



Vocational Education and Training has Strong Role in Ireland's Economic Recovery

Highlights of ETBI General Secretary's Address to Inaugural Congress

Speaking to delegates at the inaugural Congress of Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI), which is taking place this week in the Killashee House Hotel, Naas, General Secretary Michael Moriarty underlined the challenges facing Ireland's new Education and Training Boards.

"Vocational Education and Training (VET) is now central to Europe's strategy to reposition itself in the global economy, and it is the education sector closest to the labour market. The European Commission has urged Member States to target investment in VET to address skills shortages and support growth in such sectors as ICT, green economy, health, marine economy, etc. The Government's stated intention to build a world-class FET (Further Education and Training) system is in line with the EU objectives."

Mr Moriarty welcomed the structural reform of Further Education and Training in Ireland, aimed at bringing focus and coherence into the delivery of skills training, as a timely and important initiative. But he noted that such reforms must be backed by adequate resources to ensure outcomes which raise the education and training standards of our students to a significant degree.

"The challenge for Ireland's new Education and Training Boards (ETBs) will be to deliver on the knowledge, skills and competencies that the labour market needs. The broad mission of education and training encompasses such objectives as active citizenship, personal development and well-being, and these go hand-in-hand with the need to upgrade skills for employability. ETBs, through their second-level schools and further education colleges are well placed to develop such transversal generic skills, while also delivering on the industry-specific skills through our further education programmes."

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Our schools and colleges can deliver on these skills needs and competences, but they need the capacity to do so – and that has not been a feature of recent government policy, where cuts to resources are the order of the day. Instead of cutting back on PLC resources by raising the pupil-teacher ratio, the focus must be on enhancing and growing this sector in line with EU policy. Investment in education and training is key to both productivity and economic growth potential. Any under-spending today will have serious consequences in the short- to medium-term for Ireland’s skills base.

Mr Moriarty went on to discuss the critical role vocational education and training plays in the development of human capital:

Education is a significant factor in determining life chances, and a strong predictor of adult life chances. Countries which invest heavily in education benefit socially, culturally and economically.

The challenge of globalisation, modernisation and rapid technological change means that we must increase the level of educational standards of the Irish workforce, as a highly educated workforce is a prerequisite for inward investment, especially in the area of new technology.

The danger we face in the education sector now is that it will be the survival of the fittest, that education could become more and more the preserve of those who are well-off either financially or intellectually. My fear is that, in these straitened times, the system could well fail those who need assistance most.

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.