

## EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEMS IN IRELAND

### Primary Education (First Level)

Primary education is founded on the belief that high-quality education enables children to realise their potential as individuals and to live their lives to the fullest capacity as is appropriate to their particular stage of development. Primary Education is compulsory from the age of six to twelve years and children are entitled to attend school from the age of four.

### Post Primary Education (Second Level)

Second-level education consists of a three-year junior cycle followed by a two or three-year senior cycle. The Junior Certificate examination is taken after three years. In senior cycle there is an optional one-year Transition Year Programme followed by a choice of three two-year Leaving Certificate programmes.

The Leaving Certificate is structured as a two-year programme. The Transition Year has been introduced to provide student with enriched opportunities for personal development. Accordingly, schools are not permitted to offer a three-year Leaving Certificate programme, since this would undermine the Transition Year objectives.

The Leaving Certificate examination is held at the end of the Senior Cycle in post-primary schools. It is the terminal examination of post-primary education. The Senior Cycle caters for pupils in the 15 to 18 year old age group. Students normally sit for the examination at the age of 17 or 18, after 5 or 6 years of post-primary education.

### VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

As well as the courses provided in third-level institutions, a wide range of vocational educational and training courses are offered within the education sector for students who have completed second level. The principal programmes are the Post-Leaving Certificate Courses. In addition, off-the-job training for apprentices is provided in the Institutes of Technology and in FAS Training Centres.

### **Apprenticeship**

Apprenticeship operates primarily in a number of designated trades, for example: engineering, construction, motor, electrical, printing and furniture.

Standards to be achieved in each trade are measured through on-the-job competence testing, together with modular assessment and formal examinations for off-the-job elements. These standards have been agreed between the education sector, FAS, employers and trade unions and are being implemented on a phased basis. An apprenticeship Committee, established by FAS and representative of the social partners, is overseeing the implementation of the new system

### **Colleges of Technology**

The Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) is the biggest third level institution in Ireland with 22,000 students. It has six constituent colleges, two colleges of Technology, the college of Commerce and the college of Music. The DIT awards its own degrees.

The Institutes of Technology (IOT's), which were introduced in the 1970s to provide for further technical education needs, have, over the years, become an integral part of the Irish third level system. There are now twelve IOT's throughout Ireland offering education and training, both full-time and part-time, for trade and industry over a broad spectrum of occupations and levels, in the areas of Business Studies, Engineering & Technology and Science & Paramedicine. The Institutes are located in Athlone, Carlow, Cork, Dundalk, Dun Laoghaire, Galway, Letterkenny, Limerick, Sligo, Tallaght, Tralee and Waterford.

### **Colleges of Education/Teacher Training**

In Ireland the system of teacher training differs between primary and second level school teachers. Typically second level teachers complete a primary degree at university and then follow up with the Higher Diploma in Education again at university. Primary school teachers complete a three year programme, leading to a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) degree, at one of the five teacher training colleges.

Teachers of Home Economics are trained in Colleges of Education for Home Economics. There are two such colleges in Ireland, (St. Angela's, Sligo and St. Catherine's, Sion Hill,



Dublin) which provide a full-time four-year course leading to a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) degree.

All graduates of these colleges are awarded a university degree on successful completion of their studies. A specialist college for teachers of Physical Education and Technical Subjects - Engineering, Construction Studies, Thomond College in Limerick, was incorporated into the University of Limerick in 1991. Finally, teachers of Art are trained in the National College of Art & Design in Dublin. All of these institutions are associated with the universities for their degree awards.