

VISION FOR CHANGE – REPORT OBJECTIVES & RECOMMENDATIONS

IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS REPORT

PERIOD ENDING: DECEMBER 2009

Dept of Education and Science – NEPS and QCAP

VISION – Working in Partnership with Service Users, facilitating recovery & community reintegration

Objective: Service User Participation

4.3 *The flexible provision of educational programmes should be used to encourage young people to remain engaged with the education system and to address the educational needs of adults with mental health problems.*

Level at which implementation is taking place - tick box(s)

National: **Regional:** **Local Health Office:**

Progress to date:

The *Junior Certificate Programme* provides three levels (Foundation, Ordinary and Higher) in Irish, English and Mathematics and two levels (Higher and Ordinary) in other subjects in order to cater for the range of student ability and aptitude.

A *Junior Certificate School Programme* was introduced in 1995 as an intervention within the Junior Certificate specifically aimed at students who are potential early school leavers. It is designed to assist schools and individual teachers in adopting a student-centred approach to education and to provide students with a programme to meet their individual needs. The DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) Action Plan for Educational Inclusion provides for extended access to the JCSP for second-level schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantage. An additional 30 schools joined the programme in 2007, and a further 24 schools joined in 2008. Arrangements are being made for the final phase of rollout of JCSP to DEIS schools in 2009/10. Participation in the programme is supported by an enhanced pupil:teacher ratio and by the provision of professional development support to schools and teachers. There are currently 221 schools/centres offering the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) is currently offered in some 380 schools/centres and taken by around 6% of students each year.

The *Transition Year Programme* is a one-year optional programme which provides a bridge between junior and senior cycle. Its aim is to promote the personal, social, educational and vocational development of students and prepare them for their role as participative and responsible members of society. It allows individual schools scope to create a programme of learning experiences that matches the needs of their particular student cohort.

The restructured Senior Cycle provides a range of programmes suited to the differing abilities, aptitudes and interests of students. The Leaving Certificate now has three separate orientations –

The **Leaving Certificate (Established)** programme offers students a broad and balanced education while allowing for some specialisation. Syllabuses are provided in a wide range of subjects – 34 in all.

The **Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP)** is best described as a leaving certificate with a strong vocational dimension. It provides students with opportunities to realise their potential for self-directed learning, for innovation and for enterprise.

The **Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA)** is a distinct, self-contained two-year leaving certificate programme aimed at preparing students for adult and working life. It is a person-centred course involving a cross-curricular approach rather than a subject structure. The programme emphasises excellence in a broad range of achievements. It is

innovative in the way students learn, in what they learn and in how they learn and in how their achievements are assessed. The programme is characterised by educational experience of an active, practical and student-centred nature.

For those who leave school early there is the Youthreach programme which is run by local VECs, and also the Community Training Centres run by FÁS which cater specifically for young people for whom mainstream education was not suited.

Through the Education Equality Initiative the Department has funded Schizophrenia Ireland to design and develop training materials for educators and students who self-experience mental illness; to implement awareness training programmes for staff in further education colleges; to set up support structures for people with self experience who aspire to attend Further Education courses and to research good practice in Ireland and abroad.

Objective:

Responding to the Mental Health Needs of Children & Adolescents

10.4 Programmes addressing mental health promotion and primary prevention early in life should be targeted at child populations at risk.

Level at which implementation is taking place - tick box(s)

National:

Regional:

Local Health Office:

Progress to date:

All second-level schools provide a guidance and counselling service for their students and they receive ex-quota hours from the Department of Education and Science for this provision. The service includes the provision of individual guidance and counselling for students either at critical stages in their education or at times of personal crisis.

Schools also use *Mental Health Matters*, a resource pack on mental health for 14 to 18 year olds developed by Mental Health Ireland on an optional basis as a module in the Transition Year Programme, an element of the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme, a component of the SPHE programme or an element of other subjects such as Religion or Home Economics.

The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) provides a range of services, both direct and indirect, which support the personal, social and educational development of children in primary and second-level schools through the application of psychological theory and practice in education and having particular regard for those with special education needs.

All primary and post primary schools have access to psychological assessments either directly through the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) or through the Scheme for Commissioning Psychological Assessments (SCPA) a panel of private practitioners administered and paid for by NEPS.

In addition NEPS provides assistance, upon request, to all schools and school communities that experience critical incidents. NEPS also provides a service to the State Examinations Commission in connection with the assessment of applications for Reasonable Accommodations in the Certificate Examinations and responds to queries in relation to individual children from other sections of the Department of Education and Science and from the specialist agencies.

At a broader level NEPS provides advice input and expertise from the psychological perspective to the formulation of a range of supports aimed directly at the personal, social and educational development of students in primary and/or second-level schools.

Since the establishment of the NEPS in 1999, the number of NEPS psychologists has increased from 43 to 156. During 2009 progress was made in relation to new recruitment but this was almost wholly counterbalanced by losses of personnel due to retirement and resignation. The Renewed Programme for Government has reiterated the commitment to expand the NEPS psychologist complement to 210. Recruitment in this regard is currently underway and 8 psychologists are currently in process from an existing recruitment panel. The DES and Public Appointments Service (PAS) are at an advanced stage in relation to the development of a recruitment competition from which a new panel will be formed to allow for the continuation of the staff expansion to the level set out above. It is envisaged that

this expansion will enable the allocation of a psychologist to all first and second level schools and offer an enhanced level of service to Special Units and schools.

10.5 *For those children in school settings it is recommended that the SPHE be extended to include the senior cycle and that evidence-based mental health promotion programmes be implemented in primary and secondary schools.*

Level at which implementation is taking place - tick box(s)

National:

Regional:

Local Health Office:

Progress to date:

Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is now part of the curriculum for all pupils in primary schools. It provides specific opportunities to enable the child to understand himself or herself, to develop healthy relationships, and to establish and maintain healthy patterns of behaviour.

SPHE has been compulsory in the junior cycle of second-level schools since September 2003. It provides students with a unique opportunity to develop the skills and competence to learn about themselves and to care for themselves and others and to make informed decisions about their health, personal lives and social development.

Modules at junior cycle deal specifically with belonging and integrating, handling conflict constructively, bullying, dealing with peer pressure, coping with stress, emotional health and well-being, influences on decision-making, and relationships and sexuality education. In third year, an awareness of the range of agencies which can help students in difficulty is promoted, as well as the skills of knowing when and how to seek help. SPHE is designed for implementation in the context of a caring whole-school approach which is supported by the pastoral care structures in schools.

A programme in SPHE for senior cycle is currently being developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, and the Department looks forward to receiving proposals in this area. The Council has consulted widely on a draft curriculum framework, and there has been general acceptance that it should cover such areas as Mental Health, Gender Studies, Substance use, Relationships & Sexuality education, and Physical Activity & Nutrition.

Schools also use Mental Health Matters, a resource pack on mental health for 14 to 18 year olds developed by Mental Health Ireland on an optional basis as a module in the Transition Year Programme, an element of the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme, a component of the SPHE programme or an element of other subjects such as Religion or Home Economics.

VISION FOR CHANGE – REPORT OBJECTIVES & RECOMMENDATIONS

IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS REPORT

PERIOD ENDING: DECEMBER 2009

3rd Level Policy

VISION – Working in Partnership with Service Users, facilitating recovery & community reintegration

Objective:
Service User Participation

3.4 *The adult education system should offer appropriate and supported access to information, courses and qualifications to service users, carers and their representatives that would help to enhance and empower people to represent themselves and others.*

Level at which implementation is taking place - tick box(s)

National: Regional: Local Health Office:

Tick box; progress to date; provide supporting factual information; reasons for partial completion / not yet commenced

Fully implemented: Partially implemented: Not yet commenced:

Completion Date: _____

Revised Timescale (commencement and completion dates): _____

Share the key learning points which have evolved in the implementation of this recommendation:

A HEA commissioned review of funding to achieve equity of access to higher education in 2005 gathered information that suggested that there was poor awareness of the financial supports available at further and higher education among both potential and actual students. The funding review recommended that ‘comprehensive and accessible information on financial support should be made available to students, parents and communities, through development of the existing booklet and a range of other formats’.

In January 2008 the Higher Education Authority launched www.studentfinance.ie, a comprehensive, user friendly guide to student grants and supports in further and higher education. The website provides information on the full range of student supports, including the Fund for Students with Disabilities which is an important source of support for students with mental health difficulties. Since its launch the website, as of November 20th 2009, had received in excess of 525,000 site visits and in excess of 4.2 million page views.

In 2009 www.studentfinance.ie won Ireland's eGovernment Award for Education. The Education eGovernment award recognises an organisation's effectiveness in harnessing information technology to deliver better services, information and efficiencies to its target audience. According to the organisers of Ireland's eGovernment awards, a record number of entries were submitted in 2009. The awards were judged by a panel comprising representatives from industry, academia and the public sector. The panel evaluated entries on a range of judging criteria including accessibility, content and how the website contributes to the improvement of public access to information and services.

Recommend key issues for consideration by the IMG:

Objective:**Belonging & Participating: Social Inclusion**

4.1 *All citizens should be treated equally. Access to employment, housing and education for individuals with mental health problems should be on the same basis as every other citizen.*

Level at which implementation is taking place - tick box(s)

National: Regional: Local Health Office:

Tick box; progress to date; provide supporting factual information; reasons for partial completion / not yet commenced

Fully implemented: Partially implemented: Not yet commenced:

Completion Date: _____

Revised Timescale (commencement and completion dates): _____

Share the key learning points which have evolved in the implementation of this recommendation:

Recent data from the Higher Education Authority (HEA) indicates that participation by students with a disability in higher education has improved significantly over the last decade. In 2007-8 students with a disability represented 4.2% of undergraduates in higher education institutions, compared to 0.6% in 1994.

Legislation under the Equality Act 2004, Equal Status Act 2000 and Disability Act 2005 protects students against discrimination and places important obligations on higher education providers in accommodating the needs of students with mental health difficulties.

Higher Education Institutions are allocated funding by the HEA and the Department of Education and Science for the provision of access, disability and counselling services.

Further supports for disability services are provided through the Strategic Innovation Fund. This includes €900,000 for a three year funded project for a Regional Assessment Centre in Athlone IT. Athlone IT, in conjunction with NUI Galway, Letterkenny IT, Sligo IT and GMIT, hopes to develop a regionally based service so that all students entering further and higher education have timely access to needs assessment services. It will establish a leading assessment centre in the region to enable access and progression of students with disabilities.

Recently, the Department of Education and Science / Higher Education Authority secured €2.4m from the Dormant Accounts funding for access based initiatives in the Institutes of Technology (IOT), which will include supports for students with disabilities. 56 projects have been approved in the IOT sector under this scheme.

Supports for students with mental health difficulties are supplemented through the ESF aided Fund for Students with Disabilities. The Fund is allocated to further and higher education institutions to ensure the successful participation of students with disabilities, including students with a mental health difficulty. The Fund is administered by the National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education. In the 2008-9 academic year, some €11.4m was approved for institutions for around 3,843 students.

With regard to students with a mental health difficulty, 109 were granted supports under the Fund in 2008-9 (78 in 2007-8). The types of mental health difficulties that have been supported under the fund include Anxiety Disorder, Depression, Bi Polar Affective Disorder and Schizophrenia.

Core elements in an institutional disability service include individual needs assessment for all registered

students, student mentoring, academic accommodations, lecture notes, assistive technology services, learning support service and access to library materials. The objective of these supports is to empower this group of students to become independent learners by tailoring supports to enhance their academic, personal and social development to achieve their academic potential and ultimately make a successful transition to employment.

Learning support services provided to students with mental health difficulties include one-to-one specialist tuition and subject specific tuition. One-to-one specialist tuition provides students with organisation, communication and learning skills to cope with the demands of social, personal and academic integration into Higher Education. Additional subject specific tuition may be provided to compensate for lectures missed due to absences, hospital appointments, effects of medication etc. Due to the nature of the difficulties experienced by this group of students, they require additional support to ensure that they understand the material covered in lectures. Students adhere to guidelines in availing of additional tuition and engage with the tutor assigned to assist them by prioritising their learning needs. Assistive Technology, for example laptops, can be provided to students who would experience significant difficulty in using computer labs on the campus.

Recommend key issues for consideration by the IMG:

4.3 *The flexible provision of educational programmes should be used to encourage young people to remain engaged with the education system and to address the educational needs of adults with mental health problems.*

Level at which implementation is taking place - tick box(s)

National: **Regional:** **Local Health Office:**

Tick box; progress to date; provide supporting factual information; reasons for partial completion / not yet commenced

Fully implemented: **Partially implemented:** **Not yet commenced:**

Completion Date: _____

Revised Timescale (commencement and completion dates): _____

Share the key learning points which have evolved in the implementation of this recommendation:

Higher education institutions are conscious of the need to develop more flexible modes of learning and my Department is working with the Higher Education Authority (HEA) to support the expansion of opportunities in this area. Developmental funding has already been allocated under the Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF). One key activity funded by the SIF is the Supported Flexible Learning project. The aim of this project is to establish mainstream flexible learning at the Institutes of Technology, to meet learner and workforce development needs. Successful implementation of the project will result in mainstreaming supported flexible learning within and across the Institutes and will be vital in meeting the core challenge of providing flexible learning opportunities in the higher education sector. Under this project a new flexible learning portal, www.Bluebrick.ie, was launched by the Minister for Education and Science in September 2009. The portal lets a prospective learner search for and compare flexible learning courses in all the institutes of technology and also allows them to apply for courses online.

Recommend key issues for consideration by the IMG:

Objective:
Responding to the Mental Health Needs of Adults

11.2 *A Health Promoting College Network should be developed and implemented.*

(Department of Education and Science)

Level at which implementation is taking place - tick box(s)

National:

Regional:

Local Health Office:

Tick box; progress to date; provide supporting factual information; reasons for partial completion / not yet commenced

Fully implemented:

Partially implemented:

Not yet commenced:

Completion Date: _____

Revised Timescale (commencement and completion dates): _____

Share the key learning points which have evolved in the implementation of this recommendation:

Higher education institutions provide health services as part of their student support services. Student support services are essential in helping higher education to deliver on its multiple objectives (personal, social, economic and cultural). They help individual students maximise their higher education experience and realise their academic potential. Student services are an integral part of the whole student experience and crucial to the development of well-rounded students.

A report on the health of Irish students, commissioned by the Health Promotion Unit of the Department of Health and Children and published in 2005, provides a useful resource, as well as providing the strategic direction for effective policy and programme planning, both in the health services and for those involved in college management. The Health Promotion Unit is a key partner in the development of the Health Promoting College Network.

The report consisted of two parts: a *College Lifestyle and Attitudinal National (CLAN) Survey* and a *Qualitative Evaluation of the College Alcohol Policy Initiative*. The CLAN Survey contained a section on the mental health of students. It found that the majority (85%) of students rated their mental health as good or very good, though 4% rated their mental health as poor or very poor. This was significantly higher than the number of students who rated their quality of life or general health as poor.

The Higher Education Authority, the Department of Education and Science and the Consultative Group on Health Promoting Colleges supported the survey initiative and encouraged college participation.

One of the outcomes of the CLAN survey is that the National Working Group on Alcohol in Higher Education has recently been renamed the Health Promoting College Network. The Network had its first meeting on 26th April 2007.

Within this broad health promotional framework, higher education institutions develop policies to create and maintain an environment which is conducive to the health and well-being of students and staff.

One outcome from the National Working Group on Alcohol in Higher Education and earlier studies has been the development and implementation of campus alcohol policies for universities and other third-level educational institutions in Ireland. A working group report *The Framework for Developing a College Alcohol Policy* outlined a number of options for college authorities when drafting and implementing the alcohol policies and health promotion measures.

The main focus areas of these Alcohol Policies include actions with regard to sponsorship and advertising, limiting harm in the drinking environment, education and awareness, campus support services, and encouraging alcohol-free alternatives and choices. Each institution is free to adopt the guidelines to reflect the needs and aspirations of their own campus environment. All Universities have an alcohol policy in place, and all but two of the Institutes of Technology have policies in place (the final two IoT's have policies in development).

All of the Institutes of Technology provide medical staff on campus (nurses and doctors) who frequently hold events promoting healthy lifestyles and make literature available to all students on exercise, diet, alcohol, safe sex etc. Institutes provide financial and other support to clubs and societies and encourage all students to take part in exercise and sports. This is promoted through the sports officers appointed in each Institute. Institutes have policies on the use and abuse of alcohol - particularly in relation to events organised by the Students' Union.

In the University sector a number of College Health Services have part-time Health promotion officers who run Health promotion weeks and develop educational material, both paper and online, focusing on Mental health, Sexual health, Nutrition, Exercise and on issues re Alcohol and Drugs and run workshops. A typical Health promotion week would involve Sport, Peer Supporters, catering etc. The health promotion officer at TCD runs a smoking cessation programme.

Many University counselling services also run workshops focused on mental health issues such as Stress management, resilience and coping skills. Some but not all counselling services have addiction counsellors.

TCD has an online Mental Health portal which provides educational information on Mental health and online counselling. A major collaborative project has been developed (and submitted for funding under SIF II) to develop this further and roll it out in other third level colleges, both universities and IoTs.

UCC is preparing to launch CALM, also known as the Relief Series, an online self-help programme designed to help people who suffer from mild depression and anxiety as well as promoting a healthy lifestyle. It also has a programme to help with Insomnia, and abuse of Drink & Drugs.

The Student Health Services in TCD, UCC and NUIG and the HSE have jointly initiated a feasibility study on the development of a coordinated strategy to form a National Health Promotion campaign for students focusing on Mental health, Sexual health, Nutrition, Exercise and on issues re Alcohol and Drugs aimed at third level students in Ireland. The HSE have funded a part-time Health promotion coordinator for this feasibility study.

Recommend key issues for consideration by the IMG:

VISION FOR CHANGE – REPORT OBJECTIVES & RECOMMENDATIONS

IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS REPORT

PERIOD ENDING: DECEMBER 2009

Further Education

VISION – Working in Partnership with Service Users, facilitating recovery & community reintegration

Objective:
Service User Participation

3.4 *The adult education system should offer appropriate and supported access to information, courses and qualifications to service users, carers and their representatives that would help to enhance and empower people to represent themselves and others.*

Level at which implementation is taking place - tick box(s)

National: Regional: Local Health Office:

Tick box; progress to date; provide supporting factual information; reasons for partial completion / not yet commenced

Fully implemented: Partially implemented: Not yet commenced:

Completion Date: The Adult Education Guidance Initiative (AEGI) has been available nationwide since 2007

Revised Timescale (commencement and completion dates): _____

Share the key learning points which have evolved in the implementation of this recommendation:

The AEGI provides a nationwide advice and support service to learners and potential learners in adult and community education, the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) and the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI). The aim of the AEGI is to empower the learners to make the appropriate decisions for themselves.

Recommend key issues for consideration by the IMG:

The National Guidance Forum Report “Guidance for Life” (2007) indicates that innovative approaches to the delivery of guidance and client-specific models have been effective in integrating educational provision into local learning provision. Among those who receive guidance are people with mental health problems. Clients with mental health issues need to be referred to the Guidance Service in a very managed, careful and responsible way. Different approaches are being explored throughout the country, but it may be that guidance by way of group guidance in a setting that has been designed with mental health professionals in attendance to support the process would be particularly useful.

Objective:

Belonging & Participating: Social Inclusion

4.1 *All citizens should be treated equally. Access to employment, housing and education for individuals with mental health problems should be on the same basis as every other citizen.*

Level at which implementation is taking place - tick box(s)

National: Regional: Local Health Office:

Tick box; progress to date; provide supporting factual information; reasons for partial completion / not yet commenced

Fully implemented: **Partially implemented:** **Not yet commenced:**

Completion Date: _____

Revised Timescale (commencement and completion dates): _____

Share the key learning points which have evolved in the implementation of this recommendation:

The principles of Further and Adult Education courses are access, transfer and progression. They are, in principle, open to all but the main purpose is to provide a range of supports to people who have left school early or who need further vocational education and training to enhance their employment prospects and to enable them to progress their education up to a standard equivalent to upper secondary level. Programmes are provided free of charge and are available on a full-time and part-time basis at FETAC Levels 1 – 6. They range from adult literacy and community education programmes to second-chance education for early school leavers and adults with low skills to advanced vocational training. These programmes have a strong focus on personal development and empowerment.

Recommend key issues for consideration by the IMG:

4.3 *The flexible provision of educational programmes should be used to encourage young people to remain engaged with the education system and to address the educational needs of adults with mental health problems.*

Level at which implementation is taking place - tick box(s)

National: **Regional:** **Local Health Office:**

Tick box; progress to date; provide supporting factual information; reasons for partial completion / not yet commenced

Fully implemented: **Partially implemented:** **Not yet commenced:**

Completion Date: _____

Revised Timescale (commencement and completion dates): _____

Share the key learning points which have evolved in the implementation of this recommendation:

Youthreach is an integrated programme of education, training and work experience, introduced jointly with FÁS in 1989, for young people aged between 15 and 20 who have left school early without any qualifications or vocational training. There are almost 6,000 places available nationwide under the Youthreach umbrella. Almost 3,700 of these are funded by the Department of Education and Science Youthreach programme and operated by VECs in around 100 Youthreach centres. The majority of the remainder are funded by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and operated by FAS in around 30 Community Training Centres.

The programme usually provides two years integrated education, training and work experience. Basic skills training, practical work training and general education are features of the programme, and the application of new technology is integrated into all aspects of programme content. There is a strong emphasis on personal development, on the core skills of literacy/numeracy, communications and IT, along with a choice of vocational options and a work experience programme.

The BTEI provides flexible, part-time options across Further Education and an opportunity to combine a return to learning with family, work and other responsibilities. The major focus of the BTEI is to target hard to reach/socially excluded groups, including people who have mental health problems. Contributors to an overall assessment of the BTEI programme stressed the importance of the opportunities which have been provided to the target groups since its inception.

Recommend key issues for consideration by the IMG:	
4.9	<i>Community and personal development initiatives which impact positively on mental health status should be supported e.g. housing improvement schemes, local environment planning and the provision of local facilities. This helps build social capital in the community.</i>
Level at which implementation is taking place - tick box(s) National: <input type="checkbox"/> Regional: <input type="checkbox"/> Local Health Office: <input type="checkbox"/>	
Tick box; progress to date; provide supporting factual information; reasons for partial completion / not yet commenced Fully implemented: <input type="checkbox"/> Partially implemented: <input type="checkbox"/> Not yet commenced: <input type="checkbox"/> Completion Date: _____ Revised Timescale (commencement and completion dates): _____	
Share the key learning points which have evolved in the implementation of this recommendation: The suite of Further and Adult Education programmes are intended to achieve the Departmental goal of enabling individuals to reach their full potential and to participate fully as members of society and contribute to Ireland's social, cultural and economic development. The BTEI, adult literacy and basic education as well as community education programmes are particularly for adults who are hard to reach and are accessing informal/ non-formal education as a first return step on the lifelong learning ladder.	
Recommend key issues for consideration by the IMG:	
Share the key learning points which have evolved in the implementation of this recommendation:	
Recommend key issues for consideration by the IMG:	
10.5	<i>For those children in school settings it is recommended that the SPHE be extended to include the senior cycle and that evidence-based mental health promotion programmes be implemented in primary and secondary schools.</i>
Level at which implementation is taking place - tick box(s) National: <input type="checkbox"/> Regional: <input type="checkbox"/> Local Health Office: <input type="checkbox"/>	
10.6	<i>Provision of programmes for adolescents who leave school prematurely should be the responsibility of the Department of the Education and Science.</i> (Department of Education and Science)
Level at which implementation is taking place - tick box(s) National: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Regional: <input type="checkbox"/> Local Health Office: <input type="checkbox"/>	
Tick box; progress to date; provide supporting factual information; reasons for partial completion / not yet commenced Fully implemented: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Partially implemented: <input type="checkbox"/> Not yet commenced: <input type="checkbox"/> Completion Date: _____	

Revised Timescale (commencement and completion dates): _____

Progress to date:

The National Development Plan, 2007-13 has set a high level goal aimed at ensuring that the proportion of the population aged 20-24 who complete upper second-level education or equivalent will exceed 90% by 2013.

A key focus of the Government's education policy is to prioritise investment in favour of those most at risk and to optimise access, participation and outcomes at every level of the system for disadvantaged groups.

The latest CSO data show that the proportion of 18-24 year olds who left school with, at most, lower secondary education in Ireland was 12.3% in 2006, compared with an EU 27 average of 15.4%. The educational profile of 20-24 year olds in Ireland has improved steadily in recent years, as increasing opportunities have been made available in the further education and training sector. Almost 87% of 20-24 year olds in 2006 had completed second-level education (or higher), up from 82.4% in 2000.

The strategy to encourage optimum participation is set out in DEIS, the action plan for educational inclusion which is being implemented over the period 2005-2010, and is also supported by flexible curricula. The National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB), the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) and the Department are working together to ensure that an integrated approach to children at risk of early school leaving is adopted between staff in these services and other staff involved in the implementation of the new School Support Programme under DEIS.

Youthreach is an integrated programme of education, training and work experience, introduced jointly with FÁS in 1989, for young people aged between 15 and 20 who have left school early without any qualifications or vocational training. There are almost 6,000 places available nationwide under the Youthreach umbrella. Almost 3,700 of these are funded by the Department of Education and Science Youthreach programme and operated by VECs in around 100 Youthreach centres. The majority of the remainder are funded by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and operated by FAS in around 30 Community Training Centres.

The programme usually provides two years integrated education, training and work experience. Basic skills training, practical work training and general education are features of the programme, and the application of new technology is integrated into all aspects of programme content. There is a strong emphasis on personal development, on the core skills of literacy/numeracy, communications and IT, along with a choice of vocational options and a work experience programme.

The Special Education Needs Initiative (SENI) has been in operation in 20 Youthreach centres since 2007. This initiative is a general allocation/team based model which addresses the special educational needs of students in Youthreach. Some of their special needs may be of a mental health nature. This initiative has been evaluated and was found to be meeting the needs of learners. Any extension of the SENI will have to take account of the present and prospective economic and budgetary context and related financial constraints.

Recommend key issues for consideration by the IMG: