



# *Y*our *E*ducation *S*ystem

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A Report on the Response to the  
Invitation to Participate  
in Creating a Shared Vision  
for Irish Education into the Future

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Thomas Kellaghan and Páid McGee  
*Educational Research Centre*

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

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Mindful of the fact that education is a central feature of Irish life, contributing to the development and well-being of individuals and of society, the then Minister for Education and Science, Noel Dempsey, T.D., instituted in January 2004 a national consultative process called Your Education System (YES). The purpose of the process was to provide all involved and interested in education with the opportunity to contribute to the development of a vision of education for the future. While competing perspectives on the purposes of education were likely to emerge, making the achievement of consensus unlikely, it was hoped that at least the major values underlying our education system would be articulated, which, in turn, might point to how forward-looking aspirations might build on past accomplishments. Participants were encouraged to adopt a long-term perspective in considering decision-making and the planning of educational provision, which too often in the past had been constrained by short-term considerations and sectional interests. Furthermore, since many of the consequences of choices made today only become manifest generations later, participants should take account not only of contemporary conditions but of how these might change in the future.

Education systems adapt continually to changing conditions, and the Irish system is no exception. Furthermore, major changes over the last half century have had important social and economic consequences. The provision of free education at post-primary level in the 1960s and expanded opportunities at third level in the 1970s and 1980s not only opened up opportunities for young people, but provided, along with other factors, the conditions required for the unprecedented economic development of the 1990s. Once progression to post-primary education was open to all, a reconceptualisation of primary education, embodied in the 1971 curriculum, became possible, providing new approaches to learning for children as they embarked on their formal educational careers.

Other developments in recent years include an extensive legislative framework (some of which directly relates to education, some indirectly), the reform of curricula, and a series of reviews of specific aspects of educational provision which, inter alia, focused on special education, autism, reading disability, disadvantage, the points system, the preparation of teachers, and third-level education. A variety of documents, including the National Development Plan 2000–2006 (in which education was identified as a priority), the Agreed Programme for Government (June 2002), social partnership agreements (most recently, Sustaining Progress 2003–2005), the National Children’s Strategy, the National Health Strategy, the Information Society Strategy, and the National Anti-Poverty Strategy, also have implications for education.

One might conclude that sufficient documentation is available to guide policy and decision-making in education, and that a process such as Your Education System was not required. There are, however, a number of reasons why this conclusion might not be warranted. First, recommendations in reports on specific topics were often idealistic rather

than realistic, and usually were not costed. Secondly, it was not obvious what principles should guide the prioritisation of recommendations emanating from different sources which budgetary constraints would inevitably impose. Thirdly, while government and social partnership proposals might be considered to have a status not shared by the reports of ad hoc groups, they often reflect the views of powerful pressure groups rather than those of the general population. At best, they are the result of exercises, not in participatory democracy, but in representative democracy from which many people feel excluded. While the YES process might not allow all interested individuals to express their views, and was open to manipulation, it did provide the opportunity for voices that are not normally heard to have a say. In this, it espoused the principle expressed by Thomas Jefferson (to John Taylor, 1816) that 'the mass of the citizens is the safest depository of their own rights.'

The fact that it is over ten years (1992–1995) since the last major overall reviews of Irish education policy in the Green Paper (*Education for a Changing World*), the National Education Convention, and the White Paper (*Charting Our Education Future*) were carried out might in itself suggest the need for a general review at this time. During those years, the length of time students remain in the formal education system increased; the nature of the employment available to graduates of the system changed and became more demanding; there has been major growth in the use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT), and further growth is to be expected; immigration increased; and the values of our society continue to change, resulting in what many people perceive to be a strengthening of materialism and a decline in traditional civic, religious, and cultural values.

It is clear that the Your Education System (YES) process was launched at a time when several factors, ranging from changes in social relationships and work patterns to growth in globalisation, multiculturalism, and the use of Information and Communications Technology, pose a variety of new challenges for the education system. Among the issues that now demand attention are the need to expand the range of available learning experiences so that all can avail of the opportunities which contemporary developments offer; the need to improve the quality of students' learning in preparation for a future that is uncertain and unpredictable and will require skills of problem-solving, creativity, flexibility, and the capacity to go on learning; and the need to adapt the education system to balance unity and diversity in a society that is becoming increasingly pluralistic.

In this report, the main components of the YES process are first described. This is followed by a brief description of participation in the process in terms of attendance at meetings, accessing the website, and a national survey of public opinion. The next (main) section of the report summarises the views of participants expressed in meetings, in written submissions, and in the national survey. In the final section, general conclusions are presented. A list of individuals and agencies from whom submissions were received is appended to the report.

## 2 THE YES PROCESS

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There were six major components of the YES process of consultation.

1. A secretariat was set up in the Educational Research Centre with responsibility for recording and reporting on the proceedings of the process.
2. The Minister for Education and Science at the time published a document in January 2004 entitled *Your Education System*, in which individuals were invited to express their views about the education system and, in particular, to contribute to a debate about how they would like to see it develop in the medium- to long-term. The document listed for further consideration a number of key concepts that seemed relevant to such a debate: that education serves many goals; that education should meet the differing needs of all learners; that learning is a life-long process; that education has an important role in promoting equality; and that education should prepare learners for a changing and uncertain future. It suggested a series of headings under which comments might be made: schools, teachers, learners, examinations/qualifications, beyond school, quality, Information and Communications Technology, further education, higher education, connecting with communities, and paying for education.
3. Public meetings were held in 17 locations<sup>1</sup> throughout the country between February 5 and March 30, 2004. Meetings were also held with special interest groups: The Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools (March 26, 2004); The National Parents' Council – Primary (April 3, 2004); The Local Authority Members Association (April 15, 2004); The Irish Vocational Education Association (April 27, 2004); The Joint Managerial Body/Association of Management of Catholic Secondary Schools (April 29, 2004); and *Dáil na bPáistí* (January 29, 2005). Focus meetings to address issues of socioeconomic disadvantage were held in Cork (August 4), Tallaght (September 28), and Galway (October 4). Each meeting was chaired by a well-known public personality. At many of the meetings, attendees were invited, on their way in, to indicate the issues which they considered most important. Expressed preferences were taken into account by the chairperson in ordering the discussion. A panel of individuals representing a broad range of interests (including students) was present at meetings and provided comments.

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<sup>1</sup> Galway (February 5), Sligo (February 12), Malahide (February 17), Letterkenny (February 19), Kilkenny (February 23), Ballsbridge (February 24), Mullingar (March 1), Dundalk (March 2), Cavan (March 4), Portlaoise (March 8), Tralee (March 11), Limerick (March 12), Wexford (March 15), Castlebar (March 22), Cork (March 25), Waterford (March 29), Tallaght (March 30).

The Minister attended 14 of the public meetings, while a Minister for State (Síle de Valera, T.D., Brian Lenihan, T.D.) attended the remaining three. It was made clear that the Minister saw his function as listening to the views expressed; he adhered to this policy, speaking only at the end of each meeting to thank those who had attended and those who had engaged in discussion. At the meetings with the special interest groups, the Minister responded to the discussion and sometimes expressed views on some of the points made. At focus meetings, he engaged in some interaction with participants. The present Minister, Mary Hanafin, T.D., attended the *Dáil na bPáistí* meeting.

4. A website ([www.youeducation.ie](http://www.youeducation.ie)) was set up in January 2004 with two main functions: to provide summaries of meetings and to receive and publish comments from individuals. Comments could also be submitted to the secretariat in hard copy. The authors of a number of submissions did not wish to have them placed on the website.
5. The views of a quota sample (N=1,511) of the Irish population aged 15+ years were sought on a range of key and topical education issues in interviews carried out in June–July 2004 by Millward Brown IMS. The issues investigated were: the emphasis placed on a variety of goals in schools; conditions in schools; information available about schools; teachers and teaching; curricula and examinations; education and the community; school management; ways of improving education; the funding of education; and the evaluation of education. A report of the survey is available at [www.youeducation.ie](http://www.youeducation.ie) and [www.erc.ie](http://www.erc.ie)
6. To guarantee the integrity of the process, eight individuals agreed to act as independent trustees: Ms Mary Davis, Dr Garret FitzGerald, Dr Pádraig Hogan, Dame Geraldine Keegan, Dr Barry McGaw, Mr Ned Sullivan, Dr Catherine Sweeney, Mr John Wilson. One or more trustees attended all but one of the public meetings.

# 3 PARTICIPATION IN THE YES PROCESS

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The consultation process evoked widespread interest. Average attendance at 17 public meetings was over 260 (ranging from approximately 150 to approximately 450). Those in attendance included parents, teachers, students (at all levels), and members of the general public. The secretariat also received 593 written submissions, many of them through email. Furthermore, a sample of 1,511 individuals (787 female; 724 male) aged 15+ years at 108 sampling points throughout the country responded to a questionnaire in an interview that lasted about half an hour.

Interest in the process is also indicated by the fact that the secretariat website had 431,719 hits between January 2004 and July 2005. The most extensive activity occurred during, and immediately following, the public meetings in March and April 2004. Approximately 10,000 hits were still being recorded in each of the first five months of 2005. Interest was not confined to Ireland: the site was also accessed from Austria, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Pakistan, Poland, the Slovak Republic, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America.

The following are examples of the responses of individuals to the process which were submitted to the website.

'I believe that what you have set out to do is an extremely open, frank and positive task. The manner in which this website and documentation is structured, put forward and responded to allows for everyone to have their say, no matter how small. I only hope that the result of this endeavour actually improves the school system for the future of everyone.'

'The YES document is a great way of hearing the views of people who have an interest in changing the system for the good and would usually not get to have their voices heard.'

'I feel that the YES document has raised many of the key issues to be questioned about the current state of the education system.'

'I highly commend the Minister for his initiative and hope that the process clarifies priorities for us.'

'I am thrilled that the Minister has begun this review .... I believe that our system has to change to survive.'

‘As a teacher of over 20 years experience may I say how I welcome the opportunity of giving my views. While everyone from teacher unions to ‘experts’ are regularly asked for their views, officialdom rarely if ever seeks the opinion of the teacher in the classroom.’

‘I really do not have much faith in this consultation process.’

The meetings ‘allowed ordinary citizens ample opportunity to express their views on the education system.’

‘... may I congratulate the Minister in giving all stakeholders the opportunity to submit their views on the direction of our education system.’

‘I sincerely hope that the good intentions of this document do not take root on a shelf in a store room but act as a foundation of a better ever-improving education that is inclusive, fair, and a world leader.’

Data from the consultation presented in this report were obtained from three sources: public, special interest, and focus meetings; submissions to the secretariat; and the national survey of views of the Irish public. While each had strengths and weaknesses, in combination they provided a rare opportunity for the general public to have its voice heard on education. Because particular issues in Irish education seldom feature in electoral politics at national level, and because local education structures, which might provide a forum, exist only in the vocational sector, there is little opportunity to gauge the views of the general public on educational issues. This is surely a loss to policy-makers and to the discourse in which the powerful partner-groups engage, especially given the rapidly changing nature of Irish society and the substantial developments in education over recent decades.

A strength of the public meetings was that they were open to everyone, and provided, at local level, a forum for the expression of views. They engaged people concerned with all levels of education, attracting students, parents, teachers, and others involved in education, as well as individuals who attended in none of these capacities but were concerned with the role of education in society. The meetings gave people the opportunity to have their voices heard directly by the Minister as well as by senior officials of the Department of Education and Science. Parents and teachers were strongly represented at all meetings, while participation by some interest groups, in particular the industrial/commercial sector and third-level education (including teacher education), was limited.

The greatest weakness of the public meetings was that they could be, and often were, dominated by special interest groups, in some cases conveying the same message at a number of meetings. More than one submission to the website remarked on what was termed the ‘highjacking of meetings.’ ‘What a good idea to air views in public’, another commentator noted, and then continued (perhaps overstating the case), ‘but a pity that the general public don’t take part.’

A further weakness of the public meetings was that because of large attendances, not all who wished to speak could do so. The impression at most meetings was that there were as many more wishing to speak as actually spoke. Furthermore, as attendances included many teachers, it may have been difficult for parents to express concerns or criticisms regarding their own children's educational experiences, and very difficult indeed for students to do so, though some did. While critical comments about teachers were uncommon at public meetings, groups from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds in focus meetings expressed some serious concerns about teachers' attitudes to working-class parents. Parents, teachers, and students also had, of course, the opportunity to express their views on the website, where there was less evidence than at public meetings of efforts by special interest groups to dominate the agenda.

The views expressed at public, special interest, and focus meetings, as well as views expressed directly to the secretariat, while presenting important and interesting views of individuals who were sufficiently interested in education to make their views known, could not be regarded as necessarily reflecting the views of the general population. To address this issue, a sample of the Irish public was selected for interview. A strength of the survey was that it was nationally representative and provided the first occasion in 30 years on which the views of the public about a range of issues relating to education were solicited.

A limitation of surveys is that they lack the depth and richness that oral and written submissions can provide. Furthermore, in considering results, the range of responses is often ignored. For example, while it may be considered reassuring that 55% of respondents regarded the emphasis placed on developing independent learning skills in post-primary schools to be 'just right', it may also be important that 36% considered it to be 'too little'. Variation is also in evidence in the percentage of respondents who judged the seriousness of the problem of 'lack of student discipline'. The percentages that regarded the problem as 'very serious', 'somewhat serious', 'not too serious', and 'not at all serious' were, respectively, 32, 37, 20, and 7.

To attempt to present in summary form the array of views of speakers at meetings and of those who made written submissions was a daunting, one might even say impossible, task. Clearly, not everyone's views could be represented, if only because of limitations of space. But more fundamentally, a report that attempted to do so would present a very disjointed discourse. Some selection of material was required, and for this, criteria were required. The consistency with which an issue was raised was one criterion, though this was not just a matter of counting the number of times a topic was mentioned. Secondly, evidence of consensus was sought, though this did not mean that dissenting views did not occur (and these will sometimes be referred to). For some issues, evidence of consensus was provided by comparing views expressed in meetings and submissions with responses in the national survey. Thirdly, views that adopted a long-term perspective seemed particularly appropriate. Often, however, it proved difficult to get participants to look much beyond their immediate needs (relating, for example, to provision for special needs, to student indiscipline, or to problems in gaining access to post-primary schools). Perceptions of immediate needs, may, of course, have important long-term implications for reforms which, when they occur, usually involve refinement in existing patterns, not dramatic structural changes.

While every effort was made to apply these criteria, it is likely that personal biases operated in the selection of material. Because of this, readers are encouraged to read the submissions of participants on the secretariat website ([www.youreducation.ie](http://www.youreducation.ie)). Not only are they likely to find a perusal of many of the contributions rewarding, their action will also serve as a recognition of the commitment, time, and effort that contributors invested in the preparation of their submissions.

# 4. THE RESPONSE TO THE YES INVITATION

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Responses to the invitation to participate in creating a shared vision for Irish education in the future are categorised for the most part in terms of the topics used in the *Your Education System* document published at the beginning of the consultation process. However, some alterations were made to accommodate the responses of participants.

## CURRICULUM

Many of the comments on curriculum reflected the view that education should be sensitive to the societal conditions in which students live and the economic conditions in which they will work after leaving school. In contrast with this situation, the curriculum which students experience at present was regarded as too narrow, too academic (much of post-primary education was perceived to be geared to entry to third-level education), and too focused on content at the expense of process. It also placed too much emphasis on memorisation, and was overloaded.

Furthermore, the needs of *all* students, and the suitability of curricula and teaching methods to meet them, were considered to require greater attention than they are accorded. There was considerable support for the view that the education system cannot proceed on the basis that one size fits all if it is to respond adequately to the individual needs, aptitudes, and interests of all learners, and if it is to contribute to their optimal development. This principle is one that perhaps needs recognition now more than ever as the population of learners becomes increasingly diverse, with more students from a variety of ethnic, religious, and secular backgrounds entering the system, and more young people with varying needs (including those with learning difficulties) remaining in school and college for longer periods of time.

Issues surrounding the appropriateness of curricula and other forms of provision for students with special educational needs were raised at all the public meetings, in which strong dissatisfaction with current provision was a persistent theme. Problems arising from delays in assessing pupils, large classes, and lack of specialised teachers were highlighted. Views expressed at meetings received support in the national survey of the public, in which a large percentage of respondents identified a need for more learning support and special education teachers.

Many of the views about curricula were related to post-primary education and reflected concern about both the content of curricula and the methods used to implement them in schools. In considering issues of content, some commentators thought that students should have a wider range of traditional academic subjects from which to choose in post-primary schools (e.g., foreign languages, psychology). While positive attitudes to Irish, and a recognition of its importance as part of our cultural heritage, were evident, the subject was perceived by some to be accorded too much time and attention in schools (several suggested that it should not be compulsory). Resources (personnel, space, and equipment) for a number of subjects (physical education, computer studies) were considered inadequate, while the content of some courses (e.g., science) was regarded as out-of-date, or thought to be of little interest to students.

There was considerable support for the introduction of courses in post-primary schools in areas that might be considered less academic but which would be more relevant to students' everyday lives (e.g., health, 'life skills', drug/alcohol awareness, parenting/child care, entrepreneurship). However, it was recognised that this could create problems in the context of a curriculum that some considered to be already overloaded; furthermore, for some commentators, it reflected an increasing, and probably unwise, reliance on schools to deal with social problems.

A view that received particular support from parents was that insufficient attention is paid in schools to the development of students' values, sense of social responsibility, and self-esteem.

Overall, the level of concern expressed about methods of teaching and learning was probably greater than that expressed about curriculum content. There was little if any dissent from the views that there was a need for more 'active', less didactic approaches, more 'experiential learning', more 'creative ways of learning', more practical work, and more 'problem-solving exercises.' To meet this need, it is clear that more physical resources, as well as new approaches to teaching and learning, will be required in schools. In the case of science, while teachers welcomed new curricula, they noted that these were not being supported by adequate laboratory facilities. Methods of teaching languages (including Irish) were thought to be unsatisfactory.

A number of general conclusions may be drawn relating to curricula.

- Attention to the needs of students with learning difficulties/special educational needs should be a priority.
- Curricula should be broadened to include a wider range of knowledge and skill (arts, science, technical skills, aesthetics), skills that are relevant to the future economic needs of students, and activities designed to develop student values, social responsibility, and self-esteem.
- There is a need for greater flexibility in curriculum implementation so that curricula and ways of teaching can be adapted to students' interests, abilities, and learning styles.
- The total curriculum demands on students should be examined at both primary and post-primary levels, bearing in mind that different combinations of subjects in post-primary schools are associated with differing demands.

- There should be less emphasis on the transmission and acquisition of knowledge, and more on engaging students in independent thought to find solutions to problems.
- Students should experience more practical work. This need could be partially addressed immediately by the provision of adequate laboratory facilities in schools for teaching science. However, it has much wider implications in the longer term, raising issues relating to the provision of space in schools, teaching methods, and methods of examining.

## LEARNERS

The role of schools in developing student knowledge and skills received considerable attention in the consultation process. The issue is obviously related to curricula which were considered in the last section since curricula are designed primarily to develop the knowledge and skills of learners. Thus, considerations in the last section are relevant in this section.

When addressing the issue of desirable student achievements, commentators did not call for higher levels of achievement in established areas of the formal curriculum, with the exception of improved 'basic skills', in particular literacy and numeracy. Rather, in line with comments on curricula, they spoke of the need to develop generic skills (decision-making, problem solving, to be independent thinkers, learning to learn, learning to think, communication skills) and competencies in non-academic areas ('life skills' including cooking, car driving, social skills, practical skills, personal development, social and interpersonal skills, entrepreneurship, self-esteem). In this, they reflect the views held in many countries that employers seek employees with generic skills and the ability and willingness to learn, and that national economies need to be strengthened by the establishment of stronger links between schooling, employment, productivity, and the market.

When learning difficulties were discussed at public meetings, dyslexia was the condition that most frequently gave rise to contributions. Advocates of two groups, who tended to be organised, also had a strong presence at a number of meetings: children with autistic spectrum disorder and children with serious hearing impairment. Local separate provision in a special class or, more usually in a special school, was sought for children in the former category. A group representing children with serious hearing impairment argued for education through the medium of sign language and for teachers who themselves had a serious hearing impairment. However, the Irish language requirement created a practical barrier to the recruitment of such teachers.

The effects of educational disadvantage on students' achievements and life chances were discussed at a number of public and focus meetings. A variety of issues were raised: the need for increased funding; the need for greater integration of schemes and services in addressing problems associated with disadvantage; the need for greater co-operation between schools, families, and communities; the need for greater flexibility to allow schools to set their own goals and devise and monitor procedures to achieve them; and the need for the Department of Education and Science to address delays in releasing funds for programmes.

It may be that improved guidance counselling also has a role to play in addressing issues relating to disadvantage (e.g., early school leaving). At any rate, current resources were considered to be inadequate with the result that little guidance, and even less counselling, is available to students during the junior cycle of post-primary education.

Issues relating to student behaviour (primarily in post-primary schools) were raised at several of the public meetings. It was claimed that abuse of alcohol and of drugs, indiscipline, and disruptive behaviour were becoming more common, and were interfering with the work of schools. Furthermore, the situation seemed set to get worse because of legislation that was perceived to erode the rights of students who wished to engage in learning.

Four general conclusions may be drawn relating to students.

- Students should acquire in their education a broad range of decision-making, problem-solving generic skills to optimise their functioning in a 'knowledge-based' economy.
- Greater attention should be paid to the development of competencies in non-academic areas.
- Provision for guidance counselling should be improved.
- The problem of indiscipline in schools needs to be addressed.

## ASSESSMENT/EXAMINATIONS

It is not surprising that assessment (including formal examinations) received attention since it occupies a central role in many aspects of the education process: when used to make educational decisions about students; to provide feedback to a student about his or her progress, strengths, and weaknesses; to judge instructional effectiveness and curricular adequacy; and to inform policy. As in other fora, deficiencies in the present system, especially at the end of post-primary schooling, were identified.

The use of assessment for formative purposes received little attention, though one commentator did suggest that external assessment should be in place to identify students in need of further support. Similarly, assessment at the primary school level did not attract much attention. Again, there was an exception. In one contribution, a need for some form of external assessment of students' learning in primary schools was identified.

In discussion, and in submissions to the secretariat, assessment and examinations were considered primarily in the context of the summative functions of public examinations, in particular the Leaving Certificate Examination. The important functions performed by such examinations were recognised: certifying that learners have satisfactorily negotiated a sector of the education system and achieved an accepted level of competence for that sector; sorting students into different levels of achievement; the selection of students for further study and for some jobs; and the influence which, together with school syllabi, they exercise on school knowledge.

A number of problems with the present system were identified: the fact that examinations tend to measure students' ability to recall factual information rather than higher-order skills; an over-reliance on terminal written assessments; the undesirable influence of examinations on teaching and learning, on the competencies that students acquire, on their involvement in

learning tasks, and on early school leaving to avoid taking examinations. These issues appear to be compounded by the predictability of examinations. One submission referred to RTE programmes in which Leaving Certificate Examinations were analysed and subjected to comment by students and the public and which gave the clear impression that questions that required the abstraction and application of key concepts in new situations were resented. 'It wasn't fair because we hadn't seen it before (hadn't memorised it).' This view, it may be added, is clearly reinforced by RTE programmes before the examinations in which the advice of teachers/ 'experts' suggests that students should focus their efforts on mastering strategies to help them over the examination hurdle ('go over past examinations ...' 'that topic nearly always comes up ...'). From this perspective, not only does the examination become the de facto curriculum, it can inhibit the development of mastery of subject matter and the honing of lasting competencies.

A number of issues were identified as relevant in considering the role of examinations in the shaping of education for the future. These include their adequacy in recognising the great variety of aptitudes and needs of learners; the degree to which examinations support or inhibit more active forms of learning; the extent to which examinations assess learners' ability to use their knowledge and understanding to illuminate issues that are unfamiliar, rather than to determine if learners can remember what they have heard and read; and their adequacy in assessing learners' ability to demonstrate the kind of competencies they are going to need in the future when they have to apply knowledge in a variety of situations to solve problems creatively and effectively.

While one commentator did not see the need to change anything, and another thought that the whole system should be scrapped, most comments proposed a variety of reforms, many involving what was called 'continuous assessment'. In the national survey, just over half of respondents thought that marks given by a student's own teacher should contribute to a student's grade, while two-thirds favoured dividing the Leaving Certificate course into a number of modules which would be taken at different times and would be examined as they were completed. Proposals also related to assessments based on project work and portfolios, practical assessments, open-book assessments, and oral assessments in language (for the Junior Certificate Examination). The view was also expressed that 'extra-curricular' activities (in sport, community involvement, work experience, drama, debate) should be recognised in certification. Satisfaction was expressed with the Applied Leaving Certificate Examination, both in terms of meeting the needs of students not served by the traditional Leaving Certificate Examination and of its methods of assessment.

Two general conclusions can be drawn from the consultation process relating to assessment/examinations.

- Reform of the Leaving Certificate Examination will be required if students are to develop the generic problem-solving skills considered to be crucial for functioning in a 'knowledge-based' economy.
- A wider range of student knowledge and skills should be assessed using a variety of procedures over an extended period of time.

## TEACHERS

Given their central role in education, it is not surprising that teachers (and teaching) attracted considerable attention in the consultation process. Teachers were strongly represented at public meetings. Many were critical of the lack of resources in education and perceived their work to be undervalued by the system and by society. Dealing with the difficult behaviour of some students was identified as a particular source of frustration.

In the survey of the views of the general public, majorities agreed that many or most teachers are skilled at their job and are committed. The survey also revealed, however, that a good deal of variation was perceived to exist among teachers. Thus, approximately one-third of respondents considered that the statements 'Teachers are skilled at their jobs' and 'Teachers are committed' were true of only 'very few' or 'some' teachers. Furthermore, while two-thirds of respondents believed that 'many' or 'most' teachers have a difficult job, more than 2 in 5 considered that only 'very few' or 'some' are good at maintaining discipline, motivating students to learn, or helping students who are struggling. Concern about teachers also featured in submissions to the secretariat.

The lack of competence among some teachers in Irish received attention, together with the low entry standard in mathematics for primary school teachers. An apparent anomaly was identified in the fact that a higher level of achievement was required to become a teacher in the junior grades of a primary school (460 points were required for admission to the B.Ed. programme) than to become a teacher of Higher Level Leaving Certificate physics (280 points were required for a science degree programme).

Several commentators referred to what they considered to be the poor quality of teacher preparation (particularly for post-primary teachers).

A number of commentators thought that the level of accountability in teaching was low. To address this issue, as well as to improve the quality of teaching, a number of procedures were proposed: regular appraisal and feedback, more unannounced inspections, and mechanisms to allow feedback from students to be taken into account in evaluating teaching. Although the matter was not clarified, comments seemed to focus on external appraisal rather than on the more important aspect of quality assurance which internal appraisal (including school self-evaluation) provides. Actions ranging from retraining to removal from the classroom were recommended to follow appraisal.

A number of other issues relating to teaching were raised. One was absence from class to provide or attend inservice and to conduct oral examinations. A second related to what was called 'feminisation' and a perceived need to encourage more males to enter the profession. Steps to address the recruitment of male teachers, as well as of teachers from a variety of backgrounds, were supported. Thirdly, bullying by teachers was identified as an issue, together with the need for mechanisms that would improve mutual respect between teachers and students.

The main conclusions relating to teachers that arise from the consultation include the following.

- Teacher preparation should ensure that on graduation teachers are competent in subject matter and methodology.
- More frequent and diverse methods of teacher appraisal are required.
- Action is required when teaching underperformance is identified.

## PARENTS

Much of the discourse on parents focused on their relationships to schools and teachers rather than on the essential role they play in their children's development. While reference was made to the need for greater 'parental involvement' in education, the specifics of that involvement were not explored.

It was remarked that time and opportunity for teachers and parents to meet are inadequate, and that teachers should make themselves more available so that more frequent meetings could take place.

It was also stated that parents need more information regarding schools (e.g., their extra-curricular activities, facilities, project work, disciplinary practices) to make choices. (The issue of providing information to the general public will be considered in the next section, Schools.)

General conclusions regarding parents are the following.

- Parents should have greater involvement in their children's formal education, though the precise nature envisaged for such involvement other than meeting more frequently with teachers was not made clear. (The role of parents will arise again in a consideration of the control and management of schools in the next section.)
- More information about schools should be available to parents.

## SCHOOLS

Information and Communications Technology (ICT) was identified on several occasions during the consultation as a major element in requiring (and facilitating) change in the structure and organisation of schooling. The implications of intensive use of ICT are considerable. It could involve a move in teaching from didactic methods towards supported learning and tutoring which, in turn, would alter the relationship between teacher and learner, as the teacher becomes less a provider of knowledge and more a facilitator and tutor, a process that will make heavy demands on his/her organisational skills. It is clear that if the potential of ICT as an effective source of learning in schools is to be realised, teacher education and professional development will be required to build teachers' competence and confidence in its use. Furthermore, to accommodate ICT and the new forms of learning it can support, the structure and organisation of schools based on individual classroom units may

need to be adapted, and the potential role in the school of individuals other than teachers (e.g., ICT specialists, parents) explored.

One might have expected school libraries to have received attention in this context. While the case was made that libraries are inadequately housed and stocked, and are not sufficiently exploited, concern was not widespread.

In the national survey, large majorities (over 90%) considered it important that schools should make information publicly available on the courses they offer, their facilities for dealing with students with learning disabilities/problems, and their code of discipline. About three-quarters of respondents thought that evaluation information should be publicly available about schools (primary and post-primary) in an annual report on performance and in the evaluation reports of inspectors. In the case of post-primary schools, more than 7 in 10 said that Junior and Leaving Certificate Examination results, the number of students that go on to third level, and information on improvement in students' achievement during their period in a school should be made public.

A number of issues were raised during the consultation process about the control and management of schools. Opposing views were expressed about the role that professionals and parents should play in management and in determining curricula. Gaps in provision for training individuals to serve on boards of management due to lack of funding were noted. It was also stated that school authorities fail to engage with student councils, and that the suggestions and attempts of students to influence school policy are not taken seriously.

At a more general level, a need was perceived for a redistribution of power in the education system. Majorities of respondents in the national survey thought that students and parents have too little influence at present. The meeting with members of *Dáil na bPáistí* in the consultation process provided evidence of the important contributions that quite young students have to make.

Changes in Irish society, in which multiculturalism has increased and commitment to religion decreased, are already reflected in the increased diversity in the control and management of schools which existing regulations permit. As well as schools associated with individual religions, ones serving inter-denominational and language clienteles are also available. In the national survey, respondents were divided on whether to continue with this system or to introduce a more uniform system. Issues were raised relating to parents' right to education for their children in a faith or non-faith based setting and to maintenance of the authenticity of a faith-based school experience. It was pointed out that while the provision of schools under different systems of management is feasible in urban areas, it is obviously problematic in rural areas.

Conclusions relating to schools include the following.

- A greater and more meaningful role should be accorded to students and parents within a reordered professional-client relationship to reflect a heightened sense of their rights.
- More information should be available to the public about schools.
- A policy is required regarding the provision and management of schools to respond to the increasing cultural and religious diversity of Irish society.

## EDUCATION OUTSIDE SCHOOL

A number of inter-related principles underlying a consideration of the importance of education outside school, and of the relationship between formal education and out-of-school education, identified in the YES consultation document, were by and large endorsed in the consultation.

The first principle asserted that education is life-long. While the term education is often restricted to the systematic instruction that is provided for young people in school, clearly learning extends beyond the school gates. Before going to school at all, children have accomplished a great deal, not least the ability to use language. After school, learning continues to be a dynamic process in the lives of individuals; some engage in a variety of formal or informal educational activities, or may follow courses provided in their employment.

A second principle is that learning occurs everywhere. This in a way is a restatement of the first principle. However, it is clearer in its recognition of the role of agencies outside school (e.g., family, peer groups, church, clubs, libraries, the internet) in the intellectual, physical, spiritual, emotional, moral, and social development of young people during the school-going years.

Thirdly, learning occurs in a variety of ways. For example, the kind of formal memorisation that occurs in schools, and was the subject of criticism in the consultation process, differs very much from the forms of learning that computers and internet connectivity can provide if they are used to develop skills of communication, analysis, information management and retrieval, and problem solving.

On the basis of a consideration of these principles, a need was perceived in contributions to the consultation process for greater emphasis on involving the community and parents in decision-making and on providing a wider range of learning opportunities. To realise the potential of communities, in particular to provide 'experiential learning', the need to improve channels of communication between schools and a variety of agencies (in industry, youth groups, outdoor education service) was identified.

Recognition of the important contribution to learning that individuals, institutions, and agencies outside the school can make gives rise to a series of disparate and wide-ranging challenges to schools. Greater sensitivity will be required to the achievements and learning styles of learners on entering school, particularly of students from disadvantaged backgrounds; contacts with parents and communities during learners' educational careers will need to be improved; and much greater involvement will be required with the 'end-users' of the products of the formal education system.

Acceptance of the principles that education is lifelong (beginning before children enter school and extending throughout the life-span), and that provision should be designed to meet the needs of individual learners, raises issues regarding the length of time individuals remain in the formal education system. On the basis that rewards are attached to long-term survival in school and college, policy has been to facilitate and encourage enrolment beyond the age of 16 years. In this context, Post-Leaving Certificate courses were regarded as having

been very successful, but had not been accorded the recognition they merited. However, additional alternative opportunities for learning may be needed, created by distance education, community networks, private provision, work experience, forms of apprenticeship, or information technology, at least by some students at the post-compulsory stage of education.

There was some support for alternative approaches to education. Thus, support was expressed for spending some of the education budget on community resources outside school, for making school buildings available to local communities outside school hours, for alternative provision for students who lose interest in school, for facilitating students to work and attend school on a part-time basis, and, with the objective of improving equity, to provide all individuals with vouchers/credits which they could use to avail of education at any time during their lives. However, views expressed in the consultation on the whole suggested a preference for traditional school-based education. For example, activities outside school (including early childhood education and care) were not identified by majorities in the national survey as meriting increased funding. It may be that circumstances will dictate a greater role for less traditional activities in the future if educational provision is to address not only problems that are currently recognised but also the challenges that will arise from changing cultural, economic, and demographic conditions.

General conclusions regarding education outside school may be drawn from the consultation process.

- There is need for greater recognition of the role that individuals, agencies, and institutions outside the school play in education.
- Recognition of that role should lead to greater collaboration between schools, communities, and a variety of agencies.
- Individuals might be provided with vouchers which would entitle them to a certain amount of education throughout their lives.

## HIGHER EDUCATION

As already noted, higher education received relatively little attention in the consultation process. This is regrettable given the important role that education and research at this level would need to play in supporting the transition to the knowledge and innovation society that many consider to be the key to the country's future competitiveness and prosperity. The fact that education is also a key instrument in achieving broad social cohesion objectives poses the particular challenge for the higher education sector of facilitating greater rates of participation from traditionally under-represented and socially disadvantaged sectors in our communities.

More specifically, there is a need to focus on access, transfer, and progression requirements for lifelong learning; on the needs of individual learners for flexible, innovative modes of delivery; on implications of the growing international mobility of students; and on the overriding need for best practice principles of quality assurance and quality improvement to underpin higher education delivery.

A number of submissions in the consultation process reflected some of these issues: the need for greater flexibility in the range of courses and methods of delivery that are on offer; the need for expanded provision for part-time education, for which current funding arrangements were considered inequitable; and the need to address the drop-out rate in third-level institutions, particularly in Institutes of Technology.

Conclusions regarding higher education include the following.

- Greater flexibility is required in courses and methods of delivery.
- Students leaving post-primary schools and proceeding to higher education should be better prepared to use knowledge.
- Part-time education should be facilitated.

## FURTHER EDUCATION

While a strong case was made in several submissions to the secretariat for greater provision for further education, especially for those who had been poorly served when they were in the formal education system, there was relatively little support in the national survey for such provision.

A range of specific issues relating to further and adult education were, however, raised in submissions and at meetings. At a basic level, a need was perceived for greater recognition of the area as a significant sector in the provision of education. However, many factors were perceived to inhibit this development: cuts in student allowances; capping of numbers on courses; discrimination against students who can only participate on a part-time basis; lack of affordable, high quality, flexible child-care facilities; and the temporary nature of tutors' employment. The point was also made that more authentic modes of assessment would be more appropriate than traditional examinations.

The following conclusions may be drawn from a consideration of further education in the consultation process.

- Further education merits greater recognition in the context of the delivery of education.
- A variety of factors (including inadequate child-care facilities, an inequitable system of funding of students) were perceived to inhibit participation in further education.



## 5. CONCLUSION

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In some respects, the process of consultation was at least as interesting as its product. Several limitations were apparent. First, perhaps because the procedures were novel, perhaps because interest groups saw the meetings as a vehicle to express their views, it proved very difficult to generate meaningful discussion. Positions were stated rather than argued or debated. It may be that inexperience led some groups to give the impression that they believed the strength of a position depended on the number of times it was stated.

Secondly, it also proved difficult, both at meetings and in written submissions, to get individuals to shift their perspective from immediate concerns to a longer-term view of the development of the education system. Related to this point was the fact that contributors generally failed to take the needs of the system in general into account, preferring to focus on a particular sector or the needs of a particular group of students. However, long-term implications can be extrapolated from many of the views that were expressed.

A further related weakness that emerged during the process was the failure of many participants to recognise that resources were limited, and that additional provision in one area would have implications for provision in another. There was a marked reluctance to consider the fact that aspirations, worthy though they may be, usually cost money which means that less money is available to satisfy other aspirations.

A final limitation that was evident in some submissions was the failure to provide evidence in support of a position or proposal. For example, there was a reluctance to consider the effectiveness of proposals to address learning disabilities. Teacher numbers rather than teacher expertise seemed to be the main concern in most instances.

With these reservations in mind, we can consider a number of general themes with long-term implications that emerged in the process. One involved challenging the appropriateness of the knowledge and skills which the education system produces at present. These were regarded as an inappropriate preparation for life in a rapidly changing 'knowledge-based' economy which would require a range of competencies, variously described as problem-solving skills, the ability to apply knowledge in new situations, and cross-curricular skills. However, it is likely that the difficulty of teaching such skills was underestimated. It may also be that due recognition was not given to the fact that domain-specific knowledge makes a major contribution to successful problem-solving.

It was perhaps concern with the development of competencies that underlay a theme which related to methods of teaching and learning, in particular the need for more active and practical approaches. The theme has obvious and important implications for curriculum designers and schools in the immediate and long-term: for how knowledge is packaged and presented and for the excessive demands that some subjects are perceived to make on students' time. The extent of the challenge becomes clear when one realises that it is often easier to deal with breadth than with depth, to cover large amounts of material superficially

than to probe issues deeply, to require students to learn facts and definitions rather than to acquire understanding.

A further theme to emerge was the perception that not enough attention is given in schools to students' non-cognitive development. A range of non-cognitive dispositions that were adverted to were considered important, not just for the acquisition of cognitive competencies, but also in the context of learners' social and moral behaviour. Such dispositions include motivation to achieve competence, positive attitudes to learning, a system of values, and a sense of identity and inclusion.

Many contributors realised that reform of curricula would not be possible without reform of examinations. There was strong support, both in the national survey and in submissions, for the view that major changes are required in the Leaving Certificate Examination. On the basis of this view, as well as a consideration of the vast changes occurring in knowledge and understandings, it is clear that more than cosmetic changes to the examination will be required if schools are to foster the kinds of knowledge and skills that students will need in the future. How, for example, can an examination which (if claims are correct) relies heavily on memorisation be regarded as an appropriate preparation for life in a world of overwhelming data and multiple frames of understanding and of action? How will it prepare students to function in a situation in which the fundamental frameworks used to understand the world are multiplying and often in conflict?

The need to make public information about the resources, facilities, and performance of schools received widespread support. In the survey of the general public, large majorities said that schools should make information available about their courses, their facilities for dealing with learning difficulties, and their public examination results.

Concern about the competence of some teachers gave rise to expression of a need for stronger accountability procedures which would involve more regular appraisal of teaching and the retraining or removal from the classroom of teachers judged to be underperforming.

The behaviour of students in schools also received attention. Great concern was expressed about the disruptive effects of some students, and about constraints, some of which were perceived to arise from legal provision, in dealing with them.

At times, comments on teaching and student behaviour seemed to reflect an underlying frustration on the part of parents, and indeed of students, to deal with problems that arise. To some extent, this frustration might be addressed by a greater empowerment of parents and students, which would be achieved by according them a more meaningful role in the management of schools.

There are wider implications for school management in the context of the increasing diversity of contemporary Irish society, which received only limited attention in the consultation process. There is already some recognition of this in the control and management of schools. However, a more explicit policy would seem to be required in light of the recent and unexpected increase in multiculturalism in the country. Indeed, policies to address longer-term implications of cultural and religious diversity merit much greater consideration than they were accorded in the consultation process.

At the public meetings, identification of the need for improved resources for students with a variety of learning disabilities stood out. While the need was generally expressed by special interest groups or by individuals who had experienced difficulty in accessing services, there was no dissent from the view that students with special needs merited particular attention. Furthermore, the education of children with learning difficulties was the only activity that was identified by a majority of respondents in the national survey as meriting an increase in funding. The wider implication of these views is that curricula and teaching methods should be developed to serve the needs of all students.

Meeting the special needs of students, given the increase in personnel that will be required, has obvious implications for funding. And indeed, another major theme that emerged during the consultation process was the need for greater investment in education. Opinions expressed in meetings and in submissions, as well as responses in the national survey, were pretty well unanimous in saying that education in the country is under-funded (usually by comparison with other countries). While a need was perceived for increased investment to support a wide range of initiatives, however, there was limited appetite for providing the funds that these would require through an increase in personal taxation. Neither was serious consideration given to the effectiveness of proposed initiatives.

While the major themes identified in the consultation process focused for the most part on traditional school-based education, there was also some support for a broader concept of education that would allow for more flexible provision. This, of course, in turn, would have implications for how schools are structured and function. Further consideration of the roles of schools and of other agencies will be required to determine the most appropriate locus for the provision of opportunities for students to acquire the range of knowledge, skills, dispositions, and attitudes which they will need in their future lives.

In many ways, views expressed in the consultation reflect those of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which for some time in its meetings and publications, has been considering the role of the school in an education system designed to meet the challenges of the future. A variety of divergent scenarios which provide a framework for thinking about the future have been proposed, and a number of major issues have emerged. First, as in the consultation process, the need to consider the role of new curricula, experimentation, innovation, and modes of assessment was identified. Secondly, although the role of schools in fostering non-cognitive areas of development (e.g., learners' attitudes and values) received support in the consultation, how exactly schools might contribute merits serious consideration, as does the contribution that other institutions and agencies can make to addressing problems arising from social fragmentation in families and communities and a perceived crisis in values. Thirdly, the development of schools' relationship with other schools (to form 'networks') and with communities, other professionals, and parents needs to be explored in the interest of providing a more comprehensive and holistic context for learning. Finally, issues arise about the location of decision-making, accountability, and the relationship between schools, parents, and central authorities.

We may conclude by asking what kind of vision do the views expressed in the consultation process add up to? What messages do they convey to the policy maker? Before responding to these questions it should be pointed out that since proposals in the consultation were not prioritised, were uncosted, and in general were not supported by evidence of their likely effectiveness, the process does not provide a blue-print for action. What it does provide, however, are elements of a public vision of Irish education, which revealed not just a readiness, but an appetite, for radical change, to which policy-makers and decision-makers can refer as they set objectives, decide priorities, and develop plans and strategies.

The first element of the vision that the consultation revealed was a view of what education should accomplish. Contrary to what was perceived to be the situation at present, there was strong support for the view that education should extend beyond the academic, and pay more attention to the personal and social development of learners, and their preparation for the world of work. Furthermore, greater provision should be made for practical experience to support students' acquisition of competencies. Addressing these issues will have radical implications for curricula, teaching, conditions of learning, assessment/examinations, and teacher education. Secondly, there was strong support for increasing the funds available for education. Thirdly, the activities of schools should be more transparent. Fourthly, policy and provision that attempt to meet the needs of students with learning difficulties will evoke considerable popular support. There was less support in the public survey for provision for individuals who had been poorly served by the education system in the past, although the case for this group was strongly argued at some public meetings. Finally, the consultation provided support for action to address a number of issues relating to social problems, cultural change, and growth in the use of technology, all of which have their origin outside the school, and with which schools on their own may not be very well equipped to deal.

## 6. LIST OF SUBMISSIONS RECEIVED

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Submissions were received from the following.

Atkinson, Pauline, *Kiltealy NS, Enniscorthy*

Azzopardi, Juan Carlos, *Northside Local Education Committee, Moyross, Limerick*

Bantry Integrated Development Group

Barrett, Ursula

Barry, Bernadette

Barry, Orla

Beausang, Ita

Black, Chris

Boner, Patrick

Boyle, Joe, *FAI Schools Development Officer*

Bray Adult Learning Centre

Brennan Freeman, Eileen

Broggy, Joanne

Bruen, Dr J., Graham, R., Leahy, A., Lechleiter, Dr H., Pechenart, J., & Simon, Dr A.,  
*School of Applied Languages and Intercultural Studies, DCU*

Burke, Diane

Burke, Valerie

Byrne, Margaret

Callan, Pat, *History In-Service Team*

Canton, Fergal

Carrington, Professor Stephen

Carroll, Anne

Carter-Green, Zara

Catholic Youth Care

Cleary, Mary T., *National Coordinator, Amen*

Co Donegal VEC's Adult Service

Coleman, E., Gray, E., & Harrison, C., *Civic, Social and Political Education Support Team  
of the Second Level Service*

Comhairle na nÓg Dublin City

Comhairle na nÓg in association with Sligo CDB

Community Workers Co-operative, Galway

Conboy, N., *St Brigid's GNS, Palmerstown, Dublin 20*

Connolly, Patricia, *North Western Health Board Learning Disability Services*

Corcoran, Lyn and Barron, Michael, *Belong to Youth Project*  
Counihan, Eibhlin  
Cullinane, Susan  
Cunniffe, M.  
Cunningham, John  
Daly, Gavin  
Daly, C.  
Devery, Dave  
Diocesan Advisers for Religious Education in Primary Schools  
Doherty, Shane  
Doherty, Gerald  
Doherty, L., Mangan, P., & Layden, M.  
Donegal Travellers Project  
Dooley, Barry  
Doran, Bernie  
Dowd, Donal, *Educational Sports Development Officer, Kerry Education Service*  
Doyle, Margaret  
Doyle, Dr Owen, *Chairman, Scoil Naomh Mhuire*  
Dublin City Development Board  
Duffy, Kathleen  
Dunne-Shannon, Una, *Vice Chairperson, Parents of Autistic Children in Sligo/Leitrim Group*  
Educate Together  
Enterprise Ireland  
Expert Group on Future Skills Needs  
Fennelly, Cathy  
Fifth and Sixth Classes Primary Schools, Mayfield (RAPID) area, Cork City  
Fitzgerald, Breda, *Principal, Newtown Upper N.S.*  
Flanagan, Mary  
Flynn, Ciaran, *Principal, Ashbourne Community School*  
Forde, Mary  
Forde-Brennan, Trish  
Forfás  
Gallagher, Orlaith  
Glanville, Vivienne, *Clondalkin Women's Community Education Forum*  
Griffin, Jack  
Gunn, Dr Michael  
Gurraneasig NS, Co Cork  
Hanley, Sean  
Harper, L., *Finglas Cabra Partnership and Finglas Rapid*  
Harvey, Edward  
Healy, Denis  
Heck, Emer

Heffernan, Eamonn  
Hegarty, Ciaran  
Hennessy, Máireád  
Hope, Caroline  
Horan, Brendan  
Horgan, Donal  
Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children  
Jackson, Stuart  
Jacob, Brother P.B.  
Judge, Edward  
Kavanagh, Aoife  
Keaveney T.D., Cecilia  
Kelleher, Julie  
Kelly, Patrick  
Kerry Education Service business and Employers' Forum  
Kilanerlin National School Parents' Association  
Kilbane, Eanna  
Kilfeather, Fionnuala, *National Parents Council Primary*  
Kinsella, Catherine, *Presentation Primary School, Parnell St, Kilkenny*  
Kirby, Tom  
Lahiff, Joan  
Lane, Anna  
Lannoye, Ben  
Loreto Past Pupils' Union  
Lynch, Marie  
Lynch, Nuala and Tom  
MacEoin, Stan, *Deputy Principal, Gort Community School*  
Madden, Paul  
Maher, Margaret, *Clondalkin Partnership*  
Maher, David  
Mangan, P., Doherty, L., & Layden, M.  
Manley, John  
McAlinney, Patrick B.  
McAlinney, Mary T.  
McBride, Louise, *Donegal Youth Service*  
McCarthy, Kevin P.  
McCarthy, Jane, *Educate Together*  
McCusker, Paul  
McDonagh, F.  
McDonnell, Nuala  
McDonnell, Patrick  
McFadden, Sheila

McGarty, Pat  
McGowan, Noel  
McInerney, Anne  
McInerney, Joanna, *Burren Outdoor Education Centre*  
McKenna, Rina  
McLoughlin, Ann, *Dyslexia Awareness*  
McLoughlin, Briéd  
McLoughlin, Colette  
McMahon, Gary, *Galway City Development Board*  
McManus, Richard  
McVerry, Catherine  
Mealy, Colm  
Melley, Michael  
Microsoft Ireland  
Minogue, James  
Mockler, Hugh  
Molloy, Dara  
Monaghan, Philip  
Monkstown Educate  
Moran, Leo  
Moran, Frank J.  
Moran, Edel  
Moran, Dr Tom  
Mullarney, Maire, *Esperanto-Asocio de Irlando*  
Mulqueen, Kevin  
National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals  
National Disability Authority  
Network of Education Personnel in Partnerships and Community Groups and Area  
Development Management  
Ní Chonmhidhe Piskorska, Méadhbh, *Cathaoirleach, Parlaimint na mBan*  
Ní Mhuinneóg, Maighréad  
North Cork MABS School Costs Survey  
Ó Cinnéide, Pól  
Ó Cuiineagáin, Pádraig, *Glór Bhréifne, Glór na nGael*  
Ó Gogáin, Liam, *Chairman, Parental Equality*  
Ó hEorpa, Shane Gilchrist, *Irish Sign Language Centre*  
O'Brien, Ita and John  
O'Callaghan, Dr Diarmuid, *Registrar, IT, Blanchardstown*  
O'Connell, Anne  
O'Dea, Siobhan  
O'Doherty, Florence  
O'Donnell, Jennifer

O'Dowd, Paraic  
O'Flaherty, Ger, *Galway DCD Group*  
O'Grady, M., Guilfoyle, B., Galvin, M., Quinn, S., & Cleary, J.  
O'Leary, Claire  
One Family – Voice, Support and Action for One-Parent Families  
O'Reilly, Enda  
Organ, Margaret  
O'Sullivan, Brendan  
O'Sullivan, Neil  
Pieri, Jules  
Presentation Centre for Policy and Systemic Change  
Quigley, Trish  
Rang IV, V, VI, Scoil na Croise Naofa, Sráidbhaile, Co Phort Láirge  
Reid, Carmel  
Rothwell, Tom  
Ruane, Brian P.  
Ryan, Marian  
Ryder, Mary, *Adult Literacy Organiser, Altrusa Literacy Scheme, Cork*  
Schonfeld, Heino  
School Library Association, Republic of Ireland  
Shannon, Kevin  
Sheehan, Bill  
Stack, Teresa, *Drogheda Institute of Further Education*  
Student Council, Laurel Hill Coláiste FCJ, Limerick  
Sutton, Elma  
Tolan, Richard  
Ward, John  
Waterford City Development Board, Education Management Committee  
Waterford Women's Centre, Time For Me Women's Group  
White, Thomas Gavin  
Yates, Christine