

# Fourth Periodic Report on the Work of the NESF

Report 30 · November 2004

# Contents

<b>Foreword by the Taoiseach Mr. Bertie Ahern T.D.</b>	4
<b>Executive Summary</b>	7
Section I <b>Introduction</b>	19
Section II <b>Lone Parents</b>	29
Section III <b>Re-Integration of Prisoners</b>	47
Section IV <b>Equality Issues</b>	67
Section V <b>Early School Leavers</b>	83
Section VI <b>Equity of Access to Hospital Care</b>	105
Section VII <b>Conclusions</b>	123
Annex 1 Terms of Reference and Constitution of the NESF	152
Annex II Membership of the NESF	153
Annex III List of NESF Publications	156
Annex IV Structures & Working Arrangements of the NESF	158

### List of Boxes, Tables and Figures

Box 1	NESF 2001-2003 Work Programme	25
Box 2	NESF Report No. 20 on Lone Parents	31
Box 3	NESF Report No. 22 on the Re-integration of Prisoners	50
Box 4	NESF Report No. 23 on A Strategic Framework for Equality Issues	69
Box 5	NESF Report No. 24 on Early School Leavers	85
Box 6	NESF Report No. 25 on Equity of Access to Hospital Care	108
Box 7	Approaches to Public Management	145
Box 8	Challenges to Promoting Social Cohesion	148
Table 1	Widening Market Income Shares in selected OECD Countries	76
Table 2	Irish Labour Force Trends, 1999-2003	125
Table 3	Unemployment Blackspots, at Electoral Division Level by County, in 2002	126
Table 4	Numbers ('000s) Participating on Active Labour Market Programmes	128
Table 5	National Employment Action Plan: Summary of Referral Results, 2001-2003	131
Table 6	Tax Revenue as % of GDP for selected OECD Countries and for GDP/GNP in Ireland	137
Table 7	Effective Tax Rates of the Top 400 Earners, 1999-2000	138
Figure 1	Main Social Partnership Institutions	22
Figure 2	Role of the NESF in the Policy Design Process	24
Figure 3	Income Inequality : Gini Coefficients in Selected EU Countries	75
Figure 4	A Framework to Address Early School Leaving	97
Figure 5	Educational Disadvantage League	98
Figure 6	Distribution of the GMS GP Services in the Dublin Area	105
Figure 7	Government Expenditure on Health in EU Countries, 2002	115
Figure 8	Standardised mortality rates by socio-economic group	116
Figure 9	Social Spending Reduces Poverty	133



## Foreword by the Taoiseach

The Fourth Periodic Report documents the National Economic and Social Forum's valuable work over the period 2001 – 2003 in carrying out its mandate of monitoring and analysing the implementation of specific measures and programmes identified in social partnership arrangements, especially those concerned with the achievement of equality and social inclusion.

Government reaffirmed this role when reconstituting the Forum and renewing its mandate in 2003. The particular focus in the Forum's work on joined-up and integrated approaches to policymaking and implementation across Departments and State Agencies and seeking to define policy outcomes is influential. It is essential that Government has such input into policy development and an assessment of how programmes have performed to date.

In particular, in providing a forum for discussion and debate by elected politicians and many of the main interest groupings in our society, the NESF brings together a very wide range of experiences and perspectives with a view to understanding more fully process and policy implementation issues. As well as the assessments in the individual thematic areas, the common findings and lessons are instructive for policy development in the future. The work in seeking to establish a new dynamic balance in the policy design process that requires mobilising people in new ways, encouraging experimentation and different approaches, identifying successful pilot initiatives and establishing how best these can be accepted and mainstreamed at national level will also be informative.

Bodies like the NESF can provide us with valuable advice on policy measures, how best to target resources to those most in need and at the same time help to advance our shared ambitions for a more inclusive society. Progress is, of course, not all the time dependent on more resources and in many instances better results can be achieved if we pool our experiences collectively and manage these resources more effectively. The challenge for Government is to continue to make real progress in implementing its social policy agenda. The NESF will have an important advisory role to play through its own programme of work as well as by providing further opportunity to engage individuals and groups for their views on policy developments and implementation issues. I am happy that Government agreed to expand the Forum's role to give it a stronger role in facilitating public consultation on policy matters to be referred to it from time to time by Government. The intention is to give individuals and members of the community, voluntary and other sectors an opportunity to express and discuss their views and experience on selected issues. It is important that the voices of all are heard and I look forward to seeing how this new aspect of the work develops. For example, last year's NAPS Social Inclusion Forum was able to contribute to the *National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion 2003–2005*.

On behalf of the Government, I wish to thank the Chairperson, Dr. Maureen Gaffney, the Deputy Chairperson, Ms. Mary Doyle, the Members of the NESF and the Secretariat for their hard work, commitment and contribution to the work of the NESF over the last three years.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Bertie Ahern". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Bertie" and the last name "Ahern" clearly distinguishable.

Bertie Ahern T.D.  
Taoiseach



## Executive Summary

- 1 ● This is the latest in a series of periodic reports which the NESF prepares from time to time for the purposes of reviewing implementation and follow through, mainly by Government Departments and State Agencies, on the reports that it has undertaken over a particular period of time in its work cycle.
- 2 ● In keeping with its mandate from the Government, the NESF's project work evaluates and identifies barriers to the effectiveness of policy interventions, looks at alternative options and seeks to generate new ideas for the successful implementation of policies, both at national and local levels. In providing a forum for discussion and debate by elected politicians and many of the main interest groupings in our society, the NESF brings together a very wide range of experiences and perspectives with a view to understanding more fully process and policy implementation issues.
- 3 ● A particular focus of its work is on: (i) joined-up and integrated approaches to policy-making and implementation across Departments and State Agencies, (ii) seeking to define policy *outcomes* (rather than the more traditional emphasis given to the level of resources allocated to specific programmes), and (iii) providing a stronger voice for local communities and marginalised groups. The NESF also backs up its findings with evidence-based material wherever possible. For this purpose, it draws on research findings and pilot initiatives, both here at home as well as in other EU countries, and also from the work of international bodies such as the EU, the OECD and the World Health Organisation. From time to time it commissions its own research, holds public consultation meetings in different parts of the country and generates new data from surveys that it conducts.
- 4 ● The present report deals with the work that was published by the NESF<sup>1</sup> over the period 2001-2003 and attempts to assess the impact of this on Government policies and programmes. The NESF's main conclusions are summarised below under the main policy themes and recommendations covered in these reports.

---

<sup>1</sup> The NESF's publications comprise two types of documents, namely Reports and Opinions. Compared to its Reports, Opinions are shorter documents and designed to provide more rapid policy responses to, for example, requests for its views on Government policy initiatives.

## Section II: Lone Parents

- 5 ● Some progress has been made on the recommendations in areas such as data collection and research, the provision of accommodation and community facilities and localisation in the payment of the One-Parent Family Payment (OFP).
- 6 ● Another issue highlighted in the report was the need for user-friendly information for lone parents on public services and, in this regard, the OFP information guide produced by the Department of Social and Family Affairs, in conjunction with lone parent organisations, is a welcome development. So too is the progress that has been made in the development of procedures and guidelines for Medical Card holders.
- 7 ● However, much greater progress is needed in other areas that were highlighted in the NESF report and these were supported in a recent OECD report. These include financial supports, access to social services and a better integration of provisions and the removal of barriers to participation by lone parents in education, training and employment. The new 'Gateway for Women' programme launched by FÁS is a positive step forward. Another key concern is the availability and affordability of childcare and of family-friendly policies.
- 8 ● Childcare costs impose a severe burden on lone parents. Relative to wage levels, these costs are more than double those elsewhere, which helps to explain why unemployment is also highest among lone parents here. At this stage, it is unlikely that this country will meet the childcare targets for 2010 that were set by the Barcelona European Council. The OECD has also called for a re-think of our policies on lone parents. However, the cutbacks in the 2004 Estimates may make it more difficult for lone parents to enter the labour market and may also lead to greater child poverty. But as against this, a number of improvements have been made in the Family Income Supplement and in the delivery of the Family Services Project and the Employment Support Service.
- 9 ● Greater progress is required to address the needs of non-resident fathers. These were singled out for attention by the NESF in its report which recommended that greater levels of support for those who have ongoing and regular contact with their children should now be given greater policy priority.

## Section III: Re-Integration of Prisoners

- 10 ● The NESF welcomes the progress made in implementing the main thrust of its report and wishes to congratulate the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the Prison Service for this, particularly the recruitment of a Director of Regimes, the establishment of implementation structures and of outreach services such as accommodation and income maintenance and the publication of an information leaflet for those leaving prison. The

commitment to include prisoner integration in future Prison Business Plans and the inclusion of prisoners in social inclusion strategies, such as the NAPS, and developments in relation to meeting the accommodation needs of prisoners on release are also positive steps. The NESF also welcomes the recent statement by the Minister for Finance that having a criminal record need not necessarily prevent a person being appointed to a position in the Civil Service. The research recommendations by the Law Reform Commission in this area should be given priority.

- 11 ● However, the NESF is concerned at the pace of change in some instances, such as the system of Positive Sentence Management which has not yet come on stream. One option here would be to run a pilot project to demonstrate the value of and potential Exchequer savings from such an approach. It would be important in this that the voluntary sector's expertise is called upon. Restorative justice approaches remain under-developed, as do post-release family supports.
- 12 ● While the Council of Europe's report, following the visit here by its Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman Treatment or Punishment, identified positive aspects of our system, nevertheless, concerns were also raised and these need to be addressed by the authorities here.
- 13 ● The objective of this report was to join up policy design and agreement on the one hand with policy implementation on the other, using models of implementation to achieve this linkage. The indications are that real progress has been achieved. Now that the foundation work is nearing completion, it is hoped that the pace of progress will increase and that Positive Sentence Management will soon become a reality and that the remaining recommendations, such as restorative justice approaches and post-release family supports, will be addressed.

## Section IV: Equality Issues

- 14 ● The NESF acknowledges the important progress made in recent years with the passage of major new legislation in the areas of employment and equal status, and the establishment of new institutions and mechanisms such as the Equality Authority, the Office of the Director of Equality Investigations, the National Disability Authority, the Human Rights Commission and most recently the enactment of the Equality Act 2004.
- 15 ● However, there are major challenges to be tackled in this area, as evidenced by the levels of income inequality and relative poverty in our society (these are among the highest levels in the EU), the striking inequalities in access to public services such as education and health - which are referred to in other Sections of the report - and the range and volume of discrimination cases that were outlined in the recent 2003 Annual Report of the Equality Authority. The increases in public service charges and more restrictive conditions for some schemes will hit the poor and the less well-off members of our society the hardest.

- 16 ● The social partnership agreement, Sustaining Progress, contains important commitments to mainstreaming and equality proofing in policy-making and services provision in the public sector and the NESF looks forward to its recommendations being taken into account in implementing the actions set out in the equality framework of that agreement.
- 17 ● Steady progress has been made by Departments in following up on some of the NESF recommendations – such as equality proofing the National Employment Action Plan and the National Anti-Poverty Strategy; reviewing the extension of the equality legislation to include socio-economic status, trade union membership, criminal conviction and political opinion (this should also include a re-examination of the exemptions allowed under the 2000 Equal Status Act); developing policy mainstreaming in the public sector; and the collection of new statistics on equality issues which will be helpful for policy development and implementation purposes.
- 18 ● The pilot projects on equality proofing should be published and the results widely disseminated throughout the public sector. At this stage, it would be timely for an overall review to be carried out on the progress made in implementing the equality dimensions of the Strategy Statements of Government Departments and Offices. The progress made in developing gender equality in the Civil Service could also now serve as a benchmark in other equality areas while the preparation of national action plans on racism and on equality for women could also be usefully deployed in the other areas covered by our equality legislation.

## Section V: Early School Leavers

- 19 ● Reasonable progress has been made by the Department of Education and Science in implementing the recommendations that were made by the NESF. Of particular note is the greater focus now being placed on the early childhood years and also the review of educational disadvantage initiatives that is currently being undertaken by the Educational Disadvantage Committee. Education expenditure needs to be concentrated on the early years and the increase in *per capita* spending at primary level in the 2004 Estimates is, therefore, welcome.
- 20 ● The NESF attaches special importance to this as well as to the parallel review that was undertaken by the OECD on early childhood education provision. Given the *ad hoc* way that different schemes were introduced in recent years, there is confusion and possible overlap between them and a real need, therefore, for rationalisation and better integration to be introduced in the system. Early school leaving has also to be linked in with an integrated lifelong learning framework, the development of flexible second-chance learning opportunities and greater recognition by our educational system of the accreditation of prior learning.

- 21 ● Looking to the future, the NESF would be hopeful that some of its outstanding recommendations will be taken into account particularly when the above report by the Educational Disadvantage Committee has been completed. As highlighted in its own report, educational disadvantage, given its close links to poverty, has to be tackled on a multi-dimensional basis. In this regard the NESF welcomes the emphasis in the NAPS to tackling the root causes of poverty and seeking *‘to ensure that all young people leave the educational system with an adequate education and related qualifications to support their full participation in the economy, in employment and in society’*.
- 22 ● Finally, the NESF also welcomes the priority given to tackling educational disadvantage in *Sustaining Progress* and to the commitment given there that the framework set out in its own report will be taken into account in the implementation of policy initiatives in this area.

## Section VI: Equity of Access to Hospital Care

- 23 ● The NESF welcomed the Government’s 2001 Health Strategy which it saw as an important advance in its forthright commitments to tackling the problem of equity in access to hospital care for public patients. However, the recent increases in hospital charges and raising the threshold for the drugs payments scheme will hit poor people hardest and it is now clear that the target of eliminating hospital lists by 2004 will not be met.
- 24 ● The difficulties in our health system are most in evidence in the closure of hospital beds that had been designated for public patients, while access by private patients is largely unaffected. The National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) is welcome, but it is difficult to reconcile this with the closure at the same time of hospital beds. We now have one of the lowest ratios of acute hospital beds per head of population in the OECD. The NESF’s proposal that data on *‘waiting times’* should also reflect time spent before seeing a specialist has not been acted on. The fixing by the NTPF of a 3-month deadline for hospital treatment is a positive development. Publication of the legislation on rights of access to services should be given greater priority.
- 25 ● The decision to establish the Health Services Accreditation Board allays to some extent one of the NESF’s concerns on risks to the undermining of standards in public hospitals. The NESF also welcomes the comprehensive steps taken to developing the partnership approach as the basis to addressing the changes and challenges that are needed at all levels in the system. However, more needs to be done in having a fully-established and resourced Community and Voluntary Sector (CVS) Unit in the Department and in the development of a *‘partnership approach’* for this Sector. But this will help only if the public system is adequately resourced and financed.

- 26 ● Lack of resources is no longer the stumbling block that it used to be – with the substantial increases in recent years our spend on health, in terms of share of GNP, is now above the EU average while in *per capita* terms we are the eighth highest. Further investments will be difficult to justify without major management changes to achieve better value for money, greater effectiveness in the use of budgetary allocations and a review of all options (including that of a comprehensive social insurance system) on how the system is financed. While there has been critical comment on the delays in implementing the Programme of Reforms (dealing with the Brennan and the Prospectus reports) that were announced by the Government in June 2003, these have now been addressed with major institutional changes such as the establishment of the interim Health Services Executive, the Health Information and Quality Authority and related structures. These will be underpinned by a significant legislative programme that is expected to be in place early next year.
- 27 ● The Government’s Health Services Reform Programme provides a unique opportunity to achieving greater equity for the most vulnerable groups in our society. For this purpose, fundamental structural changes to the public-private mix in our public hospitals is needed. In this regard, the NESF again repeats its call for an independent study of the alternative models and structures that are successful in other countries in providing more equitable access to their health care systems.

## Section VII: Overall Conclusions

- 28 ● This concluding section highlights a number of policy issues under the following thematic headings:
- NESF’s Evolving Role;
  - Overall Policy Impact of the NESF;
  - NESF’s Structures and Working Methods;
  - Future Policy Challenges; and
  - EU Issues.
- 29 ● Although the NESF’s reports considered in this present periodic report deal with different policy issues, nevertheless, a number of common findings and lessons emerge which are of general interest and instructive for policy purposes in the future. The more notable of these are:
- avoid uniform “one size fits all approaches” to policy-making as social problems nowadays are getting more complex and require more flexible responses that are tailor-made to individual needs and circumstances;

- encourage and reward innovation and have established channels to feed back and disseminate the results of successful pilot initiatives;
- seek to ensure that policies are evidence-based and draw on the best available research, best practice and international experience;
- management structures should ensure that policy-making and implementation becomes more transparent, participative, with access to and sharing of information and openness to new ideas, together with more effective delivery and consultative mechanisms;
- monitoring and evaluation should be built-in features of all programmes and policy measures, and the results published for wider debate by the public at large;
- targets and policy outcomes should be defined clearly for the customer and better value for money should be secured in relating these in turn to the allocation and input of staff and resources;
- team-based and inclusive approaches at all levels in the system and with full involvement of front-line staff; and
- more widespread use of joined-up and integrated ‘whole of government’ approaches, given that many social problems are complex and require coordinated policy responses to tackle more effectively the underlying root causes, as these cannot be resolved by Departments acting on their own; this was more than evident in some of the issues covered in this report, such as lone parents, prisoners, early school leavers and healthcare.

In this regard, it is significant to note that the PA Consulting Group’s Evaluation of the SMI<sup>2</sup> identified the ‘challenge of implementation’ and the failure to develop adequate mechanisms to tackle cross-departmental/cutting issues as the main themes to emerge from its review. This is also an important area of attention in other administrations e.g. the Cabinet Office in the UK<sup>3</sup>.

- 30 ● In a recent report<sup>4</sup>, which draws on international experience, a group of senior Irish public servants put forward a number of recommendations to improve this country’s capacity and capability to manage and deliver more effectively on cross-cutting issues as part of the next stage of the SMI reform process.
- 31 ● To help move this forward, the group suggests that a limited number of policy themes be selected for priority attention (referred to as ‘*strategic results areas*’), the involvement in this of the various stakeholders - namely the Government, the Oireachtas, Ministers and the Civil Service -

---

<sup>2</sup> *Evaluation of the Progress of the Strategic Management Initiative/Delivering Better Government, Modernisation Programme, 2002.*

<sup>3</sup> *Wiring It Up, a Performance and Innovation Unit Report, 2000, (<http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/innovation>).*

<sup>4</sup> *Cross-Departmental Challenges, A Whole-of-Government Approach for the Twenty-First Century, IPA, 2003.*

and that this work should be subject to parliamentary scrutiny and systematic evaluation. The NESF wishes to add its support to these proposals and to add three comments:

- equality and social inclusion issues should be built into the strategic results areas that would be prioritised for attention;
- the social partners should also be added as one of the stakeholders and;
- partnership institutions such as the NESF should also be given a role in this process.

- 32 ● Important progress has been made in recent years in addressing data deficiencies and moving towards more evidence-based methods, as a basis for the design and delivery of more effective public policies. Nowhere is this more necessary than in the social policy area where we still have incomplete information and knowledge on the nature of problems and factors involved, the needs of clients, the targeting of and impact of interventions, what policies and programmes work best and who should be consulted and involved in this process and how. There is also a pressing need to generate new ideas and thinking and, for this purpose, to synthesise and link in more fully with research work and best international practices.
- 33 ● But this work tends to be undertaken on an *ad hoc* basis and the NESF considers that this should now be moved forward and developed on a more structured basis. The Steering Group under *Sustaining Progress* is uniquely placed to play a lead role in this. For this purpose, it is suggested that a research panel might be established with the involvement of bodies such as the ESRI, the Universities, NESDO, the Combat Poverty Agency, the Equality Authority and the Office for Social Inclusion. In the UK, for example, the Strategy Unit in the Cabinet Office has been given the task of promoting and supporting the development of evidence-based policy making (<http://www.strategy.gov.uk>).
- 34 ● Despite the remarkable economic progress made in recent years we still have one of the highest levels of income inequality in the EU<sup>5</sup>. We now have the resources to tackle this more decisively than was the case in the past, but what is required is a greater understanding and agreement of the determinants and the relationships between economic and social progress in our society. Forfás has put this succinctly<sup>6</sup>: “*Economic dynamism and social progress go hand in hand. An innovative, enterprising economy offers the best opportunity to construct a fair and inclusive society in which all can contribute to and benefit from rising prosperity*”. At international level, a recent ILO report has highlighted the need for more inclusive debates and for greater emphasis to be given to developing the social dimension of globalisation<sup>7</sup>.

---

<sup>5</sup> *The Social Situation in the European Union 2003*, European Commission (Brussels, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> *Forfás Annual Report 2002* (May, 2003).

<sup>7</sup> *A Fair Globalisation: Creating Opportunities For All*, ILO, February 2004.

- 35 ● The slowing-down in our economy since 2001 will require harder choices to be made in establishing priorities in the allocation of resources, on financing issues and who pays, ensuring greater equity in access to resources and opportunities for everybody and in the process seeking to build a more cohesive, vibrant and inclusive society. The NESF has played a role in giving poverty and social inclusion issues a higher priority on the agenda of policy-makers and in successive social partnership agreements in recent years. Associated with this, it has also played a role in having the community and voluntary sector accepted as a new pillar to social partnership back in 1996<sup>8</sup>.
- 36 ● Governments and elected political representatives have, of course, the duty and the democratic mandate to take final decisions on policy matters<sup>9</sup>. But the quality and effectiveness of these can be enhanced by consulting with and taking account of the views of advisory bodies such as the NESF which, because of its wide-ranging membership, has the capacity and expertise to assess the impact of policies on those most directly affected.
- 37 ● Similarly, the recently-established Community and Voluntary Fora at local authority level have a valuable role to play in involving communities in decisions by State bodies and agencies at local levels, including also the work of the County/City Development Boards and that of the Local Authority Strategic Policy Committees. The gains to be got from further developing the role of these Fora were highlighted in the NESF's most-recently published report<sup>10</sup>.
- 38 ● At international level, the importance and value of social partnership and engagement with civil society in the policy-making process has been highlighted succinctly by the OECD<sup>11</sup>:

*'Engaging the public in policy-making is a sound investment and a core element of good governance. It allows governments and international organisations to tap wider sources of information, perspectives and potential solutions and improves the quality of the decisions reached. In addition, it allows the public to understand the basis of government policy decisions, whether they are taken at the national or international level. In this way, it contributes to building trust in government and international co-operation, raising the quality of democracy and strengthening civic capacity.'*

The NESF is fully supportive of and subscribes to the above sentiments.

- 39 ● The present social partnership agreement *Sustaining Progress 2003-2005* contains important commitments to building a fairer and inclusive society and to ensuring *'that people have the resources and opportunities to live life with dignity and have access to quality services that underpin life chances and experiences'*. This will involve major challenges and

---

<sup>8</sup> Post PCW Negotiations – A New Deal?, NESF Opinion No. 4 (August, 1996).

<sup>9</sup> In her Opening Address last July at the MacGill Summer School, the Tánaiste, Mary Harney TD, stressed that social partnership is not meant to limit the scope of political debate and political ideas or to replace decision-making by the Dáil and by the Government.

<sup>10</sup> The Policy Implications of Social Capital, NESF, October 2003.

<sup>11</sup> OECD Forum 2003. 'Grow, Develop and Prosper', Paris, April 2003.

choices in having the programmes and policies in place to deliver on these objectives and the NESF, whose new membership has recently taken up office, will seek to play its full part in contributing to this process.

- 40 ● Finally, the new National Economic and Social Development Office (NESDO) could play a key role in undertaking a proposed review of social partnership, both its strengths and its weaknesses, with a view to identifying options for its further development and enhancement in the future.

## Acknowledgements

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

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





## Introduction

### Aims of the Periodic Reports

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

### Structure of the Periodic Report

- 1.2 ● The present report deals with the work undertaken by the NESF under its 2001- 2003 Work Programme. Each Section of the report deals with an individual NESF Report or Opinion<sup>12</sup> in the following sequence:
- outline of the main features and recommendations;
  - follow-up action taken by Government on these recommendations; and
  - the NESF's overall conclusions, including in some cases revised or further policy recommendations to Government.

### NESF's Reconstitution

- 1.3 ● The NESF was originally established by the Government in 1993 for the purposes of contributing to the formation of a wider and more inclusive national consensus on major policy issues such as long-term unemployment, disadvantage and inequality in our society. A particular focus of its work was to develop initiatives to combat unemployment.

<sup>12</sup> The NESF's publications comprise two types of documents, namely Reports and Opinions. Compared to its Reports, Opinions are shorter documents and designed to provide more rapid policy responses to, for example, requests for its views on Government policy initiatives.

- 1.4 ● In December 1997, the NESF published an important report<sup>13</sup> as an input to the review that was underway at that time by the Government on the social partnership institutions. That report centred on a number of key institutional reforms, relating essentially to the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) and the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF), that were accepted and on this basis the Government decided to:
- revise the terms-of-reference for both the NESF and the NESC to ensure that their activities are more fully complementary;
  - change the membership of both bodies to reflect more fully the various strands of the social partnership process; and
  - place these bodies on a statutory basis<sup>14</sup> and, in that context, to facilitate better co-operation and sharing of support services between these bodies.
- 1.5 ● The impact of these decisions as they relate to the NESF over the 1998-2002 period of its work, which is covered in this report, is outlined in the following paragraphs.

## NESF's Current Mandate

- 1.6 ● The work of the NESF is now more closely focused on the detailed monitoring of initiatives taken in the context of national social partnership agreements, especially with regard to social exclusion and equality. This is particularly aimed at ensuring that the views and experiences of all those affected by these measures are more fully and effectively taken into account in the policy design and implementation stages<sup>15</sup>.
- 1.7 ● In renewing its mandate last year, the Government decided to expand the NESF's working methods so as to give it a stronger role in facilitating discussion and dialogue. What is envisaged here is an expansion of its present role where, for example, the NESF convenes as part of the NAPS institutional structures, the annual meeting of the NAPS Social Inclusion Forum.

## NESF's Membership

- 1.8 ● The widening of the NESF's membership in 1998 involved the addition at that stage of a Fourth Strand which includes representatives of a number of Government Departments, Local Government (General Council of County Councils, Association of Municipal Authorities and the Association of County and City Managers) as well as a number of Independent Members.

---

<sup>13</sup> *A Framework for Partnership – Enriching Strategic Consensus through Participation, NESF Report No.16 (December 1997).*

<sup>14</sup> *The National Economic and Social Development Office, Bill 2002 will place the NESC, the NESF and the NCPP on a statutory basis has now passed the second stage in the Dáil.*

<sup>15</sup> *The NESF's full terms-of-reference and constitution are given in Annex I to this report.*

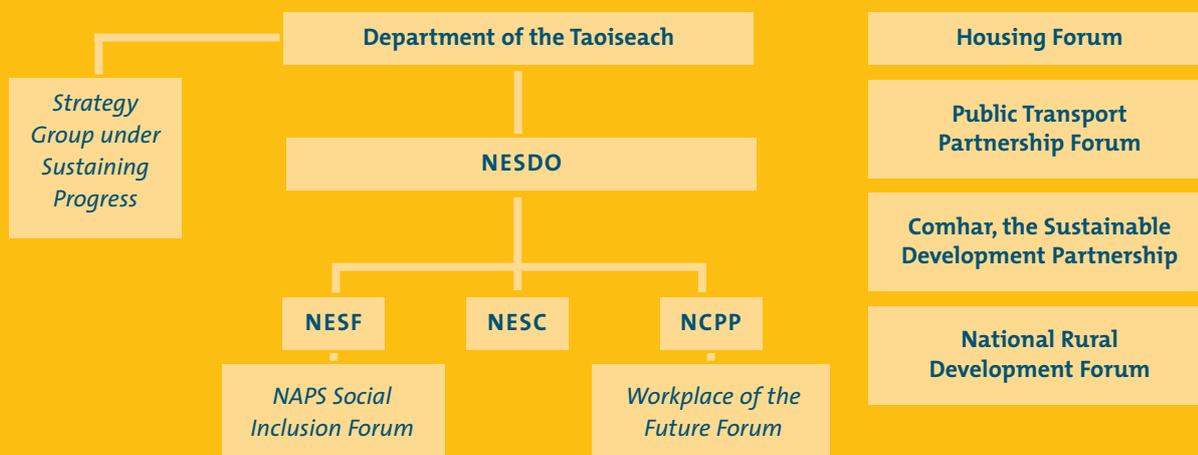
- 1.9 ● In parallel with the negotiations on *Sustaining Progress*, and arising from a commitment in the *Agreed Programme for Government*, a review of participation in social partnership was carried out last year. As a result of this, the community and voluntary pillar was expanded. The *individual members* are: CORI, ICTU Centres for the Unemployed, the INOU, the National Youth Council of Ireland, Protestant Aid and the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. The *strand members* represent: Older People, Disability, Housing, Children, Rural, Local/Voluntary and Care and are: the Irish Senior Citizens Parliament, Age Action Ireland, the Disability Federation of Ireland, the Irish Council for Social Housing, the National Association of Building Cooperatives, and Children's Rights Alliance, Irish Rural Link, The Wheel, and the Carer's Association. The strand reflects the dominant policy interests of the organisations but is not confined to issues relating only to that interest.
- 1.10 ● The representation of the community and voluntary strand in the NESF is wider than that of the community and voluntary pillar of social partnership and the Government agreed that this should continue. The revised composition of the community and voluntary strand of the NESF reflects this and the changed composition of social partnership (see Annex II to this report).
- 1.11 ● The addition of the new groups mentioned above will enhance the status and diversity of the NESF's work and can be considered in the context of governance and new public management where the emphasis is on participation, deliberation, decentralisation and innovation (Scott and Trubek, 2002)<sup>16</sup>. A recent publication from the OECD<sup>17</sup> breaks new ground in identifying key competencies that are essential for personal and social development in modern complex societies and the NESF will, in due course, be returning to the issues raised there.
- 1.12 ● The principal social partnership institutions now are the NESC, the NESF and the National Centre for Partnership and Performance (NCP). The Government agreed last year to the continuation of the NESC, NESF and the NCP for a period of three years, and that the NESF would continue with its remit in relation to equality and social inclusion. As already mentioned, it was also agreed to expand the NESF working methods to give it a stronger role in facilitating discussion and dialogue.
- 1.13 ● Social partnership institutions also include other participative structures (see Figure 1 below) such as Comhar, the Housing Forum and the NAPS Social Inclusion Forum. The membership of these latter bodies can include representation from groups outside social partnership with an expertise in a particular area. Involvement in these fora is determined by the nature of the issue or task involved and is primarily a matter for individual Departments or managing authorities involved.

---

<sup>16</sup> *European Law Journal*, Volume 8, No. 1 (March, 2002).

<sup>17</sup> *Key Competencies for a Successful Life and Well-Functioning Society*, OECD, (September, 2003).

Figure 1 Main Social Partnership Institutions



- 1.14 ● Given the complexities of modern-day living, policy responsibilities have to be increasingly shared nowadays between Government Departments at central level but also between the centre and local levels with Local Authorities and State Agencies and other bodies. In a recent address<sup>18</sup> the Comptroller and Auditor General raised the issue of how the risk-averse culture of civil servants may act against the national interest. He went on to express concern lest any reports from his Office, in the current climate, might discourage public managers from taking risks in the interests of innovation and improvements and to explain that, as far as he is concerned, the important thing to ensure is that public servants are not prevented from “*doing the right thing at the right time in the right way*”.
- 1.15 ● More generally across OECD countries, the quality of public services is increasingly a topic for major political debate. Reforms in this area are seen to require building up adaptive capacity and of ‘thinking outside the box’ by all public sector organisations at every level in the system<sup>19</sup>. Here, the challenge is how to harness this to the creation of public value<sup>20</sup> (in areas such as fairness, equity and responsiveness) and the provision of personalised services that respond better to and are shaped more by individual needs. This will entail new structures of governance, decentralisation to local levels with the centre focusing more on system-wide innovation, and greater risk-taking and experiential learning, and more resourcing and accountability in the public sector.

<sup>18</sup> Public Audit and Accountability Regimes, IPA/CIPFA Conference, Dublin, December 2003.

<sup>19</sup> The Adaptive State: strategies for personalising the public realm, Demos, December 2003 ([www.demos.co.uk](http://www.demos.co.uk)).

<sup>20</sup> For an example of the innovative work in this area, see *Creating Public Value*, Professor Michael Moore, School of Government, Harvard University.

## NESF's Structures and Working Arrangements<sup>21</sup>

- 1.16 ● Notwithstanding the changes that were outlined above, the NESF remains the largest and most representative of the social partnership institutions<sup>22</sup>. One of its continuing and distinctive features is that it includes elected members of the Oireachtas (both Dáil and Seanad) across all the main Political Parties, including Government as well as the Opposition Parties. This has been added to with the inclusion of elected members of the Local Authorities.
- 1.17 ● With its independent Chairperson and Secretariat, the NESF now works through the following structures:
- **Plenary Sessions** of the NESF's full 62 Members which debate, *inter alia*, the Work Programme and Reports / Opinions prepared by its Project Teams and / *Ad Hoc* Groups; these Sessions are normally held in Dublin Castle, with the media, outside experts, officials and invited guests in attendance; Ministers and Opposition Spokespersons may also be invited to attend and participate at these Sessions;
  - **A Management Committee** (which includes 3 representatives from each of the NESF's 4 Strands) meets on a regular basis to keep under review the NESF's overall effectiveness and functioning; its more specific functions include formal adoption of the NESF's Work Programme and of the Reports / Opinions in the light of previous debates at Plenary level as well as deciding on organisational and procedural issues;
  - **Ad Hoc Working Groups** which are established from time to time, either on the initiative of the full NESF meeting in Plenary Session or of its Management Committee, to consider specific issues; and
  - **Project Teams** which are the main bodies involved in the preparation of Reports; their membership comprises balanced representation, usually not more than three, from each Strand, with particular account taken to ensure representation by the local and/or specialised elements of the national social partnership organisations.
- 1.18 ● Reflecting the decisions taken by the Government at end-1997 to establish closer institutional relations between the NESC and the NESF<sup>23</sup>, particularly with a view to getting each body to focus on distinct parts of the policy-loop (policy-making, implementation and monitoring), Project Teams represent the major reform introduced by the NESF since that date. In essence, the work of these Teams is specifically directed at:
- evaluating the effectiveness of policies;
  - identifying corrective action and / or timely changes to ineffective policies; and
  - improving policy-making by better informing and influencing the reshaping of strategic policy analysis and formulation.

---

<sup>21</sup> Details of these arrangements are given in Annex IV of the report.

<sup>22</sup> A full list of the current Members of the NESF is given in Annex II to this report and its publications to date are listed in Annex III.

<sup>23</sup> One of the functions of the new statutory National Economic and Social Development Office will be to strengthen the complementary roles of the NESC, NESF and the NCPP in the policy consultation and advisory process.

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

**Figure 2** Role of the NESF in the Policy Design Process



1.19 ● The work of the Project Teams is specifically geared to solving problems, addressing particular policy issues and bringing an “*added value*” dimension to bear on policy-making through identifying, where possible, new thinking and alternative options. The Teams also seek to ensure that their recommendations are

- specific and actionable (both in their content and to whom they are addressed), are
- supported by underlying analysis, are costed where this is feasible and are also prioritised.

- 1.20 ● The Teams are also assisted from time to time by outside experts and may appoint Project Leaders to provide impetus and direction to their work. Another novel feature is that the Teams occasionally hold local consultations with various interests and focus groups throughout the country as well as invite written submissions from the public to assist them in their work.
- 1.21 ● Finally, the NESF's reports are submitted to Government, usually with a short delay to allow time for their consideration and the issuing of a Press Statement setting out the Government's reactions to a particular report's policy findings and recommendations. Following this, the reports are published and circulated also to the Houses of the Oireachtas, Government Departments, and State Agencies as well as to other interest groups concerned in the private and community and voluntary sectors.

## NESF Work Programme

- 1.22 ● The main policy themes that were included in the NESF's 2001 - 2003 Work Programme are outlined in Box 1 beneath.

### Box No. 1

#### NESF 2001–2003 Work Programme

##### Main Policy Themes

- Lone Parents
- Re-integration of Prisoners
- Equality Issues
- Early School Leavers
- Equity of Access to Hospital Care
- Training for Older Workers
- Equality Issues for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People
- Social Capital
- Equality Issues for Older People
- NAPS Social Inclusion Forum

- 1.23 ● The NESF's reports on Older Workers, Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People, Social Capital and Older People were published more recently and, accordingly, it was decided to hold over and deal with these in the next Periodic Report. This will allow more time for Government Departments to consider their responses and the follow-up action they envisage taking on the recommendations in these reports.
- 1.24 ● A planned report on income adequacy was held over until such time as the Social Welfare Benchmarking and Indexation Group, established under the provisions of the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness*, had reported. Eventually, it was decided not to proceed with this, given that the policy issues were subsumed in the negotiations that led to the new successor social partnership agreement, *Sustaining Progress*.
- 1.25 ● One of the immediate tasks of the in-coming NESF membership, which has recently taken up office, will be to draw up and agree a new Work Programme covering the period 2004-2006. As part of this process particular regard will be taken of the ten Special Initiatives in *Sustaining Progress* that impact on poverty and social exclusion.
- 1.26 ● An on-going concern by the NESF in implementing its Work Programme is to ensure that:
- a problem-solving approach is adopted and targeted at responding to specific questions and aimed at resolving implementation difficulties in specific policy areas;
  - duplication is avoided with other bodies and an “*added value*” dimension is brought to bear in its work processes;
  - the work is prioritised so as to link in with and influence the Government's own decision-making timetable as well as, in some instances, inputting into the negotiations on national social partnership agreements; and
  - all work topics and reports take into account major policy framework documents such as the National Anti-Poverty Strategy and commitments given on social inclusion and equality, including in the latter context the NESF's own report on Equality Proofing<sup>24</sup>.

## NESF's Financing

- 1.27 ● The NESF is under the aegis of the Department of the Taoiseach and its activities are funded through an annual Grant-in-Aid from that Department. Its Annual Accounts are audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General.

---

<sup>24</sup> *Equality Proofing Issues, NESF Report No.10 (February, 1996).*





## Introduction

- 2.1 ● This report highlighted the rise of almost 50 % in the number of lone parents with children under 15 years of age who are potentially at risk of poverty. Over the period 1981-2001, the number of lone parents on the Social Welfare One-Parent Family Payment (OFP) increased from 12,500 to just over 73,000, a six-fold increase. More recent figures in the Third Volume of the 2002 Census of Population showed that the number of one-parent families has increased by one-fifth over the last 5 years.
- 2.2 ● Key findings of the report were:
- the number of *young* lone parents (those in the under 25 age group) has been declining relatively in recent years, and almost 60 % of lone parents are now concentrated in the 25-39 age group;
  - participation by lone parents in the labour force (at about 35 %) is well below that in other countries e.g. in Finland the rate is 65 %;
  - almost half of lone parents have only primary level education, and they make up less than 2 % of those on mainstream training; and
  - lone parents are still marginalised in our society and need a wide range of supports to access public services at local level.
- 2.3 ● Against this background the main focus of the report was on:
- Enhanced delivery and quality of public services, notably
    - Housing and accommodation,
    - Income supports,
    - Health and personal services.
  - Improved access for lone parents to
    - Education,
    - Training,
    - Employment.

- 2.4 ● Other barriers highlighted in the report were the need for more family-friendly arrangements, more childcare facilities and greater integration between the income tax and social welfare systems so as to encourage fuller participation by lone parents on government programmes.
- 2.5 ● In the course of the report's preparation, a series of local hearings was organised with groups such as lone parents who are in receipt of social welfare payments, local statutory providers (namely, investigation officers and information officers from the Department of Social and Family Affairs, community welfare officers, public health nurses and social workers from the Health Boards and Local Authority Housing Offices). Consultations were also held with lone parent organisations and non-resident fathers and individuals who work with or have an interest in lone parent issues in a number of locations throughout the country.
- 2.6 ● A novel feature of the work, which informed the report's conclusions and recommendations, was the research that the NESF commissioned into the barriers and challenges that lone parents face in attempting to find a job. Another notable aspect was the consultations with non-resident fathers on their experience in becoming a father, how they view this role, frequency of contact with the child, links between maintenance and access and goals of family policy, given the changing family structures that make up our society nowadays. The recent 2002 Census of Population showed that the traditional family, consisting of a married couple with or without children now comprises only 49% of homes.

## Follow-up Action by Government Departments on NESF Report No. 20

- 2.7 ● The report contained a comprehensive set of recommendations to address the needs of lone parents under a number of core headings, namely:
- Statistical coverage and research,
  - Access to and delivery of public services,
  - Education, training and work issues,
  - Cohabitation and social welfare issues, and
  - Issues relating to non-resident fathers.
- 2.8 ● A summary of the recommendations under each of these headings, together with the action taken by Government Departments is outlined in Box 2 below.

## Box No. 2 NESF Report No.20 on Lone Parents

### NESF's Recommendations

### Action Taken by Departments

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

#### Data Issues

2.37	<p>Greater coverage of lone parenthood should be included in the official statistics that are collected regularly including the Census of Population and the Quarterly National Household Survey [CSO].</p>	<p>The Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) now includes a breakdown on lone parents.</p>
2.38	<p>A programme of research should be developed and supported by the Department of Social and Family Affairs to provide better information to inform the policy debate on lone parenthood and family formation issues [D/SFA].</p>	<p>The Families Research Programme was established in 1999 to assist in the funding of research projects on the development of public policies. Some 14 projects have been sponsored to-date. Relevant projects include “Family Formation in Ireland trends, data needs and implications” by the ESRI and Family Well-being: What makes a difference? by Dr. Kieran Mc Keown for the Céifín Centre.</p>
2.38	<p>A reformulation of the unit of analysis in official statistics should also be considered by the National Statistics Board so that non-resident parents and families within families are more fully taken account of [CSO/National Statistics Board].</p>	<p>The CSO piloted a question on number of children parented for the 2002 Census. Increasing marital breakdown and births outside marriage presented difficulties and based on feedback received it was decided not to include this question. A module on the family in the QNHS is, however, planned for 2004.</p>
2.38	<p>A system of tracking lone parents should be devised in conjunction with the main delivery agencies and data gathered on programme participation and completion [D/SFA].</p>	<p>Will be considered as part of the planned review of the operation of income support arrangements for lone parents. Being progressed in the context of the National Employment Action Plan 2003-2005.</p>

#### Access to and Delivery of Public Services

3.30	<p>Lone parents' particular accommodation needs in relation to social housing should be considered in the design, development and allocation by local authorities of a range of housing sizes and types that take account of the changing make-up of families [D/EHLG].</p>	<p>The accommodation needs of all applicants for local authority housing, including lone parents, are assessed on an individual basis and it is increasingly the case that the size of accommodation is more closely in relation to the size of the household being housed. This is reflected in the increasing number of 2 bed houses being provided by local authorities.</p> <p>The last assessment of local authority housing needs carried out in March, 2002 indicated there were 14,039 households consisting of one adult and one child on waiting lists, representing 29% of</p>
------	---	---

NESF's Recommendations	Action Taken by Departments
	<p>households on local authority waiting lists. Local authorities are continually exhorted by the Department to ensure that the design of new local authority housing developments should closely match the range of needs in any particular area. The Department's Design Guidelines for Social Housing provide guidance to local authorities on this in greater detail.</p> <p>Local authorities have been asked to review their approach to all housing needs, including those of lone parents, in a strategic manner and to develop new five year Action Plans that will govern the delivery of all social and affordable housing measures over the five-year period 2004-2008. These plans will help local authorities in identifying priority needs and providing a coherent and co-ordinated response across all housing services.</p>
<p>3.19 <b>Bed and breakfast emergency accommodation for families with children should provide adequate facilities for laundry and cooking [D/EHLG].</b></p>	<p>Since the Government Strategy on Homelessness was published in 2000, there has been an improvement in the quality and range of accommodation for the homeless. Bed and breakfast/emergency accommodation for those with children is not regarded as suitable in the long term. However, this accommodation, particularly in the Dublin area, includes access to cooking and laundry facilities and access is unrestricted during the day, with reasonable late night closures. The aim is to provide more transitional accommodation and settlement programmes to enable people to move back into the community.</p> <p>Current funding on the provision of accommodation and related services for homeless persons has increased from €31.7 million in 2001 to €51million in 2004.</p>
<p>3.21, 3.23 <b>The Commission on the Private Rented Sector recommendations should be implemented; in particular, the Private Residential Tenancies Board should be set up as a matter of priority to look at rent levels and to check on malpractice by landlords. We recommend that the Board particularly addresses the discrimination by some landlords against lone parents on Rent/Mortgage Interest Supplement and that it play a role in enforcing standards and implementing rent reviews [D/EHLG].</b></p>	<p>The Residential Tenancies Act, 2004 was enacted in July 2004. It provides for legislative reforms of the private rented sector as recommended by the Commission on the Private Rented Residential Sector and accepted by the Government. The Act introduces a significant measure of security of tenure for tenants, specifies minimum obligations applying to landlords and tenants and provides for the establishment of a Private Residential Tenancies Board to resolve disputes arising in the sector, to operate a system of tenancy registration and to undertake monitoring, research information and policy advice. The Act restricts rents to market level and also contains provisions relating to procedures for the termination of tenancies, including graduated notice periods linked to the duration of a tenancy.</p> <p>Commission recommendations accepted by Government for fiscal reforms in the private rented sector were already implemented in the 2001 and 2002 Finance Acts.</p>

	<b>NESF's Recommendations</b>	<b>Action Taken by Departments</b>
3.25	The review of the Supplementary Welfare Allowance (SWA) reasonable rent limits which determine the maximum amount payable through the Rent / Mortgage Interest Supplement should take account of rents charged in the market, particularly in larger urban areas [D/SFA].	This is already the case. The maximum level of rent which a person may incur and still qualify for a rent supplement is determined by each Health Board and is set by reference to local property considerations.
3.30	Provision should be made by local authorities within housing estates for community support facilities [D/EHLG].	<p>It is now common practice for community facilities to be provided in new housing developments. In some instances, these include crèche facilities. The Department is prepared to fund these facilities as part of the capital funding for local authorities. There is now wide acceptance across all local authorities on the need for these facilities.</p> <p>The Housing Management Initiatives Grant Scheme, which was initiated in 1995, provides assistance to local authorities for practical pilot projects. Some €4m has been paid to-date under the Scheme. Projects approved include staff and tenant training in estate management, research support, production of tenant handbooks and the employment of tenant liaison officers.</p>
3.33	The Joint Public/Private Rental Accommodation for Persons on the Rent Subsidy Initiative should be introduced by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, and once implemented, should be monitored in order to establish its relevance for lone parents [D/EHLG].	<p>A new initiative whereby local authorities will meet the long-term housing needs of Social Welfare Allowance Rent Supplement recipients was approved by Government on 6 July 2004.</p> <p>Under the new arrangements, local authorities will progressively assume responsibility, over a time-frame of 3 years, for accommodating rent supplement recipients of 18 months continuous duration, assessed as having long-term housing need, excluding asylum-seekers (or other non-nationals who do not have leave to remain in the State permanently) and those in receipt of rent supplement as a "back to work" incentive. The total number currently involved is estimated as around 19,000 nationally out of an overall total of some 58,000 rent supplement recipients.</p> <p>Local authorities will use a range of measures, including a new public/private rental initiative to meet long-term housing needs of rent supplement claimants through private rented accommodation, involving arrangements to: (a) secure long-term availability of existing accommodation, both units currently subsidised under the SWA scheme and other accommodation, and (b) develop additional accommodation through new-build PPP projects which would be financed, developed and operated on a long-term basis by the private sector but made available exclusively for households designated by local authorities.</p> <p>The new arrangements are being introduced on a phased basis from September 2004 and will be expected to benefit a significant</p>

NESF's Recommendations	Action Taken by Departments
	<p>number of lone parents – over 20% of recipients of rent supplement are in receipt of One Parent Family Payments.</p> <p>The new arrangements will, in effect, see an extension of the social housing role of local authorities through direct engagement with the private rented sector, bringing an added element of innovation to social housing provision. The welfare-based rent supplement scheme will provide short-term income support.</p>
<p>3.34 — Direction should be given at the highest political levels to the Planning Group on a new Local Authority Based Rental Scheme to ensure that its work on supply issues addresses the currently unmet needs of many lone parents [D/EHLG].</p>	<p>See the response to 3.33 above.</p>
<p>3.35 — The OFP should be benchmarked and uprated taking into account the findings of the Partnership for Prosperity and Fairness Working Group on Indexing Adequacy [D/SFA].</p>	<p>Review of income support arrangements for lone parents as per the commitment in the Department of Social and Family Affairs Statement of Strategy is to commence in Autumn 2004.</p>
<p>3.38 — Issues with regard to maintenance should be reviewed by the Department of Social and Family Affairs on a regular basis [D/SFA].</p>	<p>The last major re-appraisal of maintenance issues within the Department took place at the time of the OFP expenditure review in 2000. Maintenance issues are kept under continuous review within the Department.</p>
<p>3.40 — Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowances should be paid automatically to recipients of means-tested payments [D/SFA].</p>	<p>A Working Group has recently completed a review of those schemes. Any future changes will be considered in light of this review.</p>
<p>3.41 — User-friendly guidelines should be developed for SWA by the Department of Social and Family Affairs, in particular, in relation to Rent/Mortgage Interest Supplement and Exceptional Needs Payments [D/SFA].</p>	<p>A general information booklet (SW54) on SWA was updated in May 2003. More detailed guidelines in respect of Exceptional Needs Payments are also currently available in booklet form. It is proposed to draw up more detailed user-friendly guidelines in relation to rent and mortgage supplement.</p>

	NESF's Recommendations	Action Taken by Departments
3.9 3.46	'Family Services Workers' should be appointed by the Department of Social and Family Affairs to work with families, especially lone parent households at particular periods of crisis and to liaise with different statutory agencies [D/SFA].	Family Services Project (FSP) and Employment Support Service (ESS) officers (called Facilitators) now assist people generally who are most marginalised and distant from the labour market rather than responding on the basis of particular categories such as long-term unemployed, disabled or lone parents. In addition to this support and activation role, Facilitators also have a key remit in the provision of quality information and referral to customers. The Family Support Agency is responsible for Family and Community Services Resource Centres which also provide services to support families experiencing difficulties.
3.44	The Family Services Project should be extended to other areas; its focus on lone parent families should continue. The Family Services Workers should be located in the Family Services Project and Family Resource Centre structures, where available [D/SFA].	The Family Services Project has been expanded and is now operational in all ten of the Department's regions. In addition, the FSP and ESS have merged to form the newly established Social and Family Support Service (see note on Facilitators above).
3.47	The administration of the OFP should be localised and	The localised administration of the OFP is being implemented with 11 offices completed at end June 2004. Six of these are in the Dublin area with the others located in Galway, Limerick, Longford, Sligo and Waterford. These offices are accepting all new applications for OFP for their catchment areas. It is intended to localise a further 7 offices by year end. Teams from each of the offices have been afforded two weeks training by staff from the Pension Services Offices of the Department.
3.48	The Department of Social and Family Affairs local office staff should receive training on issues relating to lone parenthood. This training should be developed in partnership with lone parent organisations [D/SFA].	
3.50	A programme of support is needed at both schools and community levels to ensure that both young men and women have access to the range of information that they require regarding relationships, sexuality and parenting issues [D/ES].	Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) enable students to develop skills and competence to learn about themselves and others and to make informed decisions about their health, personal lives and social development.
3.56	A budget line should be provided by the Department of Social and Family Affairs for the development of peer support networks for lone parents as a matter of priority [D/SFA].	Networking grants are now the responsibility of the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. Under the grants scheme, OPEN is funded to provide peer support to lone parents.

	NESF's Recommendations	Action Taken by Departments
3.57	RAPID area implementation teams in urban areas and CLÁR teams in rural settings should consult with lone parents as a matter of priority [D/CRGA].	Lone parents are one of the target groups for the RAPID/CLÁR programmes and are part of the consultation process in each of the designated areas.
3.61	The valuable learning from community-based transport initiatives should be transferred to more rural areas [D/CRGA].	Approximately 270 new routes or over 1000 services have been introduced in rural areas and further services will be launched before the end of the year.
<b>Education, Training and Work Issues</b>		
4.13	Greater flexibility needs to be applied in the reimbursement of childcare costs for those participating in programmes; in particular, community projects rather than individual participants should be given responsibility by the main delivery agencies to vouch for childcare costs. We also recommend that the £50 limit currently being applied to a range of initiatives be increased to keep pace with rising childcare costs [D/ES].	The Department of Education and Science is communicating with VECs to verify the funding needed for childcare up to December 2003. The Department and the IVEA have initiated a review of childcare for participants on Youthreach, VTOS and Traveller Training to explore means of reducing costs in this area. There has been no change in the limit of €63.40 (£50).
4.7	Within each Government Department, an official should be designated responsibility for identifying mainstreaming perspectives and the lessons learned in pilot initiatives. In particular, the newly-established National Employment Services Advisory Committee should play a role in mainstreaming the learning from valuable pilot labour market programmes [D/ETE].	FÁS has strengthened its Social Inclusion Unit, and a core function of the Unit is to identify and, where relevant, mainstream lessons learned from pilot initiatives for specific targeted groups.

NESF's Recommendations	Action Taken by Departments
<p>4.15 — There should be a substantial increase in the number of State-provided childcare places, supported through the work of the National Childcare Co-ordinating Committee [D/JELR].</p>	<p>In April 2003, the Minister announced funding for the creation of 270 childcare places and support for 50 existing places. The Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme is currently supporting over 45,000 childcare places through grant assistance.</p>
<p>4.15 — Support should be made available for capacity-building for community groups who move from provision of sessional childcare to both sessional and full-day care provision, thereby allowing for a greater level of choice at local level. At central level, more planning is required to link needs with service provision [D/JELR].</p>	<p>County/city childcare committees have developed and are implementing five year strategic plans to develop childcare appropriate to the needs of their own area. The National Childcare Co-ordinating Committee has responsibility for central planning. In April 2003, the Minister stated that he would welcome further applications from community-based groups who are in a position to establish new childcare services offering both full day care and other services to address the needs of parents.</p>
<p>4.28 — Resources should be provided by the Department of Education and Science for mainstreaming the Waterford Student Mother's Project and other similar early intervention and support projects [D/ES].</p>	<p>This Project, together with 3 other Teenage Parenting Projects, in Galway, Limerick and Tallaght (Barnardos), will be funded under the School Completion Programme (SCP) from 2004. The projects will be linked with existing SCP projects in these areas; they are currently funded under the Children at Risk Fund, which only commits funding on an annual basis.</p> <p>The SCP has been implemented to directly target those in danger of dropping out of the education system and is a key component of the Department's strategy to discriminate positively in favour of children and young people who are at risk of early school leaving.</p>
<p>4.31 — Vocational Training Opportunities Schemes (VTOS) should be provided by the Department of Education and Science on a part-time basis to facilitate participation of groups such as lone parents [D/ES].</p>	<p>Lone parents are one of the target groups of the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI), which incorporates VTOS/Youthreach/PLC, and provides opportunities for young people and adults, to return to learning on a part-time basis. Lone parents make up approx. 9.42% (670), of the BTEI participants.</p>

NESF's Recommendations	Action Taken by Departments
<p>4.33 <b>Lone parents in third level education should be assessed for grants in their own right, as is the case for means-testing for the OFP [D/ES].</b></p>	<p>In the calculation of reckonable income under the Department's maintenance grant schemes, all sources of income must be taken into account, with certain specified Social Welfare and Health Board payments being exempt such as means-tested one parent family payments.</p> <p>Under the schemes, mature students are defined as not less than 23 years of age on the year of entry to their third level course. When assessing means, other than independent mature students, the schemes specify that the students' means, and those of their parents or guardians, must be below a prescribed limit. This provision requires that parental income be taken into account irrespective of the individual circumstances in any case where the student is not a mature student.</p> <p>Any reduction in the age threshold defining mature student status would have to be considered in the light of available financial resources and other competing demands in the education sector.</p>
<p>4.43 <b>Greater levels of flexibility should be introduced in the design and delivery of active labour market programmes by FÁS and other agencies for lone parents. In particular, the learning from Community Employment should be taken into account in the upcoming review of active labour market programmes by the Standing Committee on the Labour Market [D/ETE].</b></p>	<p>The Standing Committee was unable to produce a final report in the absence of sufficient consensus on various elements of the review.</p> <p>The future structure of the Community Employment Programme remains under consideration by a group of senior officials and FÁS. This group is expected to report on the outcome of its deliberations shortly.</p>
<p>4.22 <b>A package of supports including pre-training, taster courses and personal development should be put in place for lone parents who participate in active labour market programmes [D/ETE/FÁS].</b></p>	<p>In 2003 a review of the effectiveness of FÁS's Childcare Support Payment Scheme was undertaken. The review examined the impact of the scheme on the progression of recipients. A second study was also commissioned to undertake a follow up study of trainees who had availed of the payment. The reviews indicated that the payment was having a positive effect in terms of raising the proportion of women in training, especially those aged 33 or under.</p> <p>Females outside the labour force are the target group of the Gateway for Women programme. Gateway was initiated in late 2002 and is funded jointly by FÁS and the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform under the Equality for Women measure. To date more than 600 women have registered to engage with the Gateway programme. Gateway operated in 2002-2003 in the Dublin and West Regions and it is to be extended to further regions in 2004.</p>

NESF's Recommendations	Action Taken by Departments
<p>4.23 Targeted active labour market programmes should be made available and</p> <p>4.36 accessible to lone parents, following an assessment of their needs through the LES network, where it exists. Progression should be built into the options developed with individual lone parents by the main delivery agencies [D/ETE].</p>	<p>Agreement is reached, annually, between FÁS and the Partnership Companies in relation to target groups for LES activity. Currently, lone parents are, on average, 7% of the LES caseload. Increasing this percentage will be considered further between FÁS and the Partnerships.</p>
<p>4.49 As an initial step towards the development of a Welfare to Work Unit, a Welfare to Work Colloquium should be held by the Department of Social and Family Affairs which would bring together the main players with an interest in issues relating to welfare/work transitions to explore the development of a welfare to work strategy for groups like lone parents [D/SFA].</p>	<p>The Department is actively engaged in the identification and removal of barriers to employment for people of working age across all social welfare schemes. In this context, a number of measures have been introduced to social security schemes to make them more employment friendly for the long-term unemployed, people with disabilities and recipients of OFP, including the introduction of means disregards and the tapered withdrawal of primary and secondary payments. The question of a colloquium will be considered in the context of the development of future policy in this area.</p>
<p>4.19 Guidelines developed by the Department of Health and Children in conjunction with the Health Boards on retention of the Medical Card on taking up employment should be published and disseminated by them [D/HC].</p>	<p>A revamped set of guidelines and procedures on the operation of the Scheme has now been agreed and implemented in all of the health board areas as Phase 1 of a Project to simplify its operation. This phase also included training of health board staff on the procedures.</p> <p>Phase 2 of the project will look at ways of improving accessibility for those who benefit from the Scheme.</p>
<p>4.10 Family-friendly policies which are developed for all parents should have due regard for the specific needs of lone parents [D/ETE].</p>	<p>The Framework Committee on Family Friendly Policies in the Workplace has extended its understanding of work life balance to include a range of groups who need supports and flexibility in their working lives.</p>

NESF's Recommendations	Action Taken by Departments
<b>Cohabitation and Social Welfare Issues</b>	
<p>5.2</p> <p>The Team's deliberations on changes in the current social welfare arrangements in relation to cohabitation should be taken up and developed, in the first instance by the Oireachtas Committee on Social and Family Affairs [Oireachtas].</p>	<p>This is a matter for consideration by the Party Whips.</p>
<p>5.11</p> <p>The Department of Social and Family Affairs should monitor the operation of the cohabitation guidelines to ensure they are applied in a consistent manner across all regions. Training and regular updates should be given to Inspectors on difficulties encountered. Where appropriate, the Department should consult with lone parent groups as part of this process [D/SFA].</p>	<p>All reports of cohabitation in the case of lone parents are dealt with by the External Control Unit (ECU) in Sligo. Guidelines for assessing cohabitation are attached to each investigation request to the social welfare inspector. A series of training sessions for social welfare inspectors was carried out in 2001/02. The operation of cohabitation guidelines is kept under review.</p>
<p>5.11</p> <p>Support should be given by the Department of Social and Family Affairs to advice centres/local groups to provide information on cohabitation and its effect on the OFP and information on how cohabitation is assessed should be issued when a lone parent is initially awarded the OFP [D/SFA].</p>	<p>All new OFP recipients are given a copy of the booklet "One parent family information guide" at the time of award. This gives information on cohabitation in addition to other issues. The booklet was compiled by Treoir, AIM, Cherish, Gingerbread, Comhairle and DSFA.</p>

NESF's Recommendations	Action Taken by Departments
<b>Issues relating to Non-Resident Fathers</b>	
<p>6.4 Further research on the role of fathers should be undertaken. In this respect, a feasibility study on the development of a programme of research should be supported by the Family Affairs Unit in the Department of Social and Family Affairs. Areas to be addressed in this research should include :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– joint parenting and custody issues,</li> <li>– access issues,</li> <li>– liable relatives and maintenance, and</li> <li>– rights of married and unmarried parents [D/SFA].</li> </ul>	<p>The Government's Families Research Programme is now the responsibility of the Family Support Agency (FSA). Under the programme, research on "Young Men on the Margins" (February 2004) was published and a report on "Strengthening Vulnerable Families through Fathers" is due for publication shortly. Research has also been published on marital breakdown and the effects of parental separation on children.</p>
<p>6.12 Social support networks should be developed for young fathers and community based programmes on parent/child communication should be provided to assist young fathers in making a contribution towards their child's development [D/SFA].</p>	<p>Funded by the FSA, the functions of Family Resource Centres include meeting the needs of local communities by providing information, advice and supports to target groups and families in their area.</p>
<p>6.30 Housing policy should take account of non-resident fathers who have overnight access to their children [D/EHLG].</p>	<p>The 2002 Assessment of Local Authority Housing Needs indicated that lone parents account for 43% of needs and the Department has encouraged local authorities to provide more 2 bed units in their housing programmes to respond to this. The Department is not aware that there is a substantial demand from local authorities for this type of accommodation.</p>
<p>6.30 Father/children facilities should be provided within the local community to help fathers who have access to their children but who do not have suitable accommodation [D/EHLG].</p>	<p>No developments here.</p>

## NESF's Conclusions on the Follow-up Action by Government Departments on its Report No. 20

- 2.9** ● As the above Box shows, only limited progress has been made in following through on its recommendations. In certain cases, however, steps have been initiated to address these in the medium-term while further work is still needed on others. The importance of some of these recommendations viz. facilitating teenage parents to remain in education and means-testing young lone parents against their own incomes rather than their parents were also raised recently by the Crisis Pregnancy Agency (2003)<sup>25</sup>.
- 2.10** ● Reasonable progress has been made in relation to statistical improvements – such as the new data on children in the 2002 Census of Population, the family module that is planned for this year as well as the research studies undertaken on the wider issues of family formation. These are welcome and the results should help to better inform future policy debates and developments.
- 2.11** ● Of more immediate importance is the progress that has been made in providing accommodation for lone parents with children who are deemed to be homeless. The NESF welcomes this as well as other developments in the housing area such as the Residential Tenancies Act, 2004 and the commitment in Sustaining Progress to public-private partnership arrangements to help improve the supply of private rented accommodation. These could be of particular benefit to lone parents, who represent a sizeable number of those in need of this type of accommodation and who are in need of rental assistance. However, the announcement in the 2004 Estimates that those who have not been renting for at least six months are to be refused the SWA Rent Supplement is a retrograde step.
- 2.12** ● The provision of better community facilities is a welcome advance by Local Authorities in the planning of housing estates as well as staff training and the introduction of tenant liaison officers.
- 2.13** ● The openness of the Department of Social and Family Affairs to at least regular reviews of income maintenance issues is welcome as far as it goes. It would be important, however, for that Department to have in-built consultation mechanisms in place when undertaking such reviews. These should take place in public and the results published before any final decisions are made. The Department is to be complimented for its decision to localise payment of the OFP.

---

<sup>25</sup> Crisis Pregnancy Agency (2003) *Strategy to Address the Issue of Crisis Pregnancy 2004–2006*, Dublin, November.

- 2.14** ● While no definitive decision has been taken in relation to ‘family services workers’ (whose role would be to assist families to identify and meet their needs), the NESF welcomes the establishment of the Family Support Agency and the rationalisation of the Family Services Project and the Employment Support Service into a unified service.
- 2.15** ● The area where most progress is still needed is in relation to education, training and employment. It is now widely acknowledged<sup>26</sup> that the most successful route out of poverty for lone parents is employment but Ireland fares badly by comparison with other countries when employment rates for lone parents are examined<sup>27</sup>. In this regard, the OECD highlighted how Ireland stood out, because one-parent families here, usually headed by women, have a higher incidence of unemployment than in other countries. At the same time, and related to this, is the fact that over 40% of lone parents here were at risk of poverty in 2001, compared to the EU average of 35%.<sup>28</sup>
- 2.16** ● The recent cuts and changes in qualifying conditions in the 2004 Estimates – particularly the removal of the transitional half-payment of OFP, restrictions on the payment of the SWA Rent Supplement and in the Back to Education Allowance – may make it more difficult for lone parents to enter the labour market. As against this, however, the Government has, in line with one of the recommendations of the OECD, made a number of improvements to the Family Income Supplement so as to enhance the incentive to work for lone parents.
- 2.17** ● Against this background, the NESF welcomes the initiatives outlined in the National Employment Action Plan<sup>29</sup> such as a system of tracking lone parents and that the Department of Social and Family Affairs will over the period 2003-2006 encourage lone parents to access employment by:
- reviewing the system of income supports and examining its effectiveness as an incentive to return to work; and
  - further developing linkages between its various support areas to assist their accessing and returning to work.
- 2.18** ● As the NESF report showed, to increase labour force participation, a range of supports are necessary. These include access to family-friendly policies, childcare, mentoring and peer support, and these issues were again supported by the OECD and in a recent report on family life in this country<sup>30</sup>. IMI research has shown that achieving a work-life balance is now seen as the top challenge facing personnel managers in this country. A recent Irish

---

<sup>26</sup> In its *Labour Market Review (2003)* FÁS noted that the effectiveness of income supports for lone parents, as an incentive to return to work/education may need to be reviewed.

<sup>27</sup> OECD (2003) *Babies and Bosses: Reconciling Work and Family Life, Volume 2* found that less than half of Irish lone parents are in work compared with 81% and 83% respectively in Austria and Japan.

<sup>28</sup> EU Joint Inclusion Report, COM (2003) 733 final.

<sup>29</sup> National Employment Action Plan 2003-2005, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, October 2003.

<sup>30</sup> Daly, M. (2004) *Families and Family Life in Ireland*, February.

study on child poverty<sup>31</sup> has highlighted yet again how lone parents continue to be disadvantaged in the labour market. It recommends that, in particular, financial loss due to new domestic partnership arrangements should be avoided. The OECD cited how Ireland lags behind in terms of adequate and affordable childcare – the cost of childcare represents 33% of the average worker’s salary here, compared to 15% (net of public subsidies) in Austria and Japan. This has also been highlighted in a recent EU Commission Report (*Report on equality between women and men, COM (2004)115 final*) and in OPEN’s recent report<sup>32</sup>.

- 2.19** ● The Department of Education and Science is currently undertaking a review of childcare costs for those on some of its educational schemes (this is awaited with interest) and valuable work is being done by the Department of Health and Children in its Teen Parents Support Initiative which assists young parents. The evaluation of this Initiative<sup>33</sup> highlighted the need for financial supports, which had already been identified by the young parents themselves, for education and training, childcare and accommodation. All of these areas were also singled out for attention in the NESF report.
- 2.20** ● Following on from the work begun in its own report, the NESF welcomes the complementary work that has since been undertaken by the National Women’s Council of Ireland on a women’s model of Social Welfare Reform<sup>34</sup>. One of the key dimensions of this is the need to recognise the labour market reality of women’s atypical employment and the introduction of part-time unemployment payments for parents with young children who could have their part-time work recognised.
- 2.21** ● Greater flexibility is also required and in this regard the NESF sees the ‘Gateway for Women’ programme launched by FÁS as a way of providing more flexibility and access for groups such as lone parents as well as the commitment by FÁS and Partnership Companies to consider the question of increasing the participation by lone parents in the LES.
- 2.22** ● Again, this raises the more general question of childcare costs and the NESF wishes to add its voice to the concerns that have been raised by others, including the European Commission, on this and the related question on the feasibility at this stage of this country meeting the childcare targets that were set for 2010 by the Barcelona European Council viz having childcare available for ‘90% of children between 3 years old and the mandatory school age and at least 33% of children under 3 years of age’. Apart from the issue of affordability, childcare also needs to be provided on a flexible basis, outside ‘normal’ working hours, and in a variety of formats other than just crèche-based provision.

---

<sup>31</sup> Sweeney, J. (2002) *Ending Child Poverty in Rich Nations: What Works?* Dublin: Children’s Rights Alliance.

<sup>32</sup> *Living on the Book*, OPEN, 2004.

<sup>33</sup> CSER (2002) *Final Evaluation Report of the Teen Parents Support Initiative*, Department of Health and Children.

<sup>34</sup> *National Women’s Council of Ireland (2003) A Women’s Model for Social Welfare Reform*, Dublin: NWCI.

- 2.23 ● The NESF urges the Department of Social and Family Affairs to expedite its consideration of a Welfare to Work Colloquium to explore and develop strategies for disadvantaged groups such as lone parents. In this regard also, the OECD recommended that Ireland should rethink its policies, as these are not working, and move towards a system of mutual obligations for lone parents, with assistance provided for job search and childcare, while the parents in return would take steps to find a job and improve their financial prospects.
- 2.24 ● Finally, the NESF is disappointed that greater progress has not been made in relation to its recommendations on the better integration of non-resident fathers into the lives of their children. This dimension of the lone parent debate, which was an important part of the NESF's report, has been neglected up to now. The NESF urges that this should now be given greater priority.



## Introduction

- 3.1 ● The report was prepared on the basis of a wide series of consultations with the Prison Service, the Probation and Welfare Service, the Judiciary, the Prison Officers' Association, the Prison Education Service, visits to prisons and community-based projects (such as Connect and the Linkage Programme). Local hearings were also held as well as meetings with other voluntary groups such as Victim Support, the Penal Reform Trust, PACE, Cabra Young Offenders After Care Committee, the Blanchardstown Offenders for New Directions (BOND), Dillon's Cross, groups representing the interests of prisoners under the Good Friday Agreement. Written submissions were invited from the public and research was also commissioned by the NESF's Project Team.
- 3.2 ● The report was submitted as an input to the process of important changes that the Government has been making in areas such as the new Prison Service, the Probation and Welfare Service and the Parole Board.
- 3.3 ● In undertaking this work, the NESF was aware of the many worthwhile recommendations that had been made over the years in a range of well-regarded reports but these had been neglected or at best were not as fully acted on as they should have been. The missing link in this was the gap between policy design, on the one hand, and policy implementation on the other and the absence of coherent mechanisms or models to follow through on this.
- 3.4 ● The NESF's mandate from the Government stresses the importance of policy implementation and evaluation through project teamwork and this report demonstrates the importance of this approach. Its central focus is on the barriers to policy implementation and the related need for more focused, targeted and integrated mechanisms or models to ensure that prisoners can be more effectively integrated back into society.

## Report's Main Findings

3.5 ● These findings, which form the background to the report's recommendations, are that:

- the majority of our prisoners are male, young and are from the most deprived backgrounds and lack basic educational and employment skills; this link between crime and poverty and disadvantage has been further confirmed by the Forum on Crime and the National Crime Council;
- the running weekly costs alone now amount to almost €1,300 per prisoner, while that for a community service/supervision order comes to only €50-75;
- despite this, and the consensus views of the experts that non-custodial options are more effective deterrents than prisons, and the drop in crime over the last few years, our imprisonment rate is increasing and is now triple that of England and Wales and quadruple that of the Scandinavian countries; and
- our prisoners have one of the highest re-offending rates in Europe.

More recently, in his first Annual Report, the Inspector of Prisons and Places for Detention, Mr Justice Dermot Kinlen, was particularly critical of the homelessness and destitution of prisoners on their release, and contrasted the weekly cost of €1,300 to the State of keeping them in prison to the €60 they are given when they are set free.

## Follow-up Action by Government Departments on NESF Report No. 22

- 3.6** ● The report's recommendations are built around its overall conclusion that what is urgently required are key institutional mechanisms/models to spearhead and ensure effective follow-through on the report's recommendations. These should include:
- a Prison Service Re-integration Group at national level for strategic policy purposes;
  - an Inter-Agency Group in each Prison to develop and implement integrated approaches; and
  - a Positive Sentence management plan for each prisoner.
- 3.7** ● These new structures would be linked-up and co-ordinated with one another, with the central focus on the re-integration of prisoners. As argued in the report, this was the key issue and would provide the missing link to achieving better results, in the best interests of both the individual prisoner as well as that of society as a whole.
- 3.8** ● The report's recommendations centred on a number of issues such as to:
- increase the use of non-custodial options,
  - give more emphasis to re-integration throughout the Prison System,
  - introduce positive sentence management,
  - develop more planned and integrated after-care for prisoners on release,
  - end discrimination on the basis of a Criminal Record, apart from exceptional circumstances, and
  - increase data collection, monitoring and independent evaluation of the system.
- 3.9** ● A summary of the main recommendations as well as the follow-up action taken by Government Departments on these is set out in Box 3 below. In all cases, unless otherwise stated, these relate to the action taken by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform and / or his Department.

## Box No. 3 NESF Report No.22 on the Re-Integration of Prisoners

NESF's Recommendations

Action Taken by Departments

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

### Data and Research Issues

1.14

More detailed and timely empirical information and research should be collected and published on the nature and effectiveness of the Irish penal system.

The **Expert Group on Crime Statistics** established to examine the methods of collation and presentation of crime statistics reported in July 2004. The Group included senior representation from the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, An Garda Síochána, Courts Service, Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, the Irish Prison Service, the National Crime Council among others. The NESF recommendation “that the National Statistics Board should be consulted on the implications for data collection and priorities” was drawn to the attention of the Expert Group. Following receipt of the Group’s report, the Minister for Justice announced that he would develop proposals on the establishment of a Central Crime Statistics Unit within the Central Statistics Office.

A Report entitled ‘**Developing Irish Social and Equality Statistics to meet Policy Needs**’, prepared by the National Statistics Board, was published on 17 April 2003. The Report sets out the key tasks needing to be done to develop Irish social and equality statistics so that they could meet current and impending policy needs and it makes twelve specific recommendations in this regard. As regards implementation of the NSB report in the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, a Central Statistics Office team has assessed the statistical potential for key policy purposes of the major data holdings of the various line Divisions of the Department and its associated agencies. The team’s report was published in September 2003. The Central Statistics Office is now seeking to develop best practice guidelines to assist the preparation and implementation of a Departmental formal/statistics strategy by end-2004.

A **Justice Sector Data Network** has been activated for all associated agencies other than the Garda Síochána. Some work has been carried out on the development of a common data model. A common identifier across all systems has been identified as a key issue and the PPS No. has been singled out as the most suitable. An amendment to the Data Protection legislation may be required to facilitate such an approach. This matter is under consideration within the Department at the moment.

The Department is reactivating a proposal in relation to the creation of a **Criminal History Repository**. This would hold anonymised data from all information systems of the criminal justice sector. The new Criminal Justice Statistics Unit will be assisting the progressing of this project.

## NESF's Recommendations

## Action Taken by Departments

In relation to the **Courts**, a Criminal Case Tracking System (CCTS) currently generates sentence statistics for the Dublin Metropolitan and eight provincial District Courts offices. The CCTS system is to be extended to the remaining District Court offices during 2004. An extension of the CCTS to cover criminal cases in higher Courts is also being planned.

The **Irish Prison Service**, in its 2001 Annual Report (published March 2003) and 2002 Annual Report (published September 2003), has published extensive data and profiles of the prison population generated from the computerised Prisoner Records Information System (PRIS) which links to all prisons. The Service is currently working with a number of academics from third-level institutions to ensure that its future statistical material is timely, comprehensive and relevant to well-informed public debate and discussion about crime and punishment in our society.

As regards research, the Service has established an in-house Research Policy Group to formulate proposals on prison-based research. Funding has also been allocated by the Department's Policy Planning Research Unit to:

- research led by the Probation and Welfare Service on Homeless Offenders which has been carried out by the Centre for Social and Educational Research of the Dublin Institute of Technology. The research report has recently been completed.
- a multi-level study of prisoner recidivism which is being undertaken by a leading criminological academic body (the Institute of Criminology, Faculty of Law, University College, Dublin). Among variables to feature in the analysis will be data on a sizeable sample of prisoners including offence and offender characteristics such as age, gender, education, marital status, criminal history, offence type, length of sentence served, whether the offender participated in specialised programmes, etc. This research has recently commenced and will run for about three years.

NESF's Recommendations	Action Taken by Departments
<b>Sentence Planning</b>	
<p>3.36</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ All prisoners under sentence should have a comprehensive Sentence Plan developed on committal, by multi-disciplinary teams in conjunction with the prisoner, with re-integration as a key goal and covering a range of issues such as Substance Abuse (3.32), Education (5.19), Health (5.23) and Family Supports (5.36);</li> <li>■ Information in relation to the offender and the crime committed (including victim statement, if available) should help inform the details of the Sentence Plan;</li> <li>■ The Sentence Plan should be monitored on a regular basis; and</li> <li>■ The system should be independently evaluated and best practice shared across the prison system.</li> </ul>	<p>Positive Sentence Management [PSM] is among the key tasks of the Regimes Directorate of the Irish Prison Service. The establishment of the new Directorate is an important first step in the re-balancing of the Service's custodial and care/rehabilitation functions. The establishment of a Scoping Group to prepare a report on the introduction of PSM was one of the priority targets of the Regimes Business Plan for 2003. The Chair of the Scoping Group made a presentation to the Co-ordination Group on Offender Integration (COGOI) in January, 2004 on the Group's progress. The Group is currently finalising its draft report.</p>
<b>Institutional Reforms</b>	
<p>3.44</p> <p>The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, should prepare, on the basis of consultations with the interests concerned, a report on the most effective institutional mechanisms to lead, oversee and implement the changes recommended in 3.36 above; this should be done within six months and submitted to the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion for consideration.</p>	<p>A <b>Scoping Group on Positive Sentence Management</b> [PSM] has been established by the Irish Prison Service to prepare a report, including terms of reference for the introduction of PSM, an evaluation process and any IT requirements etc. in consultation with other relevant services within the Criminal Justice system, outside agencies and prisoners. The Scoping Group is currently finalising its draft report. COGOI [see below] will receive reports on the development of PSM. A progress report on the deliberations of the Scoping Group was provided to COGOI in January, 2004.</p>

## NESF's Recommendations

## Action Taken by Departments

## The Prison's Role in Re-integration

3.46

An Inter-Agency Steering Group should be established in each prison, to formulate detailed plans for prisoner re-integration. The Group should identify barriers, devise solutions to these barriers, develop links with community-based services and share best practice. Each Group should submit an annual progress report on its plans to the Prison Service National Re-integration Group recommended in 3.48.

Multi-disciplinary teams are already in place in each prison and place of detention to oversee implementation of their business plans. Prisoner integration will be addressed specifically in future business plans. It is envisaged that the multi-disciplinary teams will provide the mechanism for implementing Positive Sentence Management at local level which will include a focus on an integrated approach to prisoner rehabilitation and re-integration.

The Probation and Welfare Service has established links and partnerships with a wide range of community, voluntary and statutory groups in many communities and funds 75 separate initiatives to address the rehabilitation and re-integration needs of offenders. The Probation and Welfare Service met with the funded organisations in Autumn 2003 with a view to strengthening networks and strategic alliances and the enhancement of best practice in this area of work. Further contact and discussions, on a sectoral basis, are ongoing. A Directory of the funded projects and facilities is currently being finalised.

3.7

Each prison, in developing its Business Plan, should specifically address prisoner re-integration, based on wide consultation, with goal setting and regular reviews.

In April 2003, Area Development Management [ADM] presented and published a study that sets out the level of involvement of local area partnerships, community groups and employment pacts in proactive work with offenders/ex-prisoners in association with Justice agencies. The study also profiled these links together with challenges at local level in integration strategies. ADM has followed up on the study by disseminating its results and by promoting greater involvement with offenders and best practice models through a series of regional workshops held in 2003. ADM has advised that the new Partnership Plans for 2004-2006 should contain a substantive increase in focus and targeted activities on offenders/ex-prisoners.

## The Prison Service's role in Re-integration

3.7

■ The Prison Service should establish a Re-integration Group of key interests at national level to devise, monitor and evaluate a prisoner re-integration strategy to inform the work of the prison-based Inter-Agency Steering Groups recommended in 3.46 above and to advise and monitor the implementation of a package of measures to address prisoner re-integration (dissemination of best practice, involvement of stakeholders, review of prison regimes, etc.).

The Co-ordination Group on Offender Integration (COGOI) has been established. The Group comprises senior officials from Departments and other statutory agencies identified in the Report as having a role to play in progressing its implementation. The Group is also drawing on the expertise of many community and voluntary groups which have experience of dealing with the issues raised by the Report.

The Group continues to operate with terms of reference directed towards implementation of the accepted recommendations of the NESF Report.

It is understood that NESF have expressed satisfaction with the establishment of COGOI.

NESF's Recommendations	Action Taken by Departments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ A Sub-Group of the Re-integration Group should examine issues relating to sex offenders, as a matter of priority</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Voluntary and Community Sector</b></p>	
<p>The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform should:</p> <p>3.49 Give greater recognition to the role of voluntary and community organisations and encourage the further development of this sector to access the experience of interest groups and feed into policy formulation and implementation; and</p>	<p>As outlined above, the COGOI includes representation from the voluntary and community sector.</p> <p>An umbrella network, the Network of Ex-Prisoner Voluntary Agencies [NEVA], was established in early 2003. The establishment of NEVA will help to bring a coherent focus to the activities of these organisations and will facilitate improved liaison arrangements with the various statutory agencies. NEVA made a presentation to the COGOI in June 2003 on NEVA's development and planned activities and it is the intention that NEVA will attend again before COGOI in 2004 to give an update on developments in relation to its activities. NEVA organised a conference in July, 2003 on the Canadian Lifeline Project.</p>
<p>3.50 Add the category "offender peer support work" to their list of financially supported voluntary and statutory organisations.</p>	<p>ADM and local partnerships have collaborative relationships with Justice agencies. ADM is looking to develop a shared vision and practical model of how a partnership approach involving the community, state organisations and social partners might work at local level and in turn link into national level organisational and policy making arenas.</p> <p>The Probation and Welfare Service liaises closely with and facilitates, where possible, voluntary bodies such as Narcotics Anonymous, Alcoholics Anonymous and Gamblers Anonymous in their engagement with offenders in custody. The Service, with other services, is examining other possible peer support work initiatives to ascertain models of best practice and viability.</p>
<p><b>Poverty, Equality and Crime</b></p>	
<p>4.4 The Team recommends that the category of "prisoner and offender" should be included and assisted in all social inclusion strategies, at both national and local levels, with particular reference to the National Anti-Poverty Strategy.</p>	<p>The Equality for Women Measure of the National Development Plan funds gender initiatives, as part of an overall objective of enhancing NDP gender equality. One strand of the Measure is focused on disadvantaged women and women over 50 years of age. One of the Projects receiving funding in Phase 1 is the Ruhama Women's Project which is developing self-development and integration strategies for women involved in prostitution, including drug users and those with HIV. This target group may include women ex-offenders. The grant from the Department to this project is €380,921 for the period 2002-2005. The Department has recently announced the framework for Phase II of the Measure, with the launch of a strand focused on women in RAPID areas. The guidelines for this strand make specific mention of ex-prisoners as a group which can be targeted in proposals.</p>

NESF's Recommendations	Action Taken by Departments
	<p>The National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion (NAPs/incl) (2003) identified ex-prisoners as a new category among vulnerable groups in need of special support, if the key task objective of eradicating poverty and social exclusion is to be achieved.</p> <p>The 'prisoner' category is also specifically identified under the Local Development measure of the Regional Operational Programmes of the National Development Plan.</p> <p>Relevant material in relation to the Irish Prison Service's strategies as regards the re-integration of offenders have been included in a variety of policy plans/documents. Examples are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Homelessness – an Integrated Strategy [May 2000];</li> <li>■ The Homeless Preventative Strategy [February 2002];</li> <li>■ Ireland's National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion 2003-2005, as submitted to the European Commission in August 2003; and</li> <li>■ Ireland's Employment Action Plan.</li> </ul>
Non-custodial Options	
<p>4.19 A range of actions (covering the Judiciary, the Social Partners, the general public and schools) should be undertaken to increase awareness and use of non-custodial options.</p>	<p>In relation to the Judiciary, the Courts Service has made arrangements to bring the NESF recommendations, as set forth in paragraph 4.19, to the attention of the Judicial Studies Institute.</p> <p>The National Crime Council's Report 'A Crime Prevention Strategy for Ireland: Tackling the concerns of local communities', launched in June 2003, included a recommendation in relation to the expansion of non-custodial options, for juvenile and adult offenders alike. This report is being examined in the Department.</p>
<p>4.26 The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform should continue to support and expand the number and range of restorative justice projects, subject to evaluation findings.</p>	<p>The potential use of Restorative Justice practices and interventions in prisons will be considered in the context of the development of Positive Sentence Management.</p> <p>The Children's Office is continuing to take a lead role in co-ordinating the arrangements for the implementation of the Children Act, 2001. Restorative justice concepts are an integral part of that Act.</p> <p>More generally, in responding to a Parliamentary Question [No. 19810/03] on 30 September 2003 about the desirability of expanding community restorative justice schemes across the State, the Minister set forth details of restorative justice initiatives in a number of areas, including the Garda juvenile diversion programmes and those under the aegis of the Probation and Welfare Service.</p>

NESF's Recommendations	Action Taken by Departments
<b>The Way Prisons Operate</b>	
<p>3.18 <b>Future plans for prison buildings or refurbishments should be assessed at design stage to ensure that they allow regimes that are re-integration friendly, drawing on best practice (national and international).</b></p>	<p>All new prison buildings and major refurbishments are assessed, in line with NESF paragraph 3.18, at design stage.</p> <p>Prisoners already have a number of avenues to make requests or complaints, e.g. access to staff, the Governor, the Visiting Committees, the Department/Minister and the Courts. There are very specific legislative provisions governing the rights of persons in custody in addition to their general rights derived from the Constitution and from international provisions in the area of Human Rights. These provisions collectively represent a Charter of Prisoner Rights. The Irish Prison Service, in its 2001-2003 Strategy Statement, sets out a set of core values including a commitment to minimising the detrimental effects of imprisonment and to respecting the human dignity and rights of the prisoner.</p>
<p>5.8 <b>An independent mechanism, similar to the Ombudsman, should be put in place for prisoners and a Charter of Prisoner Rights should be developed in conjunction with the revision of the Prison Rules.</b></p>	<p>There would not appear to be a significant gap required to be filled by the creation of a new office of Ombudsman for the Prisons at this stage. The matter will continue to be kept under review in the normal way.</p>
<b>Training and Education</b>	
<p>5.19 <b>Training and Education should be considered as part of the Sentence Plan and should include self-development, education skills, training needs and career guidance;</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Certification and accreditation should be provided, where appropriate;</b></li> <li>▪ <b>Prison Business Plans should set targets for training and education services, to be monitored and independently evaluated; and</b></li> <li>▪ <b>An independent evaluation should be undertaken of the education and training services.</b></li> </ul>	<p>The Irish Prison Service agrees that such training and education needs [as identified in NESF paragraph 5.19] should be included in a prisoner's Positive Sentence Management Plan.</p> <p>The most recent IPS Strategy Statement includes a Target that 50% of work training courses are pursued to recognised certification levels. The IPS is in contact with FETAC regarding the accreditation of a range of work training courses in the institutions. The IPS is also reviewing its work training activities and courses to ensure that the skills involved are in line with labour market and further community-based training opportunities.</p> <p>As regards targets for training and education services, the Business Plans for individual institutions already include such targets and, efforts are being made to maximise the take-up of places in such programmes, through multi-disciplinary approaches and the co-timetabling of education classes and workshop training.</p> <p>'Prison Education in Ireland: a review of the curriculum' was published in April, 2004. The publication was compiled by senior prison-based education staff. Arrangements are currently being made to provide for a consultative process with a wide range of stakeholders on curriculum development.</p> <p>The Irish Prison Service will be further developing monitoring arrangements as the Service goes forward with the business planning process.</p>

## NESF's Recommendations

## Action Taken by Departments

## Health and Treatment Services

5.23

- The National Health Strategy should make specific reference to the health needs of prisoners;
- Prisoners' health needs should be considered as part of their Sentence Plan; and
- Health partnerships between the relevant Departments, the Prison Service and the Health Boards and others should be further developed in the delivery of services in prisons and on release.

3.23

- Offenders with severe mental health problems should be diverted before or at sentencing from the prison system to appropriate alternatives; and
- A strategic plan for the treatment of prisoners with mental health problems and substance abuse and/or alcohol problems should be designed and implemented, in the context of Sentence Planning.

Action 24 of the National Health Strategy states that initiatives to improve the health of prisoners will be advanced. The Department of Health and Children and the Health Boards are working in close collaboration with the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the Irish Prison Service in improving the health of the prisoner population within this framework.

The Irish Prison Service agrees that prisoners' health needs should be included in a prisoner's sentence management plans and this recommendation will be progressed in the context of the elaboration of Positive Sentence Management.

The Department of Health and Children set up a special committee comprising representatives of its own Department, the Irish Prison Service, the East Coast Area Health Board and the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform to draw up a Service Level Agreement (SLA) on the admission of mentally ill prisoners to the Central Mental Hospital. The SLA has been drafted and submitted to the Departments of Health and Children and Justice, Equality and Law Reform for consideration.

The Minister for Health and Children has accepted, in principle, the main thrust of the report of the Review Group on the future role of the Central Mental Hospital. A special project team representative of all the main stakeholders, including the Irish Prison Service, was subsequently established to progress recommendations of the Review Group's Report. A draft agreement was recently submitted and its implementation is currently under consideration.

The Courts Service has brought the terms of paragraph 3.23 of the NESF report to the attention of the Judicial Studies Institute. The Criminal Law (Insanity) Bill 2002, currently before the Oireachtas, contains provisions which will allow the courts to find a person unfit for trial due to a mental disorder and refer that person to a designated psychiatric centre for care and treatment, where the mental health disorder meets the criteria of the Mental Health Acts.

The Irish Prison Service is committed to healthcare standards comparable with those pertaining in the wider community. Prisoners who develop a mental illness while in prison have access to medical, nursing, psychiatric and psychological services within the prison system. The incidence of mental illness is the subject of a research project currently being undertaken by a team based in the Central Mental Hospital. The research, which is supported by the Irish Prison Service, has now been completed and the draft report is currently being finalised.

NESF's Recommendations	Action Taken by Departments
<p>6.14 <b>A full range of counselling services should be provided, monitored and independently evaluated, with delivery targets.</b></p>	<p>In relation to counselling, interviews for recruitment of nine Addiction Counsellors were held in 2002 and an order of merit was decided. However, it has not been possible to adhere to the envisaged appointment timetable due to Health Boards' budgetary constraints and the public service employment ceiling. As a result, it has been necessary to explore other options. A decision has been taken to begin the process of instituting a tender process for an external service provider from the voluntary sector to provide the counselling service. This service would be funded by the Health Boards from money ring-fenced for the provision of Addiction Counsellors to work in prisons. The service will be required to provide for equivalence of service and standards with the statutory services.</p>
<p><b>Substance Abuse</b></p>	
<p>3.32 <b>Continuity of drug treatment between prison and community should be ensured;</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Health and treatment partnerships between the prison system and the community should be further developed; and</b></li> <li><b>Flexible methadone distribution systems should be introduced to ensure stable users are able to take up and keep employment.</b></li> </ul>	<p>The Irish Prison Service agrees with the NESF recommendation in paragraph 3.32, that a prisoner's addiction (alcohol and substance abuse) treatment needs be included in a prisoner's sentence management plan. The recommendation will be progressed in the context of the elaboration of Positive Sentence Management.</p> <p>The IPS Eastern Region Group – a sub-group of the IPS National Steering Group on Drug Treatment Services – has established a sub-group to examine release policy and liaison arrangements with community-based clinics and also to consider the setting up of joint prison/community Methadone Maintenance Waiting Lists in the Eastern Region. The IPS Eastern Region Group will continue to communicate and develop links with representatives from the voluntary and community sector.</p> <p>Discussions are ongoing between the Health Boards and the Irish Prison Service regarding provision of drug treatment in prisons. The Northern Area Health Board provided additional treatment places in the community in 2003 and is looking to further increase the number of treatment places in the current year. The Irish Prison Service understands that, in the Health Boards, efforts are continuing to recruit more GPs and pharmacists for the methadone protocol. Some clinics provide early morning or evening clinics.</p> <p>The Probation and Welfare Service funds many drug treatment and related voluntary and community projects and initiatives for work with offenders.</p> <p>A special linkages group, the Prison and Community Drugs Liaison Group, was established between the Prisons in the eastern region and the voluntary and community groups, which are working with people who have difficulties with addictions and their families. The Group has produced a 'Directory of Voluntary and Statutory Groups in the community visiting the Dublin Prisons'.</p>

## NESF's Recommendations

## Action Taken by Departments

## Prison Officers

5.29

- The Prison Officer's role in the re-integration of prisoners should be recognised and enhanced;
- Induction and on-going training should develop their skills in this regard, with particular attention given to inter-personal skills, counselling, communication skills, cultural awareness and anger management.

The Irish Prison Service recognises the potential enhancement of the role of the Prison Officer in the re-integration of prisoners and the need to enhance future training and staff development to enable Prison Officers to fulfil such a role. The proposed new working and attendance arrangements for Prison Officers, which are currently being negotiated with the Prison Officers Association, include provision for significantly greater investment in staff training than is possible in the current system. Staff agreement to the proposed new arrangements would open the way to realising the enhanced Prison Officer role envisaged by the NESF.

## Family Supports

5.36

- A prisoner family support strategy should be developed in each prison, as part of their Prison Management Plan;
- All visiting facilities should be to the highest standard, and include family-friendly facilities;
- Low-income families and those travelling long distances to visit should be given additional supports;
- Independently-run Visitors' Reception Centres (with crèche facilities, refreshments, etc.) should be available in all prisons; and
- These Centres should consider developing out-reach services and post-release family supports, in consultation with others and as part of the Sentence Management Plan.

The recommendation as regards a prisoner family support strategy will be examined in the context of the elaboration of Positive Sentence Management.

One of the core values of the Irish Prison Service is to endeavour to help prisoners, where possible and appropriate, to maintain relationships with their families. The Service will continue to work in partnership with the Probation and Welfare Service and other statutory, voluntary and community agencies and services to provide best possible service and support to prisoners' families.

New external visiting facilities have been provided at Castlerea, Mountjoy, Cloverhill, and the Midlands Prisons as well as St Patrick's Institution. New internal visitor facilities have been provided at Castlerea, Cloverhill and the Midlands Prisons. A New Visitors' Reception Centre recently opened at Limerick Prison and another is due to open at Portlaoise Prison later this year.

The Society of St Vincent de Paul and the Religious Society of Friends jointly manage, on behalf of the Prison Service, Visitors' Centres (including crèche facilities) in Mountjoy, Cloverhill and the Midlands Prisons. The Bedford Row Project manages the external visitors' centre in Limerick Prison. An independent review (the Lynott Report) is informing the management and development of the Visitors' Centres.

NESF's Recommendations	Action Taken by Departments
<b>Supporting Re-integration</b>	
<p>3.11 <b>Targets should be set to enhance the resources and functions of the Probation and Welfare Service.</b></p>	<p>Outreach services aimed at improving prisoner re-integration and particularly targeting accommodation and income maintenance issues have been established in a number of prisons. Probation and Welfare Service personnel are involved in a lead role in these initiatives, particularly in establishing and improving links with external agencies. The Homeless Persons Unit pilot in-reach service in Mountjoy Prison, which was evaluated recently, found that 257 prisoners had benefited from the service during 2003. Discussions are ongoing with a view to extending the clinic service to all Dublin prisons.</p>
<p>6.3 <b>Out-reach offices ('one-stop shops' idea) with a liaison officer should be provided in all prisons by relevant statutory services, including the development of links with local community services; and</b></p> <p><b>A strategic alliance should be developed between the Connect Project, the Linkage Programme and other employment initiatives, where possible.</b></p>	<p>The Linkage Programme is funded through, and supported by, the Probation and Welfare Service. With a network of 13 Training and Employment Officers (TEOs) located throughout the country, Linkage seeks to advance the integration of offenders, in the community and coming from custody, in partnership with other agencies and referral sources. The recently-published Annual Report 2003 found that 330 prisoners had been placed in further training, education or in employment between February 2000 and December 2003.</p>
<p>6.10 <b>Consideration should be given to the development of an open prison for women.</b></p>	<p>The Irish Prison Service and the Probation and Welfare Service as well as the Linkage Programme are in on-going discussions with FÁS in relation to enhancing existing services to prisoners and to offenders in the community.</p>
<p>6.22 <b>A comprehensive information leaflet on prisoners' options on leaving prison should be produced.</b></p>	<p>The Department of Social and Family Affairs published an information guide for prisoners in June 2004. Entitled 'What now – useful things to know before and after your release'. The guide contains contact information on a range of topics including social welfare, housing, health, education, training, legal matters and managing money. The new guide has been distributed to all prisoners and will also be distributed to all new committals.</p> <p>The Department of Social and Family Affairs have advised that the target processing time for applications from ex-prisoners for Unemployment Assistance is 7 working days, where all necessary information has been provided.</p>

NESF's Recommendations	Action Taken by Departments
<b>Temporary Release</b>	
<p>6.5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Structured supervised temporary release should be the norm for most prisoners, as part of their Sentence Plan;</li> <li>■ Half-way hostels should be available for those on temporary release, if required; and</li> <li>■ The Victims' Charter should be implemented regarding notification of temporary release.</li> </ul> <p>6.8</p> <p>Recently introduced post-release supervision arrangements for sex offenders should be monitored by the Probation and Welfare Service and independently evaluated, and consideration given to extending similar forms of sentencing to other types of prisoners.</p>	<p>The Criminal Justice (Temporary Release of Prisoners) Act, 2003, which is expected to commence shortly, will provide a clear and transparent basis, as well as the necessary safeguards required, for the operation of the system of temporary release.</p> <p>The Homelessness Offenders Strategy Team (HOST) is working with relevant services and agencies to ensure appropriate provision is made for offenders leaving custody.</p> <p>The Probation and Welfare Service already provides links and referrals to a range of accommodation facilities for those leaving custody. Some of these facilities are specifically for offenders (e.g., Priorswood House and Tús Nua in Dublin). In other situations, protocols have been developed for referral of offenders to more mainstream facilities. This has also included a pilot programme in Dublin whereby a small number of transitional accommodation units have been ringfenced for offenders. Similarly, in Cork, three single apartments have been provided by the City Council for offenders.</p> <p>The provisions of the Victims' Charter relating to notification of temporary release have already been implemented by the Irish Prison Service.</p> <p>Arrangements are in place for offenders subject to post-release orders to be supervised on release from custody by Probation and Welfare Service staff as required by the legislation. The Probation and Welfare Service are monitoring the post-release supervision arrangements for sex offenders.</p>
<b>Accommodation</b>	
<p>6.19</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ An Accommodation Directorate should be established within the Probation and Welfare Service, without delay;</li> <li>■ Other statutory agencies should treat prisoners in need of accommodation as high priority cases;</li> <li>■ Local Authorities should address prisoners' housing needs in their Housing Strategies;</li> <li>■ Local Authorities should be facilitated to develop partnerships with private landlords and the voluntary sector (such as PACE); and</li> </ul>	<p>A Homeless Offenders Strategy Team (HOST) has been established and is located at the Probation and Welfare Service, Smithfield Chambers, Smithfield, Dublin 7.</p> <p>HOST recently published its Business Strategy 2004-2007 aimed at preventing and minimising homelessness among offenders and in improving access to accommodation for homeless offenders.</p> <p>Following representations from the IPS/HOST to the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, the following positive changes have been agreed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ prisoners will be entitled to apply to be placed on local authority social housing lists 9 months before completing their sentences or likely release dates;</li> <li>■ local authorities will be required to address prisoners' housing needs in the reviews of their housing strategies; and</li> <li>■ subject to estate management considerations, remand and short sentence prisoners will be able to retain their local authority tenancies while in custody.</li> </ul>

NESF's Recommendations	Action Taken by Departments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ A range of accommodation options should be provided, from supportive accommodation to independent units.</li> </ul>	<p>Under the Social Welfare (Consolidated Supplementary Welfare Allowance) (Amendment) (No.4) Regulations, 2003, short sentence and remand prisoners can continue to receive rent supplement for a maximum of 13 weeks. This change will help to preserve private rented accommodation for such prisoners and avoid them becoming homeless while in custody. The new Regulations also provide for time in custody to be counted towards the 6 month qualification period for access to rent supplement.</p> <p>A number of accommodation initiatives including local authorities and the voluntary housing sector are in progress at present.</p>
Criminal Records and Discrimination	
<p>6.25</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Criminal records should be expunged after a period of time, bar exceptions necessitated due to public safety concerns; and</li> <li>■ The Employment Equality Act, 1998 should be amended to include protection against discrimination on the grounds of a criminal record.</li> </ul>	<p>The Second Programme of the Law Reform Commission for 2002-2007 proposes, as part of an examination of the law on privacy, to consider longevity of criminal records and expunging of certain offences from the records. The Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform will consider any recommendations made in relation to the expunging of criminal records and bring forward any necessary legislative proposals in the normal way.</p>
<p>6.26</p> <p>The bar on the employment of those with a criminal record in the civil and public services should be lifted, bar exceptions.</p>	<p>Section 258 of the Children Act, 2001 (which came into operation on 1 May 2002) provides for a limited “wiping of the slate” in respect of most offences committed by persons under 18 once certain conditions have been met - namely that the individual was a child when the offence was committed, that the offence was not a serious one such as murder or manslaughter, that a period of at least 3 years has elapsed since the finding of guilt and that the individual has not been dealt with for an offence in the 3 year period following that offence. Once these requirements are met, section 258 limits as far as possible the effects of a finding of guilt by treating the person for all purposes in law as a person who has not committed, been charged with, prosecuted for, found guilty or dealt with for an offence. Although these provisions do not allow for an offence to be removed from criminal records, this section does restrict the circumstances in which reference may be made to the offence.</p> <p>As regards the amendment of the Employment Equality Act, 1998, research on international experience of legislation on proposed new grounds of discrimination (including criminal conviction/ex-prisoner/offender) was commissioned in 2002. The final report will be published shortly.</p>

## NESF's Conclusions on the Follow-up Action by Government Departments on its Report No. 22

- 3.10 ● The NESF welcomes the above detailed and comprehensive response and wishes to congratulate the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform on the progress that has been made to date in implementing its recommendations.
- 3.11 ● In its report, the NESF balanced practical policy recommendations with complementary proposals regarding institutional changes to spearhead and ensure that these recommendations were followed through. The objective was to join-up policy design and agreement on the one hand with policy implementation on the other, using models of implementation to achieve this linkage. A number of encouraging steps have been taken to this end, for instance:
- the recruitment of a Director of Regimes by the Prison Service is an important first step in rebalancing its custodial and care/rehabilitation functions;
  - the establishment and work to-date of the Co-ordination Group on Offender Integration, the Scoping Group on Positive Sentence Management and the Homeless Offenders Strategy Team are notable contributions to the development of the necessary implementation and supportive structures;
  - the establishment of outreach services in a number of prisons to improve prisoner re-integration, particularly targeting accommodation and income maintenance issues;
  - the provisions of the Victims' Charter relating to notification of temporary release have been implemented;
  - research and data issues are being addressed; and
  - an information booklet for those leaving prison was completed and published this year.
- 3.12 ● While acknowledging the progress made in moving forward on the main thrust of its report, the NESF is, nonetheless, concerned at the pace of change in some instances. This is a complex and sensitive area, but what the NESF considered could have been done within a six month timeframe has taken, in effect, over two years to complete. Now that much of the implementation infrastructure has been put in place, it is hoped that Positive Sentence Management will come on stream soon. It is the NESF's view, and one shared by many, that this will provide a better service to all concerned. It may require additional resources to get up-and-running, but will lead to substantial Exchequer savings in the medium- to long-term. One option here would be to pilot a Positive Sentence Management system in a number of prisons or with particular prisoner groups, to demonstrate the value of such an approach and to build in a learning phase in its implementation.

- 3.13** ● The NESF welcomes the Department’s commitment that future Prison Business Plans will include provision for prisoner integration. This is another positive step. The establishment of the Network of Ex-Prisoner Voluntary Agencies is also an encouraging development as the NESF strongly supports the involvement of the voluntary sector in prisoner care and rehabilitation. It is also important that the sector’s expertise is called upon, where possible and appropriate, in the design and implementation of Positive Sentence Management.
- 3.14** ● Other positive developments are the inclusion of ‘prisoners and ex-prisoners’ in social inclusion strategies, particularly Ireland’s National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Inclusion 2003–2005 that was submitted to the European Commission in 2003. The recently-announced Phase II of the Equality for Women Measure of the National Development Plan especially mentions ex-prisoners as a group which can be targeted for assistance and ADM has advised that the new Partnership Plans for 2004-2006 should contain a substantive increase in focus and targeted activities for offenders/ex-prisoners.
- 3.15** ● The NESF also welcomes the new requirement on Local Authorities to address prisoners’ housing needs in the reviews of their Housing Strategies. Another notable development is the agreement by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government to allow prisoners to be placed on Local Authority social housing waiting lists prior to their release and the changes in rent allowance regulations which aim to reduce homelessness among ex-prisoners. The proposal that the Law Reform Commission will consider longevity of criminal records and expunging of certain offences from the records is also welcomed and it is hoped that this research will be given a high priority.
- 3.16** ● While acknowledging the achievements made to-date in moving ahead on the report’s recommendations, there are a number of specific areas (in addition to Positive Sentence Management, covered above) which remain outstanding. In particular the NESF notes with concern that:
- restorative justice approaches remain under-developed;
  - delays exist in the recruitment of much-needed additional addiction counsellors;
  - a Charter of Rights and an independent mechanism, similar to the Ombudsman, have not been put in place;
  - priority does not seem to have been given to issues relating to the re-integration of sex offenders;
  - post-release family supports remain under-developed; and
  - there is no open prison option for female prisoners.

- 3.17 ● A Council of Europe’s report last year to the Government found positive aspects in our prison system, for instance: that many inmates reported good relations with prison staff, the material condition of Dóchas Centre (women’s prison), some improvements in health care and the operation of the ‘Connect Project’. However, it also voiced concerns on a number of grounds, particularly: the use of padded cells for the management of people in need of psychiatric care, no proper sanitary facilities for some prisoners, the lack of programmes of activities for some prisoners and no comprehensive policy for the provision of care to prisoners with drug-related problems. The NESF notes the progress being made to address these concerns, as outlined in the Government’s response to the Council’s Report, and emphasises that these are important issues which need to be given on-going attention and addressed.
- 3.18 ● In relation to the employment of those with a criminal record in the Civil and Public Services, the NESF welcomes the response by the former Minister of Finance, Mr Charlie McCreevy, TD to a Parliamentary Question (14 October, 2003) on the matter. This clarified that, under Section 17(b) of the Civil Service Commissioners Act 1956, having a criminal record need not necessarily prevent a person being appointed to a position in the Civil Service. In addressing the issue of criminal conviction, the Commissioners have regard to issues such as the nature of the post being filled, the classification of the offence, the time lapse since completion of the sentence, the circumstances under which the offence was committed and whether the person has re-offended.
- 3.19 ● However, in a recent comparative review<sup>35</sup> of the situation in Australia, New Zealand, the U.K. and the U.S.A., Dr. Ian O’Donnell concluded that the continuing failure to introduce legislative changes here to rebalance re-integration for prisoners with that of public safety concerns, appears “*at best, anachronistic; at worst calculated and wilful*”.
- 3.20 ● In conclusion, the NESF very much appreciates the considerable amount of work and effort, from the Department and the Prison Service, in particular, that has gone into advancing the implementation of its report. It is hoped that, now that the foundation work is nearing completion, Positive Sentence Management will soon become a reality in our prison system and that the other outstanding issues will be advanced in the near future and not put to one side.

---

<sup>35</sup> O’Donnell, I., *Wiping the Slate Clean: Rehabilitating Offenders and Protecting the Public, Administration, Autumn 2003.*

IV

## Introduction

- 4.1 ● This latest report builds on an earlier NESF report on ‘*Equality Proofing Issues*’.<sup>36</sup> It is widely acknowledged that this has had a major policy impact in advancing the equality agenda under, for example, the provisions of the ‘*Programme for Prosperity and Fairness*’. Since then, the Equality Authority and the Combat Poverty Agency published a joint report<sup>37</sup> in 2003 which focuses on the multi-dimensional nature and links between poverty and inequality and how policy issues in these areas should be considered in a more integrated proofing process in the future.
- 4.2 ● The basic thrust of the present NESF report is to set out a new vision, a set of principles to underpin this, and a strategic framework designed to achieve a more equal and a more caring society.
- 4.3 ● Another focus of the report is to provide a conceptual model for policy analysis and implementation purposes. This is set out, in terms of equality agendas, as well as outlining the implications of this for particular equality groups. The absence of such a model was evident with, for example, the review then underway of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy and also the review then in progress of this country’s equality legislation.

## Report’s Main Findings

- 4.4 ● These fall under 4 main headings:
- *Economic Inequality*: we now have a wealthier but more unequal society; the richest 30% of our population earns ten times as much as the poorest 30% of our population (see Section VII); more recent statistics, since the report was prepared, show further improvements on some indicators, with just under 60% of lone parents now below the poverty line, and the number of households living in *consistent* poverty has fallen dramatically to 5% and for children to 7%; as against this,

<sup>36</sup> NESF Report No. 10 (February 1996).

<sup>37</sup> ‘*Poverty and Inequality: Applying an Equality Dimension to Poverty Proofing*’, the Equality Authority and the Combat Poverty Agency (2003).

however, the rates for the unemployed and for lone parents were 17.8% and 23.7% respectively; in contrast to a number of budgets in recent years, Budget 2004 is expected to lead to a small reduction in the level of *relative income poverty*<sup>38</sup>;

- *Political Inequality*: this embraces issues of empowerment and the democratisation of decision-making; however, the only area where data is available relates to women; less than 30% on State Boards at the time of the report's preparation were women (compared to a Government 1993 target of 40%), 13% of Dáil seats were held by women, over 85% of employers are men while 70% of part-time workers were women and were among the lowest paid;
- *Inequalities of Respect and Recognition*: these relate, *inter alia*, to the difficulty of combining paid employment with family responsibilities; women are worst off in terms of status, income and political power and decision-making; another key element is that of changes in our society's structures, systems and institutions to allow for different norms, values, and ways of living; the increased racist attacks on immigrant groups highlight the need for more urgent action in this area; and
- *Affective Inequalities*: these relate to the unequal distribution in relationships of love, care and of solidarity with others and are of central importance to human development; although sometimes defined as private matters, they are publicly regulated and as such are open to Government policy changes and influences; action here involves the potential to shape policy in relation to sexual relations between adults, care relations between children and parents, relations between adult carers and adult dependants and relations between peers at work.

## Follow-up Action by Government Departments on NESF Report No. 23

- 4.5 ● The above four forms of inequality are all inter-related and, as emphasised in the report, these should be addressed on an integrated and coherent basis in the pursuit of a more just society. Each of these inequalities poses new challenges, which are singled out in the report, and the main recommendations that are submitted to address these, together with the follow-up action taken by Government Departments on these, are summarised in Box 4 below.

<sup>38</sup> Budget 2004: *Impact on Income Distribution and Relative Income Poverty*, Tim Callan et al, ESRI Quarterly Economic Commentary, Winter 2003.

**Box No. 4****NESF Report No.23 on A Strategic Framework for Equality****NESF's Recommendations****Action Taken by Departments**

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

**Legislation**

5.11

■ Our incorporation of EU Equality Directives should go beyond the minimum standards laid down in these Directives; our equality legislation should now be expanded to cover new grounds such as socio-economic status, trade union membership, criminal conviction and political opinion [D/JELR];

The new Equality Act, which came into effect on 18 July last, amends the Employment Equality Act 1998 and the Equal Status Act 2000. This was necessary to implement the employment and non-employment aspects of the Race Directive (2000/43/EC), the Framework Employment Directive (2000/78/EC) and the Gender Equal Treatment Directive (2002/73/EC). The Act also provides for a number of other amendments that are the result of consultations undertaken by the Department in relation to the implementation of the Directives.

In the course of the review of the discriminatory grounds covered by the Employment Equality Act, it was argued by the NESF that the Act should be amended to include the following new grounds: socio-economic status (including social origin or social origin as a separate ground), and trade union membership, criminal conviction/ex-prisoner/ex-offender and political opinion.

The Minister has decided that it is necessary to examine in detail the implications of extending the Employment Equality legislation to the new grounds suggested having regard to international experience of legislation in those areas.

UCC Law Department was awarded the contract to carry out research in this area. A report has now been finalised and will be published in the coming weeks. The findings of this research and the information obtained through the Department's consultations in relation to the review will inform any future policy decisions.

■ Legal powers of enforcement and remedies should be developed to allow greater access to the Courts and for the Equality Authority to intervene in cases as a third party [D/JELR];

The Employment Equality Act 1998 and the Equal Status Act 2000 as amended by the Equality Act 2004 empowers the Equality Authority to provide assistance to a person who wishes to take a case under the Acts, if the case has strategic importance. Section 85(1) of the 1998 Act and Section 23(1) of the 2000 Act provide that the Equality Authority may take cases in its own name. The Equality Act 2004 also amended both the Employment Equality Act and the Equal Status Act so that Directive 97/80/EC which provides for a shift in the evidential burden of proof in gender discrimination cases will also apply to cases taken by the Equality Authority across all nine grounds under both Acts.

■ All relevant public bodies should be required to develop policy mainstreaming and promote equality as part of their core functions [D/JELR];

The Department favours a voluntary introduction of policies on mainstreaming and promotion of equality as a core function of public bodies. In this respect the Equality Authority works closely with the public sector to develop those policies. The Department is also monitoring the effect of the introduction of statutory duty within Northern Ireland and in other jurisdictions. Also a number of pilot projects on equality proofing are underway.

NESF's Recommendations	Action Taken by Departments	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The recommendations by the 1996 Constitution Review Group on including equality, economic and social rights should be acted on [D/JELR]; and</li> </ul>	<p>The transposition of the Race Directive into the Equal Status Act 2000 included combating discrimination in relation to social protection and social advantage. The Minister is opposed to the incorporation of justiciable economic and social rights into the Constitution.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The implementation and development, in consultation with the Social Partners, of the provisions in the EU (Nice) Charter of Fundamental Rights [D/T].</li> </ul>	<p>The Charter was agreed as a political declaration at Nice and has now been incorporated into the Constitutional Treaty that was agreed by the European Council in June last. The Charter does not apply where the Union has no competence to act and cannot be used to extend or modify the powers of the Union or create any new enforceable rights.</p>	
Institutions		
5.14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ All Departments should include an equality dimension in their Strategy Statements/Business Plans under the SMI [D/T];</li> </ul>	<p>In September, 2002 the Department issued Guidelines to Heads of all Departments and Heads of Office on the Preparation of Strategy Statements. These Statements are to be consistent with key Government initiatives such as the equality legislation and the 2001 Civil Service Gender Equality Policy and 'Diversity in the Civil Service: A policy on equality of opportunity' agreed by the Government in 2002. It is up to each Department/Office to ensure that its Strategy Statement is drafted appropriately and takes account of these Guidelines.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The SMI should be extended in this regard to the Local Authorities, County Development Boards, Health Boards etc. [D/T];</li> </ul>	<p>In 1997 the SMI was extended to the wider public service and the Department's 1997 Guidelines emphasised that Departments/ Offices should include in their Strategy Statements the steps being taken to progress this in respect of organisations operating under their aegis. This was re-emphasised in the 2002 Guidelines. It is up to Departments/Offices to ensure that their agencies appropriately reflect the equality dimension in their strategies.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ An Equality Plan of Action is needed for the different strands of the SMI [D/F]; and</li> </ul>	<p>As mentioned under 5.14 above, 'Diversity in the Civil Service' and 'Gender Equality Policy for the Civil Service' set out Civil Service policy on implementing equality of opportunity in employment in the Civil Service. These policies are supported by 'A Positive Working Environment: an anti-harassment, sexual harassment and bullying policy' and the Code of Practice for the employment of people with Disabilities (currently under review). Responsibility for the implementation of the equality policies lies with each Head of Department or a person designated by the Head of Department. All Civil Service organisations are required to take action to ensure that these policies are implemented in their organisations.</p>	

NESF's Recommendations		Action Taken by Departments
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Adequate budgetary resources are needed to further develop equality work plans, including that of an Equality Unit, arising from the new requirements on the Civil Service under the Equal Status Act, as well as provision of equality training modules and development of analytical skills [D/F].</li> </ul>	<p>The Department of Finance has a dedicated Equality Unit to develop and monitor equality policies in employment throughout the Civil Service. This is staffed by a Principal Officer, Assistant Principal Officer, Higher Executive Officer and a Clerical Officer. In addition, each Government Department is expected to assign responsibility for Equality to a specific officer in the Department, generally in the Personnel function.</p>
<b>Mainstreaming</b>		
5.18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The Working Group on Equality Proofing, set up under the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness (PPR), should report by end-2003; the Group should take into account, <i>inter alia</i>, the learning coming through from the gender mainstreaming group under the National Development Plan [D/JELR]; and</li> </ul>	<p>The mandate of the Working Group has been extended to oversee the development of proofing mechanisms in the context of the agenda set out in Sustaining Progress. A report of the Working Group's activities will be published during 2004.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ All Government Departments should now put in place the necessary arrangements for equality proofing such as staff training, engage with equality interests, collect data and develop equality indicators.</li> </ul>	<p>Pilot projects on equality proofing are underway in selected areas of FÁS. Funding was given to the Community Workers Co-operative to prepare a manual on equality proofing for community groups. An Equal Status Review in the North Western Health Board is also underway. An integrated approach to proofing (to include poverty, gender and equality proofing) in the areas of the Back to Education Allowance (Department of Social and Family Affairs) and the National Action Plan Against Racism (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform) has commenced.</p>
<b>Targeting</b>		
5.21	<p>The National Employment Action Plan (NEAP) and the National Plan for Social Inclusion (NAPs/incl) should be equality-proofed to ensure that all groups covered by the equality legislation are included [D/SFA and D/ETE];</p>	<p>An innovative equality proofing exercise was carried out by the D/SFA on the draft NAPs/incl in partnership with the Equality Authority and with the participation of groups from across the nine grounds covered by the equality legislation. This explored the accommodation of diversity in the mainstream elements of the Plan, the capacity of institutional arrangements to address the poverty and inequality link, and the rationale for targeting. It is intended to continue and further develop this process over the life of the Plan (2003-2005).</p>

NESF's Recommendations	Action Taken by Departments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ This process should entail equality outcomes, including equality indicators, under each of the 4 main equality headings for each of the target groups [D/SFA and D/ETE];</li> </ul>	<p>During 2003 D/ETE consulted the Equality Authority on the draft NEAP 2003-2005 for its comments. D/ETE intends that in 2004 work will begin on the development of an appropriate equality proofing approach to future plans.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The Department of Finance should equality proof the Annual Budget [D/F];</li> </ul>	<p>Each Memorandum for Government includes a statement on any gender equality implications the proposal may have.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Lessons from pilot initiatives, such as the Equal Initiative and the Equality for Women Measure, should be taken into account in policy-making and future National Plans [D/JELR, D/SCFA and D/ETE]; and</li> <li>■ Annual reports on initiatives such as these should be submitted to the Oireachtas and the Social Partners.</li> </ul>	<p>Learning from the Equality for Women measure is beginning to emerge as projects reach the final stages of their Action Plans. A process is being put in place to facilitate the transfer of learning from the Measure to the policy domain.</p>
Participating and Decision-Making	
<p>5.24</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ A strategy is needed on how best to include and resource representation from the nine equality grounds in the social partnership model [D/T]; and</li> </ul>	<p>A review was carried out in parallel with the negotiations for the new social partnership agreement, <i>Sustaining Progress</i>. This arose from a commitment in the <i>Agreed Programme for Government</i>. As a result of this review, the Government agreed to expand the community and voluntary pillar of social partnership. It now comprises 15 members – 6 individual members and 9 organisations within 7 strands (see Section I of this report).</p> <p>The views and expertise of a wide range of groups will continue to be taken into account by Departments and agencies in the consultative process outside the formal frameworks of National Social Partnership.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Research is needed into the barriers to participation in representative democracy, in particular those experienced by groups across the nine equality grounds [Houses of the Oireachtas and the Political Parties].</li> </ul>	<p>This is a matter for discussion by the Party Whips in the first instance.</p>

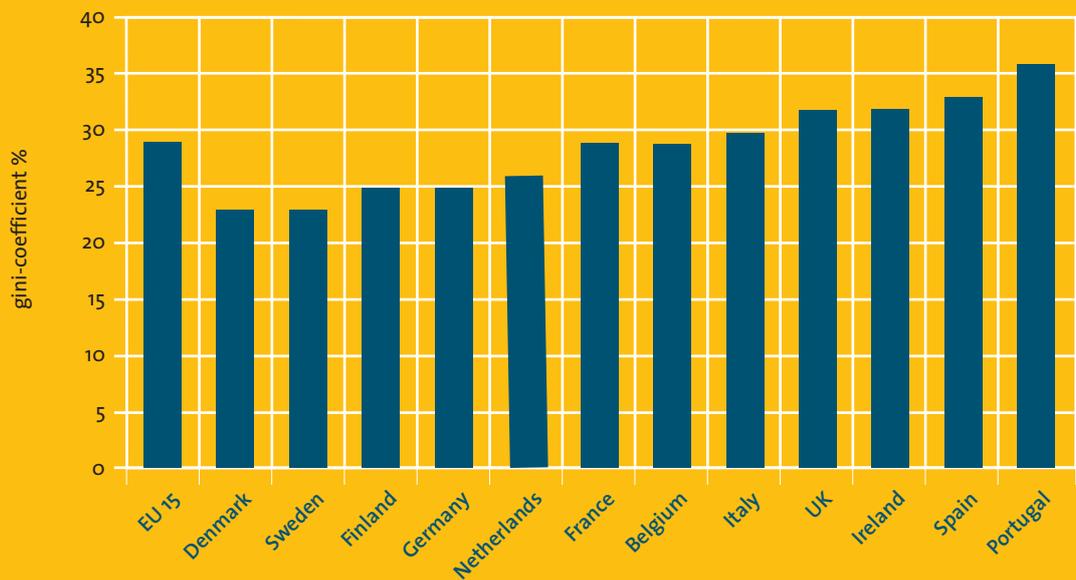
NESF's Recommendations	Action Taken by Departments
<b>Agenda Setting</b>	
<p>5.26</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ All relevant Government Departments should set time-scales for implementation of recommendations in Task Force/Working Group reports as well as Action Plans falling within their areas of responsibilities; and</li> <li>■ The need for similar task forces in other cases e.g. religious minorities, ethnic minorities or any new groups that will be covered under the amended equality legislation in the future should be examined [D/JELR].</li> </ul>	<p>It is a matter for Government to accept or reject recommendations from such Task Forces. Government Departments are not bound by such recommendations in the absence of a Government decision to accept same. The Department does not consider that the task force model is necessarily the best approach. The Department is currently preparing a National Action Plan against Racism which will be published this year.</p>
<b>Monitoring and Review</b>	
<p>5.28</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Baseline data should be collected across all the nine equality grounds [Central Statistics Office (CSO) and Government Departments];</li> </ul>	<p>The CSO has been increasing its coverage of the nine equality grounds and is at present, along with the Equality Authority, considering the development of permanent disability questions in the QNHS. A benchmark survey of the presence of the nine grounds across government social data was conducted and reported on as part of the work of the Steering Group on Social and Equality Statistics (SGSES). The CSO is also on a number of committees and groups that are concerned with increasing the statistics that can be disaggregated by the nine grounds e.g. the National Disability Authority (NDA) Research Advisory Committee.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ A module on 'Equality Issues' should be included in the Quarterly National Household Survey [CSO];</li> </ul>	<p>The CSO plans to include an 'Equality' module in the Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) for the 4th quarter of 2004. It is in discussions with the Equality Authority and will set up a liaison group to discuss the details of this module.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ the Population Census, or other periodic surveys, should address gaps such as data on disability, ethnicity, family status and sexual orientation [CSO];</li> </ul>	<p>Data on disability was made available from both the Census of Population 2002 and the QNHS. As mentioned above, the CSO is investigating the possibility of including a question on disability in the QNHS on an ongoing basis. The 'Equality' module planned for 2004 will also be used to test the feasibility of capturing data on ethnicity. The Government recently gave approval to the CSO to carry out a national post-Census disability survey following the conclusion of the fieldwork phase of the 2006 Census.</p>

NESF's Recommendations	Action Taken by Departments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Equality indicators need to be developed and time-lags in making data available also need to be addressed [CSO and Government Departments];</li> </ul>	<p>A preliminary national progress indicators report is being prepared by the CSO. This will include some indicators disaggregated by sex, age, family status and other grounds; the work undertaken through the SGSES Project and now by the SPAR (Statistical Potential of Administrative Records) Project will also address the general issue of indicators.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform should submit an Annual Report to the Oireachtas on progress made, barriers encountered and further steps needed to advance achievement of the equality objectives set; and</li> </ul>	<p>This is under review.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The establishment of a Consultative Forum to review progress and future policy priorities [D/JELR].</li> </ul>	<p>This is under review.</p>
Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion	
<p>5.29</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This Committee should play a strategic role in providing support and direction on equality issues.</li> </ul>	<p>The Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion, Drugs and Rural Development provides a strategic focus on tackling the problems of social inclusion, disadvantage and alienation. The framework for the Committee's work includes a number of important policy documents, which examine the inequalities across a number of different areas in Irish society at a strategic level.</p>

## NESF's Conclusions on the Follow-up Action by Government Departments on its Report No. 23

- 4.6** ● The NESF is encouraged by the commitments and actions that are outlined in *Sustaining Progress* to ensuring a fair and inclusive society for everybody. In this respect, it sees its report as underpinning and providing a set of criteria which would serve as a basis to be taken into account in implementing the elements of the equality framework set out in that document and also in providing a clearer vision of what we should be seeking to achieve in building a fairer and more equal society.
- 4.7** ● The scale of the challenge in this area is graphically illustrated in Figure 3 below which shows the degree of inequality in the distribution of income in EU countries.

**Figure 3** Income Inequality: Gini Co-efficients in Selected EU Countries



Source: Eurostat Statistics in Focus: August 2003.

- 4.8** ● The Gini Co-efficient measures the degree of inequality in income distribution, with a figure in the extreme of 1.0 representing total inequality and at the other extreme a figure of 0.0 representing total equality. It will be noted from Figure 3 above, that within the EU, Denmark is the country with the highest and Portugal is the one with the lowest levels of equality. In general, Member States with higher levels of inequality also tend to have a lower level of average income, with the northern European countries tending to be both richer and more equal in terms of income distribution. Ireland is however, an exception to this, having one of the highest levels of income inequality among the richer countries. This reflects political choices that were made here over the years by successive Governments in relation to public spending and taxation issues.
- 4.9** ● The levels of *relative* poverty across selected countries, that were outlined in Figure 3 above, have also been increasing, as reflected in widening income shares (see the following table). On the other hand, trends in the evolution of income inequalities in this country have been more positive. While the richest 10% here had 4.7 times the income of the poorest 10% in 1993, this fell dramatically to 3.65 in 2000.<sup>39</sup> The latter more than likely reflects primarily, as suggested by Nolan, the shortages and tightness on the labour market at that stage. Nevertheless, Ireland remains among the EU 15 Member-States with the greatest gap in income distribution. The gender pay gap has also narrowed slightly over the period 1995-2001 from 80% of male hourly earnings to 83% in 2001, compared to an EU average of 84%<sup>40</sup>.

**Table 1** Widening Market Income Shares in selected OECD Countries

	Poorest 30%	Middle 40%	Richest 30%
Canada	9.6	35.5	54.9
France	10.9	33.5	55.6
Germany	11.9	36.3	51.8
Ireland	5.7	33.2	61.1
Italy	9.0	31.9	59.1
UK	7.8	34.9	57.4
USA	8.9	33.9	57.1
Average (14)	9.3	35.3	55.4
Change mid-1980s to mid-1990s	-1.7	-0.6	2.3

Source: OECD Secretariat 2003.

<sup>39</sup> *Income Inequality during Ireland's Boom*, Nolan, B. ESRI, 2003.

<sup>40</sup> *The Social Situation in the European Union*, European Commission, October 2004.

- 4.10 ● However, the most recent data show some encouraging trends in this country to tackling family and child poverty. For example, the number of people experiencing *consistent* poverty has fallen from 9.7% in 1997 to 5.2% in 2001, while child poverty has gone down from 15.3% to 6.5%. Under the *NAPS*, the target is to reduce the number of people living in consistent poverty to below 2% by 2007 while child poverty is one of the ten Special Initiatives under *Sustaining Progress*. The aim is to target services such as health, parenting, pre-school education and amenities so as to ensure a better start in life for every child.
- 4.11 ● On the other hand, as regards *relative* income levels, nearly 13% of people were below the 50% median income line, 22% were below the 60% line and 29% were below the 70% line in 2001<sup>41</sup> and all of these figures have increased every year between 1994 and 2001 viz. the depth of poverty has been increasing in comparison to most European countries.<sup>42</sup> Those increasingly at risk of relative poverty are older people, especially older women, the chronically ill or disabled and those working in the home such as lone parents. Relative child poverty in this country is now ranked third worst in the EU.<sup>43</sup> Also, recent research<sup>44</sup> has indicated that, despite the very high growth rates over the last decade, there has been little improvement in the relative levels of socio-economic deprivation of most disadvantaged areas compared to the rest of the country.
- 4.12 ● Another indicator of the scale of the policy challenges is evident in the work of the Equality Authority. For example, in its most recent Annual Report (2003), the Authority highlighted 561 casefiles under the 1998 Employment Equality Act and 792 casefiles under the 2000 Equal Status Act.
- 4.13 ● In terms of the *workplace*, the Authority has identified the high levels of harassment on the gender, disability and race grounds. It is also evident on the sexual orientation, age and marital status grounds. As regards the *provision of goods and services*, the Authority has also particularly highlighted the high level of claims against public sector bodies. These numbered 171 in 2003 and emphasise the need for these bodies to equality proof their policies, practices and procedures. Some of the inequalities as regards access to public services such as education and health are mentioned in other sections of this report.

---

<sup>41</sup> *Monitoring Poverty Trends in Ireland: Results from the 2001 Living In Ireland Survey*, ESRI, December 2003.

<sup>42</sup> *Why is Relative Income Poverty so High in Ireland?*, ESRI, 2004.

<sup>43</sup> *Report by the Institute of Fiscal Studies, UK, March, 2004.*

<sup>44</sup> *Deprivation and its Spatial Articulation in the Republic of Ireland*, Trutz Haase and Jonathan Pratschke, Dublin, June 2004.

- 4.14 ● Turning to some of the more specific issues that were raised in its report (see Box 4 above), the NESF appreciates the decision by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform to examine its recommendation that our equality legislation should now extend to cover new grounds such as socio-economic status, trade union membership, criminal conviction and political opinion. As part of this process, work has been contracted out to research international legislative experience in this area. The NESF looks forward to seeing the results of this examination in due course.
- 4.15 ● The NESF welcomes the enactment of the Equality Act 2004. Of particular importance are the new provisions on the reasonable accommodation of people with disabilities in employment, the removal of the upper age limit in employment, the inclusion of domestic workers and the new definition of positive action in support of equality. However, the Equality Authority and the Human Rights Commission have criticised the Act for not going far enough, that elements of the EU Directives have not been adequately transposed and have also been critical of new categories of exemptions that were introduced.
- 4.16 ● The NESF is also concerned that the remedies under the Act may not be effective enough, that the Equality Authority's enforcement powers have not been further developed as it had recommended and some of the exemption clauses that limit the protection available. The EU Commission has now tabled a proposed Directive on equal treatment outside of the workplace. This breaks new ground for the EU in advancing the principle of gender equality in the supply of goods and services e.g. the use of gender as a factor in the calculation of premiums and benefits for insurance and related financial services would be prohibited.
- 4.17 ● In following up on the recommendations in its own report on this topic, the NESF welcomes the work of the Equality Proofing Working Group that has been established under *Sustaining Progress*. It suggests that the results of the pilot projects on equality proofing should be published as soon as possible so that the lessons learnt are made available to a wide audience in the public sector. The NESF is also pleased with the extension of the mandate of the Working Group under *Sustaining Progress* and the Group needs to be provided with resources for this ambitious task. The experience in Northern Ireland of implementing a statutory duty should continue to be monitored, as well as the approaches in other jurisdictions including Britain, Wales, Norway and Sweden.

- 4.18 ● The NESF supports the steps that have been taken to develop policy mainstreaming in the public sector. A recent EU-funded ‘Mainstreaming Social Inclusion’ research project<sup>45</sup> led by the Combat Poverty Agency, and with European and Irish partners (including the NESF), has highlighted positive outcomes that emerge from within a mainstreaming policy-making environment. These include bringing people back into the mainstream of society, reshaping service delivery, improving access for poorer people and disseminating and up-dating innovation and learning among different levels of government.
- 4.19 ● Important advances have also been made to equality-proof the National Employment Action Plan and the National Anti-Poverty Strategy and commitments have been made by the Departments concerned, namely Enterprise, Trade and Employment and Social and Family Affairs, to further develop these processes in the future. The support of the Equality Authority has been valuable in this development and the NESF looks forward to this being continued in the future in both the public and NGO sectors.
- 4.20 ● While noting that the Minister is opposed to making economic and social rights justiciable in the Constitution, the NESF recalls, however, that the Government is at least committed to making legislative provisions, as evidenced for example in the case of the Education for Persons with Disabilities Bill, the forthcoming Disability Bill and, in the Government’s Health Strategy (see Section VI of this report), there is an important commitment to codify access to services in terms of entitlement rather than eligibility.
- 4.21 ● A recent ESRI study<sup>46</sup> seeks to contribute to the debate on a rights-based approach by clarifying some of the key issues involved and also reviewing the experiences in this area in a number of other countries, namely the US, Australia, New Zealand, Sweden and the UK. It suggests that the hotly contested issues of justiciability and resources should be left to one side and, instead, proposes that significant advances could be made through:
- the public authorities setting out clearly the levels of service provision and the intended level of resources to underpin these;
  - people with disabilities having an entitlement to these services, with enforcement mechanisms; and
  - setting out how services are to be improved over time as more resources become available.

---

<sup>45</sup> *Mainstreaming Social Inclusion*, EU Trans-National Exchange Project, Research Report: Phase 1, February 2004.

<sup>46</sup> *On Rights-Based Services for People with Disabilities*, Professor Brian Nolan, October 2003.

- 4.22 ● The NESF welcomes the requirement that Strategy Statements of Government Departments and Offices should include an equality dimension. The implementation of this is left to each Department and Office. However, the NESF suggests that it might now be timely for the Department of the Taoiseach to review the overall state of progress in this area. This could lead to more detailed guidelines and supports for Departments and Offices, similar to the work that has already been done on Quality Customer Services. The Equality Authority could usefully assist in this work. Also, positive developments in recent times to establishing gender equality in the Civil Service provide an important benchmark to develop similar approaches for the other grounds covered by our equality legislation, taking into account for this purpose the new definition of positive action in the 2004 Equality Act.
- 4.23 ● The commitments outlined above by the CSO and Government Departments in collecting and generating new data will over time provide important evidence-based material for more effective policy-making and implementation in the future. The National Statistics Board<sup>47</sup> has played an important role in building up the momentum and outlining the changes that are needed for this purpose.
- 4.24 ● Finally, it is now more recognised that equality, diversity and respect for differences can enhance economic performance and that this in turn can also achieve more effective outcomes in the design and delivery of policy outcomes and public services<sup>48</sup> for all our citizens. Lastly, the NESF welcomes the commitment by the Department to publish national action plans on racism and on equality for women and considers that this is an approach that could also be usefully used in relation to the other grounds covered by this country's equality legislation.

---

<sup>47</sup> *Developing Irish Social and Equality Statistics to meet Policy Needs, April 2003.*

<sup>48</sup> *Article by J. Harrow entitled: The New Public Management and Social Justice in New Public Management: Current Trends and Future Prospects, K McLaughlin et. al., 2002.*



V

## Introduction

- 5.1 ● The NESF's original report in 1997<sup>49</sup> is generally acknowledged to have had a key influence in pushing the problem of early school leavers higher up the political agenda and in influencing policy developments in this area. The purpose of this present report was to evaluate the action taken and impact of the 1997 recommendations and, in the light of this, to put forward revised proposals to Government.
- 5.2 ● Despite the progress made, with many of the 1997 recommendations now implemented, the annual number of early school leavers (i.e. those who leave without any qualifications) remains unchanged. Indeed, the problem is now becoming more acute and complex, as the marginalisation of those involved increases, given the pivotal role education now plays in our knowledge-based economy.
- 5.3 ● The proportion of early school leavers (i.e. those who left with, at most, lower secondary education) was 14.7% (18.5% male, 10.8% female) in this country in 2002, compared to an EU average of 18.8% (21.4% male, 16.2% female<sup>50</sup>). The unemployment rate among early school leavers aged 18-24 was almost 17% here in 2002, compared to an overall unemployment rate then of 4.2%.

## Context of the Report

- 5.4 ● The report was finalised at an opportune stage with the then publication of the Government's Review of the NAPS (*Building an Inclusive Society*). One of the objectives set out in that Review is to provide all those who have left school early with the "opportunity to address any lack of educational experience and related qualifications that militates against their ability to participate in the economy, in employment and in society".
- 5.5 ● The NESF's report is very much in keeping and supportive of this, with its more specific recommendations geared to realising one of the

---

<sup>49</sup> NESF Report No. 11 (January 1997).

<sup>50</sup> *Measuring Ireland's Progress, Volume 1, Indicators Report, December 2003.*

Government's key education targets of reducing the number of young people leaving school early, through raising the level who complete upper second level to 85% by 2003 and to 90% by 2006. The 2003 target has not, however, yet been achieved.

## Report's Main Findings

- 5.6** ● The findings which the NESF considers are especially amenable to policy actions are:
- initiatives to address the root causes of educational inequalities – programmes at Junior and Senior Cycles are too late;
  - programmes should be better geared to group/individual needs and include consultation with young people through Student Councils and Youth Clubs;
  - vocational training alternatives to the traditional Leaving Certificate should be more actively encouraged;
  - the alarming increase in students working - one study showed that nearly 60% of those doing the Leaving Certificate had part-time jobs; and
  - a 'whole child approach' (see Figure 4 below) is needed, with the student's needs as the starting point, and involving the family, school, and the broader community in a more effective 'joined-up' delivery of services at local levels.
- 5.7** ● The report focused not only on the causes of early school leaving but also on the consequences and highlighted the significant value associated with greater investment in those at risk of educational disadvantage. A recent publication from the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB)<sup>51</sup> cited research from the United States which concluded that, for every \$1 spent on two years of intensive teaching and parenting help for children at risk of failure, this saved \$7 later in life in crime, social security, housing and mental health, while greatly improving school success. The cost of poor school attendance in the Irish context was also highlighted in the NEWB's publication; it noted that three out of four of our prisoners had a poor attendance record at school and about 40% of them had left school at 14 years or younger.

## Follow-up Action by Government Departments on NESF Report No. 24

- 5.8** ● The action taken by Government Departments, in liaison with other State Agencies, in following up on the main recommendations in the report is outlined in Box 5 below.

---

<sup>51</sup> *Making a Difference: Targeting School Absenteeism in Budget 2004*, National Educational Welfare Board.

## Box No. 5 NESF Report No.24 on Early School Leavers

NESF's Recommendations

Action Taken by Departments

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

### Pre-School Provision

4.7

**Building on international models of good practice, a more comprehensive early childhood education programme should be developed for disadvantaged children. [DES/DJELR]**

The 1999 White Paper on Early Childhood Education, sets out a comprehensive strategy for the development of early childhood education (0-6 years) which will build upon the many examples of best practice. Special emphasis will be placed on areas of social deprivation and on those with special needs.

In 2001 the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE) was established in Drumcondra. One of its key functions is to co-ordinate and enhance early education provision, including parental involvement, with particular focus on disadvantaged and special needs groups. It will also prepare the groundwork for the establishment of an Early Childhood Education Agency, as per the White Paper's recommendations.

An audit of provision for disadvantaged children and children with special needs was completed in early 2004.

The CECDE is widely represented on national and regional bodies notably the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), the National Coordinating Childcare Committee, the Preschool Regulations Review Group and the Forum on Educational Disadvantage. It also maintains close cooperation with the NCCA on the Early Years Curriculum agenda.

In 2003 the CECDE completed its first major structured consultation project with seven seminars nationwide and an online survey. More than 400 practitioners, parents and policymakers participated and made most valuable contributions to its work. A comprehensive report on these consultations is currently being prepared for publication.

The CECDE designed a comprehensive research strategy in support of the objectives of the Centre and conducted or commissioned a number of important research projects. A number of targeted pilot projects were agreed with the Department of Education and Science representing considerable investment for innovative developments in the coming 18 months.

A recent OECD review of quality, access and co-ordination in early childhood provision was published recently and will help inform policy and development.

The NCCA has prepared a discussion paper 'Towards a Framework for Early Childhood Learning', which aims to support learning in the first six years of life, in all settings – home/crèche/pre-school and so on.

A major international conference on Early Childhood organised by the CECDE took place in September 2004.

	NESF's Recommendations	Action Taken by Departments
4.8-4.10	<p>The National Childcare Management Committee should now be established to provide more strategic policy direction to early childhood care and education. In addition, the newly-established Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE) should help to provide greater co-ordination between quality early childhood care and education provision at local level. [CECDE/DJELR/DES]</p>	<p>The Cabinet Committee on Children, established in mid-2001, is chaired by the Taoiseach and includes the Government Ministers who have a significant role in implementing the National Children's Strategy. This meets on a quarterly basis to review progress and agree priorities for action. A high-level group has been set up by the Cabinet Committee to examine the issue of co-ordination. In this regard, it will consider if the National Childcare Management Committee, or some other structure, is the appropriate body for the development of strategic policy direction for the sector.</p> <p>The CECDE has recently approved the proposed membership for the Consultative Council which will include 43 of the major stakeholders in the Sector.</p>
4.12	<p>The CECDE should also work in tandem with the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) to establish a quality framework for training early years workers. [CECDE/NQAI]</p>	<p>The CECDE continues to develop its work programmes in the context of the NQAI's work and continues to liaise with them.</p>
4.13	<p>A national policy on Traveller pre-schooling now needs to be put in place. [DES]</p>	<p>Work has commenced on developing a five-year Traveller Education Strategy. The main focus of the Traveller Education Strategy exercise will be to review/evaluate existing activities, the wide range of inputs, the quality of outcomes and the experience of Traveller learners within the education system. The strategy will provide recommendations on the way forward in relation to Traveller education and will also recommend a phased implementation plan.</p> <p>The national evaluation of Pre-Schools for Travellers, which was completed in 2003, will be considered in the context of the exercise.</p>
<b>In-School Provision</b>		
4.22	<p>Primary Level</p> <p>The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) should draw up guidelines for, and support the delivery of, preventative programmes at primary level which would address, <i>inter alia</i>, under-achievement by boys. [NEPS]</p>	<p>The NEPS Model is a consultative one and involves both casework and support and development work in assigned schools. The priorities are agreed between the NEPS psychologist and school principal and reviewed over time. This could include work such as that recommended. However, at this time, there is no national level programme under development. An internal working party has been considering issues around social inclusion with a view to informing NEPS policy development and its report will shortly be considered by the Internal Management Group of NEPS.</p>

NESF's Recommendations	Action Taken by Departments
<p>Primary and Post-Primary Level</p> <p>4.19– 4.20</p> <p>Class size rather than Pupil/Teacher Ratio should be used to allocate teachers; a maximum class size of 15:1 should apply in all Designated Disadvantaged Schools, at both primary and post-primary levels. This should be accompanied by in-service training on teaching methodologies appropriate to smaller classes. [DES]</p>	<p>For the purposes of determining staffing allocations to schools, references to pupil teacher ratios (PTRs) relate to the core teaching allocation based on the number of pupils.</p> <p>The mainstream staffing of a primary school is determined by reference to the enrolment of the school on the 30th September of the previous school year.</p> <p>The pupil teacher ratio at primary level has fallen significantly in recent years from 22.2:1 in 1996/97 to 17.4:1 in 2003/04. The Department currently operates a reduced pupil teacher ratio in the schools with the highest concentration of disadvantaged children.</p> <p>Under the urban strand of the Giving Children an Even Break Programme (GCEB), over 200 schools are being supported, the maximum class size in junior classes (infants through second class) is 20:1 and 27:1 in senior classes (third through sixth class). In addition, 32 urban schools involved in Breaking the Cycle are being supported to implement a reduced ratio of 15:1.</p> <p>The teacher allocation to second level schools and VECs for a particular school year consists of the allocation warranted by the recognised pupil enrolment at the end of the preceding September, as determined by the current Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR), together with approved ex-quota or concessionary posts as appropriate. Ex- quota posts include Principal, Deputy Principal, Learning Support, Guidance and Resource teaching posts. Resource teacher allocations represent an additional allocation to provide supplementary tuition to students with special needs. Such allocations, in common with ex-quota allocations, are over and above normal staffing allocations. In addition, over 200 disadvantaged schools at post-primary level will have 220 additional teaching posts in 2004/2005.</p> <p>The actual pupil teacher ratio at second level has improved significantly in recent years. The ratio fell from 16.0:1 in the 1996/97 school year to 13.48:1 in the 2003/04 school year.</p>
<p>4.21</p> <p>More training places for educational psychologists should be made available to address the staff shortfall in the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS). In the interim, psychologists in private practice should be accessible to schools and financially assisted by the Department. [DES]</p>	<p>The NEPS service is currently available to virtually all post-primary schools and is being gradually expanded to the primary schools sector. Pending this, NEPS continues to implement a Scheme to enable schools to purchase psychological assessments from private practitioners in urgent cases.</p>

NESF's Recommendations	Action Taken by Departments
<p>4.24 <b>The current imbalance in budget allocations should be addressed in favour of post-primary, and more particularly, primary level to improve quality of provision for students at risk. [DES]</b></p>	<p>In 2004, the Department has provided more than €540 million for schemes to tackle educational disadvantage at primary and post primary level, as well as programmes for disadvantaged youth, for second chance adult and community education and measures designed to broaden access to third level education.</p> <p>The Department is currently finalising a review of all of its disadvantage programmes and an announcement in relation to the outcome of this process will be made once the review has been completed.</p>
<p>4.28 <b>The number of Learning Support teachers at primary and post-primary levels should be increased. Supports for students with learning difficulties should be transferable from primary to post-primary level. [DES]</b></p>	<p>The current level of learning support teachers in the primary school system amounts to 1,531. This enables a service to be made available to all primary schools in the country. An additional 350 teachers at primary level will be in place during the 2004/2005 school year to cater for pupils with special educational needs and learning delay/difficulties.</p> <p>The Department has also introduced a new system for the allocation of resources for special needs in primary schools. The new system involves a general weighted allocation for all primary schools to cater for pupils with higher incidence special needs, those with learning support needs, borderline mild and mild general learning disability and dyslexia. It will also allow for individual allocations in respect of pupils with more acute needs.</p> <p>The general weighted allocation system will greatly reduce the need for individual applications and supporting psychological assessments and will put resources in place on a more systematic basis, thereby giving schools more certainty over their resource levels. This will allow for better planning in schools, greater flexibility in identifying and intervening earlier with regard to pupils' special needs, as well as making the posts more attractive to qualified teachers.</p> <p>In the most disadvantaged schools (over 240 schools), a teacher of pupils with special needs will be allocated for every 80 pupils to cater for the subset of pupils with higher incidence special needs. In all boys schools, the ratio will be one teacher for every 140 pupils, in mixed schools one for every 150 pupils and in all girls schools one for every 200 pupils. In addition, all schools will be able to apply for separate specific allocations in respect of pupils with lower incidence disabilities.</p> <p>All second level schools in the Free Education Scheme have an entitlement to an ex-quota allocation for learning support education. This is determined by the enrolment at the end of the preceding September. In the 2003/04 school year there were in excess of 530 learning support posts at second level. There are no plans at present to allocate additional resources to second level schools in respect of learning support education.</p>

NESF's Recommendations	Action Taken by Departments
	<p>The National Council for Special Education, which was established in January 2004, will have a local area presence, play a key role in the development and delivery of special education services at primary and second level, tailored to local area needs, and a continuum of support in moving from primary to the second level.</p>
<p>4.29 The work by the National Council 4.31 for Curriculum and Assessment 4.35 (NCCA) should be drawn on to — design innovative Transfer Programmes and should be delivered locally. At post-primary level, school systems (including induction, timetabling, curricu- lum and disciplinary procedures) should be more responsive to students' needs. Specific regard should be given to Travellers. The EWOs, when in place, should assist with transfer together with designated school staff. [DES/NCCA/Schools/NEWB]</p>	<p>The NCCA commissioned research on Curriculum Provision and School Integration among First Year Students from the ESRI. The report entitled 'Moving Up' was published in 2004.</p> <p>Transfer programmes are a common feature of the strategies adopted by schools in disadvantaged areas to support the transition to second level schools, and best practice in this area is disseminated through the networks in place under the Home/School/Community Liaison and School Completion initiatives.</p>
<p>4.30 Social, Political and Health — Education (SPHE) and Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) Programmes should be implemented in all classes at both primary and post-primary levels and staff should be assigned in each school for this purpose. [DES]</p>	<p>The Social Personal and Health Education programme has been a mandatory subject on the curriculum of all primary and post-primary schools since September 2003. The assignment of staff to teach SPHE is the responsibility of school management. Support for the implementation of SPHE has been offered to schools for the last three years. Work has commenced on the development of a Senior Cycle Curriculum for SPHE.</p> <p>Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) is a separate subject in the Junior Cycle Curriculum and all second-level schools are obliged to provide it. In contrast to SPHE, it is examined as part of the Junior Certificate Examinations.</p>
Post-Primary Education	
<p>4.43 Flexibility in assessment should — be introduced at both Junior and Senior Cycles, drawing on elements of good practice within the Junior Certificate School Programme and the Leaving Certificate Applied. [DES/NCCA]</p>	<p>A number of subjects at Junior Certificate Level currently have a practical or coursework element (or a possible element).</p> <p>Generally newer syllabi provide more detailed information on the possibilities for different modes of assessment. The Religious Education syllabus is a good example of an otherwise "academic" subject which has an element of course work included for assessment and could be a model for other subjects.</p> <p>The NCCA is currently undertaking a developmental initiative to provide professional support for teachers in the use of assessment in the classroom to improve student learning. In addition, the NCCA proposals in Directions for Development – Developing Senior Cycle</p>

NESF's Recommendations	Action Taken by Departments
	<p>Education, published in September 2003 set out a vision for senior cycle education in Ireland in 2010. The proposals include an increased emphasis on practical project/portfolio work with assessment points spread throughout the cycle. Publication has been followed by further consultation and analysis, and the NCCA presented its initial advice to the Department in June 2004. This will be followed by further advice in greater detail at the end of the year setting out the possible configurations of subjects and options and the resource implications for professional development, equipment and infrastructure which will enable a decision to be made on implementation.</p>
<p>4.49 — In tandem, assessment at second level should be recorded in a standardised 'Certificate of Achievement' and awarded to all students on completion of formal schooling to certify academic/non-academic achievements. [DES/Schools]</p>	<p>This issue features in the debate on the future of senior cycle education. Proposals for recognition of achievement outside the scope of the curriculum are among the issues being examined, as well as an increased opportunity for recording learning in a variety of short courses as well as subjects.</p>
<p>4.51 — Linked to the above, a small number of schools from the <i>School Completion Programme</i> should be selected to participate in a pilot initiative to further test the Multiple Intelligences approach, its connection with community-based initiatives and its usefulness to school retention. [DES]</p>	<p>The Department is currently considering this proposal, in conjunction with the Report produced by the Multiple Intelligences Curriculum Assessment Project under the direction of Professor Áine Hyland of University College Cork.</p> <p>The NEPS, in conjunction with the Visiting Teachers for Travellers has developed a proposal for a pilot study "Positive Profile Research and Development Project". The aim would be to bring about a positive change in attitudes towards Traveller students through changing teaching practices and enhancing the attainment levels of Traveller children in schools (thus influencing retention levels of potential early school leavers). This is a holistic approach to assessment with emphasis on identifying children's strengths, including literacy and numeracy. The findings will have implications for the assessment of all children.</p>
<p>4.53 — Educational Welfare Officers (EWOs) should be drawn from a range of disciplines and be assigned a leadership role in issues relating to school retention. [NEWB/DES]</p>	<p>The Education (Welfare) Act was fully commenced on 5 July 2002. Under the Act, the National Educational Welfare Board was established to ensure that every child attends school regularly or otherwise receives an education.</p> <p>To discharge its responsibilities, the Board is developing a nationwide service to provide welfare-focused services to children, families and schools. For this purpose, Educational Welfare Officers (EWOs) have been appointed and deployed throughout the country to provide a welfare-focused service to support regular school attendance and discharge the Board's functions locally. It has appointed a Chief Executive Officer, Directors of Corporate and Educational Services and the necessary support and delivery staff.</p>

NESF's Recommendations	Action Taken by Departments
	<p>The overall staffing complement is 84 comprising 16 HQ and support staff, 5 regional managers, 11 senior educational welfare officers and 52 educational welfare officers.</p> <p>At this stage of its development, the aim of the Board is to provide a service to the most disadvantaged areas and most at-risk groups. Five regional teams have now been established with bases in Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford and staff have been deployed since early December 2003 in areas of greatest disadvantage and in areas designated under the Government's RAPID programme. Thirteen towns with significant school going populations, twelve of which are designated under the Government's RAPID programme, also now have an Educational Welfare Officer allocated to them. These towns are Dundalk, Drogheda, Navan, Athlone, Carlow, Kilkenny, Wexford, Bray, Clonmel, Tralee, Ennis, Sligo and Letterkenny. In addition, the Board will follow up on urgent cases nationally where children are not currently receiving an education.</p> <p>The Board has sought the first comprehensive data returns from schools in relation to attendances/absences in the 2003/04 school year and these will assist it in keeping the level of need for the new service in particular areas under review.</p>
<p>6.23 Schools who take students on the recommendation of the EWOs after September of each year should have access to capitation grants for these students. [DES]</p>	<p>Where the Department receives written confirmation that capitation was not paid to any school in respect of a pupil who enrolls in a school after the 30th September, a <i>pro rata</i> capitation payment may be made.</p>
Out -of-School and Labour Market Provision	
<p>5.10 Youth Work</p> <p>To streamline existing provision, a national strategy should be developed for the non-formal sector and its role in relation to early school leaving. As a first step, a comprehensive audit of provision should be made of all preventative measures. [Youth Work sector/DES/DJELR/DETE/DHC]</p>	<p>The National Youth Work Development Plan is a strategic plan for the development of youth work for the period from 2003 to 2007. It seeks, among other things, to “enhance the contribution of youth work to social inclusion, social cohesion and citizenship in a rapidly changing national and global context”. Implementation of the plan has commenced and will continue over time as resources permit.</p>

NESF's Recommendations	Action Taken by Departments
<p>5.11 <b>Local Committees to be set up under the Youth Work Act, 2001 should have a strand that deals specifically with early school leavers and foster partnerships between the formal and non-formal sectors.</b> [DES/Youth Work sector/VECs]</p>	<p>The Act specifies that in developing plans for youth work in their area, each VEC shall have regard to, among other things, young persons who are socially or economically disadvantaged. Implementation of the various sections of the Act is a staged process, subject to the availability of resources.</p>
<p>5.20 <b>The counselling and psychological service should be mainstreamed into Youthreach so that the needs of participants can be more adequately met.</b> [DES]</p>	<p>An annual budget is provided to Youthreach Centres, Senior Traveller Training Centres and FÁS Community Training Workshops. Centres use this budget to prioritise from a spectrum of needs. The vast majority prioritise counselling and psychological services as the key gaps in their areas.</p> <p>Provision may be organised on the basis of regional clusters, with Youthreach, Traveller and Community Training Workshops pooling resources as necessary.</p>
<p>5.20 <b>To improve progression both within and from Youthreach, commitments should be given to accelerate the rolling out of the Advocacy programme and to resource its outreach dimension.</b> [FÁS]</p>	<p>FÁS continues to roll out the Advocacy service. Donegal and Longford have been added to the locations where it is available and the service is being extended in Dublin City.</p>
<p>5.21 <b>Specific provision for young people under 15 years who are presently in Youthreach should be developed.</b> [DES/NEWB]</p>	<p>A small number of under 15s have been admitted to Youthreach, under exceptional circumstances, on the basis that all other mainstream possibilities have been tried, failed or ruled out and the young person is otherwise in danger of exiting from all education and training provision. No training allowances are payable in these instances.</p>
<p>5.32 <b>Work being undertaken by the NQAI on a qualifications framework, should include flexible modular approaches with accreditation for competencies acquired in work by those with no qualifications.</b> [NQAI]</p>	<p>The new National Framework of Qualifications developed by the NQAI was launched in October 2003. It provides for ten levels covering all awards in the State in the education and training sectors, ranging from basic education and literacy to doctorate level. It provides for the recognition of all learning whether for social, personal, citizenship or economic/vocational reasons. The objective is to provide for access, transfer and progression to higher levels of learning across the education and training sectors.</p> <p>A key element of the new system is a focus on the achievement of learning outcomes whether in formal, non-formal, community and</p>

NESF's Recommendations	Action Taken by Departments
	<p>workplace settings. The framework is also designed to provide for the accumulation of credits. The inclusion of awards in the new framework is being implemented on a phased basis in the period to 2006. In July 2004 the new awards for Levels 6, 7 and 8 in the higher education sector, which will apply to 2005 entrants, were announced.</p>
<p>5.36  <b>Young People and the Labour Market</b></p> <p><b>Employment Service should be proactively promoted as a point of referral for young people who are leaving school with no qualifications. [DES/FÁS/NEWB]</b></p>	<p>FÁS, in consultation with the Department of Education and Science, implements a series of measures to meet the needs of Early School Leavers. These involve counselling and guidance, training (including remedial education) and work experience and placement through the 'Advocacy Programme'. The programmes enable Early School Leavers to become familiar with services that are available within the local communities, including the LES. Further expansion of the LES role is a matter for consideration by the National Employment Services Advisory Committee, and will be brought to its attention.</p> <p>This is now a focus of attention for the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB). The Board is in the process of setting up a Register for 16 year olds who indicate an intention to leave school. FÁS and the NEWB are in the process of agreeing Protocols to streamline the work of both agencies to meet the needs of those in transition between school and work.</p>
<p>5.42  <b>To accommodate students who wish to combine school and work, in the short-term, the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) should be made available on a part-time basis. [DES]</b></p>	<p>This is one of the issues under discussion in the Future Directions document published by the NCCA. At present, part-time learners may sit for subjects in the Junior or Leaving Certificate examinations as external candidates, other than the LCA, and may also pursue modules within the FETAC framework of awards.</p>
<p>5.41- 5.42  <b>In tandem, the Standing Committee on the Labour Market should include, as part of its remit, consideration of combining part-time education and work, drawing on the experience of the pilot 'Linking Education to the Workplace' initiative. [DETE]</b></p>	<p>The Standing Committee was unable to produce a final report in the absence of sufficient consensus. A consultation paper on Education and Training initiatives has been prepared for circulation to the Social Partners and decisions on future direction will be taken when the review of Community Employment is completed (see also Section II).</p> <p>FÁS, the Department of Education and Science and the Dublin Employment Pact have agreed to roll out the Pilot 'Linking Education to the Workplace' initiative to a number of other Dublin areas. This is part of a strategy to bring young unqualified workers into 'Learning in the Workplace' as part of Life Long Learning. The next phase is at an advanced planning stage and will become operational in November 2004.</p>

NESF's Recommendations	Action Taken by Departments
<b>Mechanisms to Improve Service Delivery</b>	
<p>6.14 <b>Family support services at local level should be developed and greater links should be fostered between them and other local initiatives such as the Home School Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL) on issues relating to educational disadvantage.</b> [DES/DSFA/DHC]</p>	<p>The HSCL Scheme seeks to develop the parent as prime educator and to build strong supportive communities. The Local Committee (LC) of the HSCL Scheme identifies issues in the community that impinge on learning. It brings together those who have a common purpose regarding the disadvantaged e.g. local statutory and voluntary agencies, Church personnel and parents. In this way local needs are identified and responded to in a coordinated way. Issues identified at LC meetings and responded to include: Curriculum Support, Parents, Teachers, Community and Pupils Working Together and Parents as Educational Home Visitors.</p>
<p>6.18-6.19 <b>A system of formal tracking of pupils should be developed. Preparation of the Primary Pupil Database should be expedited.</b> [NEWB/DES]</p>	<p>The first phase of development of a comprehensive primary pupil database will be implemented during 2004/05.</p>
<p>6.19 <b>Modules on educational disadvantage should be an integral part of pre-service and in-service training of teachers at both primary and second-level. In addition, opportunities for joint training with youth workers should be encouraged.</b> [DES/Third Level Colleges/Youth Work Sector]</p>	<p><i>Third level</i></p> <p>The existing programmes (primary) in the Colleges of Education contain elements to assist student teachers in dealing with children with special needs, including disadvantage. Details of these curricula are matters for which the Colleges are responsible.</p> <p>Universities recognise the importance of educational disadvantage in pre-service training. At present, the major drive for reform comes from the following working groups' reports to the Minister:</p> <p>(a) the Advisory Group on Post-Primary Teacher Education, chaired by Professor Kieran Byrne, which is scheduled to make its report in the near future and;</p> <p>(b) the Working Group on Primary Pre-service Teacher Education, chaired by Professor Tom Kellaghan, and its recommendations will help inform the Department's policy in this area.</p> <p><i>Youth Sector</i></p> <p>The Minister for Youth Affairs has established a sub committee of the National Youth Work Advisory Committee (NYWAC) to look into the question of how best to strengthen the links between formal education and youth work in tackling educational disadvantage, and to make recommendations for the purpose of a submission to be made by the Minister to the Educational Disadvantage Committee.</p> <p>The NYWAC Sub-Committee's main aim is to provide guidelines on good practice between school and youth work areas and to this end has initiated research on relationships between the formal and informal sectors, and it has asked youth work organisations and VECs to make recommendations on how best to strengthen existing links.</p> <p>The sub-committee hopes to complete its work this autumn.</p>

NESF's Recommendations	Action Taken by Departments
<p>6.20 —</p> <p>Consideration should be given to mentoring for teachers within all schools, building on the experience of the Support Teacher Project which is available on a limited basis at primary level. [DES]</p>	<p>The Department intends carrying out a review of this Project, which is currently available in 48 primary schools. Its future will be considered in light of this and also that of the wider review by the Educational Disadvantage Committee of all programmes which is currently underway.</p>
<p>6.20 —</p> <p>Teachers should be facilitated to take up secondment and sabbatical opportunities to benefit from different working practices. [DES]</p>	<p>Every effort is made to accommodate teachers either through secondment arrangements, the granting of leave of absence e.g. for study purposes or through the career break scheme.</p> <p>Arrangements in individual cases are dependent on the agreement of the authorities in the school concerned and must have regard to the needs of the school and its pupils. Where proposed secondments are on a non-recoupment basis, the Department must also have regard to the costs involved in the context of overall resource availability.</p>
<p>6.28 —</p> <p>The 'collegiate' model for schools which was proposed by the Post-Primary Review Body in Northern Ireland should be piloted in a small number of areas. [DES]</p>	<p>Under the School Completion Programme (SCP) introduced in May 2002, the Department has allocated funding to clusters of schools, primary and post-primary, in an effort to tackle the problem of early school leaving. The SCP recognises that schools can no longer be expected to deal with the problem of early school leaving in isolation from what is happening in the young person's life at home and in his/her community.</p> <p>As already mentioned, the purpose of the HSCL Local Committee is to identify school related issues at community level that impinge on learning and to address these by working with other interest groups. Examples of such topics are school attendance, substance misuse, transfer programmes and family literacy and mathematics.</p> <p>The strength of the Local Committee is partnership in action. This enables parents to have greater involvement in their child's learning and local ownership of school-community strengths and challenges in a very practical and rooted way.</p> <p>Different geographical areas and groups of people dictate that there cannot be a uniform solution to the linking of community and school.</p>
<p>6.30 —</p> <p>A greater regional presence by the Department of Education and Science should be developed to interface between central policy and local delivery. [DES]</p>	<p>As part of the process of major structural reform of the Department, ten regional offices are being established. Nine of these will be in operation before the end of 2004 with the final office being established during the first half of 2005.</p> <p>These regional offices will provide a single point of contact for information and advice for interests at regional level wishing to address educational disadvantage. They will also represent the Department at regional level on City and County Development Boards, Regional Drugs Task Forces and other similar bodies as well as managing the visiting teacher services at local level and ensuring greater dialogue at regional level.</p>

## NESF Conclusions on the Follow-up Action by Government Departments on its Report No. 24

- 5.9 ● The NESF is pleased with the comprehensive response it received from the Department of Education and Science and welcomes the steady progress that has been made on a number of its recommendations. Of particular note also is that there is now an emerging consensus across all levels of the education system that further reform is needed to boost the life chances and promote equality of opportunity for those who are marginalised and disadvantaged in our society.
- 5.10 ● As the Educational Disadvantage Committee concluded in its report on the Inaugural Meeting of the Forum on Educational Disadvantage “a significant point has now been reached in relation to finding solutions to the multi-dimensional problem of educational disadvantage”<sup>52</sup>. The need for greater urgency of action in this area was highlighted by the former US Secretary of Education when he stated “*the challenges of equity and access remain today, however, and seem even more pressing given the anticipated one-third drop in Irish school leavers by 2007*”<sup>53</sup>.
- 5.11 ● On a related note, the correlation between social capital and educational outcomes has come increasingly to the fore in research studies – indeed, recent evidence suggests that exam results and drop-out rates from school are related more to community-based social capital than that of teacher quality, class size or even that of spending levels per student<sup>54</sup>.
- 5.12 ● The NESF report sets out a framework (see Figure 4 below) for how educational disadvantage can be tackled. Indeed, in *Sustaining Progress*, tackling educational disadvantage is one of the ten Special Initiatives and the NESF is pleased with the commitment given there to taking its framework into account when implementing policy initiatives in this area. It urges that this framework should now be integrated into the future planning of education services.

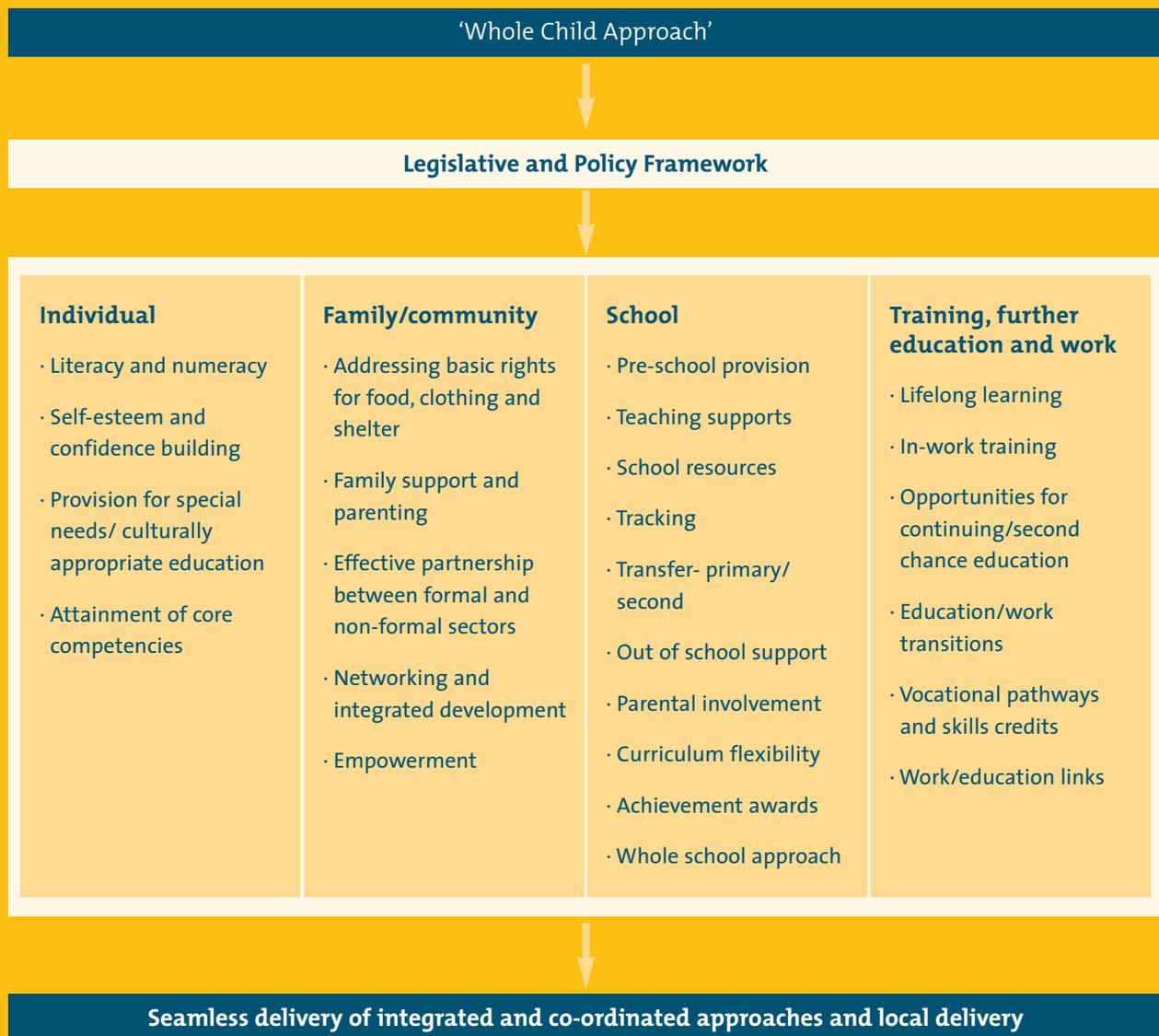
---

<sup>52</sup> *Educational Disadvantage Forum, (2003) Report of Inaugural Meeting, 18th November 2002, Department of Education and Science.*

<sup>53</sup> *Keynote Address at the Eighth National Innovation Conference, Richard W.Riley, DCU, November 2003.*

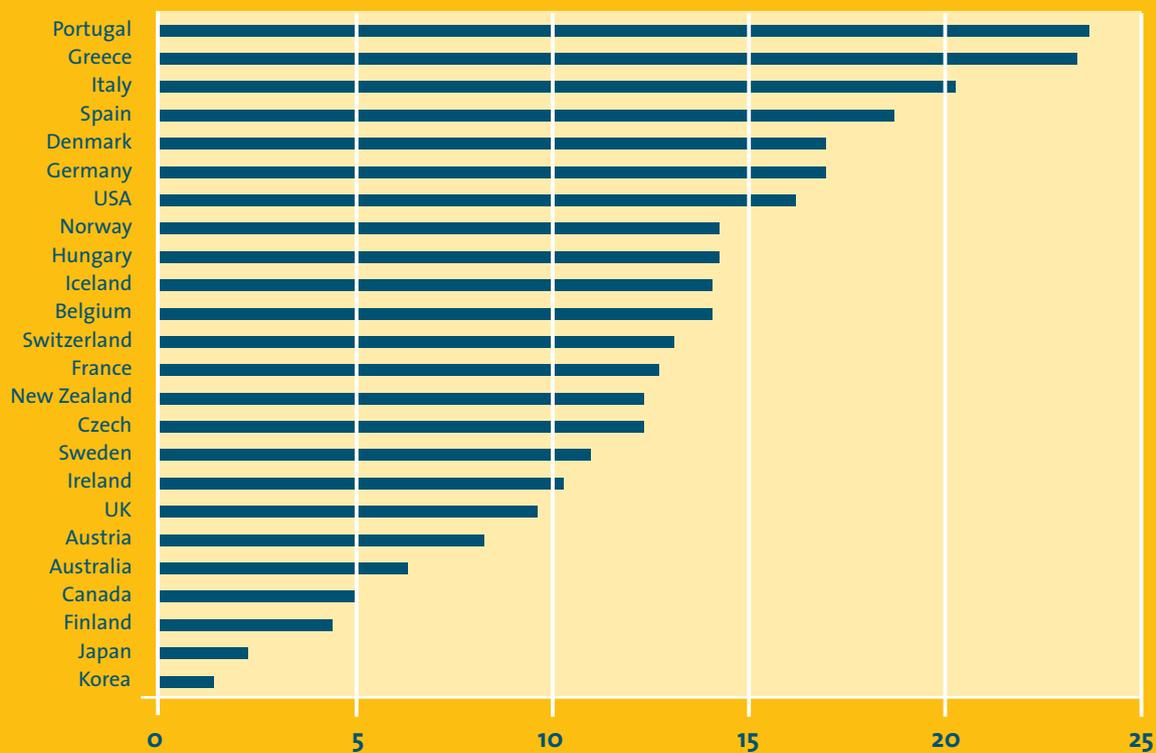
<sup>54</sup> *Article by Professor Robert Putnam on 'Community-Based Social Capital and Educational Performance' in Making Good Citizens: Education and Civil Society, Diane Ravitch and Joseph Viteritti, 2002.*

**Figure 4** A Framework to Address Early School Leaving



**5.13** ● The targets for educational disadvantage in *Sustaining Progress* also mirror those set in the NAPS<sup>55</sup>; that is halving the proportion of people with serious literacy difficulties and reducing the number of young people who leave school early (Building an Inclusive Society, 2002). In a comparison of relative educational disadvantage levels in the 24 OECD countries, Ireland ranked 8th best in a recent UNICEF publication (see Figure 5 below). The NESF strongly supports the Lisbon Strategy target for the EU of 10% for early school leavers by 2010; the current Irish rate is 18%.

**Figure 5** Educational Disadvantage League\*



Source: UNICEF (2002) A league table of educational disadvantage in rich nations, Innocenti Report Card No. 4, Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.

\* The above ranking is based on the average of five measures of absolute educational disadvantage, namely: reading literacy (age 15), maths and science literacy (age 15) and maths and science achievement (Year 8) and represents the percentage of 14-15 year olds who fall below fixed international benchmarks of competence in these areas.

<sup>55</sup> The links between educational disadvantage and poverty are well documented; see, for example, the article by E.Smyth and D. Hannon in *Bust or Boom, IPA, and College Entry in Focus, Clancy, P., 2001*.

- 5.14 ● The NESF report's main focus is on the need for a multidimensional understanding and approach to meeting the educational needs of children and young people. As with Report No. 11, it looks not only at prevention and early intervention issues but also at the concerns of those who have already left the formal education system and innovative ways of combining education and paid work for young people. The link between early school leaving and drug addiction was again highlighted recently by the President of the Irish Medical Organisation<sup>56</sup> who went on to call for "*large-scale investment in pre-school facilities and primary school which offers the best hope of the future being better than the present*".
- 5.15 ● As in its 1997 report, a key recommendation was the need for further investment in early education which is internationally regarded as the main area where educational disadvantage can be addressed<sup>57</sup>. The NESF supports the establishment of the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE), as the pre-cursor of the Early Childhood Development Agency which was recommended five years ago in the White Paper '*Ready to Learn*' (Department of Education and Science, 1999), and its focus on disadvantage and inclusion of parents as key stakeholders. What is needed now, however, is an implementation framework for the White Paper's recommended areas of action.
- 5.16 ● A recent UK report<sup>58</sup> highlighted yet again that early intervention is crucial in tackling social exclusion, given the degree that life chances are affected by childhood experiences and pinpointed evidence that inequalities in attainment were apparent even from as early as 22 months of age. The report concluded that good quality early years services that combine education, care and health can have a positive effect on children's cognitive and social development and longer-term educational attainment. The NESF fully supports these conclusions and will be returning to these in its future work.
- 5.17 ● The lack of more effective co-ordination of early years provision continues to hamper real progress in this area. Indeed, the Commission on the Family, which reported in 1998, mentioned "*how apart from Child Benefit and limited interventions for children at risk of social and educational advantage, there is virtually no State investment in the care of children before entry to primary school*". In this regard, the NESF looks forward to the outcome of the deliberations of the high-level Sub-Group established by the National Children's Office and reporting to the Cabinet Committee on Children, whose role is to look at how early years provision is co-ordinated across a number of Departments.

---

<sup>56</sup> *Why not? Building a Better Ireland, Article by Dr. Joe Barry.*

<sup>57</sup> *Shonkoff, J. and D. Phillips (2000) From Neurons to Neighbourhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development, Washington D.C.: National Academy Press; Kamerman, S. et al. (2003) Social Policies, Family Types and Child Outcomes in Selected OECD Countries, OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers, No. 6, Paris : OECD; and Sparkes and Glennerster in Understanding Social Exclusion, Oxford University Press, 2002.*

<sup>58</sup> *Tackling Social Exclusion : Taking stock and looking to the future : Emerging Findings , UK Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, March 2004.*

- 5.18** ● The NESF is encouraged by the work undertaken by the Educational Disadvantage Committee and is pleased that it is carrying out a much-needed review of all disadvantaged schemes. It is hoped that this will lead to a rationalisation and integration of measures, as the need for more coherence has increasingly come to the fore in recent times and was also singled out by the NESF in its report. Associated with this, is the need to refocus expenditure on education away from the third level sector and towards primary and post-primary levels. In this regard, the NESF welcomes the commitments in the recent 2004 Estimates to increase spending at primary level.
- 5.19** ● Other support services were also highlighted in the NESF report and developments in the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), as outlined by the Department, are much welcomed and long overdue. However, levels of provision are still low and spread thinly across schools and this needs to be addressed. Developments to date also fall short of the NESF recommendation on the need for preventative work, particularly at primary level and the NESF reinforces the need to continue to focus on this. It also welcomes the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act, 2004 which will provide a framework within which the educational requirements of children with disabilities will be guaranteed as a statutory right enforceable in law. To ensure this, it will be vital that the required level of professional support staff is put in place.
- 5.20** ● One of the most significant developments which could in time contribute to tackling more effectively early school leaving is the review of all the different options under the Senior Cycle (such as the Transition Year Option, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme, the Leaving Certificate Applied, etc.) which has been undertaken recently by the NCCA. In its document<sup>59</sup>, the NCCA sets out a number of future scenarios that are aimed at maintaining and improving the quality of the educational experience for senior cycle students and the quality of the professional staff who work with them. The NESF commends the NCCA and the Department for this progressive work and looks forward to the implementation of the proposed changes.

---

<sup>59</sup> NCCA (2003) *Directions for Development, Developing Senior Cycle Education, Dublin*.

- 5.21 ● The NESF's findings showed that tackling early school leaving is a task not only for the formal education sector but that the informal sector also has a key role to play particularly in the promotion of an integrated lifelong learning framework and the introduction of flexible second-chance learning opportunities. It welcomes the publication of the National Youth Work Development Plan in 2003 which will have a major bearing on the future enhancement of the youth work sector. The NESF urges that sufficient resources be set aside for its implementation so that required policy changes can take place in an integrated and effective manner. It welcomes the work being done by the National Educational Welfare Board but regrets that the required network of Education Welfare Officers has not yet been put in place.
- 5.22 ● The NESF also welcomes the publication, by the NQAI of its qualifications framework which will revolutionise the way that learners are accredited. This will, it is hoped, lead to greater flexibility for where people learn, how they learn and at what stage in their lives they learn. This will have particular importance for those who have already left school without formal qualifications but who would like, perhaps on a part-time basis, to pursue study. In this regard the NESF welcomes the rolling out of the 'Learning in the Workplace' initiative (following its successful pilot) which provides lifelong learning for unqualified workers. Associated with this, what is now needed is the long-awaited recognition, within our education system, of accreditation of prior learning (APL) for those who did not receive any certification in formal education but who may have acquired considerable skills/experience in the workplace and in other settings.
- 5.23 ● With regard to mechanisms that are needed to improve service delivery, the NESF acknowledges that the Home School Community Liaison Programme, through its local committees, is providing a valuable localised service which brings together parents, teachers and communities. The NESF endorses the Department's view that, for this Programme to be successful, a one-size-fits-all approach is not the best one to apply and local variations should, therefore, be part of its design and delivery. At a broader level, the NESF supports the sentiment of a recent ESRI publication<sup>60</sup> that there is a need for greater co-ordination of existing measures to counter educational disadvantage. The wider social and economic relevance of educational disadvantage and early school leaving is clearly articulated in the same publication:

*"In the Irish context, initial educational qualifications are highly predictive of employment chances, quality of employment and pay levels not only in the early labour market career but throughout adult working life ... it is clear, therefore, that continuing to increase educational expenditure, particularly on younger age groups will have positive benefits"*<sup>61</sup>.

<sup>60</sup> Mc Coy, S. and E. Smyth (2003) in Callan, T., A. Doris and D. Mc Coy (2003) *Budget Perspectives 2004*, Dublin: ESRI.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

- 5.24 ● In addition, the NESF urges that the development of regional offices of the Department should not be limited to representational matters but that they should also contribute, in a meaningful way, to the policy-making process at national level.
- 5.25 ● Finally, given the commitments that are made in *Sustaining Progress*, particularly the recognition that “*productivity of people over their working lives is significantly linked to the quality of their childhood and early schooling*”, the NESF looks forward to its continuing role in contributing to policy developments in this area, especially those policies that are designed to assist the educationally disadvantaged from a very early age. As the ESRI noted, savings of at least €14 million a year could be made if policies succeeded in helping young people to stay on in school<sup>62</sup>. Recent data from the CSO Quarterly National Household Survey highlighted graphically how 50% of those in the 25-64 age group who had not received a second-level education were either unemployed or not seeking work, compared to only 11% of those who had a degree or higher-level qualification.

---

<sup>62</sup> Mc Coy and Smyth (2003) *op cit*.

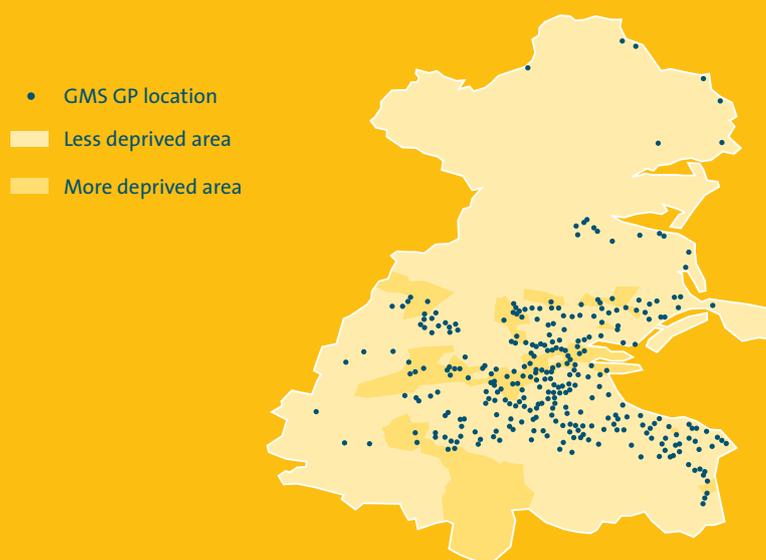


VI

## Introduction

- 6.1** ● This report was prepared against the background of the widespread public concerns about our ‘two-tier’ health system and differences in treatment between public patients and private patients. It was designed as an input to the implementation of the Government’s Health Strategy, with particular reference to giving greater priority in the future to tackling inequalities in health status as between different groups in our society.
- 6.2** ● The report’s main findings and conclusions are summarised below. At the outset, the NESF recognised, of course, that the issue of access has to be seen outside the hospital sector and emphasised in this regard the need for major development of primary care services. Here again, there are major differences in the delivery of these services as the following figure shows.

**Figure 6** Distribution of the General Medical Service (GMS) GP Services in the Dublin Area



## Defining Equity in Health Care

- 6.3** ● A common international formulation, and one that is fully supported by the NESF, is that access to hospital care should be on the basis of medical need or capacity to benefit from care, and should not be affected by other factors such as ability to pay or geographic location. The fact that at present the better-off have speedier access to care in public hospitals violates this principle and the report primarily concentrates on this issue.

## Public and Private Health Services Mix

- 6.4** ● One of the striking features in recent years has been the accelerated increase in private health insurance (this now covers close to half the population, compared to about 30% in the 1980s; it plays a much smaller role in other European countries). This reflects a range of factors such as waiting lists and quality of service in the public hospital system and higher living standards.
- 6.5** ● A large part of privately-financed specialist care is supplied by consultants who also hold public hospital salaried contracts. In many cases this private care is supplied in public hospitals. About 50% of all private beds are in public hospitals and these, in turn, account for one-in-five of all beds in acute public hospitals<sup>63</sup>. These private beds are subsidised by the Exchequer to a level of around 50%, although it has now been announced that the charges for private beds in public hospitals are to be increased by 15%. The extent of our ‘two-tier’ system as regards the private use of public hospitals is much greater here than in our EU partners. The implication of this for equity of access is a central focus of the NESF report.

## Data on Hospital Waiting Lists

- 6.6** ● Much of the concern on equity to healthcare centres on the numbers (mostly public patients) on waiting lists for treatment in public hospitals. The report analyses the data available and their limitations (e.g. the data only include those who have already been waiting for 3 months or more), their reliability as many on the lists are not still waiting treatment (e.g. having gone private, died or emigrated), and examines key trends over recent years in the different specialties.
- 6.7** ● Particular attention is given to the need for data improvements to focus on waiting times, rather than the stock of people waiting, and on the time spent waiting to see a specialist as well as the time spent from referral by a specialist to then receiving hospital care.

<sup>63</sup> Although under legislative provision 20% of beds in public hospitals are designated as private, in practice, however, about 30% of patients treated in acute public hospitals are private patients (Reform and Renewal of the Irish Health Care System, Miriam Wiley, ESRI, 2001).

## Policy on Hospital Waiting Lists

- 6.8** ● The report next examines the variety of Waiting List Initiatives that have been introduced by successive Governments in recent years to reduce the numbers on these lists. However, there are conflicting views and many commentators have queried their overall impact. There has been no formal evaluation on the value of these initiatives.
- 6.9** ● However, a recent review of the Waiting List Initiative by the Comptroller and Auditor General was critical on the use of funding over the period 1998-2002 to reduce waiting lists and, in the wake of this, the Minister for Health and Children has decided that waiting list funding will from now on be channelled through the National Treatment Purchase Fund. Among the issues highlighted by the Comptroller was that hospitals had not tracked their use of the special funding they had received in this area since 1993, with the result that it was not possible to say whether the taxpayer got value for money, while some patients were in acute hospital beds when they could have been cared for in nursing homes at a fraction of the cost.
- 6.10** ● However, policies aimed at reducing waiting times call into question the criteria for prioritising patient access and whether there is reasonable standardisation for the treatment of patients in order of their clinical priority.

## NESF's Comments on the Health Strategy

- 6.11** ● In its commitments to tackling the equity problem, the NESF considers that the Government's Health Strategy represents an important advance. The focus on entitlements rather than eligibility is also seen as a step forward. The NESF also strongly supports the ambitious and challenging targets set in the Strategy for eliminating hospital waiting lists. However, doubts have been expressed on achieving these, given the already high level of nursing vacancies at present. The challenge now is to recruit and retain staff, given the Government's recent decision to lift the embargo on recruitment.
- 6.12** ● The Strategy accepts that the public-private mix in the public hospital system is part of the problem and this marks an important policy change for the better. While the Strategy can bring about real improvements in equity for public patients, nevertheless, the NESF has a number of comments and recommendations to make and these are summarised in Box No. 6 below. The response of the Department of Health and Children to these is given in sequence on the right hand side of the Box.

**Box No. 6****NESF Report No.25 on Equity of Access to Hospital Care****NESF's Comments and Recommendations****Action Taken by Departments**

Access to care should be on the basis of medical need or capacity to benefit from care, and should not be affected by other factors such as ability to pay or geographical location. At present, the better-off have speedier access to care in public hospitals.

Public and private patients have the same access to emergency care. The Health Strategy – *Quality and Fairness: A Health System for You* – noted the unsatisfactory situation in relation to elective admissions where the division between public and private patients was 71/29 instead of 80/20.

The scope for 'two-tiers' in relation to access to public hospitals is much greater in this country than in, for example, our European Union partners. Public patients here may face long waiting times for certain types of hospital care, which the better-off can avoid.

The Department's objective is to ensure that a fair balance is achieved and that those who depend on the public system are not disadvantaged. The Department is reviewing the bed designation process which controls the number of private beds in acute hospitals.

Official data in relation to waiting for public care need to focus on 'waiting times' rather than the stock of persons waiting, and should incorporate 'time spent waiting' to see a specialist as well as time spent from referral by a specialist to then receiving hospital care.

Responsibility for the collection and reporting of waiting lists and waiting times is now the responsibility of the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF). The NTPF is focusing on waiting times and presently, any person waiting more than 3 months for admission to hospital for an operation can contact the NTPF to have their treatment arranged.

Policies directed at reducing waiting times raise particular issues for equity in access across those waiting, since they are directly concerned with the criteria for prioritising patient access. For example, guarantees that patients will be treated within a specified time will have to be linked to agreed standards for patient prioritisation.

The Health Strategy set target waiting times for patients to be treated. Medical prioritisation is a matter for the clinicians concerned so as to ensure that those deemed medically in need of immediate treatment will receive it. The NTPF is in place to ensure that those who do not need immediate treatment should wait no more than 3 months for treatment.

NESF's Comments and Recommendations	Action Taken by Departments
<p>The inequity between public and private patients in the waiting times for initial specialist appointments must also be addressed.</p>	<p>More and improved services are being made available on an ongoing basis in hospitals around the country. Significant progress has been made in improving medical staffing ratios. In the past five years, the number of consultant posts in Ireland has increased by 31% to 1,824 posts as at 1 January, 2004 and it is expected that this will impact favourably on early appointments for GP referrals.</p>
<p>Forthcoming legislation should guarantee rights to treatment within a reasonable period, taking into account the limits of public resources. Everybody should have the opportunity for maximum health gain.</p>	<p>The Department is undertaking a review of current legislation in relation to eligibility and entitlement to services. In light of this review the Department will be drafting a Bill to clarify and update the legislation in line with the goals set out in the Health Strategy.</p>
<p>A specific commitment to ensuring that all admissions to public hospitals – whether public or private – are prioritised in accordance with medical need is required.</p>	<p>The complementarity of public and private practice has been a longstanding feature of the Irish healthcare system. The White Paper on Private Health Insurance 1999 accepted the principle that access to health care should be determined by actual need for services rather than ability to pay or geographic location. The Health Strategy stated that the overall policy objective was to improve access for public patients by providing high-quality services directly in public hospitals or by arrangements with private hospitals. The Health Strategy has also clearly stated that private practice within public hospitals will not be at the expense of fair access for public patients.</p>
<p>Any greater reliance on the private sector to provide for the needs of public patients should not undermine public provision. Common quality standards should be established and regulated, in both the public and private sectors.</p>	<p>The Acute Hospital Bed Capacity Report identified the need for an additional 3,000 acute beds over the next decade. Some 589 beds have already been commissioned as part of the Government's commitment to increase bed capacity. Funding is being provided to enable a further 125 beds to be commissioned. All the new beds provided under the bed capacity initiative will be designated as public beds.</p> <p>In 2002 the Minister established the Irish Health Services Accreditation Board to operate a voluntary and objective scheme which provides for systematic evaluation of health care entities against a set of predefined quality standards by means of self-assessment and peer review. The standards were developed in consultation with health care personnel and are based on a multi-dimensional quality framework which is applied across the entire organisation.</p> <p>To date, 23 hospitals have applied for accreditation to the Board, comprising 33 organisations and representing more than 60% of all acute care facilities.</p> <p>A key policy aim of the Health Strategy is to deliver high quality services that are based on evidence-supported best practice. The Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) is being</p>

NESF's Comments and Recommendations	Action Taken by Departments
	<p>established to advance this aim. Its responsibilities will be built around three related functions (i) developing health information; (ii) promoting and implementing quality assurance programmes nationally; and (iii) overseeing health technology assessment. The structure of the organisation will reflect these functions.</p> <p>It is anticipated that the Board of the Interim HIQA will be in place by early Autumn, 2004. The Board will be charged with developing a set-up plan for the HIQA, for Ministerial approval and with overseeing implementation of that plan.</p> <p>Initially, the Authority will be set up on an administrative basis. The new Health Bill currently being drafted to underpin the Health Service Reform Programme will provide, <i>inter alia</i>, for the establishment of HIQA on a statutory basis.</p>
<p><b>A fully-fledged partnership approach should be adopted in the implementation of the Health Strategy.</b></p>	<p>The Department is committed to a partnership approach in the implementation of the National Health Strategy. Action 52 of the Health Strategy provides for community participation in decisions about the delivery of health and personal social services on an ongoing basis. Guidelines have been produced to support the further development of existing initiatives in a standardised way. Health boards continue to undertake information campaigns using a variety of mechanisms including websites, radio, television, newspapers and information booklets. The establishment of regional advisory committees and consumer panels has also taken place in a number of boards and other boards are engaged in planning the introduction of same.</p> <p>The National Consultative Forum is convened on an annual basis to monitor the implementation of the Health Strategy. The Forum is broadly based and includes patient and client groups, service providers, senior management in the health system, the voluntary sector, and organisations with an interest in the health system and relevant Government departments. It will meet again in November, 2004.</p> <p>A central focus of partnership will be to explore ways of achieving organisational change and new, more flexible forms of work organisation, which is of particular importance in the context of the Health Services Reform Programme announced by the Government in June, 2003. This programme is the most extensive reform programme announced for the Health System in over 30 years. A communications process was undertaken to inform and listen to feedback from the staff on the ground and a report on this process was published.</p> <p>The Department is implementing the Communications Strategy that emerged from the implementation of Phase I of the Reform Programme. Since its completion, a number of significant changes have taken place, including the establishment of the Interim Health Services Executive (HSE) and its change management team. In that context, the action plan contained within the Communications</p>

## NESF's Comments and Recommendations

## Action Taken by Departments

Strategy continues to provide an overall framework for communications. Work to date has included:

- The development of a network of designated communications officers from over 70 organisations within the health system.
- Newsletters have been issued periodically to all staff working in the health system.
- The health reform website was launched in December, 2003 at [www.healthreform.ie](http://www.healthreform.ie).
- A dedicated Information Project Officer is being recruited to devise and support communications and public information requirements for the Reform Programme.

*Sustaining Progress* identified sectoral partnership committees to play a key role in the verification process. Each sectoral partnership committee has responsibility for creating an Action Plan to implement *Sustaining Progress*. These Action Plans were issued to the Chief Executive Officers of the relevant agencies, who have to supply the partnership committees with progress reports. The partnership committee, upon receipt and examination of the reports have to forward the reports, together with a sectoral report, to the relevant Secretary General.

In the context of the Health Service the well-developed National Partnership Forum (NPF) is ideally suited to this task. The NPF established a working group of management and union people who created a challenging Action Plan to implement *Sustaining Progress* in the Health Service, and the Health Service Performance Verification Group (PVG) ratified this Action Plan. The NPF have issued the Action Plan to the CEO of each relevant agency. Through a dedicated liaison person the NPF is maintaining open lines of communication to assist the agencies in producing their progress reports. The NPF have also created a team to work on the sectoral report upon receipt of the agency progress reports.

The NPF's capacity to meet this challenging agenda, working collaboratively with management and unions, is based on the success of partnership-based initiatives in health service in recent years. *Quality and Fairness* recommended the creation of an Action Plan for People Management, which was successfully delivered on time through a partnership-based approach. Furthermore the requirement for a performance management system in the health service, which is in *Quality and Fairness*, the Action Plan for People Management and *Sustaining Progress* is being advanced through partnership. To date a scheme has been developed and agreed. A national steering committee of management and union personnel has been established, and the scheme is being implemented in pilot sites. This is further evidence of the potential of the Health Service partnership to deliver meaningful change in difficult and challenging environments.

NESF's Comments and Recommendations	Action Taken by Departments
<p>Success in implementing the Health Strategy's targets would mean shorter waiting times for public patients but public patients might still have to wait longer for essential treatment and not treated the same when in hospital. The Forum sees the public-private mix as a significant issue in regard to access to hospital care but the Strategy essentially leaves this unchanged.</p>	<p>Treating patients on the basis of medical priority ensures that those in need of essential treatment receive it as quickly as possible. The Health Strategy's commitment sets target waiting times for all those waiting for treatment in hospital. To achieve reduced waiting times for routine treatments the Department is using the NTPF to provide immediate access to treatment for those waiting longest and is building acute hospital bed capacity at the same time.</p> <p>The Health Strategy expressed concern at the ratio of public versus private elective activity in public hospitals (see page 100 of the Health Strategy). As stated above the Department is reviewing the bed designation process which controls the number of private beds in public hospitals. The Department is also reviewing the mix at individual health board level.</p>
<p>Alternative models in other countries that do not have the same equity problems as we do should be independently studied and given the highest priority, as planned reforms within our current public-private structure proceed. Any resulting reform, to be successful, must take as its starting-point the way our current system has evolved.</p>	<p>The Department is always seeking information in relation to systems of health care delivery around the world. However, the main concentration now is, of necessity, on the implementation of the major package of reforms agreed by Government. Together with the implementation of the Health Strategy, these reforms will address issues cited here as having an impact on equity. The implementation work is all moving forward with a clear recognition, both of the way the system has evolved together with the need for changes (see also comment above in relation to the Acute Hospital Bed Capacity Report and the NTPF).</p>
<p>The Inter-Departmental Committee of senior officials to review the implementation of the Health Strategy should pursue follow-up on this study. The monitoring structures under the revised National Anti-Poverty Strategy should also address this issue.</p>	<p>The Cabinet Committee on Health meets periodically to review progress in implementation of the Health Strategy. A Senior Officials Group Meeting takes place a week prior to that meeting to prepare for the Cabinet Committee review.</p>
<p>The State must guarantee and ensure the availability of adequate health care to all its citizens, regardless of means.</p>	<p>Goal 2 of the Health Strategy is concerned with making sure that equal access for equal need is a core value for the delivery of publicly funded services. Actions taken to further this goal include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ A review of all existing legislation relating to eligibility for services is ongoing in the Department. The outcome will inform the approach to the drafting of a new legislative framework clarifying eligibility for services.</li> <li>■ Recommendations from the review of the medical card scheme are being implemented including streamlining applications and providing clearer information to individuals about how and where to apply for medical cards.</li> </ul>

NESF's Comments and Recommendations	Action Taken by Departments
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Improved access to hospital services for public patients is being addressed through the waiting list initiative and the NTPF.</li><li>■ Boards are taking steps to ensure the provision of user-friendly, accessible, up-to-date information through information booklets, websites, IT initiatives and local radio.</li></ul> <p>Access in terms of timing and geographical location is also embraced by this goal. Measures to progress access include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Boards report that access/transport needs are considered when planning new services/facilities.</li><li>■ The introduction of individual appointment times is ongoing throughout the country.</li><li>■ The introduction of early morning/out-of-hours clinics has also begun in a number of areas.</li></ul>

## NESF Conclusions on the Follow-up Action by Government on its Report No. 25

- 6.13** ● The ambitious targets set down in the Government's 2001 Health Strategy are ones that the NESF has consistently called for but this can only lead to scepticism, cynicism and poor motivation by staff when these are not delivered on. Fears are now being expressed that, with policy heavily focused on structures and management issues, the inequalities in the system may have deteriorated further. Examples of this are the increased charges for Accident and Emergency (A & E) and overnight stays in public hospitals, higher threshold levels for the Drugs Payment Scheme and the sharp decline in numbers eligible for the medical card. These will impact severely on the poor as well as the 30% of our population who have no private insurance cover or medical card.
- 6.14** ● Public expenditure on the health service has increased very substantially in recent years<sup>64</sup> and is expected to account for nearly 25% of Government expenditure this year, compared to 19% in 1997. These figures need to be treated with caution, however, given the under-investment that occurred for so long and with 70% - 80% of the increase having been absorbed in pay. The Hanly Report contrasted hospital doctor pay in this country with that of Finland (both economies have a similar GNP per head) and found large differences with, for example, the basic salary for an Irish consultant in a public hospital at nearly three times that of Finland.
- 6.15** ● In comparative terms, this country is ranked 8th among EU 15 countries on the relative level of resources spent on health (see Figure 7 below). Over the last decade, however, there has been a significant improvement, with *per capita* public health spending here having risen from 66% to 102 % of the EU 15 average. Despite this more than doubling in health expenditure, the level of in-patient discharges grew by only 4% over this same period,<sup>65</sup> while the number of in-patient beds available in the system increased by 3%. However, this has been challenged<sup>66</sup> on the basis that such a comparison does not include hospital day case activity which increased by 66% over this period and that the increase in health care spending was actually under half that reported when adjusted for inflation. While there have been many real improvements, Dr Seán Barrett<sup>67</sup> has highlighted the serious problems of efficiency and accountability, anti-competitive practices in the training and recruitment of staff (both medical and administrative) and in services provision (e.g. health insurance and pharmacies). The additional non-medical staff recruited over the period 1997 – 2001 was at such a rate that it exceeded the entire medical staff that was employed in the system in 2001.

---

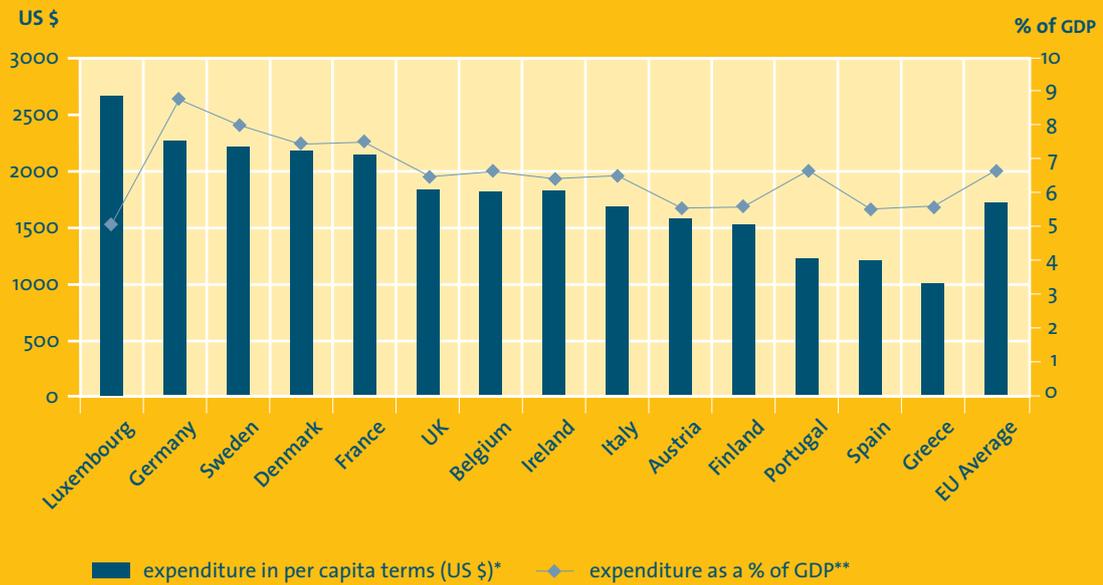
<sup>64</sup> This has also been true elsewhere, with health expenditure growing more rapidly and now accounting for more than 8% of GDP on average for OECD countries (*The OECD Health Project: Towards High Performing Health Systems*), OECD, May 2004; the 2002 *Wanless Report* (for the UK Treasury) estimated that the scale of funding would have to increase from its then level of 7.7% of up to 12.5% of GDP over the next 20 years in order to deliver a first-class health service there.

<sup>65</sup> 'Restructuring the Health Services', address by Dr. Seán Barrett TCD at the Annual Conference of the Hospital Consultants Association in Limerick (October, 2003).

<sup>66</sup> 'Health Spending and the Black Hole', Maev-Ann Wren, ESRI Quarterly Economic Commentary, Autumn 2004.

<sup>67</sup> 'The Task of Irish Health Reform', Dr. Seán Barrett, *Irish Banking Review*, Winter 2003.

Figure 7 Government Expenditure on Health in EU 15 Countries Year 2002



Source: OECD Health Data, 2004 (Netherlands excluded as public/private split of total healthcare was unavailable).

\* Using Purchasing Power Parities to eliminate differences in price levels.

\*\* Using GNP for Ireland.

**6.16** ● Given its mandate from Government, the central focus of the NESF's report was the lack of equity in access to hospital care. This was understandable given that *"inequalities in health and access to health services are now widely seen as key aspects of broader socio-economic inequalities and social exclusion"*<sup>68</sup>. These links have been well documented and researched by people such as Professor Richard Wilkinson, University of Nottingham<sup>69</sup>, and in his address at the conference last autumn of the Adelaide Hospital Society he referred, *inter alia*, to the role of social capital in underpinning the health status of a community. This has also been highlighted by the NESF in its most recently-published report<sup>70</sup>.

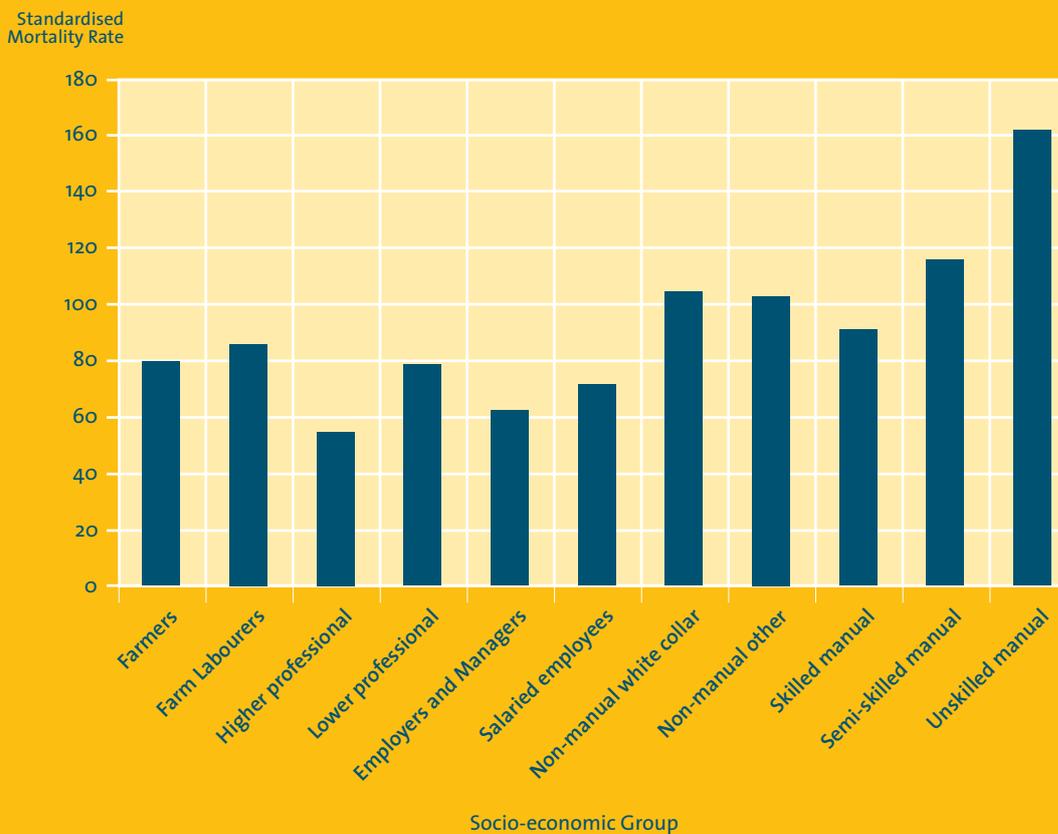
<sup>68</sup> 'Indicators and Targets for Social Inclusion in the European Union', Atkinson, Marlier and Nolan (2003).

<sup>69</sup> *Unhealthy Societies: the afflictions of inequality*, RG Wilkinson, (1996).

<sup>70</sup> *The Policy Implications of Social Capital*, NESF Report No., 28 (October 2003).

6.17 ● The wide inequalities in health status between different groups, as evidenced by indicators such as life expectancy, mortality and sickness<sup>71</sup>, are strongly linked to unemployment<sup>72</sup> and, in the Irish context, are well documented in various reports, notably in his first annual report in 1999 by the present Chief Medical Officer, Dr. James Kiely; in the Institute of Public Health’s report in 2001 entitled *Inequalities in Mortality 1989-1998* and in *Health in Ireland – Hard Facts* by the Department of Public Health and Primary Care in TCD and in *Health in Ireland – An Unequal State*, report by the Public Health Alliance, Ireland, June 2004 (see also Figure 8 below).

**Figure 8** Standardised mortality rates by socio-economic group



Source: *The Sociology of Health and Illness in Ireland*, A. Cleary and M. Treacy, University College Dublin Press, 1997.

<sup>71</sup> As highlighted in the WHO 2002 European Health Report, the “central task in improving health is to reduce socio-economic inequalities”

<sup>72</sup> *Unemployment and Health*, B. Nolan and C. Whelan, ESRI, 1997.

- 6.18 ● In its *Annual Report 2000*, the World Health Organisation ranked Ireland eleventh out of the fifteen EU Member States in terms of the responsiveness of health systems across countries<sup>73</sup>. This is a measure of how well health systems perform in meeting the expectations of patients in relation, for example, to respect and dignity, prompt attention, quality of basic amenities and choice of care provider.
- 6.19 ● As already mentioned, the Government, in its 2001 Health Strategy, placed equity and fairness among the key principles and stated that *“equity will be central to developing policies (i) to reduce the difference in health status currently running across the social spectrum in Ireland, and (ii) to ensure equitable access to services based on need”*. The Strategy went on to say that *“the current mix of public and private beds in the public hospital system ... raises serious challenges, which must be addressed in the context of equity of access for public patients”*. It concluded by promising that *“access to services to be more equitable – the perceived two tier aspect of healthcare to be eliminated”*.
- 6.20 ● However, the necessary measures and programmes to make progress in achieving the Strategy’s aims on *“equity of access”* have not been as successful as was originally intended. For example, one key target, namely that of eliminating hospital lists by June of this year, has not been met, although notable progress has been made. It is also unlikely that the targets which were set subsequently in the NAPS of reducing the *“gap between the lowest and highest groups by at least 10% for circulatory diseases, for cancers and for injuries and poisoning by 2007”* will be met.
- 6.21 ● The difficulties in our health system are most in evidence in relation to bed capacity in our hospitals. However, progress is being made in this area as the data provided by the Department on the increase in the number of beds that have been commissioned show. But the bulk of hospital beds closed as a result of the recent cut-backs in funding involved beds that were designated for public patients. At the same time, access to public hospitals by private patients has remained largely unaffected. A devastating critique of our public hospital system has been provided by Dr. David Hickey, one of our leading consultants<sup>74</sup>. The lack of bed capacity – we have one of the lowest ratios of acute hospital beds per thousand of the population in the OECD, although the average length of stay is shorter here than elsewhere – is a central problem in our health service and we are still trying to deal with the loss of over 3,000 beds that were closed in the 1980s. Further closures followed in the 1990s.
- 6.22 ● The Government’s initiative in establishing the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF), which purchases private care for public patients, is welcome but it is difficult to reconcile this with the cut-backs in hospital beds that are primarily affecting public patients. The improvements made in the data presentation on waiting times is also welcome, as is the focus

---

<sup>73</sup> *Annual Report 2000, WHO, Geneva.*

<sup>74</sup> See his article in *Acute Healthcare in Transition in Ireland: Change, Cutbacks and Challenges*, Professor Ray Kinsella, (2003).

now by the NTPF of setting three months as the maximum waiting time. But the NESF proposed that the data should also reflect “*the time spent waiting*” to see a specialist after referral by a GP as well as the time spent subsequently in waiting for hospital care. At present there are wide differences, with public patients having to wait much longer than private patients. However, the recent significant increases in the number of consultant posts should help to improve this situation.

- 6.23** ● It is accepted, of course, that the setting of medical priorities is a matter for the clinicians concerned. However, as the recent Brennan Commission report pointed out, the public-private mix in our public hospitals results in a conflict of interest for consultants between meeting the needs of public patients on the one hand and prioritising and using publicly-provided resources in public hospitals for private patients on the other. This also raises issues of fair competition with private hospitals as the resources used are subsidised and are not charged for fully.
- 6.24** ● In the Health Strategy there was a commitment to publishing new legislation that would clarify and codify provisions in relation to access to services, in terms of entitlement rather than eligibility. However, this has not yet been delivered and should now be given greater priority. One of the NESF’s concerns about the undermining of public provision has been allayed to some extent with the Minister’s decision to establish the Health Services Accreditation Board. But this will only help if the public system is adequately resourced and managed. Another important development in this area will also be the establishment of the Health Information and Quality Authority.
- 6.25** ● The NESF also welcomes the Department’s commitment to a partnership approach and the comprehensive steps that have been taken to this end that are outlined in its reply in Box 6 above. However, greater commitment is needed to establish and resource a Community and Voluntary Sector (CVS) Activity Unit in the Department and in developing ‘active partnerships’ across the full spectrum of the CVS in the healthcare area.
- 6.26** ● Given Ireland’s significant increased spend on health in recent years, further investment will be difficult to justify unless this is accompanied by radical structural reforms in how the system is managed and financed. This should include all options, including that of a comprehensive social insurance system. This underlines the importance of the Health Service Reform Programme, announced by the Government in June 2003, which draws on the conclusions and recommendations of two reports, namely the Commission on Financial Management and Control Systems (the Brennan Commission) and the Audit of Structures and Functions in the Health System (the Prospectus report).
- 6.27** ● The third report on medical staffing and re-organisation in our acute hospitals (the Hanly report) completes the Government’s package of reforms in the health services. This involves a major programme of change over the next decade designed, *inter alia*, to achieve better outcomes,

improved and safer services, integrated hospital networks, closer linkages with primary care services through GPs and the evolving primary care teams and the wider process of reform.

- 6.28** ● Implementation of the Hanly report's recommendations, which have already been accepted by the Government, will involve major challenges and difficult decisions by all the interests involved, not only by the Government in providing leadership and resources but also commitment, co-operation and willingness to negotiate by the medical and other support staff through the established industrial relations machinery. Already, however, there have been critical comments on the slow pace, the fragmented approach to implementation, and the levels of expertise and capacity within the system to drive the process of change<sup>75</sup>.
- 6.29** ● However, the Government has now established the Interim Board of the Health Services Executive as well as the the National Steering Committee whose roles will be to oversee the implementation of its Reform Programme. A change management team is up and running in the Health Services Executive and the Department of Health and Children is engaged in joint working with the interim body on streamlining of identified agencies, human resources and industrial relations issues, financial transitions, service planning and communications. This groundwork is a welcome development which will greatly assist the Reform Programme.
- 6.30** ● This Reform Programme provides a unique opportunity to build a planned and systematic equality focus into the new structures and organisations involved in the planning and delivery of the health services. The Equality Authority could make a useful contribution to the development of such a strategy.
- 6.31** ● The changes needed to bring about improvements in the treatment of public patients and in achieving greater equity for the most vulnerable groups in our society will have to be radical as no re-jigging or fine-tuning at the edges will make meaningful progress in these areas. In essence, what is now required is a fundamental examination of the public-private mix in our public hospitals. This is uniquely high by European standards and is the main contributory factor to the 'two-tier' health system that we have. These changes should be a central plank in the Government's negotiations on consultants' contracts.
- 6.32** ● The NESF, therefore, repeats its call for an independent study to be made of alternative models and structures in other countries that do not have anything like the inequities that we have and urges that this study should now be given top priority by the Senior Officials Group that reports

---

<sup>75</sup> *Reforming the Irish Health Services, address by Professor Niamh Brennan to the Annual Conference of the Adelaide Society on 11 October 2003.*

to the Cabinet Committee which meets regularly on the Health Strategy. The following comments in a study<sup>76</sup> that was published in 2003 are instructive in this regard:

*“Continued crisis in the health system, even after recent large increases in spending, has provoked impatient and ill-informed political scepticism about the efficacy of investing in health. Yet, it could have been predicted that, without reform of the deep-rooted inequities and irrationalities of the health care system, and necessarily therefore confronting vested interests, the health system would remain in crisis”.*

- 6.33** ● On a somewhat similar note, quantified research findings by Layte and Nolan<sup>77</sup>, using data from the *Living in Ireland* survey, suggest that the lower income groups in our society have a large unmet need for healthcare (those in the lower income quintiles have a larger proportionate share of chronic illness than those in the richer income quintiles). This in turn implies that the current structure of our system restricts equality of access by poorer groups to healthcare services. For example, the richest one fifth of the population has the highest access to hospital specialists.
- 6.34** ● As noted by Wiley<sup>78</sup> the present policy commitment to an unspecified ‘mix’ of public and private is becoming more challenging as the number with private insurance approaches 50% of the population. Prioritising this ‘balance’ becomes more important if the thrust of the Government’s health reform programme is to be successful. One of the key issues that has to be considered in the pending review of the Consultants’ contracts is the differential way that public and private patients are treated at present.
- 6.35** ● The danger that the policy response to the ‘system failure’ in our health system may result in even more controls from our already centralised system of administration has been pinpointed in a recent article<sup>79</sup> by Dr. Fergus O’Ferrall. As a counter to this, he advocates the need for new approaches, drawing on the new thinking on governance and policy-making<sup>80</sup>, with the Government playing an ‘enabling’ rather than a ‘controlling’ role and ‘people-centeredness’ and the development of social capital at the heart of the policy-making process in the health services.
- 6.36** ● Finally, the NESF welcomes the moves by the Competition Authority to expand its work in the health sector<sup>81</sup> and urges in this regard that the Authority should pay particular attention on the need to achieve a balance between competition principles and the goals of equity and other social policy considerations.

---

<sup>76</sup> *Unhealthy State*, Maev-Ann Wren, March 2003.

---

<sup>77</sup> *Equity in the Utilisation of Health Care Services in Ireland*, Layte and Nolan, ESRI, November 2003.

---

<sup>78</sup> *Potential Pitfalls along the Path to Health System Reform*, Professor Miriam Wiley, ESRI, in *Public Affairs*, December 2003.

---

<sup>79</sup> *Reforming Healthcare*, *Studies*, Autumn 2003.

---

<sup>80</sup> *Understanding Governance – Policy Networks, Governance, Reflexivity and Accountability*, Robert Rhodes, Open University, 1997.

---

<sup>81</sup> *‘Competition in the Irish Health Sector’*, address by Mr. John Evans, Competition Authority, at the Dublin Economic Workshop, October 2003.



VII

## Conclusions

### Overall Policy Impact of the NESF

- 7.1 ● The NESF continues to fulfil a unique role in providing a link, through its Oireachtas Members (Strand One), between elected political representatives and the social partnership process and organisations. Moreover, the NESF nowadays seeks to establish a new dynamic balance in the policy design process that requires mobilising people in new ways, encouraging experimentation and different approaches, identifying successful pilot initiatives and establishing how best these can be accepted and mainstreamed at the national level.
- 7.2 ● Earlier Sections of this report have pinpointed how the responses from Government Departments have varied in following up on NESF recommendations. These have not been as positive and decisive as could have been the case in certain instances. Nevertheless, the NESF believes that, when viewed in the overall, it has continued to input and influence Government policy decisions for the better. Moreover, the political impartiality of its advice has continued to be a distinguishing feature of its work.
- 7.3 ● Over the longer-term, what may be seen as its most lasting contribution is likely to have been the role that the NESF has played in having greater policy priority given by successive Governments here over the last decade to equality and social inclusion issues as well as a more effective and sustainable balance between economic and social policies.
- 7.4 ● The NESF keeps its structures and working arrangements under regular review and makes whatever changes are necessary to these in the light of experience. More generally, and drawing on the discussions at a NESC Conference in 2003<sup>82</sup>, now is an opportune time to stand back and take a critical look at the social partnership process as a whole, as well as its supporting institutions, with a view to enhancing its capacity to:
  - contribute to the resolution of policy issues which are tending nowadays to be more complex than was the case in the past;

<sup>82</sup> *Deliberation and Public Policy*, NESC, November 2003.

- drive change and be part of the solution, rather than becoming a barrier and part of the problem;
- provide greater vision, leadership and encouragement to facilitate organisational changes, both in the private and public sectors, and with greater focus on outcomes, as distinct from inputs and process issues;
- deliver real change and reform in the public sector;
- give greater priority to implementation issues, especially the need for greater delegation, decentralisation and experiment more so as to take better account of local needs and of local knowledge; and
- refine its structures and working methods to better reflect changing trends in the workplace, in technology, in welfare and in society.

Given its functions and composition, the National Economic and Social Development Office could play a central role in such a review.

## Future Policy Challenges

**7.5** ● As underlined consistently by the NESF in its work, seeking a better balance between economic and social issues in our society should be seen as a necessary basis to ensuring that growth and prosperity are sustainable into the future<sup>83</sup>. The challenges involved in this have to be addressed not only by government but also by all the other actors and interest groupings in our society, if the multi-dimensional and deep-rooted problems and issues involved are to be effectively tackled. In the following paragraphs we comment briefly on a selected number of these challenges in the following sequence:

- Creating an Inclusive Labour Market
- Levels of Social Expenditure and their Financing; and
- Delivery of Quality Public Services.

These will also provide key reference points and serve as the backdrop in the consideration and finalisation of the NESF's 2004-2006 Work Programme.

## Creating an Inclusive Labour Market

**7.6** ● Trends in the evolution of the labour force in recent years are outlined in Table 2 below. While long-term unemployment has fallen dramatically in recent years, this trend has, however, been reversed recently. Long-term unemployment has risen to 32% of the total number unemployed, and

<sup>83</sup> The European Commission in a report (entitled "Choosing to grow: Knowledge, innovation and jobs in a cohesive society") to the Spring European Council last year, highlighted that those Member States who perform best are those where the principles of active welfare policies are applied with the greatest consistency and commitment.

now accounts for 1.4% of the labour force. This increase largely comprised men and women in the 25-44 year age group. Approximately half of unemployed men (and one third of unemployed women) aged 45 years or over are now long-term unemployed. This problem is much greater in disadvantaged urban and rural areas where, as mentioned previously, there has been little improvement over the last decade in their position compared to the rest of the country.

**Table 2 Irish Labour Force Trends, 1993 – 2003**

Years	1993	1995	1997	1999	2001	2002	2003
	'000s						
Labour Force	1,403	1,459	1,539	1,710	1,816	1,859	1,899
Employment	1,183	1,282	1,380	1,614	1,745	1,777	1,811
Unemployed	220	177	159	95	70	82	88
Long Term Unemployed (LTU)	125	103	86	40	21	23	27
Unemployment Rate %	16	12.2	10.3	5.6	3.9	4.4	4.6
LTU Rate %	8.9	7.1	5.6	2.3	1.2	1.3	1.4

Source: CSO QNHS Second Quarter, 2004. (annual averages)

**7.7** ● The 2002 Census of Population shows that the number of people who classified themselves as unemployed, on the basis of their stated Principal Economic Status, came to over 159,000, representing an overall unemployment rate measured on this basis of 8.8%<sup>84</sup>. Altogether, there were some 88 urban and rural areas unemployment blackspots recorded which had an average unemployment rate of more than 24% (see Table 3 below) – three times the national average.

**7.8** ● The labour supply is forecast<sup>85</sup> to decline substantially over the next 15 years – from 3.5% to 0.4% per annum – as both the rates of natural increase and female participation fall. An FÁS/ESRI report<sup>86</sup> expects that the demand for skilled and unskilled manual workers, other than maintenance workers, will decline in the future and that approximately 60% of new jobs will require higher education, with almost all the remainder requiring upper secondary education. A recent ESRI report<sup>87</sup> found that Ireland has less equality of opportunity than most other European countries and that this has changed little over the last thirty years, despite the huge expansion in education and economic growth.

<sup>84</sup> The differences between the various measurements of unemployment were outlined in the NESF's Report No.13, May 1997.

<sup>85</sup> Building the Economy: Medium Term Prospects, John FitzGerald, ESRI, November 2003.

<sup>86</sup> Occupational Employment Forecasts by Region for 2010, FÁS/ESRI Manpower Forecasting Studies, Report No.11, January 2004.

<sup>87</sup> Economic Change, Social Mobility and Meritocracy: Reflections on the Irish Experience, ESRI Quarterly Economic Commentary, Autumn, 2004.

This reinforces the need for effective education and training measures and other social inclusion measures to support disadvantaged groups into employment, if our economic growth is to be underpinned into the future.

**Table 3** Unemployment Blackspots, at Electoral Division Level, by County, in 2002

County	Number and Location	Average Unemployment	Average Unemployment Rate
Cork City	11	163	24.7
Dublin City	15	341	24
Donegal	18	105	25.2
Galway County	6	134	27.6
Limerick City	11	147	24.8
Louth	4	445	22.1
Mayo	5	95	29.9
Waterford City	6	125	24.5
Other counties	12	197	22.6
<b>Overall</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>188</b>	<b>24</b>

Source: 2002 Census of Population.

**7.9** ● One of the NESF's concerns is that long-term unemployment could become more entrenched again, particularly in disadvantaged urban and rural areas, (this concern is also highlighted in the EU's Employment Report<sup>88</sup>). The NESF does not share the contention by FÁS, in its recent Review<sup>89</sup>, that greater emphasis should now be given to up-skilling the existing workforce, rather than the unemployed. In its view, what is required instead is a more balanced use of resources, both public and private; to cater for the increase in demand for enhanced training and education measures for all such groups in the labour market. Knowledge is the new measure of power in our society and, as noted by Peter Drucker<sup>90</sup>, "From now on the key is knowledge. The world is becoming not labour intensive, not materials intensive, not energy intensive, but knowledge intensive".

<sup>88</sup> Joint Council/Commission Employment Report 2003–2004, March 2004.

<sup>89</sup> The Irish Labour Market Review 2003, FÁS, November 2003.

<sup>90</sup> Managing for the Future, Peter F. Drucker, 1992.

- 7.10** ● The interface between social welfare and income taxes (including secondary benefits such as housing and health) needs also to be regularly monitored to minimise anomalies and disincentives to taking up employment. Additional factors that need to be given greater priority are those of childcare costs and transport needs, in both urban and rural areas. Also, the measures under RAPID and CLÁR Programmes in tackling unemployment black spots (see Table 3 above) need to be intensified.
- 7.11** ● The NESF acknowledges, of course, that the tax wedge (representing the gap between wage levels paid by employers and take-home pay received by employees) has been much reduced over the period 1996-2003. It fell more sharply here than in any other OECD country<sup>91</sup>, and at a level now of 7.4% for a married person on the average industrial wage with two children, is the lowest in all of the OECD countries (the comparable figures for France and Sweden, for example are 40% and 39.5%, 18% in the UK and 15% in the US), while the replacement rate (the ratio of unemployment payments to the income from work) is also more modest in this country than elsewhere<sup>92</sup>. As a result the incentives to work have been improved considerably here and this has been a factor contributing to the unprecedented increase in employment.
- 7.12** ● While there has been legislative changes in recent years to improve career leave and provide better protection for part-time workers, there is still scope for further development, as only 7% of firms here allow employees to take career breaks and only 13% of firms have introduced flexible time systems<sup>93</sup>. Also, firms need to adopt an integrated equality strategy to mobilise the potential of under-represented groups in the labour force<sup>94</sup>.
- 7.13** ● The scale and range of this country's active labour market programmes (see Table 4 below) is, as the OECD has pointed out, still relatively large – despite the recent dramatic fall in unemployment – and their effectiveness needs to be kept under review so as to minimise potential deadweight and replacement effects. It may be argued, of course, that programmes such as Community Employment have moved away from their original aim of re-integrating the long-term unemployed into employment and have effectively become more public service providers.

---

<sup>91</sup> *Taxing Wages*, OECD, 2004.

<sup>92</sup> *OECD Economic Surveys, Ireland, July 2003*; more recent data from the EU Commission shows that the 'unemployment trap' (which measures the combined effect of increased taxes and benefits withdrawal on taking up a job) is now the third lowest here in the EU.

<sup>93</sup> *The Irish Labour Market Review 2002*, FÁS, 2002.

<sup>94</sup> *Building an Inclusive Workforce*, The Equality Authority, January 2004.

**Table 4** Numbers ('000s) Participating on Active Labour Market Programmes

Type of Programme	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
FÁS Training	12.0	13.0	12.0	11.0	14.0	11.0
Community Employment	40.0	39.0	36.0	33.5	25.0	20.0
Back to Work Allowances	24.0	37.5	39.0	32.0	27.0	17.0
VTOS	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.5	6.0	5.7
Tourism Training	11.5	11.0	11.0	12.0	12.0	12.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>92.5</b>	<b>105.5</b>	<b>103.0</b>	<b>94.0</b>	<b>84.0</b>	<b>65.7</b>
Nos. Unemployed	106.0	89.0	69.0	79.5	84.0	88.0

Source: FÁS and reproduced in the OECD's July 2003 Economic Survey of Ireland for years 1998-2002. For 2003, relevant Agencies reports.

- 7.14** ● The EU evaluation of the first five years of the European Employment Strategy<sup>95</sup> concluded that labour market programmes alone rapidly reach their limits when they are not part of a wider approach that also encompasses complementary social inclusion measures in other policy areas. This has long been advocated over the years by the NESF in its policy recommendations. In June last the EU Employment and Social Affairs Council agreed new employment guidelines, also including specific recommendations for the individual Member States. In the case of this country, these recommendations related to increasing the supply and affordability of childcare, a renewed emphasis on gender equality measures, active labour market measures/making work pay and lifelong learning.
- 7.15** ● Best practice models of regional and local governance – featuring a strong involvement of social partners and civic society and the mobilisation of all relevant actors – can, as experience both here and elsewhere has shown, enhance the outcomes of labour market measures in terms of initiating experimental approaches, mainstreaming best practice and advising on improvements in the design and delivery of services. Successful research by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions has pinpointed the need for setting objectives and establishing quality standards that are relevant to particular groups and local settings and for more autonomy to be given to local actors in developing and implementing policies.

<sup>95</sup> Impact Evaluation of the European Employment Strategy, European Commission, 2002.

- 7.16** ● The unemployed are not a homogenous group and successful case studies show the need for new and more flexible policy responses<sup>96</sup>. In this regard, there has been critical comment, for example, in relation to the design of the High Support Process<sup>97</sup> where it is considered that FÁS has focused too heavily to-date on just the training needs of the individual, rather than a more person-centred approach to addressing employability barriers.
- 7.17** ● This was one of the key recommendations made in the NESF's original report back in 1994<sup>98</sup> that led to the establishment of the Local Employment Service. Such a holistic approach is now needed more than ever in the development of employment measures and services at the local level and the creation of better links between the National Employment Action Plans and the NAPS. In short, active labour market policies should be tailored more to meet individual needs and also embody a clear and easily-understood balance between opportunities, obligations and incentives for those involved. A recent OECD report<sup>99</sup> has again highlighted the need to strengthen career guidance for adults in this country through, for example, contracting more services out to community groups.
- 7.18** ● ESRI research shows that nearly 17% of households in poverty are headed by employees while the incidence of poverty has doubled among those at work here since 1994<sup>100</sup>. The assertion by successive governments here that employment is the best route out of poverty is not, therefore, necessarily true in all cases – at EU level, the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) has recently pointed out that there are some five million people who are facing poverty and who are unemployed, but there are some 11.4 million people facing poverty who are in employment. Another important finding is that, in contrast to the situation in the UK, as the unemployment rate went down<sup>101</sup>, those living in jobless households in this country have fallen from 15.4% in 1993 to 8.5% of the population in 2002. On a less positive note, a further study<sup>102</sup> shows that, despite the economic boom in recent years, jobless households continue to suffer from high levels of deprivation, with 74% of these still below the 50% poverty median income line.

---

<sup>96</sup> *Access to Employment for Vulnerable Groups, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2002.*

<sup>97</sup> *Eliminating Long Term Unemployment, INOU Briefing Paper, October 2003.*

<sup>98</sup> *Ending Long-term Unemployment, NESF Report No. 4, June 1994.*

<sup>99</sup> *Career Guidance and Public Policy: Bridging the Gap, OECD, February 2004.*

<sup>100</sup> *Monitoring Poverty Trends, ESRI, July 2002.*

<sup>101</sup> *The Irish Employment Boom and the Distribution of Work, Professor Brendan Walsh, UCD, November 2003.*

<sup>102</sup> *Work-poor Households: The Welfare Implications of Changing Household Employment Patterns, ESRI, March 2004.*

- 7.19** ● A greater emphasis and priority needs to be given to preventative measures, providing a wider range of training and education measures, improving the quality of jobs available and also addressing the education and life-long learning capacity and skills of people already in employment<sup>103</sup>. This is crucial if the NAPS targets – to eliminate long-term unemployment not later than 2007 and to reduce the level of unemployment experienced<sup>104</sup> by vulnerable groups towards the national average by 2007 – are to be met. As pointed out recently by FÁS<sup>105</sup>, this will require more resources.
- 7.20** ● Experience both here and at EU level shows that access to lifelong learning opportunities is weakest for groups who need it most such as the disabled, older workers, the educationally-disadvantaged, immigrants and temporary workers. Recent research from the EU Commission and OECD<sup>106</sup> confirms that the risk of unemployment for the low-skilled is reduced, had they been provided with training supports when they had a job.
- 7.21** ● As part of our implementation of the EU Employment Guidelines, and to prevent the drift into long-term employment, anyone aged 18-54 who is over six months unemployed is now referred by the Department of Social and Family Affairs to FÁS who engages with them with the aim of placing them on an appropriate job, training or education scheme. However, as the following table shows the success of this process has been limited. This may be further affected by Government cutbacks in education and employment measures for the long-term unemployed and other disadvantaged groups. The recent EU 2003–2004 Employment Report<sup>107</sup> has also been critical on the lack of an overall coherent framework in the wide range of education and training initiatives that have been introduced in this country in recent years.

---

<sup>103</sup> *Labour Market Issues for Older Workers, NESF Report No. 26, February 2003.*

<sup>104</sup> *For a Better Quality of Work, European Foundation, 2001.*

<sup>105</sup> *Op.cit.*

<sup>106</sup> *OECD Employment Outlook 2004*

<sup>107</sup> *Op.cit.*

**Table 5 National Employment Action Plan: Summary of Referral Results, 2001 – 2003**

	July-01		July-03	
	Referrals	%	Referrals	%
Number Referred	11,323	100	21,290	100
Left Live Register (LR)	5,562	49	9,071	43
Numbers Interviewed	7,456	66	13,526	64
Of these – Placed in Jobs/Programmes	1,979	27	2,871	21
FÁS interviewees off the LR	3,807	51	5,427	40
Non-Attendees	2,709	24	5,799	27
Non-Attendees now off LR	1,755	65	3,644	63

Source: INOU, October 2003

- 7.22** ● Due to internal differences, the Standing Committee on the Labour Market, that was chaired by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, has completed its Review of the Active Labour Market Programmes (including Community Employment, Jobs Initiative, Education, Training and Back to Work Programmes) but was unable to reach a consensus on policy reforms. As a result, the future structures of Community Employment and Jobs Initiative have still to be decided on by the Government.
- 7.23** ● A separate review of the Social Economy Programme was commissioned by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and is also to be considered as part of the above processes. Substantial overhauls to this Programme<sup>108</sup> have been called for. The Government has indicated that the views of the Social Partners will be taken into account before final decisions are taken, but the extent to which this will be the case remains to be determined.

<sup>108</sup> *Achieving Inclusion, CORI Justice Commission, September 2003.*

- 7.24 ● A review of the two strands of the National Employment Service – the FÁS Employment Service (ES) and Local Employment Service (LES) – has recently been completed and proposals on the future operation of the Employment Service are expected to be submitted to the Government in the near future.

## Levels and Financing of Social Expenditure

- 7.25 ● Drawing on a recent report<sup>109</sup> and others (notably Esping-Andersen), a number of key strategic policy issues that call for attention under this heading are as follows:
- the level of resources that should be allocated to social expenditure in a society that is committed to social justice; in the decade up to 1999, *social security* transfers (which includes cash benefit expenditure but excludes service expenditure such as health and housing) as a percentage of our GDP fell from 14% to under 10%, while the EU 15 average remained broadly unchanged at 17% over this period<sup>110</sup>;
  - these transfers reduced the risk of poverty here from 36% of the population to 21% in 2001, but this was one of the lowest reductions in the EU where the average is 15%<sup>111</sup>, while Sweden has the lowest risk at only 10% (see *The Lisbon Scorecard IV*, Centre for European Reform, March 2004);
  - social expenditure is strongly related to the poverty rates across countries (see Figure 9 overleaf); a study of the Swedish social model<sup>112</sup> found that narrowing wage differentials, while at the same time sustaining welfare benefits, can go a long way to eliminating poverty, if this is also complemented with high incentives to work;

---

<sup>109</sup> *Irish Social Expenditure in a Comparative International Context*, Dr. Virpi Timonen, (Combat Poverty Agency, 2003).

<sup>110</sup> Caution is needed in interpreting these figures; for example, unlike the situation in most other countries, Ireland's GDP exceeds its GNP by nearly 20% due to the operations of multinational companies here; moreover, social expenditure is also affected by a number of other factors including voluntary private social expenditure (e.g. on pensions), demographics and tax expenditure; for detailed analysis see NESF No. 111 *op cit.* and J. Lawlor and C. McCarthy (Irish Banking Review, Autumn 2003); however, using either GDP or GNP, this country's social spending is still one of the lowest in Europe (see *Achieving Inclusion*, CORI Justice Commission, September 2003).

<sup>111</sup> EU Joint Inclusion Report, December 2003, *op cit.*

<sup>112</sup> *The Welfare State in Transition: Reforming the Swedish Model*, Freeman et al, Chicago University Press (1997).

Figure 9 Social Spending Reduces Poverty<sup>113</sup>

Source: OECD Secretariat (2003).

- this expenditure has to cover not only traditional social risks but also the reconciliation of work/family life and an ageing population; for example, public expenditure on pensions here is expected to increase to 6.7% of GNP over the next 20 years, compared to 4.6% at present<sup>114</sup>;
- establishing policy priorities needs to be given greater attention; one such area is that of better and more affordable childcare provision; the link between good quality childcare and tackling disadvantage has been highlighted already in Section II as well as in a number of recent publications (NESC No. 111 op cit; OECD, 2003)<sup>115</sup>;

<sup>113</sup> Relatively high social spending is also strongly correlated to employment levels, with the Nordic countries, for example, such as Sweden and Norway, having the highest employments rates of 74% and 76% respectively in the EU; this reflects the emphasis on focusing social spending in these countries on measures to support employment.

<sup>114</sup> Adequate and sustainable pensions, joint EU Council/Commission Report, September 2003.

<sup>115</sup> OECD (2003) Social Policies, Family Types and Child Outcomes in Selected OECD Countries, OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers No. 6.

- the issue of who pays for these services as between the markets, the family and government (the so-called ‘welfare triangle’<sup>16</sup>) and the distinction and choices made between universal provision on the one hand (as in the Scandinavian countries, who also tend to be more successful in achieving greater income equality) and means-tested services on the other as in this country and the UK; (expenditure subject to means-testing accounted for, on average, around 10% of total social protection spending in the EU, but in Ireland this amounts to almost 28% and to 17% in the UK<sup>17</sup>);
- the arrival of the ‘third way’ as a new policy approach in the 1990s in countries such as the UK and Germany has placed the emphasis on individual responsibility and empowerment of citizens to meet their welfare needs on the labour market through training and lifelong learning; the basic idea here is not, however, that far removed from what has been for years one of the underlying features of the Scandinavian model;
- the structure of financing the system has differing economic effects in terms of redistribution, income equality and work incentives; this country has been ranked second lowest in a list of OECD countries by reference to the share of employer/employee/income taxes paid relative to labour costs<sup>18</sup>;
- the balance in the allocation of resources between welfare benefits and active labour market programmes (as well as better integration between the tax and social welfare codes) to improve the employment prospects of those who participate; OECD studies show that policies in Canada, the Netherlands, Denmark, the UK and the USA have been particularly successful in getting those who had been excluded back into work;
- but promoting labour market participation is not a substitute for income distribution and in the provision of adequate benefits to people who need them; more work does not mean less poverty; in the US and the UK, for example, there are more people at work and for longer hours but there is also now more poverty<sup>19</sup>; however, the Scandinavian countries show how it is possible to succeed in providing extensive social protection systems while at the same time achieving high labour force participation rates; and
- more generally, the trade-off between equity and efficiency considerations in the design, structure and delivery of the social protection system needs to be reviewed on a regular basis; as the NESF has pointed out, there is “a historic opportunity to now guide the evolution of Ireland’s social assistance and social insurance systems to align and

---

<sup>16</sup> *Why We Need A New Welfare State*, Gosta Esping-Andersen, Oxford University Press, 2002.

<sup>17</sup> *Modernising Social Protection for More and Better Jobs*, European Commission, Com (2003), Brussels.

<sup>18</sup> *Annual Competitiveness Report 2002*, National Competitiveness Council/ Forfás, November 2003.

<sup>19</sup> *Those of working age in the UK who are living in poverty have risen from 13% to 24% of the population over the last 20 years* (see the article by Professor Nickell in the *Economic Journal*, Spring 2004).

*converge into a truly developmental welfare state that secures social inclusion while respecting economic exigencies*<sup>120</sup>.

- 7.26** ● A recently-published study comparing expenditures across countries<sup>121</sup> has come forward with a number of conclusions which have important implications for policy purposes viz.:
- contrary to traditional beliefs, the net national costs of government social programmes are virtually zero; the reason for this is that welfare states, such as the Nordic countries, take more care in choosing the design of taxes and transfers so as to avoid compromising growth;
  - again, contrary to the views of many economists and the ideology of many politicians, social spending has contributed to, rather than inhibited, economic growth; the richer the country the more it transfers to the poor;
  - social programmes differ greatly in how they redistribute between rich and poor, and just adding and comparing expenditures is not a measure of their redistribution effects; and
  - broad universalism in taxes and entitlements fosters growth better than low-budget countries' preferences for strict means-testing and complicated tax compromises.
- 7.27** ● In his categorisation of welfare systems, Esping-Andersen<sup>122</sup> classifies this country as belonging to the UK/US models where welfare provision is limited to acute market failures. Here the dominant thrust, as he sees it, is towards a *“residual role of targeting benefits only to the demonstrably needy”*. As a consequence of this, the middle classes are encouraged to opt for private insurance (the health sector is a good example of the trend in this country), while governments have strengthened income testing and are shifting the emphasis from conventional needs-tests to work-conditional benefits.
- 7.28** ● However, Esping-Andersen considers that this approach has major drawbacks, most notably if benefits are work-conditional, and also they then do not help those who are not at work:
- subjecting eligibility to a needs-test will most likely result in benefits at a low level and coverage gaps, and welfare dependency are likely to be substantial;
  - work-conditional benefits may also exert downward pressure on wages;
  - private welfare insurance may relegate lower income households to the status of second-class citizens;

---

<sup>120</sup> *An Investment in Quality Services, Inclusion and Enterprise, NESG. (2002).*

<sup>121</sup> *Growing Public: Social Spending and Economic Growth Since the Eighteenth Century, Peter Lindert, University of California, 2004.*

<sup>122</sup> *Op. cit.*

- as international experience shows, targeted welfare results in very high poverty rates; and
- the model results in limited policy options for future policy reforms, as the middle classes will be less willing to pay higher taxes, particularly when they also have to pay for private insurance.

- 7.29** ● International league tables are used however, to buttress two diametrically opposed policy positions. One side argues that these data confirm that higher public social spending is an obvious option for securing greater equity and social cohesion, if only there was the political will to do this. On the other hand, the opposite extreme takes the view that the low taxation system that we now have has been the cornerstone of Ireland's recent prosperity and the basis for the unprecedented job creation that has radically improved social outcomes here in recent years.
- 7.30** ● The latter viewpoint also suggests that Ireland's relatively low social spending by international standards should, therefore, be seen as an opportunity, rather than as a problem. It accepts that there are significant social needs where the case for further public social spending can be made, but that these should be presented on a case-by-case basis, along with accompanying organisational changes where necessary, so that proportionate improvements in outcomes are in fact realised. Indeed, as argued by O'Riordan<sup>123</sup>, unrestrained spending increases on public services, without having set down clear objectives in advance, simply postpones further the day when services reach acceptable standards.
- 7.31** ● However, certain key policy improvements in outcomes that may be sought might best be secured through additional expenditure on services, rather than through higher transfers. Providing these services improvements may also require wholly new delivery mechanisms and arrangements (see the next sub-Section beneath). Finally, it is also important to appreciate that education spending, by convention, is not included in the above international comparisons of expenditure on social protection. Education has, of course, a key role to play in remedying many of our social deficits. This will require additional resources to be allocated for this purpose.
- 7.32** ● In examining the financing of social expenditure, it needs to be borne in mind that, in relative terms, we are now a low tax economy, with the overall tax burden here at around 28% of GDP, compared to an EU 15 average of nearly 41% of GDP. This holds true, whether GNP or GDP is used as the basis of comparison (see Table 6 below)<sup>124</sup>. Indeed, Ireland is one of the very few countries whose tax/GDP ratio declined between 1990 and 2000 and where this ratio is lower than the averages for both the OECD and the EU 15 since 1970<sup>125</sup>. This country continues to be the lowest-taxed State in the EU, even within the enlarged 25-member Union<sup>126</sup>.

---

<sup>123</sup> Article by Dr. Colm O'Riordan on *Improving Irish Public Services*, *Irish Banking Review*, Summer 2004.

<sup>124</sup> A different perspective is put forward by De Buitléar and McArdle who argue that, adjusting for certain unique factors (such as our relatively low debt service interest payments, low defence spending and social security payments) the tax burden here comes to 41.7%, as compared to the EU average of 41.9%.

<sup>125</sup> *Taxation in Ireland*, John Bristow, IPA, 2004.

<sup>126</sup> *Structures of the taxation systems in the European Union, 1995-2002*, Eurostat, 2004.

**Table 6** Tax Revenue as % of GDP for selected OECD countries and for GDP/GNP in Ireland

Country	1995	1999	2000	2001	2002
Austria	41.6	44	43	45.4	44.1
Belgium	44.6	45.3	45.7	45.8	46.2
Denmark	49.4	51.5	49.5	49.8	49.4
Finland	45.1	47	47.3	46.1	45.9
France	44	45.7	45.2	45	44.2
Germany	38.2	37.7	37.8	36.8	36.2
Greece	32.4	37	37.5	36.9	34.8
Italy	41.2	43.3	41.9	42	41.1
Luxembourg	42.3	40.1	40.4	40.7	42.3
Netherlands	41.9	41.2	41.1	39.5	39.3
Norway	41.1	40.4	39	43.3	43.1
Portugal	32.5	34	34.9	32.3	33.8
Spain	32.8	35	35.2	35.2	35.6
Sweden	48.5	52.3	54	51.4	50.6
UK	34.8	36.1	37.2	37.3	35.9
EU 15	40.1	41.4	41.4	41	40.5
Ireland (GDP)	32.8	31	31.2	29.9	28
Ireland (GNP)	37	36	37	36	35

Source: OECD Revenue Statistics 2003 (with GNP ratio for Ireland calculated using CSO National Income and Expenditure data).

- 7.33** ● The income tax share (at 30%) of total tax revenue here is one of the lowest in Europe. Moreover, tax reductions over the last decade have benefited the rich most, have been far in excess of spending on welfare improvements while we now also have one of the lowest systems of capital taxes in Europe (see *Rich and Poor: Perspectives on tackling inequality in Ireland*, Cantillon, Corrigan, Kirby and O'Flynn, 2001) and also the ESRI's *Quarterly Economic Commentary* (Winter 2003). Moreover, the proportion of revenue accounted for by social security contributions here remains at only half that within the OECD and the EU 15. In most countries, these contributions account for over 30% of revenue and in only three members – Ireland, the UK and Denmark – does the proportion fall below 20%<sup>127</sup>.
- 7.34** ● The wide range of tax reliefs and exemptions that have grown up over the years enables the rich to pay relatively lower taxes than those on more modest incomes (see Table 7 beneath), with 18% of the country's top 400 earners having an effective tax rate of less than 15% (this compares with a rate of 20% at the time for the average PAYE earner). An examination by the Revenue Commissioners of a sample of 16 individuals, from these top earners, who paid effective rates of less than 7%, found that this was mainly attributable to property-based tax incentives such as those for multi-storey car parks and hotels. Moreover, an examination of those with an effective tax rate of 30% and under indicated that a substantial number of these were partners in a relatively small number of partnerships that had been set up to avail of specific incentives.

**Table 7** Effective Tax Rates of the Top 400 Earners, 1999-2000

Range of Rates %	% of Total
Less than 5	12.7
5-9	3.0
10-14	2.5
15-19	3.0
20-24	4.7
25-29	3.3
30-34	8.5
35-39	19.0
40-44	30.3
45-49	13.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Revenue Commissioners' Study on Effective Tax Rates for High Earning Individuals.

<sup>127</sup> Bristow, *op.cit.*

- 7.35** ● One of the policy implications of this, of course, is the huge loss of revenue that must be made up elsewhere to pay for public services and other policy programmes. Given that every percentage point in the tax revenue amounts to about €1 billion for the Exchequer, raising taxes here to the average European levels would, it is estimated, increase revenue by at least an extra €8 billion a year<sup>128</sup>.
- 7.36** ● However, as evidenced in reports from the ESRI and NESC, it is not so much that income tax rates here are out of line with other countries, but rather that the tax base in this country is too narrowly drawn. In a joint paper presented at the meeting last Autumn in Kenmare of the Dublin Economic Workshop, De Buitléar and McArdle argue that, given the favourable medium-term outlook for the economy, and on the basis of certain assumptions for the public finances, there is no need for a return to the restrictive spending policies or the tax increasing policies of the 1980s. The ESRI is also optimistic about our economy's growth and employment performance in the medium-term<sup>129</sup>.

## Delivery of Quality Public Services

- 7.37** ● Drawing on the above analyses, the NESF considers that now is an opportune time to plan long-overdue improvements in public services. In this regard, a medium-term perspective to the planning, funding and provision of public services is required and one that is not unduly contingent on the cyclical nature of the public finances. More generally, this should also be situated in the context of further developing the Government's capacity to tackle key policy issues in a longer-term perspective<sup>130</sup>. The NESDO could play a useful role in this regard. This would confer many advantages in terms of achieving more effective outcomes for all the interests involved, for the economy and for society as a whole<sup>131</sup>. It would also help reduce much of the uncertainty in the present system by underpinning a more rights-based approach to the provision of public services.
- 7.38** ● What is envisaged here is a parallel exercise to the five-year plan for infrastructure investment which the Minister for Finance announced as part of last year's budgetary process. Such a medium-term perspective in the planning of public services is now a distinctive feature of the new Comprehensive Spending Reviews introduced by the Labour Government in the UK; inherent in the success of this process is the positive and proactive role played by the Treasury there in moving social policy to centre stage in the policy deliberation process<sup>132</sup>.

---

<sup>128</sup> *After the Ball*, Fintan O'Toole, November 2003.

<sup>129</sup> *ESRI Quarterly Economic Commentary*, Summer 2004.

<sup>130</sup> *Promoting Longer-term Policy Thinking*, CPMR Discussion Paper No. 22, 2002.

<sup>131</sup> *The advantages of this approach in the case of health expenditure have been highlighted by Kinsella, op.cit*

<sup>132</sup> *Understanding the Finance of Welfare*, Professor Howard Glennester, LSE, May 2003.

- 7.39** ● Access to public services is of key importance to building a fairer society and, as the Combat Poverty Agency has rightly highlighted, this should now be seen as representing a form of ‘public wealth’. But public confidence on the benefits to be got from public services needs to be restored. This has been seriously eroded in recent years as large amounts of money have been allocated to certain services but this has not been conditional on achieving long-overdue structural and management reforms in the system. The health sector is a good example of this (see Section VI). An opinion poll last autumn showed<sup>133</sup> that the public would now prefer cuts in services than having to pay increased taxes to finance better services; this is complemented by other polls conducted by Amárach Consulting which found that Irish people were more selfish now and less interested in altruism beyond their immediate family.
- 7.40** ● As emphasised by Heifetz<sup>134</sup>, a key element in public services reform is to get people to accept that they are part of the solution. This has, therefore, to be found through new ways of thinking and sharing responsibility more evenly among all stakeholders, rather than expecting the public sector on its own to effect the process of change that is required. Public management and governance are in a state of flux and a central question faced by administrations everywhere nowadays<sup>135</sup> is whether the public sector has the capacity to (i) design and deliver effective and efficient services at a tax level that the electorate is prepared to accept; and (ii) can move forward to ‘outcomes’ and quality improvements in services as distinct from ‘process activities’ and ‘outcome’ considerations<sup>136</sup>.
- 7.41** ● Building on the references to social rights in the NAPS<sup>137</sup> and by the NESF<sup>138</sup>, the current social partnership agreement (*Sustaining Progress*) contains important commitments to the identification, monitoring and achievement of quality public services. The NESF welcomes this approach which it had advocated for a long time<sup>139</sup>. The issues involved in the Council of Europe’s major study on access to social rights were discussed at a seminar organised here in October 2002<sup>140</sup>.
- 7.42** ● As part of the work that now needs to be undertaken in following through on the above commitments, the OECD<sup>141</sup> has highlighted that there is still much scope for further exploiting the benefits of market mechanisms in the delivery of publicly-funded services in this country such as:
- **Benchmarking** so as to compare performance levels across providers of similar services to identify best practices;

---

<sup>133</sup> *The Irish Times*, 29 September 2003.

<sup>134</sup> Article by Ronald Heifetz, Centre for Public Management at the Kennedy School of Government, in the report by Demos, *op.cit.*

<sup>135</sup> *Public Management and Governance*, T. Bovaird and E. Löffler, 2003.

<sup>136</sup> *Public Management Reform*, C. Pollitt and G. Bouckaert, 2000, and *Performance Measurement: Getting Results*, H.P. Hatry, 1999.

<sup>137</sup> *Building an Inclusive Society, a Review of the NAPS*, (February, 2002).

<sup>138</sup> *Op.cit.*

<sup>139</sup> *Quality Delivery of Social Services*, NESF Report No. 6 (1995).

<sup>140</sup> *Social Rights and Social Cohesion*, European Institute of Social Security Seminar (2002).

<sup>141</sup> *OECD Economic Surveys, Ireland*, (2002).

- **Contracting out and competitive tendering** can achieve substantial cost savings by exerting competitive pressures on service providers<sup>142</sup>; and
- **Introducing user choice (including voucher schemes)** by allowing consumers to choose from alternative suppliers, while maintaining public funding of services.

The new executive agencies in the UK, which are autonomous entities charged with the delivery of government services there, are a step along this route. However, caution is needed as the ‘agency culture’ can, as experience in New Zealand shows, damage the government’s capacity to act as a unit. A more radical move is that of empowering citizen groups, voluntary bodies etc. to deliver government services at local levels and, in the process, dispensing with many civil service layers of administration at central level<sup>143</sup>.

- 7.43** ● One area that offers potential to enhance the delivery of public services such as health, education and community services is that of public-private-voluntary partnerships. Although originally conceived for capital infrastructure projects, the PPP model can also be applied to public services and this is now well established in several countries. This offers many advantages in terms of value for money, supporting innovation and encouraging more flexible, responsive and quality services<sup>144</sup>. The NESF supports the call made there for a greater public debate on the policy issues involved. The reported blockages and delays to developing these approaches need to be tackled more decisively by the Ministers concerned.
- 7.44** ● At the European level, there is increasing recognition being given to improving the delivery of public services and to strengthening their impact on targeted groups. For example, the EU Commission has drawn up a set of ten broad principles for good practice which the NESF supports and considers that these should be taken into account by all Government Departments and Offices in preparing the Charters of Service Standards that are to be put in place here.
- 7.45** ● There has been growing discontent in EU countries with the overall quality of public services. As noted by Hemerijck<sup>145</sup>, this derives from three factors: too little is invested in public services, administrative procedures are old-fashioned, and provision does not measure up to the diversity in needs. Hence, the need for policy change, innovation and experimentation with new forms of service provision in areas such as childcare, education and training and professional care for the elderly.

---

<sup>142</sup> In his recent Michael O’ Brien memorial lecture in Waterford, the leader of the Labour Party, Mr Pat Rabbitte TD, acknowledged that in certain instances public services should be opened up to competition to deliver a better service to the public.

<sup>143</sup> See *Re-inventing Government*, David Osborne and Ted Gaebler, 1992.

<sup>144</sup> ‘The Potential of Public-Voluntary Partnerships for the Delivery of Quality Social Services’, Frank Allen and Finbarr Bradley, *Studies*, Volume 91, Number 364.

<sup>145</sup> *Op. cit.*

- 7.46** ● In the UK, research<sup>146</sup> with both clients and service providers shows that particular types of delivery mechanisms seem to work well and may increase participation among the most vulnerable groups. These include:
- individually-tailored approaches;
  - multi-agency working;
  - joining up and customising services;
  - making services more accessible through one-stop shops and flexible timescales;
  - common objectives for all targets; and
  - providing alternative environments for delivery.
- 7.47** ● Personalisation of public services to better suit individual needs represents a new departure in the UK to the delivery of these services there. In essence, this centres on empowering customers, who are far more knowledgeable about their own needs and potential, in designing services, with the providers and other professional staff fulfilling an enabling role in this process. The advantages of this more radical approach are seen as enabling *“society to create better collective solutions with a less coercive, intrusive state, a lower tax burden, a more responsible and engaged citizenry and stronger capacity within civil society to find and devise solutions to problems without state intervention”*<sup>147</sup>.
- 7.48** ● In response to the 2002 Barcelona European Council Conclusions, the European Commission published a White Paper on Services of General Interest – these include energy, postal, transport, telecommunications, health, education and social services – with the aim of clarifying the particularities of the different sectors involved and setting the scene for a framework directive in this area in the future. One of the important points in this is that the development of EU rules – relating, for example, to competition and State aids – have now to be taken into account and these will have an impact in the future on the role and functioning of social services throughout Europe.
- 7.49** ● There is concern, however, that the framework legislation proposed by the Commission could undermine the ability of social service providers to maintain the level and quality of many services throughout Europe. Indeed, the European Social Platform is now calling for a thorough ‘mapping exercise’ of social services in the EU to be undertaken before any further steps are taken towards general EU legislation in this area. The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) has also expressed concern on the speed of liberalisation.

---

<sup>146</sup> *Tackling Social Exclusion, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, op.cit., March 2004.*

<sup>147</sup> *Personalisation through participation, a new script for public services, Charles Leadbeater, DEMOS, 2004.*

- 7.50** ● The Quality Customer Service element of the Strategic Management Initiative (SMI) has taken important steps through, for example, its guidance for Customer Service Action Plans, which establish equality/diversity as a key element to be addressed by these Plans. The Equality Authority has played a valuable role in this work and the NESF considers that organisations providing public services should now put arrangements in place to ensure this equality focus. This would include equality and diversity training for staff, equality reviews of service provision and equality action plans, partnership with groups representing customers from across the nine grounds covered by the equality legislation and gathering necessary equality data.
- 7.51** ● The Government's review of the NAPS<sup>148</sup> contains important commitments in relation to access to education, employment, health, housing and social services. For this purpose, the Strategy intends to develop indicators, which the NESF fully supports, to monitor these standards and to establish accessible, transparent and effective mechanisms for ensuring the implementation of and adherence to these standards.
- 7.52** ● The growth of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) has the potential also not only to transform the relationship between the citizen and the government but also offers new opportunities to address traditional problems of exclusion in society, for example, by offsetting the factors associated with remoteness and restricted mobility. However policy initiatives are needed to help those on the wrong side of the 'digital divide' and the citizen-centred approach should be to the fore in this process. A number of recommendations to this end were contained in a recent report by the Information Society Commission<sup>149</sup>.
- 7.53** ● Significant costs are involved in accessing the Internet for disadvantaged groups in our society. Over half of Irish people do not have access to or do not know how to use a computer, while a recent study<sup>150</sup> found that in Dublin there are considerable differences between social class categories, ranging from a high of 71% among higher professional to just 15% among those in the unskilled manual class.
- 7.54** ● While a lot has been achieved in the area of e-government and in reforming the delivery of public services, the more demanding tasks now remain, particularly as regards striking a proper balance between the interests of service providers, both at the level of management and of front-line staff, and the privacy rights of citizens and those of service users and, more generally, in joining-up and integrating the provision of public services<sup>151</sup>. The Public Services Broker has a key role to play in the electronic delivery of services and the NESF urges that its establishment should be expedited.

---

<sup>148</sup> *Building an Inclusive Society, Department of Social and Family Affairs (February, 2002).*

<sup>149</sup> *E-Government, More than an Automation of Government Services, October 2003.*

<sup>150</sup> *Digital Divide: Analysis of the Uptake of Information Technology in the Dublin Region, Report Commissioned by the Dublin Employment Pact, T. Haase and J. Pratschke (2003).*

<sup>151</sup> *E-Government and the Decentralisation of Service Delivery, CMPR Discussion Paper No. 25, 2003.*

- 7.55** ● A new approach to public services provision is that of ‘public value’<sup>152</sup>. This could be helpful in setting goals for public services reform, monitoring performance and providing different approaches and perspectives for policy analysis and debates. One of its distinct advantages over the public management techniques of the 1990s, which focused on more limited areas such as cost-effectiveness and little public participation, is that it covers the quality of services and choice, service outcomes and targets, as distinct from inputs and activity measures, and the value of trust, legitimacy and confidence between the citizen and the government.
- 7.56** ● Some of the main differences between the three different models of public services management are outlined in Box 7 overleaf. In short, the new public value approach has the potential to better inform and result in better decisions at each developing stage of the policy cycle through establishing more clearly what the public wants, providing better techniques to appraise policy options, offering a wider set of criteria in selecting public service providers, developing new measurement and reporting mechanisms, and greater accountability and innovation. For a fuller discussion of the issues involved see the UK Cabinet Office document by Gavin Kelly and Stephen Muers at [www.strategy.gov.uk](http://www.strategy.gov.uk).

---

<sup>152</sup> This has been defined as “what the public values – what they are willing to make sacrifices of money and freedom to achieve” (see ‘Creating Public Value, UK Cabinet Office, Strategy Unit’, 2002).

## Box No. 7 Approaches to Public management

	<b>Traditional public management</b>	<b>New public management</b>	<b>Public value</b>
<b>Public interest</b>	Defined by politicians/experts	Aggregation of individual preferences, demonstrated by customer choice	Individual and public preferences (resulting from public deliberation)
<b>Performance objective</b>	Managing inputs	Managing inputs and outputs	Multiple objectives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Service outputs</li> <li>• Satisfaction</li> <li>• Outcomes</li> <li>• Maintaining trust/legitimacy</li> </ul>
<b>Dominant model of accountability</b>	Upwards through departments to politicians and through them to Parliament	Upwards through performance contracts; sometimes outwards to customers through market mechanisms	Multiple <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Citizens as overseers of Government</li> <li>• Customers as users</li> <li>• Taxpayers as funders</li> </ul>
<b>Preferred system for delivery</b>	Hierarchical department of self-regulating profession	Private sector or tightly defined arms length public agency	Menu of alternatives selected pragmatically (public sector agencies, private companies, JVCs, community interest companies, community groups as well as increasing role for user choice)
<b>Approach to public service ethos</b>	Public sector has monopoly on service ethos, and all public bodies have it	Sceptical of public sector ethos (leads to inefficiency and empire building) – favours customer service	No one sector has a monopoly on ethos, and no one ethos always appropriate. As a valuable resource it needs to be carefully managed
<b>Role for public participation</b>	Limited to voting in elections and pressure on elected representatives	Limited – apart from use of customer satisfaction surveys	Crucial – multi-faceted (customers, citizens, key stakeholders)
<b>Goal of managers</b>	Respond to political direction	Meet agreed performance targets	Respond to citizen/user preferences, renew mandate and trust through guaranteeing quality services.

**7.57** ● The increased focus on raising standards and seeking to achieve greater integration in the delivery of public services should, therefore, involve everybody<sup>153</sup> engaged in the provision of these services. A recent report pinpoints a number of strategic issues and action points to push forward the reform agenda in the Civil Service here<sup>154</sup>. While important progress has been made in recent years much more remains to be done, however, as evidenced by the survey that was carried out earlier last year for the Department of the Taoiseach<sup>155</sup> which found that 20% of customers were not satisfied with the service that they were receiving. However, we are now better positioned than we ever were to tackle these issues in a more integrated and effective manner as we still have, in relative terms, one of the most robust economies and public finances in Europe and we now also have a better understanding of what will work and will not work in policy terms. Moreover, policy approaches are called for where there is more effective links and organisational changes and ‘joining up’ between the different policy components. Handling cross-cutting issues is one of the most commonly heard complaints about service delivery<sup>156</sup>, yet not enough attention has been given to examining the role of individual Government Departments in this area.

## EU Issues

**7.58** ● Although Europe is one of the richest regions and European systems of social security are among the most developed in the world, yet there are today more than 65 million people – representing 18% of the EU population – who are living with less than 60% of the median national income<sup>157</sup>. Without social welfare transfers, the risk of poverty would jump to 24% of the population, or 40% if pensioners are included<sup>158</sup>. Moreover, about half of those living below the 60% relative poverty line had been doing so for three successive years. The level of income inequality here is now the highest in the OECD area<sup>159</sup>.

**7.59** ● Our recent EU Presidency came at an important time on the European social policy agenda, with the review of the second round of the national anti-poverty plans that had been submitted by the Member States, the new Joint Council/Commission report on social inclusion (in effect, this will be a comparative document on the 15 National Plans), and the Joint Council/Commission report on employment policies in the Member States. The ten new Member States who joined the EU on the 1st of May last raise

---

<sup>153</sup> A study in the UK found that 50% of innovation in the public sector there is initiated by front-line staff and middle managers (see *The Challenge of Innovating Government*, S. Borins, 2001).

---

<sup>154</sup> *Towards a New Generation of Partnership: Change and Modernisation in the Civil Service*, National Centre for Partnership and Performance, 2003.

---

<sup>155</sup> *Irish Civil Service Customer Satisfaction Survey*, Lansdowne Market Research, January 2003.

---

<sup>156</sup> *The Management of Cross Cutting Issues*, R. Boyle, IPA, 1999; also, *The Role of Strategy Statements*, R. Boyle et al, IPA, 2000.

---

<sup>157</sup> *European Strategy in the Field of Poverty and Social Exclusion*, Pena-Casas, Degryse and Pochet, (European Social Network, 2003).

---

<sup>158</sup> Address by Mr. Jerome Vignon, European Commission, at the inaugural meeting of the NAPS Social Inclusion Forum, January 2003.

---

<sup>159</sup> At the EU level, the gap between the most and least well-off is lowest in the Nordic countries and widest in the Southern countries, the UK and in this country.

important social implications. Their entry meant an increase of nearly 30% in the EU's population while its average level of income will be reduced by almost 20%<sup>160</sup>. The level of GDP per head for the new Member States varies from 35% of the EU average for Latvia to 74% for Slovenia.

- 7.60** ● The EU's Social Policy Agenda is now focused on modernising the European social model through a more 'active welfare state' aimed at investing in people, increased competitiveness, more and better jobs, improved social services open to everybody, equal opportunities for all and guaranteed fundamental and social rights<sup>161</sup>. In this respect, it is important to note that the Mid-Term Review of the EU Social Policy Agenda (June 2003) highlighted that the most dynamic, high performance countries in the EU are those where economic and social policies interact in a positive way and the role of social policy as a productive factor integral to the dynamic development of modern, open economies and societies.
- 7.61** ● The ILO in its recent report *Social Security – A New Consensus* (2004) concurs with this view of social security as an instrument for sustainable social and economic development and stresses the need to look for synergies between policies for social protection, employment and development. This is also an important element of the Lisbon Agenda, which seeks to balance the three pillars of economic, social and environmental development. The NESF has for long advocated such integrated approaches in policy-making and delivery. In its response to the ILO World Commission Report on the Social Dimension of Globalisation, the EU Commission submitted a Communication to the Council and the European Parliament in May whose underlying aim is to ensure that the EU makes an active contribution to harnessing globalisation to serve social as well as economic goals and that the benefits are spread more evenly.
- 7.62** ● The European Council's agreement last June on the Constitution for Europe was, of course, the crowning achievement of the Irish Presidency. Ireland's initiative in tabling an amendment earlier on to the effect that the EU should "*in all of its activities aim to combat social exclusion*" represents an important step forward in strengthening EU action in this area. Other notable provisions are the inclusion in the Constitution of an article on participatory democracy and a regular dialogue at EU level with civil society organisations as well as promoting dialogue with the social partners and the Tripartite Summit, the incorporation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights, a legal base for Services of General Economic Interest and new possibilities to strengthen economic coordination within the Euro zone.

---

<sup>160</sup> *Ireland and the Future of Europe*, CORI, October 2003.

<sup>161</sup> 'Employment and Social Policies: a framework for investing in quality', European Commission Communication (Com 2001) and 'Monitoring quality of life in Europe', European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2003).

- 7.63** ● These reflections should also be seen as part of the wider debate which is just starting in the EU on the Future Financial Perspectives which sets out a draft budgetary framework for the period 2007-2013.
- 7.64** ● In its on-going monitoring of the Member States' anti-poverty strategies, the EU Commission has highlighted eight challenges that stand out for attention (see Box 8 below). The NESF in its future work programme will focus on these challenges and seek to ensure that policies and programmes are directed at providing life opportunities and resources on a more equitable basis in our society.
- 7.65** ● One of the specific instruments which is used by the EU in the area of social policy is the 'open method of co-ordination'. This is a relatively new process, and one which the NESF strongly supports. This method recognises the value of pooling experience and identifying best practices among member states, as well as supporting monitoring and peer review. It also respects national diversity. The EU report on social inclusion<sup>162</sup> is an important document and one to which the NESF attaches considerable importance, given its emphasis on ensuring effective links between economic, employment and cohesion policies, a more rigorous and effective monitoring of progress through the use of commonly-agreed indicators, a better evaluation of policies and a clearer assessment of their effectiveness and value for money.

## Box No. 8

### Challenges to Promoting Social Cohesion

- Developing an inclusive labour market and promoting employment as a right and opportunity for all;
- Guaranteeing an adequate income and resources to live in human dignity;
- Tackling educational disadvantage;
- Preserving family solidarity and protecting the rights of children;
- Ensuring good accommodation for all;
- Guaranteeing equal access to quality services (health, transport, social care, cultural, recreational and legal);
- Improving delivery of services; and
- Regenerating areas of multiple deprivation.

<sup>162</sup> Joint Council/Commission Report on Social Inclusion, March 2004.

- 7.66 ● One particular issue which stands out for attention is the extent to which public authorities here (as well as the other actors concerned) are open to and prepared to act on the policy guidelines that are drawn up under the ‘open method of co-ordination’ in the formation and implementation of social policies, the experience of what constitutes best practice, the learning that occurred and how this can be more effectively put into practice.
- 7.67 ● On a related note, the recent EU enlargement from 15 to 25 Member States will, because of the much lower levels of economic and social development in many of the new Member States, create significantly more challenges for monitoring social policies at European level and the system’s present capacity to function effectively, which is already under strain, will be severely challenged. Additional voices of concern<sup>163</sup> are that the employment and economic dimensions of the Lisbon strategy may now be given greater priority over those of the social policy goals.
- 7.68 ● Finally, the NESF supports the further streamlining of the EU’s ‘open method of co-ordination’. The NESF supports the participation by representatives of those who are experiencing poverty throughout Europe in the development of the NAPS process at EU level. This has helped to point the way forward to the continuing need and relevance of a welfare state and its role in supporting those who are most marginalised in our societies. As a European academic<sup>164</sup> put it recently *“the welfare state at the start of the 21st century should not only provide a minimum income guarantee and a health/health promotion guarantee, but also a human capital guarantee. This entails a shift from a static notion of equality, centering around material resources ... towards a more dynamic and service intensive notion based on capacities, opportunities and empowerment”*.

---

<sup>163</sup> *Social Developments in the European Union, European Social Observatory, 2004.*

<sup>164</sup> *Hemerijck, op cit.*



# Annexes

## Annex I Terms of Reference and Constitution of the NESF

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

## Annex II Membership of the NESF

Independent Chairperson	Dr. Maureen Gaffney
Deputy Chairperson	Mary Doyle, Dept. of the Taoiseach

### Strand (i) Oireachtas

Fianna Fáil	Michael Woods T.D. John Curran T.D. Pat Carey T.D. Senator Mary O'Rourke Senator Paschal Mooney Senator Brendan Daly Senator Geraldine Feeney
Fine Gael	Senator Paul Coghlan Damien English T.D. Paul Kehoe T.D.
Labour	Joan Burton T.D. Willie Penrose T.D.
Progressive Democrats	Senator Kate Walsh
Independents	Senator Feargal Quinn
Technical Group	Jerry Cowley T.D.

### Strand (ii) Employer/Trade Unions/Farming Organisations

#### *Employer/Business Organisations*

IBEC	Maria Cronin Heidi Loughheed
Small Firms' Association	Patricia Callan
Construction Industry Federation	Kevin Gilna
Chambers of Commerce/ Tourist Industry/Exporters Association	Robert O'Shea

#### *Trade Unions*

Technical Engineering & Electrical Union	Eamon Devoy
Civil & Public Service Union	Blair Horan
AMICUS	Jerry Shanahan
SIPTU	Manus O'Riordan
ITCU	Paula Carey

*Agricultural/Farming Organisations*

Irish Farmers' Association	Mary McGreal
Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers' Association	Michael Doody
Irish Co-Operative Organisation Society	Mary Johnson
Macra na Feirme	Carmel Brennan
Irish Country Women's Association	Anne Murray

**Strand (iii) Community and Voluntary Sector***Womens Organisations*

National Womens Council of Ireland	Orla O'Connor Joanna McMinn
------------------------------------	--------------------------------

*Unemployed*

INOUE	June Tinsley
ICTU Centres for the Unemployed	Patricia Short

*Disadvantaged*

CORI	Sr. Brigid Reynolds
Society of St. Vincent de Paul	John-Mark McCafferty
Pavee Point	Bríd O'Brien
Anti-Poverty Networks	Sharon Keane

*Youth/Children*

NYCI	Malcolm Byrne
Children's Rights Alliance	Raymond Dooley

*Older People*

Senior Citizen's Parliament/Age Action	Robin Webster
--	---------------

*Disability*

Disability Federation of Ireland	Aisling Walsh
----------------------------------	---------------

*Others*

The Carers' Association	Frank Goodwin
Irish Rural Link	Seamus Boland
The Wheel	Fergus O'Ferrall

## Strand (iv) Central Government, Local Government and Independents

---

### *Central Government*

Tom Considine,  
Secretary-General, Department of Finance

Paul Haran,  
Secretary-General, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment

John Hynes,  
Secretary-General, Department of Social and Family Affairs

Gerry Kearney,  
Secretary-General, Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs

Niall Callan,  
Secretary-General, Dept. of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government

---

### *Local Government*

General Council of County Councils	Councillor Constance Hanniffy
------------------------------------	-------------------------------

Association of Municipal Authorities	Councillor Patricia McCarthy
--------------------------------------	------------------------------

County and City Managers Association	John Tierney
--------------------------------------	--------------

---

### *Independents:*

Institute for the Study of Social Change, UCD	Prof. Colm Harmon
--	-------------------

Department of Sociology, NUI Maynooth	Dr. Mary P. Corcoran
---------------------------------------	----------------------

ESRI	Prof. Brian Nolan
------	-------------------

Tansey, Webster, Stewart & Company Ltd.	Paul Tansey
---	-------------

	Cáit Keane
--	------------

---

### **Secretariat**

Director	Seán Ó hÉigeartaigh
----------	---------------------

Policy Analysts	David Silke Sarah Craig Gerard Walker
-----------------	---

Executive Secretary	Paula Hennelly
---------------------	----------------

---

## Annex III NESF Publications

### (i) Forum Reports

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

## (ii) Forum Opinions

<b>Opinion No.</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Date</b>
1.	Interim Report of the Task Force on Long-term Unemployment	Mar 1995
2.	National Anti-Poverty Strategy	Jan 1996
3.	Long-term Unemployment Initiatives	Apr 1996
4.	Post PCW Negotiations – A New Deal?	Aug 1996
5.	Employment Equality Bill	Dec 1996
6.	Pensions Policy Issues	Oct 1997
7.	Local Development Issues	Oct 1999
8.	The National Anti-Poverty Strategy	Aug 2000

### Forum Opinions under the Monitoring Procedures of Partnership 2000

<b>Opinion No.</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Date</b>
1.	Development of the Equality Provisions	Nov 1997
2.	Targeted Employment and Training Measures	Nov 1997

## (iii) NAPS Social Inclusion Forum: Conference Reports

1. Inaugural Meeting on 30 January 2003

## Annex IV Structures and Working Arrangements of the NESF

### Introduction

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

### Plenary Sessions

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

### Management Committee

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

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

## Project Teams

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

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

### *Ad Hoc Working Groups*

20. Working Groups may be established on the initiative of the full NESF meeting in Plenary Session, or of its Management Committee, to consider specific issues which form part of or are related to the NESF’s Work Programme or to assist the Management Committee, for example, in the preparation of the Periodic Reports.
21. In contrast to the role of the Project Teams, which will be focussed on resolving problems on the implementation of specific policies and programmes, the above Working Groups may be used, in particular, to advance and accelerate the preparation of shorter Reports or Opinions which will be

linked in with the Government's timetable and decision-making processes. These Groups will function along the more standard lines of the NESF's former Standing Committees.

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

## NESF's Chairperson

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