

MEETING OF CHAIRPERSONS OF
COMMUNICATIONS, EDUCATION AND TRANSPORT
COMMITTEES

Dublin Castle – 16-17 June 2013

Speaking points for Minister Ruairí Quinn, T.D., Minister
for Education & Skills

Rethinking Education for a Digital Age

- I would like to thank the Chairpersons of the Transport, Communications and Education Committees for the invitation to address this meeting.
- In Ireland we are embarking on a reform agenda across the education sector. You cannot embark on reform in the 21st century without due regard to technological and digital developments. Reforms in Ireland are currently underway in our literacy and numeracy strategy, transformation of lower secondary education (junior cycle) and the creation of a new architecture for further education and training. Reforms must centre around the need to improve learning outcomes and ensure our young people develop the skills and competences they need to prepare for working life and I believe the digital age facilitates these developments.

- For example, in the context of the reform of junior cycle, the use of e-portfolios will be explored. The use of digital portfolios by students will have massive advantages, beyond the examinations themselves. It is designed to encourage innovation in schools and more creative teaching and learning in the classroom.
- Junior Cycle reform will also see the development of short courses in programming/coding and digital media literacy which will be available to schools from September 2014.
- In line with our Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, a new integrated curriculum for languages is currently being developed. It will be available for junior classes (generally ages 4-8) from September 2014. The definition of text in the new curricula is inclusive of digital literacy. Digital literacy is embedded in the learning outcomes.
- This Strategy provides that the re re-configuration of the content of initial teacher education (ITE) courses for primary and post-primary teachers will ensure the development of their skills in literacy and numeracy teaching, including digital literacy and how ICT may be used to support and enrich learning in literacy and numeracy. This is already in train: some reconfigured ITE programmes with renewed focus on literacy and numeracy and ICT as teaching

and learning tool have started, the rest will follow over the next number of years.

- The Strategy also emphasises the importance of digital literacy through assessment of students' ability to read digital material as part of the national assessments of English reading at primary and post-primary levels.
- Ireland is not alone in embarking on education forms at this time. We along with our European colleagues face the same challenges in providing a quality education for our young people. This is a challenging time for many countries as we try to deliver a more appropriate education for the 21st century student.
- The digital age facilitates the bringing together of our European neighbours so we can learn from each other. My Department is represented on a number of European fora which explore the use and impact of technology in education. My Department is currently the lead partner in an EU Commission funded project which will pilot ePortfolio solutions in post primary schools.
- I note that later today there will be a discussion on the “Digital Agenda” for Europe. One of the actions identified in the Digital Agenda is “Member States to mainstream eLearning in national policies”. We know eLearning enables people to acquire skills anywhere, anytime. It empowers teachers to adopt

new practices. It allows for self-regulated and informal learning. This is the way forward and we in Ireland are increasing access to e-learning resources across the education system.

- In Irish higher education, technology will be a key enabler, facilitating collaboration and the sharing of resources, and creating a virtual academic community. The National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning, which I launched last November, is a key system-level infrastructure. Through the establishment of a national digital platform for teaching and learning resources, as well as for professional networking, the National Forum will build on the key online teaching and research resources that have been developed for the third level sector in recent years, and on the collegiality that has supported these.
- We must embrace the digital age and ensure that our education system is ready to exploit the opportunities and meet the challenges of providing education in a digital age.

Thank you.