



Ireland's Educational Success Story Could be Undermined, Education Chief Tells Delegates

ETBI General Secretary Addresses Inaugural Congress

Speaking at the inaugural Congress of Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI), taking place this week in the Killashee House Hotel, Naas, General Secretary Michael Moriarty told delegates that continued investment in the education system over the years up to 2009 had brought about considerable success in terms of Irish educational outcomes.

“Early school leaving has been reduced to 10.5% of the secondary school population, about 4% below the EU average and close to the EU target of 10%. Seven out of ten of our secondary school leavers go on to higher education. Ireland is joint first in the EU at 49.9% for 30-to 34-year-olds with third-level qualifications, the EU headline target being 40%¹. It is clear our investment in the education system a decade ago has produced results today, and it is those results that attracted the many international enterprises that have located in this country.”

But there was still a very long way to go, Mr Moriarty said.

“The percentage of the working-age population with less than upper secondary education is 26%, compared with the OECD average of 21%. And there are well-documented issues with regard to literacy, numeracy and problem-solving. PISA² for 15-year-olds in 2009 identified a decline in literacy and mathematic outcomes, with Irish students ranking below the OECD average in mathematical performance.”

¹ Eurostat (2010)

² OECD Programme for International Student Assessment. <http://www.oecd.org/pisa/46643496.pdf>

Mr Moriarty noted that Ireland's economic future and stability depended on the next generations being at the top of the skills ladder to enable them to compete in the globalised economy, and to make them Ireland's trump card if inward investment was to drive the economy out of recession. Against this backdrop, he said, the impact of the on-going cuts to resources, staffing and facilities since the beginning of the recession was severely felt throughout the Irish education system, and could well impact long-term on education outcomes, thus impacting on Ireland's economic recovery.

"The current single biggest challenge for our schools, colleges and centres of education is to increase and enhance year-on-year the educational standards and capabilities of our students. In other words, we must continue to preserve and grow the educational experience. This is becoming more and more difficult under the continuing harsh regime of budget cuts.

Last year we told the government that the cupboard was bare, in terms of cutbacks. Shaving anything up to €100 million from educational spending in the upcoming budget, as has been proposed, would be a severe shell-shock to the system, and could undermine so much good work achieved to date."

Mr Moriarty noted that Minister Quinn had been dealt a bad hand of cards and that recent press reports indicated that he had been fighting to reduce the education budget cutbacks of this severity at Cabinet level.

"We support him, we urge him, and we urge his Cabinet colleagues to recognise what has already been given from the sector and to realise that the cutbacks to education funding over the past decade or so are likely to reverse Ireland's noted educational achievements, and that any further significant cuts will undoubtedly accelerate this trend."

ENDS

Issued by: Michael Moriarty, General Secretary

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Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) is the representative body for Ireland's 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs), and works to protect, promote and enhance the interests of vocational education and training within the wider education sector and the country at large.

ETBI and ETBs were established (and replaced, respectively, the Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA) and Vocational Education Committees (VECs)) when the Education and Training Boards Act 2013 commenced on 1st July 2013.

ETBs deliver a wide range of educational services, managing 254 second-level schools, including Post Leaving Certificate colleges (PLCs), and 450 education centres. ETBs also operate multi-faith community national schools at primary level. With the commencement of the ETB Act 2013, ETBs are responsible for the provision of all further education and training in Ireland. PLCs have developed a range of programmes and courses in response to the needs of industry and commerce which are certified by FETAC at levels 5 and 6, and by the professional bodies which set standards for entry into the professions.