Early School Leavers and Youth Unemployment

Forum Report No. 11

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Executive Summary
Executive Summary

Overview

1. Early school leaving and youth unemployment are, in the Forum’s opinion, among the most serious social and economic problems which this State must address. These issues were raised in the Forum’s Report No. 4 – Ending Long-term Unemployment which called for a diversion of the significant savings arising from declining pupil numbers to pre-school primary and second-level intervention in order to benefit those identified as being at risk of leaving with little or no qualifications.

2. In this Report, the Forum sets out clearly the link between poor education performance and poverty and looks at how poverty is reinforced and perpetuated through the combination of the impact of our education system and the inadequacy of our social welfare system. The Forum also considers the problem of progression opportunities for early school leavers in the light of changing labour market conditions and the fall in some traditional job opportunities for the unskilled. In the Forum’s view, new institutional measures to promote a ‘Whole Community’ approach need to be developed to:

   i. address problems ranging from inadequate income, poor housing, absence of study facilities, curricular reform and broader assessment measures; and

   ii. promote partnership between parents, schools, community groups and employers.

Characteristics of Early School Leaving and Youth Unemployment

3. Section II sets out the characteristics of youth unemployment and current policy responses. It is clear that youth unemployment, particularly youth long-term unemployment, is a serious problem in both the European and domestic context. The extent of the links between educational disadvantage and households that are already disadvantaged in terms of unemployment or low income is highlighted. The fall in some traditional employment opportunities combined with a process of ‘qualification inflation’ as more and more young people stay on in education, means that the social exclusion of early school leavers is becoming more acute. Although the numbers of such leavers has been falling in recent years (it is estimated that around 3,200 left before Junior Certificate in 1995), the Forum considers that their situation must be urgently addressed in a broad strategy encompassing education and training, income adequacy and the development of an area-based response to local needs.
Priority Groups

4. **Section III** proposes a new set of Priority Groups for policy action. Given that the needs of the very educationally disadvantaged must, in the Forum’s view, take priority, and under the maxim that prevention is better than cure, the Forum considers that the main policy emphasis should be directed at particular Priority Groups which range from those who are in pre-school right up to those who have already left without qualifications. The stocks and flows of early school leavers with no qualifications are estimated and a conceptual model of pathways and transitions in relation to the education system is outlined. In the Forum’s view, the current flows along the education pathway can be seen as generally one-way, with little or no flexibility to return to the formal education system for early leavers.

Prevention

5. **Section IV** examines the provision of pre-school, primary and second-level education and includes consideration of alternatives to the formal school system. Chief among the Forum’s **recommendations** in relation to the provision of education are:

- the Department of Education should set a target to eliminate early school leaving within the next five years;

- pre-school provision in disadvantaged areas and the special needs of Travellers need to be addressed;

- at primary level, savings from declining pupil numbers should be targeted in full at schools serving disadvantaged areas; the Department of Education should bring forward separate proposals setting out clear objectives to meet the needs of Traveller children (i.e. the same retention and achievement rates as other children). Mechanisms to monitor attendance and to track dropouts also need to be put in place by schools and by the Department of Education;

- at second level, there is an urgent requirement to broaden assessment techniques to take on board different abilities and talents other than those related to academic prowess. Options should be ‘gender-proofed’ to ensure equal access and outcomes for boys and girls. Examination fees should be abolished for those on low incomes (giving priority to abolition of Junior Certificate fees); and

- alternatives to school exist in the community and voluntary sector; development of these alternatives requires better co-operation between schools and such services in targeting resources within the local community context.
Cure

6. Section V looks at cures for early school leaving and youth unemployment. The main policy response for 15-18 year olds at present is Youthreach. The Forum recommends that, in addition to specified reforms of the Youthreach programme, an additional 1,000 places need to made available, targeted at those who have left school early with no educational qualifications. It is further recommended that an additional 100 places be made available for the target group on the FÁS Specific Skills Training programme. Given the current lack of policy measures for those aged between 18 and 21, the Forum recommends that a new pilot programme be set up for unemployed early school leavers with no qualifications, with a quota of 750 additional Community Employment places and 300 additional Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) places. In allocating these places, gender representation in accordance with the male/female proportions in the target group should be implemented. The impact of such training provision should also be gender-proofed. Support systems for young single mothers to strengthen their access to, and participation in, education and training should be an integral part of such programmes.

7. The Forum also looks at the development of linkages between schools and employers and urges that the work being done in this area be strengthened and deepened. The Forum further recommends that the Department of Education bring forward proposals to develop such links in disadvantaged areas.

8. In relation to Second Chance Education, the Forum recommends that these options should be targeted at the very disadvantaged, including lone parents, the disabled and the long-term unemployed. The costs of participation, including childcare costs, for the very disadvantaged should be addressed and literacy and numeracy options further developed. Imaginative outreach mechanisms are needed to reach these target groups and the Forum recommends that a public service information campaign should be undertaken by the Departments concerned to promote the options for second chance education.

Conclusions and Recommendations

9. Section VI sets out the Forum’s conclusions and recommendations on early school leaving and youth unemployment. The Forum’s strategy is to:

(a) halt the flows into early school leaving;
(b) deal with the continuing flows until such time as early school leaving is eliminated; and
(c) deal with the stock of young unemployed.
10. The Forum considers that the key target must be the elimination of early school leaving within the next five years. In order to meet this target, and to deal with continuing flows in the meantime as well as the current stock of unemployed, six inter-related priority actions are required. These are:

i. targeted reductions in the numbers leaving school early over the next five years (around 3,200 currently leave before Junior Certificate);

ii. the provision of 1,100 additional training places for those aged between 15 and 18 who have already left without qualifications;

iii. the establishment of a new pilot programme for those aged between 18 and 21 with an additional 750 places on Community Employment Schemes and an additional 300 on the VTOS Scheme;

iv. the targeting of second chance education at the most disadvantaged;

v. the establishment of a new, high-level interdepartmental group to oversee the implementation of the recommendations in this Report; and

vi. the development of institutional mechanisms and procedures to promote a 'Whole Community' approach in the delivery of education and training services.

Costs

11. The Forum has costed the above recommendations at around £12m in total. While fully aware of the constraints on public expenditure, the Forum considers that this investment is essential on both economic and social justice grounds. This will require additional expenditure involving a reordering of priorities on Government expenditure and the targeting of any savings arising from declining pupil numbers.
Section I

Introduction
Introduction

Overview

1.1 The Forum has been concerned for some time now with employment opportunities for young people, a concern which is reflected in its Report No. 4 – *Ending Long-term Unemployment*. This concern centres particularly on those with little or no formal educational or training qualifications, in the light of rapidly changing labour market conditions. In analysing the effects of these changes, the Forum has considered both the demand for, and the supply of, young labour market entrants, the type of jobs which are generally available to them and their opportunities for training and progression.

1.2 This Report, which is primarily concerned with those who leave school before completing junior level and the young unemployed with no educational qualifications, examines the key factors which influence a young person’s ability to access employment and to improve his or her employment opportunities. These key factors centre on:

- educational qualifications; in this regard, the singular nature and academic focus of the education system has not sufficiently addressed the needs of those with different abilities and talents;

- availability of high-quality, labour market-oriented vocational education, training and work experience opportunities for those in the 15-24 year old age-group; and

- socio-economic factors such as:
  - the cost of education, particularly for those experiencing multiple disadvantage;
  - the impact of the education system on those whose particular needs and requirements are not being met;
  - the levels of support provided in the home, school and community;
  - the impact of the social welfare system; and
  - the particular and different difficulties facing Travellers, young unskilled men and young single mothers with poor educational qualifications in relation to the changing nature of the jobs market.
1.3 The Forum has previously referred to the link between the cyclical nature of educational disadvantage causing poverty, and of poverty causing educational disadvantage and this must be clearly acknowledged. According to NESC\(^1\), the differential response to educational opportunity of those groups most affected by economic change has yielded the principal social structural defect in modern Irish society – the creation of large numbers who have lost their traditional occupational base, who have been unable to find new occupational outlets, and whose children are frequently poorly integrated into the education system and who are, in consequence of these problems, progressively marginalised. Estimates suggest that such households amount to about 11% of non-elderly and non-farm households in Ireland. NESC go on to say that educational inequality has not been the prime cause of this outcome. Rather, it has been the mechanism by which other inequalities in resources have been brought together and reproduced in the new emerging order. In addition, a 1994 study by the ESRI\(^2\) found that three out of four poor households were headed by a person with no qualifications and that a further 19% were headed by persons with only junior cycle qualifications.

1.4 It is clear, therefore, that school-based solutions alone are not sufficient. The Forum has previously stated that the central tenet underlying Government policy should be that of full employment. In this context, the issues of appropriate vocational education and training in tackling unemployment, particularly long-term unemployment, assume major importance. In global terms, the benefits of raising skills levels are important for employers and the economy through their impact on competitiveness and productivity. In this regard, the Forum notes the recent comments by Forfás\(^3\) on the potential of the economy to create 300,000 new service jobs over the next fifteen years, provided that, among other things, there is an outflow of well-qualified graduates to take up the opportunities in this sector.

1.5 The Forum, in considering all of these issues, has taken an holistic approach to the problems of early school leaving and youth unemployment. This Report will be concerned with identifying those whose needs are not being effectively met by the current education and training systems, in order that targeted action across all policy areas can be taken to redress this situation.

**Previous Reports**

1.6 In its Report No. 4 – *Ending Long-term Unemployment* – the Forum refers briefly to the need for early intervention in the school sector through the provision of more flexible and meaningful education options and also calls for action to

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address the situation of young people who have already left school without qualifications. The Forum expresses concern at the high number of these school leavers, who are the most likely in time to become long-term unemployed, and points out the very high potential cost to the State of such people over their lifetimes. In that Report, the Forum strongly favours diverting the significant savings arising from declining pupil numbers to pre-school, primary and second level interventions in order to benefit those identified as being at risk of leaving with little or no qualifications.

1.7 Since the Forum’s Report No. 4 was published, the Minister for Education has published the White Paper on Education, *Charting our Education Future*. The Forum notes that equality of access to, participation in, and benefit from school runs through the White Paper. A major concern of the Forum in the present Report will be to seek to have these aspirations translated into practice through implementation of specific actions to benefit early school leavers and the educationally disadvantaged and to equip them to participate in the labour market. The Forum considers that the definition of early school leaving needs to be seen in terms of the generally unfavourable outcomes facing such students.

**Policy Initiatives**

1.8 The Forum is heartened by the continuing attention devoted to policy review in the area of early school leavers and youth unemployment. In December 1995, the Educational Research Centre report on *Educational Disadvantage in Ireland* was published jointly by the Department of Education and the Combat Poverty Agency. Its main focus was on the Schemes of Assistance to Schools in Designated Areas of Disadvantage. Following this, the Minister for Education announced a new scheme *Breaking the Cycle* with revised criteria for primary schools on 8th May, 1996. The new scheme is based on targeting resources, using revised criteria, to identify schools in the most disadvantaged urban and rural areas, with the provision of additional supports for these schools and the requirement that each school included in the scheme should prepare and submit a five year development plan. 25 large urban schools (plus an additional 8 schools with close associations with those schools) and 25 clusters of small rural schools (119 schools in total, mainly four or five schools per cluster) have now been selected to take part in this scheme.\(^4\) The Forum welcomes the broad thrust of this intervention, calls for its extension and looks forward to early action in relation to second level schools.

1.9 The European Social Fund Programme Evaluation Unit operating under the aegis of the Department of Enterprise and Employment and the EU Commission published an Evaluation Report on *Early School Leavers Provision* in

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\(^4\) Based on an Information Note prepared by the Combat Poverty Agency.
February 1996. This evaluation makes a number of recommendations which are
drawn on later in this Report. Growing and Sharing Our Employment, the
Department of Enterprise and Employment's strategy paper on the labour
market, launched on 18th April, 1996 is a recent Government policy statement
which, among other things, identifies unqualified school leavers as a group
which requires special measures. The Forum has already commented on the
main proposal in this strategy with regard to youth progression in its Opinion
No. 3 - Long-term Unemployment Initiatives.

1.10 The Forum also welcomes the development of the National Anti-Poverty
Strategy (NAPS), of which one of the five key themes is educational dis-
advantage. The Forum notes that the area emphasised by most submissions on
the NAPS was that of education. In its Opinion on the National Anti-Poverty
Strategy, the Forum stresses the importance of education and of training as
priority themes at a number of levels which should be available as lifelong
options.

1.11 The Forum looks forward to the forthcoming White Paper on Human Resource
Development by the Department of Enterprise and Employment which, it is
understood, will focus on the crucial area of training and progression and will,
inter alia, examine the options to improve measures for young people.

Methodology

1.12 In drawing up its work programme for 1996, the Forum identified early school
leavers and youth unemployment as a priority work theme. In January 1996,
Standing Committee 2 began hearing presentations from and entering into
dialogue with a number of relevant experts. A full day public Plenary Session
was held on 13th March, 1996. Monthly Standing Committee meetings
continued to consider the issue at the same time as work on other publications
was proceeding.

1.13 The structure of this Report is as follows:

Section II outlines European and Irish labour market experience of early
school leavers and youth unemployment and current policy
responses.

Section III considers definitions of the target groups and the numbers
involved, looks at the availability of foundation training and
provides two related ways of looking at the wide ranging issues
involved, namely pathways and transitions.
Section IV starts from the core assumption that prevention is better than cure. In this context it considers and makes recommendations in relation to pre-school, primary and second-level schools.

Section V examines the Youthreach programme in terms of the nature of the service provided and the target group for this service. New measures required for the educationally disadvantaged aged between 18 and 21 are also proposed to deal with the absence of targeted labour market measures for this age group. The role of Second Chance Education and measures to promote links with employers are also examined.

Section VI sets out the Forum's conclusions and recommendations.

1.14 Finally, the Forum wishes to record its appreciation to all those who presented papers and contributed to the preparation of this Report, as set out in Annex 3. A special word of thanks is due to those who participated in the Forum's Plenary Session in March 1996 on Early School Leavers and Youth Unemployment.
Section II

Characteristics of Youth Unemployment and Policy Responses
Characteristics of Youth Unemployment and Policy Responses

(i) European Context

2.1 The scale of youth unemployment in the period 1988-1995 for Ireland and the EU 12 is shown in Table 2.1. The most striking feature is the fact that the Irish rate of youth unemployment (Measure 2 in the Table) increased by almost 5 percentage points between 1990 and 1994 and then fell back by 4 percentage points in 1995. This is in spite of a continuing high increase in the labour force and falling levels of emigration. The improvement in 1995 over 1994 can be mainly attributed to the strong employment performance of the Irish economy in recent years which now appears to be making an impact on youth unemployment, and to the increased number of young people opting to stay in full-time education. By contrast, the average youth unemployment rate in the EU 12 is now almost 5 percentage points above the 1990 rate, mainly due to subdued economic growth, despite an increase in the numbers staying on in education and training.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2.1</th>
<th>Youth unemployment and young people in the labour market EU 12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Numbers unemployed 15-24 (as percentage of total in 15-24 age-group)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU 12</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Youth unemployment rate (number unemployed 15-24 as percentage labour force aged 15-24)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>24.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU 12</td>
<td>19.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


EU data in this sub-Section is based mainly on Youthstart – A New Commitment, European Social Fund, March 1996.
2.2 An indication of the extent of the serious problem of youth long-term unemployment is set out in Table 2.2 below. Out of eleven EU States, Ireland had the eighth highest rate of youth long-term unemployment in 1994 (although it must also be noted that only one other state had a higher rate of adult long-term unemployment). In common with most of the other States, the Irish rate of youth long-term unemployment was higher than that for the adult (10.9% as compared to 8.2%) in that year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>DK</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>GR</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Irl</th>
<th>It</th>
<th>Ned</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>UK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall LTU rate (%)</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth LTU rate (%)</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older LTU rate (%)</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

YouthStart – an EU Initiative for Youth

2.3 As part of a concerted response to the problem of youth unemployment across Member States, the EU Commission launched the Youthstart strategy in December 1993 coinciding with the EU White Paper Growth, Competitiveness and Employment. Youthstart aims to guarantee all young people access to a recognised form of education and training and especially targets those young people leaving school without formal education. Youthstart is comprised of three components namely:

- Member States policies and provision (exchequer funded);
- Member States mainstream European Social Fund (ESF) funded policies and provision; and
- Employment Youthstart Community Initiative.

2.4 These elements comprise the three pillars of the Youthstart strategy, the success of which is contingent on maximising and transferring the learning between and across the respective programmes and initiatives.

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2.5 The strategy aims to address the potential dynamic of the link between the three components with regard to:

- investment in education, training, guidance and counselling;
- the reinforcement of active labour market policies;
- transnational innovation and good practice in a wide range of projects focused on the needs of the least qualified young people in preparation for entering the labour market.

2.6 In his address to the Forum on Youthstart, EU Commissioner Mr Padraig Flynn urged the Forum to follow closely developments on this new initiative. The Forum will certainly be interested in the evaluation of the results of this new and experimental programme and its impact in tackling the overall problem of youth unemployment.

2.7 It has been observed by the EU Commission that, in many areas, the rate of unemployment of unqualified young people runs at four or five times the adult rate and that it tends to be four times higher among those without vocational qualifications. While no comparative data exists at EU level for the under 25 age group, CSO data for the period 1992-1995 (Figure A.1, Annex 1) indicate that the youth unemployment rate in Ireland was almost twice the adult rate in that period. With regard to the rate of unemployment for those without educational qualifications in the 15-24 age-group compared to the overall rate for that age-group, the ESRI annual School Leavers' Surveys and the CSO's annual Labour Force Surveys both provide different measures, as can be seen in Table 2.3 below, but it can be deduced that the real rate lies somewhere between these two i.e. between 2 and 3 times the overall rate and appears to be worsening in recent years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2.3</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ratio of youth unemployment without qualifications rate to overall youth unemployment rate</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Importance of Education

2.8 In the EU 12, there were around 9.4 million young people with only junior level education and a further 4.7 million without any formal qualification at all at the beginning of this decade (see Table 2.4). This 14.1 million (or 30% of the age group) are those most likely to form part of the hard core long-term unemployed. The same data indicate that around 26% of young people in Ireland had no qualifications beyond junior level.

<p>| Table 2.4 |
|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Young people with a weakened position on the labour market 1990-1992 |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>without ANY formal qualification(^{(1)})</th>
<th>with NO qualification BEYOND compulsory education(^{(1)})</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>as % of age group</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in actual numbers</td>
<td>4.7 m</td>
<td>9.4 m</td>
<td>14.1 m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: European Commission

\(^{(1)}\) Different definitions in Member States. The data relate to different years for Member States, but mainly cover data available between 1990 and 1992. The data for Ireland relates to 1992.

2.9 EU youth unemployment is significantly higher than the composite OECD average with the Irish youth unemployment rate the sixth highest in the OECD\(^7\). The EU Commission has concluded very pessimistically that alternative approaches for unqualified or poorly qualified young people have not been designed, or if they have, there has been inadequate evaluation and they have been abandoned or changed. In the words of the EU Commission:

"The combined impact of this data must be to underline the fact that the fight against youth unemployment in Europe, far from being over, has scarcely begun to show positive results."

\(^7\) Source: OECD.
2.10 The Forum shares the above concern. It considers that education is a key
clement in enabling people to compete for job opportunities and that a weak
educational background seriously limits those opportunities. The level of
education obtained is also a major determinant of the ability to access training
and progression opportunities.

(ii) Youth Unemployment in Ireland\(^8\)

2.11 Figure 2.1 shows the overall youth employment and unemployment picture for
the period 1989-1995 which indicates that these variables have been affected by
the overall rate of economic activity in Ireland as well as by the large increase in
those staying on in full-time education.

Figure 2.1

![Graph showing employment, unemployment, and education trends for 15-24 year olds (PES Basis)](image)

2.12 Annex 1 contains further Figures (A.2, A.3, A.4, A.5, A.6) based on CSO data
for 1992 to 1995 which indicate that:

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- in Figure A.2, the number of unemployed 21-24 year olds without qualifications has fallen from 5,000 to 3,300 over the period, while the number of unemployed 15-17 year olds has increased from 1,900 to 2,300. The number of unemployed 18-20 year olds declined from 3,800 to 2,600 in the period 1992-1994 and then rose again slightly in 1995 to 2,700;

- Figure A.3 shows a breakdown of the above data by age and gender. This indicates that there has been a substantial drop in unemployment for males with primary qualifications only in the 18-20 and 21-24 age groups (from a total of 5,900 in 1992 to 3,700 in 1995 for these age-groups). However, as the level of employment and inactivity for such males do not appear to have been affected by this drop, emigration may be a factor behind this (the net migration change in the 1992-95 period for males aged between 15-24 was -3,500, while that for females was ~700\(^9\)). Sampling error may also be a factor, given the small numbers of unemployed involved in the groups; it is not possible to draw definite conclusions about trends in relation to such small estimates from the Labour Force Survey.

- at 9.7%, the long-term unemployment rate for 15-24 year olds was over 2.5 percentage points higher than that of the adult long-term unemployment rate in 1995, according to the Labour Force Survey. Figure A.4 in Annex 1 shows the very large increase that took place in the rate of youth long-term unemployment in comparison to that for adults in the period 1990 to 1993, rising from 9.8% to 12.8% as compared to a plateau of around 8.5% for adults in that period;

- the proportion of male long-term unemployment in the 15-24 age-group fell from 58% in 1989 to 47% in 1995, while that for females fell from 48% to 40% in the same period. However, the male proportion was actually higher in 1995 than it was in 1992 (Figure A.5). The rapid growth of services in the labour market and the projected importance of this sector to overall growth in coming years point to particular difficulties for young unemployed men with no qualifications or skills in finding jobs if they do not fit the right 'profile' or indeed, if their cultural influences prevent them from seeking jobs in this sector in the first place;

- Figure A.6 shows the rate of long-term unemployment disaggregated by level of qualification. This shows that the rate of long-term unemployment for those with primary qualifications only is over twice that for those with junior cycle qualifications and over five times that for those with the Leaving Certificate. The rate of long-term unemployment for those with primary qualifications only is further disaggregated into male and female

rates. Although there have been fluctuations, the female rate has tended to be slightly lower over the period, at around 30% on average, while that for males is around 31% on average.

(iii) School to Work and Adulthood Transitions\textsuperscript{10}

2.13 The above movements are mirrored in the annual school-leavers surveys carried out by the ESRI. Figure 2.2 shows the dramatic changes in the employment situation of all second level school leavers in Ireland over the 15 year period from 1980 to 1995. It shows the very rapid decline in employment chances up to 1983 – with a corresponding rapid growth in unemployment. Employment chances remained relatively stable from 1983 to 1990 – with minor annual fluctuations; although unemployment also declined. The level of unemployment, which appears to be linked to the overall rate of economic activity, would have been affected to some degree by the rapid growth in third-level entry which went from 20% to just over 40% of the total cohort over the whole period. After 1990 employment declined rapidly – with a corresponding growth in unemployment; and the situation did not improve significantly until 1995.

\textbf{Figure 2.2}

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\textsuperscript{10} The main source for the following paragraphs up to Para. 2.32 is a paper prepared for the Forum by Prof. Damien Hannan, ESRI, entitled \textit{School to Work and Adulthood Transitions in Ireland: Problems and Possibilities}. (January 1996).
2.14 Figure 2.3 shows the extremely rapid growth that has occurred in the educational qualifications of second level school leavers over the 15 years since 1980. The proportion of the cohort with a Leaving Certificate qualification has grown from 60 to over 80%. There has been a corresponding decline in those leaving with a junior cycle qualification – whether a Group or Junior Certificate. This declined from just over 30% to around 15%. The magnitude of these changes has not led to an equally significant decline in those dropping out at junior level, although those leaving before taking any Junior Certificate examination did fall from around 10% to under 4% in the 1980-95 period. The actual number of early leavers is estimated to have remained around the 3,500 to 4,500 range since the end of the 1980s up to 1994. However, in the 1996 School Leavers Survey, it is estimated that this number has now dropped to 2,200. We can add to this those who do not go on to second-level – estimated at around 1,000 per annum.

![Figure 2.3](image)

2.15 Figure 2.4 shows the relationship between educational level and unemployment rates over the 1980s and early 1990s. It provides clear evidence of the significantly higher probability of employment for those with a Leaving Certificate. It shows a very strong economic rationale for staying on in school to get better qualifications.
2.16 Nearly all of the better qualified are absorbed in the labour market over time. The position of the unqualified does improve slightly, but the unemployment rate stabilises at a very high level. In a five year follow-up study, the unqualified started out in 1987 with an unemployment rate of around 61%, but they ended up five years later with almost the same rate (58%). However, for those with a Leaving Certificate, the unemployment rate both started in a relatively better position at around 32% (half the rate of the unqualified group), and had declined five years later to a rate of 10%. There also appears to be a much higher rate of job turnover amongst the least qualified, with much lower probabilities of getting a secure long term job.

2.17 Successful emigration is not an option for the least qualified. They disproportionately experience all the personal and social problems associated with being an unsuccessful immigrant abroad. Alternatively, they return home to their families, which are usually amongst the most disadvantaged – the double disadvantage syndrome. Those with very poor qualifications have also become increasingly more concentrated among those from the most deprived social backgrounds. Therefore, although the group has become smaller, it has become more urgent to address the problems of the group.
The Importance of Grades

2.18 Recent research indicates\footnote{Quoted in D. Hanham's paper to the Forum and based on research by Breen, Hannan and O’Leary, 1995, using data from the School Leavers Surveys at the beginning of the 1990’s.} that higher grades at Junior Certificate level are actually of more labour market value than poor grades at Leaving Certificate level. The rate of return is much the same for both males and females. In general, even very low grades in the Junior Certificate examination are better than no grades at all. Staying on to do the Leaving Certificate, given the same grades as Junior level, is better on average than leaving the system at Junior Certificate level. Irish employers pay attention not only to what examination is taken, but how well people do in their examinations. Much the same relationship to examinations and grades holds for wage/income returns to those in employment. The situation for examination levels can be seen from Table 2.5 below. These relationships between examinations and grades appear to be stronger in Ireland than in other European countries, although there is no definitive cross-national work done in this area in Europe.

Earnings Differentials

2.19 Table 2.5 indicates the increasing returns according to the level of qualifications obtained. It also shows how low levels of income are maintained across the different age groups for those with only junior cycle qualifications, pointing to the lack of opportunities to progress to better jobs for such people.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2.5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Earning Differentials by Educational Level and Age-group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987, primary education = 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior secondary cycle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior secondary cycle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Employers’ recruitment policies

2.20 As Table 2.1 shows, there is a high rate of youth unemployment in Ireland at present. When this is combined with very fast structural change in occupations/industries employing youth labour, particularly unskilled labour, it indicates...
that traditional channels of recruitment no longer seem to operate. With such a labour supply, employers are using educational qualifications/grades to sort out those whom they will interview for jobs. In making such decisions, employers take into consideration the general human capital built up in schools, measured through examinations and grades. The assumption is that the higher the qualifications/grades, the lower the training costs and the more potentially valuable the employee.

2.21 Educational success may also be equated by employers with development of relevant social/personal skills, such as ability to assimilate into a work environment, ability to work with others, ability to concentrate, and time keeping. However these assumptions may apply, the fact remains that the probability of making a successful transition to the labour market varies significantly from over 95% for the best qualified to less than 40% for the least qualified. Early school-leavers are the unavoidable fall-out in such a system and their chances of secure and well-paid employment are greatly lessened.

2.22 Of course there is a, mostly implicit, matching of job difficulty with qualification/grade requirements – but these seem to have shifted upwards at a significant rate over the 1980s and early 1990s. For instance, in most large retail outlets one now needs a Leaving Certificate to be considered for the job of shop assistant. Fifteen years ago, a junior cycle qualification was enough. There has been significant qualification inflation for most occupations, even unskilled ones, and a significant upgrading of the desired employee ‘profile’.

2.23 Since there is a high correlation between educational qualifications and social class of origin, any class bias in employment decisions will also be reflected in such educationally based decisions.

2.24 The Forum questions the adequacy of any such implicit assumptions deriving as they do from an academically-oriented education system which does not measure attributes such as interpersonal skills or initiative. Continuing reform of the education system, in particular reform in relation to what abilities and attributes are assessed and the manner in which they are assessed, will assist employers to look beyond educational qualifications to the other attributes which are useful in employment situations.

Social Origin

2.25 In a situation where around 80% of the cohort go on to do the Leaving Certificate, the social class selection of those leaving early is very pronounced, and has become even more so over time. 85% of early leavers now come from working class origins or small farms, where the average proportion of all school leavers from such backgrounds is around 50%.
2.26 55% of early leavers come from families where fathers are unemployed, compared to less than 20% in the total cohort. Most of the unemployed of course are working class, so the combined percentage of early leavers who are either working class or unemployed comes to only 88%. These figures provide an indication of the cycle of disadvantage referred to earlier, in that early school-leaving must be seen as symptomatic of wider measures of disadvantage rather than simply as a function of the education system.

2.27 Given persistent unemployment and persistent denial of opportunity to establish valued adult status in one’s community, a higher proportion of young people in this situation seek alternative channels of achievement – perhaps acceptable only to, and having status within, small subgroups of the society. This, however, does not excuse or remove personal responsibility from such individuals if they get involved in crime or the drug subculture.

**Location of Disadvantage**

2.28 Table 2.6 shows the distribution of disadvantage for primary-level pupils as defined by Kellaghan et al. This study indicates that, contrary to the general perception, rural areas have the highest level of disadvantage (60.7%) with only around 40% for urban areas with populations greater than 10,000. (The fact

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Level Pupils</th>
<th>Dublin City and Dun Laoghaire</th>
<th>Other Urban Areas (Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford)</th>
<th>Towns (pop. between 10,000 and 40,000)</th>
<th>Rural Areas (Pop. less than 10,000)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Distribution of disadvantaged pupils</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>60.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of disadv. pupils as % of all pupils in location</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupils attending designated primary schools serving disadv. areas as % of all pupils in location</td>
<td>41.2%</td>
<td>21.8%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

that rural areas are defined as having populations with less than 10,000 means that this would encompass many small country towns). The Table also shows that Dublin has the greatest concentration of disadvantage and that it is the area that is best served under the Scheme of Assistance to Schools in Designated Areas of Disadvantage. Provision in Dublin of designated schools is over 8 times better than in rural areas and over four times better than in towns. Given that absolute numbers of disadvantaged pupils are 2.4 times more numerous in rural areas than in Dublin, the differences between locations are even more extreme; provision is twenty times better in Dublin than in rural areas.

Young Women’s Withdrawal From the Labour Force

2.29 The data show that a very high proportion of the most unqualified female school leavers withdraw from the labour force, usually those with poor labour market records. More of these unqualified leavers have children than other groups. Single motherhood is highly concentrated among the most unqualified and among those with very poor labour market histories. Many factors contribute to early single motherhood, but for most it is an outcome that emerges only gradually and only after a lot of negative experiences with seeking employment.

2.30 Where young women have poor educational qualifications, their general economic status is much poorer than their male counterparts. In addition, those from very poor working class backgrounds, with poor educational qualifications, tend to marry within the same class/educational group; their probability of establishing economically secure unions is much lower than for others.

2.31 Table 2.7 provides some summary information on the incidence of early marriage and single motherhood among young women with different levels of education. As one can see both, but particularly single parenthood, are closely related to poor educational levels.

| Table 2.7 |
| Early Marriage and Single Parenthood amongst Young Women by Level of Education |
| No Qualifications | Intermediate | Leaving | 3rd Level |
| 1. Married (%) | 20 | 26 | 21 | 5 |
| 2. Single Mothers (%) | 11 | 9 | 1 | 1 |
| 3. Withdrawn from Labour Force | 27 | 14 | 8 | 1 |

(Analysis of 1987 School-Leavers’ Survey and five-year follow-up)
2.32 In the five-year follow-up study, the marriage rate was around 22% for those with a Leaving Certificate or lower, but for third level graduates, it was only 5%. It appears that, for those with third-level qualifications, both educational and career establishment indicates significant postponement of marriage.

2.33 In the case of lone parents – the majority of which are mothers – special tabulations from the Labour Force Survey, 1989 indicated that only 37% were economically active, with 18% in full-time employment, 7% in part-time employment and 13% unemployed or seeking work. This high unemployment rate – about one-third of economically active lone mothers – suggests that a significant number of lone parents may take up paid work.15 However, the Forum considers that young, very disadvantaged women may not be able to overcome their educational disadvantage without appropriate supports. In this regard, the Forum notes that programmes being run by Santa Rosa College14 in California for single parents illustrate how targeted education and training can lead to good progression and employment opportunities. Arrangements for child care are an integral part of these programmes.

Stress Levels

2.34 Unemployment increases stress levels significantly for young people; with some evidence15 that the increase is slightly greater for the least qualified and those with poorer prospects of employment. There is some evidence also that those from more deprived backgrounds are also more distressed, particularly those with few social and social-emotional supports. These figures are somewhat lower, however, than those for equivalent adults. They nevertheless involve very high levels of stress for the young unemployed. Suicide figures for 1995 indicate that around one in five suicides are accounted for by the 15-24 age-group, with almost 90% (72) of these being male. Although the data available are not linked to employment status, the figures for that age-group seem to indicate a slightly higher risk for unskilled manual workers for those suicides where the social group is known.16

Drug Abuse and Crime rates

2.35 According to the 1995 Annual Report of the Health Research Board, an analysis of problem drug users who presented themselves for treatment indicated that:

- the proportion of teenagers in the total treatment group rose from 17% in 1990 to 30% in 1994 and the proportions for the first contact group were 35% in 1990 rising to 51% in 1994;

14 Material supplied by National Women’s Council.
16 CSO data for 1995.
• while overall the proportions leaving school, at or under the school leaving age of 15, continued to be more than 50%, the trend was downward and participation in secondary level increased;

• the exceptionally high levels of unemployment for both the total treatment group and the first contact group were maintained over the years; and

• the most commonly used drug was heroin and there was an increasing proportion of those citing heroin in the total treatment group – the increase was even more pronounced for the first contact group.

2.36 There were some notable differences between males and females over all the years; firstly, the proportion of males was always at least three times that of females: secondly, in both groups males were proportionately more likely than females to live with their family of origin in any given year and finally, that females were always proportionately far more likely than males to be living with a drug-using partner.

2.37 In relation to crime, around 60% of the 13,487 referrals received by the National Juvenile Office in 1995 related to teenagers in the 14–17 age bracket. Of these, around 85% were male. The main offences involved related to larcenies, burglary and criminal damage (57% of the total).

Transitions

2.38 Analysis by the ESRI suggests that the transition to adulthood is very highly and very traditionally structured. In general, the achievement of fully independent adult status has employment as a prerequisite to or accompanying the establishment of a separate household, with marriage and children usually dependent on achieving the preceding transitions.

2.39 With regard to the small minority of unemployed people who marry and set up home independently, and single mothers who do likewise, these transitions are linked with poor socio-economic backgrounds, lower educational attainment and very poor employment histories which tend to maintain people within very deprived circumstances. The ESRI concludes:

"The economic and social 'damage' caused to young people by failure in education and by high unemployment is so great, and the obstacles both raise to achieving a satisfactory transition to adulthood so formidable, that policies designed to both tackle their causes and to ameliorate their damaging effects are of the utmost importance".

17 This sub-Section is based on the findings of Pathways to Adulthood in Ireland: Causes and Consequences of Success and Failure in Transitions Amongst Irish Youth, D. F. Hannan, S. Ó Riain, ESRI, 1998
(iv) Policy Responses

(a) Training

2.40 Given that it is estimated that just under 50% of the total labour force (see Annex 2) have little or no educational qualifications, together with the lack of demand for traditional low-skilled labour, the availability of appropriate vocational training is crucial. However, the Forum is aware of the limited opportunities which exists in this regard and of the relatively low progression rates associated with these programmes. While, in theory, all FÁS programmes are open to unemployed people over the age of fifteen without reference to academic qualifications, abilities and aptitudes are assessed for the more skilled courses. The Forum considers that the use of educational qualifications as an entry requirement for at least some of the training courses (including FÁS courses) for which they are now used is inappropriate and must be changed. The main foundation measure which exists for young people is Youthreach. There are currently 3,350 places available under Youthreach (including 450 in train), with 625 progression places.

2.41 CERT also provides training to young people without qualifications subject to basic literacy and numeracy requirements. However, the lower age limit for training is seventeen; in addition, the numbers involved in the 17 to 18 age-group seem to be quite small (around 120 to 150 per annum)\(^ {18}\). The Forum notes that CERT training is entirely competency based and that the majority of its trainees are successful in obtaining employment in the catering industry. Given that such training would be of real relevance and benefit to young unqualified school-leavers, the Forum recommends that the existing lower age limit be amended to allow 15-17 year olds to participate on CERT courses. The arrangements for such training could form part of the Youthreach programme.

2.42 On a related point, the Forum considers that a basic issue arises over the provision of training to 15 year olds, in the context of the raising of the formal school-leaving age to sixteen, as proposed in the White Paper on Education. This is a policy matter which will require to be dealt with by the Department of Education in conjunction with FÁS.

Other policy responses are:

- the main scheme for 18/19 year olds is the requirement to sign on with FÁS after six months on the Live Register; and

- for those aged 21 and over, there are a wide range of options (albeit under resourced in terms of the number of places available) including Community Employment, VTOS, the Educational Opportunity Scheme, Back to Work Allowance and Job Start.

\(^ {18}\) Based on information supplied by CERT.
(b) 18-20 Year Olds

2.43 The Forum considers that a serious deficiency arises out of the interaction of education, training and social welfare policy responses in the case of those aged between 18 and 21. Given the lack of access to Community Employment and VTOS schemes and the disincentives to return to full-time education due to loss of benefits, the Forum considers that specific provision be made for this age-group as a matter of urgency. The Forum therefore recommends that a new pilot programme be put in place which will provide 750 additional places on Community Employment schemes and 300 additional places on VTOS to young people aged between 18 to 21 without educational qualifications. Full details of this recommendation are set out in Section V.

c) Social Welfare System

2.44 According to the 1996 ESRI School Leavers Survey, around 31% on average of those who left school without qualifications in the 1991-1994 period were unemployed and still seeking their first job one year after leaving school. (This figure excludes those on schemes). The costs involved in keeping children on at school beyond the age of fifteen may simply be beyond the means of unemployed parents and those with very low income. The opportunity to bring in some income, even from a low-paid, insecure job may be a necessity of life for these families given the present level of Child Dependent Allowances. The only other support available to them is Child Benefit, which is a universal payment. The Forum notes that, in a 1994 report19, the Combat Poverty Agency estimated the weekly cost of education under a defined Basic Minimum Budget Standard ranged from £1.35 for a child in junior infants to £6.80 for a teenager in the final year of secondary school. The report also concluded that child support payments fell short of even the minimal expenditure associated with the upbringing of a child and that this shortfall becomes much greater in the teenage years.

2.45 The Forum considers that, in the context of overall tax and social welfare reform, Integrated Child Benefit (increased Child Benefit targeted at low income families and replacing Child Dependent Allowances) should be introduced. The Forum agrees with the recent NESC Report20 that this desirable system should be implemented in a planned way over a number of years, subject to resources. However, the Forum stresses the necessity that this does not impact negatively on people currently dependant on Child Dependant Allowances while being implemented.

2.46 The effects of interaction of the tax and social welfare system on employment also need to be considered. The attraction of a low-paid job for a young school-leaver without any other resources may not persist when that person becomes eligible for Unemployment Assistance at age 18. In other words, the replacement ratio has changed and, unless the skills and abilities of that person are raised to enable him or her to access better job opportunities, there is no incentive to work and the potential to slide into long-term unemployment increases. Furthermore, the social welfare system acts as a disincentive to return to formal education for those aged between 18 and 21 given that there is no provision for returning to a course of study while retaining benefits.

(d) Role of Parents, School and the Community Sector

2.47 The Forum has already noted in Section I the changes which are underway in the Department of Education in relation to curricular reform and the targeting of those who are educationally disadvantaged. However, the Forum was struck by the consensus in virtually all of the submissions it received on the need for co-ordination of all the stake-holders in the education and training systems in order to effect the necessary changes to meet the needs of all young people in these systems. The Forum considers that the concepts of empowerment and partnership in the delivery of education and training services are useful in terms of making the most effective use of resources available to a community. This means that education would be concerned not only with individual advancement but with collective advancement also. The general principles for partnership projects centre around needs-directed learning, democratic decision-making and participative ways of working both within schools and between schools and other agencies. One of the most obvious ways of increasing partnership is by increasing the involvement of parents, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, in the education of their children.

2.48 In the context of building a partnership concept, the Forum was very interested in a submission it received from Galway VEC in relation to the development of a ‘District Approach’ to combat the effects of educational and social under-development in Galway City. This project, which is being carried out under the EU Youthstart initiative, is based on the creation of ‘Learning Neighbourhoods’ involving community-wide, life-long, life-quality enhancing opportunities for all. Galway VEC now leads a consortium consisting of four primary schools, three second level schools, three youth organisations and four community groupings, with links to other statutory agencies. The two primary aims of this project are to:

(i) identify and alleviate structural factors which contribute to lack of success by young people at school and to early school leaving in specific pilot areas. This will be done by a combination of support programmes for parents and schools, the improvement of existing support services and
the development of new services for the disadvantaged. The co-ordination of institutions and agencies in terms of curricular reform and in-service training, integrating all those involved in the delivery of education and youth training interventions will also be carried out and links with employers developed; and

(ii) improvements in the educational and social development of those at risk of leaving early in the pilot schools and in the education and training services to early school leavers in specific pilot areas. This will focus on the development, again on an inter-agency basis, of positive attitudes and personal attributes and competencies in those at risk of leaving early, while special training programmes for those who have already left will promote the development of skills, attitudes and enhanced potential for employment.

Conclusions

2.49 The Forum concludes that early school leaving, although falling in recent years, has become a far more pressing problem because of the almost total absence of regular and sustained employment opportunities for those without formal education and qualifications in the modern economy. This is compounded by the inflation of qualifications, whereby less qualified young people are excluded from employment which in the past might have been available to them.

2.50 The key issues to be addressed from the above analyses include:

- the numbers leaving school without qualifications and those with junior cycle qualifications only;
- the inflation of qualifications for even relatively low-skilled jobs;
- the concentration of those who leave school early among already disadvantaged families;
- the different problems of young, educationally-disadvantaged men and women in the labour-market;
- the costs of keeping a child in school for disadvantaged families and the effects of the social welfare system in contributing to disadvantage; and
- the involvement of parents, schools, community groups and employers in contributing and shaping the education and vocational training systems in a co-ordinated way so that the needs of all young people and the community can be met.

2.51 The very high proportion of our total population in the youth age group makes it all the more difficult to tackle these problems. The numbers reaching 18 and entering the labour market will start to decline rapidly after 1998, so there is now a window of opportunity to intervene actively to tackle our problems.
Section III

Targeting Resources – Priority Groups
Section III: Targeting Resources – Priority Groups

Introduction and Definition

3.1 Having considered all of the critical factors at play in the youth labour market, it is now necessary to look more closely at the terms “educationally disadvantaged” and “early school leaver”. This Section will examine these concepts and make recommendations in relation to the priority groups for attention. In the Forum’s view, these concepts must be defined in terms of the generally adverse outcomes for young people without formal education and qualifications.

Educational Disadvantage and Early School Leavers

3.2 The extent of educational disadvantage in Ireland is clear from the following details for the period 1993-1995 (annual averages):²¹

- up to 1,000 did not progress to second level school at all;
- 3,000 left second level school with no qualification whatsoever (of which 1,970 were boys and 1,030 were girls);
- 7,600 left school having completed Junior Certificate only (4,900 boys and 2,700 girls); of which 2,400 failed to achieve at least 5 passes in the Junior Certificate (no gender breakdown available);
- 2,600 young people left school having completed the Junior Certificate and a Vocational Preparatory Training (VPT) course only (1,400 boys and 1,200 girls); and
- around 7,000 did not achieve 5 passes in the Leaving Certificate examination (around 4,000 boys and 3,000 girls).

Existing Target Groups

3.3 For Government policy purposes, two educationally disadvantaged groups have been identified: Priority Group 1 and Priority Group 2. Priority Group 1 are 15-18 year olds, who are unemployed and have left school with no

²¹ Based on ESRI School Leavers’ Survey 1996 and Department of Education data.
qualifications. Priority Group 2 are those who have left school after successfully completing junior cycle secondary school. The target group of Youreach, the main national programme for those who have left school early, is Priority Group 1. However, as 28% of Youreach participants have some level of formal educational qualification\textsuperscript{22}, some Priority Group 2 are also catered for in the programme.

3.4 Having looked at the existing target groups, the Forum considers that a reordering of priorities must be implemented. This requires concerted, parallel action in relation to these groups in order to:

(i) halt the flows into early school-leaving; and

(ii) tackle the problems of existing educational disadvantage.

However, in saying this, the Forum recognises that there are what might be termed 'crisis communities', which are so lacking in resources and their problems are so severe that time in school or in a training centre cannot be expected to provide more than a safe haven and friendly environment for its participants.

Proposed New Target Groups

3.5 For policy purposes and to avoid confusion with the existing target groups in paragraph 3.3, the Forum proposes a revised set of groups as follows:

- **Priority Group A** should consist of those at risk of leaving school with no qualifications and becoming unemployed i.e. potential early school leavers in danger of leaving with less than 5 passes at junior cycle. Based on the principle that prevention is better than cure, this group would contain a number of priority sub-groups i.e.-

  - **Priority Group A (i)** would be pre-school children;
  - **Priority Group A (ii)** would be primary level children;
  - **Priority Group A (iii)** would be those children at the junior cycle of second level.

Within all of these sub-groups, the special needs of Travellers, who are among those most likely to leave early, must be taken into account. The Forum notes that a number of recommendations in this regard have already been set out in the 1995 *Report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community*,

• **Priority Group B** should consist of those aged between 15 and 18 who have already left without qualifications, including those with less than 5 passes in the Junior Certificate, and who need targeted intervention via *Youthreach*;

• **Priority Group C** should consist of those aged between 18 and 21 who have left school early without qualifications. This group requires targeted measures which will offer an incentive to take up education, training and employment opportunities; and

• **Priority Group D** should consist of those who have left with junior cycle qualifications only.

The Forum considers that the main emphasis at this stage must be on Priority Groups A, B and C.

**Other Educationally Disadvantaged Groups**

3.6 Once adequate resources have been allocated to cater for the needs of these three priority groups, the broader group of those who are educationally disadvantaged needs to be considered for action. In terms of the generally unfavourable outcomes for those without a Leaving Certificate qualification, the Forum regards anyone with less than five Ds in the Leaving Certificate or equivalent as educationally disadvantaged. As well as the 21,000 educationally disadvantaged leaving the system each year on average, there is a further potential 177,000 in the school system or 21% of the total school population. It is estimated that 69,000 unemployed people are educationally disadvantaged, equivalent to 40% of the total unemployed and 5% of the labour force (see Annex 2).

**Estimation of Stocks and Flows of proposed Priority Groups B and C**

3.7 The Forum has estimated the stocks and flows of Priority Groups B and C in paragraph 3.5 above (unqualified school-leavers) as follows²³:

(i) **1995 Flows 15-18 year olds – No qualifications**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Estimate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary education only</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior to Junior Certificate</td>
<td>2,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 5 D's in Junior Certificate</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtotal</td>
<td>5,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less those in employment</td>
<td>(2,200)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Annual Flow</strong></td>
<td><strong>3,000</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

²³ Data on flows supplied by the Department of Education. Data on stock taken from the 1995 CSO Labour Force Survey (ILO basis)
(ii) Stock – No Qualifications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Stock</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15-17 year olds</td>
<td>2,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-20 year olds</td>
<td>2,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Stock</strong></td>
<td><strong>5,200</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Availability of Training

3.8 Using the figures in paragraph 3.7, the Forum has estimated the shortfall in training places as set out in Table 3.1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.1 Training Places required</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Year One</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Places required</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7,100</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Places Available</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(i) Youthreach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Progression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ii) Other FÁS training for those</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with no qualifications (e.g.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Skills Training, CYTP etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>based on demand for such training in 1995(^24)</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Places Available</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5,020</td>
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<tr>
<td>5,645</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shortfall</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3,180</td>
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<tr>
<td>1,455</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

\(^*\) Assumes 50% dropout rate from Year One, with remainder going on to Progression

Provision for Travellers

3.9 The Department of Education currently provides around 300 places in Junior Traveller Centres, with a further 550 places in Senior Traveller Centres under the one-year Department of Education/FÁS programme. Given that there were

\(^24\) Material supplied by FÁS.
an estimated 2,000 Traveller children aged between 12-15 in 1993, of which only 100 were in mainstream second level schools, the magnitude of their needs is very apparent; again, the Forum refers to the recommendations which have already been made in this area\textsuperscript{25}. However, the Forum considers that the recommendations set out in this Report are also relevant, in a general sense, to the education and training needs of Travellers.

**Conclusions on Availability of Training**

3.10 It will be noted that the above analysis does not take account of those with Junior Certificate only. While the Forum believes that this group also requires targeted support, the sheer size and nature of those with no qualifications means that they must receive priority. In the Forum’s opinion, the shortfall of just over 3,000 places to cater for these very educationally disadvantaged must be immediately addressed. While it is recognised that not all of those included in the quantification of stocks and flows above may be interested in participating in Youthreach, the Forum considers that imaginative outreach mechanisms are needed to make this programme more focused on, and attractive to, the very disadvantaged. As a first step, the Forum recommends that the Department of Education, in conjunction with FÁS, should set a target to increase the number of participants with no qualifications under Youthreach by 1,000 in the next twelve months at an estimated full-year cost of £6.3m. This recommendation assumes that there will be no displacement of those currently on Youthreach with some qualifications; the Forum considers that such participants might be redirected to more appropriate FÁS courses to better reflect their higher levels of numeracy and literacy. More detailed recommendations on Youthreach are set out in Section V.

3.11 As a second step, the Forum recommends that a further 100 places on the FÁS Specific Skills Training programme be made available to unqualified early leavers between 15 and 17 years of age, at an estimated cost of £0.26m.

3.12 In addition, the Forum believes that separate provision is necessary for the almost 3,000 18-20 year olds with no qualifications who have moved beyond the normal Youthreach age bracket and have nowhere to go until they become eligible at age 21 for Community Employment and VTOS. The Forum is therefore recommending that 750 places on Community Employment schemes and 300 places on VTOS be made available to this group at an estimated total full year cost of £3.9m. The criteria attaching to this recommendation are set out in full in Section V.

3.13 In making the above recommendations, we are well aware of the resource constraints under which the Government is operating. However, we consider

that the necessary funding for this investment in education and training must be made available through the allocation of additional resources to this area and through a re-ordering of priorities on public expenditure.

3.14 The Forum also considers that the current rate of dropout from Youthreach at around 50% must be tackled and better progression rates achieved, although it is noted that the average duration for participants is around 11 months\textsuperscript{26}. It appears that many participants may be leaving to take up jobs, even if these are low-paid or unstable because of the opportunity to earn income, or for child care reasons. The structure of Youthreach must be sufficiently flexible to recognise these factors and to make provision for them as required. As the report by the Programme Evaluation Unit of the European Social Fund on Early School Leavers Provision stated:

"if the situation regarding the relative lack of progression opportunities is not addressed, it will become ever more difficult to discern the exact purpose of Youthreach other than as a holding mechanism for significant numbers of young people until they become officially unemployed at 17 or 18 years of age."\textsuperscript{27}

The Forum’s recommendation regarding the issue of progression is dealt with in Section VI.

Pathways and Transitions

3.15 The Forum has adopted a simple conceptual model of the educational system in order to situate the problem of early school leaving in its context. If the educational system is regarded as a pathway, then points such as moving from primary to secondary level, the Junior Certificate, the Leaving Certificate, third level certificates, diplomas, degrees and graduate qualifications can be seen as sign-posted and publicly recognised and sanctioned exit routes from the system. Each stage can be seen as a transition stage. Early school leaving without any qualifications can be seen as one form of irregular exit from the system.

3.16 The analogy of the pathway helps to situate the issue of educational disadvantage in its context. The person who leaves school after attempting one year of a Leaving Certificate course but without sitting for an examination or the person who leaves with extremely low grades may also be regarded as exiting in an irregular and possibly unplanned manner from the educational system. The phenomenon is repeated through all the different levels of the system.

\textsuperscript{26} Information provided by FÁS
\textsuperscript{27} Evaluation Report on Early School Leavers Provision, Programme Evaluation Unit, European Social Fund, 1996
3.17 In using this conceptual model, we need to look at certain structural elements in the school system which make it difficult for some students to remain in the system. In the case of students, these elements include a curriculum which is irrelevant to their existing lives and expectations of the future, together with teaching methods which may favour the better equipped student. Such a system not only slows some students’ progress but blocks others from participating and benefiting from the system altogether. This feeds through into the generally unfavourable economic and social consequences for these students in their transition to adulthood.

3.18 The analogy can also locate second chance education as a series of re-entry points into the established pathway. The number of mature students at third level is growing steadily. In the same way, the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) opens a range of re-entry points for those over six months unemployed, aged 21 years and over, who wish to secure second level qualifications. It must, however, be borne in mind that many of those leaving without qualifications at an early age may not be able to avail of second-chance opportunities without the provision of necessary “bridging” courses in literacy and numeracy. What is also often overlooked is the lack of interest among early school leavers in any kind of formal education and training. This therefore implies that imaginative outreach and delivery mechanisms are required to make such courses attractive to these young people.

3.19 The analogy also allows us to consider the location of some of the activities of the voluntary youth sector aimed at helping early school leavers. The Forum considers that this sector has been neglected. With appropriate recognition and certification, the activities undertaken by this sector could be seen as complementary to the formal systems of education and training in providing another transition point out of, or back into, these systems. The Forum also wishes to make the point that the funding for this sector is poorly resourced and is spread over a number of Government agencies, thus leading to a considerable waste of time and effort by this sector in accessing resources.

Failure to Effect Transitions

3.20 Looking at the process of early school leaving, a number of significant transition points have been identified. The first transition point is into school. Difficulties of adjustment may arise, both in the sense that the child has problems in coming to terms with the social context of the school and in the sense that the school fails to respond to the needs and social context of the child. The transition to becoming a reader is another significant event. The school experience of a child who has not negotiated this transition has been likened to a stranger in a foreign country with an alien language. The concept of discontinuity between the child’s domestic and external experiences and that
of the school system is useful in understanding the potential problems in this situation\textsuperscript{28}.

3.21 The transition from primary to secondary school may also be a traumatic experience for some children. There is a movement from a child-centred curriculum with one teacher to a subject based curriculum and a number of subject teachers. For some there may also be a change from a small local school to a large school some distance from home. As many as a thousand a year fail to go to secondary school at all. Further transition points are the end of the junior cycle, the move into the Leaving Certificate examination class, with the associated options of which Leaving Certificate to take, and the move to post Leaving Certificate education. Each transition point may become a crisis point and ultimately may become an exit point from the school system. A graphic representation of this analogy is on the next page. The flows out of school-leaving at or below junior cycle may be regarded as one-way only, given that the opportunities for such leavers to come back to the formal education system are generally very slim.

\textsuperscript{28} Education and Poverty, CMRS, 1992.
Box 1
Pathways and Transitions 1995

- Home
- Primary Level
  - Secondary Level
    - Junior Certificate (JC) 67,200 candidates
      - JC Elementary
      - JC Standard
    - Transition Year
      - Leaving Certificate (LC) 62,000 candidates
        - LCA
        - LC St.
        - LCV
  - Employment
    - Unemployment Training
    - Community and Voluntary
    - Other

Est. Nos. Leaving 1,000
Nos. Leaving 12,200 of which

(i) No Qualifications 2,200
(ii) JC only, of which 2,000 with less than 5 passes 7,900
(iii) JC with VPT 2,100

Nos. with less than 5 passes 7,200
Section IV

Prevention – Pre-school, Primary and Second Level
Section IV: Prevention – Pre-school, Primary and Second Level

Prevention is Better than Cure

4.1 "... primary prevention is less expensive and far more effective in solving a wide range of social problems than is treatment extended once such problems have emerged." 29

The Forum was strongly impressed by the virtual unanimity of the experts it consulted, in stressing the importance of prevention. The Forum itself highlighted the importance of early preventative action in the school sector in its Report No. 4, Ending Long-term Unemployment. From discussion in earlier Sections, it is clear that youth long-term unemployment can block the transition to independent adult living and seriously curtail life choices. In turn, there is a markedly higher propensity to suffer long-term unemployment amongst those who have little or no educational qualifications. However, while the concept of prevention is very important, the Forum wishes to reiterate the view expressed earlier in this Report that education-based solutions alone are not sufficient to deal with the complexity of the nature of poverty and educational disadvantage. Such solutions need to be situated in a wider, or 'Whole Community' approach, otherwise they may reinforce false impressions about the nature of poverty by implying that the causes of poverty are to be found at the level of individual characteristics (their 'failure' to benefit from the education offered) rather than at the level of society's structure.

4.2 There is a definite role for foundation programmes such as Youthreach for those who leave school early. However, there appears to be a consensus among those responsible for Youthreach, that the labour market chances of participants would in general be better if they had stayed at school and achieved some form of qualification. With regard to second-level education, there is a continuing requirement to adapt to the needs of potential early school leavers since many students are already suffering from the effects of educational disadvantage and are clearly identifiable as likely to leave early. This means that the focus must also involve pre-school and primary level. In deprived areas in particular, children are entering primary school with a serious level of disadvantage with respect to children from better-off backgrounds. Many teachers claim to be able to identify pupils at high risk of early school leaving in the early years of primary school.

4.3 Experience with such projects as High/Scope in the United States and the Rutland Street project in Dublin confirm the value of early interventions on subsequent educational experiences and labour market outcomes. Positive results were found also through longitudinal studies in social relationships and adjustments to adulthood. The economic benefits to government were also found to be positive where initial expenditure generated later savings through a smaller cohort of individuals with social or behavioural problems.  

The Role of Schools

4.4 The Forum is very clear that the school alone cannot tackle the multiple deprivation experienced by many in society. However, the size of the resources allocated to schools, the number of years spent in school and the fact that these are the most formative years of a child's life do place a significant responsibility on schools to be accountable for the quality of the services provided. The Forum considers that the school system should be sufficiently flexible to take on board and to reflect the viewpoints and circumstances of the families and communities which it serves.

4.5 As part of this, the Forum recommends that initial teacher training and in-service training be structured to take on board the different life experiences of disadvantaged children and families in order that the school environment may be adapted to family and community circumstances. Rural areas present a special challenge due to the fact that, while teachers may live in the community, the pockets of poverty and disadvantage may not be visible.

4.6 The complex structures which create and perpetuate disadvantage and strategies to counter it are being addressed in the context of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy. The Forum notes with approval that the first of five key issues to be addressed by this Strategy is educational disadvantage, followed by unemployment, particularly long-term unemployment. The Forum welcomes the NAPS strategy and hopes that the aim of tackling these core issues will be achieved in an effective manner.

4.7 In the context of targeting resources at the disadvantaged, the Forum calls on the Department of Education to set a target to eliminate early leaving before completion of the junior cycle within the next five years. As part of an ongoing process, this target should aim to achieve a 20% drop in early leavers in 1997 (a reduction of around 600 on the figure of 3,200 approximately for 1995 at a cost of £1.3m). The Forum recognises that the associated reforms necessary in

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30. Based on material on High/Scope supplied by the Disability Federation of Ireland; also CMRS in Education and Poverty, 1992 and Kellaghan et al in Education Disadvantage in Ireland, 1995.
curricular changes, assessment techniques, guidance and counselling services may require additional resources other than those becoming available due to declining pupil numbers. (These savings have been estimated at £80m, based on a hypothetical calculation of savings on teachers salaries if the pupil teacher ratio had been maintained at 27:1 (1987 level) as against the current ratio of 22:1). However, the Forum considers that the social arguments for such changes require a re-ordering of priorities on public expenditure to meet the necessary investment.

Pre-School Provision

4.8 Early education services include the care and educational nature of a wide range of child care activities and of primary schooling below the compulsory school age (6 years). The positive results associated with certain pre-school programmes for disadvantaged children have already been mentioned earlier.

4.9 Parental involvement is one key element in a successful early education intervention in favour of the disadvantaged. Other key requirements identified by educationalists are well trained staff, low child to adult ratios and a clearly worked out curriculum.

4.10 The White Paper on Education briefly describes existing pre-school provision, whether for Travellers, children with disabilities or for disadvantaged groups. It also points out that, as 65% of 4 year olds and almost all 5 year olds are enrolled in primary schools, much early education takes place in a school setting.

4.11 A pilot pre-school intervention programme, Early Start has now been established in forty school centres in designated areas of disadvantage. The Department of Education has stated to the Forum than an important goal of such centres is to raise awareness in parents of their own capacity to enhance their children’s educational process and to assist them in developing relevant skills.

4.12 However, the Forum is concerned at the effect Early Start had in displacing some existing community-based child care services. This resulted in the disempowerment of some of the more active women from disadvantaged communities. It is not acceptable to the Forum that one form of disadvantage (early school leaving) should be catered for by creating another form of disadvantage for women who were providing a useful service. In this regard, work done by White et al in relation to pre-school programmes suggests that

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32. Source: Department of Finance.
the parent’s role has been confined to assisting in programmes designed and principally implemented by professional educators. Their work calls for a clear definition of the concept of empowerment and an examination of whether the programmes which bring about such empowerment are more beneficial than others. The Forum notes the commencement of a project under the EU initiative, NOW, for the accreditation of prior learning in this area. This programme may provide the necessary scope to devise a role for experienced women from the community in the provision of pre-school education and care.

4.13 Having made this point, the Forum wishes to reiterate that it is very much in favour of the Early Start programme. It considers that this programme’s effectiveness should be monitored and regularly evaluated and that the experience gained from this should be made available to all those involved in the education and care of young children. The Forum is also strongly in favour of the extension of the programme and its intensification but stresses that this must be in co-operation with community and voluntary service providers.

4.14 In addition, the Forum welcomes the steady expansion in the development of pre-school programmes for Traveller children from 18 in 1984 to 56 at present, catering for approximately 660 children. However, the Forum considers that it is now appropriate that the Department of Education should put in place a comprehensive pre-school system and management structure for Travellers. The Forum recommends therefore that the Department should carry out an evaluation of the present programme in order to develop a standard programme and a national policy for pre-school provision for Traveller children.

Primary School

4.15 Since the 1970s, the nature of the primary school curriculum has been a child-centred rather than a subject-based system. While retaining this basic principle, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment has been involved in a continuing review of the curriculum since 1991. This aims to make a more precise statement of objectives, where possible, in terms of student behaviour and attainments. The Forum also notes the White Paper statement of interest that there will be no children in early primary school, having regard to the assessment of their abilities, with serious literacy and numeracy problems. It is intended that this will be achieved through identifying problems earlier, adapting to individual needs, better assessment methods, an expanded school psychological service, the Home-School Links programme, and in-service training for teachers. Schools will also be expected to include objectives and performance measures on literacy and numeracy in a strategy to be included in their school plans. The Forum endorses all of these proposals as being vital to the improvement of our education system but considers that specific, actionable
targets must be set in each of the above areas together with timetables for their achievement. In particular, the Forum notes that there are only 37 psychologists in the Department of Education’s Psychological Service (12 for primary schools serving mainly disadvantaged areas and 25 for post-primary schools). The Forum considers this to be totally inadequate and recommends that the Department of Education bring forward its plans for the expansion of this service as a matter of urgency.

Further to this, the Forum considers that the special needs of Travellers must be addressed in the provision of education services. The Forum notes that, of approximately 5,000 Traveller children of school-going age, only 4,200 are involved in pre-school or primary education. It is also noted that poor attendance, although a problem in many cases, is not a sufficient explanation for the poor performance of many Traveller children, which in turn can add to their reluctance to continue into second level. The extent of educational disadvantage can be seen from a 1993 estimate which calculated that there were only around 100 Traveller children aged twelve to fifteen years attending mainstream second-level schools out of the estimated 2,000 eligible and obliged to do so. In addition, the majority of Traveller children attending second-level schools leave within their first two years. Training provision in the Junior Traveller Centres only provides around 300 places, so plainly there is a major shortfall in meeting Traveller needs. While we do not wish to raise expectations about education-based solutions alone tackling the problem of educational disadvantage among Travellers, the Forum recommends that the Department of Education bring forward proposals to address the special needs of Traveller children as a matter of urgency. These proposals should set out specific objectives and targets for their achievement (i.e. the same rates of retention and achievement as other children), together with timescales for implementation of plans and delivery of results.

A particular problem discussed in the Green Paper on Education is the small size of many primary schools. The aim is to create eight teacher schools in urban areas – one teacher for each year – and four teacher schools in rural areas. Since the publication of the OECD Report Investment in Education, in 1964, a policy of creating four teacher schools, where possible, and in consultation with local interests, has been pursued. As a result the number of schools with three teachers or less has been reduced by two-thirds from 3,934 in 1965 to 1,380 in 1992. At the same time the total number of primary schools has declined by a third from 4,743 in 1965 to 3,224 in 1992. However, 43% of national schools had fewer than four teachers in 1992.

4.18 The demographic decline in the population of primary school age will lead over the next few years to a sharp increase in smaller schools. As rural areas will experience a disproportionate amount of this demographic decline, the incidence of small schools will probably be higher still. The high incidence of small schools, particularly in rural areas, has implications for the delivery of extra assistance for those who are falling behind in primary schools.

4.19 In this regard, the Forum welcomes the announcement in May 1996 by the Minister for Education of a new scheme *Breaking the Cycle* for 25 selected large primary schools and 25 clusters of rural primary schools serving disadvantaged areas as outlined in Section I. The aim is to provide a more closely targeted response to educational disadvantage. The scheme will also be adapted to local circumstances and schools selected will receive special support on the basis of five year development plans.

4.20 With regard to the costs of such a scheme, a few figures are enlightening.\(^{38}\) Using 1995 per capita costs for different levels of education, the £11,400 spent by the education system on a child who leaves after primary school and the £15,850 incurred on behalf of a child who leaves after two years of secondary school, is in sharp contrast to the £37,525 spent by the State on behalf of a student who completes a four year programme at third level. This latter figure will increase further as the full effect of the abolition of third level fees is felt by the Exchequer. It was possible to find extra resources for the educationally advantaged in recent years. Therefore, it must, in the Forum’s view, be possible to find resources for the early school leavers and educationally disadvantaged now.

4.21 One area which the Forum feels has not been adequately addressed in the White Paper or elsewhere, is the development of sports in education. The Forum understands that sport is one of the more successful extra-curricular activities. The sense of achievement, personal confidence and self-esteem which participation in sport can engender can be an important factor in developing life-skills. Furthermore, this area offers a number of possibilities for career opportunities. The Forum notes that in a recent survey of 84 young unemployed people in the inner city,\(^{39}\) 12% of males and 2% of females expressed an interest in training in sports coaching. However, according to a recent survey of 365 second level schools, 67% stated that they had no sports coaches, while 98% provided sports as an extra-curricular activity.\(^{40}\) The Forum considers that this position is very inadequate and recommends that the Department of Education bring forward plans as a matter of urgency to develop the role of sport in education.

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\(^{39}\) Report on Training Needs of Inner City Youth, January, 1996, INOU/Larkin Centre for the Unemployed.

\(^{40}\) Survey on Staffing, Funding and Facilities in Irish Second Level Schools, ASTI, November 1996.
Truancy

4.22 The issue of truancy has already been examined by a Department of Education Working Group, and is now the subject of a Task Force in that Department. The Forum does not intend, therefore, to duplicate work already in progress but will limit itself to a number of issues directly related to early school leaving. In this sub-Section, truancy from primary schools and second level schools to the end of compulsory education, are considered together.

4.23 The Working Group is unanimous that “serious non-attendance, in the vast majority of cases, is linked to disadvantage”. The Working Group also concludes that the revised structures and programmes which it recommends must be seen as key elements of the Government’s strategy for promoting equity in the school system. Accordingly, such changes should be funded as part of the Government’s policy of focusing on disadvantaged areas and groups. The Forum strongly endorses both of these points: truancy is in general linked to disadvantage and funding to tackle it should be provided on grounds of equity. The Forum further considers that the costs associated with schooling such as books, stationery, trips and materials required for certain subjects, which can be a factor in leading to truancy, should be provided under the additional resources allocated for disadvantaged pupils. Furthermore, schools should develop mechanisms to promote the value and image of school among families of regular non-attenders. Given that the Home/School/Community Liaison programme is charged with the task of improving internal understanding, respect and communications between home and school, this should form an important part of that programme.

4.24 The Forum also agrees with the view of the Working Group that schools themselves should be expected to pursue a vigorous policy in relation to attendance issues. We further consider that school principals should be responsible for putting in place appropriate procedures for monitoring attendance and for following up on dropouts. In looking at the options for enforcement agencies, the Forum notes the view of the Working Group that such a dimension would be inappropriate to the role of Home/School/Community Liaison programme. The Forum further notes the existing deficiencies highlighted in the report in relation to the four urban School Attendance Areas regarding structures, flexibility in providing service and lack of resources. The Forum recommends that the Department of Education, in conjunction with other relevant bodies, bring forward proposals to remedy these deficiencies as a matter of urgency.

4.25 On a related point, the Forum considers that the current role of the Gardaí in enforcement of school attendance in certain areas is wholly inappropriate and should be abolished.

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4.26 In cases where truancy is very severe, the services that community and youth organisations can offer in providing alternatives to school should be fully explored. The Forum therefore further **recommends** that the Department of Education bring forward proposals for sharing and disseminating information among all school attendance officers regarding such services.

4.27 In making the above recommendations, the Forum notes that the Education Boards Bill has now been published. However, given the possibility of delays in enacting this legislation, the Forum considers that these recommendation must still go ahead to meet current needs.

4.28 With regard to the proposed new legislation, the intended replacement of School Attendance Officers with Education Welfare Officers (EWOs) is welcomed. The Forum considers that these EWOs should come under the remit of the Local Education Boards (when established) and that these officers should, in addition to their envisaged role, be able to offer a monitoring role to parents and children in their area of operation. They should also be able to play an advocacy role with schools or particular teachers on behalf of these parents and children.

4.29 Provision for very short-term sanctuary arrangements may be required in some instances, possibly outside the school building. Where a serious stand-off has developed in school, removal of the child for a week or so could allow teachers and pupils to reassess the situation with the assistance of an Education Welfare Officer. In urban areas, a room and resources might be provided for this purpose in the same location as the Education Welfare Officers’ Centre. This sanctuary could be staffed only as required by Education Welfare Officers, home school liaison staff or youth workers suitably trained as “foster-teachers”. A panel of such “foster-teachers” might be set up and called on as required. The question of referral of the child to specialist services, help for a family in crisis, or consultation of experts by teachers should be examined. Because of the dispersed nature of the problem in rural areas, a panel might be trained with good geographic spread.

4.30 The recommendations of the Working Group on suspensions and expulsions in respect of non-attendance, which centre on recording and notifying the facts to the proposed Regional Education Boards and limiting the duration of such expulsions, are strongly endorsed. In the meantime, schools should notify the Department of Education regarding such developments. Current appeal mechanisms for parents should be reviewed. Children registered in a school should be regarded as enrolled in that school unless and until enrolled in another school. The Forum argues strongly that fighting non-attendance with out of school suspensions only aggravates the problem for the student. It may
also be a means of removing the problem rather than confronting it. While the Forum acknowledges that suspension or expulsion can be the most obvious response to an intractable immediate problem for all concerned, it is not ultimately in the best interests of the regular non-attender.

4.31 A tracking mechanism needs to be put in place as recommended by the Working Group. This would allow the local education boards, when established, to ensure that every student at a minimum physically transfers into a secondary school. In the meantime, and in order to tackle the problem of disincentives for schools in reporting dropouts (e.g. fall in capitation, possible loss of a teacher, reluctance to see return of a disruptive pupil), the Forum recommends that the Department of Education introduce procedures which will encourage such reporting and which will not penalise a school for doing so. The Forum also considers that the appropriate authority to notify the Department of Education and FÁS of the dropout would be the school principal involved.

4.32 Finally, the Forum urges that the home-school preparatory work programme for some disadvantaged final year primary children and their parents be extended in the first instance to all disadvantaged primary schools.

The Transition into Secondary School

(i) White Paper Reforms

4.33 We now turn to the transitions model outlined in Section III. The White Paper notes a number of blocks to the transition from primary to secondary including poor communication between primary and secondary schools, problems gaining access to the school of first choice, different teaching methods which are less child-centred and more subject-centred in secondary school, curricula which do not suit some individual needs and too early subject choice leading to restrictions later on.

4.34 The Forum recommends that the preparatory work undertaken with disadvantaged primary school children and their parents be matched by similar supports in the first year of secondary school. More intensive supports are necessary for the Travelling community because of the strong tradition of leaving at the end of primary school. Detailed recommendations have already been made elsewhere in this regard.42

4.35 The Junior Cycle Schools Programme is intended to continue the child centred approach of primary school into the junior cycle of secondary school for those who are particularly weak. The Forum notes the encouraging evidence which suggests that the programme is being targeted at the weaker student and is not being used widely as a holding location for the disruptive child.

4.36 The Junior Certificate is a major advance in the way it is intended to be taught and in the more flexible approach to the curriculum, which can be adapted to local circumstances. However, it is still a three year programme assessed at its conclusion by a written examination. In almost all cases oral skills, portfolio work, project work and assignments do not contribute to the final mark awarded. The new Junior Certificate Elementary Programme, introduced in September 1996, marks a move away from this system and is to be welcomed on that basis.

4.37 In the blocks to transition from primary to secondary level identified in the White Paper, problems gaining access to the school of first choice is mentioned. The Forum notes the formal abolition of academic entry requirements for secondary schools although in practice, streaming continues to take place. The Forum also notes with approval the assertion in the White Paper that:

- junior cycle education, based on co-operation and not competition among schools will be open to all on the basis of equal opportunity;

- the local education boards will have statutory responsibility to ensure that this aspiration occurs; and

- the education boards will also be required to ensure that arrangements are in place to track and monitor school attendance and the transfer of students' profile cards from first to second level schools.

4.38 The Forum notes that streaming of pupils between schools can still occur in subtle ways. This streaming can be a reflection of a deep current in society, whereby various socio-economic groups strive to maintain and improve their own positions. The further reduction of this streaming, to the benefit of the disadvantaged will, therefore, in the Forum’s view, be an extremely difficult task. But this is important nonetheless on grounds of equity. The Forum considers that the proposed Regional Education Boards could play an important role in dealing with this.

(ii) The Examination System

4.39 "Examinations designed mainly for selection purposes tend to be less concerned with documenting what the candidate knows or can do and more concerned with the problem of discriminating reliably between candidates of different ability levels." This quote is taken from the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.\(^{43}\) Because the second level system is dominated by a single written terminal examination, this Section will begin by looking at the examination system and its implications.

\(^{43}\) Quoted in Assessment and Certification in the Senior Cycle – Issues and Directions, NCCA, 1993.
4.40 The NCCA lists a number of strengths of the Leaving Certificate examination. It has attained a very high reputation in terms of standards, status and currency. It is regarded as being objective, fair and impartial compared with alternative approaches because it is set nationally and marked externally. The White Paper on Education states that the aims of the senior cycle programme are to “develop each student’s potential to the full, and equip them for work or further education”.

4.41 However, the NCCA lists a number of weaknesses which centre on academic bias and limited assessment techniques. The Leaving Certificate syllabuses for individual subject areas are currently being revised by the NCCA and a number of issues in relation to assessment have already been raised. The new Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme aims to “strengthen and expand the vocational dimension of the learning experiences offered to students in the senior cycle”. It offers equal accessibility to both girls and boys, according to the White Paper on Education. The programme is intended to foster “a spirit of innovation and initiative in young people by developing vocational, technological, communicative and interpersonal skills within the same programme”. The Leaving Certificate Applied aims to “prepare students for the transition from school to adult and working life, including further education”. The programme is intended to focus on the needs and interests of students, making use of local resources and involving the local community.

4.42 The Forum welcomes the initiatives being taken by the Department of Education in reforming the Junior and Leaving Certificate programmes and the aspirations in the White Paper for these. However, in the Forum’s opinion, the weaknesses highlighted by the NCCA point to the need for reform to be considered as a continuing process which must be measured in terms of reducing and eliminating these deficiencies. The Forum also considers that the real test of availability of programme options to students of both sexes will be the ability of schools, particularly small schools, to obtain the necessary resources and facilities to provide them. In providing such options, the Forum recommends that they be gender-proofed in terms of both access and outcomes for boys and girls.

4.43 The Forum further considers that a key part of the education system should be to provide guidance and counselling to all young people, but particularly those who are educationally disadvantaged so that they are aware of all the avenues of education and training. The Forum considers that there should also be an increased emphasis on health and sex education programmes in schools with specific targeting of girls and boys (separately as well as together). A recent survey in the South Inner City found a sense of powerlessness among young people regarding their unemployed status, indicating that vital career guidance and counselling services need to be established both at school level and in
centres for unemployed early school leavers to empower young people to find possible solutions to their individual problems.\textsuperscript{44}

4.44 There may well be genuine fears that tampering with the conventional Leaving Certificate may reduce its currency in the market place, as an entry qualification to further education, training and careers. It is important that the strengths of the Leaving Certificate are not lost. However, the Forum is strongly of the view that, rather than being seen as second-rate options, the new Leaving Certificate programmes can point the way for the development of the conventional Leaving Certificate, in terms of curriculum design and assessment methods. The Forum also believes that grasping the opportunities for developing the conventional Leaving Certificate based on the experience of the new programmes in terms of showing results and achievements will result in a better programme from every perspective.

4.45 The potential early school leaver and educationally disadvantaged are neglected, relatively speaking, because of the emphasis in terms of quality and intensity of input on examination candidates. It is very easy for the withdrawn pupil to be overlooked in favour of brighter pupils. The disruptive young person becomes a major problem, affecting not only their own education but that of other students also. In addition, in the case of isolated disruptive pupils, it is likely that pressure will come to bear on the school from parents, who have legitimate aspirations for the academic success of their own children. Coping with such disruptive behaviour requires analysis of the particular difficulties which may be unrelated to the school itself and which may require appropriate counselling and guidance.

4.46 The university sector in particular and the third level sector generally, is served by the examination system in its selection procedures. It has been suggested to the Forum that the removal of the onus for the differentiation between students of almost similar ability, for third level entry, could free up the second level system to provide education for all its students. One mechanism proposed to the Forum was to move the selection for high status faculties such as medicine, veterinary, dentistry, pharmacy etc. to the end of the first year of third level education, based on the results of that examination. As well as freeing up the second level system, it might also allow students to make more mature choices about their vocational preferences.

4.47 However, the Forum rejected this proposal on the basis of cost, using the figures set out in paragraph 4.20 as an indicator (the level of resources required for those completing a four year programme at third level amounts to almost two and a half times that for those leaving second level after two years). In the

\textsuperscript{44} INOU/Connolly Information Centre for the Unemployed, \textit{Youth Unemployment in the Inner City}. 

\hfill \textit{page 62}
Forum's view, the targeting of resources to tackle educational disadvantage must, in the first instance, be directed at pre-school, primary and the junior cycle of second level education.

4.48 There is a need to keep the points system and its effects on the second level system under review. At the same time, assessment techniques at second level must be broadened to meet the needs of all students. Whether the issues of third level selection and second level assessment can be separated is a matter about which there is much disagreement.

4.49 On the issue of third level selection, the Forum recommends that the Department of Education should carry out an evaluation of the impact of the abolition of fees in relation to the take-up by students from disadvantaged areas. In this regard, the Forum notes and supports the recommendation by the Higher Education Authority that 500 places nationally be reserved in third level institutions for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. As part of such a national policy, the experience gained from pilot programmes such as the Ballymun Initiative for Third level Education (BITE) and the Limerick Community Based Education Initiative (LCBEI) should now make it possible to mainstream these programmes.

(iii) Abolition of Examination fees

4.50 A further immediate cause for the removal of a child from school is the realisation by parents that a Junior Certificate examination fee is due and a realisation also that there is a larger Leaving Certificate examination fee due at a later date. The amount is small in absolute terms, but it may be impossible for a family failing to make ends meet on unemployment assistance or low income to find the amount required. The Forum notes that school authorities have discretion to alleviate examination fees in total or in part on financial hardship grounds, subject to the overall amount of the alleviation not exceeding an amount notified to each authority by the Department of Education. A total of £500,000 was allocated for purposes of fee alleviation in the 1995/96 academic year, an increase of 25% on 1994/95. Schools are not required to inform the Department whether alleviation was allocated to Junior or Leaving Certificate candidates.

4.51 The Forum considers that the global amount of £500,000 to alleviate hardship is minimal – if this is considered, for example, in terms of the Junior Certificate alone, the number of pupils assisted would only be around 11,700, based on the 1996 examination entry fee of £43. The number would be even lower if the Leaving Certificate is included, given the higher entry fee of £46 for that

examination in 1996. While the Forum does not have details on the number of pupils that would require assistance in terms of alleviation of hardship caused by examination fees, it has no doubt that they would be far higher than the current level of assistance available. While some members favoured total abolition of fees for all, others felt that the possibility of targeting should first be examined, particularly in relation to junior level fees. The Forum therefore recommends that the targeting of the abolition of examination fees for disadvantaged families be addressed as a matter of urgency, taking into account the cost of the administration of such a scheme as against the amount of revenues currently being generated (around £6m).

Alternatives to the School System

4.52 The fact that around 30% of the labour force have little or no educational qualifications (see Annex 2), with all of the social and economic consequences that that entails, points to the urgent need for reforms that will address these needs.

4.53 The Forum believes the practical response lies somewhere between reform and the construction of alternative systems, with the balance tilted in favour of reform of the current established system. The total reluctance of many early school leavers to re-enter the system of conventional schooling, and their desire for paid employment means that there will be a continuing need for programmes such as Youthreach. There will also be a need for youth work organisations providing additional and alternative support to these young people who have left, or are in danger of leaving school, with little or no qualifications.

4.54 However, the Forum considers that in order to tackle early school leaving in disadvantaged schools or in disadvantaged clusters in rural areas, the distinct and complementary contribution of youth work should be recognised and utilised in association with the school system. Youth organisations already contribute substantially to the overall education of our young people. Youth groups throughout the country provide personal and social education opportunities for a substantial proportion of the school-going population, enabling them to grow and mature. Involvement in these non-formal education processes also helps young people to engage more fruitfully within the school setting.

4.55 In recent years, a close working relationship has emerged in some areas between the formal and non-formal education providers. This has in some cases taken the form of special projects involving young people who are in danger of leaving school early, enabling them to gain more from their formal education and contributing to their overall social and personal development. Other youth work initiatives take the form of involving young people who have already left
school early in quality experiences which enable them to acquire new personal and social skills and to access further education and training. In some schools, co-operation between schools and youth services takes the form of information sharing (while respecting the unique interpersonal relationship between the youth worker and young people), the use of school premises by youth groups and joint planning in relation to services for students.

4.56 The Forum is aware that co-operative working between teachers and youth workers provides a major challenge for both. The Forum is, therefore, proposing a gradual incremental approach to build on the strengths of both sectors and the beginnings made in co-operation between them.

4.57 The Forum recommends, therefore, that:

- the emphasis must be on integration at all levels – taking account of the socio-economic background and experiences of the young person through better co-operation between the delivery agencies in the local community context. Resources can then be best targeted to meet the needs of those who are not benefiting from current provisions;

- the Minister for Education, and in due course the local education boards, encourage and support experimentation. Success at local level will depend on the step by step building of trust between teachers and youth workers through the development of modest projects initially. The development of a single national framework at an early stage is likely to reduce the scope for innovation and creativity, which a project by project development permits;

- the exchange of good practice should be encouraged to develop and improve existing systems. Much is to be gained from the holding of thematic conferences, common in-service training and joint planning at local and regional levels involving both formal and non-formal education providers. After a modest start in building contact and trust between the youth sector and the school sector the potential future benefit is enormous, in the Forum’s view. For many years now pilot projects, many funded by the EU, have gained valuable experience in dealing with early school leavers, the educationally disadvantaged and potential early leavers. This wealth of experience has remained in the youth sector, and as pilot projects come to an end, has remained with individual youth workers. This issue has been recognised by the new EU YouthStart programme which requires that pilot projects be mainstreamed; and

- that the youth sector should seize the challenge to influence the development of the established school system. Otherwise there is a danger that many of the pilot projects to assist the marginalised will
become marginalised themselves. The Forum also urges the school system, individual schools and individual teachers to accept this challenge, and learn from it. The Forum is of the view that the failure to bridge the gap between the youth and school sectors would be a missed opportunity of potentially huge proportions.

4.58 The Forum recognises that these recommendations on alternatives to school have resource implications. As already noted, this sector is poorly resourced and funds are spread over a number of agencies. The Forum therefore recommends additional resources be made available, through a re-ordering of priorities on public expenditure, and that administrative procedures in the funding of this sector be improved.

Summary of Recommendations

4.59 In conclusion, the Forum's recommendations on educational issues which were detailed earlier on in this Section may be summarised as follows:

(i) Elimination of Early School Leaving

4.60 In relation to those at risk of leaving early (3,200 in 1995) the Department of Education should set as a target the reduction and eventual elimination of the numbers in this group within the next 5 years. Such a policy requires curricular reform, the targeting of resources to alleviate the associated costs of education for very disadvantaged families and the provision of guidance and counselling to pupils and parents. A reduction of 20% on the annual flow should be set for 1997, which would imply a reduction in the numbers leaving early to around 2,600 at an estimated cost of £1.3m.

(ii) Pre-school

4.61 The White Paper states that the overall aim of the Department of Education’s pre-school programme is "to compensate for background deprivation". In the Forum's view this is not enough. Given the cumulative disadvantage of the children and the communities concerned, there is a clear argument for positive discrimination. To overcome the stigma attaching to special provision and to provide genuine equality of participation in education for disadvantaged children, the Forum recommends that Early Start should form a model provision which would in time be made available in all areas. What the Forum has in mind is that the service would be of such a high quality that it would in fact be a model of excellence.
4.62 In the Forum’s opinion, the key elements of Early Start should continue to build on:

- links to the primary level educational disadvantage scheme. In particular, the rural clusters of schools referred to in the new Breaking the Cycle scheme should develop links with local Early Start schemes. For the dispersed disadvantaged in rural areas, it may be necessary to devise more imaginative means of delivery than a permanent, fixed, central site; the provision of special transport for programme participants should also be considered;

- developing targeting criteria and outreach mechanisms to recruit the most disadvantaged children in their catchment area;

- providing support and encouragement for parents. This may take place in the Early Start centre, but it may also need a measure of outreach into people’s homes;

- developing a standard curriculum, flexible enough to be adapted to local conditions; and

- maintaining adult/child ratios at appropriately low levels. It is also important that there be a minimum number of staff that are trained in childcare or education for adult/child ratios. As mentioned above, however, the experience of women in existing voluntary community schemes must be built on, developed and incorporated into existing and future Early Start programmes.

4.63 The Forum further recommends that an evaluation of current pre-school provision for Traveller children be carried out by the Department of Education and that a national policy and programme for these children be put in place following such evaluation.

(iii) Primary School

- savings from declining pupil numbers should be targeted in full at schools serving disadvantaged areas. The Forum considers that a radical reduction in the pupil teacher ratio for disadvantaged children, to a figure in the region of 15:1 in the early years of primary school, is necessary to allow sufficiently radical changes to be made in teaching practice to benefit potential early school leavers;

- there must be continuous monitoring and analysis of the most effective ways in which educational disadvantage should be tackled, particularly in
rural areas, because of the problem of dispersion. It is more likely in schools selected in rural areas that only a proportion of the children will be disadvantaged. The Forum is therefore concerned that the extra resources be allocated in the most effective way possible to ensure their needs are met. The Forum also recommends that individual schools make provision for alleviating the direct costs of schooling for pupils from disadvantaged families, in any plans drawn up by them under a scheme for disadvantaged schools. The Forum further recommends that the Department of Education bring forward proposals to address the special needs of Traveller children as a matter of urgency. These proposals should set out clear objectives (i.e. the same retention and achievement rates as other children) and targets for their achievement, together with a timetable for implementation of plans and delivery of results;

- initial teacher training and in-service training for teachers should be adapted to include the perspective of:
  - youth workers, particularly youth workers in the relevant geographical area;
  - parents, particularly the parents of disadvantaged children. In this regard, steps should be taken to ensure that these parents are helped to gain the necessary confidence to talk to teachers about their children and to enable them to indicate their ability to deliver on any proposed solutions to problems which may require their active involvement; and
  - adult returners to second-chance education.

- in order to facilitate the early assessment of children with reading and numeracy difficulties, the production and dissemination, with training, of suitable standardised tests for Ireland should be expedited. Once Early Start and the targeting of disadvantaged schools have been adequately resourced, any additional resources coming available should be devoted to broader actions to improve literacy and numeracy;

- the Department of Education should bring forward proposals as a matter of urgency in relation to:
  1. the development and resourcing of the school Psychological Service at primary and second level; and
  2. the development and resourcing of the role of sport in education.

4.64 Finally, the Forum wants to make it clear that it supports the proposed targeting only on the basis that the quality of the programmes developed will more than compensate for any negative labelling which may arise for individual children.
The Forum hopes that the quality of these programmes will lead to a positive image in the minds of teachers, parents and the local community.

(iv) Truancy

(a) Institutional mechanisms

- with regard to suspensions and expulsions, the facts of each case should be recorded and notified to the Department of Education (or, in time, to the proposed Regional Education Boards). The duration of such expulsions should also be limited. Current appeal mechanisms for parents should be reviewed. Children registered in a school should be regarded as enrolled in that school unless and until enrolled in another school;

- provision for very short-term sanctuary arrangements may be required, possibly outside the school building. Where a serious stand-off has developed in school, removal of the child for a week or so could allow teachers and pupils to reassess the situation with the assistance of an Education Welfare Officer. The use of Home/School liaison staff or youth workers suitably trained as "foster-teachers" might be set up and the need for referral services in particular cases should be examined;

- school principals should be responsible for putting in place appropriate procedures for monitoring and enforcement of attendance. The Department of Education, in conjunction with other relevant bodies, should bring forward proposals to remedy the deficiencies in the four urban School Attendance Areas regarding structures, flexibility and resources as a matter of urgency. The involvement of the Gardaí in enforcing school attendance in certain areas is wholly inappropriate and should be terminated. The Forum further recommends that the Department of Education bring forward proposals for sharing and disseminating information, particularly in relation to the services that community and youth organisations can offer in providing alternatives to school, to all school attendance officers;

- in relation to the proposed Education Boards Bill, the Forum considers that the Education Welfare Officers should come under the remit of the Local Education Boards (when established) and that these officers should, in addition to their envisaged role, be able to offer a monitoring role to parents and children in their area of operation. They should also be able to play an advocacy role with schools or particular teachers on behalf of these parents and children;
a tracking mechanism for dropouts is urgently required. The Forum recommends that the Department of Education introduce procedures which will encourage schools to report dropouts to the Department and to FÁS and which will eliminate the current financial disincentives for a school to do so. The Forum also considers that the school principal is the appropriate authority to notify the Department of Education and FÁS when a pupil leaves the system;

(b) Factors for Parents

- the costs associated with schooling such as books, stationery, trips and materials, which can be a factor giving rise to truancy, should be provided under the resources allocated for disadvantaged pupils. Furthermore, schools should develop mechanisms to promote the value and image of school among families of regular non-attenders; and finally,

- the Forum urges that the home-school preparatory work programme for some disadvantaged final year primary children and their parents be extended in the first instance to all disadvantaged primary schools.

(v) Second Level

4.65 The Forum recommends that, at Junior Certificate level, assessment systems should be designed to reflect the overall objectives of the curriculum, support teaching methods aimed at a broader range of pupils and develop a broader range of abilities, skills and aptitudes. The Forum recognises the work that is already being done and acknowledges that this is an arduous task, requiring expertise in assessment techniques and consistent political support to win the acceptance of the stakeholders in the school system.

4.66 The ability of schools to offer the new vocational Leaving Certificate programmes may be constrained by the availability of resources. The Forum therefore recommends that schools must have the necessary resources to be able to provide both male and female students with real choices, and that vocational education must be accorded equal status with that of the standard Leaving Certificate programme. It is critical that the new Leaving Certificate options should be regarded as of high status, in the eyes of employers, of parents and of school authorities; employers should be clearly informed that the new options measure many of the skills they are seeking in employees. The successful experiences of early students of these options should be made known to parents of children at junior cycle and employers. Once there is a demand from employers and parents, there is a better chance that the options will be taken up by schools generally. The Forum further recommends that options made available at both Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate level should
be gender-proofed to provide equal opportunities and equality of outcomes for both male and female pupils.

4.67 The Forum also recommends that the abolition of examination fees for disadvantaged families, be addressed as a matter of urgency, taking into account the cost of the administration of such a scheme as against the amount of revenues currently being generated from fees (around £6m). As a first step, the abolition of fees at junior level for disadvantaged families should be considered.

4.68 The Forum considers that any scheme for disadvantaged schools should be weighted initially in favour of the junior cycle of secondary school. This is to forestall a concentration in favour of pupils in the crucial transition into the Leaving Certificate examination class. There may be a temptation to focus on the students who leave at this penultimate stage, as the quickest means of moving towards the target retention rates to Leaving Certificate in the White Paper. This would be to the detriment of the more disadvantaged who are prone to leave earlier.

4.69 In relation to the transition from second to third level, the Forum recommends that the Department of Education carry out an evaluation of the impact of the abolition of third level fees on take-up from disadvantaged areas. The development of a national policy to make 500 places available in third level institutions for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, as proposed by the Higher Education Authority, should also be carried out by the Department.

(vi) Alternatives to School

4.70 Regarding alternatives to school,

- the emphasis must be on integration at all levels through better co-operation between the delivery agencies in the local community context. Resources can then be best targeted to meet the needs of those who are not benefiting from current provisions;

- the Minister for Education, and in due course the local education boards, should encourage and support experimentation. The development of a single national framework at an early stage is likely to reduce the scope for innovation and creativity, which a project by project development permits;

- the exchange of good practice should be encouraged to develop and improve existing systems in a variety of ways e.g. the holding of thematic conferences, common in-service training and joint planning at local and regional levels involving both formal and non-formal education providers;
the youth sector should seize the challenge to influence the development of the established school system. Otherwise there is a danger that many of the pilot projects to assist the marginalised will become marginalised themselves;

the Forum recognises that these recommendations on alternatives to school have resource implications. As already noted, this sector is poorly resourced and funds are spread over a number of agencies. The Forum therefore **recommends** additional resources be made available, through a re-ordering of priorities on public expenditure, and that administrative procedures in the funding of this sector be improved.
Section V

Cure – Youthreach, Employment and Second-Chance Education
Section V: Cure – Youthreach, Employment and Second-Chance Education

5.1 Having looked at the characteristics of early school leavers and youth unemployment the Forum considered in Section IV how schools might meet the challenges that these present. Clearly, however, the school system alone cannot redress the multiple disadvantages engendered by poverty and the Forum wishes to underline this fact most emphatically. Therefore, reforms in education must be balanced by reforms to improve income adequacy and the home and community environment. It must also be recognised that there will always be some young people who will want to leave the formal education system at the earliest opportunity without having achieved basic literacy and numeracy levels. These young people will require training programmes which should be competency based and predicated on building self-confidence and esteem.

Youthreach

5.2 The Forum acknowledges the good work which is being done on behalf of early school leavers and some of the most educationally disadvantaged, in the Youthreach programme, which is aimed at 15 to 17 year olds. Furthermore, the Forum understands that the EU Commission have now informed the EU Monitoring Committee for the Operational Programme for Human Resources that any increased resources coming available under this programme should be directed entirely at Youthreach. However, in the wake of the recommendations drawn up by the Evaluation Unit of the European Social Fund programme, following its recent evaluation of Youthreach, the Forum considers that it must be reformed.

5.3 The key priority, in the Forum’s view, in terms of access, attention and resources, must be the unqualified early school leaver. While the Forum would not be opposed in principle to an extension of the two year programme to three years for the early school leaver, a more pressing requirement is to refocus the programme to make it more attractive and relevant to those with no qualifications. Another priority in the Forum’s view must be the provision of sufficient second year places so that the progression year becomes a reality for all participants.

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5.4 The Forum also considers that the provision of Youthreach should be delivered in a flexible manner which meets the requirements of its client group who may drop out from time to time to avail of part-time, temporary or seasonal employment opportunities. The Forum further considers that pregnancy should not be a cause of dropout from the programme. The course material must also be relevant to the participants. A recent survey\textsuperscript{47} of 84 young people (44\% male, 56\% female) in the Inner City of Dublin, half of whom had only primary level education, provides some indication of what is required. Most of them were not interested in full-time education and were looking for a job. Almost all said they would be interested in training for work, particularly certified training. Of those who specified a particular interest, the main areas were childcare (24\%), catering (13\%) and computers (10\%). Half of the group said that they needed to improve reading and writing skills. Crucially, almost 20\% of the group either did not know or thought they were not eligible to apply for a range of training courses. For those who did participate in training, several referred to the enjoyment of being involved with other people and learning new skills while others cited lack of sufficient money and childcare facilities as limiting their options in relation to training.

5.5 In the Forum’s view, Youthreach provision should be flexible, provide for continuity of contact and offer progression opportunities (including pathways back into the formal education system), which are competency based, have recognised certification and which make provision for childcare costs. Moreover, these services cannot operate in a vacuum – health, guidance, counselling and support services should be clustered around such services.

(i) Accommodation Needs

5.6 A further result of resource constraints is that Youthreach, by and large, takes place in rented accommodation. This is a particular problem in disadvantaged areas where suitable premises are not available. Given the foreseen ongoing need for Youthreach programmes, the question of purchase of premises in these areas was considered to be a costly option and the Forum recommends instead that possible sharing of accommodation with schools in the areas should be considered. The Commission on Schools Accommodation might consider this issue.

(ii) Certification

5.7 It is essential, in the Forum’s opinion, that priority be given to the development of certification for participants and that this be made known to employers. It would be important also that the proposed certification of Youthreach

\textsuperscript{47} Report on Training needs of Inner City Youth, INOU/Larkin Unemployed Centre, January 1996.
participants be recognised and understood by schools. Progress back into school should, in the Forum’s view, be considered when designing certification for Youthreach participants. The Department of Education and FÁS should develop this with Teastas as a matter of urgency.

(iii) Responsibility

5.8 Previously, the lack of clarity in relation to responsibility for Youthreach between the Department of Education and the Department of Enterprise and Employment seriously hampered the programme. The recent adoption of policy responsibility for the education of those under eighteen by the Department of Education is therefore welcomed. However, this new clarity must be carried through into practice. The legacy of distrust between Youthreach centres must, in the Forum’s view, be tackled vigorously.

(iv) Recommendations on Youthreach Places

5.9 In Section III it was estimated that there is currently a shortfall of around 3,000 training places in relation to young people currently unemployed with no educational qualifications. To deal with this, the Forum recommends that:

(i) the Department of Education, in conjunction with FÁS, should set a target to increase the number of such participants under Youthreach by an additional 1,000 in the next twelve months at an estimated full year cost of £6.5m. While this assumes that there will be no displacement of those currently on Youthreach with some qualifications, the Forum considers that such participants might be redirected to more appropriate FÁS courses to better reflect their higher levels of numeracy and literacy. Moreover, these services cannot operate in a vacuum – health, guidance, counselling and support services should be ‘clustered’ around such services; and

(ii) FÁS should provide an additional 100 places on the Specific Skills training programme for this group, at an estimated full-year cost of £0.26m.

In providing these places, the aim should be that they should meet the full gap over time in provision of training places for unqualified early school leavers, with appropriate yearly targets to meet requirements. These places should be allocated on the basis of appropriate gender representation in accordance with the male/female ratio in the target group. The impact of training and education provided should also be gender-proofed.
5.10 We further recommend that:

- *Youreach* courses should be flexible, labour market-oriented and given recognised certification, and provision should be made to enable and facilitate participants to progress back into the formal education system if they so wish;

- difficulties with accommodation in certain areas should be addressed in conjunction with the Department of Education in relation to possible sharing of space with schools in those areas. The Commission on Schools Accommodation might look at this issue;

- health, guidance, counselling and support services should be “clustered” around the programme; and

- provision should be made for childcare costs.

### Recommendation on New Pilot Programme for those aged between 18-21

5.11 Given the current lack of provision for the above age-group as noted in Sections II and III, a programme needs to be made available to them to give real weight to the need for an active labour market policy in this area. According to the 1995 Labour Force Survey, there are 2,800 unemployed young people aged between eighteen and twenty-one without qualifications. These are the group which require targeted action.

5.12 The Forum recommends, therefore, that the Department of Enterprise and Employment, in conjunction with FÁS and the Local Employment Service, should set up a pilot programme with the following quotas:

(i) an additional 750 places under the Community Employment Schemes at an estimated net full-year cost of £2.4m; and

(ii) an additional 300 places under the VTOS scheme at an estimated full-year net cost of £1.5m.

5.13 Within the above group, the Forum considers that the following criteria should be used to determine those most in need of assistance:

- early school leaver (left before age 15) with no qualifications and unemployed for most of the period prior to signing on the Live Register; and

- disadvantaged background e.g. one or both parents unemployed.
The Forum's earlier recommendation on gender-proofing of Youthreach also applies here.

5.14 The Forum further considers that this new programme should be implemented by the Local Employment Service (LES), where operational, which would be best placed to judge the guidance, development and counselling needs required by applicants under the programme in co-operation with FÁS and other relevant bodies in the youth and unemployed sector. The LES should also carry out an evaluation of the programme one year after its introduction, to determine the options and measures necessary to mainstream the programme and to make sufficient places available to cover all of those unemployed with no qualifications in this age-group (currently around 2,800).

5.15 It is essential that this recommendation is implemented without delay and that the young person signing on for the first time is made aware of this new programme in order to address the very passive nature of the social welfare system for those under twenty-one. In addition, supports for young single mothers need to be put in place to strengthen their access to, and participation in, training and education programmes. While the Forum is aware of the constraints on public resources, it considers that the programme recommended above is necessary to give real weight to the promotion of targeted labour market policies.

Co-ordination of Service Provision

5.16 The co-ordination of service is essential to the effective delivery of education services, a point which is well summed up by Kellaghan et al,\textsuperscript{48} in stating that:

"One does not find concerted action involving a range of strategies covering:

- curriculum adaptation at primary and post-primary levels (paying particular, though not exclusive, attention to literacy and numeracy skills);
- smaller classes, particularly in the early grades, to facilitate individual attention and the development of relationships between teachers and pupils;
- pre-school provision, reflecting an emphasis on prevention rather than remediation; a high degree of parent involvement in the educational process (both in their own homes and in schools);
- the reform of school organisation to develop a unity of purpose and build on existing strengths of teachers and pupils; and"

adequate financial resources for schools to operate comfortably and a high level of involvement of other community agencies."

5.17 The co-ordination of services for the early school leaver and the potential early school leaver has a number of aspects. First is the resolution of inter-agency conflict and lack of clarity about respective roles. This can result in a poorly managed programme and poor service to the client. Responsibility for Youthreach mentioned above is a case in point.

5.18 A further aspect of co-ordination is the tracking of students. The Forum has already referred to the need for tracking in Section IV and has recommended that the Department of Education should bring forward proposals on an appropriate mechanism to do so as a matter of urgency.

5.19 The recommendations of the Forum in relation to co-ordination are therefore:

- the feasibility of additional youth support services acting together with the local Youthreach co-ordinator to provide these services at the Youthreach centre should be examined;

- existing structures such as area based responses to long-term unemployment and pilot projects should start to build up co-operation and trust between agencies at local level. When the Education Boards come into being they can build on this initial work;

- as already mentioned elsewhere in this Report, accessing resources is a major issue for community and voluntary agencies due to the number of different State agencies involved. Co-ordination of these agencies is essential to eliminate this problem.

Employment

(i) Financial Pressures

5.20 Many early school leavers come from areas where coming of age is marked by the ability to bring income into the household. Traditionally this has been through acquiring a job; however, ongoing employment opportunities for unqualified school leavers are disappearing in our more sophisticated economy. Nevertheless, even the possibility of a low wage for a short period can exert a strong immediate "pull" out of the school system on the potential early school leaver. There may also be very strong family pressure in low income situations to contribute to the household budget. It is clear too that what most unemployed early school leavers aspire to is a job. The success of Youthreach, in attracting more clients than it has places for, may be partly explained by the fact that it pays an allowance and has the appearance of a job to its potential clients.
(ii) Protective Legislation

5.21 The Forum notes that the Protection of Young Persons (Employment) Act, 1996, has now come into force. This Act restricts the hours which can be worked by young people, particularly during school terms. A further preventative measure, in the Forum’s view, is the adequate policing of this legislation to ensure that violations or breaches in certain areas of the youth labour market do not arise. The Forum recognises however, that where the young person or his/her parents collude in breaking this law through financial necessity, policing is very difficult. This reinforces the previous recommendations on alleviating some of that economic pressure.

(iii) Schools and Employers

5.22 The Forum notes that many schools have developed links with employers. It is also aware of the IBEC Business and Education Links Programme which has three main elements:

- the implementation by linked schools of a programme of development for senior cycle students which includes personal, interpersonal and enterprise skills development (Altramas programme);

- each linked school and company arrange a practical input from a menu of specified link activities which enhances the Altramas programme. Students are also exposed to a Business Appreciation programme involving senior management from the local business community;

- each school and business engage in ongoing planning and evaluation of the link every academic year.

5.23 The Forum endorses all of these developments and recommends that the Department of Education should bring forward proposals to build on and strengthen such linkages in relation to schools serving disadvantaged areas. The opportunities which information technology may offer in relation to the dissemination of information and good practice should be exploited by the Department, as should any opportunity to link up with radio or television programming.

(iv) Role of Employers

5.24 The Forum supports efforts by employers to enrich the conventional Leaving Certificate as well as efforts to develop the Leaving Certificate Applied and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme. We recognise the difficulties employers face in moving to systems of employee selection other than those based on academic qualifications given the current dearth of broader
assessment measures. In saying this however, we would urge employers to review their recruitment policies where possible, bearing in mind that the most qualified or certified young person is not always the best candidate for every job and that the recruitment of over-qualified employees can lead to high levels of frustration and high staff turnover.

5.25 As was pointed out to the Forum by Mr Dermot Stokes, National Youthreach Coordinator, many early school leavers are very capable. We therefore urge that links between local employers and youth training providers should continue to be built on and developed so that:

(a) young people with particular talents and abilities can come to the attention of employers; and

(b) the employment skills and training needs of the local area can be articulated and reflected in training provision.

5.26 In order to promote the take-up of job opportunities in some parts of the services sector, the Forum considers that the employer and trade union bodies might consider the issue of a joint initiative on the terms and conditions of employment in these areas.

(v) Job Readiness/Employment Creation

5.27 In the Forum’s view the issues around the creation of low skilled jobs must be debated and efforts made to resolve the difficulties. If we are serious about tackling unemployment, particularly long term unemployment, the needs of the least skilled must be catered for. The opportunities for progression are central to all life chances and therefore the Forum believes the State must develop a national policy in relation to vocational education and training as a necessary investment to raise the competitiveness and productivity of the workforce and particularly to equip the educationally disadvantaged with the flexibility and multiple skills necessary for the current labour market. These schemes should also aim to maximise entrepreneurial skills. In this regard, the Forum strongly makes the point that eligibility requirements for FAS training schemes should not be based on standard educational qualifications where these are inappropriate to the type of training being provided.

Second Chance Education

5.28 One of the most difficult transitions in the early school leaver’s life, and the one which is likely not to happen, is the transition back into schooling. According to a recent report,49 it appears that current estimates of between 5% and 16% of

49. Article on National Literacy Agency figures, Irish Independent, 2 October 1996.
adults with literacy difficulties may well be conservative. In addition, the OECD has estimated that 58% of the adult population in Ireland left school at or before the junior cycle of second level. This is one of the highest proportions in the EU.\footnote{OECD, 1996, \textit{Lifelong learning for all}, quoted in Horizon Review, Issue Summer 1996.} Therefore, the Forum strongly \textbf{recommends} that all agencies involved in the delivery of second chance education review their access procedures in order to reach those who are most disadvantaged. The Forum further \textbf{recommends} that resources for second chance education should be targeted at the disadvantaged, on grounds of equity. Resources, though an important issue, are not the answer to the problem on their own. As stated, the main problem is to provide accessible and relevant options and to encourage the adults concerned to avail of those options. It is important also to differentiate between the needs of those who are out of the system for a relatively long time and those who have recently left.

5.29 With regard to VTOS the Forum \textbf{recommends} that sufficient places be made available for lone parents, adult dependants, recipients of disability payments and the long-term unemployed wishing to take up such an opportunity. The Forum further considers that monitoring of the uptake of VTOS and second chance education should be carried out to ensure that the programmes are targeting, and reaching, those who are most disadvantaged.

5.30 On the question of motivation, the experience of those providing second chance education suggests very strong self motivation in the case of the adult learner. However, those who never present themselves for second chance education may well be suffering from very low self-esteem and have a very poor sense of control over the direction of their own lives. The first requirement therefore, is one of imaginative outreach mechanisms, to contact and encourage the most educationally disadvantaged. In this regard, the Forum \textbf{recommends} that a public information campaign be launched to highlight the options available, using appropriate youth role models (e.g. music or sports stars).

5.31 An adequately funded adult literacy/numeracy scheme is then required, so that a service which is free to the user can be provided. Given that the lack of income is a key point in availing of second-chance opportunities, it is important that this be addressed in assessing the associated costs of this type of education e.g. childcare costs, travel costs, meals and so on.

5.32 Accreditation for second-chance courses should be an option rather than a formal requirement, as the prospect of any assessment might well lead to the exclusion of those with the most negative experiences of school, who are most in need of a second chance. The pursuit of liberal, interest-based adult
education is a valid entry point for many adults. Succeeding at something they have an interest in, and prior knowledge of, may improve their self-esteem, to the point where they might avail of a certified course.

5.33 In order to make it possible for disadvantaged women to attend second chance education, provision must be made for the costs of child care. It is worth noting the extensive experience and significant potential of community development and self development courses amongst women in deprived areas. As well as the advantages for the women themselves, there is the potential for a positive impact on the education of their children. This is suggested by the finding reported in *Educational Disadvantage in Ireland* \(^51\) that a mothers education is the single best socio-economic predictor of student performance. In addition, second chance education for women can improve the local community, as women are often the most active in the earliest stages of community development. The very inadequate funding available in this area is a source of concern to the Forum.

5.34 In relation to young adults, the option of going back to a school setting to pursue formal examinations needs to be actively canvassed, and special provision made in existing schools. However, the problem of the disincentives in the social welfare system to return to formal education mentioned earlier in this Report would need to be addressed in this context. As student numbers fall, teachers could perhaps be deployed for second chance education as well as for Post Leaving Certificate courses. A degree of flexibility in provision is required, so that the option of entering and leaving second chance provision a number of times is catered for. Due to the fragmented lives led by some of the educationally disadvantaged and early school leavers, it is unrealistic to expect them to attend consistently over long periods.

5.35 In relation to the older adult (25+) the responsiveness, accessibility, flexibility and inclusiveness of community-based adult education has much to offer. The experience of women in this sector has been referred to earlier. There is still some progress to be made in increasing male involvement in community-based second chance education. In this sector, it is also important to maintain and develop teaching methods specifically aimed at the adult. In addition, opportunities are required for those with experiential learning backgrounds to acquire accreditation for prior learning and to access suitable training. This situation is analogous to that of those involved in community-based child care provision. The Forum considers that funding for this sector should be made available so that an adequately resourced adult literacy and numeracy service can be provided. Again, the problem of access to funds for voluntary groups

\(^{51}\) *Educational Disadvantage in Ireland*, Kelleghan et al., Department of Education, 1995
due to the number of State agencies involved and mentioned elsewhere in this Report needs to be addressed.

5.36 The Forum is concerned that not enough is being done to promote second chance education, particularly in terms of reaching the most educationally disadvantaged. The Forum therefore, recommends that information packs be made available in all Social Welfare public offices which set out clearly the options available for young people and for those over 25. The use of video monitors on these options in public offices should also be considered.
Section VI

Conclusions and Recommendations
Section VI:  
Conclusions and Recommendations

Key Principle

6.1 The key principle underlying the Forum’s analysis of the problem of Early School Leavers and Youth Unemployment is that the link between educational disadvantage and subsequent poor labour market experience and life-chances must be clearly acknowledged. Policy responses to deal with the problem must be situated in the broad context of the socio-economic problems faced by disadvantaged households and not simply on education-based solutions. The Forum’s analysis of the characteristics of early leavers show that:

- those who leave school with primary qualifications only are most at risk of unemployment, particularly long-term unemployment;

- around 90% of poor households are headed by early leavers;

- the social origin of early leavers is very pronounced with 75% of leavers coming from working class origin or small farms; 55% of early leavers come from families where the fathers are unemployed;

- more boys than girls are likely to leave early;

- Traveller children are among those most likely to leave early, with only around 5% of Traveller children aged twelve to fifteen years attending mainstream second level schools;

- young women who leave early are more likely to withdraw from the jobs market and to marry early or to be single parents with children;

- the earnings differentials between those with no qualifications compared to those with qualifications is large and remains so over time; and

- rural areas\textsuperscript{52} have the highest level of disadvantage.

\textsuperscript{52} Rural areas are defined as areas with populations of less than 10,000, which would include most small country towns.
Strategy

6.2 Although the numbers leaving early have been falling in recent years, amounting to around 3,200 in 1995, the problems of this group have become more urgent to address due to the changing nature of the labour market. In the Forum's opinion, this requires a concerted strategy to:

(i) halt the flows into early school-leaving; and

(ii) deal with the stock of young unemployed.

6.3 The framework proposed by the Forum to implement this strategy centres on:

- tackling the problems associated with inadequate income for disadvantaged families in meeting the costs of keeping their children in school;

- targeted intervention at pre-school, primary and second level education, with curricular reform, a broader range of assessment techniques, the provision of guidance and support services and changes to teacher training and in-service training;

- the provision of vocational education and training courses for those who do leave early which are:

  (a) flexible to the needs of their client group,

  (b) provide for continuity of contact, and

  (c) offer progression opportunities (including pathways back into the formal education system), which are competency based, have recognised certification and make provision for childcare costs. Moreover, these services cannot operate in a vacuum – health, guidance, counselling and support services should be clustered around such services;

- the elimination of disincentives in the social welfare system to return to formal education for those between 18 and 21, particularly in relation to income adequacy. In the Forum's opinion, the current lack of a policy response for this age-group other than the limited measures introduced last year requiring young people to sign on with FÁS after six months on the Live Register is not acceptable. The particular requirements of this age group mean that policy responses need to be formulated to identify appropriate vocational education, training and employment opportunities, to provide guidance and counselling services via an expanded Local Employment Service and the expansion of VTOS type schemes;
the development of partnership between parents, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, schools, youth organisations and other education and training agencies in the delivery of education and training services in their own communities.

Key Recommendations

6.4 In the Forum's opinion, there is one key target which must be set to deal with the problem of early school leaving; that is the total elimination of early school-leaving within the next five years.

6.5 A number of priority actions should be carried out, both to attain the target and to deal with the situation of those who have already left early without qualifications. These are:

**Priority Action 1:** to eliminate early school leaving within the next five years, the Department of Education should aim to achieve a reduction of the order of 20% in the first year in the numbers leaving before the completion of junior cycle, as the first step in the five-year process. This would mean a fall in the numbers leaving early from around 3,200 to 2,600, at a total estimated current cost of £1.3m (Priority Group A in Section III). This Priority Action requires that the special needs of Traveller children also be addressed, as recommended in the body of this Report. We therefore recommend that the Department of Education bring forward proposals to address these special needs as a matter of urgency. These proposals should set out specific objectives and targets for their achievement (i.e. the same rates of retention and achievement as other children), together with timescales for implementation of plans and delivery of results;

**Priority Action 2:** the Department of Education, in conjunction with FÁS, should set a target to increase the number of participants under Youthreach with no educational qualifications (Priority Group B in Section III) by 1,000 in the next twelve months, at an estimated total full-year cost of £6.3m. This assumes no displacement of existing numbers undergoing training. FÁS should also provide a quota of an additional 100 places on its Specific Skills Training Programme for this target group, at an estimated full year cost of £0.26m. The ultimate objective under this heading for the Department of Education, in conjunction with FÁS, should be to have all those who have left school early involved in a Youthreach programme. Youthreach itself requires reform, as set out in the body of this Report, and provision needs to be made for childcare costs for lone parents. In addition, training provision should be gender-proofed in terms of both access, in line with the gender ratio in the target group, and in terms of outcomes of participation.
Priority Action 3: the Department of Enterprise and Employment, in conjunction with FÁS and the Local Employment Service where operating, should introduce, as a matter of urgency, a pilot scheme for those aged between 18 and 21 who have left school early with no educational qualifications, who have been unemployed for most of the duration since then and who come from a disadvantaged background (Priority Group C in Section III). On the basis of these qualifying criteria, this scheme should provide:

(i) an additional 750 places on Community Employment schemes at an estimated net cost of £2.4m; and

(ii) an additional 300 VTOS places at an estimated net cost of £1.5m

Upon evaluation of this pilot programme, and on the basis of positive results, the Forum considers that it should be mainstreamed and that sufficient places should be made available to cover all of those with no educational qualifications in this age-group (around 2,800). Again, this programme should be gender-proofed and support systems put in place to assist lone parents in taking up these options.

Priority Action 4: second chance education should be directed at the most disadvantaged, provision should be made to cover the costs involved including childcare costs, literacy and numeracy options should be improved and imaginative outreach mechanisms employed to reach the target group.

Priority Action 5: the establishment of a new, high-level interdepartmental Working Group with representatives from the Departments of Education, Social Welfare, Enterprise and Employment and from FÁS to oversee the implementation of the recommendations set out in this Report and to tackle the broad range of issues arising in educational disadvantage in a co-ordinated and ongoing manner; and

Priority Action 6: while Priorities 1 to 5 are important stand-alone initiatives, the Forum believes that real progress in the delivery of appropriate education and training services for the educationally disadvantaged must be placed in the context of a partnership approach. Therefore, the Forum recommends that the Department of Education should foster and develop initiatives, in co-operation with other relevant State agencies and those working in the youth sector, to build on a ‘Whole Community’ or local area approach in the delivery of education and training services. The Forum considers that such initiatives are necessary to embrace and to alleviate the wider socio-economic problems associated with the link between educational disadvantage and poverty.
6.6 In making the above recommendations, the Forum is aware of the resource implications that arise. This will require more funding in addition to resources arising from a reordering of priorities and demographic changes. However, the Forum considers this expenditure is justified and necessary on both economic and social grounds; the Forum further notes that the amount of additional expenditure required should fall in the next few years as population changes impact on the numbers in the target groups and as the target to eliminate early school leaving within the next five years begins to take effect.

Detailed Recommendations

Conceptual Model

6.7 In Section III, a conceptual model of the education system as a series of pathways and transitions was set out; this model is now reformulated slightly (see Box 2) to situate the Forum’s main recommendations within this concept. In the Forum’s view, pathways should be high-quality, easily followed and comprehensive. The Forum is emphatic that they should include all the necessary ingredients for success i.e. guidance and counselling, basic education, individual support training, alternance, qualifications, certification and placement.

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**Box 2**

Pathways and Transitions – Forum Recommendations

Year One of Five Year Plan to eliminate Early School Leaving

- **Home**
- **Primary**
  - 600 retained
  - 400 leaving
- **Junior**
  - 2,200 leaving pre-JC and 2000 with less than 5 Ds
  - Youthreach 1,000 new places
  - Specific Skills Training 100 new places
- **Senior**
  - 2,800 Stock
  - 18-21 year olds
  - CE 750 new places
  - VTOS 300 new places
- **Employment**
- **Unemployment**
- **Training**
- **Third Level**
- **Other**

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6.8 The Forum further considers that the above concept needs to be situated in a 'Whole Community' approach, involving all of the partners in a community (e.g. parents, schools, training providers, community groups, employers) developing appropriate institutional mechanisms to address the relevant needs and requirements of that community in tackling poverty and disadvantage.

Supply-side Measures

(i) Education

6.9 Prevention is better than cure – the Forum recommends that resources now becoming available due to declining pupil numbers should be targeted in full at schools serving disadvantaged areas with particular emphasis on pre-school, primary and the junior cycle (particularly the critical first year transition) of second level education.

6.10 The real benefits of high-quality pre-school education in particular should receive more attention and resources by the Department of Education in the light of the findings of the programmes examined in this Report (Priority Group A (i) in Section III). The particular problems in rural areas (including small country towns with populations less than 10,000) need flexible initiatives in co-operation with local development programmes. One proposal put forward by the Forum is that transport issues be addressed.

6.11 As set out above, the Forum recommends that the Department of Education set a target to eliminate early leaving before completion of the junior cycle within the next five years (for Priority Groups A (ii) and (iii) in Section III). This target should aim to achieve a 20% drop in early leavers in 1997 (a reduction of around 600 on the figure of 3,200 approximately for 1995 at an estimated cost of £1.3m). This should entail associated reforms in curricular content, assessment techniques, guidance and counselling services and tracking of dropouts. Also, options provided under the Junior and Leaving Certificate programmes should be made equally available to both boys and girls. These reforms may require additional resources other than those becoming available due to declining pupil numbers. (A hypothetical estimate has put this saving at £80m since 1987 if savings on teachers salaries had been realised – instead the pupil/teacher ratio was reduced from 27:1 to the current 22:1). However, the Forum considers that the social arguments for such changes require a re-ordering of priorities on public expenditure to meet the necessary investment.

6.12 Resources should be made available to disadvantaged families in relation to the costs of keeping a child in school in terms of books, uniforms, materials, sports, extra-curricular activities and so on. In addition, the Forum recommends the abolition of examination fees for disadvantaged families, particularly those for the Junior Certificate. In the longer term, the Forum considers that, in the
context of overall tax and social welfare reform, Integrated Child Benefit, should be phased in, increasing Child Benefit and targeting it at low income families to replace Child Dependent Allowances. The Forum agrees with the recent NESC Report\(^53\) that this desirable system should be introduced incrementally, subject to resources given the significant costs involved, while stressing that it must not impact negatively on people currently dependent on Child Dependent Allowances.

6.13 A broader range of assessment and certification techniques needs to be developed at second level. Any consequences which such changes may have for the points system should be treated as a separate matter.

6.14 The impact of the abolition of third level fees on the take-up by students from disadvantaged backgrounds should be evaluated by the Department of Education together with the development of a national policy to make 500 places available at national level for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, as recommended by the Higher Education Authority. The experience gained from pilot programmes in this area should be of use in developing and mainstreaming such a policy.

6.15 Second chance education should be targeted at those without educational qualifications. Income adequacy issues should be addressed and options should be available on a life-long basis. Literacy and numeracy options need to be improved and provision made towards child-care costs to assist educationally disadvantaged women to return to second-chance education.

6.16 With regard to VTOS, the Forum recommends that sufficient places be provided for lone parents, adult dependants, recipients of disability payments and the long-term unemployed. Monitoring of the take-up should ensure that the programme is targeted and reaching the most disadvantaged. Public offices of the Department of Social Welfare should make available information packs setting out the different options. The use of video monitors should also be considered.

(ii) **Foundation Training**

6.17 The Forum recommends that the Department of Education, in conjunction with FÁS, should set a target to achieve an increase in the number of participants with no qualifications under Youthreach by an additional 1,000 in the next twelve months at an estimated full year cost of £6.3m (Priority Group B in Section III). This assumes that there will be no displacement of those currently on Youthreach with some qualifications. However, the Forum considers that such participants might be redirected to more appropriate FÁS courses to

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better reflect their higher levels of numeracy and literacy. Furthermore, the *Youthreach* programme should be reformed in terms of flexibility and recognised certification, the development of progression measures and provision to allow participants to progress back into the formal school system if they so wish. As already stated, training provision should be gender-proofed and supports for lone parents put in place. Childcare costs should be provided for and health, guidance, counselling and support services should be clustered around the *Youthreach* service.

6.18 In addition, the Forum recommends that FÁS should also make available an additional 100 places on its Specific Skills Training Programme for the above target group, at an estimated full year cost of £0.26m.

**Demand-side Measures**

6.19 The Forum recommends that the new vocational education and training programmes be promoted to employers and to parents in terms of their broader measurement of skills, abilities and aptitudes. The Forum notes the links that are already in place between schools and employers and urges that these be strengthened and developed. With particular regard to schools serving disadvantaged areas, the Forum recommends that the Department of Education should bring forward proposals as a matter of urgency to promote links between these schools and local employers and to disseminate information on good practice in this area.

6.20 While noting the limited options open to employers in determining their selection criteria in the absence of assessment techniques which measure a broad range of abilities and competencies, the Forum urges that links between employers and local training providers be strengthened and deepened in order that capable young people who might otherwise be excluded can come to their attention. The Local Employment Service, where operational, could serve a useful intermediary role between local employers and those early school leavers who have received appropriate guidance, counselling and training and who are employment ready.

**New Pilot Programme for 18-21 year-olds**

6.21 As a public service measure, a new pilot programme should be introduced by the Department of Enterprise and Employment, in conjunction with FÁS and the Local Employment Service, for those aged between 18 and 21 to rectify the current lack of policy response for this age-group (Priority Group C in Section III). The programme should be targeted at those who have left school early with no qualifications, who have been unemployed for most of the period since
then and who come from a disadvantaged background (e.g. one or both parents unemployed). The vocational education and training, guidance and counselling services for this group should also be addressed with the following quotas made available to them:

(i) 750 additional places on Community Employment schemes at an estimated net cost of £2.4m; and

(ii) 300 additional VTOS places at an estimated £1.5m.

This programme should be evaluated after one year and sufficient places made available accordingly to meet the needs of all those in this target group.

6.22 The Forum also considers that employer and trade union bodies might look at the need for a joint initiative on standards and conditions of employment in certain areas of the rapidly developing services sector of the labour market.

Institutional Mechanisms

6.23 In order to oversee the delivery of the above recommendations, together with the more detailed recommendations contained in the body of the Report, the Forum recommends that a new high-level inter-Departmental Working Group should be established. This Group should comprise representatives from the Departments of Education, Social Welfare, Enterprise and Employment and FÁS. Its terms of reference should be as follows:

(i) to examine the disincentives that exist for schools in notifying the Department of Education and FÁS of pupils that have dropped out of school and to bring forward proposals to eliminate such disincentives. As part of this, proposals for a tracking mechanism should be developed by the Group whereby schools will be responsible for monitoring attendance levels, suspensions, expulsions and dropouts in order that appropriate interventions can be made available to the young people in question;

(ii) to examine mechanisms whereby targeting the abolition of examination fees for disadvantaged families may be delivered, with priority given to the abolition of Junior Certificate fees and taking into account the complexity and the administrative procedures which might be associated with that in terms of the overall revenues generated from fees;

(iii) to bring forward proposals to ensure that:

- the target set of 1,000 additional unqualified young people on Youthreach and a further 100 on the Specific Skills Training programme in 1997 is achieved;
• equality of gender representation and outcomes is achieved in accordance with the gender proportions in the target group;

• progression under the Youthreach programme becomes a reality; also,

• to bring forward proposals regarding CERT training for 15 to 17 year olds, possibly under the umbrella of Youthreach provision;

(iv) to develop, in conjunction with Teastas, recognised certification for the broad range of skills and competencies gained by young people through programmes like Youthreach;

(v) to bring forward recommendations on changes to initial teacher training and in-service training to take on board the dimension and viewpoint of disadvantaged parents and communities and to develop the concept of parents as partners, particularly in disadvantaged areas;

(vi) to review access procedures for second chance education in order to ensure that those who are most disadvantaged are targeted; and

(vii) to monitor and to evaluate on a regular basis the progress made in progressing all of the recommendations set out in this Report; as part of this evaluation process, the Group must invite submissions from all agencies and bodies involved in the delivery of education and training and services to the unemployed in this regard. Such submissions should be summarised and made available as part of the Group's evaluation process. In this context, the Group should make its report available to the Forum and to the ongoing mechanism for the monitoring of educational disadvantage established under the National Anti-Poverty Strategy.

6.24 The Forum considers that the first Report by the Group should be made available at the end of the twelve month period following the publication of this Report by the Forum.

Resources

6.25 The Forum recognises that all of the above recommendations have considerable resource implications. The constraints which exist on public expenditure are also fully recognised. However, the Forum considers that in the interests of both growth and competitiveness and of social justice, the necessary investment in improving education and training opportunities for the very educationally disadvantaged should be made. This requires additional expenditure, a reordering of expenditure priorities and the targeting of any savings arising from declining pupil numbers as set out in this Report.
6.26 The Forum has referred in a number of instances throughout this Report to the benefits to the State of making the necessary investment in education and training services and improving the skills and competencies of the labour force. In the absence of such investment, the Forum considers that what could be termed negative and unproductive costs will arise for the State regarding social welfare, health and justice administration expenditure over the lifetimes of those who would otherwise benefit from earlier intervention.
Annexes
Annex 1

Figure A.1.

Adult and Youth Unemployment Rates

Figure A.2

Level of Unemployment for 15-24 year olds with Primary Qualifications only
Figure A.3.

Level of Unemployment by Age, Gender with Primary Qualifications only

Figure A.4.

Youth and Adult Long-term Unemployment Rates

- Long term Unemp. over 25s
- Long term unemp. 15-24
Figure A.5.

Proportion Long-term Unemployed
15-24 year olds

Figure A.6.

Long-term Unemployment Rate for 15-24 year olds by level of qualification
## Annex 2

### Table 1

**Estimate of Educationally Disadvantaged in the Education System**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Actual</th>
<th>Potential</th>
<th>As % Total School Population (859,000)(^54)</th>
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<tr>
<td>(1) Early School Leavers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) did not enter second level</td>
<td>1,000 x 8 cohorts</td>
<td>8,000</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) left without qualifications</td>
<td>3,000 x 10 cohorts</td>
<td>30,000</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) did not achieve 5 passes in Junior Certificate</td>
<td>2,400 x 11 cohorts</td>
<td>26,400</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Potential Educationally Disadvantaged</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) Junior Certificate (5 Passes or more)</td>
<td>5,000 x 11 cohorts</td>
<td>55,000</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Junior Certificate plus VPT</td>
<td>2,600 x 12 cohorts</td>
<td>31,200</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) Less than 5 passes in Leaving Certificate</td>
<td>7,000 x 13 cohorts</td>
<td>91,000</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>21%</td>
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\(^{54}\) Source: Department of Education
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>As % Total Labour Force (1.443m)</th>
<th>As % Total Unemployed (175,300)</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) Primary education only</td>
<td>263,000</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Unemployed – primary education only</td>
<td>50,400</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) Educationally disadvantaged</td>
<td>424,000</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) Unemployed and educationally disadvantaged</td>
<td>69,000</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes to above Estimate

1 Three-year averages (see paragraph 3.2 of the Report).
2 Includes one cohort for each primary school year. Because of low coverage, Early Start is not counted as a cohort.
3 It is assumed the average stay of the ‘no qualification’ group in secondary school is 2 years.
4 Assumes a two-year Leaving Certificate.
5 Source: Unpublished 1995 CSO data. Many of these would have a Primary Certificate and are not, therefore, strictly no qualification.
6 Unpublished 1995 CSO tables provide data on those who completed junior cycle (369,000) and Leaving Certificate (458,300). Using the proportion of school candidates who achieved 4 Ds or less (12% on average in the period 1993-1995) as a rough proxy for the labour force as a whole, the total is generated.
7 Using the same sources and method as in Note 6: those unemployed with junior cycle qualifications only amounted to 63,800 in 1995. Those unemployed with Leaving Certificate qualification amounted to 43,400. However, the calculation of 5,200 for those with less than 5 passes in the Leaving Certificate may be an underestimate as the proportion of poor Leaving Certificates is likely to be higher among the unemployed.
Annex 3

People who Assisted the Forum on this Report

Mr. Peter Archer, Director, Education Office, Conference of Religious of Ireland*
Mr. Scott Boldt, Marino Institute of Education
Sr. Joan Bowles, Director, Limerick Youth Services
Ms. Berni Brady, Director, AONTAS (National Association of Adult Education)*
Mr. John Canavan, Evaluator, European Social Fund Programme Evaluation Unit*
Ms. Patricia Curtin, Manager, Local Employment Service, Special Unit, FÁS
Mr. Oliver Cussen, Department of Education
Mr. Pat Dowling, Department of Education
Mr. Robbie Gilligan, Senior Lecturer in Social Work, Trinity College, Dublin
Prof. Damian Hannan, Economic and Social Research Institute
Ms. Noreen Hayes, Dublin Institute of Technology*
Ms. Nuala Henry, President, National Parents Council, Post-Primary Tier*
Ms. Louise Hurley, Head of Research and Information, National Youth Federation*
Ms. Helen Johnston, Research Manager, Combat Poverty Agency
Dr. Thomas Kellaghan, Director, Educational Research Centre
Ms. Margaret Kelly, Department of Education
Mr. Nick Killian, Public Relations Officer, National Parents Council, Post-Primary Tier*
Mr. Liam Kilroy, Department of Education
Ms. Mary Lyne, South Kerry Development Partnership
Ms. Alice Malone, Director, Louth Youth Federation
Mr. Edwin Mernagh, Northside Partnership
Sr. Theresa McCormack, Director, Education Office, Conference of Religious of Ireland*
Dr. Anne McKenna, Chair, Early Start Monitoring Committee, U.C.D.
Dr. Phillip McKenzie, Senior Consultant, Education and Training Division, OECD, Paris
Fr. Peter McVerry S.J.,*
Mr. Sean Mitchell, Treasurer, National Parents Council, Post-Primary Tier*
Mr. Albert O'Ceallaigh, Chief Executive, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment*
Dr. Phillip O'Connell, Economic and Social Research Institute
Mr. Turloch O'Connor, Project Manager, EUROPS
Mr. Liam O'Dwyer, Assistant Chief Executive, Services, National Youth Federation*
Mr. Declan Purcell, Department of Enterprise and Employment
Prof. David Raffe, Director, Centre for Educational Sociology, University of Edinburgh
Mr. Tom Ronayne, WRC Economic and Social Consultants Ltd.
Mr. Pat Ryan, Chief Executive Officer, Galway City VEC
Mr. Ronnie Sheehan, Department of Enterprise and Employment
Mr. David Silke, Research Officer, Combat Poverty Agency
Mr. Dermot Stokes, Youthreach Co-ordinator
Mr Hugh Strain, Letterkenny VEC*
Ms. Rose Tully, Honorary Secretary, National Parents Council, Post-Primary Tier*
Mr. Tony Tyrrell, Evaluator, European Social Fund Programme Evaluation Unit
Ms. Joan Walshe, National Co-ordinating Team, ADM Ltd.
Mr. Joe Treacy, Central Statistics Office
Mr. John Feeney, Department of Education
Ms. Mary O’Brien, Health Research Board
Mr. David Booth, CERT

*Consultations with Secretary of Standing Committee
Annex 4

Terms of Reference and Constitution of the Forum

1. The Terms of Reference of the National Economic and Social Forum are to develop economic and social policy initiatives, particularly initiatives to combat unemployment, and to contribute to the formation of a national consensus on social and economic matters.

   The Forum will:-
   
   (i) Have a specific focus on:-
   - job creation and obstacles to employment growth;
   - long-term unemployment;
   - disadvantage;
   - equality and social justice in Irish society; and
   - policies and proposals in relation to these issues;
   
   (ii) Make practical proposals on measures to meet these challenges;
   
   (iii) Examine and make recommendations on other economic and social issues;
   
   (iv) Review and monitor the implementation of the Forum’s proposals and if necessary make further recommendations; and
   
   (v) Examine and make recommendations on matters referred to it by Government.

2. The Forum may consider matters on its own initiative or at the request of Government.

3. The Forum will work in two year cycles and will inform Government of its programme of work within three months of the beginning of each cycle.

4. In drawing up its work programme, the Forum will take account of the role and functions of other bodies in the social and economic area such as NESC and the CRC to avoid duplication.

5. The Forum may invite Ministers, Public Officials, Members of the Forum, and outside experts to make presentations and to assist the Forum in its work.

6. The Forum will publish and submit all its reports to Government, to the Houses of the Oireachtas and to other Government Departments and bodies as may be appropriate.

7. The Forum will be drawn from three broad strands. The first will represent the Government and the Oireachtas. The second will represent the traditional Social Partners. The third strand will be representative of groups traditionally outside the consultative process including women, the unemployed, the disadvantaged, people with disability, youth, the elderly and environmental interests.

8. The Forum will have an independent Chairperson appointed by Government.

9. The term of office of members will be two years during which term members may nominate alternates. Casual vacancies will be filled by the nominating body or the Government as appropriate and members so appointed shall hold office until the expiry of the current term of office of all members. The size of the membership may be varied by the Government.

10. The Forum is under the aegis of the Office of the Tánaiste and is funded through a Grant-in-Aid from that Office. This Grant-in-Aid is part of the overall estimate for the Office of the Tánaiste.
Annex 5

Membership of the Forum

Independent Chairperson:  Maureen Gaffney

Government Representative:  Eithne Fitzgerald, T.D.,
Minister of State at the Office of the Tánaiste
and at the Department of Enterprise and
Employment

Chairpersons of the
Standing Committees:  Dr. Eileen Drew
Professor Donal Dineen

Oireachtas

Fianna Fáil:
  Martin Cullen, T.D.
  Chris Flood, T.D.
  Tom Kitt, T.D.
  Senator Willie Farrell
  Senator Marian McGennis
  Senator Paschal Mooney

Fine Gael:
  John Connor, T.D.
  Frances Fitzgerald, T.D.
  Senator Bill Cotter
  Senator Madeleine Taylor-Quinn

Labour:
  Joe Costello, T.D.
  Senator Mary Kelly

Progressive Democrats:
  Senator Cathy Honan

Technical Group:
  Kathleen Lynch, T.D.

Independent Senators:
  Senator Mary Henry

Social Partners

Trade Unions:
  Paula Carey
  Charlie Lennon
  Patricia O’Donovan
  Manus O’Riordan
  Tom Wall
Employer/Business Interests:
Mirette Corboy
David Croughan
Declan Madden
Aedhric McGibney
Aileen O’Donoghue

Agricultural/Farming
Organisations:
Mary Coleman
Ciarán Dolan
Mervyn Wynne
Monica Prendiville
Michael Slattery

“Third Strand”
Womens’ Organisations:
Ursula Barry
Noreen Byrne
Cris Mulvey

Unemployed:
Mike Allen
Brendan Butler
Jane Foley

Disadvantaged:
Niall Crowley
Mary Daniel
Eithne McNulty

Youth:
Gearóid O’Maoilmhichíl

The Elderly:
Breda Dunlea

People with a Disability:
Roger Acton

Environmental Interests:
Jeanne Meldon

Academics:
Fr. Seán Healy
Monica McWilliams

Secretariat
Director:
Seán O’hÉigeartaigh
Secretaries of the Standing:
Maeve Harold
Committees:
Mary McKeon
Research/Administrator
Brian Kenny
Executive/Secretarial:
Theresa Higgins
Liz Reason

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Annex 6

Forum Publications

(i) Forum Reports

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Report No.</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Negotiations on a Successor Agreement to the PESP</td>
<td>November 1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Ending Long-term Unemployment</td>
<td>June 1994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Income Maintenance Strategies</td>
<td>July 1994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Quality Delivery of Social Services</td>
<td>February 1995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Jobs Potential of the Services Sector</td>
<td>April 1995</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(ii) Opinions


Opinion No. 2 (dated 29th January, 1996) on the development to-date of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy.


Opinion No. 4 (dated August 1996) on the Post-PCW Negotiations – A New Deal?
