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Update

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Raising awareness,
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Conor Leeson

Contact the editor:

E conor@ncpp.ie T 01 814 6398



EDITORIAL

Building capacity for change

It has been said that not all change is for the better. However, we now know that changing the way we work and how people are managed is critical for our economy and our society.

In recognition of this, the Government launched an integrated National Workplace Strategy in 2005 to support and drive workplace change.

The focus of the National Workplace Strategy, which is the subject of this issue of *Update*, is on leadership and the capacity for change, upskilling and workplace learning, increasing employee involvement, promoting

equality and diversity, and improving the quality of working life.

Delivering this agenda, whether in the public or private sectors, will not be easy. It involves not just changing the way work is organised, but also changing the behaviour and attitudes of managers, employees and union representatives.

Continued overleaf >

A new year, a new structure...

On 1 January 2007, the NCPP officially became a constituent body of the National Economic and Social Development Office (NESDO), a new umbrella organisation incorporating the NCPP, the National Economic and Social Council (NESD) and the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF). The main effect of this development is to place the NCPP and its sister organisations on a statutory footing, while facilitating and promoting closer co-operation between the three bodies in terms of research, analysis, publications and administrative services. The Chairman of NESDO is Dermot McCarthy, Secretary General of the Department of

the Taoiseach, and its Chief Officer is Rory O'Donnell, Director of the NESD.

... and a new Strategy

On 10 January, the Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, TD, launched the NCPP's new Strategy for 2007-2010. Entitled '*Irish Workplaces: A Strategy for Change, Innovation and Partnership*', the document comprises a series of practical responses to the long-term policy objectives outlined in the National Workplace Strategy and *Towards 2016*. We will return to the Strategy in more detail in the next issue of *Update*. In the meantime, you can order your own copy by contacting us on (01) 814 6300, or visit www.ncpp.ie to download it directly.

“Managers, employees and their representatives need to work together to develop an ongoing culture of co-operation with change.”

We know what needs to be done. Managers, employees and their representatives need to work together to develop an ongoing culture of co-operation with change.

We need to bring about:

- New and more flexible forms of work organisation that improve productivity and organisational effectiveness
- A better delivery of public services
- Modern workplaces adapted to the individual needs of employees
- New systems that measure and reward good performance
- Better workplace relations based on problem-solving and the need to avoid conflict.

The key to achieving these changes, in my view, is leadership development. It is about building the capabilities of managers, employees and unions, in both the public and private sectors, to proactively introduce and manage change.

I agree with the Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, T.D., who told the recent Labour Relations Commission symposium on *New Perspectives on Workplace Change* that “managers deal with complexity, but leaders

deliver change”. We need more workplace leaders to deliver workplace change.

So how do we bring this about?

There are key words that come up again and again regarding the management of change – trust, credibility, motivating and inspiring people, sharing information, listening, problem-solving, an inclusive approach and developing a shared understanding of the organisation’s future.

The social partners, through the three-year Workplace Innovation Fund established by the Government under *Towards 2016*, now have a major opportunity to identify and develop potential leaders in this area. The Fund will assist them to provide potential leaders with the knowledge, skills, behaviour, qualities and personal attributes to promote and bring about change in our workplaces.

In addition, the NCPP’s new *Strategy for Change, Innovation and Partnership 2007–2010* contains a series of practical approaches to partnership that also have the potential to deliver real improvements in our ability to anticipate and manage change.

*Peter Cassells
Chairman, NCPP*



Transforming our places of work

This issue of *Update* is devoted to an examination of the National Workplace Strategy, the Irish Government's blueprint to transform our workplaces into 'workplaces of the future'.

The value of such a strategy is that it offers us an opportunity not only to imagine the future workplace but also to work together to make it happen.

The Strategy has a clearly articulated vision of the characteristics of a modern, dynamic and successful workplace. It outlines a comprehensive set of recommendations which must now be delivered to make this vision a reality.

It is a critically important initiative which aims to encourage us to change the way we think about, and act within, our workplaces. Both employees and employers alike must open their minds to new ways of working, to improve communication, consultation, performance and productivity, advance the quality of our working lives and embrace equality, diversity and learning.

In this issue, we examine the National Workplace Strategy from a range of different perspectives:

- We look back to the genesis of the Strategy, the Forum on the Workplace of the Future, and the findings which underpinned its extensive recommendations.
- We outline plans for a major public awareness campaign in support of the Strategy in 2007.
- Our system of social partnership is examined and the various ways in which *Towards 2016* reaffirms and supports the aims and objectives of the Strategy are described.
- We highlight the work of the High Level Implementation Group, summarise the key findings of its first annual progress report, and profile the members of the Group.
- We describe the steps being taken by the NCPP and its partners to develop indicators of workplace innovation, which are critical to the achievement of more innovative workplaces throughout our economy.
- We summarise the key ideas and recommendations which emerged from last September's workplace learning Masterclass, Learning in a Knowledge Society – is Ireland Ready?

The Workplace Strategy's main objectives will be extremely difficult to deliver unless Ireland's two million employers and employees are made aware of the key issues at hand, and the reasons why our workplaces need to change. That is why the public awareness campaign, in particular, is of such critical importance.

It is no exaggeration to say that the successful implementation of the National Workplace Strategy is imperative if Ireland's current economic prosperity is to be maintained and her international competitiveness improved upon.

It is a challenge we simply cannot afford to shirk.

Lucy Fallon-Byrne
Director, NCPP



Taking stock

Philip Kelly recalls the key findings of the Forum on the Workplace of the Future.

One of the many benefits of participating in the Forum on the Workplace of the Future back in 2003–04 was the opportunity it offered to bring issues together in a new way. It presented new information and re-presented or articulated anew information and values already possessed, but which had slipped below the radar. For many of us, it offered new insights into the way things are or could be interconnected.

It is perhaps timely, almost two years since publication of the Forum’s final report – now of course our National Workplace Strategy – to reflect on the findings or evidence base which underpinned its extensive recommendations. At some level, the findings are more powerful than the recommendations.

The key interlocking findings of the Forum concerned four main areas:

■ Workforce

Return on investment in R&D can only be optimised by investing in people.

This investment is the key to retaining people in particular jobs and in the workforce itself. Many people are increasingly relying on their skill sets rather than the

terms of their employment contracts for their future employment.

Highly skilled women can be lost to the workforce due to issues such as the demands of childcare; and they return to the workforce to lower pay and promotion prospects. The workforce of the future will draw more heavily on women, older workers, non-nationals and on other marginalised groups. In the cases of childcare and lifelong learning, Ireland can either play catch-up or lead the way. The only way to excel in these two areas is to strike the right balance of personal, employer and Government action.

■ Workplace

Productivity and performance, lower staff turnover and better introduction of new technologies are all associated with ‘bundles’ of work practices including job rotation, training, quality circles, feedback systems and performance pay, etc. The public sector is just ahead of the private sector in these terms, but both are still relatively low.

“Many people are increasingly relying on their skills sets rather than the terms of their employment contracts for their future employment.”

■ Employers and trade unions

In the indigenous sector, the search for higher productivity will be contingent on adopting new forms of work organisation, so more flexible working patterns need to be offered and we need to be more open to diversity in the workplace. Unions need to adopt more flexible attitudes towards change management in order to broaden their appeal to members – given the increased incidence of in-house staff organisations and the individualisation of contracts.

■ Government

The key conclusion, for Government, was the need for a more integrated approach. There is a need therefore, to reflect on the experiences of the High Level Implementation Group and NCPP to see what has been achieved. In doing so, it is worth noting that we are all in the change-management business.

Replicating partnership formula?

In some respects, through the National Workplace Strategy and the work of the NCPP, we are trying to replicate at enterprise level the successful tripartite approach to planning and problem solving that has served us so well for almost two decades at national level. Is this an overly simplistic approach? Are the high-level policy issues we deal with as Government and social partners at national level superseded by personal concerns for individual workers arising from the nature, manner and pace of change?

Yet even if the mechanism or scale of the problems are different at enterprise level, it seems almost self-evident that better communications and sharing of information are more likely to lead to win/win outcomes.

More sustainable change comes from high-participation practices. We try to legislate for communication, but this can only provide for minimum or specific cases. We are often better off leading than pushing when it comes to changing behaviour. And this is where the NCPP comes in – in terms of research and dissemination of new ways of being in the workplace. It is very difficult to be an agent of change. For those involved, it is personally and organisationally tiring. All of the usual barriers to change emerge. Those people that are happy with the way things are find themselves discommoded. The NCPP also meets the institutional barriers of different funding silos and lines of accountability within the public system.

In addition, the NCPP meets ambiguity or ambivalence. Sometimes, employers and unions want to act unilaterally, but then again, they want to cloak themselves in partnership when the firm is losing money and job losses are being sought; or when the pension scheme becomes problematic, or when outsourcing is mentioned. It is difficult to adopt participative approaches, based on trust with the aim of mutual gains, when there has been little history of co-operation. And yet we know that in a time of crises, such approaches often make the difference between

survival and closure. Perhaps “real and present danger” can focus minds, but the aim of the NCPP is to promote that co-operative focus more generally in the pursuit of higher performance.

However, the NCPP cannot act alone – it must work with its fellow Government actors. And the NCPP must work with employers and unions – to achieve a ripple effect from its work.

The Workplace Innovation Fund offers us a chance to demonstrate co-operation in action, both within Government and between Government and the social partners. Working with the social partners, it gives us the means to reach out to wider constituencies.

The next national workplace survey, to be commissioned in 2008, will give us quantifiable information about attitudes and behaviours of employers and employees. Hopefully, we will get some meaningful insights as to whether our efforts are having an impact where it really matters – in the workplace.

Philip Kelly is Assistant Secretary at the Department of the Taoiseach and Deputy Chairman of the NCPP

Singing from the same hymn sheet

Damian Thomas examines the various ways in which the latest social partnership agreement, *Towards 2016*, reaffirms the aims and objectives of the National Workplace Strategy.

The National Workplace Strategy clearly recognises that the quality of our workforce, and our levels of workplace innovation and change, are critically important to Ireland's ongoing transition to a highly skilled, dynamic and knowledge-based economy. The Strategy is an important milestone insofar as it establishes for the first time an integrated and coherent approach to workplace and workforce development. It combines new planned initiatives and strategic objectives with an emphasis on adding momentum to the implementation of existing policies.

And while the Strategy is underpinned by a shared understanding of the need for a new approach to workplace change and innovation, translating this consensus into agreed practical actions at the organisational level remains a major challenge.

Our national social partnership system would appear to provide a strong platform for addressing this challenge. Since 1987, the ongoing commitment of the social partners and Government to engaging in intensive problem-solving deliberation has generated

innovative and practical solutions to a number of complex issues.

Significantly, *Towards 2016* contains a renewed commitment from all parties to the specific agenda of workplace change and innovation. This reflects a deepening appreciation, by the social partners in particular, that the development of high-participation and high-involvement work practices has to be a priority for both employers and employees. There are clear competitive advantages to be gained both from the improved deployment of our workforce and from workplace development generally. Equally, there are significant social dividends to be realised by improving the quality of individuals' working lives.

Towards 2016 is notable insofar as it specifically references the work of the High Level Implementation Group that was set up in 2005 to oversee delivery of the aims and objectives of the Workplace Strategy. In addition to endorsing the work of the Group, *Towards 2016* states that particular priority should be afforded to the Group's work of promoting and advocating – across the public and private sectors – the range of activities contained in the Strategy.

This reaffirms the key role that ICTU and IBEC have to play, as members of the High Level Implementation Group, both in championing the National Workplace Strategy and in building support within their respective constituencies for the wider agenda of workplace change and innovation.

A key commitment under *Towards 2016* is the establishment by the Government of a three-year Workplace Innovation Fund. The Fund will enable the social partners and the NCPP to build a stronger commitment to workplace innovation and to the development of new ways of working through partnership, with a view to increasing flexibility and improving performance. In order to maximise the value of the Fund, financial support will be conditional on the learning and experience gained being shared with other organisations and with the policy community. The NCPP will also seek to develop case studies on the basis of these initiatives as exemplars for wider discussion.

Towards 2016 outlines an ambitious and holistic agenda for workplace partnership, and commits the NCPP to undertake a number of specific initiatives, as follows, in support of the National Workplace Strategy:

- The development of a detailed project plan, in consultation with IBEC, ICTU and relevant government departments and agencies, outlining a series of practical approaches and activities to

further develop workplace partnership. This project plan will include customised approaches designed to address the different needs and challenges facing key sectors within the economy.

- The finalisation of revised guidelines on employee financial involvement and the development and promotion of an associated active programme of education and communication for employees, management and unions. [Editor's note: The report containing these guidelines has now been concluded, within the timeframe stipulated in *Towards 2016*, and will be launched in January 2007.]
- The commissioning of a further attitudinal survey of employers and employees in 2008 to assist in the process of measuring and managing the process of change and modernisation in Irish workplaces.

The national agreement also includes initiatives and recommendations that enhance and augment particular aspects of the Workplace Strategy. For example, the development of future skills is one of the

“Towards 2016 contains a renewed commitment from all parties to the specific agenda of workplace change and innovation.”

five strategic action areas identified in the Strategy, and this is reflected throughout *Towards 2016* by a strong emphasis on the need for a concerted effort to increase the levels of learning and upskilling across all Irish workplaces.

The impending publication by the Government of the National Skills Strategy is referenced, and a review of existing workplace learning and upskilling initiatives is recommended, to ensure they match anticipated requirements and provide a co-coordinated and user-friendly system that is focused on both employability and competitiveness.

The Government, IBEC/CIF and ICTU are also committed to working with existing and future partnership initiatives in order to progress workplace learning and upskilling projects and, as outlined in the table overleaf, a number of specific actions have already been agreed in this regard:

Getting started

Towards 2016:

Progressing Workplace Learning and Upskilling

- Development of a targeted guidance, learning and training programme, particularly accessible to the manufacturing sector. This programme will include coaching and mentoring for workers in vulnerable employments, where appropriate
- Measures for the promotion of take-up of apprenticeships by older workers
- Mainstreaming of the Knowledge Economy Skills Passport
- Increased support for the pilot trade union-led learning network under the FÁS 'One-Step-Up' programme, and for the Workplace Basic Education Fund
- Further expansion of the Skillnets programme, including pilot initiatives to focus on those with lower skill sets
- A targeted fund to alleviate the fees in public institutions for part-time courses by those at work and who have not previously pursued a third level qualification

For its part, the NCPP has developed a new strategic framework of its own, entitled *Irish Workplaces – Strategy for Change, Innovation and Partnership*. It sets out a detailed and integrated work programme designed to lead and support workplace transition during the period 2007–2010.

Three main strategic priorities have been identified that will guide its work in the coming years:

- Developing a greater level of commitment among all stakeholders to supporting workplace innovation and change
- Increasing the focus on building organisational capacity for change and the practical ways in which partnership can provide support for this
- Expanding the role of partnership into new, emerging concerns in relation to the quality of people's working lives.

In conclusion, a key premise underpinning the establishment of the Forum on the Workplace of the Future (2003–05) was that the same energy invested in Ireland's economic transformation over the past two decades must now be applied to the transformation of our workplaces for the 21st century.

An integral part of the success of the Irish social partnership experience has been its capacity to respond speedily to changing economic and social circumstances. This continued adaptability is clearly evident in the extent to which *Towards 2016* embraces a new consensus squarely focused on workplace change and innovation.

Dr Damian Thomas is Head of Policy and Partnership at the NCPP

“An integral part of the success of the Irish social partnership experience has been its capacity to respond speedily to changing economic and social circumstances..”

Making progress

Cathal O'Regan describes the work of the High-Level Implementation Group and the main findings of its first progress report

The first annual progress report of the High-Level Implementation Group established to oversee execution of the National Workplace Strategy was published in August 2006.

Chaired by the Minister for Labour Affairs, Tony Killeen, T.D., the Group is comprised of the relevant Government departments, State agencies and the social partners.

Their report summarises the progress that has been made to date across the Strategy's five strategic action areas, as follows:

Commitment to workplace innovation

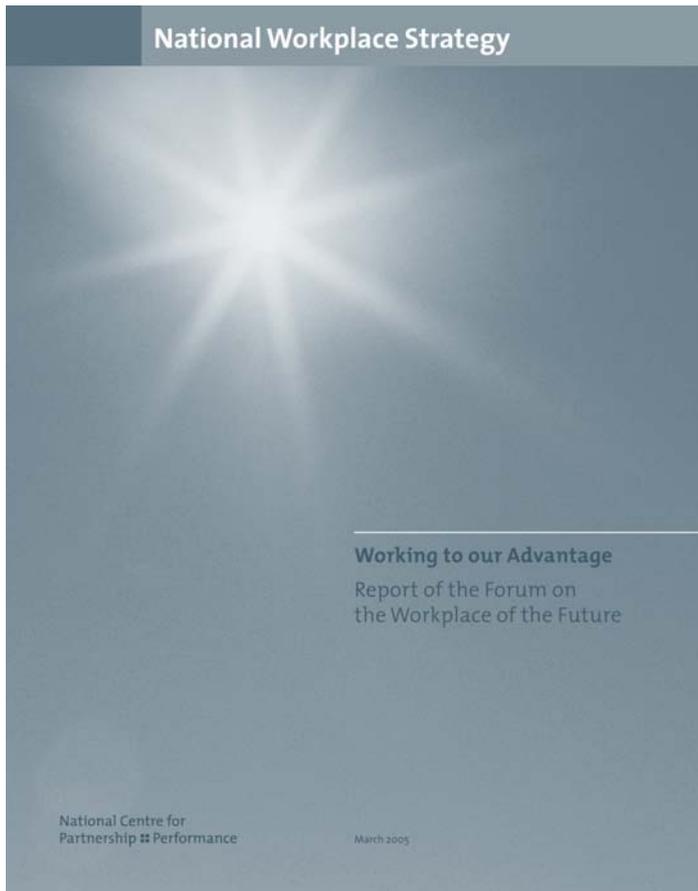
The report describes the progress made by Government departments and State agencies in establishing workplace innovation as a strategic priority of public policy, and cites examples from Forfás, FÁS, Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland and the Central Statistics Office.

The report also points to progress made in the context of the new national partnership agreement, *Towards 2016*, where clear

commitments are in place to develop workplace innovation across the public and private sectors. Several noteworthy initiatives have been agreed in *Towards 2016*, including the establishment of a Workplace Innovation Fund which commits significant additional resources to developing working practices in the private sector. The NCPP is currently engaged with other key stakeholders in planning the roll out of this new Fund in 2007.

The report points towards a number of sectoral initiatives in education, health and local government as examples of a growing commitment to workplace innovation. Another key undertaking by the NCPP is the roll-out in 2007 of a nationwide public awareness campaign to promote the importance of innovation in the workplace.

The High Level Implementation Group highlights progress in improving the data infrastructure on workplace innovation, and records a series of initiatives being undertaken by the NCPP in conjunction with Forfás and the Central Statistics Office.



Profile: National Workplace Strategy High-Level Implementation Group

Recommendation 41 of the final report of the Forum on the Workplace of the Future advocated the creation of a High-Level Implementation Group to oversee the successful implementation of the National Workplace Strategy.

The Group was duly established by Government in March 2005 following adoption of the Forum Report, and met for the first time in May of that year.

The Group operates under the aegis of the Department of Enterprise, Trade & Employment, and is chaired by the Minister for Labour Affairs, Tony Killeen, T.D.

Its members include senior representatives of five Government-departments, three State agencies and the social partners, as follows:



Chairperson
Tony Killeen, T.D.
 Minister for Labour Affairs

Catherine Byrne
 Executive Council member,
 Irish Congress of Trade Unions

Ciaran Connolly
 Assistant Secretary General,
 Department of Finance

Patricia Curtin
 Assistant Director General, FÁS

Lucy Fallon-Byrne
 Director, National Centre for
 Partnership and Performance

Frances Gaynor
 Assistant Principal Officer,
 Department of Enterprise,
 Trade and Employment

Pat Hayden
 Principal Officer, Department of
 Enterprise, Trade and Employment

Eddie Keenan
 Director of Industrial Relations,
 Construction Industry Federation

Philip Kelly
 Assistant Secretary General,
 Department of the Taoiseach

Billie Mathews
 Principal Officer, Department of
 Enterprise, Trade and Employment

Paddy McDonagh
 Assistant Secretary General,
 Department of Education and
 Science

Brendan McGinty
 Director of IR and HR, Irish Business
 and Employers' Confederation

Denis Rowan
 Director, Services to Business, FÁS

Martin Shanahan
 Manager, Forfás

John Walsh
 Assistant Secretary General
 Department of Enterprise,
 Trade and Employment

Noel Waters
 Assistant Secretary General,
 Department of Justice, Equality
 and Law Reform

Fergus Whelan
 Industrial Officer, Irish Congress
 of Trade Unions

HLIG Secretariat

c/o NCPP
 16 Parnell Square
 Dublin 1
 T (01) 814 6300
 F (01) 814 6301
 E info@ncpp.ie

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“Several noteworthy initiatives have been agreed in Towards 2016, including the establishment of a Workplace Innovation Fund which commits significant additional resources to developing working practices in the private sector.”

Capacity for change

The National Workplace Strategy identifies a number of key objectives to achieve real capacity for change, both at national level and at the level of the individual enterprise. One of these is the development of leadership and management skills in the public and private sectors, and the progress report identifies a number of important initiatives funded by Enterprise Ireland, FÁS, Skillnets and the Department of Finance.

Another objective of the NWS is the development of greater strategic human-resource management capability in the public sector, and the report highlights a number of commitments in *Towards 2016* that will progress this issue. Another significant development noted in the report is the enactment of new legislation on employee information and consultation which adds to the momentum for change.

Further progress is expected during 2007 on a number of issues, including employee financial involvement and work by the Labour Relations Commission on improving capacity at enterprise level for the in-house resolution of disputes. The development of workplace partnership

across the public and private sectors remains a key priority for the High Level Implementation Group, and will be addressed in the NCPP’s new strategic plan for the period 2007–2010.

Developing future skills

Major progress has been made in respect of the new National Skills Strategy, which will be launched in 2007. This, along with the ‘One Step Up’ initiative and the establishment of a National Qualifications Framework are key strategic developments at a national level.

The progress report notes significant increases in investment in in-company training since 2004. Investment in core programmes managed by FÁS, Skillnets Ltd and the Department of Trade, Enterprise and Employment totalled approximately €52m in 2006, compared to €14m in 2004.

Access to opportunities in the workplace

The National Workplace Strategy highlights the need for a labour force management strategy that maintains the capacity to meet the needs of a changing labour market. The High Level Implementation Group reports on a number of important developments in addressing issues including equality and diversity in the workplace, childcare, economic migration policy, and supporting older workers. For example, developments include the launch of a new Wage Subsidy Scheme for people with disabilities, the enactment of the Employment Permits Act, the establishment of the Office of the Minister for Children and the implementation of the National Childcare Investment Programme (2006 – 2010). The Group also highlights research being carried out by the National Centre for Partnership and Performance (NCPP) and the Equality Authority on the business case for managing diversity and equality in the workplace.

Quality of working life

The Group acknowledges that more empirical evidence is required to enhance the debate and analysis of quality-of-working-life issues. Collaborative projects involving the NCPP, the Health and Safety Authority, the Equality Authority and others are destined to address the current data deficit.

Commenting on the report, Minister Killeen said: *“If we are to meet the challenges presented by the globalised 21st century market, our workplaces must be geared for constant change and innovation. All of the people involved – employers, employees, policy makers, and social partners – need to create a shared understanding of what needs to be done, most importantly at the level of the workplace.”*

He continued: *“People and their skills are at the core of an organisation. A flexible workplace will identify and put in place the types of work arrangements that best facilitate a high level of worker involvement and that best meet the needs of the organisation. The National Workplace Strategy is the roadmap for producing workplaces that are adaptable and agile and that balance flexibility with security. This Report highlights the important progress that has been made in achieving this.”*

Without doubt, the High-Level Group has made significant progress in its first full year of existence. And while it is clear that much remains to be done, the Group may look forward with confidence to 2007 in the knowledge that a good start is half the battle.

Cathal O’Regan is Head of Organisational Change and Innovation at the NCPP

“Investment in core programmes managed by FÁS, Skillnets Ltd and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, totalled approximately €52 million in 2006, compared to €14 million in 2004.”

Innovation measures up

Larry O’Connell on the challenge of measuring innovation.

In practice, all forms of innovation – from research and development to marketing and design – depend for their effectiveness, and sometimes their inspiration, on how a company is structured, how its work is organised and the internal practices and culture of the organisation.

It is now recognised, in Ireland and across Europe, that these issues are crucial for innovation and that if we are to sustain our competitiveness in the knowledge economy, workplace innovation must be improved. To do so, we need to know not only how well we are doing but also exactly what it is that Ireland’s most innovative companies are doing.

Under the National Workplace Strategy, a Benchmarking and Indicators Working Group, comprising the Central Statistics Office, Forfás and the NCPP, is looking at ways to develop the data infrastruc-

ture and our knowledge about what is happening in our workplaces.

A key challenge for the Working Group is to improve data co-ordination, particularly in relation to three main surveys dealing with innovation and the workplace in Ireland, namely:

- Community Innovation Survey (Forfás/Eurostat)
- Annual National Employment Surveys (CSO)
- National Workplace Surveys (NCPP 2008)

In this context, the NCPP has, for example, submitted additional questions in the area of workplace change and structural/organisational change to be included in the CSO’s National Employment Survey. The inclusion of a permanent question on information and consultation for employers and their employees is also under consideration.

Furthermore, Forfás has an agreement with Eurostat, the EU’s statistical office, that Ireland (along with the UK) will pilot a new expanded module on organisational innovation in 2007.

The Working Group is also working to develop indicators for workplace innovation. Workplace innovations are defined as innovations specifically concerned with attributes and features of the workplace – for example, systems of internal communication, programmes to support greater employee involvement, new training initiatives, and programmes that promote a better work-life balance. In practical terms, workplace innovation is the adoption of programmes or systems of organisational change, including initiatives focusing on human-resource management (HRM), industrial relations, and work organisation and employee well-being.

Indicators of Workplace Innovation: Assessing the innovative potential of your workplace

Key Workplace Practices	Production, Maintenance, Service or Clerical		Executives, Managers, Supervisors, Professional Technical	
	Your Company	Industry Average	Your Company	Industry Average
Percentage of employees involved in programmes designed to elicit participation and employee input (e.g. quality circles, problem solving or similar groups).		32		47
Percentage of employees provided with relevant operating and financial performance information (e.g. quality, productivity, profitability, etc.).		61		75
Percentage of employees receiving compensation partially based on group performance (e.g. profitsharing, gainsharing, etc.).		38		48
Percentage of employees owning shares in their organisation (e.g. employee share ownership plan, etc.).		20		28
Average hours training provided for employees.		32		33

To date, work has focused on the development of indicators in the field of HRM that could be used as indicators for workplace innovation.

Research carried out for the Working Group by the University of Limerick focused on the development of HR indicators based on a small, multi-sector sample of some of the larger companies in Ireland. The research has identified practices which are likely to lead to high performance in three areas: productivity, innovation and staff retention.

UL researchers looked at over 30 workplace practices and from these, five have been identified as critical indicators. These are presented below as a guide or benchmark for companies interested in promoting workplace innovation. Industry averages for different categories of

employees from across a sample of the 'Top 1000' Irish companies are also included for comparative purposes.

More detailed comparative research for the NCPP is currently underway at the University of Limerick, in collaboration with the Equality Authority, and will be available early in 2007.

Dr Larry O'Connell is Head of Research at the NCPP

Workplace learning: views from the coalface

A summary of the views expressed at the NCPP's 2006 National Workplace Strategy masterclass.

On 25 September last, more than 200 public and private-sector delegates from throughout Ireland attended the NCPP's 'Learning in a Knowledge Society' Masterclass at the RHK in Dublin.

The second in a series of Masterclasses organised under the auspices of the National Workplace Strategy, the event was opened by Tony Killeen, T.D., Minister for Labour Affairs, and moderated by RTE's Áine Lawlor.

Keynote speakers included Sir Ken Robinson, an internationally renowned expert on creativity and innovation in business and education, and Professor Andy Hargreaves, the Thomas More Brennan Chair in Education at Boston College, USA. From Ireland, they were joined by Professor Tom Collins, Head of Education at NUI Maynooth, Eoin O'Driscoll, the chairman of Forfás, and Lucy Fallon-Byrne, Director of the NCPP.

The broad message to emerge from the event was that if Ireland is to compete successfully as a knowledge economy, we must embrace workplace learning.

The Masterclass also showcased examples of what is happening on the ground in respect of workplace learning in Irish organisations. Here we present a summary of the experiences gained by employers and employees alike, built around key findings on workplace learning in Ireland:

Workplace learning: the employers' perspective

Fewer than fifty per cent of Irish organisations currently offer their employees meaningful learning opportunities. The Masterclass heard that Irish private and public-sector organisations must devote more resources to the provision of such opportunities if Ireland is to maintain its international competitiveness.

Not enough employers appear to realise this, or if they do, they do not appear to be convinced by it. In stark contrast, the employers featured in the case studies made a powerful business case for workplace learning, arguing that it improved staff retention rates and led to real improvements in the capacity of their organisations.

"I would say to business people: If you don't provide training and learning opportunities for employees, then it will cost you."

Jim Hoey, Managing Director,
Masonite Ireland

"I would definitely say to any company out there to embrace education and to educate your workforce, because they are your best resource."

Nicola Gilmartin, HR Manager,
Abbott Ireland

Staff retention and commitment

The employers featured in our case studies argued that a key benefit of investing in employee training and education was the ability to retain skilled staff. Their message was that spending on learning is an investment, not a cost.

"By investing this money in our staff, I personally feel that they are committed to us as a business and as an employer... It makes them [the staff] want to achieve a lot more; it gives them goals rather than aspirations. There is also lower staff turnover within the company, and that's a very important factor."

Joanne Fernandez,
Office Manager, 123.ie

"Every employee you hire is an investment. You won't be able to hire a person with every skill that you need. It's just a waste of money if you're not going to develop those skills... It would be absolutely stupid on our part if we didn't develop those individuals while they're here."

Sean Twohig, Training and
Standards Manager,
Jurys Hotel and Towers

"It is a myth that people you train and educate move on. Everyone that's participated in the three programmes here are still with the company."

Jim Hoey

"It has certainly been worth every bit of money and effort that's gone into it."

Mary McSweeney, Partnership Co-ordinator, Dublin City Council

Nicola Gilmartin of Abbott Ireland also noted a positive effect on recruitment. Her company had been finding it difficult to recruit externally, but was then able to fill vacant positions with existing operatives after they had participated in the company's employee development programme. Other employers highlighted similar benefits.

Enhancing the capacity of the organisation

The case studies showed how learning is used to increase the companies' abilities to solve problems in-house.

Masonite Ireland decided that the establishment of proper educational facilities at its plant would help to improve their competitiveness. The company joined forces with Sligo IT to provide degree and certificate courses on site. Their employees would not otherwise have been able to access these courses because of the 24x7 shift system that operates at the plant. After participating in the programme, Jon Conlon, a maintenance technician, came up with a solution to resolve a problem related to compressors overheating during the summer months. Since the introduction of the cooling system he developed as part of a student project, the issue has been resolved.

Workplace learning: the employees' perspective

Looking at the experiences of individual employees, the case studies demonstrated that learning can provide very significant benefits, both professionally and personally — not only in terms of the increased loyalty employees felt towards their employers, but also in terms of the new-found confidence they had in their own ability.

Increasing motivation and commitment

"I couldn't believe learning could be so good. I was amazed with myself; I was amazed with other people around me".

Robert Traynor, Waste Management Supervisor, Dublin City Council

Increased motivation and loyalty was very evident among the participants in the case studies. Employers had invested in employees both financially and through the provision of time off for study and examinations. As a result of this investment, employees felt a strong sense of motivation and commitment to using their newly acquired skills to the fullest for those employers.

"It's nice to find out that the grass isn't always greener on the other side, that sometimes you really do have a lot of opportunities where you are. For myself, I have more commitment to my job, and I probably put more pressure on myself than any other individual will put me under".

Shirley Lynch, Plant Trainer, Abbott Ireland

Building confidence

Many employees spoke of how the opportunity to undergo training had transformed them. In particular, they highlighted the confidence that they now had in their own abilities.

"The difference has been in confidence. I feel I have more of an input into what goes on in the factory."

Jim Conlon, Maintenance Technician, Masonite

"Ever since then, I've progressed... I want to continue with these exams to give me a better qualification, a better future... If I didn't have that [the qualification], I don't think I'd have the confidence to sit in the interview and sell what I have."

Caroline Lynch, Life Sales Support, 123.ie

"I was a different person after the course, I felt I mushroomed."

Phil Colgrove, Rooms Bar Supervisor, Jurys Hotel and Towers

"It means I'm not afraid to take on other courses. I know that, if I want to, I can take on x and y courses to get that job – and I know that I can pass them."

Seamus O'Reilly, Nurse, St James Hospital

The NCPP would also like to thank Dermot Mulligan (DETE), Brigid McManus (DES), Rody Molloy (FÁS), Jenny Hayes (IBEC), Catherine Byrne (ICTU) and Liam O'Donogue (Enterprise Ireland) for their thought-provoking contributions to the Masterclass.

Masterclass Gallery

A selection of photographs from the 'Learning in a Knowledge Society' Masterclass which took place at the Royal Hospital Kilmainham on 25 September 2006



1. Speakers at the Masterclass included (l-r) Peter Cassells (NCPP Chairman), Lucy Fallon-Byrne (NCPP Director), Prof Andy Hargreaves and Minister for Labour Affairs, Tony Killeen, TD



2. Perusing the programme before the event were (l-r) Prof Hargreaves, Lucy Fallon-Byrne, Minister Killeen and Sir Ken Robinson



3. Keynote speaker, Sir Ken Robinson, and Masterclass moderator, Aine Lawlor (RTE)

4+5. More than 200 public and private-sector delegates from around Ireland attended the Masterclass



6. Edna Jordan, Head of Workplace Learning, NCPP, and organiser of the Masterclass



Raising awareness, promoting innovation

Conor Leeson on final preparations for a nationwide public-awareness campaign in support of the National Workplace Strategy

A major public awareness campaign to promote the key messages of the National Workplace Strategy is due to be launched in 2007, under the strategic guidance of the NCPP.

Primarily targeting Ireland's 2 million-plus employees and employers, the campaign aims to encourage greater workplace innovation in all its forms, from improved management and leadership capacity to wider employee involvement and increased workplace learning.

Among the key messages the NCPP wishes to convey by means of this campaign are the following:

- Irish workplaces – and those who populate them – need to embrace innovation and change as a matter of urgency. In a rapidly-evolving economic environment, both nationally and internationally, the status quo is no longer a viable option.
- Ireland has taken the strategic decision to transform itself into a dynamic, inclusive, knowledge-based economy/society. For this to happen, the 'buy-in' of all relevant actors – employers, managers, employees, unions, representative organisations, Government departments and State agencies – is imperative.
- Greater workplace innovation and worker participation can lead to improved performance and productivity for businesses and organisations, regardless of size or sector, and for employers and employees alike.

- Maintaining our economic prosperity and international competitiveness will depend to a large extent on our ability/willingness to innovate in the workplace, adapt to change, develop future skills, provide access to opportunities for all and improve the quality of our working lives. In other words, to deliver the strategic priorities of the National Workplace Strategy.
- It's all about partnership – and partnership works. 20 years of successful social partnership in Ireland provides ample evidence in support of that theory.

The task of transforming our places of work into 'workplaces of the future' is one that will not be achieved without the commitment of employers and employees throughout the country, regardless of size or sector.

Or, in the words of An Taoiseach at the LRC symposium (November 2006): "The proactive engagement of employers, employees and their representatives is key to implementation of the National Workplace Strategy."

For people to be able to engage, however, they must first be informed and made aware of the issues. Through what is expected to be a series of imaginative advertisements across a range of media, the campaign will endeavour to make the Strategy's key themes and messages relevant to the everyday life experiences of employers and workers in the workplace.

In addition to advertising, a variety of other awareness-raising events and activities is also foreseen, including roadshows and workshops, a workplace poster campaign and direct-marketing initiatives.

In line with EU public procurement requirements, the NCPP and High Level Implementation Group issued a call for Expressions of Interest to PR and advertising agencies throughout Europe. A shortlist of candidate companies was drawn up and invited to submit full tender proposals.

The successful tenderer has now been selected and the campaign is scheduled for launch in the first half of 2007.

Conor Leeson is the NCPP's Head of Communications