

PRESS RELEASE

Woods Welcomes Third Skills Report by Expert Group on Future Skills Needs

Dr. Michael Woods T.D., Minister for Education and Science, today, 31 July 2001 welcomed the launch of the Third Skills Report by the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs.

The Minister said the Report makes important recommendations on strategies to tackle Ireland's future skills requirements, particularly in the areas of **Research, Life Sciences and Information Technology**. He said, "it is widely acknowledged that Ireland's current economic prosperity and growth has been largely underpinned by the role that education and training has played in developing the knowledge-base of our workforce. Despite the expansion in the education sector since the 1960s, new challenges are now emerging. These new challenges are particularly well illustrated in the area of the Report dealing with the **Research, Life Sciences and Information Technology** sectors."

Researchers

The Report argues for a substantial increase in the output of doctorates, particularly in science, engineering and technology and identifies a growing need to attract suitably qualified researchers from abroad to work in Ireland. The Group notes the range of initiatives introduced by the Government to promote research opportunities. These include the continuation of the Programme for Research in Third Level Institution, the establishment of Science Foundation Ireland and the establishment of the Irish Research Council for Science, Engineering and Technology to complement the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences.

Life Sciences

A continuous supply of well qualified Graduates in Life Sciences (Chemistry, Biological Sciences, Chemical Engineering, Chemical and Biological Sciences) is essential for the Pharmaceutical, Biotechnology and Healthcare sectors. While the Group concludes that there is sufficient provision at third level once the existing output is maintained, it does highlight the need to address the falling numbers of school leavers interested in studying Science at third-level.

Information Technology – Third Level Skills Provision 2001-2005

The Group revisited the work undertaken in its First Report on the supply of IT professionals and technicians and estimates that there will be an annual average shortfall of 3,300 IT graduates between 2001-2005. It recommends increased access to IT-related skills education through expanding part-time education and post-graduate conversion course opportunities.

Dr Woods said, “formal education, industry-education links, workplace education, further education, basic and applied research all contribute to the appreciation of knowledge capital. The key challenge for education now is to develop the necessary mix of creativity and skills to enable us to respond to the needs of the labour market, and to continue to develop in this vein. The **Third Report** of the **Expert Group on Future Skills Needs** is an important guide to where the focus should be and where investment should be made to address the these needs”.

The Minister added, “in responding to such a challenge, the need to provide a long-term framework in which to develop our response is essential. It is here that the work of the **Expert Group on Future Skills Needs** comes to the fore. The challenge for the **Expert Group** will be to keep pace with the fast changing environment of the Irish and world economies and to develop a coherent framework for the future planning of our skills needs. It is on foot of the timely and accurate forecasts of the **Expert Group** that our education provision must strive to ensure that the measures are put in place to meet the rapidly changing demands of the labour market in the years to come.”

“The resource implications of the Expert Group's recommendations will be addressed in the context of the Government's consideration of the annual estimates. The Government recognises the importance of such investment in skills in sustaining and improving Ireland's competitive position and promoting economic growth. I am confident that its response to the recommendations in this report will be very positive.”

Dr. Woods concluded, “in recognition of the key role played by the group, **An Tánaiste, Mary Harney, TD**, and I are issuing a new mandate to the **Expert Group**. This will reinforce the position of the **Expert Group** as a core advisory body to government on skills needs and will better reflect the breadth and depth of its work.

I again welcome the publication of its **Third Report** and look forward to the continuing work of the **Expert Group on Future Skills Needs.**”

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