Contents

	Page
Foreword – Message from the Minister for Education and Science	2
Introduction	4
Objectives and Strategies	5
General Grant Details	6
Special Needs	7
Extra Teacher Supports for Special Needs Pupils	7
The Role of the Principal	8
Teacher Training	9
The Role of Education Centres	10
The Internet	11
ScoilNet and NCTE Websites	11
Internet Safety	11
New Scheme of Innovative ICT Projects and International Collaboration	12
Partnership	14
Evaluation of the Plan	15

A Message from the Minister for Education and Science

It gives me great pleasure to publish details of the Government's new multi-million pound initiative to enhance Information and Communication Technologies in Irish education.

The Government has already invested substantially under the ***Schools IT 2000*** initiative to ensure that every pupil will have the opportunity to achieve computer and Internet literacy and be equipped for full participation in the information society before they leave school.

While exceptional progress has been made, we recognise that ICT is a growing and changing environment. It requires continual investment to keep pace with new developments and to broaden and deepen our knowledge and familiarity with ICTs.

The Government is now making a further and unprecedented investment of **€107.92m** to enhance significantly ICTs in all first and second level schools. This investment will ensure that our students and teachers remain at the cutting edge of international innovation and development in ICTs.

The investment will be delivered to schools under a 3-year Strategic Action Plan. This new Plan will provide every school in the country with substantial grants for the development of their computer infrastructure and equipment with significant extra support for special needs pupils. It will guide every Principal in the country in how to plan for the best use of that money and it will ensure that all teachers receive the training they need to maximise the use of ICT in teaching.

Evaluation of initial projects under the Plan will inform and ensure a flexible approach in response to on-going developments in ICTs. This is vital to ensure that we acquire important skills needed to secure our future economic wellbeing.

Michael Woods

Dr. Michael Woods, T.D.,
Minister for Education and Science

1 Introduction

The Government's ambitious new three year Strategic Action Plan will significantly enhance ICT in Education. Under the Plan, **€107.92m** will be invested over the period 2001 – 2003 to build on the exceptional progress which has been made over the past four years in integrating ICTs into every school in the country. This will be done by: augmenting the ICT capital provision to schools; expanding access to, and use of Internet technologies; further integrating ICTs into school curricula and the enhancement of teacher professional development. The principles underpinning the initiative are:

- A major development of wiring-networking infrastructure in all schools and the introduction of broadband access to the Internet.
- A significant lowering of the Computer/Pupil ratio
- The further development of the teaching skills to fully integrate ICT into learning and teaching
- The facilitation of Software/Multimedia Resources development for use in schools

1.1 Objectives and Strategies

In specific terms, the objectives and strategies of the new Plan are:

- **€78.72m** capital grant aid for first and second-level schools
- Priority for Special Needs students
- **€29.2m** for support services including teacher training
- The development of ICT school plans to meet individual school needs
- Locally based teacher training
- The development of Education Web resources
- A new scheme of innovative ICT projects
- Collaboration with other European countries
- Partnership with the social partners, with industry and with the broader community
- Feedback from schools to determine future priorities

2 General Grant Details

2.1 Capital Grant Aid

An unprecedented **€78.72m** in capital funding will be invested in all schools for state of the art development of infrastructure. This will include development of wiring-networking infrastructure and the provision of broadband access to the Internet.

2.2 Grant aid for Current Costs

Under the plan, every recognised first and second-level school in the country is guaranteed substantial levels of funding. In each of the years 2001 and 2002 every school will get a basic grant of **€1905 plus €19.05 per pupil** for hardware, software, networking and wiring. This means that a primary school with **250** pupils will receive **€13,332** in the first two years of the plan. A second-level school with **500** pupils will get **€22,860** over the same period.

Grants in 2003 will be at a similar level. They may, however, have a different focus depending on the feedback from schools after the first two years of the Plan. Special attention will be given to disadvantaged pupils where their needs are not already being met.

3 Special Needs

3.1 Capital Grant Aid

Additional capital grants will also be made available from the fund of **€78.72m** for the provision of ICT resources for children with special needs at primary and post-primary level in both ordinary schools and in special schools and special classes.

3.2 Current Grant Aid

The provision of top class educational supports for special needs pupils is a key Government Priority. Under this new initiative significant additional funding is being targeted to meet the specific ICT requirements of Special Needs pupils. Over **€5m** will be spent in 2001 alone on a range of ICT grants to support Special Needs pupils. On top of the basic grants, schools will receive an average of just over **€95 extra per pupil** for every pupil in every special class in mainstream schools and special schools in the country.

Resource and remedial teachers will also receive additional grant aid to equip them for the particular needs of their jobs.

The Fund which provides computer equipment for individual students with special needs will be also be expanded.

3.3 Extra Teacher Supports for Special Needs Pupils

The **National Centre for Technology in Education (NCTE)** will continue to provide support and guidance for teachers of pupils with Special Needs. Through its publications and website it will also provide up-to-date guidance and assistance on the purchase and best educational use of equipment.

The requirements of Special Needs pupils will be kept under constant review during the lifetime of the Plan.

4 The Role of the Principal

The School Principal is a key person in the successful use of ICT in learning and teaching. Many Principals also find ICT of immense benefit for administrative purposes. The Action Plan recognises the central role of Principals in determining the ICT needs of schools, planning their infrastructure and co-ordinating their training needs.

Under the Plan, every Principal in the country will be provided with the opportunity to attend workshops in local Education Centres to:

- consider the ICT level in their own schools
- be made aware of the optimum ICT infrastructure for their school and
- be shown how to develop an ICT plan for their school

Principals will be provided with information packs with general advice and guidance and a wide variety of fact sheets with information about the supports and options available in terms of equipment and services.

Information will also be given on training options and Principals will be asked, in collaboration with their staff, to analyse the ICT training needs of their own school.

ICT Advisors and the NCTE will use the information provided by Principals to arrange further ICT training courses. These will be school based where possible.

5 Teacher Training

Teachers are the central facilitators of change in education. The vast majority of our teachers have already received training in ICT skills. From an allocation of **€29.2m**, significant funding will be made available in each year of the Plan to build on and develop these skills. An important aspect of the training programme is that it is devised to meet specific needs identified by teachers themselves.

6 The Role of Education Centres

Education Centres will play a pivotal role in supporting the delivery of the Action Plan at local level. Workshops for Principals will be organised by the Centres to commence the ICT planning process. Centre based ICT Advisors will deliver back-up planning and advice services and provide training programmes for teachers in accordance with their identified needs.

7 The Internet

Under the ***Schools IT 2000*** project, all schools already have Internet connections. The new Action Plan focuses on the provision of the infrastructure to enable schools to maximise use of the Internet. A digital network for schools will be developed to provide broadband access to all schools and access to research networks. The Action Plan will ensure that all schools reach a stage where they can make use of the digital network when it becomes available.

7.1 Scoilnet and the NCTE Websites

The Scoilnet website will be developed as a portal for access to educational information and as a source of curriculum and training materials for teachers.

The NCTE's website will be upgraded, with a particular emphasis on providing up-to-date information on equipment and technological developments.

The Software Central section of the NCTE's website will be developed to assist teachers in making decisions on the selection of the software which will be most beneficial for their particular subject, class age group or ability level.

7.2 Internet Safety

Internet Safety and Security is of paramount importance in education. The safety of our pupils is a priority. Guidelines have already been issued to all schools on **Acceptable Use Policy**. The NCTE is participating at European level in the **DOT.safe** and **ONCE** projects which are studying methods to further enhance Internet security in schools.

8 New Scheme of Innovative ICT Projects and International Collaboration

The successful integration of ICT into learning and teaching is a common goal for many countries. National and international collaborative projects using ICT are extremely valuable in demonstrating the scope of technology. They can also influence the teaching and management structures within schools.

Irish schools have already participated in hugely successful collaborative international ICT projects including:

- The **European Studies Project** involving more than **500** schools in **17** different countries
- The **Culture Ireland Project** with the United States and Northern Ireland which links schools in exploring Irish and Irish American cultural identity
- The **Dissolving Boundaries Projects** which linked **50** schools North and South in curriculum projects

In addition, Ireland is a founder member of the European **Schoolnet** which provides links between school websites in **20** different countries to create virtual classrooms.

Ireland also supports the **E-Europe Action Plan** designed to ensure that Europe keeps pace with the rest of the world in adapting to ICT developments.

Likewise, we support the EU **eLearning:Designing Tomorrow's Education** initiative. This initiative mirrors the Government's new Strategic Action Plan in its objectives of improving infrastructure, teacher training and integration of ICT into learning and teaching.

Under ***Schools IT 2000***, over **400** schools took part in ***The Schools Integration Project* (SIP)**. These projects have provided a rich stream of research knowledge in a number of technical and curricular areas. The solutions suggested by some of the projects are of such a high quality that they have been adopted by the Department.

The Action Plan provides for the identification of new priority project areas for funding. This will ensure that new methods of learning, teaching and research continue to evolve.

SIP Projects can be viewed at www.siponline.ie

9 Partnership

The **National Partnership Advice and Development Committee (NPADC)** is representative of the educational and social partners. It plays a key role in advising the Minister on ICT development needs and future policy directions.

This role will be developed to ensure that the social partners continue to have an input into the formulation of Government policy.

Partnerships with business are a particular feature of the integration of ICT into education and society. They are a significant feature worldwide of the development of the IT industry. In Ireland, partnerships at national level with companies such as ***eircom*, Intel** and **IBM** have already contributed significantly to the integration of ICTs into education. At local level, schools involved with innovative ICT projects in particular have expanded their involvement with their communities through the sponsorship and involvement of local companies at many levels.

Under the new Plan, an **Industry Advisory Group** will be established to formalise links between the IT industry and schools at national level. This Group will contribute to the development and continuation of the partnership process. Schools will be encouraged to involve local businesses, across all sectors in their innovative IT projects and in the process of extending the boundaries of traditional education through the use of ICT.

10 Evaluation of the Plan

The level of investment underpinning this initiative is very substantial. Extensive follow-up action will be required to ensure a continuing effective, varied and comprehensive response to ICT development in Irish Education.

To determine future requirements, the Department will constantly monitor and review progress in the context of feedback from schools. As part of this process, schools will be required to complete a census of infrastructure in 2002.

om 8