

Fifth Periodic Report On the Work of the NESF

Report 37 · June 2008

Contents

Foreword by An Taoiseach Mr. Brian Cowen T.D.	6
Executive Summary	9
Section I Introduction	21
Section II Labour Market Issues for Older Workers	29
Section III Equality Policies for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People	49
Section IV Policy Implications of Social Capital	67
Section V Early Childhood Care and Education	89
Section VI Care for Older People	107
Section VII Creating a More Inclusive Labour Market	123
Section VIII Conclusions	149
Annex I Terms of Reference and Constitution of the NESF	170
Annex II Membership of the NESF	171
Annex III List of NESF Publications	174
Annex IV Structures and Working Arrangements of the NESF	176

List of Boxes, Tables and Figures

Box 1	NESF 2004-2006 Work Programme	26
Box 2	NESF Report No. 26 on Labour Market Issues for Older Workers	33
Box 3	NESF Report No. 27 on Equality Policies for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People	52
Box 4	NESF Report No. 28 on the Policy Implications of Social Capital	71
Box 5	NESF Report No. 31 on Early Childhood Care and Education	93
Box 6	NESF Report No. 32 on Care for Older People	110
Box 7	NESF Report No. 33 on Creating a More Inclusive Labour Market	126
Box 8	Challenges to Promoting Social Cohesion in Ireland	163
Chart 1	Increase in volunteering/ membership of organisations	68
Chart 2	Percentage of respondents actively involved in community by educational attainment	69
Chart 3	Citizenship Taskforce's Targets	81
Chart 4	Comparison of 'Tax Wedge' across OECD Countries	145
Figure 1	Main Social Partnership Institutions	23
Figure 2	Role of the NESF in the Policy Design Process	24
Figure 3	A Framework for ECCE Policy	91
Figure 4	Childcare Provision in Selected European Countries in 2005	100
Figure 5	Creating a More Inclusive Labour Market	125
Figure 6	International Comparisons of Social Expenditure	154
Figure 7	Life satisfaction varies between people with different characteristics	157
Appendix 1	Tables from the Project Team's Survey of Employer Attitudes	43
Appendix 2	A Statistical Profile of Social Capital in Ireland	83
Appendix 3	Implementation Schedule for ECCE Policy	104



Foreword by An Taoiseach Mr. Brian Cowen T.D.

Tá an-áthas orm an réamhrá seo a sholáthar don Chúigiú Tuairisc Thréimhsiúil ar Obair an NESF.

Is léir dom ón Tuairisc go bhfuil sár-obair déanta ag an NESF i rith na tréimhse 2003 – 2006. Aithním go bhfuil clár oibre gnóthach agus fairsing leagtha amach sa Tuairisc. Léiríonn an Tuairisc an ceangal díreach atá idir obair an NESF agus an dul chun cinn atá déanta i dtreo fadhbanna sóisialta a réiteach, tacaíocht a thabhairt do dhaoine faoi mhíbhuntáiste, pobal níos cothroime a fhorbairt agus seirbhísí poiblí níos éifeachtaí a spreagadh.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to welcome the Fifth Periodic Report on the Work of the NESF, which deals with the work it has published over the period 2003-2006. The Report covers the significant evaluation and analysis of important social challenges carried out by the NESF, together with its recommendations for change and development. In doing so, it provides a concise insight into the need for ongoing preparation for, and adaptation to, change in Irish society. It underscores the critical importance of continually working to improve policy making in order to deliver ever more effective services to the public, in a sustainable way.

I am gratified to note the recognition contained in the Report regarding the progress achieved or initiated by the Government to-date in the areas of Older Workers, Equality Policies for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People, Social Capital, Early Childhood Care and Education, Care for Older People, and Creating a More Inclusive Labour Market.

In this brief Foreword, I particularly wish to commend the emphasis by the NESF on the design and validation of coherent, integrated and evidence-based services that provide good outcomes for individuals, strong communities and value for money. This resonates with the Government's own approach and is underpinned by the recent OECD Public Management Review on Ireland 'Towards an Integrated Public Service'.

On behalf of the Government, I express thanks to the Chairperson of the NESF Dr. Maureen Gaffney, to the Deputy Chairperson Ms. Mary Doyle, to those who served as members of the Forum during the period covered by the Report and to the Forum's Director Mr. Seán Ó h-Éigeartaigh and staff. The hard work, commitment and vision of all concerned have made a lasting contribution to advancing the social development of our country.

Gabhaim buíochas libh as ucht bhur bhfuinneamh agus bhur dtiomantas.

Brian Cowen T.D.
An Taoiseach

Executive Summary

Section 1: Introduction

- 1 ● This is the latest in a series of periodic reports which the NESF prepares from time to time for the purposes of reviewing implementation and follow through, mainly by Government Departments and State Agencies, on the policy reports that it had undertaken over a particular period of time in its three-year work cycle.
- 2 ● As part of the mandate given to it by the Government, the NESF evaluates and monitors the implementation of equality and social inclusion policies. This includes identifying barriers, exploring alternative approaches and generating new ideas for more effective policies, at both national and local levels. In providing a forum for discussion and debate by elected politicians and many of the main interest groupings in our society, the NESF brings together a very wide range of experiences and perspectives as a basis to understanding more fully what works and what does not work in the real world of policy implementation on the ground.
- 3 ● Within the on-going process of public sector reforms, a particular focus of the NESF's work nowadays is on: (i) joined-up and integrated approaches to policy-making and implementation across Departments and State Agencies, (ii) seeking to define *policy outcomes* (rather than the more traditional emphasis given to inputs and the level of resources *allocated* to specific programmes), and (iii) providing a stronger voice for local communities and marginalised groups. The NESF also backs up its findings with evidence-based quantitative and qualitative material wherever possible. In this regard, it draws on research findings and pilot initiatives, both here at home as well as in other EU countries, and also from the work of international bodies such as the EU, the OECD and the World Health Organisation. From time to time it also commissions its own research, holds public consultation meetings in different parts of the country and generates new data from surveys it conducts either itself or else commissions from other bodies.

- 4 ● The present report deals with the work that was published by the NESF¹ over the period 2003-2006 and assesses the impact of this on Government policies and programmes. The NESF's main conclusions are summarised below under the main policy themes and recommendations covered in these reports.

Section II: Older Workers

- 5 ● Steady progress is being made in follow-up by Government Departments/Agencies on the NESF recommendations. Support for these has been further strengthened with the commitments for older workers in *Towards 2016* and in the new *Government's Programme 2007-2012* in areas such as access to education and training, upskilling, ageism, phased retirement, increases in State pensions, and earnings disregards. Active follow-up action is all the more needed now as the dependency ratio is predicted to more than double over the next 20 years.
- 6 ● Given the evidence found by the OECD, age discrimination in the workplace here has to be tackled and initiatives by the Equality Authority, the HSE and the National Council on Ageing and Older People need to be continued and supported.
- 7 ● More flexible work arrangements, part-time/reduction in hours etc would help workers to remain on in the labour force, and recent research shows the value of older workers to employers. Life-long learning is relatively low in this country and it is hoped that the forthcoming policy document from the Departments of Enterprise, Trade and Employment/ Education and Science will address this. Other priority issues are upskilling of low-paid older workers, integrated supports such as those on offer by the Local Employment Service, and adult literacy. These supports should be better integrated and delivered.
- 8 ● The NESF very much supports the initiative by the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment to review current rules on retirement and avail more of the potential of older people in the workforce. The benefits of this would include reducing upward pressure on pensions and health expenditure in the future.
- 9 ● The NESF would welcome reforms of the pension system to give people more choice to retire more gradually through, for example, building up additional pension years beyond 65, easing the work restrictions for people to draw a State pension and a review of the tax treatment of pension income and of earned income. Tackling the increased ageing of staff in the Civil Service needs to be given more priority attention.

¹ The NESF's publications comprise Reports, Opinions, Research Documents and Conference Reports; it also publishes a Newsletter a few times a year summarising its activities for the information of the general public.

Section III: Equality Policies for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People (LGB)

- 10 ● The NESF congratulates the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform for its very positive and active role in following up on the NESF's recommendations and for its notable achievements in promoting equality for LGB people.
- 11 ● Of particular significance is the commitment in the *Programme for Government 2007-2012* to 'legislate for Civil Partnership at the earliest possible date in the lifetime of the Government'. There is now strong support for this move, with over 80% of those over 15 agreeing that same sex relationships should be given the same legal recognition. In its report, the NESF identified this as the policy change which would have the most practical and profound impact on equality for this group.
- 12 ● The Equality Authority has done pioneering work on equality proofing for all groups, including LGBs. Also to be commended is work underway by the Department of Social and Family Affairs on the compatibility of the social welfare code with this country's equality legislation, including that of sexual orientation. Another positive development is the work by *Belong To* (a Dublin-based LGB group) with the HSE to establish projects throughout the country to support young people's sexuality. The Gardai are also playing a positive role in tackling anti-gay violence and providing a best-practice guide for the force.
- 13 ● But more progress is needed in a number of areas such as: training and staff supports for public servants in services for LGBs, and removal of the exemption given to religious, educational and medical institutions under our equality legislation. The Department of Education and Science should play a lead role in tackling homophobic bullying in our schools. LGB people continue to be discriminated against as regards reproduction services, adoption and guardianship, while more needs to be done in enforcing and monitoring the equality strategies already in place, gathering data for evaluation purposes and mainstreaming pilot initiatives taking place in schools, workplaces and in the community.
- 14 ● Finally, the NESF now submits further recommendations for consideration by the Government in relation to: the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment developing a strategy to attract creative talent from abroad, drawing on this country's reputation of openness to diversity and LGB people; the Departments of Social and Family Affairs and Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs assisting the needs of disadvantaged people in community development and social inclusion policies and programmes and for the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government to encourage all City and County Development Boards to have LGB inclusion strategies in operation.

Section IV: Social Capital

- 15 ● The NESF supports the *Report of the Taskforce on Active Citizenship* which complements many of the recommendations made in its own report. A notable feature of the Government decision on this report is that it has set up an Active Citizenship Office and a Steering Group to oversee with the different stakeholders implementation of the Taskforce's recommendations over a 3-year period. The setting of targets for this purpose is also an important achievement and useful step for the future.
- 16 ● While there has been no apparent decline in volunteering, in political engagement or in levels of trust between people, nevertheless, it is still at a low level and not all issues around social capital are picked up in the ESRI survey data that was commissioned by the NESF. Besides, there are many challenges ahead for local communities such as the erosion of local ties, with the intensification of urban sprawl and the absence of locally-embedded structures to respond to community issues.
- 17 ● The need for better spatial planning and development was one of the key pillars identified by the NESF to maintain and support the development of social capital. The National Spatial Strategy is crucial to this as it is not sustainable or desirable that Dublin should continue to spread into adjoining counties and beyond. In this respect, the commitments and initiatives outlined in the *Programme for Government 2007-2012* to building strong local communities, with a new Community Plan (underpinned with a €150 million fund) and to creating vibrant rural communities through, *inter alia*, extending the rural transport initiative, investment in broadband, and doubling the CLÁR programme, are also important in terms of social capital.
- 18 ● The NESF is pleased with the positive responses it received from a number of Government Departments and Agencies to its recommendations in areas such as data collection and indicators of social capital, the exemplary role of the CDBs, increased resources for the community and voluntary sector, measures to increase political participation, assistance for community-based ICT projects and the new design guidelines for sustainable community- proofed housing.
- 19 ● However, there are a few areas where further action could be undertaken such as the new revised guidelines for Poverty Impact Assessments, produced by the Office for Social Inclusion. These should be linked in with new indicators for social capital; and developing time use surveys to measure access to childcare, training and parental leave. Finally, the NESF repeats its call for more joined-up strategic approaches and considers that coordination responsibility for this should be given to the Department of the Taoiseach.

Section V: Early Childhood Care and Education

- 20 ● A significant step to the implementation of the NESF's recommendations was the Government's decision to establish the Office of the Minister for Children. That Office and its inspiring and dedicated staff are playing the lead role in driving forward the process of change and reform in this sector. This is reflected in the commitments under *Towards 2016* which, if realised, will help to achieve the EU 'Barcelona targets' for childcare by 2010. The NESF attaches key importance to the establishment of an Early Childhood Development Unit to drive forward the process of change advocated in its report.
- 21 ● The one big disappointment, however, for the NESF is that its central recommendation of providing a State-funded high-quality care for **all** children in the year before they go to school has not been accepted. As against this, however, the *Programme for Government 2007-2012* contains a number of commitments over the next 5 years in terms of increased child support and additional childcare places.
- 22 ● *Towards 2016* has a commitment to providing 50,000 new childcare places – 5,000 of these are for school-age children. But this is very small given the increasing number of both parents at work outside the home. Making schools available for out-of-school activities, including childcare, is now being followed up, as is the integration of Traveller children into the education system.
- 23 ● The work of the City and County Childcare Committees is to be highly commended. Other positive developments are targeting children's needs from acute disadvantaged areas under the DEIS programme (with 180 schools initially and later extension to another 140 schools), developing a National Childcare Training Strategy (17,000 training places are to be provided over the period 2006-2010), the Guidelines for Childminders and that regulations for pre-school facilities are to be strengthened by the HSE.
- 24 ● Innovative pilot projects such as the *Preparing for Life* run by the Northside Partnership and the campus-style development in Cherry Orchard should be evaluated in due course, with a view to their possible mainstreaming throughout the country.
- 25 ● The 2010 review is crucial for bench-marking purposes and providing a valuable platform in planning up to 2015, which is the target date the NESF set for a comprehensive ECCE policy to be in place, based on best practice principles. A crucial element in this is the need to establish the Early Education Unit as the driver of policy changes in this area.

Section VI: Care for Older People

- 26 ● The vision and goals of providing supports to enable the elderly live active and full lives, independently in their own homes and communities for as long as possible, was the central pillar of the NESF's report. It is gratifying that this has now also been incorporated into *Towards 2016*, with the support of the Government and the Social Partners. The principles set out in that document to develop long-term care services for these purpose over the next ten years are ones that are very much supported also by the NESF.
- 27 ● It is disappointing; therefore, that the Department of Health and Children is not yet in a position to react to the NESF's recommendation that public spending on elder care should be increased over the next five years to reach at least the OECD average spend of 1% of GDP. Multi-annual resource allocations are essential for effective policy development and implementation, otherwise the present year-to-year ad hoc system will continue. The undertaking in *Towards 2016* to providing substantial additional resources for elder care, with three-quarters going for community supports, is to be welcomed.
- 28 ● Also encouraging is that the NESF's recommendation on developing a New Strategy on Ageing has been accepted in the *Programme for Government 2007-2012* which contains a number of elements that the NESF attaches importance to such as Government Departments developing operational plans and objectives for older people, joined-up thinking on initiatives, monitoring progress, consulting with voluntary groups and developing quality transport systems in both urban and rural areas.
- 29 ● Also to be welcomed are the new Government's commitments to extending developments such as the Slán Abhaile project in Co. Meath and the building of retirement villages, and other developments underway (very much along the lines of what the NESF had recommended) in the Department of Health and Children such as new standardised care needs assessment, home care packages, new standards for all residences, a new nursing home support scheme and registration and inspection by the Social Services Inspectorate. Work is also continuing on a long overdue legislative framework to provide clear statutory bases on eligibility and entitlement for care services.
- 30 ● The NESF repeats its call for the strengthening of the Inter-Departmental Group on the Needs of Older People, and that representation from Departments should be at Assistant Secretary level.
- 31 ● Work by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government is continuing on housing needs for the elderly in areas that the NESF had recommended (research, a policy review of sheltered housing, the role of the voluntary and co-operative housing sector and new funding arrangements and adaptation grants) and it urges that this be expedited.

However, the development of home care grant packages needs to be expedited by the Department of Health and Children and the HSE.

- 32 ● The NESF is pleased that its recommendation on the development of a National Carers' Strategy has now been taken on board and that this is to be completed by the end of the year, in consultation with the Social Partners. There are a number of important reports which should facilitate this such as those by the Equality Authority, the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Social and Family Affairs and the Carers Association.

Section VII: Creating a More Inclusive Labour Market

- 33 ● The NESF is pleased that its report has been taken into account and acted on in a number of key strategy policy documents such as the NDP, the *NAPSincl* and *Towards 2016*. An important element in this are the steps taken to ensure greater policy coherence and the consultations mechanisms with the Social Partners to monitor progress and provide feedback. The NESF recommendations fit well into the 'lifecycle approach'.
- 34 ● The problem of labour market vulnerability remains and the predicted slow-down in employment growth will have more serious implications for the low-skilled. It is gratifying, therefore, to note that lifelong learning for the low-skilled is now at last to be prioritised under the provisions of *Towards 2016*. This is essential to enable them to compete and find better jobs in the increasingly knowledge-based society of the future.
- 35 ● In this regard, important steps have now been taken through the extension by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment of the Employment Action Plan process to more marginalised groups; better arrangements to track and support clients with multi-agency teams; a client profiling system and a more streamlined and personalised approach to the delivery of services; and a new integrated School Support Programme by the Department of Education and Science to tackle early school-leaving. All of these were recommended by the NESF and will – if integrated and co-ordinated by all the Departments (Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Social and Family Affairs, Education and Science) and Agencies such as FÁS, the LES, Area Partnerships and the VECs – ensure better outcomes for the client and more effective use of public money in the future.
- 36 ● Other positive developments are the new migration and green cards system and the Employment Rights Authority. However, as the European Commission has emphasised, clear targets need to be set and data gaps also need to be addressed. Also, the weaknesses in our 'flexicurity' system that were identified by the European Commission in the European Employment Strategy need to be tackled.

- 37 ● The Departments of Social and Family Affairs, and Health and Children, have also improved work incentives under a number of their schemes and made further moves to simplify the services provided. The success of the campaign to increase up-take under the Family Income Supplement has been striking. However, the NESF re-states its recommendation that people should be able to retain their medical cards for a five-year period after their return to work. Another significant step is that FÁS is examining with the LES a new system of performance indicators that was proposed by the NESF.
- 38 ● Finally, the NESF is in the overall pleased with the comprehensive actions, either already taken or underway by Government Departments and Agencies, on the recommendations made in its report. However, the ESRI's forecasted rise in unemployment in 2007/2008 will impact severely on the low-skilled and will call for retraining of semi- and unskilled-construction workers on a substantial scale.

Section VIII: Overall Conclusions

- 39 ● This concluding Section of this report discusses a number of policy issues under the following headings:
- NESF's Evolving Role;
 - Overall Policy Impact of the NESF;
 - Future Challenges;
 - Rights and Public Services Standards;
 - EU Dimension; and
 - the FuturesIreland Project.
- 40 ● The reports considered in this present periodic report deal with a variety of complex economic and social policy issues. However, some common findings and lessons arise that are of general interest and these should be taken into account in the on-going evaluation and development of policies in the future. The more notable of these are:
- avoid uniform "one-size-fits all approaches" to policy-making as social problems require more flexible responses that are tailor-made to individual needs;
 - encourage and reward exploration and innovation in the system and have established channels to feed back and disseminate the results of successful pilot initiatives;
 - where possible, policies should be evidence-informed and draw on up-to-date research, best practice and successful models and experience;

- management structures to ensure that policy-making and implementation becomes more transparent and participative; with access to and sharing of information, and openness to new ideas; together with more effective delivery and consultative mechanisms;
 - monitoring and evaluation should be built-in features of all policies and programmes, and the results published for wider debate by the public at large;
 - targets and policy outcomes should be defined clearly for the customer and better value for money should be secured and these should influence the allocation and input of staff and resources;
 - team-based and inclusive approaches should be provided at all levels in the system, and with full involvement of front-line staff; and
 - more widespread use of joined-up and integrated ‘whole-of-government’ approaches to tackle more effectively the underlying root causes, as these cannot be resolved by Departments acting on their own.
- 41 ● One of the most difficult issues nowadays is that of policy implementation and the need to develop adequate cross-departmental /cross-cutting mechanisms. The challenges and the barriers involved in tackling this were again pinpointed in a recent NESF report². This was further highlighted in another complementary report³ where a group of senior Irish public servants put forward a number of recommendations to improve this country’s capacity and capability to manage and deliver more effectively on cross-cutting issues as part of the SMI reform process.
- 42 ● To help move this forward, that group suggests that a limited number of policy themes be selected for priority attention (referred to as ‘*strategic results areas*’), The various stakeholders should be involved in this – namely the Government, the Oireachtas, Ministers and the Civil Service – and this work should be subject to parliamentary scrutiny and systematic evaluation. The NESF wishes to add its support to these proposals and to make three comments:
- equality and social inclusion issues should be built into any strategic results areas that would be prioritised for attention;
 - the social partners should also be added as one of the stakeholders; and
 - partnership institutions such as the NESF should also be given a role in this process.

² Improving the Delivery of Quality Public Services, NESF Report No. 34; many of the recommendations in the recent OECD public management review report on Ireland: Towards an Integrated Public Service, April 2008 re-echo those made in the NESF report.

³ *Cross-Departmental Challenges, A Whole-of-Government Approach for the Twenty-First Century*, IPA, 2003.

- 43 ● Moves to tackle data deficiencies and use more evidence-based methods⁴, as a basis for the design and delivery of more effective public policies, need to be intensified. This is particularly true in the social policy area where there is still incomplete information on client needs, the impact of interventions, and what policies and programmes work best.
- 44 ● There is also a need to generate new ideas and thinking and, for this purpose, to synthesise and link in more fully with research work in the universities and other bodies, and best international practices. Up to now, this work has tended to be undertaken on an *ad hoc* basis and the NESF considers that this should now be moved forward and developed on a more structured basis. The Steering Group under *Towards 2016* is uniquely placed to play a lead role in this. For this purpose, it is suggested that a research panel might be established with the involvement of bodies such as the ESRI, the Universities, NESDO, the Combat Poverty Agency, the Equality Authority and the Office for Social Inclusion. In the UK, for example, the Strategy Unit in the Cabinet Office has been given the task of promoting and supporting the development of evidence-based policy making (<http://www.strategy.gov.uk>).
- 45 ● The NESF believes that it has played its part in giving poverty and social inclusion issues a higher priority on the agenda of policy-makers and in successive social partnership agreements in recent years.
- 46 ● Governments and elected political representatives have, of course, the duty and the democratic mandate to take final decisions on policy matters. But the quality and effectiveness of these decisions can be enhanced through consultations and taking more fully into account the views of advisory bodies such as the NESF which, because of its wide-ranging membership, has the capacity and expertise to assess the impact of policies on those most directly affected.
- 47 ● The present social partnership agreement *Towards 2016*, drawing on the NESF report on the Developmental Welfare State⁵, contains a new and important strategic framework to address key social challenges that individuals will face at each stage of their lifecycle. This should involve greater and more policy focus on the needs of children, young adults, people of working age, older people and people with disabilities. This in turn will entail major choices in having the programmes and policies in place to deliver on these objectives and the NESF, whose new membership has recently taken up office, will seek to play its full part in contributing to this process.

4 The NESF and the Geary Institute in UCD held an important conference on this topic which was attended by key policy-makers, academics and international experts. The Conference Report, (this has been published and is available from the NESF Secretariat), contains a number of suggestions for moving forward policy in this area.

5 *The Developmental Welfare State*, NESF Report No. 113, 2005.

- 48 ● Finally, the formal review due this year of *Towards 2016* could also be used as an opportunity to build in more flexibility and experimentation in the social partnership model so as to better prepare for the challenges and uncertainties of the future.

Acknowledgements

- 49 ● Lastly, the NESF wishes to record its appreciation to all those Departments and Agencies who assisted in the preparation of this report. A list of those involved, together with the abbreviations used in the text of the report, is as follows:

- *D/ES* : Department of Education and Science,
- *D/ETE*: Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment,
- *D/EHLG*: Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government,
- *D/F*: Department of Finance,
- *D/HC*: Department of Health and Children,
- *D/JELR*: Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform,
- *D/SFA*: Department of Social and Family Affairs,
- *D/CRAG*: Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs,
- *D/T*: Department of the Taoiseach,
- *OMC*: Office of the Minister for Children,
- *D/OT*: Department of Transport,
- *CSO*: Central Statistics Office, and
- *FÁS*: Foras Áiseanna Saothair.



Introduction

Aims of the Periodic Reports

- 1.1 ● The NESF prepares periodic reports from time to time whose underlying aim is to:
- outline the work it has undertaken over a particular period of time;
 - identify and comment on what follow-up action has been taken by the Government on its recommendations;
 - revise and/or add to these recommendations, as may be necessary with the passage of time and also in the light of its consultations with Government Departments; and
 - draw conclusions from this with a view to enhancing its work methods and its policy input to the Government's policy-making processes.

Structure of the Periodic Report

- 1.2 ● The present report deals with the work undertaken by the NESF under its 2004- 2006 Work Programme. Each Section of the report deals with an individual NESF Report or Opinion⁶ in the following sequence:
- outline of the main features and recommendations;
 - follow-up action taken by Government on these recommendations; and
 - the NESF's overall conclusions, including in some cases revised or further policy recommendations to Government.

NESF's Constitution and Membership

- 1.3 ● The NESF was originally established by the Government in 1993 for the purposes of contributing to the formation of a wider and more inclusive national consensus on major policy issues such as long-term

⁶ The NESF's publications comprise Reports, Opinions, Research Documents and Conference Reports; it also publishes a Newsletter a few times a year summarising its activities for the information of the general public.

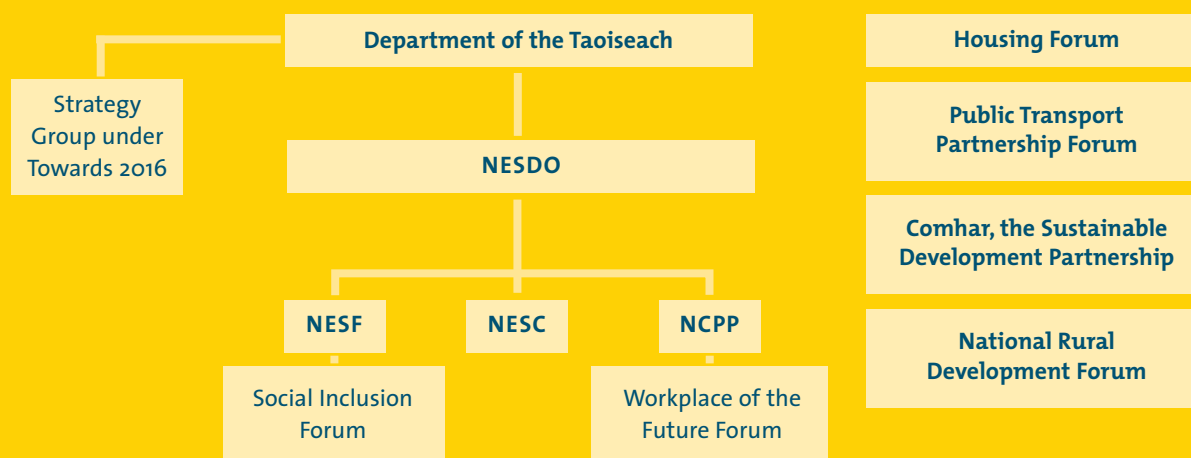
unemployment, disadvantage and inequality in our society. It has undergone a number of changes, both in its mandate and its membership, since then, as a result of changing economic and social conditions and developments in social partnership arrangements.

- 1.4 ● The work of the NESF is nowadays focused on the detailed monitoring of initiatives taken in the context of national social partnership agreements, especially with regard to social exclusion and equality. This is particularly aimed at ensuring that the views and experiences of all those affected by these measures are more fully and effectively taken into account in the policy design and implementation stages⁷.
- 1.5 ● The representation of the community and voluntary strand in the NESF is wider than that of the community and voluntary pillar of social partnership and the Government has agreed that this should continue. The revised composition of the community and voluntary strand of the NESF reflects this and the changed composition of social partnership (see Annex II to this report).
- 1.6 ● The addition of new representative groups enhances the status and diversity of the NESF's work and is also progressive in the context of governance and new public management where the emphasis is on participation, deliberation, decentralisation and innovation (Scott and Trubek, 2002)⁸.
- 1.7 ● The principal social partnership institutions now are the NESC, the NESF and the National Centre for Partnership and Performance (NCPPI). The Government agreed last year to the continuation of the NESC, NESF and the NCPPI for a period of three years, and that the NESF would continue with its remit in relation to equality and social inclusion. They also agreed earlier on to expand the NESF working methods to give it a stronger role in facilitating discussion and dialogue.
- 1.8 ● Social partnership institutions also include other participative structures (see Figure 1 below) such as Comhar, the Housing Forum and the Social Inclusion Forum. The membership of these latter bodies can include representation from groups outside social partnership with an expertise in a particular area. Involvement in these fora is determined by the nature of the issue or task involved and is primarily a matter for the individual Departments concerned.

⁷ The NESF's full terms-of-reference and constitution are given in Annex I to this report.

⁸ European Law Journal, Volume 8, No. 1 (March, 2002).

Figure 1 Main Social Partnership Institutions



NESF's Structures and Working Arrangements⁹

- 1.9 ● The NESF continues to be the largest and most representative of the social partnership institutions¹⁰. One of its continuing and distinctive features is that it includes elected members of the Oireachtas (both Dáil and Seanad) across all the main political parties, including Government as well as the opposition parties. This has been added to further with the inclusion of elected members of the Local Authorities.
- 1.10 ● With its independent Chairperson and Secretariat, the work of the NESF takes place through the following structures:
- **Plenary Sessions** of the NESF's full 62 Members which debate, *inter alia*, the Work Programme and reports/opinions prepared by its Project Teams and/Ad Hoc Groups; these Sessions are held in Dublin Castle or in the Royal Hospital Kilmainham, with the media, outside experts, officials and invited guests in attendance; Ministers and Opposition Spokespersons may also be invited to attend and participate at these Sessions;
 - **A Management Committee** (which includes 3 representatives from each of the NESF's 4 Strands) meets on a regular basis to keep under review the NESF's overall effectiveness and functioning; its more specific functions include formal adoption of the NESF's Work Programme and of the reports/opinions in the light of previous debates at Plenary level as well as deciding on organisational and procedural issues;

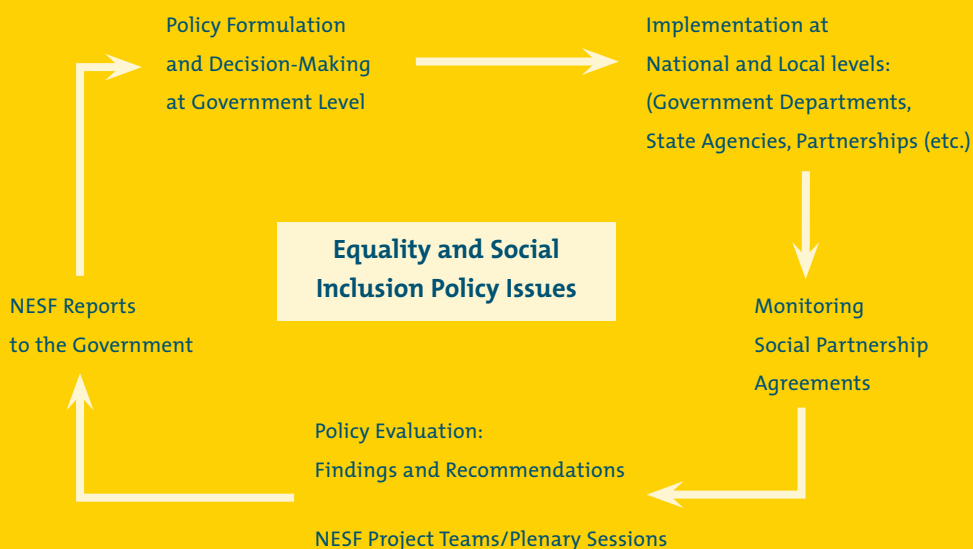
⁹ Details of these are given in Annex IV of the report.

¹⁰ A full list of the current Members of the NESF is given in Annex II to this report and its publications to date are listed in Annex III.

- **Ad Hoc Working Groups** which are established from time to time, either on the initiative of the full NESF meeting in Plenary Session or of its Management Committee, to consider specific issues; and
 - **Project Teams** which are the main bodies involved in the preparation of reports; their membership comprises balanced representation, usually not more than three, from each Strand, with particular account taken to ensure representation by the local and/or specialised elements of the national social partnership organisations.
- 1.11 ● To ensure complementarity and avoid duplication in their work, the NESF and the NESF¹¹ each focus on distinct parts of the policy-loop (policy-making, implementation and monitoring). As already mentioned above, Project Teams represent the main method used by the NESF in its work. In essence, the work of these Teams is specifically directed at:
- evaluating the effectiveness of policies;
 - identifying corrective action and/or timely changes to ineffective policies; and
 - improving policy-making by better informing and influencing the reshaping of strategic policy analysis and formulation.

The NESF’s role in the policy design process is illustrated in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2 Role of the NESF in the Policy Design Process



¹¹ One of the functions of the new statutory National Economic and Social Development Office is to strengthen the complementary roles of the NESF, NESF and the NCPP in the policy consultation and advisory processes.

- 1.12 ● The work of the Project Teams is specifically geared to solving problems, addressing particular policy issues and bringing an “*added value*” dimension to bear on policy-making through identifying, where possible, new thinking and alternative options. The Teams also seek to ensure that their recommendations are:
- specific and actionable (both in their content and to whom they are addressed), are supported by underlying analysis; and
 - are costed where this is feasible and are also prioritised.
- 1.13 ● The Teams are also assisted from time to time by outside experts and may appoint Project Leaders to provide impetus and direction to their work. Another novel feature is that the Teams occasionally hold local consultations with various interests and focus groups throughout the country as well as invite written submissions from the public to assist them in their work.
- 1.14 ● Finally, the NESF’s reports are submitted for consideration to the Government. Following on this, they are then published and are accompanied with a Press Statement setting out the Government’s reactions to a particular report’s policy findings and recommendations. At the time of publication, the reports are also circulated to the Houses of the Oireachtas, Government Departments, and State Agencies as well as to other interest groups and individuals in the private and community and voluntary sectors.

NESF Work Programme

- 1.15 ● The main policy themes that were included in the NESF’s 2004 - 2006 Work Programme are outlined in Box 1 beneath.
- 1.16 ● The NESF’s reports on Older Workers; Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People; Social Capital; and Older People were published towards the end of the previous Work Programme cycle but it was decided at the time to hold over and deal with these in the present Periodic Report. This was to allow more time for Government Departments to consider their responses and the follow-up action they envisaged taking on the recommendations in these reports. For the same reason, the reports on Public Services Delivery, Cultural Inclusion and Mental Health in Box 1 below will be dealt with in the next Periodic Report.
- 1.17 ● A planned report on income adequacy was held over until such time as the Social Welfare Benchmarking and Indexation Group, established under the provisions of the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness*, had reported. Eventually, it was decided not to proceed with this, given that the policy issues were subsumed in the negotiations that led to the then new successor social partnership agreement, *Sustaining Progress*.

Box No. 1

NESF 2004/2006 Work Programme

Main Policy Themes

- Early Childhood Care & Education
- Care for Older People
- Creating A More Inclusive Labour Market
- Improving the Delivery of Quality Public Services
- The Arts, Cultural Inclusion and Social Cohesion
- Evidence-based Policy Making
- Mental Health and Social Inclusion
- Social Inclusion Forum

- 1.18 ● One of the immediate tasks of the in-coming NESF membership, which has recently taken up office, will be to draw up and agree a new Work Programme covering the period 2007-2010.
- 1.19 ● An on-going concern by the NESF in implementing its Work Programme is to ensure that:
- a problem-solving approach is adopted and targeted at responding to specific questions and aimed at resolving implementation difficulties in specific policy areas;
 - duplication is avoided with other bodies and an “*added value*” dimension is brought to bear in its work processes;
 - the work is prioritised so as to link in with and influence the Government’s own decision-making timetable as well as, in some instances, inputting into the negotiations on national social partnership agreements; and
 - all work topics and reports take into account major policy framework documents such as the National Anti-Poverty Strategy and commitments given on social inclusion and equality, including in the latter context the NESF’s own report on Equality Proofing¹².

NESF’s Financing

- 1.20 ● The NESF is under the aegis of the Department of the Taoiseach and its activities are funded through an annual Grant-in-Aid from that Department. Its Annual Accounts are audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General. With the passage of the NESDO Act 2006, the NESF (and the NESI and the NCPP) will now be funded through the NESDO and its Accounts will also be audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General.

¹² “Equality Proofing Issues”, NESF Report No.10 (February, 1996).



Introduction

- 2.1 ● Given the trend towards ageing populations and the continuing decline in the number of younger people entering the labour market, the role of older workers will be a key issue in many European countries, including Ireland, over the coming decade. For example, the number of older people is projected to increase by nearly 80% here over the next 20 years, compared to an increase of only 3% for younger people. These changes will have many consequences for pensions and labour force participation in the future.
- 2.2 ● The importance of older workers is reflected in their number, which comes to more than half a million or the equivalent of over 30% of overall employment in our economy. Reflecting developments in OECD and EU countries¹³, the NESF considered that, from both a labour market and social inclusion viewpoint, it was an opportune time to review the barriers and plan actions in this area to promote active ageing and take better account of the needs of older workers.
- 2.3 ● Of special significance in the report, and underpinning its recommendations, were the then new unpublished data that the NESF obtained from the CSO on the labour market situation of older workers, and the special survey that the NESF undertook of employer attitudes (see Appendix 1 at the end of this Section).

¹³ Finland has been to the fore, with the support of its social partners, in promoting active ageing and in the employment of older workers which has risen by 17 percentage points over the last 15 years – the highest in Europe; Germany has in-company policies for older workers, Denmark offers later retirement, in return for higher pensions then, while the Netherland allows income tax reductions for such workers.

Project Team's Survey of Employer Attitudes

- 2.4** ● The Project Team commissioned the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) to undertake, on its behalf, a survey of employers to assess their attitudes to older workers. Questions centred on:
- trends in employment in the last two years;
 - perceived characteristics of older workers;
 - training of older workers; and
 - supports for the retention of older workers.

The following paragraphs provide a summary of the main findings.

Trends in Employment in the Last Two Years

- 2.5** ● The vast majority (83 per cent) of employers indicated that there had been no change in the proportion of employees aged over 45; 11% of companies stated that this proportion had risen; larger companies were more likely to have experienced an increase; the main factor in this was natural ageing of the workforce.

Perceived Characteristics of Older Workers

- 2.6** ● Generally, the findings were positive and similar across sectors and company size. Larger companies particularly valued the good influence older workers can have. Appendix 1 at the end of this Section provides more details. The most important positives were experience; reliability; loyalty to the job; maturity, and good influence on younger staff.
- 2.7** ● Just over half of employers indicated no preference for employing either younger or older workers. On average, 29% indicated a preference for younger workers. One-third of companies outside Dublin also indicated a preference for younger workers, compared to 23% in Dublin.

Training of Older Workers

- 2.8** ● Just under half of companies (46%) had formal training in place. Of particular note was the high proportion of retail companies with no formal training (60%) and that of construction companies with no training (54%); formal training was lower in smaller companies. Only 8 per cent of companies actively encouraged older workers to participate in training, while one-third encouraged younger workers.

Supports for the Retention of Older Workers

- 2.9 ● Few companies (12%) provide special supports for workers over 45, irrespective of company size or sector¹⁴. Of these, three-quarters provide flexible working, 41% provide retraining in new areas of work and 12% give exemptions from shift work. None of the employers provided partial or gradual retirement options.

Policy Barriers and Implementation Issues

- 2.10 ● The key concept underpinning the discussion in the report is that of *choice*. In the NESF's view, older workers should have a greater degree of choice about when to retire, about flexible working arrangements and a more supportive working environment with access to better training and progression. For this purpose, current policies and employment practices should be adapted so that older workers are more effectively supported by employers and by society generally.
- 2.11 ● The report focused on measures to retain and enhance the participation of older workers, as well as the unemployed or those discouraged from seeking work, and older women who have not been in paid work for a long time.
- 2.12 ● Building on earlier reports, the growing body of research about ageing workers in this country and internationally, case studies and areas of good practice, as well as its own research and consultations, the report singled out the following four policy areas for priority attention:
- **Attitudes of Employers:** the main challenges will be to change the attitudes and expectations of employers (only 18% of employers expressed a preference for employing older workers), raise awareness of the benefits and need for training (less than 10% of companies encourage older workers to participate in training) and increase the number of companies providing supports (such as flexible working or exemptions from shift work) which comes to only 12% at present.
 - **Training:** many older workers are in low skilled jobs and the EU Commission has been calling for greater efforts to promote in-company training. Internationally, Ireland ranks 11th out of 24 OECD countries in training provision (for older workers this rating is likely to be much lower). Four problem areas highlighted in the report are: low levels of formal education (only 50% of those in work have gone beyond the Junior Cert), difficulties in assessing training needs, and availability of certification, lack of clarity in the delivery of training and negative attitudes of employers and workers.

¹⁴ More recent data (*Manpower Ireland Older Worker Survey, 2007*) shows an improvement, with 26% of employers now having strategies to retain older workers, but only 9% of them have strategies to recruit older workers.

- **Work-Life Balance:** specific issues that arise for older workers are (i) healthy ageing (one-third of people in a sample survey cited illness and disability as the reason for their retirement); (ii) combining work with caring responsibilities (as many as 10% of workers could be caring for older adults); and (iii) older workers need more flexible /reduced working hours and, in some cases, phased retirement options. Achieving these better work-life balances will require a greater shift in attitudes by employers, trade unions and government.
- **Pensions/Social Security Provision:** unlike the situation in some other European countries, there is little scope here to redesign pension schemes so as to reduce incentives to early retirement; this reflects the relative level of social welfare pensions here to wages, which is one of the least generous in Europe; moreover the conditions attached to these schemes minimise any tendency towards early retirement; other policy measures such as improvements to training, health and better work-life balances offer more cost-effective solutions than making adjustments to the pensions system.

Follow-up action by Government Departments and Agencies on NESF Report No. 26

- 2.13 ● The report contained a comprehensive set of recommendations to address the needs of older workers under a number of core headings, namely:
- *Employer attitudes;*
 - *Training;*
 - *Work-life balance;* and
 - *Pensions.*
- 2.14 ● A summary of the recommendations under each of these headings, together with the action taken by Government Departments on these is outlined in Box 2 below.

Box No. 2**NESF Report No. 26 on Labour Market Issues for Older Workers**

NESF's Recommendation

Departmental Action Taken

The number references are to the corresponding paragraph numbers in the report.

Employer Attitudes to Older Workers

4.26

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment in conjunction with IBEC and ICTU should more actively explore avenues to promote the benefits of in-work training and retraining, particularly for older workers.

Increased funding has been allocated to FÁS to enhance training of those in employment under the One-Step-Up Initiative, as well as to the Skillnets Training Networks Programme. FÁS has expanded its training activities for the employed from €8.8m in 2004 to €43m in 2007. Total Skillnets funding has increased from €5.175m in 2004 to €24m in 2007. This will allow workers the opportunity to acquire new skills (including portable skills) and competencies so as to perform higher added-value tasks. Training is being focused on those with low levels of qualification and in low-level occupations so that they are better prepared to meet the demands of an ever-changing labour market. [D/ETE]

3.24

IBEC and ICTU should disseminate good practice in the provision of supports to older workers, particularly in relation to flexible working, reduced working hours, retraining, etc.

In 2003 IBEC produced a report and guidelines on the inclusion of older workers in the workforce. It advised employers on the development of a strategy to recruit and retain older workers. This was produced with support from the National Flexi-Work Partnership of which IBEC was part, and was distributed to IBEC's many member companies. IBEC is also actively involved with the National Framework Committee on Work-Life Balance.

In 2004, with funding from the Committee, IBEC produced a set of guidelines and an accompanying video for employers on the implementation of work-life balance policies and procedures. A series of training and information seminars were organised and the guidelines were widely distributed. In March 2007, again with support from the National Framework Committee, IBEC produced another manual for employers on the topic of childcare and work-life balance. Both of these resources are relevant to employers seeking to accommodate the needs of older workers in employment, and complement the information that is distributed routinely by IBEC's employee information unit on best employment practice. [IBEC]

ICTU are also active participants on the National Framework Committee on Work-Life Balance and have produced guidance for trade unions with their assistance in the past. ICTU are in the process of updating this material and produced a briefing paper on work-life balance as part of its participation in the European Year of Equal Opportunity for All, 2007. Its Equality Committee has also committed itself to developing further Congress policy on older workers. Congress has been involved in the *Senior Select Retain and Retrain* project funded under the EQUAL Community Initiative. This resulted in a report which made a number of recommendations for change to policy and practice on older workers. [ICTU]

NESF's Recommendation		Departmental Action Taken
Training in and for the Workforce		
4.9	The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, in consultation with the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, should put in place a strategy as a matter of priority to implement the recommendations of the Task Force on Lifelong Learning.	The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment in conjunction with the Department of Education and Science are in the process of finalising a national lifelong learning policy document, which will set out Ireland's strategy and objectives in the area of lifelong learning. Once completed this document will be forwarded to the European Commission. The implementation of the National Skills Strategy will make a major contribution to the lifelong learning agenda.
4.17	The remit of the National Training Advisory Committee (NTAC) should be broadened to include the design and development of a work-based training package that takes account of the specific needs of older workers. In consultation with the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, and State training agencies, some of the surplus in the National Training Fund should be used to develop and disseminate this package.	The National Training Advisory Committee was merged with the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs in early 2004. The Expert Group advises Government in relation to future skills/training requirements. As part of the increased funding for training people in employment, there is a considerable focus on encouraging older people to become more involved in training and to remain in work for longer. [D/ETE]
4.25	The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment in consultation with the NTAC should draw up a National Framework for the delivery of in-work training that identifies more clearly the specific roles and responsibilities of FÁS, Enterprise Ireland and the Skillnets initiative. Consideration should be given to improving co-ordination mechanisms between them and the National Centre for Partnership and Performance.	The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment have established the Upskilling Co-ordination Group for the purposes of ensuring that the impact realised from the State's increasing investments in training is maximised and that all publicly-funded programmes are delivered in a coordinated and efficient manner. FÁS, Enterprise Ireland, Skillnets and the County Enterprise Boards are members of the Upskilling Co-ordination Group. [D/ETE]
4.27	The recommendation of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs that FÁS, Enterprise Ireland and Forfás should examine how best to undertake a regular company-level survey of training should be expedited and should specifically identify	A survey of in-company training is carried out periodically by the CSO (in conjunction with FÁS) through the Continuing Vocational Training Survey (CVTS) series. The CVTS is run on a periodic basis as part of the National Employment Survey. The most recent survey CVTS ₃ was conducted in 2006 and results are expected in October 2008. The survey provides internationally comparable data on in-company training in Ireland.

	NESF's Recommendation	Departmental Action Taken
	the training needs of older workers.	In addition to this, Forfás through the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) conducted an analysis of in-employment training and education in 2005. The EGFSN also analysed the generic and occupational specific skills required in the workplace as part of the National Skills Strategy Research in 2007. [D/ETE]
4.30	The Department of Education and Science should give greater consideration to the specific needs of older workers, including opportunities for progression and the recognition of prior experiential learning. This should apply to programmes like the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS), which provide education opportunities for the unemployed.	The general issue of targeting Further Education programmes on older people is being pursued in the context of the commitments to this effect in the social partnership document <i>Towards 2016</i> and the <i>National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016</i> . The general recognition of prior experiential learning is one of a number of requirements of the Further Education and Training Awards Council that will apply to all Further Education programmes in the near future. This will have the effect of facilitating progression. [D/ES]
4.32	The literacy model developed by the Department of Education and Science, NALA and the Local Authorities, 'Return to Learning Initiative', should be mainstreamed and promoted more widely at national, regional and local levels throughout the public sector generally.	Workplace literacy is now the responsibility of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, which operates through FÁS, and had €2m in 2005 and again in 2006 for this purpose and has €3m in 2007, and again in 2008. [D/ES]
4.33	The Information Society Commission, through its advisory group on lifelong learning, should consider the development of a series of guidelines for employers in relation to older workers and IT.	The Information Society Policy Unit (ISPU) is developing a new Action Plan on the Knowledge Society. This will include initiatives targeted at older people and issues on staying longer in the workforce, ICT opportunities to enhance quality of life and participating actively in society. The ISPU is also exploring the development of training modules for seniors. A number of ICT training initiatives for target groups (including older, disadvantaged and the disabled) have been funded under the ASC (Access, Skills and Content) Initiative. [D/Taoiseach]
4.35	Building on the success of the Fast Track to IT (FIT) concept, a tailored programme geared towards the needs of older workers should be developed by the main training agencies and delivered on a pilot basis, through Skillnets and/or in a selected number of workplace settings.	The Fast Track to IT industry-led initiative continues to contribute to helping ensure that Ireland has the necessary IT skills. The establishment of a specific programme tailored to improving the IT skills of older workers will be examined. [D/ETE]

NESF's Recommendation	Departmental Action Taken
<p>4.43 The Employment Action Plan (EAP) re-engagement process should be extended to those aged over 55 years and to those not on the Live Register but currently out of work, such as older women returning to the labour force.</p>	<p>The preventive process involves a systematic engagement with the unemployed (those on the Live Register for three months are referred from the Department of Social and Family Affairs to FÁS) to assist them progress towards employment, training or active labour market programmes. This process was extended to those aged 55-64 on a national basis at the end of 2006. This approach complements the phasing out of the Pre-Retirement Allowance, where older workers were not required to be available for work. [D/ETE]</p> <p>The first selection of customers in this age category commenced with effect from July 2006. The involvement of the over 55s in the EAP is likely to facilitate an increase in the rate of return to the workforce for this age group. [D/SFA]</p>
<p>4.49 FÁS is currently piloting the model developed by the Northside Partnership on Expanding the Workforce Programme. On the basis of the pilot results this model should be more widely mainstreamed for groups such as women returnees, the long-term unemployed and people with a disability and with the active involvement of employers and the Local Employment Service.</p>	<p>To test approaches, and to identify potential barriers, in activating individuals in receipt of One Parent Family Payments, FÁS commenced work on an initiative to proactively engage with this cohort. Since this cohort is predominately women, FÁS proposed an initiative that used the process in situ for women returnees (Expanding the Workforce), with additional elements relevant to the needs of lone parents. This initiative was implemented in late 2006.</p> <p>The geographical areas chosen for these initiatives were Dublin Inner City, Ballymun, Tallaght and Cork City. The target was women on the FÁS Register, in receipt of One Parent Family Payment who were not currently on any FÁS training or employment programme and residing in the areas identified above. The number of people identified as meeting this criteria, were 1,039 (Dublin Inner City), 1,183 (Ballymun and Finglas), 1,228 (Tallaght) and 1,047 (Cork City).</p> <p>Overall the attendance rate was approximately 10% in each area. The follow-up survey of individuals who chose not to respond or participate to ascertain the reasons why they did not engage was completed.</p> <p>As a result of the findings, FÁS is hosting a roundtable discussion with relevant stakeholders to review FÁS provision of services for people in receipt of the One Parent Family Payment. [D/ETE]</p>

NESF's Recommendation	Departmental Action Taken
Work-Life Balance	
<p>5.12, 5.25</p> <p>The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment in conjunction with IBEC and ICTU should put in place a dissemination strategy for the guidelines and training that have been developed by the European Foundation and others on work-life balance issues.</p>	<p>See response to 3.24 above.</p>
<p>5.19</p> <p>A national Workplace Health Co-ordinator should be put in place as recommended in the National Health Promotion Strategy. He/she should have specific regard for the needs of older workers.</p>	<p>The HSE has a number of Health Promotion Officers with a specific role in relation to workplace health promotion. These officers report to a Functional Manager within the Population Health Directorate. This Manager has national responsibility for a number of Health Promotion programmes including health promotion in the workplace. The Department and the HSE continue to work together to promote the workplace as a key setting to deliver the health promotion message. [D/H&C]</p>
<p>5.22</p> <p>Earned income disregards under the Carer's Allowance should be calculated using net rather than gross weekly income as an incentive for more women to take up part-time work.</p>	<p>The Carer's Allowance means test has been eased significantly in recent years. The income disregard has been increased in successive Budgets. In April 2006 the income disregard was increased to €290 per week for a single person and €580 per week for a couple. In April 2007 the income disregard was increased to €320 per week for a single person and €640 per week for a couple. In April 2008 these disregards were further increased to €332.50 and €665 per week respectively. This ensures that a couple can earn in the region of €37,200 per annum and still receive the maximum rate of carer's allowance and the associated free travel and household benefits. A person with an income at the level of the disregard can receive the maximum rate of carer's allowance as well as the associated household benefits and free travel pass. The level of carer's allowance payable decreases as income increases above the threshold.</p> <p>The number of hours a carer can engage in employment, self-employment, education or training outside the home and still be eligible for carer's allowance, carer's benefit and the respite care grant was increased from 10 to 15 hours per week with effect from June 2006. [D/SFA]</p>
<p>5.27</p> <p>The National Framework Committee on Family-Friendly Policies should broaden its remit to include older workers and should fund specific pilot initiatives for them as a policy target group. At the same time,</p>	<p>The National Framework Committee for Work/Life Balance Policies was established under the Social Partnership process and its remit agreed by the Social Partners. Its mandate is to support and facilitate the development of family-friendly policies at the level of the enterprise rather than to focus on any specific type of employee. One of the key tasks of the Committee is to examine how best to improve access to family-friendly working arrangements in order</p>

NESF's Recommendation	Departmental Action Taken
<p>the Departments of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Health and Children and Social and Family Affairs, should collaborate more effectively to streamline and integrate their work on older workers.</p>	<p>to realise the potential benefits that these arrangements would offer from both an equality and competitiveness perspective. [D/ETE]</p> <p>The Government provided funding of €278,000 in 2007 to support the activities of the Committee. A range of activities have been undertaken by the Committee since its establishment in 2000, including the organisation of Work/Life Balance Day on an annual basis; the provision of direct financial assistance to organisations; the provision of expert assistance to individual organisations; the development of a range of supports and tools to assist employers and employee representatives; the development of an interactive website; information dissemination and exchange activities, and research. [D/ETE]</p> <p>The Department is participating in an Interdepartmental Committee on Ageing in the Public Service which is examining the extent of the ageing problem in the medium and long term in the public service and will be making recommendations on this issue. Older staff in the Department are eligible to avail of existing Work Life Balance initiatives which specifically support transition to retirement. [D/SFA]</p>
<p>5.29 Opportunities for downshifting should be considered for older workers. In particular, their possible role as mentors within the workplace should be developed.</p>	<p>The proposal that older workers could act as mentors/coaches to new recruits is a positive proposal and the Department will give this further consideration. [D/SFA]</p>
<h3>Pensions</h3>	
<p>6.59 Given the limitations that apply to pension benefits in Ireland, there are very few options to encourage people back to work or to remain in work longer using pensions as a policy option, apart from raising the low maximum age limits for retirement that apply to certain groups of workers in the public sector, e.g. the Gardaí.</p>	<p>Issues in relation to retirement age and building up pension entitlements after what would now be considered normal retirement age are discussed in the Green Paper on Pensions. Following the completion of a consultation process on the Green Paper at the end of May 2008 the reforms suggested in relation to older workers now fall to be considered in the context of the framework for long-term policy on pensions which is to be completed by the end of 2008. [D/SFA]</p>

NESF's Conclusions on the Follow-up Action by Government Departments and Agencies on its Report No. 26

- 2.15** ● At the outset, the NESF is pleased with the steady progress that has been made by the Departments and Agencies in the implementation of its recommendations. Follow-up in this area has now been given renewed momentum with the commitments in *Towards 2016* to:
- provide further encouragement and support for older people to access further and higher education and lifelong learning, with targets to be set for their participation; and
 - support their continued participation in the labour market, including family literacy projects, upskilling, and tackling ageism.
- 2.16** ● Moreover, support for older workers has been further strengthened with the commitments in the *Programme for Government 2007-2012* to:
- introduce phased retirement to allow workers a greater say in their retirement age;
 - increase the State Pension for every year that a person over 66 delays taking it; and
 - extend the earnings disregard for those on the State Non-Contributory Pension without affecting their pension entitlement.
- 2.17** ● The profile of our working-age population is gradually ageing (albeit at a slower rate than other countries) due to low fertility rates and increases in life expectancy. It is predicted that our domestic labour force supply will diminish with future growth becoming more reliant on inward migration and measures to increase participation rates – including those to promote the participation of older workers¹⁵. At European level the effective retirement age has fallen substantially – across the OECD, the number of years a man can expect to spend in retirement has increased from an average of 11 years in 1970 to 18 years in 2004; the corresponding figures for women are 14 and 23 years respectively¹⁶. A possible factor why Irish workers have relatively longer working lives is that spending on pensions here is one of the lowest in Europe and that only 38% of employees in the private sector have pension coverage¹⁷.
- 2.18** ● Our population is projected to increase from 4 million to 5.1 million in 2030. Those aged 65- 80 years of age are predicted to increase from 400,000 to 900,000 – an increase of 125%¹⁸. The old-age dependency ratio (the % of the population aged 65 and over relative to the population aged 15-64) is forecast to increase from 16% to 28% by 2030, but this will be well

¹⁵ OECD, (2005), *Ageing and Employment Policies: Ireland*.

¹⁶ OECD, (2007), *Modernising Social Policy for the New Life Course*.

¹⁷ See the article by K. Allen in *Contemporary Ireland, A Sociological Map*, 2007.

¹⁸ Department of Finance (2005), *Ageing Projections Exercise Ireland*.

below the EU average¹⁹. On present trends, there will be fewer people at work generating the wealth to support the social welfare, health and other needs of those not working.

- 2.19** ● The EU Lisbon Agenda set a target 50 % employment rate for those aged 55-64 years, (a figure now exceeded by Ireland at 52%). While the percentage of our working-age population not at work (inactivity rate) at 32% is average for the EU, it is higher than the UK, Netherlands, Sweden and Denmark which have inactivity rates under 25%. Higher employment rates among older workers can also bring additional benefits in reducing the upward pressure on future pension and public health expenditure²⁰.
- 2.20** ● The NESF report highlighted some negative perception among some workers of older workers and resistance to the introduction of more flexible work arrangements for older workers. Evidence of some age stereotypes among employers was also highlighted by the OECD²¹. In the circumstances, the commitments given in *Towards 2016* to promoting a cultural mindset change among both employers and employees to encourage older workers – as well as tackling ageism – (the Equality Authority, HSE and the National Council on Ageing and Older People have been active in promoting initiatives in these areas and this is to continue)) to remain in employment are to be welcomed²².
- 2.21** ● More flexible working arrangements , including reducing hours of work and rearranging work duties , would encourage people to work beyond existing retirement age. The NESF believes that there is potential for firms to pursue more active retention policies taking into account the work-life balance requirements of the older worker.
- 2.22** ● In this regard, the NESF welcomes the growing awareness of the benefits that older workers can make to business by their continuing to work up to and beyond current retirement age. Recent research has rated older workers highly in terms of the quality of their work, reliability, team working and interacting with those in more senior positions²³.
- 2.23** ● Given their knowledge and experience, older workers can also act as a mentor to younger workers in supporting their training and career progression and the NESF's proposal in this area has been supported by the Department of Social and Family Affairs. The customer profile of Irish firm is also ageing and these can relate better to older workers – making a good business case for a more balanced age-mix in the workforce. The nature of work is also changing, with a move from more manual type work towards more knowledge-based work which would enhance the employment prospects for older workers.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, CSO, 2007.

²⁰ *Ibid*, Department of Finance.

²¹ OECD, (2005), *Ageing and Employment Policies* Ireland.

²² A recent EU-funded research report involving Age Action, FÁS, ICTU, PARTAS and Contact Recruitment has called for the scrapping of the mandatory retirement age for older workers; recent data from the Equality Authority shows that ageism has now overtaken racism as the most common reason for complaints about discrimination in the workplace.

²³ Chambers Ireland (2006), *Labour Force Survey*, Dublin: Chambers Ireland.

- 2.24 ● Our level of lifelong learning remains low compared to other best performing countries, particularly for older workers, even though they have, generally speaking, the greatest need to have their skills updated. The NESF considers that opportunities in this area need to be significantly increased – helping people to work ‘smarter’ rather than ‘harder’ and it looks forward to the policy document on lifelong learning which is at present being finalised by the Departments of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and Education and Science.
- 2.25 ● Important also is the increased funding given to the One-Step-Up Initiative and the Skillnets, and the greater focus now on encouraging older people, particularly those with low levels of qualification and in low-paid jobs, to get more involved in training and to remain longer in work. The NESF is pleased also that its recommendation on the need for greater co-ordination between the various State Agencies involved has now been acted on with the establishment of the Upskilling Co-ordination Group.
- 2.26 ● A further initiative has been the recent extension of the Employment Action Plan referral process to those between 55 to 64 years of age on the Live Register. However, there are other people in this age group looking for work who are not on the Live Register such as carers, women returners, people on disability payments etc and consideration should be given by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment to their inclusion. Dedicated employment service supports, such as those provided by the Local Employment Service, could help older workers find alternative employment if made redundant and/or take up more suitable work. This could include job-search assistance and additional supports for employers.
- 2.27 ● Now that responsibility for workplace literacy has been transferred to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, the NESF wishes to repeat its call for the mainstreaming of the *Return to Literacy Initiative* that had been developed by the Department of Education and Science, the National Adult Literacy Agency and the Local Authorities.
- 2.28 ● The NESF welcomes the improvements made to carers allowance, carers benefit and respite care. The valuable role that people play in caring for older people and adults and children affected by disability and ill health must be more fully recognised and supported.
- 2.29 ● The NESF supports the recent call by the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment for a review of current rules governing retirement as part of an examination of the role and potential of older people in the workforce. The Minister has now asked his Department to prepare a policy paper and a labour force study of the issues involved. People are now living longer – the number of people over 65 will triple over the next 30 years – and are enjoying a greater period of retirement compared to previous decades. We are now up above the average EU lifespan for both males and females, and there has been a narrowing of the gap between the death rates for men and women aged 65 and over²⁴.

24 Ageing in Ireland, CSO, 2007.

- 2.30** ● It is recognised that an abrupt ending to working life is not the best approach to retirement and that many older workers would like the option of a more gradual retirement. The NESF would encourage such arrangements. For self-employed people there is no set retirement age and indeed a high proportion of those working over 65 years are self-employed. For employees working in the private sector the usual retirement age set out in contracts of employment is 65 years. As already mentioned above, there is now an economic and business rationale for increasing the retirement age, provided that the employee is willing and fit to continue to work.
- 2.31** ● For public servants recruited prior to 2004, retirement is optional from age 60 with a compulsory retirement age of 65. For those recruited since then, the minimum retirement age is 65 with no maximum age set. There are also variations for different groups of public servants such as Gardai, prison officers, army, firemen etc where the retirement age is earlier. In the changed circumstance now obtaining, compared to the time when these rules were drawn up, the NESF considers that consideration should be given to providing an option of extending the retirement age for public servants generally.
- 2.32** ● More generally, the process of ageing in the Civil Service is expected to increase dramatically in the future, with the proportion of staff over 50 expected to increase from 25% at present to around 45% over the next decade. This calls for a service-wide policy to tackle this through more external recruitment and job selection strategies, more active skills development and training to fill competency gaps, succession planning and the integration of the PMDS with other HR policies²⁵.
- 2.33** ● Finally, the NESF would welcome reforms of the pension system to give people more choice to stay at work longer and retire more gradually including, for example:
- the feasibility of enabling people to build up additional years of pension entitlement beyond 65;
 - the dropping of the requirement that a person cannot work full time or earn more than €38 per week before they can draw a State retirement pension; and
 - a review of the rules on the tax treatment of pension income and earned income; at present pension income is included for income tax assessment purposes along with any other income earned.

The recent publication of the Government's Green paper on Pensions provides the opportunity to have an informed debate on these and other related issues. One of the most serious issues to be faced is that half the country's workforce has made no private pension arrangements and,

²⁵ See *Inside Government*, Joanna O'Brien, IPA, September 2007.

in this regard, the NESF supports the call by FÁS that the issue of the portability of supplementary pension rights should be further investigated²⁶. The recent OECD report²⁷ emphasised how the current system of tax incentives for pensions saving is very generous and needs to be better targeted.

²⁶ *The Irish Labour Market Review*, 2007, FÁS.

²⁷ OECD Economic Surveys, Ireland, April 2008.

Appendix 1

Tables from the Project Team's Survey of Employer Attitudes

Table 2.1a Trend in Older Workers as a Proportion of Workforce Over the Last Two Years, by Sector

Trend	Services	Retail	Construction	Industry	Total
Increased	7%	11%	12%	20%	11%
Remained unchanged	87%	86%	79%	74%	83%
Decreased	6%	3%	9%	6%	6%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 2.1b Trend in Older Workers as a Proportion of Workforce Over the Last Two Years, by Company Size

Trend	Company Size (number of employees)				Total
	1-9	10-19	20-50	51+	
Increased	10%	15%	18%	25%	11%
Remained unchanged	85%	77%	73%	63%	83%
Decreased	5%	8%	10%	13%	6%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 2.2a Reasons for Increase or Decrease in Older Workers as a Proportion of Workforce, by Sector

	Services	Retail	Construction	Industry	Total
Reasons for Increase:					
Natural ageing of workforce	67%	75%	77%	47%	63%
Shortage of skilled younger workers	13%	15%	23%	53%	29%
Other	21%	10%	-	-	8%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Reasons for Decrease:					
Retirement	21%	20%	33%	78%	36%
Targeting of younger workers	-	-	67%	11%	20%
Redundancy package	26%	20%	-	-	13%
Other	53%	60%	-	11%	31%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 2.2b Reasons for Increase or Decrease in Older Workers as a Proportion of Workforce, by Company Size

	Company Size (number of employees)				Total
	1-9	10-19	20-50	51+	
Reasons for Increase:					
Natural ageing of workforce	58%	64%	71%	100%	62%
Shortage of skilled younger workers	33%	27%	14%	-	29%
Other	9%	9%	14%	-	9%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Reasons for Decrease:					
Retirement	32%	20%	25%	67%	33%
Targeting of younger workers	21%	20%	25%	-	20%
Redundancy package	15%	20%	-	33%	15%
Other	32%	40%	50%	-	33%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 2.3a Characteristics of Older Workers (frequency), by Sector

Characteristics	Services	Retail	Construction	Industry	Total
Experience	90%	91%	88%	87%	89%
Slow to adapt to change	15%	16%	29%	13%	17%
Loyalty to the job	65%	73%	61%	64%	66%
Difficult to retrain	6%	11%	17%	7%	9%
Maturity	59%	57%	46%	55%	56%
Prone to ill health	6%	3%	9%	14%	7%
Reliable	70%	78%	73%	60%	70%
More expensive to employ	23%	19%	12%	22%	20%
Good influence on younger staff	39%	38%	41%	38%	39%
Outdated skills especially in new technology/computers	20%	22%	14%	27%	21%
Total	41%	22%	15%	21%	100%

Table 2.3b Characteristics of Older Workers (frequency), by Company Size

	Company Size (number of employees)				Total
	1-9	10-19	20-50	51+	
Experience	89%	90%	94%	93%	89%
Slow to adapt to change	16%	22%	23%	24%	17%
Loyalty to the job	66%	63%	75%	75%	66%
Difficult to retrain	8%	12%	13%	11%	9%
Maturity	55%	54%	66%	54%	56%
Prone to ill health	8%	5%	5%	6%	7%
Reliable	69%	70%	78%	77%	70%
More expensive to employ	19%	26%	28%	28%	20%
Good influence on younger staff	37%	35%	51%	56%	39%
Outdated skills especially in new technology/computers	21%	20%	29%	20%	21%
Total	83%	8%	5%	3%	100%

Table 2.4 Formal Structured Training by Sector – All Workers

	Services	Retail	Construction	Industry	Total
Formal structured training present	47%	40%	54%	44%	46%
No formal structured training	53%	60%	46%	56%	54%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 2.5a Active Encouragement to Participate in Training, by Sector

	Services	Retail	Construction	Industry	Total
Company encourages more younger workers to participate than older workers	26%	35%	65%	10%	31%
Company encourages more older workers to participate than younger workers	9%	6%	11%	4%	8%
Neither of the above	66%	59%	24%	86%	61%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 2.5b Active Encouragement to Participate in Training, by Company Size

	Company Size (number of employees)				Total
	1-9	10-19	20-50	51+	
Company encourages more younger workers to participate than older workers	33%	30%	25%	20%	31%
Company encourages more older workers to participate than younger workers	8%	5%	7%	-	8%
Neither of the above	59%	65%	68%	80%	61%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%



Introduction

- 3.1 ● Despite the notable progress made in recent years, lesbian, gay and bisexual people still face significant discrimination because of their sexual orientation. Members of this community have good reason and cause for concern in not making their sexuality known in public. For example, in a 2002 European Values Survey, over a quarter of Irish people said that they would not like to have a homosexual as a neighbour. This was one of the highest figures in the EU. More recently in a survey of over 1,000 gays, lesbians and bisexuals in Ireland, only 50% of those surveyed said they can be open about their sexuality with all whom they work with²⁸.
- 3.2 ● In 2002, another survey showed that less than half (48 per cent) of public sector organisations (excluding Government Departments) said that they had taken steps to promote equality and/or avoid discrimination in relation to sexual orientation. Of the nine equality grounds, sexual orientation was the only one to score less than 50 per cent, with disability, gender, race, family status and age all scoring over 60 per cent (Millward Brown IMS, 2002: 13).
- 3.3 ● It was against this background of continuing discrimination that the NESF prepared this report. The work was also undertaken in the context of the following policy developments:
- the strengthening of EU competences in the equality area under the Amsterdam Treaty;
 - the commitments under the Belfast Agreement to equivalence in the North and in the South in relation to human rights provisions;
 - the Equality Authority’s report in this area that was published in 2002; and
 - the agreement in the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness* that the recommendations in the Authority’s report “will be considered by the Social Partners to establish how they might be carried forward”.

Purposes of the Report

- 3.4 ● The NESF report focused on identifying the barriers to implementing policy proposals in this area and recommended a strategic set of priority actions to resolve these barriers, based on engagement at a senior level with relevant Government Departments.
- 3.5 ● The report was prepared by a Project Team that was drawn from gay and lesbian organisations, women's organisations, employer and trade union interests, the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, the Equality Authority and the Local Authorities. The Team was chaired by Mr. Bernard McDonagh, who had then recently retired as Secretary-General of the former Department of Equality and Law Reform. An earlier report, *A Strategic Policy Framework for Equality Issues* (NESF Report Number 23, March 2002), provided a conceptual framework for the work of the Team.

Policy Barriers and Implementation Issues

- 3.6 ● The Project Team's work process centred on consultations, both in writing and in subsequent bilateral meetings, with 11 Government Departments, as well as with the Law Reform Commission and the Human Rights Commission.
- 3.7 ● The report detailed, for each Department, the main features of these consultations under a number of key headings, such as the:
- current status of the various policy recommendations that were made; and
 - identification of perceived barriers to the implementation of the policies and possible solutions.
- 3.8 ● This process of engagement and dialogue with Departments resulted in specific and focused undertakings (these are listed in Box 3.3 of the report):
- to improve policies and to provide better services to the lesbian, gay and bisexual community;
 - to include issues regarding sexual orientation in Departmental strategic planning, which would in turn have positive outcomes for lesbians, gays and bisexuals as customers and as staff members;
 - to include lesbian, gay and bisexual organisations as a target group for funding; and
 - the development of institutional frameworks and structures to process these recommendations.

Partnership Rights for Same-sex Couples

- 3.9 ● The NESF Project Team identified partnership rights for same sex couples as the issue which would be both most likely to encounter serious barriers to implementation, but also as the recommendation which could have the most practical and profound impact on equality for this group.

Report's Recommendations

- 3.10 ● The recommendations fall under a number of over-arching headings that apply across a wide range of Government Departments. These are as follows:
- *Departments' Strategy Statements and Business Plans;*
 - *Equality Proofing;*
 - *Services Provision;*
 - *Representation and Funding; and*
 - *Legislation.*
- 3.11 ● In undertaking this work, the NESF was aware of the many worthwhile recommendations that had been made over the years in a range of well-regarded reports but these had been neglected or at best were not as fully acted on as they should have been. The missing link in this was the gap between policy design, on the one hand, and policy implementation on the other and the absence of coherent mechanisms or models to follow through on this.

Follow-up Action by Government Departments and Agencies on NESF Report No. 27

- 3.12 ● The report's recommendations were built around its overall conclusion that what was urgently required were key institutional mechanisms/ models to spearhead and ensure effective follow-through on the recommendations. A summary of the main recommendations as well as the follow-up action taken by Government Departments on these is set out in Box 3 below.

Box No. 3

NESF Report No. 27 on Equality Policies for Lesbians Gays and Bisexual People

The number references are to the corresponding paragraph numbers in the report.

NESF's Recommendation

Departmental Action Taken

Strategy Statements and Business Plans

4.5

The NESF recommended that a Government decision should be issued requiring that all Government Departments and State Agencies where appropriate, should from here on in have incorporated in their Strategy Statements and Business Plans a more proactive commitment to achieving equality for all the groups covered by the legislation in this area.

Diversity in the Civil Service was published in 2002 which included protection under the equal status grounds and encouragement of diversity in the civil service. On foot of this publication most Departments published their own internal and external strategy statements which included equality of opportunity for all employees and clients, including the minority groupings under the nine grounds. Examples of such actions are outlined below²⁹.

The Department of Health and Children's Strategy Statement 2003-2005 included an action to "Work to mainstream the needs of lesbian, gay and bisexual people into the design, delivery and impact assessment of health and personal social services." Current DOHC Strategy Statement for 2005-2007 lists a "Strategy for Equality and Diversity in the health services" as one of the important policy frameworks. The 2008 Strategy Statement has not yet been published.

The HSE is developing a framework equality strategy that includes a focus on sexual orientation, has established a working group on lesbians, gay, bisexual and transgender issues. The report, *Recognising LGB Sexual Identities in Health Services* was recently published by the Equality Authority and the HSE on access to health services for lesbian, gay and bisexual people.

The Department of Social and Family Affairs Strategy Statement 2005-2007 includes the following strategic objectives: "Ensure that the social welfare code meets the requirements of the Equal Status Act, 2000, and other relevant legislation", and also: "Provide a positive working environment and, in line with equality legislation, promote equality of opportunity for all employees of the Department."

The DFSA also published their Human Resources Strategy *Partnership, Development and Performance* in April 2003; one objective is to "promote a positive working environment within the Department, equality of all employees and a culture of mutual respect." Under this strategy, the Department committed itself to ensuring that its HR policies were in line with *Diversity in the Civil Service*. The DFSA HR Strategy includes the commitment to "enforce vigorously the Civil Service Policy on Harassment, Sexual Harassment and Bullying". A revised and enhanced version of the policy was published in Sept 2005. The definitions include same sex harassment as provided for in the Employment Equality Act 2004.

The Department of Agriculture and Food's Strategy Statement identifies one of its values in fulfilling its mission statement and mandate as "Behaving ethically, fairly, impartially and respecting social justice, equality and inclusion."

²⁹ The responses from Departments on this Report were co-ordinated by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

NESF's Recommendation

Departmental Action Taken

The Department of Agriculture and Food's Customer Service Action Plan 2005-2007 contains a commitment to ensure the rights to equal treatment established by equality legislation and accommodate diversity, so as to contribute to equality for the groups covered by the equality legislation. An action arising from this commitment is to treat the Department's customers equally and to work towards eliminating barriers, as and when they are identified. In its Customer Charter, the Department undertakes to treat its customers equally and to seek to accommodate diversity. The Department's Human Resource Strategy addresses the issue by setting the goal that equality is an uncontested principle applied in all aspects of its work.

FÁS's commitment to ensuring equality for all its customers is articulated in its Statement of Strategy 2006 – 2009. Caring, inclusiveness and equality is a core value of the organisation and combating discrimination and accommodating diversity is the primary application of Priority Goal 6.

The Department of Foreign Affairs has undertaken a comprehensive equality review of policies in relation to the terms and conditions for staff of the Department posted to diplomatic Missions abroad. The review focused in particular on the treatment afforded to non-marital partners accompanying officers posted abroad in relation to foreign service allowances and other entitlements in the context of existing equality and employment legislation. The review confirmed that the current practices of the Department are in full compliance with current equality and employment legislation.

The Department of Education and Science's promotion of equality is embedded in the Education Act 1998 in a number of ways. For example, schools must use their resources to ensure that the educational needs of all students are identified and provided for, and must also establish and maintain an admissions policy that provides for maximum accessibility to the school and which ensures that principles of equality are respected. The Education (Welfare) Act, 2000 requires schools to prepare a code of behaviour that specifies the standards of behaviour to be observed by students. The Equal Status Acts, 2000 to 2004 require that schools (and other bodies) do not discriminate across the nine grounds.

Under the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government's Customer Service Action Plan 2006 - 2008, a core principle is to "Ensure the rights to equal treatment established by equality legislation and accommodate diversity, so as to contribute to equality for the groups covered by the equality legislation."

Although not named in the original Local Development Social Inclusion Programme (LDSIP) guidelines, GLB were added to the list of target groups on foot of the NESF report.

NESF's Recommendation	Departmental Action Taken
Equality Proofing	
<p>4.8 The NESF recommended that:</p> <p>4.9 LGB's should be specifically addressed in all equality proofing exercises.</p> <p>Examples of sexual orientation in equality proofing processes should be documented and disseminated, and all data regarding social inclusion and equality should include LGB as a target group.</p>	<p>The Equality Authority has published an <i>Equality Proofing Template Document for City and County Development Boards</i>. This includes positive action measures for targeting disadvantaged groups to full participation. It has also published <i>Equal Status Guidelines for Enterprises and a Guide to the Equal Status Act 2000 to 2004 and the provision of Health Services</i>. These include examples of best practice and are published on the Equality Authority website.</p> <p>The remit of the Equality Proofing Working Group, which is chaired by the Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform, also includes developing tools for equality proofing. GLEN is represented on this Group. Also as a subgroup to this Working Group, there is a Data Sub Group due to report to the Equality Proofing Working Group on data gathering and analysis in relation to the nine grounds. GLEN is also represented on this subgroup.</p> <p>The Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform has also funded a policy liaison post in GLEN for three years to end-2008 and has been facilitating meetings between GLEN and Departments and Agencies on policies, programmes and services which impact on the LGB group. GLEN was chosen because they are a non-governmental policy-focused organisation that has campaigned for the welfare of LGB people and for their right to equality since 1987.</p> <p>The Equality Authority is being resourced under the new round of Structural Funds to establish an Equality Mainstreaming Unit which will work with providers of education, training and employment services and will include a focus on sexual orientation.</p> <p>A project is currently underway in the Department of Social and Family Affairs to carry out a technical review of the entire social welfare code (both statutory and non-statutory) to examine its compatibility with the Equal Status Act, 2000 (as amended) to identify any instances, or potential instances of direct or indirect discrimination on any of the nine grounds identified under the Act, including sexual orientation.</p> <p>The new <i>National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016 (NAP inclusion)</i>, tasks the Office for Social Inclusion (OSI) with ensuring that the necessary data are in place to enable development, monitoring and evaluation of the Plan and of the social inclusion elements of other national strategies, such as <i>Towards 2016</i> and the <i>National Development Plan</i>, which are directed at those groups who are most at risk of experiencing poverty and social exclusion. OSI is being assisted in this regard by the Technical Advisory Group, which comprises representatives from key Government Departments, the Combat Poverty Agency, the ESRI, the CSO, the Equality Authority and social partners. This Group is considering, as part of its work programme, the issues of gaps in data availability, poverty measurement and indicators and research.</p>

NESF's Recommendation	Departmental Action Taken
	<p>A HSE National Equality Steering Group has been established with a view to place equality in the context of the HSE transformation programme.</p> <p>In the Department of Health and Children, <i>Quality Customer Service Action Plan 2005-2007</i>, published on their website, the Department aims to “Ensure the rights to equal treatment established by equality legislation, and accommodate diversity, so as to contribute to equality for the groups covered by the equality legislation; identify and work to eliminate barriers on access to services for people experiencing poverty and social exclusion, and for those facing geographic barriers to services.”</p> <p>In 2004, a FÁS Equality Proofing project took place in the Employment Services with funding from the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. In 2006, the results of this pilot were mainstreamed across all FÁS Employment Services with the establishment of eight ‘Equality Proofing Working Groups’. The result of this process was the agreement of regional equality proofing action plans that aim to improve service delivery in practical ways in local offices for one or more grounds covered in the equality legislation. FÁS is committed to continue with the process of Equality Proofing across the nine grounds in regional divisions.</p>
<p>4.9 It also recommended that sexual orientation should be specifically included as a relevant ground in two pilot exercises by FÁS and the Department of Education and Science.</p>	<p>Every school is now required to have in place a policy which includes specific measures to deal with bullying behaviour. This should be developed within the framework of an overall school Code of Behaviour and Discipline. Such a code, properly devised and implemented, can be the most influential measure in countering bullying behaviour in schools. In August, 2006 the Department published five policy templates for post-primary schools, including an anti-bullying template, to guide and assist schools in developing their own policies. The anti-bullying policy template takes account of recent legislative and regulatory changes, and reference is made to issues of contemporary concern such as the need to tackle text bullying, cyber-bullying and homophobic bullying. The National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) is at present developing updated guidelines for schools on Codes of Behaviour. The issue of homophobic bullying will be further addressed in this context. The <i>Belong To Youth Project</i> can now support youth groups around the country to establish LGB youth groups. The Equality Authority and the <i>Belong To Youth Project</i> have worked together to develop a school-based response to the issue of homophobic bullying in schools. In late 2006 the <i>Making Your School Safe</i> initiative was launched, to support schools to prevent and address homophobic bullying in post-primary schools. It involved posters for use by schools and information material for principals on action that could be taken by schools.</p>

NESF's Recommendation	Departmental Action Taken
	<p>The National Office for Suicide Prevention of the Health Service Executive has made funding available for the post of national co-ordinator of LGB youth services.</p> <p>The Department and the Equality Authority are working collaboratively on equality and diversity in schools since 2005. A pilot evaluation exercise was undertaken in two schools (one primary and one post-primary) with a view to refining the Whole School Evaluation (WSE) criteria for assessing the extent to which school policies and practices meet equality requirements, including the issue of sexual orientation. The outcomes of this work are being used within the Inspectorate's Evaluation, Support and Research Unit (ESRU) to amend the criteria to be used in WSE. [D/ES]</p>
Service Provision	
<p>4.11 The NESF recommended that all Departments and State Agencies should take the necessary steps to ensure that they are aware of the needs of their LGB clients or service users, the extent to which their needs are currently met, and how these are met in their services, programmes and schemes.</p> <p>More specifically, the NESF recommended that all Departments and State Agencies should put in place employment equality policies, equal status policies and anti-harassment policies that name LGBs as a target group.</p>	<p>Nine Government Departments have met with GLEN to discuss issues in each department relating to the needs of LGB clients or service users.</p> <p>Examples of equality policies in the workplace in Government Departments and agencies include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The Health Service Executive has published a number of policy and information documents on Equality and Diversity for use throughout the health services. These include <i>Dignity at Work and Equal Opportunities and Diversity in the Workplace</i>, both of which address the subject of sexual orientation. ■ A range of training and awareness raising initiatives have been implemented by the Department of Social and Family Affairs in line with the <i>Civil Service Anti-Harassment, Sexual Harassment and Bullying Policy</i>. ■ FÁS has agreed an Equality Policy which aims to articulate its approach to equality for its customers clearly and succinctly by: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) demonstrating its commitment to ensuring equality; b) defining what this means in terms of activities and actions and c) clarifying responsibilities for its implementation at all levels of the organisation. The policy sets out the organisation's commitment to meet its obligations under equality legislation, to promote equality proactively and to work to prevent discrimination across the nine grounds covered by equality legislation and will be sent to all staff. <p>In addition, FÁS's <i>Respect and Dignity in the Workplace</i> (Prevention of bullying and harassment) includes all forms of harassment, relating to the nine grounds, including LGB.</p> <p>A recent initiative from the HSE is the establishment of a National LGBT Sub-committee as part of a National Social Inclusion Governance group, "to advise, make recommendations and support the development of a programme of work on LGBT health that is aligned with the reform process of the HSE with timeframes, targets, resources and outcomes clearly identified and monitored".</p>

NESF's Recommendation	Departmental Action Taken
	<p>The HSE has also completed work on the first <i>National Intercultural Health Strategy</i> in line with recommendations within the NPAR. of good practice already in place.</p>
<p>4.12 All public services should undertake a risk assessment to ensure that the service provided is accessible and appropriate to the LGB community (e.g. for employment services in relation to the risk of harassment in work placements and how to deal with any such incidences). These assessments should be undertaken in partnership with service providers, employees and their trade unions and customers.</p>	<p>See section on Equality Proofing above.</p>
<p>4.13 Training and staff supports regarding equality generally and sexual orientation in particular should be built-in to all public services.</p>	<p>Examples of such training are as follows:</p> <p>In the Department of Social and Family Affairs a one-day course is run for front-line staff, focusing on issues such as defining diversity, exploring the dimensions of diversity, examining the impact of workplace banter, exploring culture and the dimensions of cultures as well as a video-based exercise designed to help participants understand how generalisations and prejudgments can impact in the workplace. The course covers all nine grounds including sexual orientation.</p> <p>Guidelines are being designed to assist FÁS staff in defraying their fears in working with different groups, and in complying with equality legislation. Equality training is being developed to assist use of the guidelines. These <i>Equality for Customer Guidelines</i>, and its training will be available for all FÁS staff. The guidelines and training will be widely promoted throughout the organisation.</p> <p>Pobal initiated the production of a resource guide to support the inclusion of young LGB and Transgender learners in both formal and non-formal education settings. The guide, <i>More Than a Phase, A Resource Guide for the Inclusion of Young Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Learners</i>, was published in Summer 2006 and made available to Partnerships, second- level schools and youth groups.</p> <p>Pobal also organised a workshop targeting community development staff of Partnerships in 2006. The aim of the workshop was to support community workers in the development of strategies for targeting the LGB community.</p>

NESF's Recommendation	Departmental Action Taken
<p>3.76 The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform should encourage an evaluation of the Garda Liaison service in relation to the LGB community with a view to mainstreaming the learning gained and its application in other policy areas.</p>	<p>Leaflets and posters have been developed by the Garda and have been disseminated among the LGB communities and posted in Garda Stations. These give contact details of the liaison officers and emphasise that people can expect a professional equality-based service. Relevant issues pertaining to LGB people have been included in the professional training of new Garda recruits. A National Advisory Group comprising representatives from LGB organisations has been set up to build on the work undertaken.</p> <p>Recent initiatives include the <i>LGBT Community Safety Strategy</i> for the Dublin Metropolitan Region. The strategy includes: A drop-in service at the LGBT community centre Outhouse and regular Forum meetings between the Gardaí, LGB commercial venues and other community representatives.</p>
Representation and Funding	
<p>4.15 The NESF recommended that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ All Boards of State Agencies charged with pursuing equality and social inclusion issues should ensure that they have adequate expertise and timely advice regarding the specific needs of the LGB community, particularly those who are cumulatively disadvantaged. ■ Disadvantaged LGB people should be explicitly targeted as a vulnerable group under the NAPS, in the same way that women are. ■ As an immediate stop-gap response to the needs of LGB groups, the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform should consider providing funding to LGB organisations to develop their infrastructure and facilitate their input to policy-making. ■ In the design and operation of funding schemes under equality, community development and social inclusion programmes, it 	<p>The then Minister for Labour Affairs, Mr. Frank Fahey TD, (Monday 16th August 2004), established an Expert Advisory Group on Bullying and the resulting Stress in the Workplace. There are three State Agencies who are now, depending on the specific nature of the issue, in a position to offer advice and assistance to both employers and employees on workplace bullying and harassment, including sexual orientation. These are the Health and Safety Authority, the Labour Relations Commission and the Equality Authority.</p> <p>The <i>National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016 (NAPinclusion)</i> sets out a coherent and comprehensive long-term lifecycle approach as adopted under <i>Towards 2016</i>. Specific vulnerable groups are not dealt with separately in the NAPinclusion, but rather are addressed within the various lifecycle and communities chapters. GLEN and the Office for Social Inclusion met in June 2007 to discuss the position of disadvantaged LGB's in the context of social inclusion policy. Among the issues discussed at this meeting was the lack of data and research concerning LGB's in poverty and how this issue could be addressed in the context of the Office for Social Inclusion data strategy.</p>

NESF's Recommendation	Departmental Action Taken
<p>should be borne in mind that within any group in Irish society (e.g. women, ethnic minorities, and poor people) there will be members who are also lesbian, gay or bisexual. For this reason, organisations representing lesbians, gays and bisexuals should, in principle, be eligible for such funding.</p>	
Legislation	
<p>4.23</p> <p>The NESF recommended that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Future legislation should recognise the diversity of families now present in Irish society, including the Family Law Bill, currently at Draft Stage. ■ In its deliberations on legal reform in relation to co-habitation, the Law Reform Commission should include consideration of the feasibility of different models to achieve equal rights for same-sex partnerships, drawing on the experiences of other countries which have recently legislated in this regard. ■ The Human Rights Commission should specifically address issues relevant to LGB people in its review of legislation and State practices. In undertaking its work, the Commission should consult with LGB organisations. ■ The Department of Finance should establish a Working Group to examine the taxation and pension situation of same sex couples from an equality perspective. ■ In the context of transposing the EU Employment Directive, provision should be made 	<p>The Government's Legislative Programme announced in January last includes a commitment to provide for a Civil Partnership Bill. The Law Reform Commission <i>Report on Rights and Duties of Cohabitants</i> published in December 2006, together with the <i>Options Paper on Domestic Partnership</i> published by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform in November 2006, are being carefully considered in developing legislative proposals to give greater legal protection and certainty to same-sex couples in particular, and to cohabiting couples generally. Heads of a Bill are currently being prepared in the Department and are expected to be brought to Government in Spring 2008. Many of the specific differences in treatment in legislation between same-sex and opposite-sex couples, referred to in the NESF Report were also raised in the Law Reform Commission Report and in the Options Paper, and these will be taken into account in the development of detailed legislative proposals for consideration by Government.</p> <p>The Human Rights Commission published in 2006 research by Dr. F. Ryan and Ms. J Walsh entitled <i>The Rights of De facto Couples</i> which included a review of same sex couples.</p> <p>A joint Union/Management Working Group was established in January 2005 to examine certain recommendations of the Commission on Public Service Pensions and report to the Minister for Finance on the implementation of same. These included a recommendation to modify the public service spouses' and children's schemes to allow payment of a survivor's pension to a nominated financially dependent partner. The Working Group comprises representatives from various Government Departments, ICTU Public Services Committee and Garda and Permanent Defence Forces representative associations. The Group's Final Report, completed in 2007, will be submitted to the Tánaiste/Government in due course. The issues relating to taxation of couples, including same sex couples, were examined by the Tax Strategy Group in 2003 and the relevant papers are available on the Department of Finance website. They were also examined in the Options Paper on Domestic Partnership and the Law Reform Commission Report on Rights</p>

NESF's Recommendations	Action Taken by Departments
<p>for positive action on sexual orientation to be taken.</p>	<p>and Duties of Cohabitants.</p> <p>The <i>EU Employment Directive 2000/78/EC</i> was transposed into Irish Law by the Employment Equality Act 2004 and this allowed for positive action to redress discrimination on the nine equality grounds including sexual orientation. In relation to Occupational Pension Schemes, the Pensions Act 1990 was amended by Section 22 of the Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2004 to implement Council Directive 2000/78/EC (Employment Directive).</p>
<p>3.89 The NESF also recommended that the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform should be given an overview and monitoring role by the Government in relation to implementing equality for LGB people, similar to the role it plays at present in relation to gender and the Traveller community.</p>	<p>The Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform carries out this role on foot of a Government decision – the Diversity and Equality Law Division has day-to-day responsibility for implementation of equality issues on the ground of sexual orientation. The Department has asked other Departments for progress reports and has facilitated meetings between GLEN and Departments /Agencies.</p>

NESF's Conclusions on the Follow-up Action by Government Departments and Agencies on its Report No. 27

- 3.13 ● Against the background of last year's successful European Year of Equal Opportunities for All, the NESF wishes to congratulate the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform on its very positive and active role in implementing equality for LGB people. Since the publication of the NESF report, many significant achievements and progress have been made in the delivery of its recommendations, notably in the roll-out of appropriate strategy documents in this area by Government Departments and State Agencies.
- 3.14 ● The NESF welcomes the incorporation by most Government Departments and State Agencies in their Strategy Statements, of a commitment to achieving equality for all groups covered by the equality legislation. This is both in terms of creating a positive working environment, following on from the publication of *Diversity in the Civil Service* in 2002, and in service delivery. The NESF would urge all Departments outstanding to now follow suit. Of particular note is the research assistance given by the Department of Education and Science to NUI Maynooth, in partnership with GLEN, on sexual orientation issues, and also that Department's assistance to co-publish with GLEN a short guide for schools. The HSE has also been one of the most significant funders of LGB groups across the country. A further example of this is the recent report³⁰ on research into the experiences of LGB people in accessing the health services.
- 3.15 ● The NESF also particularly welcomes the commitment in the *Programme for Government 2007-2012* to 'legislate for Civil Partnerships at the earliest possible date in the lifetime of the Government'. There is now strong public support for such a move with 84% of those aged 15+ agreeing that same-sex relationships should be given the same legal recognition (Lansdowne Opinion Poll, 2006). This reflects a significant change in public attitude over the past decade.
- 3.16 ● The former Taoiseach, Mr Bertie Ahern, T.D. confirmed³¹ the Government's commitment in this area, to providing a more supportive and secure legal environment for same-sex couples and to legislating for civil partnerships at the earliest possible date, taking into account the Colley Group's Paper and the pending Supreme Court Case. As identified by the Colley Group, achieving an equality of status and standing for same sex couples, as for heterosexual couples, can only be achieved by affording access to civil marriage for same sex couples or, failing that, to introduce a model of civil partnership that is on a par with the UK model. More recently, the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform ruled out the prospect of a referendum to allow for gay marriage and instead has promised that legislation providing for a civic partnership scheme will be introduced instead³².

³⁰ *Recognising LGB Sexual Identities in Health Services*, the Health Services Executive and the Equality Authority, 2008.

³¹ Speech at the official opening of the renovated Outhouse premises in Dublin for the Gay Community, July 2007.

³² Speaking at the launch of GLEN's Annual Report, December 2007. The Government's Bill to grant legal protection to same-sex couples was published recently (end-June).

- 3.17 ● In relation to equality proofing, the NESF welcomes the work of the Equality Proofing Working Group and looks forward to the outcome of its deliberations, particularly in relation to data gathering and analysis, an area which has seen little progress to date. The gathering of data in relation to those most at risk of experiencing poverty and social exclusion, including many LGB people, is also important in the evaluation of *Towards 2016* and the *National Development Plan*.
- 3.18 ● As noted by Mr Eoin Collins of GLEN in 2006³³, the economic boom and competitive marketplace has brought with it more positive equal opportunity policies in private companies wishing to attract LGB employees. However, an attitude survey indicates that only 50% still feel they can be open about their sexuality at work so much more needs to be done in this area.
- 3.19 ● Other positive developments, since the NESF's report, include the campaign on school bullying, *Making your School Safe for LGBT Students*, developed by *Belong To* and the Equality Authority. The NESF hopes this initiative will be further supported in all schools. *Belong To* (the Dublin-based gay and lesbian youth project officially funded four years ago), is now working with the HSE to establish more such projects throughout the country to provide supports and services on young people's sexuality.
- 3.20 ● The NESF congratulates the Garda Síochána for its continued positive response and actions to make the Gardaí more responsive to the reality of anti-gay violence. Recent initiatives include the LGBT Community Safety Strategy for the Dublin Metropolitan Region which was launched by the then Minister of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Michael McDowell in June 2006. The Gardaí are also committed to developing a best practice guide for all members of the police force. Gay Liaison Officers have been deployed in many parts of the country, recruitment to the Gardaí is advertised in the gay press and LGB awareness training is being provided for the force³⁴.
- 3.21 ● The NESF also welcomes the key advisory and consultative role that GLEN has played in working with Government Departments and State Agencies. The support for its continued work by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform is important and it underlines the importance of continued consultation with members of the LGB community in the design, planning and delivery of services and policies in this area.
- 3.22 ● While acknowledging the achievements made to-date in moving ahead on the report's recommendations, however, there are a number of specific areas which remain outstanding. In particular the NESF notes with concern that:
- there has been less progress in relation to the building-in of training and staff supports in the provision of public services;

33 Reviewing Progress on Equality for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People, Equality News, Spring 2006.

34 GLEN website *op. cit.*

- the limited progress made in funding LGB groups on community development and social inclusion programmes;
- few, if any, risk assessments have been undertaken by the public services;
- Section 37.1 of the Employment Equality Acts under which certain religious, educational, and medical institutions may give more favourable treatment on the religion ground to an employee or prospective employee in order to maintain their religious ethos, or may take action which is reasonably necessary to prevent an employee or a prospective employee from undermining their religious ethos. ICTU and the ASTI have called for a consultative process to lead to the removal of this Section from the equality legislation; and the NESF would strongly support such a process; and
- with the continuing homophobic bullying in many schools, the Department of Education and Science should play a lead role in tackling this through promoting and supporting good practice initiatives in the schools.

- 3.23 ● The NESF notes that since the publication of its report, further areas of concern have arisen in relation to immigration and parenting. Under the EU Free Movement Directive, newly relocated EU citizens will have their relationships of a minimum of two years duration recognised by the State. However, this does not apply to existing migrants and their partners. In relation to parenting, LGB men and women continue to be discriminated as regards assisted reproduction services, adoption and guardianship.
- 3.24 ● There are also concerns on the lack of specific services for older people, in relation, for example, to housing, day-care services and active retirement groups.
- 3.25 ● There is now a considerable body of research literature demonstrating the business case for supporting equality policies. The American economist Richard Florida has broadened out this analysis by showing a strong link between respect for diversity, and especially openness to immigrants and LGB people and the capacity of cities and regions to attract and retain workers in key creative and knowledge-base sectors. He does not argue that LGB people or immigrants necessarily make a greater contribution to creativity and the creative sectors, but rather that if these people are respected it is likely that other forms of diversity and difference will be respected also.
- 3.26 ● Richard Flood and Irene Tinagli³⁵ have identified this country as one which has shown the most significant growth in creative industries. Such growth has taken place side by side with some of the most comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation (including sexual orientation) in the world.

³⁵ See www.demos.co.uk/files/EuropeintheCreativeAge2004

Ireland is now viewed internationally as a place that is more open and accepting for LGB people and is now 'on the map' for highly-skilled LGB immigrants (but lack of legal recognition of relationship remains a barrier).

- 3.27** ● In the circumstances as outlined above, the NESF submits the following additional recommendations for consideration by the Government:
- the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment should develop a strategy to attract and nurture creative and knowledge-based talent, building on this country's reputation of openness to diversity and LGB people;
 - the Department of Social and Family Affairs should assist LGB groups serving the needs of disadvantaged LGB people in community development and social inclusion policies and programmes;
 - the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs should identify how its programmes could proactively support LGB organisations; and
 - the Department of the Environment, Heritage, and Local Government should identify current good practice in certain City and County Development Boards with regard to having LGB inclusion strategies in operation, with a view to having these extended to all other such Boards.
- 3.28** ● In conclusion, the NESF very much appreciates the considerable amount of work and effort that the Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform in particular has already contributed to implementing actions for full equality for LGB people in Ireland. However, more remains to be done in enforcing and monitoring the strategies in place, in providing training and education, and in gathering data to evaluate current initiatives and mainstream the many pilot initiatives underway in schools, workplaces and in the community.

IV

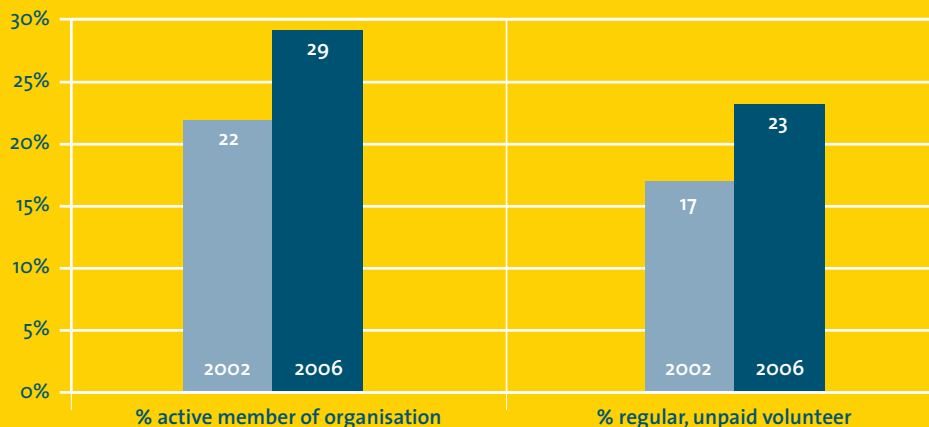
Introduction

- 4.1 ● Since the publication of Robert Putnam’s work on social capital in 1995, there has been growing national and international interest in the concept. Social capital is defined as the social networks that, together with shared norms, values and understandings, facilitate collective action and cooperation within and among groups. Social capital can take many forms – having regular social contact with other people, trusting other people, feelings of mutual obligation, a willingness to reciprocate, engagement in your community, volunteering, a shared sense that one can effect change in the community, participating in the political life of one’s community and having trust in institutions.
- 4.2 ● A growing body of evidence shows that high levels of social capital bring significant benefits to individuals, families and communities. At the level of the community, high levels of social capital are associated with economic growth, social equality and quality of public governance. In such communities, young people are less likely to commit suicide, drop out of school early, and get involved in crime and anti-social behaviour. At the level of the individual, high social capital is associated with physical and psychological health, well-being and life satisfaction.
- 4.3 ● At a time when Irish society is experiencing rapid change, the NESF in this report called for a clear articulation of a public philosophy promoting active citizenship as the core of the broad values and principles for a just and inclusive society. The NESF commissioned the ESRI to undertake a survey of key measurements of social capital and the results are summarised in Appendix 2 at the end of this Section.
- 4.4 ● Comparison with other European countries shows that, overall, Ireland shows average or above levels of social capital. Relative to their European counterparts, Irish people show a high membership of community and voluntary associations – 65% compared to an average of 48% across 32 European countries. Rates of membership in sport and recreational organisations – at 28% – are particularly high relative to the European average of 16%. In addition, in comparison to the European average of 7%, more than double the percentages (14%) of Irish people do unpaid voluntary work for such organisations. Involvement in youth work, local

community action groups and women's groups is also higher than the European average. Overall, the general level of community involvement or volunteering was about 20% across the whole population.

- 4.5 ● As highlighted in the NESF/ESRI survey, Irish people were also at the top of a number of European countries in terms of their sociability and contact with friends, neighbours and relatives.
- 4.6 ● The more recent survey conducted in 2006 for the Taskforce on Active Citizenship found that regular volunteering increased from 17.1% of the adult population in 2002 to 23.1% in 2006, while active community involvement went up from 22% to 29.0% over the same period (see Chart 1 beneath). More broadly, 29% of the adult population, an estimated 860,000 people, were involved as active members of their community in 2006.

Chart 1 Increase in volunteering/membership of organisations



Source: Taskforce on Active Citizenship (2007b) Statistical Evidence on Active Citizenship in Ireland.

- 4.7 ● The Taskforce also reported that civic-political engagement – measured as participation in at least one of eight possible areas of activity within the previous 12 months – was up from 30.8% to 37.2% over the period 2002-2006. Their *Statistical Report* concluded that this low level raises ‘major concerns on grounds of social equity and potential access to political and community decision-making’ (p. 9).
- 4.8 ● The NESF/ESRI survey found that Irish voter turnout (63%) was in the middle of the range for other countries – lower than countries like Australia (95%), Denmark (87%), but higher than the UK (60%). Trust in institutions was also above average. Levels of inter-personal trust are average – 26% agree that ‘Most people can be trusted’, but this rises to

39% if the question is ‘Most people can be trusted – but it depends on the people in question’. In 2006, 88.5% of all respondents said that they were registered to vote (Taskforce on Active Citizenship, 2007).

- 4.9 ● Some interesting gender differences came to light in the Taskforce Survey with women accounting for 72% and 61%, respectively, of Church and Community/resident association organisations. By contrast, men accounted for 73% of sports organisations. Furthermore, there were differences between foreign nationals with those who were born here. Only 14.5% of newcomers were regular volunteers, compared to 23.6% in the case of Irish nationals. In addition, 18.3% of newcomers were involved compared to 29.6% in the case of Irish nationals. The pattern was reversed in the case of civic political engagement which was higher among newcomers (42.6%) compared to the rest of the population (36.8%) (Taskforce on Active Citizenship, 2007b). The proportion of the population actively involved in the community varies by educational attainment, being highest for those with Leaving Cert qualifications and above (see Chart 2 beneath).

Chart 2 Percentage of respondents who are actively involved in community (last 12 month) by educational attainment



Source: Taskforce on Active Citizenship (2007b) Statistical Evidence on Active Citizenship in Ireland.

- 4.10 ● Social networks play a strong role in developing social capital. The ESRI survey for the Taskforce on Active Citizenship asked how many ‘close friends’ people had: ‘people whom you feel at ease with, whom you can talk to about personal matters, share a confidence with, seek advice from or call upon for practical help’. 50% of respondents said that they had 8 ‘close friends’ which has reduced since 2002, from 56%. When asked how many ‘close friends’ they had among those of other nationalities, only one in five Irish nationals had a close friend from among other nationalities living here.

- 4.11 ● Interestingly, levels of community efficacy, or feeling your decisions count, differed by income levels. Respondents were asked if they agreed with the statement that: *'you can influence decisions affecting your local area'*. Just over one half of all adults agreed with this statement with just over one in four of low income households disagreed, compared to less than one in ten of high income households. This suggests that those in lower income households feel their actions will not make a difference locally.
- 4.12 ● The surveys also conceal some worrying trends. There is some evidence that interpersonal trust is showing some decline in recent years. Voter turnout is also declining, and is particularly low among the young, urban dwellers and lower socio-economic groups. In general, levels of social capital also tend to be lower in poorer communities. The data also suggests that the elderly, people living in rural areas and in large urban centres, lower socio-economic groups and those who are disabled or engaged in home duties are experiencing considerable barriers in becoming actively engaged as citizens.
- 4.13 ● The data also suggest that there is considerable untapped potential for more civic and community volunteering – 80% of the population was not involved in any type of volunteering on a regular basis. In 2002, this had fallen to 71%, which nevertheless is still nearly three quarters of the adult population.
- 4.14 ● The NESF report also highlighted how, as in other countries also, individuals nowadays are more inclined to engage on their own terms but in conformity with shared values within a specific setting or community. A good example of this is the Time Bank in the village of Glounthane, Co Cork, which is a local initiative focused on encouraging mutual help through a sharing of time, effort and skills in the community. The aim is to increase local social connections and involvement, so that people can benefit from living in a more caring and vibrant community.
- 4.15 ● The challenge for public policy is to provide an enabling environment where individuals and communities can act together to effect social change in ways that they find attractive.
- 4.16 ● The NESF report set out detailed policy guidelines to encourage and support social capital. In particular, it examined three policy areas where the development of social capital is of particular relevance: work-life balance; lifelong learning; and spatial planning.

Follow-up Action by Government Departments and Agencies on NESF Report No. 28

- 4.17 ● The main recommendations in the report, together with the follow-up action taken by Government Departments on these, are summarised in Box 4.

Box No. 4 NESF Report No. 28 on the Policy Implications of Social Capital

The number references are to the corresponding paragraph numbers in the report.

NESF's Recommendation

Departmental Action Taken

Measuring Social Capital

5.29
9.8

Link indicators of social capital to measures of poverty, social exclusion and inequality in line with the recommendations in the NESF *Framework on Equality Report*.

Attached to the EU-SILC in 2006 was an EU wide module on "Social & Cultural Participation". This will provide an opportunity to link indicators of social capital with the measures of poverty, deprivation, inequality etc. The results of this module will be published in mid 2008. [CSO]

A short section on Social Participation was included in the 2006 National Disability Survey. Results will be available soon. [CSO]

The consistent poverty measure, which is the official Government approved measure used to monitor the overall poverty reduction goal in the new National Action Plan for Social Inclusion, has been revised using a set of up-to-date indicators that reflect current living standards. The revised 11-item deprivation index includes new indicators that can capture the effect low income can have on social participation. [D/SFA]

It is also worth noting that a short section on Social Participation was included in the 2006 National Disability Survey.

The Department has developed a variety of performance indicators under the Local Development, Community Development, Community Services and other Programmes. These measure the participation and benefits for key social inclusion target groups, such as disabled, lone parents, Travellers etc. [D/CRAG]

The Taskforce on Active Citizenship commissioned an ESRI survey which examined active citizenship and gender, income and education levels and nationality indicating differences across all factors (Taskforce on Active Citizenship, 2007b).

5.30

Develop (a) a module on Social Capital for application in various household surveys including the *Quarterly National Household Survey*; (b) a limited core of questions on Social Capital for use in various surveys at national level; and (c) contribute to international comparative work in this area

- a) A module on Social Capital was included in the QNHS in the third quarter of 2006 and analysis of the data has commenced. It is planned to publish the results soon.
- b) We are using the module on Social Capital to identify a core set of questions that could potentially be included in our household surveys. Once we have analysed the data we will be in a position to assess how the various questions worked in the field and assess their potential for inclusion in the main household surveys.
- c) The 2006 EU-SILC module on "Social & Cultural Participation" will provide data comparable at an EU level. [CSO]

	NESF's Recommendation	Departmental Action Taken
5.32	Develop community surveys involving local communities, intermediary bodies, area-based partnerships and public authorities to measure the level and distribution of social capital at local level.	Following the recommendations of the Taskforce on Active Citizenship, the Department will participate in the 2009 International Citizenship and Civic Study aimed at 14 year olds in school. [D/ES] The Department's Regional Office Service (ROS) carries out school-based surveys in areas such as School Substance Abuse Policies and School Admissions Policies. [D/ES]
6.20	Mainstream social capital dimensions in public programmes, service delivery and policy statements – "impact statements" provide one possible approach.	The revised guidelines for Poverty Impact Assessment, produced by the Office for Social Inclusion, outline the process by which government departments, local authorities and State agencies assess policies and programmes at design, implementation and review stages in relation to the likely impact that they will have or have had on poverty and on inequalities. Social capital is not specifically mentioned in the new guidelines. [D/SFA]
6.22	Promote the integration, co-ordination and active involvement of all citizens (irrespective of social position, ethnicity, etc), through the County/City Development Board (CDB) process and other means in the delivery and planning of public services.	CDBs, through their member agencies and with the support of their respective Departments and national agencies, will continue to promote the co-ordination of delivery of services at local level, in an inclusive manner, including through their involvement with the County/City Community and Voluntary Fora, established as part of the CDB process. [D/EH&LG] The ROS is currently undertaking work to develop a plan to address service integration and partnership working, as part of implementation of the actions included in the DEIS action plan. [D/ES]
Enhancing Active Citizenship & Community Development		
7.10	Implement – on the basis of agreed timetables and targets – the Government White Paper on <i>Supporting Voluntary Activity</i> , including the establishment of <i>Voluntary Activity Units</i> in relevant Government Departments.	The Department continues to implement the White Paper. Funding for C & V Organisations has been increased well beyond the levels set out in the White Paper. The Government remains committed to the underlying principles set out in the White Paper. [D/CRAG]
7.10	Implement – again on the basis of agreed timetables and targets – the recommendations of the <i>National Committee on Volunteering</i> including the establishment of a National Centre for Volunteering and a network of local volunteer centres.	Recommendations of the Task Force on Active Citizenship have superseded the recommendations of the National Committee on Volunteering. Local volunteer centres have been established in 12 counties and are under negotiation in a number of other counties.[D/CRAG]

NESF's Recommendation	Departmental Action Taken
<p>7.12 Encourage initiatives at local level to increase voter registration, education, political awareness and turnout.</p>	<p>The compilation and publication of the register of electors is a matter for each registration authority. To assist authorities in this work, the Department implemented a package of measures in 2006, including :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ An enhanced programme to improve the register of electors developed by the Department and local authorities. As part of this process, local authorities engaged over 1,500 personnel to carry out a nationwide house-to-house campaign. Many houses were visited more than once. ■ Additional ring-fenced financial resources of €6 million to local authorities for the register campaign and an intensive publicity and campaign. ■ An on-line register search facility through local authority websites and a central website – www.checktheregister.ie ■ New arrangements for deletion of the names of deceased people using the Death Event Publication Service. [D/EH&LG] <p>New voting facilities for prisoners were operated for the first time at the 2007 General Election. [D/EH&LG]</p> <p>New guidance for local authorities on “Preparing and Maintaining the Register of Electors” was completed by the Department and made available to authorities, returning officers and relevant Government Departments. [D/EH&LG]</p> <p>The Department advised local authorities that the approach in 2007 should make maximum use of information from the 2007/8 Register campaign, information by Returning Officers on their experiences with the Register at the general election, information by members of the public and actions and initiatives by authorities, which proved successful in the 2007/8 Register campaign. [DEH&LG]</p> <p>Citizenship is currently promoted in the school system through a number of subject areas. These include Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) (junior cycle), Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) at primary and post-primary (junior cycle) level and Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE) at primary level. At senior cycle the NCCA proposals for reform envisage the development of a full optional subject in SPHE which would be assessed as part of the certificate examinations. The NCCA has also started to develop a syllabus for a new subject “Politics and Society” which is proposed as a full optional examinable subject. [D/ES]</p>
<p>7.17 Support the work of the <i>Community and Voluntary Fora</i> and <i>County Development Boards</i> to engage citizens, especially young people and other groups at risk of alienation from politics and civic engagement, and broaden the representative base of the Fora and Boards.</p>	<p>The Department will continue to support the work of the C&V Fora and the CDBs. In addition, the D/EHLG, in conjunction with D/CRAG will work with the Active Citizenship Office (when fully established), to engage citizens as appropriate. C&V Fora are encouraged to engage with community groups in an open, democratic and accountable manner. [D/EHLG]</p>

	NESF's Recommendation	Departmental Action Taken
4.40	Increase support for research on social capital, including extent and impact of Community and Voluntary activity.	<p>D/CRAG operates an annual grant scheme which provides training & research grants to the Community & Voluntary sector. D/CRAG also inputs into the design of CSO Census and other relevant research.</p> <p>The Department's research activities in this area would be through the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences. I [D/ES]</p> <p>The HEA is prepared to engage in developing linkages between citizenship initiatives across the higher education sector. It has supported pilot projects in NUI Galway (on 'Civic engagement, Student volunteering and active citizenship', and also on 'service learning') which have proven to be successful and it will examine the possibilities for expansion. [D/ES]</p>
7.53	Provide public support for local-based Information and Communications Technology and other local media (e.g. community notice boards, community time banks etc.) to facilitate exchange of information, volunteering and mutual help and use e-Government and the New Connections Programme to better connect communities and public service providers.	The Department has a range of Grant Schemes and Programmes which support community-based ICT projects. These include the Annual Grants Scheme, Dormant Accounts Scheme, the Local Development Programme and the Community Development Programme. [D/CRAG]
7.54	Pilot new policy-learning innovations at local level e.g. community time banks, deliberative polling, youth parliaments, etc.	Innovative local projects are eligible for funding under existing schemes. Recent examples of projects funded include Young Social Innovators, Philanthropy Ireland, Digital Communities Project, etc. [D/CRAG]
More Flexible Working Arrangements		
8.18	Develop local and specific workplace partnerships and arrangements to enhance trust and engagement in the workplace and provide greater flexibility to facilitate voluntary caring outside the workplace.	<p>The duration that people can receive carer's benefit was extended from 65 weeks to 104 weeks from December 2005. (The duration of carer's leave was similarly extended from March 2006).</p> <p>In 2005 the carer's allowance scheme was extended to facilitate care sharing arrangements.</p> <p>The number of hours a carer can engage in employment, self-employment, education or training outside the home and still be eligible for carer's allowance, carer's benefit and the respite care grant was increased from 10 to 15 hours per week with effect from June 2006.</p>

NESF's Recommendation	Departmental Action Taken
	<p>The income disregard in the carer's allowance means test has been increased in successive Budgets. As a result of improvements announced in Budget 2008, the disregards increased to €332.50 and €665 per week respectively from April 2008. Similarly, the earnings threshold for carer's benefit is €320 per week at present but this was increased to €332.50 per week from April 2008. [D/SFA]</p>
<p>5.31 Develop a national <i>time-use survey</i> (TUS) to measure progress in equality of access to childcare, training and parental leave as well as provide a more general view of how time is spent in work, commuting, caring, volunteering, education, etc</p>	<p>There are no concrete plans for the CSO to undertake a TUS. However we are reviewing our suite of social survey instruments and the range of social statistics being published. The TUS is one of the issues that we are taking into consideration in relation to our future strategy for the development of social statistics.[CSO]</p> <p>In addition, a pilot 'short-form' TUS was undertaken by the D/JELR in 2005, in conjunction with advice from the CSO which we are using to inform future CSO TUS strategy. [CSO]</p>
<h3>Opening up Lifelong Learning</h3>	
<p>8.21 Support greater involvement of parents, communities and voluntary organisations in the life of schools – through family-community-school-teacher partnerships and use of existing schemes such as the home-school-community liaison scheme.</p>	<p>Renewed emphasis will be placed on the involvement of parents and families in children's education in schools and school clusters participating in the Special Schools Programme (SSP). Schools will have to include the Home/School/Community Liaison (HSCL) function as part of their three-year action plans, with co-ordinators employed on a full-time basis to cover one or more schools. Teacher/co-ordinators, working with clusters of rural primary schools, will have responsibility for the HSCL function as a key element of their duties. [D/ES]</p> <p>Under <i>Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS)</i>, 80 additional posts have been allocated in order to extend the HSCL to all 338 urban/town primary and 203 second level schools participating in DEIS, in addition to the 370 local coordinators already in place. HSCL services are provided to 651 schools in total (281 second level schools and 370 primary schools) under the DEIS action plan. [D/ES]</p> <p>DEIS is being rolled out on a phased basis over the period 2005-10, and focuses on addressing the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities, from pre-school through second-level education (3 to 18 years). [D/ES]</p> <p>The Department's Visiting Teacher Service for Travellers provides a very comprehensive range of supports to assist Traveller families which include liaising with local agencies on behalf of Travellers, providing backup to the Resource Teachers for Traveller Education in schools, co-operating with school authorities in relation to issues that may arise and ensuring that Traveller children are enrolled in schools. [D/ES]</p>

NESF's Recommendation	Departmental Action Taken
<p>8.25 Encourage better use of local publicly-funded schools at primary and second levels at evenings, weekends and holidays as meeting places for local youth and community activities and meetings.</p>	<p>There is a commitment in the Programme for Government to promote greater sharing of school facilities by community groups and other appropriate services. The Department has encouraged schools to act in this area. Despite additional costs, insurance and staff availability, the management bodies are favourably disposed. Meetings of the interests concerned are being held to explore these issues. [D/ES]</p> <p>The Department's publication <i>Looking at our Schools: An Aid to Self-Evaluation for Primary and Post-Primary Schools</i>, suggests that the relationships between the school and the wider community should form one of the self-evaluation criteria for schools. [D/ES]</p> <p>The Department's ROS issued a Circular to all primary and post-primary school management authorities in 2005, encouraging them, where possible, to be supportive and active in the development of school-age childcare facilities by allowing either space in existing premises which could be adapted, or spare site capacity, to be used for the creation of "stand alone" childcare facilities. [D/ES]</p> <p>A meeting with the second level representative Management Bodies (JMB, IVEA and ACCS) was held in April 2007 to discuss the implications arising from the wider use of school facilities. These relate to additional costs, insurance and staff availability. Notwithstanding these barriers, the Management Bodies are favourably disposed. [D/ES]</p>
<p>8.26 Promote links between youth voluntary organisations, youth parliaments, Comhairle na nÓg, local voluntary youth councils and schools; support for student councils in schools and promote links with youth organisations.</p>	<p>The D/EHLG and the CDBs will continue to co-operate with the OMC in this area, particularly in relation to the implementation of the review of the operation of Comhairle na nÓg.</p> <p>All second-level schools in the SSP will need to have a student council to support engagement between school staff and students on SSP measures. Plans at school cluster/community level will also need to be informed by a structured process of consultation with learners. Both HSCL and School Completion Programme co-ordinators will be well placed to support this process. In addition, increased integration will be promoted between the work of second-level schools and centres catering for young early school leavers, particularly Youthreach Centres and Senior Traveller Training Centres. [D/ES]</p> <p>The Department continues to support and promote the work of voluntary youth organisations through its various funding schemes including the Youth Service Grant Scheme and the Special Projects for Youth Scheme. [D/ES]</p> <p>The Department also funds a number of cross-border, cross-community projects. Student Councils are now established in the majority of post-primary schools. A Student Council Co-ordinator has recently been appointed to support schools and teachers in this area. [D/ES]</p>

NESF's Recommendation	Departmental Action Taken
	<p>In 2006, a structure for the resourcing of VECs to carry out the functions set out for them under the Youth Work Act, 2001 was agreed. Youth Officers appointed to VECs under this structure are currently liaising with relevant local organisations and are mapping the current service levels available for young people. In addition, the Youth Officers are actively promoting links and networking within the youth work sector and other local interests. Financial support was made available in 2007 to VECs for this new structure and related programme and implementation costs. [D/ES]</p> <p>To promote structured dialogue between policy-makers and young people, a third national Young People's Consultative Conference was held in 2006 in Dublin on the theme of 'active citizenship'. It is envisaged that a further conference will take place in 2008. [D/ES]</p> <p>The OMC set up the Comhairle na nÓg Implementation Group in September 2006 comprising representatives from the main Government Departments, the HSE, City and County Development Boards, local authorities, young people and the youth sector. The Comhairle Group is cited in <i>Towards 2016</i>, as a key innovative Government measure to increase participation by children and young people in local and national decision-making.</p>
<p>8.27 Extend links between schools and communities in support of active and service-based learning in schools (Leaving Certificate Applied Programme, Transition Year or Civic, Personal and Social Education) and extend community-based programmes to Junior Cycle.</p>	<p>The Transition Year Programmes Guidelines state how community/care services would be relevant as an element of preparation for adult life as well services concerned with social, economic, physical, sensory and mental disabilities, and special groups such as children, the chronically ill and the aged. The Young Social Innovators Programme provides an opportunity for young people in Transition Year to engage in social awareness education and social action at local level. The Leaving Cert Applied allows students to apply their learning and experiences to practical educational tasks at school, in the workplace and in the wider community. [D/ES]</p>
<p>8.30 Develop local-based adult learning centres, learning networks and initiatives to assist those alienated from formal educational settings and develop targeted supports in association with local communities.</p>	<p>These are matters for the VECs. The Department puts the resources and supports in place to ensure there is a wide range of course options available in the Further and Higher Education sectors for people who wish to continue their studies after second-level and for people returning to education later in life. [D/ES]</p>

8.32

Strengthen community and business links to institutions of further and higher education (e.g., service learning) through distance education, outreach centres, accreditation of community learning and access to courses and facilities.

Departmental Action Taken

There are already substantial community and business links with higher education institutions at regional and national levels, and institutions are aware of the importance of enhancing those links. The Department and the HEA encourage greater flexibility in course design and delivery focused primarily on the needs of the learner. [D/ES]

The HEA is currently commencing a study on open and distance learning (ODL) that will involve the establishment of an Expert Group (to include international experts) and which will advise on a national distance learning policy for Ireland. [D/ES]

To date, substantial progress has also been made with modularisation and semesterisation of third level provision, and higher education institutes are already developing e-learning strategies. The HEA has developed a framework for a national Modular Accreditation Program (MAP) for the up-skilling of those in employment and develop key competencies in the areas of management skills such as Finance, interpersonal skills such as Leadership and technical skills such as Logistics. [D/ES]

All VECs have Community Education facilitators to support Community Education in their areas. Since 2003, the National Framework of Qualifications has provided participants in adult education with a qualification system that allows for recognition and accreditation of learning. [D/ES]

Where there is a sound evidence base that the demand and need for outreach provision does exist, this should be strategically planned by a core higher education institution in partnership with the local community (including other further and higher education institutions in the region) and this facility should add to, rather than duplicate, existing resources and provision, both in the regional and national context. [D/ES]

The availability of the National Framework of Qualifications since 2003 has provided participants in adult and further education with a qualification system that allows for recognition and accreditation of learning. FETAC Certification at Levels 1 to 6 is available to further education learners, including Community Education students, if they wish. [D/ES]

NESF's Recommendation

Departmental Action Taken

Managing Space for Social Engagement and Sustainable Communities

8.51

Incorporate social capital dimensions in the design and layout of the built environment.

New design guidelines – *Quality Housing for Sustainable Communities* – which will assist in achieving the objectives outlined in the housing policy statement *Delivering Homes, Sustaining Communities* were issued by the Department in March 2007. This is supported by other complementary documents including the new draft guidelines on sustainable residential development in urban areas (which issued on 6 February for public consultation), the accompanying best practice Urban Design Manual and the Apartment Design guidance which was finalised in September 2007. [D/EHLG]

Quality Housing for Sustainable Communities refers to factors to be addressed which include: the extent to which the scheme creates a pleasant, safe and secure living environment that provides a sense of identity and place and fosters the development of Community. Public open spaces should be designed as important nodes in the sustainable place-making hierarchy, regardless of scale or type, in order to facilitate community interaction and create a sense of place. [D/EHLG]

8.55

Support public transport and other alternatives to the car. Informal car-pool arrangements as well as measures to provide incentives for alternatives to city or town centre parking (e.g. “park-and-ride” facilities and safe-cycle provision) should be considered.

The Department is preparing a *Sustainable Travel and Transport Action Plan* which will deal with these issues. The Minister hopes to commence the public consultation process for the Action Plan shortly and to have the plan itself by about mid year. [D/OT]

NESF's Conclusions on the Follow-up Action by Government Departments and Agencies on its Report No. 28

- 4.18** ● The NESF strongly welcomes the *Report of the Taskforce on Active Citizenship* (this was submitted to the Government in March 2007), with its comprehensive analysis of citizenship, social networks, community involvement and social capital in contemporary Ireland. The overarching and integrated approach adopted by the Taskforce has taken forward and complements many of the recommendations in the NESF's own report and also opens up the debate on active citizenship across the main areas of civic, community, cultural, occupational and recreational life in our society.
- 4.19** ● Of particular concern and focus to both the Taskforce and to the NESF in their respective reports were issues round democratic participation and local participation structures.
- 4.20** ● A notable development is that the Government has established an Active Citizenship Office and a Steering Group to oversee the implementation of the Taskforce's recommendations with the different stakeholders involved over a 3-year period. Some of the main recommendations include:
- establishing an Independent Electoral Commission to encourage everyone who is eligible to register and vote;
 - introducing National Presidential Citizen Awards to recognise outstanding contributions to civic and community life;
 - encouraging all forms of community and voluntary organisations to undertake proactive initiatives to reach out and engage with newcomers to Irish society; and
 - introducing a programme in the public service to promote community engagement and participation.
- 4.21** ● In addition, the Taskforce sets out the following targets:

Chart 3 Citizenship's Taskforce Targets

Setting a number of ambitious but realisable targets to work towards over the coming years as follows:

- to increase the pool of people active in their community by 60,000 each year for the next three years
- to increase the number of adults engaged in at least one form of 'civic activity' by 60,000 each year for the next three years
- to reach, by the end of the current decade, a level of at least 60% voter turnout amongst the 18-24 year olds (it has been under 50% in recent elections)
- to increase the level of voter participation from the CSO estimate of 75.5% in the General Election of 2002 to at least 80% in all future General Elections, with targeting of areas of exceptionally low turnout
- to increase the proportion of adults saying that they agree with the statement that they 'can influence decisions affecting your local area' from 54% in 2006 to 65% in 2010

Source: *Taskforce on Active Citizenship (2007b) Statistical Evidence on Active Citizenship in Ireland.*

4.22 ● A positive feature which stands out is that there has been no decline in volunteering, active membership of community and voluntary bodies, in political engagement or in levels of trust between people. However, there is clear evidence of decline in turnout at elections, in line with international trends. Moreover, there are sharp differences in participation by age, employment status, educational level and household composition. There are also grounds for concern as only one-third of the population is actively involved in their community. Sport, religion, schools, and various community and resident groups still provide the backbone of active community engagement. It is also possible that, as the Taskforce has pointed out, more subtle issues around social capital are not captured in the survey data such as people's sense of empowerment, participation in decision-making, and the way that political power and decision-making is distributed in the population.

4.23 ● While this focus on civic engagement at national level is welcome, there are many challenges ahead within local communities. For example, a recent study of new suburbs, Corcoran *et al* (2007³⁶) shows that the viability and sustainability of communities in these new suburbia is less bleak than is popularly thought. Nevertheless, they conclude that the community ties are being eroded 'by the intensification of development and its attendant problems on the one hand, and the absence of locally embedded institutional structures for responding to community needs on the other'.

³⁶ Corcoran, M., Gray, J. and Peillon, M. (2007) 'Ties that Bind? The social fabric of daily life in new suburbs' in T. Fahey, H. Russell and C.T. Whelan (Eds.) *Best of Times? The Social Impact of the Celtic Tiger*. Dublin: Institute of Public Administration.

- 4.24 ● The 2004 National Spatial Strategy (NSS) has, of course, a key role to play in providing a strategic national, regional and local spatial policy framework. This is crucial as it is not sustainable that Dublin's development should continue to spread outwards into adjoining counties and beyond. Another related development are the *Regional Planning Guidelines for the Greater Dublin Area (GDA)*. These translate the NSS into regional strategies and objectives, and the underlying principles are now reflected in the GDA city and county development plans. The effects of these policies are starting to be seen in more integrated and strategic policies at local levels. However, the NSS has been criticised as being too dispersed in its population settlement pattern and this it is claimed has been further diluted with the Government's subsequent decentralisation programme for public servants.
- 4.25 ● Commitments in the new *Programme for Government 2007-2012* to build strong local communities through a new Community Development Plan (underpinned with a €150 million fund over a 5-year period to build playgrounds, community centres, local markets, recycling, sports and recreational facilities throughout the country) are to be welcomed, both in terms of community development as well as that of social capital. Complementing this is a range of parallel commitments by the Government to create vibrant rural communities through extending the rural transport initiative nationwide, investing in broadband, doubling the funding for CLÁR, expanding the rural social scheme and new plans for farm tourism.
- 4.26 ● Over and above this are the new Government's commitments to balanced regional development as reflected in the Atlantic Gateways project, a Gateways innovation fund, an initiative for the North-West, urban renewal and dock and harbour areas development.
- 4.27 ● All of the above commitments are in-keeping with and supportive of the thrust and findings of what was recommended in the NESF's report. In addition, the NESF is also pleased with the positive responses it got from Government Departments and Agencies, as set out in Box 4 above, most notably:
- including a module in the Quarterly NHS in 2006 (the results were published recently in Volume 11 of the Population Census), developing indicators of social capital and linking this with up-to date indicators on living standards and social participation for target groups such as the disabled, lone parents, Travellers etc;
 - the exemplary role of the CDBs and of their member agencies and parent Departments in the delivery of services at local level in an inclusive way and involving the Community and Voluntary Fora and their engagement with community groups; support for this work by Government Departments in liaison with the new active Citizenship Office;

- increased resources for the C & V sector (well above the levels set in the 2000 Government White Paper and continuing commitment to the principles underlying that Paper;
- the measures taken to increase voter registration, education, political awareness and voter turnout; of particular note were the new arrangements for postal voting by prisoners in the 2007 general election; grant schemes to assist community-based ICT projects and for innovative local projects; and the recent design guidelines for housing in the Government's *Delivering Homes, Sustaining Communities* policy statement with its emphasis on sustainable community proofing, creating places where people want to live and work now and in the future, and providing public open spaces to facilitate community interaction and a sense of place.

4.28 ● There are a few areas outstanding in the NESF report where further action could be undertaken with beneficial results for the community, such as:

- linking in the new revised guidelines for Poverty Impact Assessments, produced by the Office for Social Inclusion, with the new indicators for social capital; developing time- use surveys to measure access to childcare, training and parental leave; and
- widening the remit of the Active Citizenship Office to develop strategic thinking in the inter-connected areas of active citizenship, community development, work-life balance, community learning, spatial strategy and social capital; the location of that Office in the Department of the Taoiseach places it in a key pivotal position to lead and influence developments in these areas.

4.29 ● Finally, the NESF repeats its call for more joined-up approaches to facilitate strategic thinking and planning on related policy areas such as active citizenship, community development, work-life balance, community learning and spatial strategy. For this purpose, it considers that lead responsibility in this area should also be given to the Department of the Taoiseach.

Appendix 2

A Statistical Profile of Social Capital in Ireland Introduction

The NESF commissioned a special survey³⁷ from the ESRI to take a quick picture of some key dimensions of social capital under the following headings:

- community engagement and volunteering;
- community efficacy;
- political and civic participation;
- informal social support networks/sociability; and
- norms of trust and reciprocity.

Some international comparisons are drawn on towards the end of the Section in order to shed some light on recent trends in Ireland in a cross-country context.

Community Engagement and Volunteering

There is a clear pattern of higher involvement for more educated groups – while controlling for age. Similar patterns of higher involvement apply in the case of household income. These results suggest greater community engagement and volunteering among higher socio-economic groups (although the unemployed are an exception).

A number of other interesting results emerge. There is a lower level of engagement among the elderly (65 and more) and those who are engaged in home duties as well as those who are ill or have a disability of some kind. Community engagement and volunteering is higher among the unemployed and average to above average for those in employment. There are no large differences between men and women, although there is a higher level of community group membership among men. The data also indicate higher levels of community engagement and volunteering outside large urban conurbations (with the exception of community group membership in Dublin).

The overall level of community involvement or volunteering is around 20% across the whole population. Of concern is that approximately 80% of the population is not involved in local community groups or in any type of volunteering, and that this is even higher for particular groups.

The NESF Survey indicated a somewhat lower rate of volunteering among the young (aged 18-29) compared to those in mid-life (30-49). However, these differences are not large and overall a large deficit in youth volunteering – compared to older groups – is not evident.

³⁷ The detailed statistical results are presented in tabular formats in the report and are not reproduced here in the interest of brevity.

Community Efficacy

Community efficacy refers to the capacity of a community to effect change – on the part of its members. Data from the *All-Ireland Social Capital and Health Survey 2001* of the Institute of Public Health in Ireland show that community efficacy is positively related with age, level of education, ownership of accommodation and length of residence in the local area.

Political and Civic Participation

Questions were asked in the NESF Survey about the extent of participation in various forms of political or civic action. Whereas 64% of respondents made a voluntary donation of money to charities, schools or Churches, less than 20% attended a public meeting, joined an action group or contacted an organisation, public official or representative about some issue of concern. Gender differences tended to be limited, although men were more likely than women to have attended a public meeting. This may indicate, in part, the influence of child-minding constraints and other factors on women's ability to take an active part in local groups or meetings.

Differences by age indicate, as might be expected, much lower levels of activity and engagement by the elderly (apart from donations of money to charity, schools and churches). There was no marked difference in levels of civic engagement among young people (aged 18-29).

However, differences by level of educational attainment told a different story. For example, the proportion of adult respondents with primary schooling only, who contacted a local organisation to deal with a problem was 5%, compared to 18% in the case of third-level graduates.

Very sizeable differences emerged in relation to employment status. For example, 24% of the unemployed attended a public meeting in contrast to 6% for those who were ill or had a disability. Similarly, large differences emerged with respect to size of location/settlement. For example, those living in rural areas were much more likely to have attended a public meeting or contacted a local representative or public official.

The overall rate of turnout (in the 2002 general election) according to the sample estimate, at 75.7%, is well in excess of the true national turnout rate (62.6%). Apart from possible survey bias, over-reporting of voting behaviour is common in many surveys of voting. The NESF Survey findings also confirm those of Lyons and Sinnott (2003) that voting behaviour is lowest among the young, urban dwellers and lower socio-economic groups. The relatively high turnout in Dublin is likely to conceal significant differences by local areas within the city and county if more detailed data were available at that level. An interesting point to note is the positive association between frequency of attendance at religious services and voter turnout (which also applies when age is controlled for).

Informal Social Support Networks/Sociability

Data on the extent of informal social contact showed that just over half of respondents had received a social visit in their own home. A similar proportion had visited someone else in their home. Some other key findings are: (i) the elderly are less likely to make social visits to others (but are more likely to receive); (ii) higher education graduates are more likely to visit or receive visits; (iii) the unemployed are much less likely to visit or receive visits; and (iv) respondents living in medium-sized towns (between 5,000 and 10,000 inhabitants) visit less than those in other size locations.

Social support networks can be important for various personal reasons including job search, health and well-being. “Close friends” are defined as those with whom one feels at ease, can talk to about personal matters, share a confidence or seek advice from or call upon for practical help. Apart from relatives, spouses or partners, relatives “not living at home” constitute the main source of social network support: over 60% of respondents have 3 or more “close friends” compared to 36% among work associates. Surprisingly, perhaps, no major differences arose between men and women. Young people are more likely to draw on support of “others” (who are not neighbours, work associates or relatives).

Once again, these findings do not account for support within families or other household members. The unemployed stand out as one of the groups with the least social support (as measured by the number of “close friends”) and the least social contact (as measured by visits at home).

Norms of Trust and Reciprocity

Measures of interpersonal trust in various surveys are viewed as a proxy for the level of social capital in a community or among a particular group. The results of the NESF Survey question on trust indicated that around one quarter of adults believe that “most people can be trusted”. This figure does not vary much across demographic or socio-economic groups. However, those who are unemployed, living in large towns other than Dublin (with a population over 10,000) as well as those with a disability or illness tend to be less trusting of others in general.

International Comparisons

Comparisons with other countries indicate that Ireland is about average or above average for European countries on most indicators of social capital – for example, membership of voluntary or community associations, volunteering, interpersonal trust, trust in various institutions and voter/ political engagement. Informal social contact is likely to be higher in Ireland - although the evidence is very limited. Within Europe, there are large differences between Southern and Northern Europe with much higher levels of trust in Scandinavia. Ireland and the United Kingdom show medium levels in many of the comparisons.

Trends in Social Capital in Ireland

The overall picture which emerges is that some aspects of social capital, notably interpersonal trust and levels of election turnout, have declined in Ireland in the recent decade. These results are broadly consistent with patterns in the USA, United Kingdom and Australia (OECD, 2001a).

However, it is difficult to draw any definite conclusions about trends in volunteering at this point as further research and data collection are needed to monitor trends as well as to focus on (i) the nature of volunteering and voluntary organisations, and (ii) the extent of difference across socio-economic, gender, employment and regional groups.

Finally, no time series data are available with respect to informal social networks or sociability. However, it is likely that increased work pressure; commuting and other factors are beginning to impinge on patterns of social contact and network support. However, a comparison of trends over time is not possible until the data coverage in the recent surveys undertaken by the NESF and the Institute of Public Health is repeated at a future date, or a comprehensive time-use survey is undertaken.

Conclusions

A key area for policy attention is young people. From the data presented in the NESF Survey, young people are not significantly less engaged socially (volunteering, voting, trusting and socialising) than older groups. However, voting turnout is lower. Apart from lifecycle differences, it is likely that some forms of social interactions among the young are poorly captured in existing survey questions on social capital. For example, young people rely more on new technology to communicate and may interact with their peers on a less formal and structured basis.

The NESF Survey indicates a number of areas or groups where engagement is lower:

- the elderly;
- people living in rural and large urban centres;
- lower socio-economic groups; and
- those who are ill, disabled or engaged in home duties (although these results are correlated with age).

V

Introduction

- 5.1** ● This report was prepared against the background of the rapidly changing nature of Irish society, the very inadequate implementation of policy on childcare in this country and the markedly insufficient financial investment in the education and care of our younger citizens. Ireland's relative provision of early education for children is one of the lowest in OECD countries³⁸. At the same time, childcare costs, relative to earnings in this country, are the highest in the OECD, amounting to nearly 30% of net family income, which is over double the OECD average of 13%³⁹, while Ireland is almost alone in the EU in having no paid parental leave⁴⁰.
- 5.2** ● Ireland is a greatly changed society. We have achieved our highest population level since 1871. The birth rate has been increasing since 1994 with children under 6 years now comprising almost 10% of the population. The population is increasingly urbanised, with 60% urban-based in 2002, and the greater Dublin area now comprising 26% of the total population. The number of women working outside the home rose from 483,000 in 1995 to 851,000 in 2007, an increase of nearly 80%. And Ireland has experienced unprecedented economic growth.

What Progress has been made on Implementing ECCE Policy?

- 5.3** ● Despite our now unprecedented levels of prosperity, Ireland continues to rate among the lowest investors in ECCE. Public investment is less than 0.2% of GDP, compared to the EU average of 0.5%. This contrasts with 0.8% in Denmark and 0.7% in France. Early childhood policies here are weak, with several government departments sharing responsibility for policies affecting young children. The childcare sector is poorly regulated and conceived mainly as a service for working mothers⁴¹. The NESF report concluded there had been little progress on the implementation of the

³⁸ See the Article by P. Donnelly in *Beyond Educational Disadvantage*, 2007.

³⁹ *Babies and Bosses, Reconciling Work and Family Life*, OECD, 2007.

⁴⁰ *Where Are We Now?*, Ursula Barry (Editor), Tasc, 2008.

⁴¹ For a critical review of the evolution of the ECCE provision, see Irish Approaches to ECCE, paper presented by Maura Adshead, University of Limerick to the Centre for Social and Educational Research (CSER), January 2008.

policy decisions set out in the Government White Paper on ECCE in 1999. Instead we have had “a picture of inaction, peripheral implementation and drift”⁴².

What are the Economic Gains from Investment in ECCE?

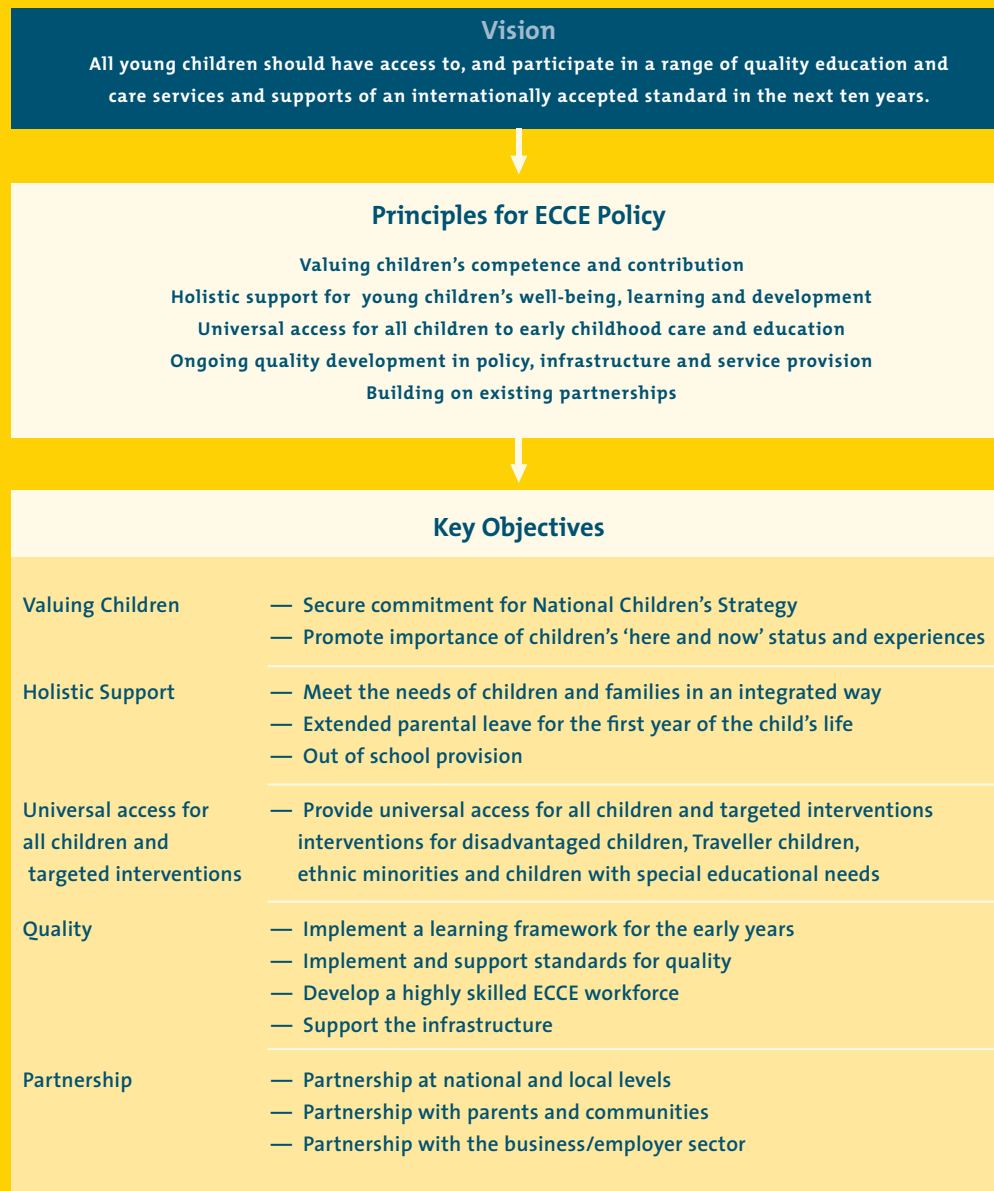
- 5.4 ● The NESF report presented a summary of a major review of research on the economic dimensions of investment in ECCE. While all children benefit from high quality childcare programmes, the benefits are particularly significant for disadvantaged children. The Nobel Laureate Professor James Heckman, who presented a paper in Dublin in 2005, cited evidence from the US which shows that for every \$ invested in ECCE, there is a return of \$17. He also shows that ability gaps open up early, long before formal schooling begins, and that the highest returns are on early interventions which set the stage and nurture the abilities needed for success in later life.
- 5.5 ● The NESF report also provided its own-commissioned cost-benefit analysis which shows that for every € invested in ECCE, a return of €7.10 can be expected. The report concluded that in terms of outcomes for children, ECCE matters. The returns are unquestionable. ECCE provision for all children clearly deserves to be an issue of high political priority.

A Policy Framework and Recommendations for ECCE

- 5.6 ● The NESF concluded that this is a time of unique opportunity in Ireland in relation to ECCE policy. If that opportunity is taken it will be a landmark in Irish social and educational history and will yield significant dividends in the quality of life of all children and of Irish society generally.
- 5.7 ● The NESF recommended a policy framework (see Figure 3 overleaf) accompanied by detailed action lines. The report also included a detailed implementation schedule for each action line over the first five years, after which a formal review of progress would be undertaken (reproduced as Appendix 3 at the end of this Section). If the recommended policy framework were implemented by the target year of 2015, a comprehensive system of ECCE would be in place, based on best practice principles, as a framework of support for future generations of our youngest citizens.

⁴² In its 2004 review of Irish ECCE policy, the OECD commented that that ‘it is clear that a national policy for the early education and care of young children in Ireland is still in its initial stages’.

Figure 3 A Framework for ECCE Policy



- 5.8** ● It will be noted from Figure 3 above that the proposed framework for ECCE policy is underpinned by the following five principles :
- Valuing children’s competence and contribution;
 - Holistic support for young children’s well-being, learning and development;
 - Universal access for all children to early childhood care and education;
 - Ongoing quality development in policy, infrastructure and service provision; and
 - Building on existing partnerships.
- 5.9** ● Key objectives were set out in the report in relation to the achievement of these principles and the key actions needed over the next five years were detailed.

Follow-up Action by Government Departments and Agencies on NESF Report No. 31

- 5.10** ● The action taken by Government Departments in following up on the main recommendations in the report is outlined in Box 5 below.

Box No. 5

NESF Report No. 31 on Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)

The number references are to the corresponding paragraph numbers in the report.

NESF's Recommendation

Departmental Action Taken

Policy Framework for ECCE

7.1

The NESF recommended a policy framework and implementation plan for ECCE to cover a ten-year period. By the target year of 2015, a comprehensive system of ECCE would be in place, based on best practice principles, as a framework of support for future generations of our youngest citizens.

Towards 2016 contains a commitment by the Government and the Social Partners to develop over a ten-year period an infrastructure to provide quality, affordable childcare and to increase the childcare places (of all types) by 100,000 over this period.

6.7

This should be underpinned by five principles for ECCE policy:

- Valuing children's competence and contribution,
- Holistic support for young children's well-being, learning and development,
- Universal access for all children to early childhood care and education,
- Ongoing quality development in policy, infrastructure and service provision and
- Building on existing partnerships.

The *Towards 2016* framework is built on a vision where children are respected with a valued contribution, a voice of their own, with all children cherished and supported by family and the wider society and able to realise their potential.

To this end, a set of long-term goals are set down in relation to, for example, every child's rights to sufficient resources, supports and services and that all families should have access to childcare services appropriate to the circumstances and needs of their children.

The above goals are to be pursued through the NAPinclusion, the National Development Plan (National Childcare Investment Sub-Programme) and the National Children's Strategy where the policies are elaborated in greater detail.

Policy Framework for ECCE

6.16

Maternity leave should be increased by two weeks per year over the next five budgets so that by 2009 women will be entitled to the payment for 26 weeks.

The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform is responsible for changes to Maternity Leave.

From 1 March 2006 Paid/Unpaid Maternity Leave was increased by 4 weeks and, on 1 March 2007, Paid/Unpaid Maternity Leave was increased by a further 4 weeks. This brought the total duration of Paid Maternity Leave to 26 weeks and the total duration of Unpaid Maternity Leave to 16 weeks from March 2007. [OMC]

NESF's Recommendation	Departmental Action Taken
<p>6.18 For those parents who do not wish to stay at home for the baby's first year, access to a quality early childhood education and care service should be provided.</p>	<p>The National Childcare Investment Programme 2007-2010 (NCIP) has a commitment to create an additional 50,000 childcare places which will include places for babies.</p> <p>Furthermore, in 2006 the City and County Childcare Committees (CCCs) undertook a Strategic Mapping Exercise that enabled them to identify gaps in childcare provision in their areas. Many of these gaps exist in the provision of childcare places for babies. This information has been used by the CCCs to develop their Strategic Plan 2007-2010 and many have identified the provision of baby childcare places as a key target going forward. [OMC]</p>
<p>6.19 School age childcare policies should be developed to include a strong emphasis on play and design of facilities and delivery of training for staff working with the 4-14 age group. Legislation should be drafted/amended to ensure regulation of the school-age childcare sector.</p>	<p>In June 2005 the "Developing School Age Childcare" report by a Working Group of the National Childcare Co-ordinating Committee was launched. This makes a number of recommendations for the development of school-age childcare to support the childcare needs of parents. The report also contains a set of guidelines for the development of quality school-aged childcare in Ireland which addresses the issues of play and appropriately trained staff.</p> <p>Following the publication of this report, the CCCs were given a special allocation of funding to facilitate and promote the possibility of developing school-aged childcare services on school premises and in communities.</p> <p>Furthermore, under the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme 2000-2006 (EOCP), applicants could apply for capital and staffing grant assistance towards the development of school-age childcare services. To avail of assistance, applicants had to provide a childcare facility which offers the child a range of recreational facilities, both restful and active, to meet the diverse needs of the child.</p> <p>Under its successor, the NCIP, the Government has made a further commitment that 10% of the new 50,000 childcare places to be provided will be for children of school-going age, outside of usual school times.</p> <p>The Child Care (Amendment) Act 2007 allows for the regulation of school-age child care services. The Minister for Children will consider the appropriate form of these regulations. However, there are no draft regulations at present and these would only be drawn up after substantial consultation. [OMC]</p>
<p>6.21 A National Early Age Development (NEAD) programme should be developed to support the needs of all children. A core dimension of this programme would be the provision of a State-funded high quality ECCE session – 3.5 hours per day, five days a week for all children in the year before they go to school.</p>	<p>Universal pre-school provision for children is not included in the <i>Programme for Government 2007-2012</i>. [D/ES]</p>

NESF's Recommendation	Departmental Action Taken
<p>6.27 Childminder networks should be developed/enhanced to support those who currently provide services and to link with centre-based services. Childminders should be required to register/ be accredited like other providers, as should providers of school-age childcare.</p>	<p>Since 2002 funding has been allocated to the CCCs to provide support for training, information and networking for childminders. This was expanded in 2004 with the launch of the National Childminding Initiative (NCMI). The total funding allocated to childminding initiatives to date has been over €8 million.</p> <p>Under the NCMI, CCCs pro-actively work to create childminding networks in their City/County areas and all now have a Childminding Network. A Quality Awareness Programme was also developed for childminders to undertake, and it also serves to develop networks between childminders.</p> <p>Some CCCs have representatives of centre-based services and childminding services on their management committee. This also provides an informal opportunity for networking between the two sides of the sector.</p> <p>In December 2006 National Guidelines for Childminders were launched. These set down core requirements that should be met by childminders. The Guidelines outline the process for the statutory and voluntary notification of a childminding service. They give full details on the roll-out of the voluntary notification process which CCCs will promote. This will help to promote quality in this sector.</p> <p>A new tax exemption initiative was introduced in 2006 for voluntary notified childminders. Any childminder earning less than €10,000 a year, increased to €15,000 a year in 2007, who has voluntarily notified, is eligible to apply for the tax exemption. [OMC]</p>
<p>6.28 Significant reforms of the present infant class system in primary schools should be undertaken urgently. Reforms are needed in physical infrastructure, staffing, reduced adult/child ratios of 2:20 initially, equipment and resource facilities for play and facilities that support after-school care.</p>	<p>The School Planning and Building unit within the Department of Education and Science is cognisant of and takes into account best practice in designing schools to meet the needs of a population ranging in age from 4 to 12.</p> <p>The Department does not own the school premises but has issued circulars to all schools at both primary and second level encouraging them to make their premises available to the local community outside of school hours. [D/ES]</p>
<p>6.29 Serious attention should be given in new primary schools to campus-style developments to incorporate the whole range of ECCE services.</p>	<p>There is one such campus style development in Cherry Orchard, Dublin, which incorporates the whole range of ECCE services. The school aims to provide an integrated model of care and education there from birth and throughout the school lifecycle. The capital cost to the Exchequer was some €12 million. The impact of this development in delivering equality of opportunity to children from disadvantaged communities will be assessed.</p> <p>Putting campus style developments in place as a matter of course in new primary schools raises not just the issue of the capital and operational costs but also the danger of creating a parallel structure to that funded under the 2000-2006 Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme (EOCP) and its successor programme the National Childcare Investment Programme (NCIP). [D/ES]</p>

	NESF's Recommendation	Departmental Action Taken
6.36	Child and Family Centres should be established at local level to provide integrated services to disadvantaged children and their parents.	Such centres have not been established.
6.38	A phased transition should be put in place for Traveller children, to move from segregated services to more mainstream provision.	Government policy on Traveller education is one of integration. In 2004, the last segregated Primary classroom in the country for Traveller children closed down. There are in the region of 45 segregated pre-schools for Travellers at the moment. The policy set out in the Department of Education and Science's Traveller strategy published in 2006 is to phase out segregated provision and move towards integrated provision for children of pre-school age over a 10 year period. There are a number of models of transition arrangements whereby pre-school Traveller children are now in integrated settings. [D/ES]
6.51	A single accrediting body should be set up to establish a unitary inspection and evaluation process for ECCE providers; develop a registration process for all ECCE providers; and implement the CECDE's National Framework on Quality.	<p>The HSE has responsibility for pre-school inspection under the childcare regulations. All childcare providers who provide a service for more than 3 children have to register with the HSE. Childminders, who are exempt from the provisions of these Regulations because they are caring for 3 or fewer pre-school children, can avail of the voluntary notification and support system which has been put in place by the HSE.</p> <p>The inspection and evaluation process for ECCE providers is rigorous with each pre-school setting being inspected every 2 years.</p> <p>The CECDE will continue to drive the implementation of Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education. [D/ES]</p>
6.62	A minimum standard for ECCE staff should be agreed and phased in over the next five years.	<p>The National Childcare Strategy 2006-2010 includes a commitment to develop a National Childcare Training Strategy which will look at the training requirements for ECCE staff and the recommended qualifications at different occupational levels within the sector.</p> <p>An inter-Departmental group has been set up to develop the strategy and its work will be supported by a number of representative sub-groups from across the sector. [D/ES]</p>
6.63	Community Employment (CE) workers should be well-supported in ECCE settings with mentor-style training by qualified ECCE mentors. In the longer term, CE places in childcare should be replaced by a social economy type model that supports essential services in the community.	<p>Currently, there are over 22,500 participants nationally on Community Employment projects. Of these, it is estimated that 2,000 participants (9%) are ring-fenced on childcare programmes at community level. Through the Individual Learning Plan, which provides for training and development of CE participants, there are many examples of successful completion of accredited training in childcare up to and including FETAC Level 5. The majority of these projects are linked to County Childcare Committees which are supported locally by FÁS.</p> <p>On the transfer of the Social Economy Programme from FÁS to Pobal in December 2005, a sizeable number of projects were</p>

NESF's Recommendation	Departmental Action Taken
	<p>in Community Childcare. However, the vast majority of these projects had a mixture of funding and posts, which included EOCP funding (D/JELR), Social Economy and CE. Projects would not be economically viable without the support of CE places. Community Childcare projects, by their nature, would face inherent difficulties in achieving self-sustaining economic viability as they have a responsibility to deliver childcare services to socially excluded clients who are not in a position to pay commercial rates. [D/ETE]</p>
<p>6.64 A national pay scale should be established for ECCE workers as a matter of urgency and a joint labour committee should be established by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.</p>	<p>The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment has no function in setting pay rates in any sector of the economy. Terms and conditions of employment are determined in the main by a process of collective bargaining between the employers and employees or their representatives. Within this system, parties are free to negotiate or not to negotiate. The State facilitates the bargaining process by providing a framework and institutions through which good industrial relations can prosper. [D/ETE]</p>
<p>6.65 Proactive measures to address the under-representation of men in ECCE settings should be encouraged through active recruitment policies and through networking to support those already in the sector.</p>	<p>Although the OMC does not have any specific remit over the issue of recruitment and networking of Men In Childcare (MIC) it does, however, work with the CCCs to promote this initiative.</p> <p>A MIC network was established in 2004 and was developed by Kilkenny CCC. There are now 9 CCCs involved and the network has identified many issues that need to be addressed to encourage more men to enter the childcare profession. To date there have been three MIC conferences to highlight this important issue.</p> <p>The OMC has supported this initiative by providing funding for the network through the various CCCs annual action plans.</p> <p>With regard to recruitment in the sector, it is agreed that further professionalisation of the sector, better career paths, and higher pay rates should attract and retain people of both sexes in the sector. [OMC]</p>
<p>7.8 The overall responsibility for the development of and implementation of ECCE policy should reside in one Government department. The designation of the most appropriate department is a matter for Government.</p>	<p>The creation of the Office of the Minister for Children (OMC) with a Ministerial seat at Cabinet was announced in December 2005.</p> <p>The Minister for Children now has responsibilities spanning the issues of child protection and welfare, youth justice, and early childhood care and education. Key personnel from the relevant sections in the Departments of Justice, Equality and Law Reform; Health and Children; and Education and Science are now under the aegis of the Office of the Minister for Children, which is located in the Department of Health and Children.</p> <p>This brings together the relevant officials involved in the areas of Early Childhood Care and Education in one cohesive office. [OMC]</p>

NESF's Recommendation	Departmental Action Taken
<p>7.9 Once departmental responsibility has been agreed, an Early Childhood Development Unit should be established within this department to coordinate the delivery of policy.</p>	<p>By creating the Office of the Minister for Children, the relevant officials from the Departments concerned have been brought together to develop, co-ordinate and deliver on policies that will help ensure the well-being and development of children. [D/ES]</p>
<p>7.17 An investment envelope for ECCE should be ring-fenced by the Department of Finance.</p>	<p>An investment envelope of €575 million has been allocated to the NCIP to create 50,000 additional childcare places through capital grant investment and to support disadvantaged parents using community-based childcare services through the Community Childcare Subvention Scheme. [OMC]</p>
<p>7.10 The City and County Childcare Committees should continue to be resourced so that they develop as the local bodies charged with the delivery of ECCE services.</p>	<p>City and County Childcare Committees were established in 2001 under the EOCP.</p> <p>The CCCs are charged with advancing childcare service provision within their local areas through the development of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ a co-ordinated strategy for childcare services in the county based on an analysis of needs, and overseeing effective implementation against set targets; ▪ an information strategy on the provision of childcare in the county; and local countywide networks and initiatives which target all categories of childcare providers. <p>Under the NCIP, the role of the CCCs has expanded. The NCIP is being delivered at local level through the CCCs who have adopted a proactive approach in identifying local childcare needs and in facilitating greater flexibility in responding to those needs.</p> <p>In 2006 additional funding was made available to help the CCCs in developing their expanding role. To date almost €70 million has been allocated to the CCCs to carry out their functions.</p> <p>In 2006 the CCCs undertook a Strategic Mapping Exercise. This has established the current level of childcare service provision in each city/county area and has enabled them to identify where gaps exist and prioritise locations for new services. They have used this information in developing their Strategic Plans for 2007-2010. This highlights the importance of the local role that the CCCs play in the development of the childcare sector. [OMC]</p>

NESF Conclusions on the Follow-up Action by Government Departments and Agencies on its Report No. 31

- 5.11 ● The NESF very much welcomes the comprehensive response that it received from the Office of the Minister for Children, and the steady progress already made in the implementation of the recommendations in its report.
- 5.12 ● Of special significance is the Government decision to establish the Office of the Minister for Children which now brings together all relevant officials involved (from the Departments of Health and Children, Education and Science and Justice, Equality and Law Reform) in the areas of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in one central office. This provides a basis for the development, co-ordination and implementation of more effective and integrated services in this area, particularly in integrating the linkage between early childcare and early education with the school-based ECCE. This was one of the key recommendations made in the NESF's report.
- 5.13 ● Looking to the future, the NESF attached fundamental importance to the establishment of an Early Childhood Development Unit - under the direction of an Assistant Secretary – to act as the driver for change and to implement the blueprint for action that was recommended in its report. Such a Unit was also recommended in the 1998 Forum Report, the subsequent Government White Paper and the OECD review in 2004.
- 5.14 ● The NESF acknowledges and pays tribute to all the dedicated and committed staff of the new Office for Children for the inspiring and lead role they are now playing in driving forward the process of change and reform in this sector. This is evidenced in the vision and the goals contained in the current social partnership agreement *Towards 2016*. These are very much in line with the NESF'S recommendations – and are now to be followed up and put into effect by the Government and the Social Partners. It is envisaged that the various initiatives in this agreement will enable substantial progress to be made in meeting the Barcelona targets of having childcare available to 90% of children between 3 and the mandatory school age, and to 33% of children under 3 by 2010.
- 5.15 ● The one big area of disappointment for the NESF, however, is that one of its other key recommendations, namely that the Government should provide free of charge a high quality pre-school ECCE session of 3.5 hours a day for five days a week for all children has not been accepted⁴³. The costs involved in this – €136 million annually – were seen by the NESF as fully justified as the longer-term benefits of this would show a return of 7 to 1 for every € invested⁴⁴. This is considerably less than the Early Childcare Supplement, that was subsequently decided on by the Government, and would have contributed more to quality enhancement and sustainability

43 At international level there is a near uniform policy in the provision of free services for all children of pre-school age; see the article by N. Hayes and S. Bradley in *Care and Social Change in the Irish Welfare Economy*, B. Fanning and M. Rush, 2006.

44 A cost-benefit study on this was commissioned from the Geary Institute in UCD and is appended to the NESF report.

through being directed at the services themselves. A comparison of childcare provision in a selected number of European countries is given in Figure 5 below⁴⁵.

Figure 4 Childcare Provision in Selected European Countries in 2005

Country	0-2 years	3 years – mandatory School age		Mandatory school age – 12 years		Admission age to mandatory school
	1-30 hrs or +	1-29h.	30h. Or +	1- 29h.	30h. or +	(pre-primary included)
Denmark	73%	15%	79%	34%	65%	7
Sweden	53%	35%	52%	1%	95%	7
Belgium	42%	49%	48%	43%	54%	6
Netherlands	40%	82%	7%	89%	11%	5
Spain	39%	54%	40%	53%	46%	6
France	32%	56%	39%	48%	52%	6
UK	30%	72%	28%	10%	90%	5
Portugal	29%	9%	55%	30%	69%	6
Finland	27%	25%	51%	82%	18%	7
Italy	25%	21%	70%	13%	87%	6
Luxembourg	22%	51%	12%	74%	23%	4
Ireland	20%	64%	14%	64%	35%	6
Germany	16%	61%	26%	69%	29%	6
Greece	7%	27%	34%	54%	45%	6
Austria	4%	53%	16%	66%	32%	6

Source: Eurostat, EU-SILC 2005 data.

5.16 ● As against this, however, it should be mentioned that the *Programme for Government 2007-2012* contains important commitments over the next five years that will help to achieve the above NESF's objective, such as:

⁴⁵ Apart from a limited range of Departmental-funded schemes that are focused on particular children at risk, pre-school education in Ireland, as commented on by Clancy (see *Contemporary Ireland, A Sociological Map*, 2007, edited by Sara O'Sullivan) 'is privately funded and hence confined to those families who can afford to pay'.

- increasing the rate of Early Childcare Supplement and Child Benefit;
- ensuring that every child will have access to a pre-school place by 2012;
- requiring housing developers to make a contribution or provide a site to local authorities for childcare facilities;
- making all leave after the first 26 weeks available to either parent; and
- examining the possibility of introducing paternity benefit and of shared parental leave.

5.17 ● The commitment under *Towards 2016* to the provision of 50,000 new childcare places, including 10,000 pre-school places and 5,000 after-school places, is to be welcomed and the NESF is pleased to note that by the end of June last €128 million in capital grants had been approved to childcare providers (representing over 18,000 new places and support for over 5,000 existing places). However, the quality of these places has also to be considered and the potential of the National Quality Framework and the NCCA Framework for Early Learning needs to be better exploited for this purpose. In this regard also, the NESF attaches importance to the review of the adequacy or otherwise of investment in this area before end-2010, in consultation with the Social Partners.

5.18 ● In the meantime, however, the planned provision of an additional 5,000 places for school-age childcare is a very small number considering the increasing numbers of parents of school-age children at work. The Department of Education and Science has sent circulars to all schools urging them to make school space available for out-of-school activities, but this is not a very pro-active approach to developing more school-age childcare. The NESF has consistently advocated such a course over the years in many of its reports. However, it is now reported that the Minister for Children is arranging talks between the Department of Education and Science and the boards of school managements (on funding and staffing issues), as part of the Government's drive to provide additional school-age childcare places by 2010. A number of European countries have been providing childcare in schools for many years.

5.19 ● Targeting the ECCE needs of children from acute disadvantaged areas is, of course, crucial through DEIS (the action plan for educational inclusion). This will concentrate on children who will subsequently attend schools serving these areas (180 school communities initially, and will then be extended to the remaining 140 schools under the School Support Programme). The programme for integrated Traveller education is long overdue.

5.20 ● The work of the City and County Childcare Committees in the provision of childcare facilities, including the development of school-aged childcare services, and the establishment of childminding networks in their areas (as was recommended by the NESF), has been outstanding and is highly commended. In recognition of this, the role of these Committees has been

expanded and this has been crucial in identifying and responding flexibly to childcare needs at local levels. The Committees are also playing an active role in encouraging more men to take up childcare work.

- 5.21 ● Another positive development is the establishment of an inter-Departmental group to develop a National Childcare Training Strategy which will include issues such as:
- the adoption of standards for the education, training and professional development of the childcare sector, in parallel to FETAC’s National Framework of Qualifications;
 - an audit of the training and qualifications of those currently in the sector;
 - the current provision of learning opportunities in the sector; and
 - the future skill needs of the sector.

These issues were also highlighted for attention by the NESF in its report. The Training Strategy aims to provide 17,000 training places over the period 2006-2010. The quality of staff is crucial and it is essential that adequate resources are provided to upskill and maintain a quality workforce. A related other positive development is the launch of the National Guidelines for Childminders in December last which will help to promote quality standards in the sector.

- 5.22 ● The inspection and evaluation of pre-school facilities is the responsibility of the HSE, and the NESF is encouraged to note that the regulations in this area are to be strengthened and published. This will help in the establishment of a national standardised inspection service and another positive feature is that inspection reports will be publicly available. The links between this inspection process and the National Quality Framework needs to be strengthened.
- 5.23 ● A project to promote better outcomes through early education is already operational in a disadvantaged area of Dublin within the Northside Partnership area. Funded mainly by Atlantic Philanthropies, with financial inputs from the HSE and the Northside Partnership, it has developed a programme, *Preparing for Life*, of early education and family support. Similar projects include *Young Ballymun* and the *Life Start Programme* funded by the National Lottery and the HSE. These could act as a model for similar programmes under the aegis of the Department of Education and Science, or the Office of the Minister for Children, and the NESF considers that such a programme should be actively pursued by these bodies.
- 5.24 ● Similarly, the campus-style development at Cherry Orchard may provide useful lessons for the development of integrated and holistic-style provision that the NESF had advocated and it looks forward to seeing the results of the evaluation of this development in due course.
- 5.25 ● The NESF regrets that little strategic attention has yet been paid to reform of primary schools, in terms of facilities, pupil/teacher ratios etc.

The links between the DEIS action plan for education inclusion and ECCE settings need to be more fully developed and the lessons from the CECDE pilot project in this area might be useful for this purpose.

- 5.26 ● In summary, the NESF is pleased to record areas where its recommendations have already been implemented. Moreover, a number of its key policy points have also been incorporated in the *Programme for Government 2007-2012* the Social Partnership Agreement *Towards 2016*, and the *National Development Plan 2007-2013*. The policy frameworks set out in these documents provide a valuable context for the further development and implementation of ECCE policies. As in the case of the NESF'S own report, these documents incorporate provisions for a review of progress in 2010. This should provide a valuable platform for planning and implementation up to 2015, which is the NESF target date for a comprehensive ECCE policy system to be in place, based on best practice principles.
- 5.27 ● The 2010 review is crucial, therefore, in providing a real bench-marking process, as a determinant as to whether general good intentions have been operationalised, adequately resourced and with what effect. This could provide a really useful opportunity to revisit the implementation schedule and review stage two of the NESF policy framework. This process would, in turn, emphasise the NESF's continuing interest in this central area of social, educational and economic concerns. The NESF'S policy framework is coherent and cohesive in the make-up of its different elements and even if this is not followed in its totality, nevertheless, it would be important to ensure for the future that policy issues are not dealt with in a fragmented and haphazard way, as has been the tendency up to now.
- 5.28 ● The NESF acknowledges and pays credit for the work of all those who have been progressing the much-needed and long overdue agenda for change in the provision of quality ECCE services. It hopes that the full range of the recommendations in its report will continue to benefit from the attention of all relevant policy-makers and stakeholders, and for the overall benefit of Ireland's youngest, most dependent and most vulnerable of its citizens.
- 5.29 ● Childcare policies have experienced significant growth and development over the last decade. The publication last December of the Government's document *The Agenda for Children's Services* provides an opportunity to put in place a truly integrated policy (as in the Nordic countries and New Zealand for example), for both early childcare and early education. This will require a wider public debate in this country, which has been lacking up to now, with the focus beyond services for working mothers and towards the perspective and policy approach in those European countries which is more child-centred and sees ECCE as a public good and responsibility⁴⁶.

⁴⁶ See *Starting Strong II*, OECD, 2006.

Appendix 3

Table 1 Implementation Schedule for ECCE, First Phase 2005–2009

	Responsibility	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	Review
Agree Departmental responsibility for ECCE	Government	x					
Establish ECDU	Government	x					
Agree and implement work programme for the ECDU	ECDU/Parent Dept	x	x	x	x	x	
Establish timelines and targets for first five year period	ECDU/Parent Dept	x					
Principle 1 Valuing children's competence and contribution							
Objective 1.1 Implement the NCS							
<i>Actions</i>							
1.1.1. Secure Govt commitment to NCS	NCO/Govt	x	x	x	x	x	
1.1.2. Implement NCS proposals on ECCE	ECDU/NCO	x	x	x	x	x	
Objective 1.2 Promote importance of children's here and now status and experience							
<i>Actions</i>							
1.2.1. Raise awareness about childhood	NCO/ Minister for Children	x	x	x	x	x	
Principle 2 Holistic support for young children's well-being, learning and development							
Objective 2.1 Integrated delivery							
<i>Actions</i>							
2.1.1. Develop integrated approaches at central level	ECDU/DHC/DES/HSE	x	x	x			
2.1.2. Continue to support local integrated delivery	ECDU/CCCs/HSE/ NVCOs/local community	x	x				
Objective 2.2 Extend parental leave							
<i>Actions</i>							
2.2.1. Extend Maternity Leave	DSFA	x	x	x	x		
2.2.2. Increase duration for Maternity Benefit	DSFA	x	x	x	x		
2.2.3. Increase duration of Parental Leave	DETE		x	x	x		
Objective 2.3 Out of school provision							
<i>Actions</i>							
2.3.1. Develop physical infrastructure	DES/Parent Dept	x	x	x			
2.3.2. Train staff	ECDU/Parent Dept			x	x		
2.3.3. Implement recommendations of NCCC Report	ECDU	x	x				
2.3.4. Draft new legislation for out of school provision	ECDU/DHC/Govt		x				
Principle 3 Universal access to ECCE for all children							
Objective 3.1 Universal access							
<i>Actions</i>							
3.1.1. Develop NEAD programme	ECDU/Parent Dept	x					
3.1.2. Roll out NEAD programme to disadvantaged areas	ECDU/Parent Dept		x	x			
3.1.3. Roll out NEAD programme to all children	ECDU/Parent Dept				x	x	
3.1.4. Continue support for CCCs and NVCOs	ECDU/ADM	x	x	x	x	x	
3.1.5. Develop childminder clusters	ECDU/CCCs	x	x				

	Responsibility	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	Review
3.16 Continue to resource existing ECCE providers to ensure ECCE for younger age groups	ECDU	x	x	x	x	x	
3.17 Reform current provision for infants in primary schools	DES/ECDU		x	x	x	x	
3.18 Develop campus style school buildings in new developments	DES				x	x	
Objective 3.2 Targeted interventions							
<i>Actions</i>							
3.2.1 Establish Child and Family Centres in local areas	ECDU/Parent Dept	x	x	x			
3.2.2 Promote 'éist' programme	ECDU	x	x	x	x	x	
3.2.3 Include Traveller interests in ECDU	ECDU	x	x	x	x	x	
3.2.4 Work with NCSE to put services in place for children with special education needs	ECDU/NCSE	x	x	x	x	x	
3.2.5 Remove anomaly regarding services for children with special needs in Early Start	ECDU/DES/NCSE	x					
Principle 4 Ongoing quality development in policy, infrastructure and service provision							
Objective 4.1 A Framework for Early Learning							
<i>Actions</i>							
4.1.1 Expedite the NCCA work	DES/NCCA/ECDU	x	x				
4.1.2 Compile resource audit for providers	ECDU		x	x			
4.1.3 Implement the framework	ECDU/DES			x	x	x	
Objective 4.2 Standards for quality							
<i>Actions</i>							
4.2.1 Amend Child Care Act 1991	DHC/Govt.						
4.2.2 Establish system of registration for ECCE	DES/DHC/ECDU		x				
4.2.3 Implement the National Framework on Quality in ECCE	DES/CECDE/ECDU		x	x			
Objective 4.3 Develop a Skilled Workforce							
<i>Actions</i>							
4.3.1 Devise profile for ECCE workers	Accrediting bodies/ECDU			x			
4.3.2 Implement the Model Framework	NQAI/ECDU	x	x				
4.3.3 Reform use of CE in ECCE	FÁS/ECDU	x	x				
4.3.4 Establish national pay scales in ECCE	DETE	x					
Principle 5 Building partnerships							
Objective 5.1 Partnership at national and local levels							
<i>Actions</i>							
5.1.1 Support NVCO input to national policy	ECDU/NVCOs	x	x	x	x	x	
5.1.2 Develop links with schools/voluntary providers	ECDU/NVCOs	x	x	x	x	x	
Objective 5.2 Partnership with parents and communities							
<i>Actions</i>							
5.2.1 Develop proposals for inclusion of parents	CECDE/CCCs	x	x				
5.2.2 Devise ways to consult with children	ECDU/NCO	x	x	x			
Objective 5.3 Partnership with the business/employers sector							
<i>Actions</i>							
5.3.1 Develop employer response to ECCE provision	Social partners	x	x	x			

VI

Introduction

- 6.1 ● There is strong evidence that older people want to remain living in their own homes and communities, rather than moving to nursing homes or to public hospitals. But more adequate supports and home-delivered services are needed for this purpose. The time is now opportune for reform, with:
- the increasing numbers who want to lead independent and active lives in the community;
 - older people expecting to have higher quality responsive services;
 - the likelihood that informal or family care in the home will not be there to the same degree in the future; and
 - the fact that preventative approaches are more effective, and have better outcomes, than crisis-driven services.
- 6.2 ● Ireland is expected to experience rapid ageing of its population in the future, with the proportion of the population aged 65 and over likely to rise from 21% in 2005 to 29% by 2025. Although this will be one of the lowest proportions in the OECD, nevertheless, with fertility rates continuing to fall and life expectancy continuing to rise, the ageing of our population is set to accelerate after 2025. Consequently, the old-age dependency ratio is estimated to rise to around 56% in 2050, compared to the OECD average of 47%.
- 6.3 ● Developing a comprehensive care agenda is a central policy concern of the NESF. In July 2005 the NESF published a report on *Early Childhood Care and Education* (see Section V of this report). Report No. 32, which centers on care for older people, is the focal point of this Section. In this report, the NESF developed a vision of care services for older people that is informed by the strong preference of older people to remain living in their own homes as independently as possible for as long as possible. This has been official government policy since the publication of the Working Party on Services for the Elderly: *The Years Ahead: A Policy for the Elderly* in 1988, but the evidence suggests that much more needs to be done to make this a reality.

Expenditure on Elder Care

- 6.4 ● Ireland is a low spender on social protection, compared to our EU partners, with our spending per capita being 60.5% of the EU average. Only Spain and Portugal spend less. As regards spending per head on the elderly, we rank lowest of our partners (see Table 1.1, page 5 of the report). Our overall spending on care services equates to 0.67% of GDP, compared to the OECD average of just under 1%.

Defining Community Care Services

- 6.5 ● The NESF report defined community care (there are no legal definitions at present and lack of clarity also on eligibility for services) to include not just health and social services but the provision of a wide range of other services such as income maintenance, housing, transport and lifelong learning. The aim is to help people to continue living in their own homes and communities with dignity and independence; to develop flexible responses and to move away from the current 'one-size-fits-all' approach. Low-level supports, if provided at the right time, can have better outcomes for older people, compared to services provided at times of crisis.
- 6.6 ● The report calls for a rebalancing of care supports to assist living at home, and strongly supports the concept of community-based subventions, particularly for those on the margins between community and residential care. It also supports the view that carers are a core element of any community care strategy and that a national strategy for caring is now required.

Barriers to the Development of Community Services

- 6.7 ● In addition to the need for greater resources, the more important of these barriers are:
- *Perverse Investment Incentives*: the present official funding of services is not consistent with the policy objective of encouraging community-based responses. Considerable resources are invested in nursing home care responses, some of which are unnecessary and inappropriate;
 - *Equality for Older People*: progress in achieving a more age-friendly society and care system cannot be achieved unless ageism in all its forms is tackled and equitable services to meet older people's needs are developed;
 - *Service Entitlement*: services are not uniform in terms of coverage and access and eligibility arrangements need to be simplified and clarified. The HSE provides a unique opportunity to move services forward to achieve a more even response to need, while still allowing for local flexibility; and

— *Strategic Statement on Ageing*: this needs to be developed to move away from the present focus on the medical model of ageing to one which places more emphasis on the social aspects of ageing and enables older people to continue contributing to and participating in society.

- 6.8** ● Innovative approaches to the provision of services are outlined in the report, such as the Summerhill Active Retirement Group in Co. Meath, and a project in a declining rural area in the Netherlands. Examples of community care services to enhance the quality of life for the elderly which are listed in the report are: *home* (heating, security, cleaning, gardening); *external* (transport, street lighting, and community centres); and *personal and social* (bathing, meals, hairdressing, sheltered housing, chiropody).

Follow-up Action by Government Departments and Agencies on NESF Report No. 32

- 6.9** ● The action taken by Government Departments, in liaison with other State Agencies, in following up on the main recommendations in the report is outlined in Box 6 below.

Box No. 6

NESF Report No. 32 on Care for Older People

The number references are to the corresponding paragraph numbers in the report.

NESF's Recommendation

Departmental Action Taken (unless otherwise stated, all the responses have been supplied by the Department of Health and Children)

Increase Public Spending on Care for Older People

1.14 Public spending in this area should be increased over the next five years to at least the OECD average of 1 per cent of GDP. This would mean an extra €500 million per year on services for older people.

An analysis of funding options to support community and residential care services for older people in the medium to longer term has commenced and will be progressed during 2008. The question of increased resource provision will be determined in the context of progressing the NDP 2007-13, and the annual Estimates process.

Develop a New National Strategy on Ageing

1.26 This should address:

- the status of older people and their contribution to society;
- baseline data and information for planning;
- current resource allocation;
- an audit of current service provision; and
- integrated responses, needs assessment, and quality standards.

Current health policies are designed to enhance the status of older people and to maximise their contribution to society. The Programme for Government provides for a New National Positive Ageing Strategy, to include progressing initiatives in each of the areas opposite.

New baseline data and information for planning became available in the latter half of 2006 and this is currently being used by the Department for improved strategies and planning in the future. This will include, for example, a review of future staffing levels.

The improved integration of community-based services for older people is underway by the Department. This includes an Evaluation in 2008 of the Home Care Package (HCP) Initiative rolled-out in 2006 and 2007. This will encompass various issues relating to HCPs, including improving need assessments and the promotion of quality standards nationally.

Promote Positive Ageing

2.12 *At Government level*

2.16

- mainstream positive ageing policies in national strategies (e.g. the National Development Programme).

At Policy level

- audit existing policies and procedures and develop a strategic response;
- consult with older people and others;

The main action taken by the Department in the last year to promote positive ageing is reflected in the NDP 2007-13. This indicates not only the significant capital investment envisaged as part of the overall Health Infrastructure Programme but also highlights separately proposed non-capital investment for Older People under the Social Inclusion Priority.

While further progress has been made recently at policy level in relation to the first three points opposite, these will be reviewed in the context of formulating the new National Strategy. The Department would not have the lead role in developing anti-ageism guidelines but would support such an initiative as appropriate.

NESF's Recommendation	Departmental Action Taken
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ promote positive ageing in both the public and private sectors; ■ develop national anti-ageism guidelines and advise on age-proofing; and ■ monitor progress and produce an annual report. <p><i>At Delivery level</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ develop better inter-agency liaison at a senior level on positive ageing issues; ■ include age equality as a cross-cutting theme in strategic planning; ■ age-proof and audit services from an age impact perspective and use administrative data to check for age discrimination; ■ raise public awareness and include older people in customer groups; ■ provide staff training; and ■ support local initiatives. 	<p>The Department, the HSE and the National Council for Ageing and Older People (NCAOP) have continued in the last year to play an important role at delivery level in promoting various positive ageing initiatives at various levels. This has primarily focused on enhancing services provision, to include improved monitoring, evaluation and training mechanisms at local and regional levels.</p>

Legal Entitlements to Community Care

4.40

The Department of Health and Children should clarify entitlement to core services such as the home help service, meals-on-wheels, day care, respite care, therapeutic/paramedic services and assisted and supported housing. It should also give a commitment to services expansion and make them more comprehensive. In keeping with the recently enacted Disability Act, 2005, older people should have a right to a holistic assessment of their needs.

As indicated above, the evaluation of the recent HCP initiative will be comprehensive, including a needs assessment and encouraging the development of packages best suited to each individual. The review of other community-based services for older people by the Department and the HSE is intended to identify policy or service improvements required in these areas at national or local level.

Work is continuing on a new legislative framework to provide for clear statutory provisions on eligibility and entitlement for health and personal social services. The aim is to produce a clear set of statutory provisions that ensure equity and transparency and to bring the system up to date with developments in service delivery and technology that have occurred since the Health Act 1970.

As signalled in the new social partnership agreement, *Towards 2016*, it is also intended to review the eligibility criteria for assessment of medical cards in the context of medical, social and economic need.

NESF's Recommendation	Departmental Action Taken
Strengthen Services Co-ordination and Planning	
<p>5.11 The present Inter-Departmental Group on the Needs of Older People should be given a stronger remit, with representation at Assistant Secretary level and a permanent and senior level Secretariat. This Group should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ develop a National Strategy on Ageing (see 1.26 above); ■ consider the structures, legislation and funding requirements for better co-ordination; and ■ support innovative approaches to local-level service co-ordination. 	<p>The Department contributes, at Assistant Secretary level, to the work of the Inter-Departmental Group on the Needs of Older People.</p> <p><i>The Office for Older People</i> was established in January 2008 to bring coherence to government planning, policy and service delivery for older people and to develop a <i>National Strategy for Positive Ageing</i>.</p> <p>A fundamental prerequisite to the implementation of “A Fair Deal” is a requirement for the development of a common assessment process to ensure a uniform approach to the assessment of need for long-term care.</p> <p>The HSE is developing a Common Assessment Process which will be rolled out nationally. The HSE advises that this will be in place prior to the introduction of the new scheme.</p>
Local Planning and Delivery	
<p>5.12</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ older people should have an active role on an on-going basis, through consultation and participation; ■ policy issues should be addressed in fora such as the HSE Advisory Panels, the Strategic Planning Committees, VECs and the City and County Development Boards (CDBs) and older people should also be directly represented; ■ greater emphasis on co-ordinating staff in service planning and delivery, with staff training on integrated service responses, and standards set and best practice disseminated; ■ data- gathering systems should be developed and analysed to plan effective responses; 	<p>Older people are consulted and encouraged to participate in the formulation of policy. Recent examples include consultation on “A Fair Deal” and representation among key stakeholders on a Working Group established by HIQA to finalise standards for long-term residential care.</p> <p>The HSE is pursuing improved integrated policies across services, e.g. the problem of delayed discharges of older people from acute hospitals is recognised as a whole system issue and is being addressed to provide an integrated care pathway for the user.</p> <p>The NCAOP “Information Framework” is designed to improved data systems and responses.</p> <p>Initiatives are planned or underway to stimulate the development of assistive technology and services for older people. These can relate, for example, to devices for the home, memory aids, communications, smart guides, simple remote controls, etc.</p> <p>The ‘About the House’ series in 2005 looked at how various technologies could provide assistance to those with reduced mobility. [D/T]</p> <p>The Information Society Commission made recommendations in 2005 on Community-based ICT programmes for disadvantaged groups and individuals, with support from the Dormant Accounts Fund. The need for further measures like the Excellence Through Accessibility Awards being developed by the National Disability Authority should be kept under ongoing review. The Government set up a Fund of €1m and allocated €1.025m in 2005 and €1.5m in 2006 for e-Inclusion initiatives. Since 2006, the Access Skills and Content</p>

NESF's Recommendation	Departmental Action Taken
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ IT solutions should be developed to improve co-ordination and integration and also to promote assistive technology for independent living; and ■ innovative approaches such as joint planning and budget sharing should be supported and lessons learnt disseminated and mainstreamed. 	<p>Initiative has funded a wide range of projects for people with disabilities and older people. [D/T]</p>
Embed Care and Case Management Principles in Care	
<p>5.17 5.18</p> <p>The Department of Health and Children and the HSE should ensure that care and case management principles, philosophies and approaches are embedded across the community care system and at the point of admission and discharge to residential and acute care services. A unified and holistic assessment process of establishing people's needs for services should be introduced as a priority.</p>	<p>The HSE has developed a national standardised care needs assessment which is being rolled out nationally. These incorporate principles relating to issues such as case management and admission/discharge to or from services.</p>
Inspect and Enhance all Standards of Care	
<p>7.13</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ the remit of the Social Services Inspectorate should be extended on a statutory basis to include all care settings for older people (residential, community and home-based; private, State or community/voluntary provision), with the necessary trained staff and financial resources; ■ inspection findings should be published, with sanctions for non-compliance with standards; ■ the principles of autonomy, empowerment and person-centredness should inform 	<p>The Minister published draft National Standards for Residential Care Settings for Older People in January 2007.</p> <p>The standards will apply to all residential settings (public, private and voluntary) where older people are cared for and for which registration is required. The draft standards are based on legislation, research findings and best practice.</p> <p>The Social Services Inspectorate of the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) has responsibility for developing standards for health and social services (excluding mental health services) and ensuring standards are met.</p>

NESF's Recommendation	Departmental Action Taken
<p>the development and implementation of standards;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ these should be clear, adequate and developed in consultation with users; ■ standards of care for older people in acute hospitals should also be developed; ■ proactive development of higher standards to move care towards quality of life measures; and ■ standards need to be developed and applied across all service levels – from front line service delivery, organisation of care, planning/integration and strategic development. 	<p>Following detailed examination by HIQA, the draft standards were recently submitted to the Minister for Health and Children for approval.</p> <p>At present, the Nursing Homes (Care and Inspection) Regulations 1993 govern standards for private nursing homes. Since July 2006, inspection reports have been made available on the HSE website.</p> <p>Acute Hospitals are not included in residential care settings for this purpose as other standards apply.</p>
Support for Home Care	
<p>3.25</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ supports for services should be more widespread and uniform, focusing initially on high-dependent older people in the community and drawing on best practice from the pilot programme of care for older people; and ■ re-balancing financial and fiscal supports away from nursing/hospital care towards community and residential settings instead. 	<p>The HSE has drawn up the national guidelines for home care packages. The implementation of these guidelines incorporate the case management and related protocols.</p> <p>The process of evaluating the effectiveness of the home care package scheme is a priority for 2008 and work is well advanced on this.</p>

NESF's Recommendation

Departmental Action Taken

Strategic Role for Housing

3.8
3.10

The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government should undertake research on older people's housing preferences and identify and address barriers or disincentives in their moving to accommodation which best fits their needs.

The role of assisted and supported housing should be expanded as an option for older people, particularly where it supports independent living and a continuum of care. This will require development of a strategic framework to address funding issues (capital and current), services and supports, planning issues and co-ordination between health and housing sectors.

The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government has asked the Centre for Housing Research (CHR) to undertake a policy review of accommodation needs where there is a care dimension. This work is now under way and should be completed by the end of 2008.

The housing policy statement, *Delivering Homes, Sustaining Communities*, which was published in February 2007, acknowledges that specific actions are required to address the wide range of special housing needs including the accommodation needs of the elderly. The availability of a mix of dwelling types of good design across all tenures (an important tenet of the statement) will provide people with greater choice to change accommodation to suit their needs as they enter their later life. Specific State support for the accommodation needs of older people ranges from grant schemes which allow people to remain in their own homes to the provision of sheltered housing options. [D/EHLG]

The voluntary and co-operative housing sector continue to play an important role in meeting the needs of older people and the funding provision for voluntary and co-operative schemes has been increased significantly. Ambitious targets of some 6,000 units have been set for the initial 2007-2009 period of the NDP 2007-2013. It is proposed to introduce new funding arrangements and to rationalise and streamline administrative and approval procedures in order to deliver increased output. [D/EHLG]

In relation to grant schemes, details of the revised housing adaptation grant schemes for older people and people with a disability were launched in November 2007. The Department is in the process of co-ordinating the transfer of the Special Housing Aid for the Elderly Scheme from the Health Service Executive to the local authorities. [D/EHLG]

The Rental Accommodation Scheme will provide new options for older single people who would like enhanced security of tenure in their old age. Also, a number of local authorities operate Financial Contribution Schemes under which private housing is part-exchanged for social rented accommodation specifically designed for older people. Broader implementation of this scheme will be encouraged. [D/EHLG]

Further funding of €0.5m was made available in the Budget Day Packages of 2006 and 2007, to provide front line health service support for sheltered housing, such as therapists and public health nurses. [D/HC]

The recently-established cross-departmental team on sheltered housing for older people (representative of the Departments of Environment, Heritage and Local Government and Health and Children, the Health Service Executive and Local Authorities) is

NESF's Recommendation	Departmental Action Taken
	<p>charged with the task of examining the issue of sheltered housing and developing future policy in this area including input on the work to be undertaken by the CHR referred to above. [D/HC]</p>
<h3>A National Strategy for Carers</h3>	
<p>3.30 The Departments of Health and Children and Social and Family Affairs should jointly establish a broad-based group (including Social Partners, carer groups and experts) to develop a National Strategy for Carers. This should give particular attention to the specific needs of older carers and be completed within 12 months.</p>	<p>The Department of Social and Family Affairs has primary responsibility for income support for carers, and the D/HC and the HSE have responsibility for support services. The D/HC continues to work with carer's organisations and the HSE in relation to progressing the health aspects of issues associated with carers (D/HC).</p> <p><i>Towards 2016</i> sets out a number of specific commitments for carers, including the development of a carer's Strategy. This commitment is reiterated in the Programme for Government. The strategy will focus on supporting informal and family carers in the community. Co-operation between relevant government departments and agencies is essential if the provision of services, supports and entitlements for carers is to be fully addressed. For that reason all relevant bodies are involved in the strategy and there will be appropriate consultation with the social partners. In addition, a request for submissions from the public was published in March 2008.</p> <p>A working group, chaired by the Department of An Taoiseach, has been established to develop the strategy. The Department of Social and Family Affairs provides the secretariat to the working group which also includes representatives of the Departments of Finance, Health and Children, and Enterprise, Trade and Employment as well as FÁS and the Health Service Executive. The expertise of other Departments and Government bodies will be called on as particular issues arise. It is intended to publish the strategy later this year.</p> <p><i>Towards 2016</i> includes a separate commitment for the Department of Social and Family Affairs to host an annual meeting of carer representative groups with relevant Departments and agencies. One such meeting was held on 23 January 2008 at which the development of the national carer's strategy was the theme. Representatives of 12 groups and 9 Departments/Agencies attended. This was a very useful and interesting meeting at which the representative groups outlined the issues they wish to see addressed in the strategy.</p>

NESF Conclusions on the Follow-up Action by Government Departments and Agencies on its Report No. 32

- 6.10** ● The vision of providing supports to enable older people live active and full lives, in an independent way in their own homes and communities for as long as possible, that was set out in *Towards 2016*, formed the central pillar and thrust of the NESF'S own report⁴⁷. This commitment by the Government and the Social Partners is, therefore, fully supported and welcomed.
- 6.11** ● In-keeping with this, the NESF also very much welcomes the goals and commitments in *Towards 2016* to developing an infrastructure of long-term care services for these purposes over the next ten years. This is to be underpinned by the following set of principles:
- designing and delivering integrated services around individual needs and based on a standardised needs assessment; the latter has been developed by the HSE and is now being rolled out nationally; in addition, home care packages are being implemented;
 - maximising the use of community and home-based care and the support of family and informal care;
 - encouraging the continued development of sheltered housing options ;
 - providing quality residential care where community and home-based care is not appropriate;
 - equitable co-payments based on a national standardised financial assessment system; the level of State support should be neutral as between public or private care and current residents should not be disadvantaged by whatever new system is introduced; and
 - information on entitlements and benefits should be clearly set out.
- However, the NESF is concerned at the slow pace in the development of home care grant packages and urges that this work should be expedited by the Department of Health and Children and the HSE.
- 6.12** ● Against the above commitments by the Government and the Social Partners, it is disappointing to find that the Department of Health and Children is not yet in a position to give a reaction to the NESF'S recommendation that public spending on care for older people should be increased over the next five years to reach at least the OECD average spend of 1% of GDP.
- 6.13** ● It is essential that multi-annual funding is provided for effective planning and development purposes⁴⁸, as targets or indicative figures, otherwise the present system of ad hoc year-to-year resource provision

⁴⁷ In 2001 Ireland had the second highest proportion (after the Netherlands) of its population aged 65 and over in nursing homes and hospitals (*Eurostat National Census of Population*).

⁴⁸ For a fuller discussion of these issues see the NESF'S report on *The Delivery of Quality Public Services*, 2007.

will continue. This will be detrimental to the design and implementation of effective policies and the above commitments will run the risk of being seen as only aspirational in nature and lacking any real substantive and binding content. The NESF readily acknowledges, of course, the commitments given in *Towards 2016* to the provision of substantial additional resources for elder care, with almost three-quarters of this being committed to community supports.

6.14 ● At the very least, the NESF would hope that the analysis which the Department is undertaking at present on the funding options to support care services for older people would be published and made available for discussion and debate by all the Social Partners, the Oireachtas and the public at large.

6.15 ● On the other hand, the NESF is very much encouraged that its recommendation on developing a New Strategy on Ageing has now been incorporated in the *Programme for Government 2007-2012* and that this will include the following elements:

- developing operational plans, with objectives for older people, by Government Departments;
- joined-up thinking on initiatives for older people;
- mechanisms to monitor progress and identify challenges;
- liaising with voluntary groups in the area;
- possible appointment of an Ombudsman for older people;
- developing quality transport systems in urban and rural areas, with the expansion of the Rural Transport Initiative for the elderly; and
- set up a training programme for all those over 50 in computer literacy⁴⁹ and enable more older people go to College through a new system of means-tested fees.

The NESF would hope that its recommendations in this area will be taken into account by the Government in their development of the above Strategy⁵⁰. In this regard, the Government's recent decision to establish an Office for Older People (under the leadership of a Minister of State) is a positive step for the future.

6.16 ● The NESF welcomes the roll-out of the Irish National Longitudinal Study on Ageing (TILDA), which was launched in November 2006. This will study a representative cohort of up to 10,000 Irish people over the age of 50 year and chart their health, social and economic circumstances over a 10 year period. The data will assist policy makers in the fields of health, social care, pension planning and biotechnology. Equally the care needs assessment

⁴⁹ Only 25% of households with at least one person 65 and over had an internet connection in 2006, compared to over 50% of households with nobody aged 65 and over (*ibid*, CSO,2007).

⁵⁰ The case for and the main elements that should be included in such a Strategy were outlined recently by Professor Éamon O'Shea in 'Towards a Strategy for Older People in Ireland', Irish Medical Journal, September, 2007.

begun by the Department of Health and Children will provide useful information for the development of policy.

- 6.17** ● The present Government has also given additional commitments which are supported by the NESF to: (i) extend developments such as the Slán Abhaile project in Co. Meath (the Project Team had discussions during the course of its work with representatives of this programme which were very useful in the preparation of the eventual NESF report); and (ii) facilitate the building of retirement villages and introduce integrated purpose-built neighbourhoods in existing communities, on a pilot basis, similar for example to the development at Westgate, Ballincollig, Co. Cork.
- 6.18** ● In addition, the NESF notes and very much welcomes other measures and actions (many of which are consistent with the NESF's own findings and recommendations) that are underway by the Department of Health and Children such as:
- rolling out of the new national standardised care needs assessment which will be carried out by multi-disciplinary teams;
 - provision of more home care packages, extra hours of home help, extra day places and extra residential care beds;
 - publication of national standards for **all** residential settings (this had been recommended by the NESF), based on research findings and best practice; these are to be finalised by the Health Information and Quality Authority⁵¹;
 - a new nursing home support scheme, *A Fair Deal*, which will come into effect this year and will ensure the same level of State support for public and private nursing home residents;
 - Departments and agencies such as the Citizens Information Board are using the full range of mechanisms to provide information on services for older people; and
 - the Health Act 2007 provides for the registration and inspection of *all* nursing homes by the Office of the Chief Inspector of Social Services.
- 6.19** ● A notable feature in all of this is that a structured process of consultation has now been initiated by the Department with the Social Partners on these issues as well as with representatives of older people groups.
- 6.20** ● The NESF is heartened to hear also that work is continuing in the Department on a new legislative framework which will provide clear statutory bases on eligibility and entitlements for health and personal social services. Action in this area was one of the key findings in the NESF's report and it urges that this work should now be given greater priority.

⁵¹ These were published recently and will come into effect when the Ministerial regulations have been signed.

- 6.21 ● While noting the various administrative and coordinating arrangements in place, the NESF again repeats its call that the present Inter-Departmental Group on the Needs of Older People should be given a stronger remit to drive forward the process of change and reforms in this area and that representation on this Group should be at Assistant Secretary level.
- 6.22 ● The NESF welcomes the work which has been initiated by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government on the housing issues that it had recommended for action. These include research by the Centre for Housing Research on the accommodation needs of older people; the establishment of a cross-departmental team to review policy on sheltered housing for older people; specific actions to meet the wide range of special housing needs; the role of the voluntary and co-operative housing sector in this; proposals to introduce new funding arrangements; and the revised housing adaptation grant schemes. The NESF urges that this work continue and be expedited as quickly as possible.
- 6.23 ● *Towards 2016* also contains a number of commitments on action in relation to the housing plans of the Local Authorities, new protocols for inter-agency co-operation on care/accommodation needs, reforms in grant schemes for private housing, and enhanced home security and energy conservation. Provision is also being made for consultation with the Social Partners on these issues through the Housing Forum. It is understood that the review of the housing adaptation grants for older people and people with a disability has now been completed and a revised framework of grant aid is being put in place that will target funding to those on lower incomes and those whose need is greatest.
- 6.24 ● The NESF regrets that Programmes on positive ageing have not yet been introduced.
- 6.25 ● The NESF is pleased that its recommendation on the development of a National Carers Strategy has now been taken on board in *Towards 2016* and that this is to be completed by the end of the year, in consultation with the Social Partners. There are a number of important reports which should facilitate this work such as those by the Equality Authority, the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Social and Family Affairs and the Carers Association.
- 6.26 ● An initial step was taken recently in further supporting carers and recognising their contribution to communities, with the introduction of new arrangements in September 2007 which for the first time allow a carer to retain a full social welfare payment and to receive, in addition, up to half the Carer's Allowance. This is estimated to boost the weekly income of 18,000 carers around the country.

VII

Introduction

- 7.1 ● A key challenge to sustaining our future prosperity is that of creating greater equality of opportunity in the labour market for **all** citizens. In this present report on *Creating a More Inclusive Labour Market*, the NESF recommended a series of measures to tackle barriers to achieving this, in both urban and rural areas. The report argues that this is not only desirable on equity grounds but is also necessary to underpin our future economic and social development.
- 7.2 ● The report makes a strong business case for a more equal and inclusive labour market approach. It argues that this will lead to a more productive and higher skilled work force and help to make our firms more competitive with those in other best performing economies. This will not only improve the prospects of the individuals affected but help sustain our national social and economic development – not least by helping to fill job vacancies. Irish domestic labour force growth is expected to fall to 0.5 % annually in the near future, compared with annual growth of 3.5 % over the past decade. The report argues that while higher immigration could boost labour force growth in the short term, it may become increasingly more difficult, and costly, to attract and integrate greater numbers of migrants in the future.
- 7.3 ● A main conclusion of the report is that labour market vulnerability continues to be generated today even in a tight labour market. The report argues that the current structures for promoting labour market policies and social inclusion are too complex (involving eight government departments and 13 separate agencies), and that the €1,000 million current expenditure annually on labour market measures could be more effectively spent .
- 7.4 ● The NESF advocates a more coherent approach to tackling unemployment with intensive ‘personalised action plans’ tailored to the needs of individuals, as well as preventive retraining measures to help those in employment who are most at risk of becoming redundant, such as low-skilled manufacturing workers. It calls for agreement between the government, unions and employers on the funding and provision of workplace training to be a policy priority.

Findings

7.5 ● The NESF identified that:

- We are now a wealthier but more unequal society than before, with the richest 20 % of the working-age population earning 12 times as much as the poorest 20 % - one of the highest levels of income inequality among OECD countries.
- There is less equality of opportunity here than in many other European countries and this has changed little over the last decade, despite a huge expansion in education and economic growth (paragraphs 4.12/ 4.13 of the report).
- 14% of households in poverty are now headed by those with a job, a rise from 7% since 1994 - an indication that employment on its own does not always provide a route out of poverty (paragraph 5.22).
- We are currently ranked 51 out of 56 countries in terms of equality of economic opportunity for women and have one of the highest penalties in pay reduction associated with motherhood - with working mothers having lower earnings than women without children (paragraphs 2.27 /2.28).
- 13% of our young people leave school early and their unemployment rate is 18% (63% of Traveller children leave school early). This is in spite of expenditure of €636 million a year on educational disadvantage (paragraph 7.50).
- The level of lifelong learning remains low compared to other best performing countries. Here, less than 10% of those aged 25 to 64 are involved in lifelong learning, compared with 34% in Sweden, 21% in the United Kingdom, 19% in Denmark, 18% in Finland and 17% in the Netherlands. Almost 75% of lifelong learners are in employment and only 3% are unemployed. The remaining 23% are not economically active (paragraphs 7.12 / 7.13).
- Over 40% of our male working-age population (15-64) is low-skilled, compared with 20 % in Germany (paragraph 7.5).
- 23% of our working age population lacks functional literacy skills. This is the second highest rate of illiteracy among 18 industrial economies surveyed. (paragraph 7.6).
- The changing nature of our economy means that without up-skilling many of our low-skilled workers will be in low-paid precarious employment, including periods of recurring unemployment. (paragraph 7.58).

An overview of the main recommendations in the report is given in Figure 4 overleaf.

Figure 5 Creating a More Inclusive Labour Market

Creating a More Inclusive Labour Market		
<p>National Strategic Framework</p> <p>To achieve a more equal and opportunity driven labour market by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Addressing structural inequalities and discrimination · Ensuring coherence of over €1,000m economic, employment and social inclusion policies · Streamlining existing delivery structures and aligning policy measures · Facilitating improved inter-agency work at local level · Ensuring the mainstreaming of good practice at local level into national policies · Directing infrastructural investment at those areas badly hit by job losses 		
Helping People towards Work	Helping People into Work	Keeping People at Work
<p>Streamline Agencies & Measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Align Measures and Services · Streamline Structures · Reform of ALM Programmes · Greater access to Services for Vulnerable People <p>Local Partnership Network</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Provide full 'menu' of supports to help people · Avoid gaps and duplication · Greater flexibility in services and use of budgets · Introduce 'Service Delivery Agreements' 	<p>Make-Work Pay Policies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Minimise Welfare to Work disincentives · Improve 'In – Work' Benefit · Provide a portable 'Cost of Participation' <p>Payment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Support for Childcare & Care services in disadvantaged areas. <p>National Employment Service</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Provide 'Intermediary' Service · 'Follow-Up' clients into work · More Equal Access to Service Provision 	<p>Workplace Strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Equality & Diversity Strategies · Increase Work-Life Practices · Retention policies for people with disabilities & older people · Agree Funding Model for sharing of costs for training <p>Training Low-Skilled Workers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Lifelong Learning to reduce number of low-skilled workers · Introduce Mentoring/personal development plans · Focus training on 34,500 young early school leavers at work · Free fees for Part-Time students
<p>Personalisation of Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Making it easier for people to get access to the services they need · Giving people more choice over the options to meet their needs · Giving people a more direct say on how services for them are shaped · Providing a continuum of support for people between unemployment and work 		

Follow-up Action by Government Departments on NESF Report No.33

7.6 ● The action taken by Government Departments and agencies in following-up on the main recommendations in the report is outlined in Box 7 below.

Box No. 7 NESF Report No. 33 on Creating a More Inclusive Labour Market

The number references are to the corresponding paragraph numbers in the report.

NESF's Recommendation

Departmental Action Taken

National Strategic Framework

4.14

A National Strategic Framework should be developed to provide better opportunities for vulnerable people to get into and stay at work and improve the effectiveness of the €1,000 million economic, employment and social inclusion measures currently in place. The focus of the Framework would be on:

- addressing structural inequalities and discrimination that exist;
- encouraging a more personalised approach to the delivery of services;
- streamlining existing delivery structures and better aligning policy measures;
- encouraging and rewarding improved inter-agency work at the local level and supporting research into how inter-agency work can best be undertaken;
- ensuring the availability of a full 'menu' of supports at local level to meet people's needs;
- supporting the mainstreaming of good practice into the design of national policies; and
- addressing infrastructural deficits in those areas badly hit by job losses.

This National Strategic Framework should be included in the negotiations for the new Social Partnership agreement. An inter-departmental group

This recommendation informed debate in relation to the conclusion of the main policy documents which currently frame economic, social and labour market policy. The *NDP*, the *NAPSincl*, and *Towards 2016* were all agreed in a manner which ensured co-ordination and coherence between the three, particularly in relation to labour market issues.

There is a commitment in the current *NAPSincl* to extend the EAP activation process to other marginalised groups including, lone parents, people with disabilities and other long-term unemployed. A High Level Group has been established to drive this agenda forward. The Group comprises the D/ET&E, D/S&FA and FÁS, and other Departments and agencies as appropriate. There are a number of fora in place to ensure this coherence will continue, including the Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion which reports to the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion, Children and Integration. There are also monitoring and reporting fora under *Towards 2016* to ensure the social partners are involved. The Social Partnership Group on Labour Market Issues (under the chairmanship of D/ET&E) has been re-activated. It includes representatives from all relevant stakeholder bodies. [D/ETE]

NESF's Recommendation	Departmental Action Taken
<p>should be established to oversee the Framework's development, coherence and implementation.</p>	
<p>4.24 — A systematic evaluation process should be put in place to measure the overall impact of economic, employment and social inclusion policies aimed at tackling labour market vulnerability and in identifying innovative activity which could be mainstreamed. A Unit should be established in each Government Department to identify and mainstream learning from innovative activity at the local level into national programmes and services.</p>	<p>There are broad based goals and specific targets set out in the <i>NDP</i>, the <i>NAPSincl</i> and in <i>Towards 2016</i>. These targets will be monitored and reviewed over the lifespan of these documents. Fora are in place to provide for consultation and feedback.</p>
National Strategic Framework	
<p>5.25 — All service providers should develop a more people-centred approach to service delivery. The main elements of this should be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ making it easier for people to access the services and support they need; ■ giving people more choice over the specific package of supports to meet their needs; ■ giving people a more direct say on how services for them are shaped; and ■ providing a continuum of support for people between unemployment and work. 	<p>FÁS has extended the High Support Process (HSP) to those defined as 'not progression ready': ex-Job Initiative, people with disabilities, those made redundant, ex-offenders, Travellers and the homeless.</p> <p>FÁS created the 'Technical Support Grant' (TSG), in early 2007 to assist Employment Services Officers (ESOs) implement a range of responses to meet the needs of job seekers who experience barriers in access to the workforce. As the HSP uses multi-agency teams, a more coordinated approach for the individual is provided. An enhanced 'Caseload Management System' has been fully rolled-out to better track and support priority clients. FÁS now has an "Individual Learner Plan" available for all those presenting under the EAP process. [D/ETE]</p> <p>The Department of Social and Family Affairs has a range of options e.g. the Back to Work Allowance (BTWA) and the Back to Education Allowance (BTEA). It also administers a fund to assist with education, training and personal development. The Activation and Family Support Programme operates on a 'bottom-up' approach, i.e. local community groups/Family Resource Centres/Area Partnerships etc identify needs for social welfare customers and their families.</p> <p>The National Development Plan 2007-2013 involves investment of some €50 million over the lifetime of this NDP. The objective of the programme is to meet the key objective of promoting participation and social inclusion through activation measures aimed at all people of working age. [D/SFA]</p>

NESF's Recommendation	Departmental Action Taken
<p>5.26 A personalised approach to the delivery of services should be included in the Customer Charters and Business Plans of those agencies and bodies (statutory and non-statutory) who have a role in helping people into work. These should be drawn up in terms of specific standards to measure any improvements in the quality of service delivery (Department of Social and Family Affairs, Department of Education and Science, Partnership Companies, Health Boards, Local Authorities, FÁS etc).</p>	<p>In its Statement of Strategy (2006-2009), Priority Goal 6 states that FÁS, in collaboration with relevant Departments/Agencies, and other key partners, will continue to assist individuals and groups experiencing exclusion from training and employment opportunities.</p> <p>FÁS Employment Services has retained the national quality standard, Q Mark, accredited by Excellence Ireland Quality Association, with an improved score in 2007 (over 2006 accreditation). [D/ETE]</p>

Meeting the Changing Nature of the Labour Market

<p>2.33 A fair immigration system should be introduced which would both help to meet Ireland's future skills needs and at the same ensure that longer-term support measures (such as training, education, housing and healthcare) are put in place to help migrant workers and their families integrate into the community. At the same time those barriers causing labour market vulnerability must be addressed, otherwise low-qualified people here will face increasing competition for available jobs in the future. This could increase the numbers of dissatisfied low-skilled workers and the creation of polarised communities in the future.</p>	<p>New economic migration arrangements including a Green Card System to attract highly skilled workers came into effect on 1st February, 2007. These skills were identified by Forfás following extensive consultation and research. There is also a revised Work Permits system to meet labour needs that cannot be met from within the EEA. Both Schemes are based on the offer of a job, and are therefore less bureaucratic and more transparent. There are also new rights under the Employment Permits Act 2006, including the issuing of permits to employees rather than to employers, which state their entitlement to the National Minimum Wage.</p> <p>Under <i>Towards 2016</i>, a range of measures have been agreed to protect vulnerable and less skilled workers. To further this aim, the National Employment Rights Authority has already been established on an interim basis. [D/ETE]</p>
--	---

NESF's Recommendation	Departmental Action Taken
Helping People Towards Work	
<p>4.18</p> <p>Local service providers (statutory and non-statutory) should form strategic links at the local level to provide the full 'menu' of supports (information, guidance, counselling, education, training, mentoring, health, housing work experience, in-work support) to help people into work and stay at work.</p>	<p>FÁS works closely, at a local/regional level, with other service providers (e.g. LES, DSFA, HSE, etc.) to provide a comprehensive range of supports to clients, including relevant information. [DETE]</p>
<p>4.19</p> <p>This adaptive and networked approach should be formalised through <i>Service Delivery Agreements</i>, which would encompass issues such as local labour market research; one-stop services, addressing any gaps or duplication in service provision; and the monitoring of agreed outcomes. These Agreements would be brief (30–40 pages), the approach should be piloted in four regions (urban and rural) in 2006 by a lead group comprising the Department of Social and Family Affairs, FÁS, VEC's, County and City Development Boards, and Partnership Companies.</p>	<p>As mentioned above, FÁS has put in place Multi-Agency Teams to help address the needs of clients who are most distant from the labour market. [D/ETE]</p>
<p>4.20</p> <p>This form of inter-agency working should be supported by all Departments who have a role to play in this area by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ making support for inter-agency work explicit in mandates for service providers and rewarding inter-agency co-operation through increased budgets; ■ including inter-agency work in the job description of staff at national and local level and providing training and support for staff on how it can best be undertaken; 	<p>FÁS and the Department of Social and Family Affairs (DSFA) operate a comprehensive Memorandum of Understanding and Framework for Co-operation (MoU) at a national, regional and local level, to work closely together, and a range of actions and measures to support this. The MoU has recently been reviewed and will be updated. The importance of this work is recognised and supported by Joint National, Regional and Local Working Groups. FÁS has agreed a contract, with a schedule of activity, with each Local Employment Service (LES), to reflect local client diversity and needs. There is also strong liaison with FÁS and PLANET (the network of Area Partnerships Companies) through a range of Working Groups and Committees. [D/ETE and D/SFA]</p> <p>FÁS is involved in working with a number of pilot initiatives under EQUAL to mainstream the learning from these. It has also implemented a number of pilot activation projects in conjunction with D/SFA and LES. These are in the process of being externally reviewed with a view to informing future activation measures as</p>

NESF's Recommendation	Departmental Action Taken
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ giving local service providers greater flexibility in the services they provide; and ■ mainstreaming learning from relevant pilot initiatives. 	<p>outlined in <i>Towards 2016</i> and in the <i>National Development Plan</i>. [D/ETE]</p>
<p>3.39 County and City Development Boards should concentrate on 10-15 key labour market and social inclusion actions, within their three year plans, with the focus on inter-agency work with other bodies to bring about major improvements in outcomes for vulnerable people seeking work. There should be measurable outcomes to this work.</p>	<p>All County and City Development Boards (CDBs) completed a review of their Strategies for Economic, Social and Cultural Development in 2006, and defined their priorities for the next three years with an emphasis on integrated service delivery by participating agencies. While there was a range of strategic priorities across the 34 CDBs, there was a key focus on social inclusion actions.</p> <p>There have been considerable developments in regard to the CDBs since this NESF Report was drafted in 2005. For example, independent consultants were engaged by the DEHLG to examine the operation of the CDBs and to make recommendations to strengthen and develop them, in line with the NDP and a commitment in <i>Towards 2016</i>. This report was completed in January 2008 and will be submitted to Government shortly for approval. [D/EHLG]</p>
<p>3.24 Local structures set up to progress people into/stay at work should be streamlined and there should be a better alignment of active labour market and related social inclusion measures. This should be agreed within the proposed National Strategic Framework.</p>	<p>See recommendation 4.20 above.</p>
<p>3.9 The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and the Department of Finance should examine how essential services supported under Community Employment could be funded on a more sustained basis other than through CE funding. This would result in a smaller revitalised programme where the main criteria for the renewal of a project's contract would be determined by its success in improving the employability of participants.</p>	<p>There are currently over 22,000 people on the various Community Employment (CE) schemes. CE is an active labour market programme to provide long-term unemployed and other disadvantaged people with an opportunity to engage in useful work in their communities on a fixed term basis. CE helps unemployed people to re-enter the workforce. To this end and in order to support the delivery of essential services, the ring-fencing and prioritisation of places for health-related services, including assistance for people with disabilities, childcare and Drugs Task Force clients was introduced over the period 2002/2003. As a result, services provision by CE participants in these sectors will continue to be maintained at a constant level. The total number of these places is currently approximately 6,000, which represents 27% of current places. While the CE scheme is kept under constant review, there are no plans at present to mainstream these CE places. [D/ETE]</p>

NESF's Recommendation	Departmental Action Taken
<p>3.11 The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and FÁS should carry out a review of the €60 million per annum directed at measures for disabled people as to why so many are on specialist, rather than in mainstream training provision; why the main employment support for disabled people is not open to those seeking part-time work; and why the uptake by employers of available grants to support reintegration is so low.</p>	<p>A review of vocational training provided by specialist training providers recommends developing a joint bridging programme in the transition from rehabilitative to vocational training and other mainstream options. The review includes recommendations on the selection and assessment of trainees. Consideration of the various recommendations contained in the consultancy report are under on-going consideration.</p> <p>The number of approved training places in specialist training provision funded by FÁS is set at 1,973. FÁS Strategy for vocational training aims, <i>inter alia</i>, to increase referrals of disabled people to mainstream options.</p> <p>D/ETE Consultative Forum on an Employment Strategy will consider strategic issues for disabled people, including the possibility of new work options and awareness for employers. [D/ETE]</p>
<p>7.51 A particular priority for the Department of Education and Science in 2006 should be the serious on-going problem of early school leaving and the need for a more coherent range of policies within disadvantaged areas to tackle this problem. The envisaged role of the Educational Welfare Boards in this area should be implemented⁵².</p>	<p>The Department has adopted a broad-based approach to tackling the problems of early school leaving. This includes the establishment of the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) as the single national body with responsibility for school attendance. [D/ES]</p> <p>Curricular reforms have been introduced such as widening the educational experience through the Junior Certificate Schools Programme, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme, and the Leaving Certificate Applied. [D/ES]</p> <p>Preventative measures put in place are the School Completion Programme (this discriminates positively in favour of children and young people who are at risk), and the Home School Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL) (a partnership between parents, teachers and communities in the interests of children's learning). [D/ES]</p> <p>The key principle of early intervention underpins early childhood education measures and many of the literacy and numeracy measures, and those to address early school leaving are being adopted under DEIS, the action plan for educational inclusion. This plan, which was launched in 2005, places a renewed emphasis on the involvement of parents and families. The Department and the National Educational Welfare Board are working together to ensure that an integrated approach to children at risk is adopted. [D/ES]</p> <p>The action plan provides for a standardised system for identifying levels of disadvantage and a new Integrated School Support Programme (SSP). 670 primary schools as well as 203 second-level schools, have been included in the programme. [D/ES]</p> <p>Continuing emphasis will be placed in building on the Home School Community Liaison Scheme and the School Completion Programme. These services are being extended to all urban primary and second-level schools participating in a new integrated School Support Programme under DEIS. [D/ES]</p>

52 More detailed recommendations are made in *Early School Leavers*, NESF Report No.24, 2002.

NESF's Recommendation	Departmental Action Taken
	<p>Central to the success of the plan will be an increased emphasis on planning at school and school cluster level, target-setting and measurement of progress and outcomes. [D/ES]</p> <p>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 over the last five 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. [D/ES]</p>
<p>3.17 FÁS and the Department of Education and Science should ensure that the eligibility criteria for their programmes are framed in terms of a person's employability problems, rather than mainly on age and/or duration of unemployment as at present. The starting and finishing times as well as the location of courses should better accommodate people's needs. There should be a particular focus on enabling more women, who wish to return to paid work, after a long period out of the workforce, to participate.</p>	<p>FÁS successfully developed and implemented the 'Expanding the Workforce' pilot initiative for women. Following external evaluation, it is currently being mainstreamed and includes the provision of part-time, flexible training for women at the Foundation Level. In addition FÁS, in conjunction with Permanent TSB, set up an initiative targeted at women returnees living between the canals in Dublin Inner City. This is both a training and work placement initiative. Successful participants (those who achieve certification) will be invited to take-up a 9 month, part-time work placement with Permanent TSB. The Technical Employment Support Fund, as described above, also provides for the funding of flexible training and other supports for people who are distant from the labour market, including women returnees. [D/ETE]</p> <p>The Department of Education and Science has no plans to dispense with requirements regarding age or duration of unemployment for VTOS, Youthreach and Senior Traveller-Training Centres. However, the increased availability of employment has focused these programmes on how best to cater for the long-term unemployed. Providers of such programmes, generally VECs, are encouraged to provide them at locations and times that best suit the students. [D/ES]</p>
<p>7.55 The Department of Education and Science should restore the original vision of the Leaving Cert Applied, with its focus on the strengths of students other than academic achievements.</p>	<p>While a review was completed in 2000, the changes made were to provide for a reduction in the duration of modules and the level of assessment, and these could not be deemed to have reduced the vocational emphasis. Students are still required to complete mandatory modules in Work Experience, Jobsearch, Guidance, Enterprise, Mathematical Applications and ICT, in addition to two vocational specialisms and a general education programme, and the modes of assessment are unchanged. [D/ES]</p>

NESF's Recommendation	Departmental Action Taken
<p>6.37 Anticipatory training should be provided for people working in vulnerable sectors in those regions experiencing high levels of redundancies. This work should be undertaken by FÁS in co-operation with the IDA and Enterprise Ireland.</p>	<p>FÁS provides an early intervention and responsive programme, including flexible training where required, for people facing redundancy and company closures. FÁS services in this area were recently externally reviewed and have been followed up with appropriate enhancements.</p> <p>In a number of cases, Multi-Agency Task Forces are set up to provide a comprehensive response, at a local or regional level. [D/ETE]</p>
<h3>Helping People into Work</h3>	
<p>5.30 There should be a reform of State supports to ensure the minimisation of welfare to work disincentives and to simplify entitlements (taking into account recent reviews and evaluations). This should include an automatic payout of Family Income Supplement (FIS) for those with children taking up low-paid work based on their social welfare and revenue administrative records. The design of FIS itself should be examined to see whether it could be improved (taking into account the trends towards reduced family size, more forms of atypical work etc). This work should be undertaken by the Department of Social and Family Affairs, the Department of Finance and the Revenue Commissioners.</p>	<p>The automatic payout of FIS has been considered in the context of the examination of a second tier child income support. However, a number of practical issues have arisen, including the need to be responsive to changing circumstances. For example, FIS entitlement is based on current net earnings and family circumstances, whereas social welfare and revenue administrative records do not provide sufficient data regarding either current family links, net earnings or full-time/part-time status of employment. [D/SFA]</p> <p>A number of enhancements to work incentives were announced in Budget 2007 to facilitate and provide incentives for entry or re-entry into the workforce. In addition, the elimination of unnecessary complexities within and across schemes and the simplification of means testing from an internal and external customer service perspective was an overriding objective. The measures included improvements to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Jobseeker's Allowance and Farm Assist; ■ Jobseeker's Allowance, Farm Assist Disability Allowance and Pre-Retirement Allowance; ■ Lone Parent Benefits; ■ Jobseeker's Benefit, Illness Benefit, Injury Benefit and Health & Safety Benefit; ■ Rent Supplement; and ■ Budget changes 2006 and 2007 in the Back to Work Allowance Scheme. [D/SFA]
<p>5.14 An individual should retain all their existing secondary benefits⁵³ (for an agreed period of time, say, five years) when they take up training, education or work. This work should be undertaken by the Department of Social and Family Affairs.</p>	<p>A person who receives disability allowance or blind pension may retain the electricity/gas allowance, if held, and his/her free travel pass on transfer to Back To Work Allowance (BTWA), for the duration of that payment.</p> <p>In addition, some categories of recipient of free travel and the household benefits package (e.g. people in receipt of Carer's Allowance) can engage in a specified level of employment, education or training without it affecting their eligibility for household benefits and free travel e.g. if a person is claiming</p>

53 D/SFA list the most important ones as the National Fuel Scheme, Smokeless Fuel Allowance and Christmas Bonus Payments paid by DSFA; Rent, Mortgage Interest Supplements and Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance paid by the Community Welfare Division; and the Differential Rent Scheme administered by Local Authorities. There are also extra payments for those on Disability Allowance who receive Free Travel, Electricity/Gas Allowance and Telephone Allowance, all paid for by D/SFA.

NESF's Recommendation	Departmental Action Taken
	<p>Disability Allowance (DA) and engaged in rehabilitative employment and has earnings below €432.50 per week, they will still retain a small entitlement to DA and can, therefore, retain their entitlement to the secondary benefits listed above. [D/SFA]</p> <p>In addition, the Health Service Executive (HSE) and the Department of Health and Children have agreed with the Department of Social and Family Affairs that DA claimants engaged in employment under the earnings disregard will retain an entitlement to their medical card and any additional HSE payment (such as Mobility Allowance) for a period of 3 years.</p> <p>Improvements to Rent Supplement introduced in June 2007 extend qualifying conditions and ease the means test. €75 of additional income is disregarded in the assessment of means and 25% of additional income in excess of €75 is also disregarded. This improvement in the assessment of means for those with income from employment, applies to rent supplement recipients engaged in employment of less than 30 hours a week. Those accepted as eligible for accommodation under the Rental Accommodation Scheme, and who were not engaged in full-time employment in the previous twelve months, may now take up full-time employment and retain their Rent Supplement, subject to the normal qualifying rules of the scheme.</p> <p>Those in receipt of the Back to Work Allowance and Back to Education Allowance may retain some of their secondary benefits for the duration of the schemes if their household income is less than the income limits for the particular secondary benefit. [D/SFA]</p>
<p>5.15 A user-friendly, index linked, 'cost of participation payment' should be introduced, whereby people would retain (for an agreed cumulative period of time, say five years), the consolidated value of all their existing monetary secondary benefits on entering training, education or work⁵⁴. This would both minimise a main financial barrier to progression and greatly simplify payment and administration arrangements.</p>	<p>While the proposal to combine all current monetary entitlements in a single payment may result in a simplification of the process, the continued payment at current levels for up to five years (either as secondary benefits or as a 'cost of participation payment') would remove the advantages to be gained by a gradual withdrawal of payments and re-introduce the disincentive effects and potential poverty traps.</p> <p>In addition, the extent to which such a payment would replace non-social welfare monetary secondary payments, e.g. Refuse Charges/Exemptions and other local authority provisions and/or monetary provisions administered by other Government Departments, could have significant administrative and resource implications. [D/SFA]</p>

⁵⁴ NESF in their report, No, 113, 2005, put forward a longer-term goal for having more variable personally-tailored support packages to help people realise their potential. This would be accompanied by the eventual merging into the one programme of the several contingency-based social assistance payments which currently provide welfare transfers to people of working age.

NESF's Recommendation	Departmental Action Taken
<p>5.16</p> <p>The household income threshold for the retention of secondary benefits should be index-linked to the annual increase in the level of average earnings.</p>	<p>The income thresholds for the Fuel Allowance Scheme and the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance have increased in recent years.</p> <p>See also the response under 5.14 above. [D/SFA]</p>
<p>5.11</p> <p>The Department of Social and Family Affairs and FÁS (with the support of the Citizens' Information Board (previously Comhairle), Money Advice and Budgeting Service and local representatives of the range of marginalised groups) should provide a 'one-stop information service' for those seeking employment or taking up training, education or employment programmes. This should provide clear information on all the benefits and supports people should expect to retain when taking up employment or on participation in programmes.</p>	<p>FÁS provides comprehensive information on these at all its Employment Services Offices. It has recently initiated discussions with D/SFA with a view to exploring more customised 'benefit planning' information for clients, at an individual level.</p> <p>The Department has a network of local offices and Information Officers to provide services to all those seeking information on employment/education supports or training. In addition Facilitators engaged in the Social and Family Supports Service of the Department provide information on all benefits and supports people can retain when taking up employment or participating in particular programmes. [D/SFA]</p> <p>The Citizens' Information Board supports the provision of information on social services, to assist people seeking employment or taking up training, education or employment programmes, through its nationwide network of Centres, its Information Phone Service and Information website, www.citizensinformation.ie. [D/SFA]</p>
<p>5.9</p> <p>The Department of Health and Children should allow a person to retain their medical card for a five-year (cumulative) period after returning to work.</p>	<p>Actions taken in this area include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The current retention period of three years for medical cards for long-term unemployed who take up employment. ■ In 2006 it was agreed that a person in receipt of Disability Allowance or Blind Pension payment and who takes up employment will be allowed to retain their medical card for a maximum of three years. The current Programme for Government has a commitment to allow people with disabilities to work without losing key essential medical card cover after 3 years. ■ Both the income guidelines and the income allowances for children taken into account for the purposes of assessment of eligibility for the medical card were increased. ■ Since 2005, the assessment guidelines have been increased by 29% and more so in the case of dependent children. Applications are now considered on the basis of income net of tax and PRSI, and allowance is made for reasonable expenses in respect of mortgage/rent, childcare and travel to work. ■ Introduction of the GP visit card and improvements to the assessment of medical cards help to remove "poverty traps" and disincentives to taking up work or progressing to better paying work. Thus since January 2005, an additional 211,521 people have free access to GP services.

NESF's Recommendation	Departmental Action Taken
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Work is continuing on a new legislative framework to provide for clear statutory provisions on eligibility and entitlement for health and personal social services. ■ As signalled in the social partnership agreement, <i>Towards 2016</i>, it is also intended to review the eligibility criteria for assessment of medical cards in the context of medical, social and economic need. [D/H&C]
<p>5.34 The Department of Social and Family Affairs should undertake a research programme to provide evidence on measures most effective in helping to support people from welfare into work, including an analysis of the flow of people into and out of unemployment and the take-up rates of in-work benefit. This work should be published on an annual basis.</p>	<p>Having remained relatively static at some 12,000-13,000 over a number of years, those receiving FIS have, however, nearly doubled between 2001 and 2007. This reflects a very significant increase in publicity, including a concerted advertising campaign in 2006.</p> <p>A project currently under way on FIS and due to report in mid-2008 will provide more accurate data on this subject.</p> <p>An independent review in 2005 concluded that the NEAP process encourages many people to increase their job search efforts and improves Live Register exit. The duration for selection in the NEAP was reduced in October 2006 from six months on the Live Register to three months. This is in line with the commitments in <i>Towards 2016</i>. Increased emphasis will also be placed on engaging with lone parents, people with disabilities and all of working-age and in receipt of welfare payments.</p> <p>An Inter-Departmental Group with representatives of the Departments of Social and Family Affairs, 'Enterprise, Trade and Employment', and FÁS meets bi-monthly to analyse outcomes and develop appropriate policy interventions. [D/SFA]</p>
<p>6.39 The National Employment Service should ensure equality of access to service provision for those who have great difficulty getting work (whether full-time, part-time temporary etc whichever is the most realistic option), whether on the Live Register or not.</p>	<p>FÁS is a member of a 'High Level Activation Group' (also comprising the Departments of Social and Family Affairs, Enterprise, Trade and Employment and The Taoiseach), set up under <i>Towards 2016</i>. FÁS is obliged to provide priority attention and support to clients identified as part of this measure, in accordance with Government policy. [D/ETE]</p>
<p>6.41 A Client Profiling System should be developed (based upon the experience of recent Irish and international profiling exercises) and introduced by the National Employment Service to identify those clients who would benefit most from early intervention and the appropriate services and supports that would best help them into work.</p>	<p>The Department is currently undertaking a major national Profiling Study, building on earlier pilots. FÁS is working closely with D/SFA in this regard and is represented on the Steering Group set up to oversee this initiative. [D/SFA]</p>

	NESF's Recommendation	Departmental Action Taken
6.35	<p>The National Employment Service should act as an 'intermediary body' on behalf of low-qualified clients to co-ordinate and mediate appropriate supports for them from different agencies. Each client should have a <i>Personalised Action Plan</i> detailing the support to be provided to them by all service providers (including the National Employment Service) as well as their own obligations and incentives in availing of these services.</p>	<p>FÁS works closely with all clients who are activated under the National Employment Action Plan and with other vulnerable clients who present on a voluntary basis, and liaises, as appropriate, with other service providers. An Action Plan is agreed in respect of all NEAP clients. FÁS also contracts with the LES to provide an intensive mediation and guidance service to a range of clients distant from the labour market. [D/ETE]</p>
6.30	<p>The National Employment Service should follow-up on low-skilled clients placed in employment for a six-month period to provide them or their employer with any additional supports that could help sustain them in their jobs.</p>	<p>FÁS is currently in the process of exploring provision of guidance for the employed. In this context, consideration will be given to low-skilled clients. [D/ETE]</p>
6.32	<p>Three new performance indicators should be introduced (to complement the current focus on placement) to measure the effectiveness of the National Employment Service (FÁS and LES). These indicators should measure :</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> I. How well the employability needs of people are being met. II. The sustainability of the jobs where people are placed. III. Inter-agency co-operation required to support the up-skilling and personal development needs etc of clients. 	<p>FÁS has developed a range of quantitative and qualitative performance indicators in relation to its service provision. This is further supported through client externally- conducted surveys (annual) and regular reviews of services and programmes. It is examining how best to integrate the new performance indicators suggested, in conjunction with the LES. [D/ETE]</p>

NESF's Recommendation	Departmental Action Taken
<p>6.33 An independent Evaluation Unit should be established to carry out an outside assessment of the performance of the Service. This Unit could be located either within the NDP Community Support Framework Evaluation Unit or the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.</p>	<p>There was a full independent review of the NES carried out by Fitzpatrick's Associates in 2003. More recently, Indecon Consultants in 2005 did a review of the National Employment Action Plan activation process. This process currently takes up a large portion of NES work. On foot of these reviews, and in the context of their recommendations, a wide range of changes were put in place.</p> <p>The FÁS Employment Service produces an annual business plan, which includes goals, targets and both qualitative and quantitative key performance indicators. In addition, FÁS has concluded contractual agreements with the Local Area Partnerships for the provision of the Local Employment Service range of activities. These also include goals, targets and the range and type of activities to be carried out.</p> <p>Both strands of the NES report into the National Employment Service Advisory Committee. This Committee, which includes representation from all main stakeholders including the social partners, reports in turn to the main FÁS Board and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. [D/ETE]</p>
<h3>Keeping People at Work</h3>	
<p>5.41 The business case for employers implementing integrated equal opportunity/diversity strategies; work-life balance practices (taking account of childcare, disability and elder care needs) and retention policies (particularly for older workers and those who acquire a disability) should be examined and developed in a coherent way. This could be promoted through an award aligned with others such as the FÁS <i>Excellence through People Award</i> or the <i>Oz Ability Awards</i>.</p>	<p>Action here includes :</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sectoral Plan for people with disabilities consistent with the National Disability Strategy. 2. Job retention policy for people who acquire a disability is being considered by the Consultative Forum on an Employment Strategy. 3. As stated previously, the National Framework Committee for Work/Life Balance Policies mandate is to support and facilitate the development of family-friendly policies at the level of the enterprise rather than to focus on any specific type of employee. One of the key tasks of the Committee is to examine how best to improve access so as to realise the potential benefits that these working arrangements would offer from both an equality and competitiveness perspective. Government is providing funding of €350,000 in 2008 to support the activities of the Committee. [D/ETE]
<p>7.38 A formula for the sharing of workplace training costs for the up-skilling of low-skilled workers between the State, employers and trade unions should be developed by mid-2006. This is one of the biggest challenges to be faced and initial discussions should commence around those common points of agreement</p>	<p>The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs will be examining the issue of introducing incentives to increase participation in training. These include the exploration of individual learning accounts (a financial account that may receive contributions from the State and/or employer), tax incentives, and paid learning leave. [D/ETE]</p> <p>In 2008 FÁS will pilot an individual Learning Option arrangement for grant aiding the training of employed individuals in certain circumstances.</p>

NESF's Recommendation	Departmental Action Taken
<p>within the recent IBEC and ICTU proposals in these areas.</p>	
<p>7.53</p> <p>The initial focus of additional State support for worker training should include those young people (under 25 years of age) who left school early and are now at work. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment should fund four weeks formal off-the-job training for 5,000 of these young people each year over a five-year period (commencing in 2007) at an indicative annual cost of €20 million⁵⁵. A main means of facilitating this training should be that the young worker would receive up to €2,000 into their own Individual Learning Account (administered by the Department), for occupational training linked to a personal development plan and accredited under the National Framework of Qualifications⁵⁶. Other funding instruments such as training vouchers and grants should also be considered.</p>	<p>As mentioned previously, the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs will be examining individual learning accounts and based on their discussion the Department will determine, subject to agreement with the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Finance, whether to proceed with the introduction of individual learning accounts. [D/ETE]</p>
<p>7.39</p> <p>Training and education providers (FÁS, VECs, colleges etc) should offer more flexible provision, accredited within the National Framework of Qualifications, at times and locations to suit both employees and employers. There should be a particular focus on those in part-time, temporary and other atypical forms of work</p>	<p>The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs will be asked to examine in 2008, the flexibility of publicly-funded training programmes and in particular those provided by FÁS and Skillnets to ensure that their delivery is as flexible as possible. [D/ETE]</p> <p>The Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) in particular caters especially for people in full-time or part-time employment. [D/ES]</p>

⁵⁵ The estimated cost per employee would be €4,000, consisting of a €1,300 payment (in lieu of wages) for training undertaken during the working week and €2,700 to cover education/training/support costs.

⁵⁶ The young person would be able to choose from a list of FÁS/D/ETE approved training/education providers. There should be consultations between the Department, employers and unions to consider how training could be provided in a flexible way to suit the needs both of the employer and employee.

NESF's Recommendation	Departmental Action Taken
<p>(who receive on average less training than those in full-time employment). This is of particular relevance for women, a higher proportion of whom are engaged in these types of employment.</p>	
<p>7.48 Personal Development Plans and Mentoring should be provided for all low-skilled workers to help develop their occupational skills. The National Employment Service should undertake this mentoring role for those who take up work for up to a six-month period (supporting the client in adapting in the workplace and working through any issues which arise). Those already at work could be supported by different approaches, including trade union and/or employer learning representatives within the business or through a network of firms.</p>	<p>FÁS accepts the benefits of mentoring and follow-up of low-skilled clients after placement. However, the cost and resource implications are considerable. It places approximately 5,000 trainees, 7,000 scheme participants and 11,000 direct job seekers into employment during a year. This means mentor and follow-up for approximately 23,000 people a year. [D/ETE]</p> <p>For those already at work, FÁS has agreed to fund ICTU for the recruitment and training of 480 Union Learning Advocates whose recruitment should commence in 2008.</p> <p>FÁS has also agreed to fund the recruitment by SIPTU of 50 Union Learning Reps as a pilot project in Dublin and Cork, again to commence recruitment in 2008.</p>
<p>7.20 There should be a system of free fees for part-time students engaged, for the first time, in taking occupationally relevant courses at each level in further and higher education (i.e. at certificate, diploma and primary degree award levels) recognised within the National Framework of Qualifications⁵⁷.</p>	<p>In 2007 the eligibility criteria for participants in the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) was amended to allow free tuition to any adult with less than upper second level education.</p> <p>The Programme for Government, as agreed following the 2007 general election, includes a commitment to means-tested free fees for approved part-time courses at third-level. <i>Towards 2016</i> also contains a commitment to put in place a targeted scheme to alleviate the fees in public institutions for part-time courses at third level for those at work who have not previously pursued a third-level qualification.</p> <p>In following up on this, the HEA has developed proposals for a Modular Accreditation Programme (MAP) that could be delivered on a flexible part-time basis through a number of third-level institutions. Students participating in the Programme will benefit from a substantial fee subsidy. A pilot Modular Accreditation Programme commenced in Tallaght IOT in October 2007. The Higher Certificate in Good Manufacturing Practice and</p>

⁵⁷ There are 35,300 part-time students enrolled in higher education courses paying an estimated €45 million in fees each year. Based upon these figures, the indicative total cost of the above proposal would be €30 million per annum.

NESF's Recommendation	Departmental Action Taken
	<p>Technology, to be awarded at HETAC Level 6, will focus on providing education and training in fundamental and applied aspects of science and good manufacturing practice relevant to the pharma/ healthcare industry. It is proposed to launch a number of additional Modular Accreditation Programmes in 2008.</p> <p>Students pursuing approved part-time under-graduate courses are eligible for tax relief on their fees. The Strategic Innovation Fund which the Government introduced to incentivise reform and modernisation of higher education also provide opportunities for institutions to review their structures to provide better opportunities for part-time provision. For example, in the Institute of Technology sector, Cork IT is leading a project to enhance opportunities for people in employment to access learning to enhance their skills for current and future occupations. [D/ES]</p>

NESF's Conclusions on the Follow-up Action by Government Departments and Agencies on its Report No. 33

- 7.7** ● The focus of this report was on offering practical recommendations to help create more opportunities for vulnerable people to access training and education options and thereby find better quality jobs on the labour market. At the same time, it also emphasised the strong business case for a more equal and inclusive labour market approach. The NESF is pleased from the feedback received and the responses from Government Departments and Agencies, as evidenced in Box 7 above, that the report has contributed to the debate and influenced the conclusions of the main key strategic policy documents which currently frame economic, social and labour market strategies, notably the *NDP*, the *NAPSincl* and *Towards 2016*.
- 7.8** ● An important element underpinning all of this is that arrangements have been put in place to ensure more effective coherence, co-ordination and follow-through in the system and that mechanisms, involving consultations with the Social Partners, are now in place to monitor progress and provide feedback.
- 7.9** ● The recommendations of the report also fit in well into the 'lifecycle approach' towards meeting the needs of 'People of Working Age' which was proposed by the NESC and later adopted in *Towards 2016*. Of central importance in the present context is the objective in this social partnership agreement to prioritise participation in lifelong learning for low-skilled people by enhancing opportunities to access education and training, to upskill and develop new skills and secure recognised qualifications. This will be essential for the future in equipping people with the skills needed in an increasingly knowledge- based society.
- 7.10** ● While this country's overall employment rate (at 68%) is nearing the EU 2010 Lisbon Target of 70%, it is lower than other countries such as Denmark (76%), Netherlands (74%), and Sweden (72%). This is mainly due to our relatively lower employment rate for women. This is limited by the high cost and general shortage of childcare provision as well as other caring needs for the disabled and the elderly which have been largely undertaken up to now by women in the home. These constraints have also been highlighted in greater detail in other NESF reports that are covered in this periodic review. These will have to be tackled more resolutely if the goal of increased female participation in the workforce is to be realised.
- 7.11** ● We were still creating jobs at a relatively high level up to recently, but this, however, is now slowing down appreciably. For example, looking ahead, the ESRI predict a rapid deceleration in job growth – mainly resulting from the slowing down in housing construction. Unemployment rose to 4.6% in 2007 and is forecasted to rise to over 7.0% by the end of 2008⁵⁸. As highlighted in the NESF report, the problem of labour market vulnerability still remains and a fall in employment growth will have

more serious implications for those who are low-skilled. This gives added impetus for reinforced actions to alleviate the causes of labour market vulnerability as advocated in the NESF's report. In particular, the decline in employment in the construction sector can be expected to necessitate the re-training of semi-and unskilled –construction workers on a substantial scale.

- 7.12 ● An important feature of the follow-up action taken on the NESF's report is that of the extension of the Employment Action Plan process to marginalised groups such as the disabled, those made redundant, ex-offenders, Travellers and the homeless; better arrangements to track and support clients; multi-agency teams; and the establishment of a High Level Group to drive this agenda of change forward. A number of new and long-overdue features in this will be a streamlined and personalised approach to employment service delivery to help individuals. Supports provided by the Department of Social and Family Affairs to local community groups/ family resource centres will help identify employment, education, and training needs. It is important that all the bodies involved (the Department of Social and Family Affairs, FÁS, the LES, and the Area Partnerships) complement each other's work.
- 7.13 ● The NESF supports the further development work being undertaken by the Department of Social and Family Affairs, in conjunction with FÁS, on the development of a Client Profiling System as proposed in its report. It believes that this will help to identify those clients who would benefit most from early intervention. But it is critically important that appropriate services are available and on hand that would help them into work. This is particularly important to ensuring the success of extending the EAP to other marginalised groups.
- 7.14 ● The new migration system, with green cards, a revised work permit system and the new Employment Rights Authority are other important advances. With migrants now accounting for just under 15% of our workforce, we need to ensure that longer-term measures, such as training, education, housing and healthcare, are put in place to support their integration in the community. The NESF welcomes, therefore, that the integration of migrants has been set as one of the four priority goals in Ireland's *National Strategy for Social Inclusion*⁵⁹. However it shares the concern of the European Commission on the absence of clear targets, with continuing data shortages being advanced as the key explanatory factor. As the Commission has rightly stated it is important that data deficits are not allowed to become a barrier in themselves to more effective early actions in this area⁶⁰.

59 Government of Ireland, (2006), *National Report for Ireland on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion, 2006-2008*, Dublin: Government of Ireland.

60 European Commission, (2007), *EU Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2007- Ireland Country Profile*, Brussels: EU Commission.

- 7.15 ● The 2007 report by the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN)⁶¹, which acknowledges the policy contribution of the NESF report, highlights the challenge that Ireland faces in upskilling its workforce to meet the needs of a more competitive knowledge-based economy – evidenced by the need to upskill 500,000 individuals by 2020. The EGFSN report notes (as did the NESF report) that our level of lifelong learning is relatively low compared to other best performing countries. It highlights the particular problem of those at lower skill levels who have difficulty in accessing learning opportunities, and concludes that new innovative initiatives are needed to foster a culture of continuous lifelong learning. This very much re-echoes the NESF’s own conclusions in this area.
- 7.16 ● The issue of ‘*flexicurity*’ has gained in importance in the EU policy debate and will inform discussion here among the Social Partners as we move forward in an increasingly globalised competitive world. One of the challenges in this is to increase productivity, innovation and competitiveness, on the one hand; while at the same time addressing the challenges of social exclusion and unemployment among more vulnerable groups of workers and the emergence of a more segmented labour market⁶². In this regard, the European Employment Strategy calls for labour market institutions to adopt ‘flexicurity’ principles. This involves the interaction of four key elements which are (1) sufficiently- flexible contractual arrangements; (2) effective labour market policies; (3) credible lifelong learning systems and (4) modern social security systems. Ireland is characterised at present as having a high degree of flexibility but relatively low security for workers⁶³.
- 7.17 ● The NESF is pleased with the recent measures taken by the Departments of Social and Family Affairs and Health and Children to facilitate and provide enhanced incentives⁶⁴ in assessments for medical cards and retention of secondary benefits for entry or re-entry into the workforce. It also welcomes the focus on the elimination of unnecessary complexities and the simplification of services. The Department’s national campaign to improve the uptake of Family Income Supplement has been successful and resulted in a substantial increase in applications. Another notable development is that of the research being commissioned to examine factors behind the level of take up for the FIS scheme.

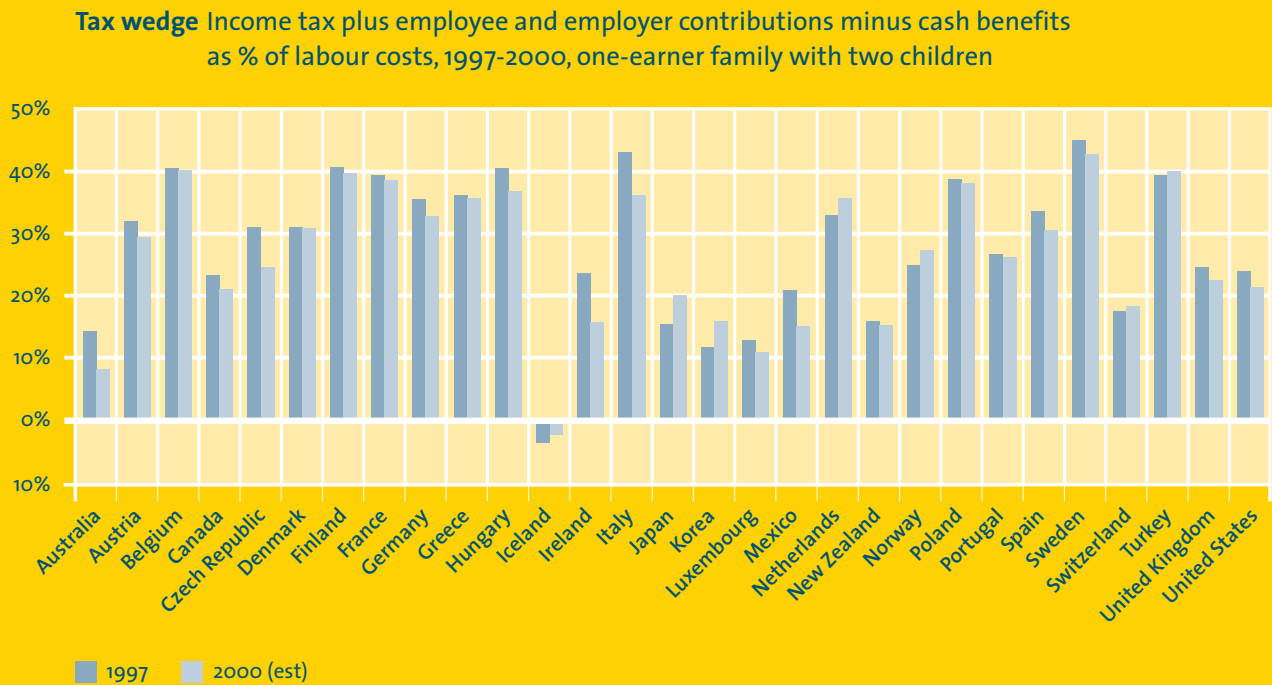
61 Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, (2007), *Tomorrow’s Skills: Towards a National Skills Strategy*, Dublin: Forfás.

62 EU (2007), *European Employment Observatory Review: Autumn 2006*, Brussels: European Commission.

63 EU (2006) *Employment in Europe 2006*, Brussels, European Commission.

64 The latest data, (*Taxing Wages*, 2006, oECD), shows that the ‘tax wedge’ in this country is one of the lowest in Europe (see Chart 4 below).

Chart 4 Comparison of 'Tax Wedge' across OECD Countries



Source: OECD Taxing Wages 1999-2000

- 7.18** ● Another positive development is the commitment in *Towards 2016* to allow people with disabilities to work without losing medical card cover after three years. However, the NESF wishes to restate its recommendation that a person be allowed to retain their medical card for a five-year cumulative period after returning to work. This would provide an extra needed incentive and help reduce uncertainty for job seekers, who in many cases are the most vulnerable in our society. It would also help simplify present arrangements.
- 7.19** ● A further welcome step is that the Expert Group on Future Skill Needs will now be examining proposals made in its report for incentives to increase participation in training, individual learning accounts for those young people who left school early, and the flexibility of publicly-funded training programmes. The NESF concurs with the comments of the European Commission that increasing employment participation and access to education among marginalised groups in this country will demand a more flexible response in the area of training and education provision, including removing rigidities in the scheduling of training.

- 7.20 ● FÁS is now examining how best to integrate the new performance indicators proposed in the NESF report in conjunction with the Local Employment Service. While FÁS accepts the benefits of mentoring and follow-up of low- skilled clients as recommended in the report, it stresses how the cost and resource implications are considerable. However, this should not negate the commencement of pilot initiatives - to ascertain what approaches work best and what/if any additional costs and resource requirements might arise. It is important to bear in mind that the cost to government of not doing anything in this area is also considerable.
- 7.21 ● The NESF is encouraged by the long-overdue introduction of a new Integrated School Support Programme by the Department of Education and Science to tackle the ongoing problem of early school leaving, which is particularly pronounced in areas of disadvantage. Also, the emphasis that will be placed under the DEIS on the setting of targets and on the measurement of progress and of educational outcomes is a notable step forward.
- 7.22 ● *Towards 2016* contains an important commitment to the creation of a targeted fund for the alleviation of fees in public institutions for those at work who have not previously pursued a third level qualification. Such support had been recommended in the NESF report. The funding of €10 m for a pilot scheme commencing in Autumn 2007 is an important first step.
- 7.23 ● Overall, the NESF is pleased with the comprehensive actions, either already taken or underway by Government Departments and Agencies, in responding positively by and large to the recommendations made in its report. We recognise that this is very much a work in progress and that there remain many more important challenges to be met. The vision of the report is for a more equal and inclusive labour market which, as well as providing everybody with the opportunity of rewarding employment, will also meet the needs of Irish business in a more globalised and competitive environment as well as providing everybody with the means to live more enjoyable lives. These objectives are complementary and are now underpinned by the improvements made in this country's migration arrangements and the measures taken to protect less-skilled workers.

VIII

Conclusions

Introduction

- 8.1** ● One of the distinctive features of the NESF is that it follows up with Government Departments the action (if any) that they have taken in the implementation of the policy recommendations contained in its reports. This is important as a record of the NESF's contribution so that (i) its membership can see the value of their commitment and contribution to the work of the NESF; and (ii) for the public at large also who are playing an active and increasingly important role through their submissions to the work of the Project Teams and the focus groups and also through their attendance and participation at the NESF's Plenary Sessions.
- 8.2** ● Reflecting the changing economic and social conditions in this country, the NESF's role has been reviewed and modified by successive governments over the years. It was originally established in 1993 for the purposes of contributing to the formation of a wider and more inclusive national consensus on long-term unemployment which at that stage stood at over 9%. This was more than three times that of Germany and the UK at the time and, in itself, was also greater than even the total unemployment rates in many OECD countries.
- 8.3** ● The NESF's role today centres on monitoring and evaluating the implementation of specific measures and programmes identified in the context of social partnership agreements, especially those concerned with social exclusion and inequality. This role was further strengthened by the Government in recent years when it decided that it would ask the NESF to facilitate public consultations on issues that they would refer to it from time to time. One example of this is the convening by the NESF of the meetings of the Social Inclusion Forum.
- 8.4** ● The most recent meeting of that Forum was held on 15th November last in the Royal Hospital Kilmainham. All meetings of the Forum have a particular policy focus and, on this occasion, it was on the following themes (taken from the 12 high level goals contained in the *Government's National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (NAPinclusion) 2007-2016*):
- Children, Goal 2, Literacy Difficulties in primary schools serving disadvantaged communities;

- People of Working Age, Goal 5, Employment and Participation;
- Older People, Goal 7, Community Care; and
- Communities, Goal 12, Integration of Migrants.

As in the past, a conference report was prepared and was widely circulated for attention to policy-makers, both at national and local levels, as well as to all those who attended the conference.

- 8.5** ● Another example of the NESF's extended consultation processes in its work is the strengthened role in recent times of the NESF Plenary Sessions through the involvement of others – apart from its own membership – such as national and international experts, statutory bodies and agencies, voluntary and community organisations and members of the public at large who have direct experience and knowledge of the policy issues under debate. This provides participants with a real opportunity to input before reports are finalised and then submitted to the Government, thereby adding to the strength and authority of their findings and recommendations.
- 8.6** ● These changes have also been complemented through the addition over the years of more groups from the Community and Voluntary Strand on the NESF membership such as Carers, Irish Rural link, the Wheel and more recently the Council for Social Housing, the Community Platform, the National Traveller Women's Forum and Migrants.

Overall Policy Impact of the NESF

- 8.7** ● The NESF continues to fulfil a unique role in providing a link, through its Oireachtas Members (Strand One), between elected political representatives and the social partnership process and institutions. This has been developed further in more recent times with presentations and discussions of NESF reports at meetings of Joint Oireachtas Committees and also through debates in both Houses of the Oireachtas and the tabling of Parliamentary Questions in the Dáil.
- 8.8** ● Based on past experience and its desire to experiment further and explore new approaches, the NESF nowadays seeks to establish a new dynamic balance in the policy design process that involves mobilising people in new ways, through focus groups, written submissions, presentations at meetings, and especially through identifying successful pilot initiatives at local levels and examining how best these could be accepted and mainstreamed at the national level.
- 8.9** ● Earlier sections of this report have pinpointed how the responses from Government Departments and Agencies have varied in following up on NESF recommendations. These have not been as positive and decisive as could have been the case in certain instances and reflect a range of factors

such as resource constraints, the capacity or willingness of Government Departments to accept these recommendations, and possible conflicts with their own set of policy priorities.

- 8.10** ● Nevertheless, the NESF believes that, when viewed in the overall, it has continued to input effectively and influenced Government policy decisions for the better. Moreover, the political impartiality of its advice has continued to be a distinguishing feature of its work.
- 8.11** ● Over the longer-term, what may be seen by many outsiders as its most lasting contribution is likely to have been the role that the NESF has played in:
- having greater policy priority given by successive governments here over the last decade to equality and social inclusion issues;
 - seeking to have a more effective and sustainable balance between economic and social policies; and
 - strengthening and making more inclusive the social partnership process and its supporting institutions through the addition and widening of the community and voluntary sector as a social partner⁶⁵.
- 8.12** ● The NESF keeps its own structures and working arrangements under regular review and makes whatever changes are necessary to these in the light of experience. More generally, and drawing on its own experience over the years, it might now be an opportune time, in the context of the formal review this year of *Towards 2016*, for the social partners themselves to stand back and take a critical look at the social partnership process as a whole⁶⁶, as well as its supporting institutions, with a view to enhancing its capacity to:
- continue to contribute to the resolution of policy issues; these are tending nowadays to be more complex than was the case in the past; this is particularly the case in relation to inequality, discrimination and social exclusion issues;
 - drive change dynamically and be part of the solution, thereby minimising the risk of becoming a barrier and part of the problem;
 - provide greater vision, leadership and encouragement to facilitate organisational changes, both in the private and public sectors, and with greater focus on outcomes, as distinct from inputs and process issues;
 - deliver real change and reform in the public sector;
 - give greater priority to implementation issues, especially the need for greater delegation, decentralisation and more experimentation so as to take better account of local needs and of local knowledge; and

⁶⁵ See the NESF'S Opinion No.4 entitled *Post PCW Negotiations – A New Deal*, 1996.

⁶⁶ See *Saving the Future*, Tim Hastings, Brian Sheehan and Pdraig Yeates (2007), for a review of the major challenges to social partnership in sustaining competitiveness and social justice in an increasingly more demanding and globalised economy in the future.

— refine its structures and working methods to better reflect changing trends in the workplace, in technology, in welfare and more generally in society as a whole.

In the above context, it should be mentioned that the Department of the Taoiseach is at present engaged in a *Value for Money and Policy Review* of the National Economic and Social Development Office (NESDO) and its three constituent bodies.

- 8.13** ● In essence, then what is envisaged here is how best to strengthen and develop the capacity of our social partnership model, with a view to building in more flexibility and experimentation to confront the unforeseen challenges and uncertainties of the future. One of the criticisms made of social partnership is that social policy has not been given greater priority up to now and that one of the features of the process, namely of ‘incremental change will not significantly alter the place of anti-poverty policy within Irish public policy’⁶⁷.

Future Policy Challenges

- 8.14** ● As underlined consistently by the NESF in its work, seeking a better balance between economic and social issues in our society should be seen as a necessary basis to ensure that growth and prosperity are sustainable into the future⁶⁸. The challenges involved in this have to be addressed more vigorously, not only by government, but also by all the other actors and interest groupings in our society as a collective effort, if the multi-dimensional and deep-rooted problems and issues involved are to be effectively tackled.
- 8.15** ● Our economy has made remarkable progress over the last decade, with over 2 million people now employed, a rapidly increasing population and an end to forced emigration. The scale of relative improvements in our levels of prosperity now make us one of the richest countries in the EU in terms of GDP per head, although other measures of well-being such as GNI or Consumption per head place us at around the EU Euro-area average.
- 8.16** ● At the same time this unprecedented level of success has provided us with the resources to tackle the persistent social problems in our society more decisively and consistently than has ever been possible in the past. This is reflected in the improvements made to social services such as education, health and housing and the improved opportunities for those who are disadvantaged to better their life chances. Although income inequalities here are among the highest in Europe, and inequalities in terms of access to resources, representation, recognition and respect remain serious issues for our society, nevertheless, most people are now

⁶⁷ *The Institutionalisation of Anti-Poverty and Social Exclusion Policy in Irish Social Partnership*, E. Connolly, Combat Poverty Agency, 2007.

⁶⁸ The European Commission has regularly highlighted that Member States who perform best are those where the principles of active welfare policies are applied; a more recent report here by the Equality Authority and the NCPP, *High Performance Work Systems*, 2008, pinpoints that workplace equality and diversity strategies are key components to high-performance work systems.

better off than was the case a decade ago and measures of life style (see below) show us to be among the top OECD countries in terms of 'happiness'.

- 8.17** ● Moreover, the available evidence also points to greater upward social mobility and equality of opportunity between social groups in recent years, although the children of the well-off still enjoy very substantial advantages over those from disadvantaged and working-class backgrounds.
- 8.18** ● It must be acknowledged, however, that despite these successes, we face major challenges in stepping up the momentum and seeking to achieve greater progress in the future for those – e.g. people with disabilities, minority groups, migrants, the unemployed, lone parents and early school leavers - who are not benefitting as fully as they should from the much better living standards and opportunities that the majority of our people are now enjoying.
- 8.19** ● This is evidenced by the proportion of our people at risk of poverty which is one of the highest rates in the EU27⁶⁹. We also have the third highest level of child poverty in the EU. Moreover, the effect of pension and social welfare transfer payments in reducing these relative rates of poverty is low compared to our EU partners. There are also high numbers who experience discrimination in our society. For example, the CSO's Special Survey on Equality (2005) reported that 12.5 % of those aged 18 and over stated that they had experienced discrimination over the previous two years. The latest data⁷⁰ on income distribution again confirms the widening income gap in our society, with the top 10% of households having a disposable income 14 times that of households in the lowest 10% income bracket.
- 8.20** ● In 2004, the level of social protection expenditure in Ireland was 17% of GDP, which was just over half the rate in Sweden. International comparisons of net social expenditure (i.e. after-tax) for a selected number of countries are shown in Figure 6 beneath. It is instructive to note⁷¹ that of the 6% of GNI gap here below the OECD average, 1.3 percentage points of this is due to our younger population, 0.5 percentage points is due to our lower unemployment rate while the balance reflects relatively lower welfare benefits in this country.
- 8.21** ● However, it must be acknowledged that gross expenditure here on social services has increased by more than 50% between 2001 and 2005, equivalent to a 2 percentage point rise in our net expenditure figure of under 15% shown in Figure 6 beneath. Moreover, there has been a substantial shift in budgetary policy in recent years, with welfare increases moving ahead of wages and with tax reductions at only slightly more

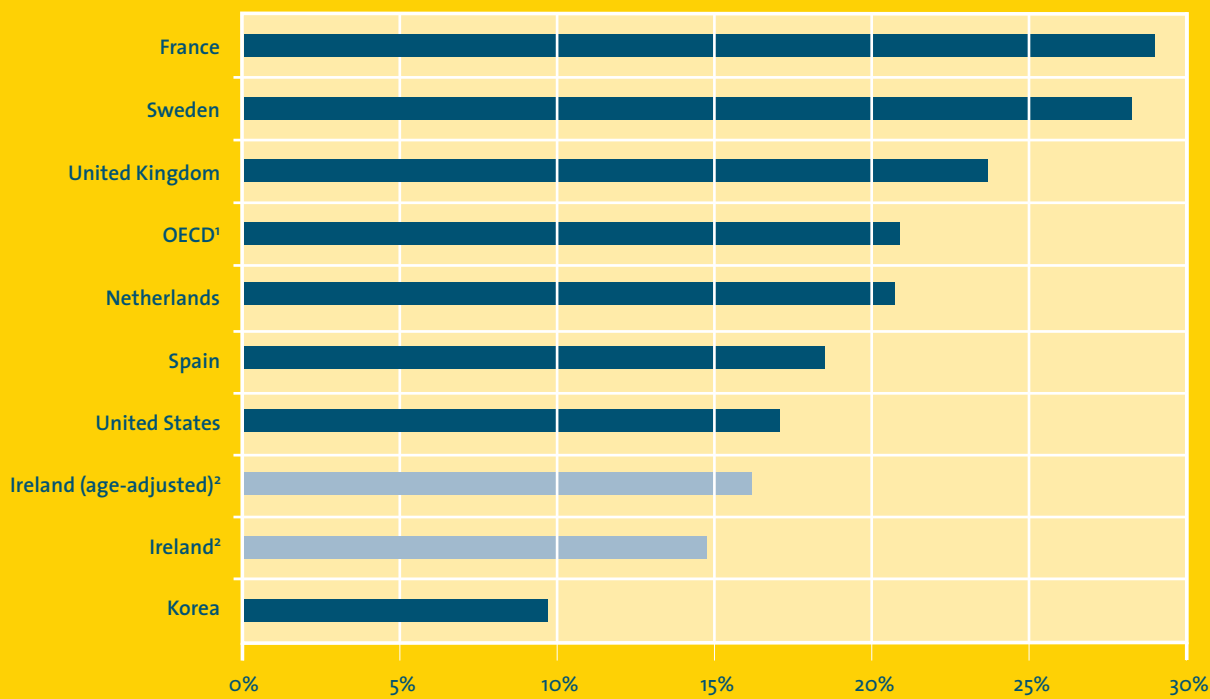
⁶⁹ *Measuring Ireland's Progress 2007*, CSO, June 2008.

⁷⁰ *2004/2005 Household Budget Survey*, CSO, July, 2007.

⁷¹ *OECD Economic Surveys*, Ireland, 2006.

than wage increases. This is reflected in the last five budgets' success in reducing the rate of income poverty here by 37% at the 50% income threshold⁷². Under Budget 2008, the lowest income groups will gain progressively more, with the result that the 'overall distributional effect will be similar to that achieved in the last five budgets'⁷³.

Figure 6 International Comparisons of Social Expenditure



¹ Unweighted average of 23 OECD Countries.

² In per cent of GNP. The age-adjusted series shows net expenditure if Ireland's Population had the OECD-average age structure.

Source: Adema, W. and M. Ladaique (2005), "Net Social Expenditure, 2005 Edition: More Comprehensive Measures of Social Support", OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers, No.29, OECD, Paris, www.oecd.org/els/workingpapers

⁷² *Analysis of Budget 2007*, Combat Poverty Agency.

⁷³ *Budget 2008*, (Annex B), page C.27, December 2007.

- 8.22 ● Against the background of the unprecedented increases in wealth, employment and living standards in this country in recent years, there is increased concern being expressed, however, on how this is impacting on the overall quality of life, people's happiness, their work-life balance, the sense of community, of volunteering and social bonds in our society, and on our distinctive culture and identity.
- 8.23 ● These are complex issues and ones where there are sharp differences of views, often expressed at extremist and emotional levels and lacking supporting evidence in many instances. Some see the 'Celtic Tiger' as having lifted the boat and raised living standards for everybody. However, others dispute this and are very much of the view that our model of development has been paid for at too high a price in terms of an overall deterioration in the quality of life, a breakdown in family life and in traditional values, and serious damage to our environment. Nevertheless, both sides are in agreement that the profound changes in our economy and in our society are posing enormous challenges, but also opportunities, and that these are likely if anything to continue and accelerate into the future.
- 8.24 ● Given the fundamental issues that are at stake, it is important that everybody in their different roles and involvement in our society should understand and be kept informed on the impact of the underlying economic, social and environmental factors involved. For this purpose, we need the best research analysis and evidence-based data that is available to enable us to assess alternative options and choices before final policy decisions are made. Empirical evidence on some of these issues has recently become available from the ESRI⁷⁴ and other leading academic researchers which will add considerably to our understanding and knowledge of some of the profound changes underway in our society.
- 8.25 ● What is clear, however, is that the accelerated pace of population and demographic changes, inward migration, and changes in our society – as evidenced by the diversity of family structures and the decline in the traditional family, fewer children, an ageing population, violence, drug addiction, divorce, single parenthood, a multi-cultural society and a fall-off in religious practice – all highlight and emphasise the need for more informed and open discussions of these issues and of their policy implications.
- 8.26 ● This debate should involve all institutions and bodies throughout all levels of our society, including the statutory and voluntary and community sectors, as well as the media. It should be well-prepared by commissioned research and improved statistical data and analyses. Serious gaps at present in these areas need to be addressed. The social partners should play a key leadership role in this area and the NESF intends to turn its attention to this area in its future work.

74. *Best of Times? The Social Impact of the Celtic Tiger*, Fahey, Russell and Whelan, ESRI, 2007.

- 8.27** ● Using GDP/GNP as measures of well-being is nowadays being increasingly questioned. Once a certain level of material needs is met, further increases in wealth will not necessarily result in corresponding increases in well-being. This conclusion is supported by many international studies. Consequently, other measures have come to be used such as self-sufficiency indicators (employment, childcare costs, welfare benefits, and access to services), equity (income inequalities, gender pay gaps, housing costs), health indicators (mortality, morbidity), social capital and social cohesion (levels of crime, voting at elections, volunteerism and trust in political institutions) and subjective measures based on survey results of the population⁷⁵.
- 8.28** ● International comparisons⁷⁶ show that GDP per head is positively correlated with life satisfaction levels, with a score of 0 for those who are fully dissatisfied, to a score of 10 for those who are fully satisfied. On this basis, Ireland does very well with a score of over 8 – this is near the top along with countries such as Denmark, Netherlands, Belgium and Austria, while the former East European countries of Poland, Slovakia and Hungary are near the bottom at around 6.
- 8.29** ● Further comparisons show that well-being varies depending on gender, age, marital status; education and income (see Figure 7 below). On average, life satisfaction is marginally higher for men. The differences by age are smaller. Satisfaction levels also tend to be higher for the elderly than for young people. On average, it increases with education level and varies by marital status, with levels for married people around 10 points higher than for those who are divorced and widowed. The difference is higher still for separated individuals. Single or never married people are the least satisfied.
- 8.30** ● The changing role of the family and the importance of family-friendly employment policies at European level, in relation to flexitime and flexicurity, and of integrating these with equal opportunities and good quality and affordable child and elder care, have been highlighted in a European quality of life survey⁷⁷. The findings from this survey have many policy implications in terms of supports, particularly for women – for example having children if they so wish, and making choices between employment and care – and that supports for men are needed to change traditional attitudes to caring. Developing family-friendly policies should, therefore, cover both men and women⁷⁸. In particular flexicurity measures should be co-ordinated with work and care demands, particularly time-off to provide care. The European Foundation’s study considered that this

⁷⁵ *Society at a Glance, Social Indicators*, OECD, 2006.

⁷⁶ *WorldValue Surveys and World Development Indicators*, World Bank, 2004.

⁷⁷ *First European Quality of Life Survey: Families, work and social networks*, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2005.

⁷⁸ *Reconciling adaptability and equal opportunities in European workplaces*, Webster, European Commission, 2001.

Figure 7 Life satisfaction varies between people with different characteristics

	Gender		Age				Education			Marital Status				Income		
	Men	Women	<25	25-50	51-64	65+	Low	Middle	High	Divorced	Married	Single never Married	Widowed	High	Medium	Low
Austria	0.83	0.80	0.83	0.82	0.82	0.79	0.78	0.85	0.88	0.71	0.85	0.80	0.76	0.88	0.78	0.77
Belgium	0.73	0.75	0.81	0.74	0.78	0.75	0.67	0.75	0.80	0.63	0.82	0.69	0.61	0.85	0.75	0.61
Canada	0.78	0.79	0.85	0.75	0.81	0.80	0.78	0.77	0.83	0.69	0.85	0.70	0.80	0.85	0.82	0.70
Czech Republic	0.67	0.65	0.64	0.96	0.60	0.66	0.59	0.69	0.76	0.54	0.71	0.65	0.52	0.75	0.66	0.57
Denmark	0.85	0.81	0.85	0.85	0.82	0.78	0.82	0.88	0.84	0.72	0.87	0.83	0.76	0.92	0.87	0.75
Finland	0.83	0.86	0.82	0.86	0.84	0.82	0.79	0.91	0.86	0.76	0.91	0.78	0.79	0.89	0.88	0.76
France	0.67	0.64	0.72	0.66	0.61	0.65	0.63	0.67	0.70	0.58	0.72	0.64	0.53	0.78	0.64	0.54
Germany	0.72	0.74	0.78	0.71	0.71	0.79	0.70	0.76	0.75	0.61	0.75	0.76	0.74	0.78	0.79	0.66
Greece	0.59	0.58	0.57	0.58	0.61	0.62	0.52	0.56	0.64	0.61	0.63	0.56	0.51	0.69	0.58	0.49
Hungary	0.38	0.39	0.49	0.38	0.32	0.39	0.33	0.43	0.54	0.29	0.43	0.38	0.26	0.56	0.31	0.23
Iceland	0.85	0.86	0.84	0.89	0.82	0.79	0.81	0.87	0.95	0.69	0.91	0.85	0.81	0.93	0.89	0.77
Ireland	0.86	0.83	0.82	0.84	0.83	0.87	0.82	0.85	0.88	0.82	0.90	0.80	0.85	0.90	0.84	0.80
Italy	0.71	0.66	0.67	0.69	0.70	0.67	0.64	0.70	0.74	0.72	0.73	0.66	0.54	0.77	0.66	0.62
Japan	0.50	0.53	0.50	0.47	0.54	0.59	0.45	0.50	0.62	0.44	0.55	0.42	0.58	0.65	0.48	0.46
Korea	0.45	0.45	0.45	0.44	0.45	0.57	0.33	0.46	0.46	0.23	0.50	0.39	0.35	0.60	0.47	0.33
Luxembourg	0.83	0.81	0.79	0.82	0.87	0.82	0.76	0.84	0.85	0.81	0.85	0.80	0.81	0.89	0.88	0.75
Mexico	0.79	0.81	0.82	0.78	0.79	0.87	0.78	0.80	0.85	0.77	0.82	0.80	0.78	0.81	0.80	0.76
Netherlands		0.89	0.96	0.90	0.88	0.85	0.85	0.92	0.91	0.80	0.96	0.88	0.76	0.94	0.92	0.79
Poland	0.47	0.49	0.63	0.48	0.43	0.46	0.43	0.49	0.61	0.32	0.50	0.56	0.36	0.60	0.53	0.38
Portugal	0.66	0.65	0.70	0.59	0.60	0.62	0.53	0.74	0.83	0.65	0.69	0.63	0.53	0.77	0.60	0.43
Slovak Republic	0.45	0.44	0.53	0.44	0.43	0.40	0.37	0.47	0.54	0.30	0.45	0.50	0.38	0.54	0.40	0.35
Spain	0.65	0.66	0.65	0.66	0.67	0.61	0.60	0.70	0.70	0.71	0.69	0.65	0.51	0.70	0.69	0.52
Sweden	0.80	0.78	0.77	0.79	0.80	0.80	0.78	0.78	0.82	0.72	0.87	0.71	0.63	0.87	0.83	0.70
Turkey	0.33	0.42	0.41	0.34	0.38	0.39	0.37	0.35	0.38	0.25	0.38	0.38	0.35	0.49	0.32	0.29
United ¹ Kingdom	0.76	0.71	0.76	0.73	0.73	0.71	0.74	0.72	0.77	0.65	0.78	0.73	0.70	0.80	0.71	0.64
United States	0.77	0.76	0.78	0.72	0.81	0.85	0.73	0.76	0.79	0.70	0.84	0.74	0.75	0.89	0.76	0.72
OECD-26	0.69	0.68	0.71	0.68	0.68	0.69	0.64	0.70	0.74	0.60	0.73	0.66	0.61	0.77	0.69	0.59

¹ Great Britain Only.

Source: WorldValue Surveys and World Development Indicators, World Bank, 2004.

should include income coverage, not only for poor households, but also to encourage men to take caring leave. European experience shows that only a fraction of fathers take parental leave.

- 8.31** ● The *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016*, and related documents such as *Towards 2016* and the *National Development Plan 2007-2013*, identifies a range of targets and policy actions as well as strategic goals, within the lifecycle approach, in the following key priority areas :
- Children,
 - People of Working Age,
 - Older People,
 - People with Disabilities, and
 - Communities.
- 8.32** ● A number of high level goals have been set for each of these priority areas, with the overall aim of reducing *consistent* poverty to between 2-4% by 2012, and eliminating it totally by 2016. Other national strategy documents have been developed for groups experiencing inequality, but significant challenges remain to secure their implementation. These include the National Women’s Strategy, the Disability Strategy, the National Action Plan against Racism and the Report of the Task Force on the Traveller Community. A criticism made of policies in these areas is that their focus up to now has been on targeted measures and groups, rather than that of achieving specific equitable outcomes⁷⁹.
- 8.33** ● All of the above documents will, of course, form the backdrop to the NESF’s Work Programme 2007-2010 which will be finalised shortly. But the main challenge facing all of these will be that of effective delivery of their policy commitments on the ground. As experience has shown, this is an important weakness in our system. This will require robust monitoring and evaluation if it is to be addressed adequately, and will need the involvement of all stakeholders in these processes.
- 8.34** ● Equality and social inclusion issues are the focal point for the NESF’s work. These have to be tackled on a multidimensional basis, and in this regard a recent ESRI report⁸⁰ has drawn a number of important conclusions which are worthwhile repeating here:
- the need to move beyond income in identifying those most in need;
 - the value of the consistent poverty measure – using the revised set of basic deprivation items that are now included in the Social Inclusion Plan – is underpinned; and

⁷⁹ See the article by Mel Cousins in *Welfare Policy and Poverty*, Combat Poverty Agency, 2007.

⁸⁰ *Multiple Deprivation and Multiple Disadvantage in Ireland: An Analysis of EU-SILC*, C.T. Whelan, B.Maitre and B. Nolan, April 2007.

— the consistently poor represent a distinctively deprived group, and should be accorded a very high priority, but another group is at risk of being exposed to basic or multiple deprivation at particular times due to factors such as home ownership, education and social class background.

- 8.35** ● These findings present new evidence-based data to improve our understanding of the impact of policy actions and will be of particular value to the work of the NESF in the future. The need for such data has been stressed regularly by the NESF⁸¹ and the above report, plus others that are planned by the ESRI covering various stages in the lifecycle, are especially timely and welcome. The CSO has also recently begun the publication of a very useful new series of social indicators, with an emphasis on disaggregation by key characteristics such as the nine equality grounds covered by this country's equality legislation.
- 8.36** ● The NESF welcomes the above strategic approaches and important overarching structures that have now been put in place to achieve greater integration and complementarity between economic and social policies. But serious challenges remain of policy implementation and access to quality public services, linking economic and social rights to public services standards delivery, and moving to a new, more customer-focused system geared to meeting individual needs, with clear targets and outcomes for the client and an equality infrastructure to cater for the increasing diversity of customers. Allied to this is the planned use of E-government in providing on-line delivery of public services. However, a report from the Comptroller and Auditor⁸² was critical of performance in this area e. g. the Public Services broker had not delivered on the promise to provide a single website on data sharing between service providers. The NESF had put great store on the usefulness of this for disadvantaged groups in our society.
- 8.37** ● It does not necessarily follow that improvements to public services must involve increases in public expenditure. Indeed, as the NESF's work over the years has shown, and as confirmed by the present report, improved outcomes and results for the client can be obtained in certain instances through better policies, improved targeting, monitoring and evaluation, more cross-cutting teams and enhanced co-operation between statutory and voluntary bodies on the ground. However, it is true that improvements to services (e.g. early childhood care and education, training and up-skilling, literacy) will call initially for increased public expenditure but this will be offset by the resulting benefits to individuals and society as a whole in the long-term.

⁸¹ *Getting the Evidence, Using the Evidence and Evaluating the Outcomes*, Conference Proceedings.

⁸² E-Government, Special Report No 58, 2008.

- 8.38** ● In this regard a further critical report from the Comptroller and Auditor General⁸³ has highlighted the need for timeliness in public services delivery, systems to measure improved effectiveness in delivery, the setting of targets for reform initiatives, and the achievement of quality services targets. Up to now, modernisation has been mainly limited to improving administrative capacity or changing delivery systems. However, a welcome sign (as announced in his recent Budgets by the Minister for Finance) is that reforms will now move forward to linking outputs to outcomes, as distinct from the focus up to now which was largely on measuring inputs. This is potentially a significant step forward and will provide an important new basis to measuring and monitoring improvements to public services.
- 8.39** ● For this new customer-centred approach to be successful⁸⁴, it must be underpinned by a set of guiding principles, namely:
- a whole-of-government approach with improved co-ordination and integrated provision of services;
 - a focus on early intervention /prevention;
 - a strategic medium-term perspective for the planning, funding and provision of services;
 - greater autonomy, with innovative and pilot approaches at local level, and a built-in evaluation culture to determine what is or is not working; and
 - more use of user consultation models to better inform the development and delivery of services on key aspects such as rights and quality standards, and complaints/appeals procedures.
- 8.40** ● A new radical approach to public services – self-directed services – which allocates budgets to people so that they can shape the services that they need has recently come to the fore in the UK⁸⁵. This has the potential to deliver more effective services at lower cost than the traditional inflexible top-down approaches and has now got the support of a number of government departments and agencies in Whitehall.
- 8.41** ● The NESF attaches key importance to whole-of-government or cross-cutting approaches so as to achieve more effective delivery of public services. However, these approaches are difficult to put into operation (referred to as the ‘wicked issues’ by the former UK Prime Minister Mr. Tony Blair) and involves much time and effort in bedding them down in the system. A recent example here of the need for and the potential of such approaches is provided by the Regeneration Plans for Moyross and Southill areas of Limerick City (see www.limerickregeneration.ie).
- 8.42** ● Experience in the UK over the last 10 years, which has been to the fore in driving forward initiatives in this area, shows that this has been

83 *Value for Money Report 56, Improving Performance: Public Service Case Studies*, 2007.

84 *Improving the Delivery of Quality Public Services*, NESF Report No.34, 2007.

85 *Making It Personal*, C. Leadbeater, J. Bartlett and N. Gallagher, Demos, 2008.

mixed but that it is getting better and that the impact in many cases will not be evident for some time to come⁸⁶. The lessons from this pinpoint the importance of its being driven from the top, effective feedback, partnership-based with key stakeholders involved, the focus on outcomes and area-based and a willingness to tackle the ‘silo’ thinking and autonomy of government departments and agencies⁸⁷.

- 8.43** ● Acceptance of the above principles raises serious challenges and will require radical reforms to the system and in the policy-design process in terms of better linkages between policy-making, implementation and monitoring⁸⁸, balancing greater autonomy and innovation/risk-taking with accountability, and evaluating the growth in government agencies – there are now over 200 of these (non-trading) agencies, nearly half of whom were established since 1990⁸⁹. Many of these serve to deliver at local level the social partnership model that exists at national level. However, there is no general set of criteria to help policy makers decide whether or not to establish an agency to carry out a particular function, or on the appropriate levels of autonomy and accountability to be given. An important finding from a recent study⁹⁰ is that the absence of a planned approach to the development of agencies in the social inclusion sector has ‘led to poor policy outcomes and the ineffective use of public resources’.
- 8.44** ● Another report reviewing Irish agencies contains a number of recommendations in this area which the NESF endorses⁹¹. These include:
- A formal set of criteria to help decision-makers on whether or not to locate a task in an agency;
 - A continuum of legal and structural agency types, with corresponding levels of autonomy and accountability mechanisms in relation to HR, finance and policy;
 - Clear and precise links between agency strategy statements, the inputs to agencies (staff, finance) and their outputs, expressed in performance indicators; and
 - Regular monitoring by the parent departments.

Rights and Public Services Standards

- 8.45** ● In recent years there has been a growing debate in this country on economic and social rights⁹² and linking these rights to establishing standards for the delivery of public services. This has centered round the use of human rights principles to help disadvantaged groups, such

⁸⁶ *Making Policy in Theory and Practice*. H. Bochel and S. Duncan, 2007.

⁸⁷ *Joined-up government: past, present, and future*, G. Mulgan, 2005.

⁸⁸ *A Framework for Partnership – Enriching Strategic Consensus through Participation*, NESF, 1997.

⁸⁹ Breakfast Briefing to the Association of Chief Executives of State Agencies, by Dr. Muirís Mac Cárthaigh, IPA, February 2008.

⁹⁰ *Advisors Advocate: The Impact of State Agencies on Social Policy*, Órlaigh Quinn, IPA, 2008.

⁹¹ *The Corporate Governance of Agencies in Ireland*, Anne-Marie McGauran et al, IPA, 2005.

⁹² Certain rights have, of course, already been established under this country's equality legislation, namely the Employment Equality Acts and the Equal Status Acts; the public sector has been a significant focus for allegations of discrimination under both of these Acts.

as people with disabilities, the homeless, lone parents, and Travellers, to achieve equality and social inclusion. In its recent Strategic Plan⁹³ the Irish Human Rights Commission sets out six strategic goals in this regard, namely:

- to promote a culture conscious of human rights;
- to push for human rights to be central to the formulation of all policy and legislation;
- to work with the Northern Irish HRC;
- to advocate for a society that values diversity by respecting human rights;
- to identify emerging challenges; and
- to strengthen the Commission’s ability to do its work.

8.46 ● The NESF supports these goals and will take them into account in its future work. Moreover, and drawing on the experience with the Disability Act and the associated Sectoral Plans by Government Departments, these rights should now be given more concrete expression in terms of standards of services that clients can expect for key social services in areas such as health (mental and physical), education, housing, social welfare, vulnerable groups support and employment. But for these standards to be effective, it is essential⁹⁴ that they:

- Are jointly set by all stakeholders and serve to improve practice and performance throughout all levels of public services delivery;
- Be measurable and be validly compared across diverse service providers;
- Be used as tools for learning and of improving performance;
- Meet minimum human rights standards; and
- Provide the basis for public policy interventions and influence the allocation of public resources.

8.47 ● A good analysis in the UK of how human rights could be used empirically as a tool to improve the public’s experiences of public services and of the steps that the Government should take to encourage and facilitate this were outlined in a recent report by the Ministry of Justice there⁹⁵.

8.48 ● Standards for public services should also be set⁹⁶ by reference to criteria such as:

- *Adequacy*, standards should be sufficiently high and a high proportion of those in need should be covered;

⁹³ *Strategic Plan 2007-2011*, Human Rights Commission, 2007.

⁹⁴ *The Developmental Welfare State*, NESF, 2005.

⁹⁵ *Human Rights Insight Project*, Ministry of Justice Research Series, 2008.

⁹⁶ *Access to Social Rights in Europe*, Professor Mary Daly, in the Seminar Report on Social Rights and Social Cohesion, Anne Lavan (editor), 2002; see also *Modernising Irish Government*, N. Collins, T. Cradden and P. Butler, 2007, for a critique on the delivery of public services, including an analysis of the reasons for a number of significant failures here in recent years.

- *Acceptability*, with less complexity around regulations, clear eligibility procedures and full implementation of the provisions;
- *Affordability*, people on differing incomes should be able to afford services that meet their needs; and
- *Accessibility*, ease of access to public services and this may require a locally-based strategy.

An additional criteria should now be added to the above, namely that of adaptability in terms of flexibility in the design and delivery of public services to take into account the practical implications of the increasing diversity and varying needs of our now multi-cultured population.

EU Dimension

- 8.49** ● As part of the follow-up to the March 2000 Lisbon Agenda, the EU has an on-going role in monitoring the Member States' anti-poverty strategies, and the latest (published) Joint Council/Commission report has highlighted the challenges that stand out for attention by this country (see Box 8 below). These will also provide important reference points in the consideration and implementation of the NESF's 2007-2010 Work Programme.

Box No. 8

Challenges to Promoting Social Cohesion in Ireland

- ensure investment in services is sustained, and delivered in an integrated manner along with welfare reforms, and more accessible and more flexible delivery attuned to the needs of those groups at greatest risk of poverty and exclusion;
- continue to promote active inclusion to ensure the range of issues associated with the significant on-going levels of migration are effectively addressed;
- ensure adequacy of income support for pensioners and achieve a significantly wider coverage of supplementary private schemes, while taking due account of the long-term sustainability of the public finances;
- tackle the major barriers of access to healthcare (e.g. financial burden of care and long waiting times) and ensure more equitable access, notably through enhancing nationwide availability of primary health care, acute care, emergency and long-term care services; improve care coordination and integrated care; and
- achieve efficiency gains in service delivery while improving the health of the population and reduce substantial health inequalities.

- 8.50** ● These are major challenges also throughout the EU, with 16% of Europeans at risk of poverty, 10% are in jobless households, 20% live in sub-standard housing and the proportion of early school-leavers is over 15%. These figures have hardly changed over the years – in some cases they have deteriorated. This has led to calls by NGOs at European level⁹⁷ for the role of the Open Method of Co-ordination (with its common objectives, common indicators, national reports on strategies and EU action programmes) to be strengthened within the overall EU's Lisbon Strategy. Additionally, it is claimed that the focus of the Strategy has moved to the first two pillars (competitiveness, and more and better jobs) while the third pillar (social inclusion) has been downgraded.
- 8.51** ● It is also interesting to note the results from recent consultations held across Europe⁹⁸ which showed that a majority of European citizens would like to see the EU play a more substantial role in the social area, but at the same time they believe that national governments should remain the key decision-makers⁹⁹. The topics that were identified in these consultations were environmental issues, social conditions, family policy, immigration and the EU's role internationally.
- 8.52** ● An important recent development in policy-making at European level is the initiative taken by the European Commission of consulting with the public throughout Europe for their views before finalising its policy proposals for submission to the Council of Ministers. One example of this is the current consultation which aims to generate debate on social realities across Europe, with the focus on: the nature of work; modern family life; demographic trends; the position of women in society; social mobility; the incidence of poverty and inequality and changing values and increasingly multicultural societies. The Equality Authority has been to the fore in this and, in its recent report¹⁰⁰ to the European Commission, has sought to place equality, diversity and non-discrimination at the centre of this discussion and for the EU to develop policy tools to drive forward a more effective strategy.
- 8.53** ● This is also an important time on the European agenda and the recent Spring meeting of the European Council, under the Presidency of Slovenia, launched the second three-year cycle of the Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs. In this regard, the NESF attaches key importance to maintaining the balance between the three elements of that strategy, namely economic, social and environmental. Attempts in some quarters to give greater priority to the economic component should be strongly resisted. Additionally, it is opportune to review also the European employment strategy, ten years after its launch. The most recent Joint Council-

97 *NetworkNews*, EAPN, Brussels 2007.

98 King Baudouin Foundation; the findings were discussed at a Plenary Session of the National Forum on Europe in Dublin Castle last June.

99 At the meeting last year in Brussels under the German EU Presidency of the People Experiencing Poverty Group participants emphasised how their experience of social exclusion was quite different to that of policy-makers.

100 *Europe's Social Reality*, report on a round-table discussion, Equality Authority, 2007.

Commission Employment Report showed that 22 million more new jobs need to be created in Europe if the employment target of 70% is to be achieved by 2010.

- 8.54** ● An important element in this is the current debate at European level on ‘flexicurity’ and the search for flexibility and security on the labour market.¹⁰¹ The NESF has already made known its views on this key policy area and again it wishes to emphasise the importance of involvement by the social partners at European level in the search for comprehensive and balanced approaches that take into account all the related elements involved such as life-long learning, social protection mechanisms, active labour market policies and the different situations and traditions in the Member States. At its meeting in December last, the EU Employment and Social Affairs Ministers agreed common principles on flexicurity based on 4 components: effective labour market policies, flexible and reliable contractual arrangements, comprehensive lifelong learning strategies and modern and adequate social protection systems.
- 8.55** ● Finally, a recent review¹⁰² has again highlighted how social democratic countries such as Norway and Sweden, as well as corporatist states (The Netherlands, Germany and France) outperform the neo-liberal models of the market economy, as represented by the US and the UK. Moreover, social well-being in the former group of countries is superior in terms of greater equality in the distribution of incomes, less poverty, less economic insecurity, less distrust of other people, and lower levels of stress and crime. The author concludes that the environmental problems and crises this century will be of a kind not experienced before and will affect socio-economic groups and countries differently. She considers that the best way to meet these challenges is through a co-operative approach between the social partners using the principles of the social democratic model.

FuturesIreland Project

- 8.56** ● The National Economic and Social Development Office (NESDO) – which comprises the NESF, the NESC and the NCPP – has been asked by the Department of An Taoiseach and the Social Partners to conduct a national foresight exercise. The project, which is now called *FuturesIreland*, is an ambitious and creative initiative which will examine the current assumptions and beliefs that orientate practice, thinking and policy-making in Ireland and in doing so will work to develop greater insight about future possibilities.

¹⁰¹ ‘Flexicurity’ has come in for critical comment at European level on the grounds that it is more focused on labour flexibility and less so on strengthening social security systems. More than 70% of Europeans now consider that a job for life is a thing of the past.

¹⁰² *Does Europe need neoliberal reforms?* Mica Panic, Cambridge Journal of Economics, 2007.

- 8.57** ● It will involve participative methods, networks of diverse actors and the use of long-term strategic futures techniques. The process is increasingly regarded as a valuable addition to traditional ways of informing public policy planning, decision-making and initiating joint actions.
- 8.58** ● More commonly associated with future-oriented thinking in the areas of science, technology and innovation, the *FuturesIreland* project will encompass a broader canvas of socio-economic activity in both the public and private sectors. Its underlying aim is to explore how the Learning Society generates wealth and social cohesion; equip policy-makers and a range of economic and social actors with an understanding of the implications of a learning society for their areas of responsibility; and provide an increased capability to make informed decisions in the context of a rapidly changing and globalised world.

Defining the Project

- 8.59** ● Ireland in 2030 will be a very different place. This project will sketch some of the likely differences. However, the challenge is not so much to predict what future generations will do but to think about the capabilities and competences that might be advantageous for individuals, communities, businesses and institutions to have in 2030. For example, individuals might like to have a sense of the type of upbringing, education and society that would foster the confidence, creativity and connectedness to ensure the emergence of sufficient 'cultural creatives' in every walk of life. Similarly, institutions might like to develop a sense of how stronger accountability, effective decentralisation and the future of 'curriculum' in education can be discussed and advanced.
- 8.60** ● In essence, the project is about the processes of governance and decision-making that will allow Irish society retain its deep sense of self and what it stands for while also enabling the economy to continue to prosper. The project, therefore, has three underlying concerns – governance, social cohesion/identity and wealth creation. In each of these areas it will focus on particular concerns or problems that will be critical to how Ireland responds to future challenges. A National Advisory Panel (NAP) – comprising a broad range of senior representatives from government departments, local authorities, business, trade unions, and the universities and an International Expert Panel - have been established and will report directly to the NESDO Board. Initial meetings with the NAP suggest that the project might focus on the following three practical areas of application.
- Governance for the future: well-being and quality of life;
 - Social cohesion: cultural identity in 2030; and
 - Wealth creation: business, environment and innovation.

What makes the FuturesIreland Project different?

- 8.61** ● Initial meetings of the National Advisory Panel have helped clarify the distinctive features of the FuturesIreland project, its purpose and a sense of how its objectives will be achieved. There are three principal ways that the project differs from other foresight work in Ireland:
1. there are many futures/foresight projects, but no over-arching view;
 2. Ireland is now beyond catch-up and convergence; we have, therefore, to think about possibilities in new ways; and
 3. An intuition that discussion of three spheres – public governance, business/economy and society – can inform each other in ways that we have not fully captured to date.
- 8.62** ● The working methodology for the FutureIreland will be both close to current policy and problem-solving approaches, particularly as it is practiced within the NESDO bodies, but also quite distinctive. It will be similar in that it is a participative process which is linked to current decision-making. The objective is to change how we look at society and economy – to change the terms of the debate. The process will be rooted in rigorous analysis. It will also build on the fact that knowledge about solutions and the critical problems facing society are widely held.
- 8.63** ● But the process will be different from existing approaches in that it is about developing imagination. It will be less about mediating differences and more about confronting ourselves with new possibilities and frontiers. The objective is to look out and to imagine and then to re-examine current practices, ways of thinking, skill-sets, roles, procedures etc. This requires an ability to step outside the everyday concerns, a sense of unlearning – at least temporarily. The methodology also relies on weak signals and experiments, rather than representative experience and established or best practice.
- 8.64** ● Finally, it is envisaged that the project will be completed by early Autumn next. It is being funded under the NESDO Subhead within the Vote for the Department of the Taoiseach. For further details see www.futuresireland.ie.

Annexes

Annex I Terms of Reference and Constitution of the NESF

1. The role of the NESF will be:
 - to monitor and analyse the implementation of specific measures and programmes identified in the context of social partnership arrangements, especially those concerned with the achievement of equality and social inclusion; and
 - to facilitate public consultation on policy matters referred to it by the Government from time to time.
2. In carrying out this role the NESF will:
 - consider policy issues on its own initiative or at the request of the Government; the work programme to be agreed with the Department of the Taoiseach, taking into account the overall context of the NESDO;
 - consider reports prepared by Teams involving the social partners, with appropriate expertise and representatives of relevant Departments and agencies and its own Secretariat;
 - ensure that the Teams compiling such reports take account of the experience of implementing bodies and customers/clients including regional variations;
 - publish reports with such comments as may be considered appropriate; and
 - convene meetings and other forms of relevant consultations appropriate to the nature of issues referred to it by the Government from time to time.
3. The term of office of members of the NESF will be three years. During the term alternates may be nominated. Casual vacancies will be filled by the nominating body or the Government as appropriate, members so appointed will hold office until the expiry of the current term of office of all members. Retiring members will be eligible for re-appointment.
4. The Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson of the NESF will be appointed by the Government.
5. Membership of the NESF will comprise 15 representatives from each of the following four strands:
 - the Oireachtas;
 - employer, trade unions and farm organisations;
 - the voluntary and community sector; and
 - central government, local government and independents.
6. The NESF will decide on its own internal structures and working arrangements.

Annex II Membership of the NESF

Independent Chairperson Dr. Maureen Gaffney

Deputy Chairperson Mary Doyle

Strand (i) Oireachtas

Fianna Fáil	John Curran T.D. Michael McGrath T.D. Cyprian Brady T.D. Seán Ardagh T.D. Senator Brian Ó Domhnaill Senator Geraldine Feeney Senator Marc McSharry
Fine Gael	Dan Neville T.D. Terence Flanagan T.D. Senator Paul Coghlan Senator Jerry Buttimer
Labour	Seán Sherlock T.D. Willie Penrose T.D.
Green Party	Senator Dan Boyle
Independents	Senator Rónán Mullen

Strand (ii) Employer/Trade Unions/Farming Organisations

a. Employer/Business Organisations

IBEC	Danny McCoy Tony Donohoe
Small Firms' Association	Patricia Callan
Construction Industry Federation	Dr Peter Stafford
Chambers of Commerce/	
Tourist Industry/ Exporters' Association	Seán Murphy

Trade Unions

Technical Engineering & Electrical Union	Éamon Devoy
Civil & Public Service Union	Blair Horan
AMICUS	Jerry Shanahan
SIPTU	Manus O'Riordan
ICTU	Esther Lynch

Agricultural/Farming Organisations

Irish Farmers' Association	Michael Berkery
Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers' Association	Mike Doody
Irish Co-Operative Organisation Society	Emer Duffy
Macra na Feirme	Catherine Buckley
Irish Countrywomen's Association	Carmel Dawson

Strand (iii) Community and Voluntary Sector***Gender***

National Women's Council of Ireland	Órla O'Connor
-------------------------------------	---------------

Housing

Irish Council for Social Housing	Karen Murphy
----------------------------------	--------------

Labour Market

Congress Centres Network	Kathleen McCann
--------------------------	-----------------

Social Analysis

CORI	Sr Brigid Reynolds SM
------	-----------------------

Poverty

Society of St Vincent de Paul	John Mark McCafferty
-------------------------------	----------------------

Youth/Children

NYCI	Marie Claire McAleer
------	----------------------

Children's Rights Alliance	Jillian van Turnhout
----------------------------	----------------------

Older People

Senior Citizen's Parliament/Age Action	Maireád Hayes
--	---------------

Disability/Carers

Disability Federation of Ireland	Joanne McCarthy
----------------------------------	-----------------

The Carer's Association	Frank Goodwin
-------------------------	---------------

Rural

Irish Rural Link	Seámus Boland
------------------	---------------

Voluntary/Networks

Community Platform	Frances Byrne
--------------------	---------------

The Wheel	Ivan Cooper
-----------	-------------

Others

National Traveller Women's Forum	Maria Joyce
----------------------------------	-------------

Integrating Ireland	Stavros Stavrou
---------------------	-----------------

Strand (iv) Central Government, Local Government and Independents

Central Government

Secretary-General, Department of Finance
 Secretary-General, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment
 Secretary-General, Department of Social and Family Affairs
 Secretary-General, Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs
 Secretary-General, Department of the Environment, Heritage and
 Local Government

Local Government

Association of County & City Councils	Cllr Ger Barron
	Cllr Constance Hanniffy
	Cllr Mattie Ryan
Association of Municipal Authorities	Cllr Paddy O'Callaghan
Local Authority Members' Association	Cllr William Ireland

Independents

	Cáit Keane
Institute for the Study of Social Change, UCD	Prof. Colm Harmon
NUI Maynooth	Prof. Mary P. Corcoran
Trinity College, Dublin	Prof. Rose Ann Kenny
Southside Partnership	Marie Carroll

Secretariat

Director	Seán Ó hÉigeartaigh
Policy Analysts	Dr Anne Marie McGauran
	Dr Jeanne Moore
Executive Secretary	Paula Hennesly

Annex III NESF Publications

(i) NESF Reports

Report No.	Title	Date
1.	Negotiations on a Successor Agreement to the PESP	Nov 1993
2.	National Development Plan 1994 – 1999	Nov 1993
3.	Commission on Social Welfare – Outstanding Recommendations	Jan 1994
4.	Ending Long-term Unemployment	June 1994
5.	Income Maintenance Strategies	July 1994
6.	Quality Delivery of Social Services	Feb 1995
7.	Jobs Potential of the Services Sector	April 1995
8.	First Periodic Report on the Work of the Forum	May 1995
9.	Jobs Potential of Work Sharing	Jan 1996
10.	Equality Proofing Issues	Feb 1996
11.	Early School Leavers and Youth Employment	Jan 1997
12.	Rural Renewal – Combating Social Exclusion	Mar 1997
13.	Unemployment Statistics	May 1997
14.	Self-Employment, Enterprise and Social Inclusion	Oct 1997
15.	Second Periodic Report on the Work of the Forum	Nov 1997
16.	A Framework for Partnership – Enriching Strategic Consensus through Participation	Dec 1997
17.	Enhancing the Effectiveness of the Local Employment Service	Mar 2000
18.	Social and Affordable Housing and Accommodation: Building the Future	Sept 2000
19.	Alleviating Labour Shortages	Nov 2000
20.	Lone Parents	July 2001
21.	Third Periodic Report on the Work of the Forum	Nov 2001
22.	Re-integration of Prisoners	Jan 2002
23.	A Strategic Policy Framework for Equality Issues	Mar 2002
24.	Early School Leavers	Mar 2002
25.	Equity of Access to Hospital Care	July 2002
26.	Labour Market Issues for Older Workers	Feb 2003
27.	Equality Policies for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People: Implementation Issues	April 2003
28.	The Policy Implications of Social Capital	June 2003
29.	Equality Policies for Older People: Implementation Issues	July 2003
30.	Fourth Periodic Report on the Work of the NESF	Nov 2004
31.	Early Childhood Care and Education	June 2005
32.	Care for Older People	Nov 2005
33.	Creating a More Inclusive Labour Market	Mar 2006
34.	Improving the Delivery of Quality Public Services	Feb 2007
35.	The Arts, Cultural Inclusion and Social Cohesion	Mar 2007
36.	Mental Health and Social Inclusion	Oct 2007
37.	Fifth Periodic Report on the Work of the NESF	June 2008

(ii) NESF Opinions

1.	Interim Report of the Task Force on Long-term Unemployment	Mar 1995
2.	National Anti-Poverty Strategy	Jan 1996
3.	Long-term Unemployment Initiatives	Apr 1996
4.	Post PCW Negotiations – A New Deal?	Aug 1996
5.	Employment Equality Bill	Dec 1996
6.	Pensions Policy Issues	Oct 1997
7.	Local Development Issues	Oct 1999
8.	The National Anti-Poverty Strategy	Aug 2000

(iii) NESF Opinions under the Monitoring Procedures of Partnership 2000

1.	Development of the Equality Provisions	Nov 1997
2.	Targeted Employment and Training Measures	Nov 1997

(iv) Social Inclusion Forum: Conference Reports

1.	Inaugural Meeting	Jan 2003
2.	Second Meeting of the Forum	Jan 2005
3.	Third Meeting of the Forum	Feb 2006
4.	Fourth Meeting of the Forum	Nov 2007

(v) NESF Research Series

1.	A Study of Labour Market Vulnerability and Responses to it in Donegal/Sligo and North Dublin	Jun 2005
2.	The Economics of Early Childhood Care and Education	Sept 2005
3.	Delivery of Quality Public Services	Sept 2006
4.	Mental Health in the Workplace: Research Findings	Oct 2007
5.	In The Frame or Out of the Picture	Feb 2008

(vi) NESF Occasional Series

1.	Evidence-based Policy Making: Getting the Evidence, Using the Evidence and Evaluating the Outcomes	Jan 2007
----	--	----------

(vii) NESF Seminar Series

1.	In The Frame or Out of the Picture	Feb 2008
----	------------------------------------	----------

Annex IV Structures and Working Arrangements of the NESF

Introduction

1. The following structures and working arrangements are designed to enable the NESF to work as efficiently and effectively as possible in the discharge of its mandate.
2. The NESF will work through:
 - Plenary Sessions;
 - A Management Committee;
 - Project Teams; and
 - Ad Hoc Working Groups.

Plenary Sessions

3. The functions of the Plenary Sessions will be to debate, *inter alia*,:
 - the NESF's draft Work Programme, on the basis of proposals submitted by the Management Committee; and
 - the Reports prepared by the NESF's Project-based Teams and Ad Hoc Working Groups.
4. Ministers may attend and participate at these Sessions at the invitation of the NESF or on their own initiative. Opposition Spokespersons may also be invited to attend and participate at these Sessions.
5. Plenary Sessions will be held between four and six times a year. The main venue for meetings will be Dublin Castle but one or two Sessions a year may be held in provincial locations.
6. Plenary Sessions will be held in public, except when dealing with issues relating to the internal management of the NESF. Invitations to concerned interests to put forward their views and attend such Sessions will normally be left to the discretion of the NESF's Chairperson. "*Public*" in this context will also be interpreted to mean that the media will be invited to attend.

Management Committee

7. The Management Committee will be responsible for the management of the NESF and in ensuring its overall effectiveness and functioning. This role will include:
 - assisting the Chairperson of the NESF, in conjunction with the NESF Secretariat, in carrying out her Executive role;

- formally adopting the NESF’s Work Programme in the light of the discussions at Plenary level; this should indicate a statement of the problem to be addressed under each main theme and serve also as the ‘mission statement’ for the subsequent work of the Project Teams;
 - monitoring the Work Programme and the Structures and Working Arrangements on an on-going basis; agreeing amendments in both these areas which may be necessary in the light of experience;
 - when work is initiated on a particular theme or sub-theme, the Committee may give broad guidelines to the Team concerned on the specific issues to be covered, give indicative timetables for completion of the project, make suggestions on sources of information, outside expertise, etc. but this should not be such as to unduly delimit or circumscribe the autonomy of the Teams;
 - formally adopting the Reports prepared by the Project Teams and Ad Hoc Working Groups; these may be accompanied with a NESF commentary, as the Committee considers appropriate, based on the debate at Plenary level; in advance of the Management meeting, the Project Team/ Working Group may meet to review and amend its Report, as it sees fit, taking into account the comments made at the Plenary Session;
 - preparing the Periodic Reports on the work of the NESF and on the implementation of its recommendations; for this purpose, the Committee may prepare guidelines on the procedures to be followed in discussing follow-up action by Departments on recommendations contained in NESF Reports;
 - in exceptional circumstances, and where action has to be taken at short notice such as a request from Government or an individual Minister, the preparation of Reports in this case may be undertaken either by the Committee itself or through its establishing an Ad Hoc Working Group for this purpose;
 - the composition of such a Group, which will be drawn equally from all four Strands and decided on by the NESF’s Chairperson, in consultation with the Management Committee, will have particular regard to involving Members with relevant expertise and experience in the area under examination; these Groups may also be assisted by outside experts; and
 - in the above circumstances and because of the time constraints involved, these Reports will be adopted uniquely by the Management Committee (this will be referred to as the “*fast-track*” procedure).
8. The Management Committee will be chaired by the NESF’s Chairperson. Each of the Strands will have three representatives on the Committee.
 9. Finally, the quorum for meetings of the Committee will be a simple majority of Members. This will also apply in the case of meetings of the Project Teams and of Ad Hoc Working Groups.

Project Teams

10. Reflecting the NESF's new focus on policy implementation and evaluation, including the impact of policies in specific geographic areas, these Teams will be the main body involved in the preparation of Reports. The Teams – whose membership should not exceed twelve at most – will comprise balanced representation from the various organisations and interests involved, with particular account taken to ensure representation by the local and/or specialised elements of the national social partnership organisations.
11. To encourage as full participation as possible, and, the ownership of and input by the full NESF membership of the final results, Project Teams will:
 - at an early stage in their work make an interim presentation at Plenary Sessions on how their work is progressing; this will provide an opportunity for all NESF Members to make an input before reports are too far advanced and finalised by the Teams;
 - Plenary Sessions might break into smaller Working Groups for the above purpose;
 - for information purposes, periodic up-dates (1/2 pages), will be circulated by the Teams through fax/e-mail to all NESF Members on the progress made in their work; and
 - furnish attendance records to the Management Committee, with a view to addressing any problems that may arise in this area.
12. The work of the Teams will be specifically directed at:
 - evaluating the effectiveness of policies;
 - identifying corrective action and/or timely changes to ineffective policies; and
 - improving policy-making by better informing and influencing the reshaping of strategic policy analysis.
13. Save in exceptional circumstances when the NESF's Chairperson would need to be consulted, the appointment of Team Chairpersons, and/or Project Leaders if needs be, will be made by the Project Teams themselves.
14. The Teams will have particular regard to and take into account as fully as possible any guidelines prepared by the Management Committee to facilitate them in their work.
15. For this purpose, and to serve as a standard-type frame of reference, the Teams should take the necessary steps to ensure that:
 - within the framework of the NESF's agreed Work Programme and Management Committee's guidelines, specific and operational terms-of-reference are agreed to in the early stages of their work, in consultation with the Management Committee, together with an indication of the work-process, phasing and time-table involved and other related issues such as background documentation, speakers, research (if any) to be commissioned, etc.

- on-going consultations and interaction are held with Departments/State Agencies so that up-to-date information is available on official thinking on policy issues and of whatever work may already be underway;
 - the work process is geared to solving problems, addressing specific policy issues and bringing an “*added value*” dimension to bear on policy-making through identifying, where possible, new thinking and alternative options;
 - recommendations are specific and actionable (both in their content and to whom they are addressed); they also need to be supported by underlying analysis, costed (where this is feasible) and prioritised;
 - detailed drafting points are left to the Secretariat; and
 - where possible, decisions on substantive issues are only taken when there is a representative and balanced attendance of Members present.
16. Project Teams may be assisted by outside experts. Decisions in this area will be taken by the NESF’s Chairperson, on the basis of proposals from the Team in question. The task of these experts will be to facilitate the work of the Teams through the preparation of position papers, participation at meetings (but not voting) and, in some cases, the drafting of Reports or Sections of such Reports.
17. The tasks of Project Leaders will be to provide impetus and assistance in the overall management of the Project Teams.
18. The Teams will mostly meet in private but may, by agreement with the Chairperson of the NESF, hold public meetings or local hearings as appropriate. All such public meetings will be chaired by the NESF’s Chairperson.
19. Finally, Ministers, Opposition Spokespersons, interest groups and public officials may be invited to attend meetings of the Teams. NESF Members not on a particular Team but who wish to contribute will be invited to make written submissions and follow this up with an oral presentation, subject to the agreement of the Team concerned.

Ad Hoc Working Groups

20. Working Groups may be established on the initiative of the full NESF meeting in Plenary Session, or of its Management Committee, to consider specific issues which form part of or are related to the NESF’s Work Programme or to assist the Management Committee, for example, in the preparation of the Periodic Reports.
21. In contrast to the role of the Project Teams, which will be focussed on resolving problems on the implementation of specific policies and programmes, the above Working Groups may be used, in particular, to advance and accelerate the preparation of shorter Reports or Opinions which will be linked in with the Government’s timetable and decision-making processes. These Groups will function along the more standard lines of the NESF’s former Standing Committees.

22. As a general principle, these Groups will consist of not more than twelve Members. The composition and chairing of such a Group will be decided by the NESF's Chairperson, following consultation with the Management Committee. Particular attention will be given in this regard to having Members nominated who have relevant expertise and experience in the area under examination. There will be balanced representation on these Groups.
23. Working Groups may also be assisted by outside experts, under the same arrangements as will apply in the case of the Project Teams.
24. Save in exceptional circumstances, Reports from Working Groups will be discussed and adopted in the normal manner through the Plenary Session/ Management Committee mechanism.

NESF's Chairperson

25. The Chairperson will seek to facilitate and encourage participation by all of the Members of the NESF so as to achieve consensus. She will have a key role in managing the operation and administration of the NESF. These tasks will include:
 - chairing Plenary Sessions, Management Committee meetings and hearings by the Project Teams which are held in public;
 - encouraging participation and consensus and facilitating groups not directly represented to put forward their views and make presentations to the NESF;
 - taking final decisions on membership of the Project Teams, as well as on related questions such as that of alternates, in consultation with the Management Committee;
 - liaising with the Project Teams and Ad Hoc Working Groups;
 - organising agendas and work programmes in consultation with the Secretariat and the Management Committee;
 - ensuring that the Work Programme is within the NESF's terms-of-reference and that its implementation has regard to agreed structures, working arrangements and timetables; and
 - dealing with publicity and media issues on behalf of the NESF.
26. In her absence, the above functions will be undertaken by the NESF's Deputy Chairperson.