

**Objective :** To provide relevant education for all people throughout their lives, so that they can participate fully and meaningfully in developing themselves, their community and wider society.

### Early Childhood Education – Investment required

Quality preschool education has been recognised as important to support children to succeed better in primary and secondary school, thus contributing to breaking the cycle of disadvantage.[Note: provision for childcare for working parents is addressed in a separate briefing].

#### Two things Government can do

1. Ensure every child has access to at least two years of free pre school education in a quality, accessible, appropriate and resourced setting, including provision for children with additional needs.
2. Develop and implement a 5 year programme of investment to build the required physical and staff infrastructure for this.

### Primary and Secondary School – Disadvantage continues

There were 869,492 students enrolled in schools in 2015 and this is projected to increase requiring at least an extra<sup>1</sup> 22,000 places at primary level by 2019 and 58,000 places at second level by 2026.

- 9.5% (c 5,000) of students leave school each year without a Leaving Certificate and this rises to 18% in disadvantaged schools<sup>2</sup>.
- 17% of 15 year olds scored<sup>3</sup> below the basic level of proficiency in maths, 10% in reading and 11% in science, with students in disadvantaged schools performing significantly more poorly.

#### Six things Government can do -

1. Reduce the early school leaving rate to 5%.

2. Ensure that 95% of 15 years olds reach basic proficiency in maths, reading and science
3. Fully accommodate the needs of all students within the school system.
4. Make adequate investment to meet the needs of the increasing school population.
5. Complete curriculum reform for Junior and Leaving Cert leading to more flexible and student centred programmes.
6. Provide enhanced, targeted supports for students experiencing disadvantage and for those with additional needs.

### Higher Education – Inequality persists

Having a 3<sup>rd</sup> level qualification is closely linked with higher employment rates and income levels throughout life.

There were 196,000 students enrolled in Higher Education in 2015 and the number of 3<sup>rd</sup> level students is set to rise by 16,000 by 2021 and 39,000 by 2026<sup>4</sup>. Funding per student and general funding to colleges has decreased since 2009, leading to a drop by Irish Universities in the world rankings.

- In the most disadvantaged areas less than 20% of students progress to 3<sup>rd</sup> level compared with over 80% in more affluent areas. The dropout rate for students from lower socioeconomic groups is also higher than for those from higher groups.<sup>5</sup>
- While students on Level 7 and 8 courses can avail of means tested grants, student financial hardship is increasing, affecting both dropout rates and academic performance where students must seek employment in term time.

### Four things Government can do

1. Develop a sustainable funding base for 3<sup>rd</sup> level colleges which also promotes equality for disadvantaged students. This will mean a complete revision of the student grant scheme.
2. Support programmes which encourage “non traditional” students to access 3<sup>rd</sup> level education.
3. Make adequate provision for the increase in demand for third level places arising from the impending demographic changes.
4. Address the dropout rate from 3<sup>rd</sup> level which constitutes a waste of both financial and human capital.

### Adult Literacy – remains a barrier for many people

Literacy is essential for participation in society and involves skills of listening, speaking, reading, writing, numeracy and using everyday technology to communicate and handle information.

- 18% of Irish adults have less than a basic proficiency in literacy
- 26% have less than a basic proficiency in numeracy<sup>6</sup>

### Three things Government can do

1. Set a goal of increasing the proportion of adults with basic proficiency to 95% for literacy and 90% for numeracy.
2. Target increased resources to support adults with low literacy to develop the relevant skills
3. Put in place specific literacy development programmes for young people who do not complete school, or who do so with low skills.

### Lifelong Learning – key to growth

The fast pace of technology and changes in the types of employment available in Ireland mean that there is a consistent need for upskilling. Lifelong learning also has a vital role in promoting active citizenship, positive mental health and makes a significant contribution to the wellbeing of people and society.

- 25% of adults aged 25-65 have less than Leaving Cert standard of education and a further 24% have only Leaving Cert standard.<sup>7</sup>

- Lower educational levels are linked to lower levels of employment and of participation in the workforce (81% employment rate for those with 3<sup>rd</sup> level compared to 54% for those with lower second level)
- The lifelong learning rate in Ireland at 7.3%<sup>8</sup> is well below the EU average of 10.5%<sup>9</sup>.

### Six things Government can do

1. Increase participation in Lifelong Learning to at least the EU average by ensuring that every adult has opportunities for ongoing training and development throughout their lifetime, via the development of flexible and affordable programmes.
2. Recognise the social benefits of lifelong learning, and ensure adults have access to a range of non formal and personal development opportunities.
3. Financially support part time learners, and develop modular further education and training programmes whereby learners can combine learning with caring, employment and other commitments.
4. Increase the number of places for mature students at 3<sup>rd</sup> level.
5. Continue reform of the apprenticeship training scheme providing adequate resources to support the increased young population and those wishing to reskill.

<sup>1</sup>

<https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/Statistical-Reports/Projections-of-Full-Time-Enrolment-Primary-and-Second-Level-2015-2033.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/Statistical-Reports/Retention-Rates-of-Pupils-in-Second-Level-Schools-2008-Cohort.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Education-Reports/Programme-for-International-Student-Assessment-PISA-2012-Learning-for-Life-The-Achievements-of-15-year-olds-in-Ireland-on-Mathematics-Reading-Literacy-and-Science.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.heai.ie>

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.heai.ie/sites/default/files/heai-progression-irish-higher-education\\_final.pdf](http://www.heai.ie/sites/default/files/heai-progression-irish-higher-education_final.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.cso.ie/en/surveysandmethodology/education/piaac/>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/releasespublications/documents/education/2011/educationalattainment2011.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> [http://solas.ie/docs/Adult\\_Lifelong\\_Learning\\_Q4\\_2014.pdf](http://solas.ie/docs/Adult_Lifelong_Learning_Q4_2014.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Lifelong\\_learning\\_statistics](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Lifelong_learning_statistics)