

Press Release

The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs Calls for Further Investment in Information Technology Sector

The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (Expert Group) today, 31 July 2001, called for an investment of £130 million in the Irish Information Technology (IT) sector at the launch of their Third Report on Future Skills Needs (Third Report) in Ireland. The Expert Group further recommended the establishment of a dedicated expert project team within the Higher Education Authority to oversee and administer this new investment.

The First Report published by the Group in 1999 saw an investment of £75 million by the Government in IT that created 5,400 new IT places in third level education. Recognising the pace of change in this industry and its importance in the Irish economy and despite the current slowdown in the U.S. economy the Expert Group forecasts, in the Third Report, strong growth in the IT sector between 2001-2005. It is estimated that there will be an annual shortfall of about 2,500 professionals and 800 technicians between 2001-2005. The Expert Group recommends that this investment for a five-year period is critical to sustaining Ireland's position as a European leader in this sector and for the growth of the Irish economy as a whole.

Dr Danny O'Hare, Chairman, Expert Group, thanked the Government, in his opening remarks for its response to the previous/earlier reports and commented: "The Third Report contains recommendations to ensure that Ireland has the necessary skills base for a competitive, knowledge-driven economy in the areas, which demand immediate attention if we wish to see continued economic growth. These include Information Technology (IT), Researchers, Life Sciences and the Construction Industry sectors, which are crucial to Ireland's future economic development. These have been singled out for attention in this Third Report.

Mr Colm Regan, Executive Director, Forfás, (and Member of the Expert Group) presented the main findings and the key recommendations of the Third Report (copy of presentation included in press pack). He outlined in detail the rationale for the recommended £130m increase in investment in the IT sector skills and highlighted the importance of Research and Life Science skills to the national economic infrastructure. Development of the physical infrastructure, he added, was equally critical and, in this context, it is important that sufficient Construction skills are made available to meet the targets set in the National Development Plan.

Dr Danny O'Hare in his concluding remarks stated: “the **Expert Group on Future Skills Needs** has targeted its recommendations at the sectors it feels will be pivotal to Ireland’s economic growth during the period 2001-2006. The implementation of these recommendations will underpin Ireland’s continued prosperity in years to come. We will continue to monitor implementation and has already commenced work on updating the data used to support their work. The Expert Group hopes that the Government will respond as positively to these recommendations as it has in the past”.