities in the process, both with the Education and Training Boards (ETBs) in the initial phase to establish evidence of demand by consulting pre-school parents and subsequently through the requirement for the existing patron to consult with local community and school interests in proposing to transfer patronage of an existing school to an alternative patron body. In that process, proposals from all prospective multi-denominational patrons that wish to be considered will be taken into account.

One primary school in Killarney, Co. Kerry opened in September, 2017 under the “early-movers” provision of the Schools Reconfiguration for Diversity process.

The Minister for Education & Skills believes this new process is of major importance to the future of education in Ireland, and to providing a system which reflects the changing needs of families.

**Transition from Second Level to Higher Education**

The report *From Transaction to Transition: Outcomes of the Conference on the Transition from Second Level to Third Level Education in Ireland* [27] published in 2011, set out a range of actions which could be taken to improve the transition process for students into higher education. The report arose from a joint commitment of the Higher Education Authority and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment to examine this area, amid concerns that the current system of using the Leaving Certificate results for entry into college was having a negative impact on the quality of learning in upper secondary education. This was viewed as giving rise to a culture of rote learning and teaching to the test, and affecting the subsequent capacity of students to participate effectively in higher education.

The report focused on 3 areas:

- Commitment to address any problematic predictability in the Leaving Certificate examinations;
- Commitment to reduce the number of grade bands used in the marking of the Leaving Certificate examinations;
Commitment to significantly reduce the number of programme offerings for entry into honours bachelor degree programmes in higher education, and to offer much broader and common entry routes, reducing unnecessary specialisation in the early part of courses.

These actions are in addition to the general strategy of ongoing curriculum reform, (embedding of key skills, and broadening approaches to assessment) which form part of the Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle changes under way, and the reforms under the Strategy for Higher Education.

2018

There have been no significant reforms in this area Q3 2018. Any policy changes in the coming months will be reported on in December 2018.

2017

The changes to the Leaving Certificate Grading System and Common Points scale came into effect in 2017. Over 58,000 students sat the Leaving Certificate Examinations in 2017 and were marked under the new 8 band grading scale, down from the old 14 point scale. A key feature of the changes introduced to the Leaving Certificate grading is the award of 37 points for entry to higher education for a 30-39% result in a higher level paper. Prior to the change being introduced no points were awarded at this level. The change was introduced to encourage the take up of higher level papers in senior cycle and to reduce the risk to the student who opts for a higher level examination. As a result of this change, the take up of higher level papers increased from 63% in 2016 to 66.3% in 2017, the recent trend on its own would have predicted an increase of approximately 1.3% only.

There were over 80,000 applications to the Central Applications Office (CAO) in 2017 for entry to higher education. All applicants through the CAO in 2017 were scored using the new Common Points Scale, regardless of when they sat the Leaving Certificate.

The new Common Points Scale was designed to minimise the use of random selection. Random selection occurs where applicants receive the same score and are randomly selected for a course place. By introducing different interval between points scored, far fewer students will achieve the same points score. The number of courses for which random selection applied in the first round of 2017 CAO higher education offers was reduced by approximately 50% in 2017, following the introduction of the new Common Points Scale.

2016

The strategy is continuing. The new grading arrangements for the Leaving Certificate and the points system for higher education entry will come into effect in 2017.

A new on-line resource Get Ready for Education: a Learning Journey [28] has been developed by a consortium of higher education institutions to help second level students prepare for the challenges of higher education. The courses are available on-line or as a blended learning option. They cover five areas -- student orientation, discovering learning, critical and creative thinking, digital literacy and communications and responsible citizenship.