

SECTION 1: POLICY & LEGISLATION

TASK FORCE ON ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP FINAL REPORT

The Taskforce on Active Citizenship in Ireland was established to advise the Government on the steps that can be taken to ensure that the wealth of civic spirit and active participation already present in Ireland continues to grow and develop. Through a consultation process undertaken last Autumn, the Taskforce compiled a set of recommendations, which were launched on Wednesday 28 March by An Taoiseach Bertie Ahern.

The main recommendations to Government include:

- Independent electoral commission to encourage everyone who is eligible to register and vote in elections, to support voter education programmes and to provide data, research and analysis on political engagement and awareness.
- National Presidential Citizen Awards to recognise outstanding contributions to civic/community life.
- Formal Citizenship Ceremony to mark admission to Irish citizenship and to engage and welcome newcomers. This could apply to all Irish citizens when they reach the age of eighteen.
- National Active Citizenship theme each year to stimulate local initiatives and events. This initiative would culminate in an Active Citizenship Week.
- Group insurance scheme currently open to members of Local C&V Fora to be promoted widely amongst relevant organisations and groups to counter prohibitive insurance costs for C&V groups.
- Initiative to help C&V organisations to meet compliance costs and ensure they are proportionate.
- Programme in the public service to promote community engagement and participation, for example, by providing some time off for voluntary effort and through pre-retirement courses.
- Priority provision by Local Authorities of community & recreational facilities as part of planning processes.
- Audit of existing community facilities by Local Authorities through County/City Development Boards.
- Better use to be made of schools at evening and weekend time, to act as community hubs.
- Expansion of education for citizenship in the school system and in youth and adult education sectors.
- Certificate/award which would be earned through completing at least three months volunteering or community involvement activity (Ireland or overseas)
- Initiative to promote, support and link together initiatives across the Higher Education sector.
- Establishment of a National Observatory to act as a focal point for research on civic engagement.

The Taskforce has also set a number of targets to:

- Increase the pool of people active in their community

by 60,000 each year for the next three years.

- Increase the number of adults engaged in at least one form of 'civic activity' by 60,000 each year for the next three years.
- Reach, by the end of this decade, a level of at least 60% voter turnout amongst the 18-24 year olds.
- Increase the level of voter participation from the CSO estimate of 75.5% in the General Election of 2002 to at least 80% in all future General Elections, with targeting of areas of exceptionally low turnout.
- Increase % of adults who agree with the statement that they 'can influence decisions affecting your local area' from 54% in 2006 to 65% in 2010.

The Taskforce has also published papers on:

1. Statistical Evidence on Active Citizenship in Ireland
2. Research on Active Citizenship in Faith-based Communities
3. The Concept of Active Citizenship

For further information and/or copies of all the reports please contact:

Secretariat to the Task Force on Active Citizenship
2-4 Merrion Row, Dublin 2.
Tel: 01 6194330
Website: www.activecitizen.ie

NEW CRIMINAL JUSTICE BILL PUBLISHED

On 15 March The Tanaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Michael McDowell, TD, announced that the Criminal Justice Bill had been published. The main provisions in the Bill are:

Bail

1. That a Garda Chief Superintendent may give his or her opinion that the applicant for bail is likely to commit serious offences if granted bail.
2. Applicant will have to provide a statement of his/her assets and income as well as details of his/her previous criminal record and details of previous bail applications.
3. Those granted bail may be subject to electronic monitoring, to ensure they are complying with the conditions set down by the Court.
4. The prosecution authorities are being granted a right to appeal against a grant of bail or against any conditions attaching to bail, where granted.

Sentencing

1. A person who commits any of a list of *scheduled

offences and, within 7 years, commits another one of those offences will be subject to a penalty of imprisonment equal to at least $\frac{3}{4}$ of the maximum laid down by law for that second offence. Where the

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second offence carries a potential maximum of life imprisonment, a sentence of at least 10 years must be imposed.

2. Upon release, a person who has been imprisoned for one of the scheduled offences may be subject to a 'crime prevention order'. It will require the person to observe any conditions laid down by the court. These may include a condition that he or she keeps the Gardai informed of his or her movements. The order may last for up to 10 years or until the maximum sentence for the offence, had it been imposed, would have expired.

**The scheduled offences (in Schedule 2 of the Bill) are among the most serious known to the criminal law and include all the offences that are typically associated with gangland crime, including, of course, drug trafficking and firearms offences.*

Detention Periods extended

New arrangements will allow for up to 7 days detention for the investigation of serious cases involving explosives and firearms to allow time to interview suspects and witnesses and to carry out detailed forensic examinations of crime scenes. The seven-day detention is already available under the Criminal Justice (Drug Trafficking) Act 1996. The new arrangements will be subject to the same judicial supervision as currently applies in the case of the 1996 Act.

Drug Trafficking

The Bill provides for a new provision for a mandatory minimum sentence of at least 10 years in cases where a convicted person had drugs to the value of €0.5million.

New Offences of Possession of Articles or Cash

Possession of articles or cash in circumstances that give rise to reasonable inference that they will be used in the commission of a serious gangland type offence, will carry a penalty of up to 5 years imprisonment.

Firearms

The Bill re-iterates the need to impose the mandatory minimum sentences in a range of firearms offences and clarifies the relevant statutory provisions to that effect.

Right to Silence

1. The Bill clarifies the circumstances in which inferences may be drawn for a failure by an accused to answer questions relating to marks on his or her person or clothing or in places where he or she has been or a failure by an accused to reveal certain facts that he or she could be expected to have accounted for.

2. Certain safeguards are provided in relation to, for example, whether the person had access to legal advice before refusing to answer certain questions. The changes also ensure the law is extended, and will now apply, for the first time, to all arrestable offences.

Retention of Samples

The Bill will allow for the indefinite retention of fingerprints, palmprints and photographs of suspects. This, together with similar arrangements to be introduced

in the case of DNA samples under a Bill, which the Government has already approved for drafting, will ensure the Gardai will have access to substantial intelligence data.

Garda Executive Management Board

The Bill amends the Garda Síochána Act 2005. It establishes a new Garda Síochána Executive Management Board. The executive Board members will be the Commissioner as Chair, the Deputy Garda Commissioners and a member of the civilian staff from the top management of the Garda Síochána. Three non-executive members of the Board will be appointed by the Government on the nomination of the Minister. The Board will keep under review the performance by the Garda Síochána in relation to its functions as well as in relation to the arrangements and strategies in place to support and enhance the performance of those functions. It will provide six-monthly reports to the Minister, which will be laid before the Oireachtas.

For further information please contact:

Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
94 St. Stephens Green, Dublin 2.
Tel: 01 6028358 / 6028359 Fax: 01 6789003

The Bill is available on the Oireachtas website:
www.oireachtas.ie

RESEARCH ON RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS LAUNCHED

On 13 March the Minister for Education and Science, Mary Hanafin, T.D. launched a major study on Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) in post-primary schools. Authors of the study are Dr. Paula Mayock, Senior Researcher at the Children's Research Centre, Trinity College, Dr. Mark Morgan, Head of Education Department, St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra and Karl Kitching, researcher and lecturer at St Patrick's College, Drumcondra. The project, commissioned by the Crisis Pregnancy Agency and Department of Education and Science (DES), examines the implementation of the RSE programme since it was first introduced in post-primary schools in the '90s. Although a number of evaluations of the programme have taken place, this is the first time that barriers to the implementation of the programme have been examined at national, regional and local level.

The research shows that significant progress has been made in the implementation of RSE, especially at junior cycle level. 89% of schools surveyed teach RSE in 1st and 2nd year. 11% of schools stated that they do not teach RSE at all in 1st or 2nd year. This increased to 20%

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in 3rd year, 30% in the 1st year of the leaving certificate cycle and 33% by the final year of that cycle.

The study found that approximately 40% of schools are implementing the RSE programme very effectively and a further 36% have moderate levels of implementation. The programme is most effective in schools where principals ensure that a policy is developed; appoint a programme co-ordinator and release staff for training.

Whole-school support for RSE was also identified a crucial factor in schools with high implementation levels. The development of an RSE policy in consultation with the board of management, parents and teachers is of huge benefit. Schools that develop RSE policies and have good leadership from the principal and board of management, are capable of overcoming traditional barriers such as having an overcrowded curriculum, discomfort among teachers with the content of the programme and pressure of examination subjects.

The authors of the report have developed a model for effective implementation of RSE based on their discussions with schools that are implementing the programme effectively. In response to the findings of the report the Crisis Pregnancy Agency and DES have begun work on the development of new teaching resources for the RSE programme, covering topics such as relationships, contraception and STIs.

The Crisis Pregnancy Agency is funding the development of a new resource for adolescents on sexual development for use by parents/ teachers and also a resource for parents with older adolescents. Both resources are due to be published by end of the year.

The report is available on both
www.education.ie and www.crisispregnancy.ie

SECTION 2: FUNDING

DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION GRANT SCHEME 2007

Irish Aid, the Government's official development assistance programme, invites applications from voluntary organisations and educational bodies for grants for development education projects, which are designed to increase awareness and understanding of development issues. There are 4 types of grants available: **Strategic Priority Fund**; **Civil Society Development**; **Education Fund**; **Capacity Building Fund**; and, **Challenge Fund**. The closing date for Round Two of the Scheme is **29 June 2007**.

For further information/application forms please contact:

Irish Aid, Department of Foreign Affairs,
Bishops Square, Redmond Hill, Dublin 2
Tel: 01 4082000 Fax: 01 4082880
Email: developmenteducation@dfa.ie
Website: www.irishaid.gov.ie/grants_education

SECTION 3: ROUND UP

NEW GOOD PRACTICE RESOURCE FOR COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY GROUPS

Solid Foundations is a unique new publication for anyone working in C&V/charitable organisations in Ireland that very simply explains what you must do by law, what you ought to do, and what you could aspire to do, in terms of good practice, when setting up and running your group or organisation. Launched by Minister of State Noel Ahern on 1st March, it aims to help thousands of community and voluntary groups all across Ireland in how they manage their organisations.

It can be used by any community, voluntary and nonprofit organisation, any NGO, and any charity in Ireland, regardless of age, size, location, and area of focus. It is written so that it provides factual information about the legal obligations that organisations in the sector face, as well as practical advice on how they can run their organisations in line with good practice standards. *Solid Foundations* is available in hard copy from **The Wheel** at a cost of €20.00 + €1.50 p&p.

For further information/to order a copy please contact:

Danielle Byrne
The Wheel, ISFC, 10 Grattan Crescent,
Inchicore, Dublin 8
Tel: 01 4548727 Email: danielle@wheel.ie

Copies of all publications and documentation highlighted in this edition are available for reference or loan purposes from the
Irish YouthWork Centre
Tel: 01 8729933 Fax: 01 8724183
Email: fbissett@youthworkireland.ie
Website: www.iywc.com