



The National Centre for Technology in Education (NCTE), established under the aegis of the Department of Education and Science has a wide remit in the area of information and communications technologies (ICTs) and education, extending beyond the use of ICTs in schools to cover all educational ICT issues. Its main initial tasks are to manage the implementation of the Government's Schools IT 2000 initiative, to develop ICT policy proposals and to provide policy advice to the Department of Education and Science. Teacher training in ICTs is one of its priorities this year. For future information regarding the NCTE and its initiatives, please consult www.ncte.ie.

Schools IT 2000 – to date

Schools IT 2000 – A Policy Framework for the New Millennium - launched 28th November 1997 announced a Government investment of £40 million for ICT in education.

The National Centre for Technology in Education (NCTE) - established March 1998 - Staff now includes Director, 6 National Co-ordinators and 3 ancillary staff

Technology Integration Initiative – launched May 7th 1998. A total of £21 million has been allocated in 1998 to develop the ICT infrastructure in Schools. This includes £6 million already provided for ICT in schools, particularly at 2nd level, plus an additional £15 million under Schools IT 2000. Grants were issued in late May 1998 providing ample opportunity and time for schools to use the grant to maximum benefit. All schools in the free education system at primary and post-primary levels received grants as follows:

- Ordinary Schools at first and second-levels: £2000 plus £5 per pupil. A school with 40 pupils received £2200 and a school with 400 pupils received £4000.
- Ordinary schools with one or more special classes received an additional grant of £1500 plus £20 per head for each special class pupil.
- Special Schools received a grant of £3000 plus £20 per pupil.
- In addition an additional special fund of £250,000 was made available for the provision of computer equipment to individual pupils with special needs in ordinary classrooms. A further £250,000 has been made available during 1999.
- Funding has also been allocated to provide hardware for Teacher Training Institutions, Education Centres and the School Integration Project.

This grant aid was added to substantially at local level by Parent/Community and Business contributions and all of this in conjunction with the Telecom Eireann Information Age Initiative has ensured that more than 15,000 new computers were placed in schools by the end of 1998.

- A current provision of £3 million was also made in 1998 to provide support for Schools IT 2000. The figure for 1999 is £6 million.
- *Teacher Skills Initiative* - A Programme of Teacher Professional development was implemented which provided course places for about 24,000 teachers during 1998 with a further 21,000 places available during 1999.
- *Schools Support Initiative* – This includes *ScoilNet* and the *School Integration Project*.

- *ScoilNet* - This is an online support service, which will provide information, advice and support to schools on Schools IT 2000 and related issues. The ScoilNet website was made available in September 1998 at www.scoilnet.ie. Since then, the National Centre for Technology in Education (NCTE) has been taking submissions from a wide range of end users on how they would wish to see ScoilNet developing through the on-line submission form. ScoilNet website guidelines and template document are now available for use by a wide range of content providers to ensure high quality design and content services. The formal launch of the ScoilNet website took place on 28th September 1999. The development of ScoilNet is a major partnership between Department of Education and Science and Intel. The NCTE has responsibility for the implementation and maintenance of the ScoilNet web site.

School Integration Project (SIP) - This project will promote whole school development and the integration of computers into learning and teaching in schools. Over 300 proposals for SIP have been received involving more than 600 schools. An initial list of 48 projects, involving 228 schools and 58 project partners from the public and private sectors, was announced by the Minister for Education and Science, Mr. Micheál Martin, TD, on Tuesday 30th March, 1999.

IT Advisers – Interviews have been held for positions of IT Adviser attached to each of the 20 Full-time Education Centres. 16 successful candidates have taken up their appointments from the beginning of the new school year in September 1999 and the remaining 4 will be appointed as soon as possible.

National Policy Advisory and Development Committee (NPADC) - Seminars were held during 1998 to brief the Partners in Education and the Social Partners on Schools IT 2000. A National Policy Advisory and Development Committee (NPADC), which includes representation from these partner groups, has been established. The NPADC advises the Minister and the Department of Education and Science on the future implementation of *Schools IT 2000* and on the development of policy on ICTs in education. Four meetings have been held to date. The NPADC is currently planning a major review/evaluation of Schools IT 2000.

Partnership Projects

- *International Conference – ICTs in Education*. An International Conference on ICTs in Education – “Dissolving Boundaries – ICTs and Learning in the Information Age” was held on 4/5 May in Dublin Castle. It was co-sponsored by DES/DfEE/DENI in association with OECD/CERI.
- Telecom Eireann (Eircom) as the major partner with the DES in Schools IT 2000 has provided funding of £15 million to the project. Every school has been supplied with a multimedia computer and an Internet connection. Each school has received free installation of a telephone line, free rental of the line for two years, and a number of hours (5) free usage of the line per session for Internet access. Free Internet Service is being offered to each school also via Telecom Internet (eircom.net). Schools may, however, choose another Internet Service Provider if they wish. All Education Centres, 20 full-time and 10 part-time, are being provided with a computer network for training purposes. Telecom Eireann (Eircom) has provided each with: 1 Server, 9 multimedia computers and other network hardware and an ISDN line.
- IBM – Wired for Learning – IBM is providing funding of \$1 million to develop a project to facilitate the integration of ICTs into the school environment and to encourage and enable parent/community access to schools. Two groups of schools have been selected, one in the Dublin area and one in Cork and the project has been launched at both sites.
- D.I.S.C. - Dublin Inner-city Schools Computerisation Project. Over 4,500 pupils on 20 inner city schools will benefit from DISC as it upgrades the schools to high spec multimedia computer capacity with peripherals over 3 years and co-ordinates basic IT training for the 350 teachers involved. The partners in the DISC project are DIT, the Department of Education and Science through the National Centre for Technology in Education, Siemens Information and Communications, the Dublin Inner City Partnership and the 20 primary/post-primary inner city schools.
- There is significant commercial/industrial/business/agency/organisation involvement with projects under the SIP. Participants in partnerships with schools include – Compaq, Intel, Corel Corporation, Gill and McMillan, Telecom Eireann, Siemens, IBM, Apple, ISTA, IMTA, DCU, Lego Ltd., UCC, St.

Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Diocese of Ferns, Bord na Gaeilge, Towns of Ennis, Dundalk, Kilkenny, etc.

- EDCAST Project – The DES in co-operation with RTE and BOCOM developed a project to broadcast data to 50 schools and libraries. The main emphasis was on delivery of material from the Internet. This project is currently being evaluated with a view to a national rollout of the system.

Schools IT 2000 – Future plans

- *Technology Integration Initiative (TII)* - Plans are being developed for the next phase of the *TII* which will build on provision made in 1998. An expert study of future technological infrastructure options for schools is being undertaken to inform future decisions. This will include the development of models for the provision of technical support to schools over the longer term.
- *Teacher Skills Initiative (TSI)* – Reviews are planned of all existing courses and will involve independent evaluation. In addition to providing further introductory courses to teachers the NCTE will continue to develop specialist courses i.e. on the Internet, First Line Maintenance, particular curriculum areas, etc. The delivery of courses online will be explored and developed. The involvement of Education Centres, IT Advisors, and the Inspectorate of the DES will be further developed and the latter in particular will play a major role in evaluation of developments in schools. Liaison will be further developed with 3rd level to progress the development of accreditation for both course tutors and participants. An important target in the next phase will be pre-service training in ICTs for teachers.
- A project with Sun Microsystems will facilitate the setting up of a central server for hosting of school websites etc. and will also provide the opportunity to explore further models for the development of secure Internet access and use by schools and Education Centres.
- *School Integration Project (SIP)* – Further development of *SIP* will take place and further projects will be announced as they are developed.

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