

SECOND PROGRESS REPORT

**A PROGRAMME FOR
A PARTNERSHIP GOVERNMENT
2016 - 2021**

April 2017

Introduction

Since May 2016 work has been underway on the implementation of the Programme for a Partnership Government to tackle Ireland's greatest challenges head on and create a conducive environment in order to build a strong economy and to deliver a fair society.

In December 2016, the first Programme for Partnership Government Progress Report was published tracking the achievements and work underway to date across the range of commitments. Since that point work on the implementation of the Programme for Government has been ongoing across all Departments and this is reflected by over 200 updates outlined in this, the second progress report.

The Government will continue to deliver on its ambitious programme of work and move ever closer to its core target of improving people's lives throughout Ireland.

Following on from this report, a consolidated and comprehensive Annual Report will be published in May, following the Government's first year in office.



Key Achievements

Strategy for the Rental Sector launched

Help-to-Buy Scheme opened with 3,800 applications received

34 projects announced under €200m Local Infrastructure Activation Housing Activation Fund

Action Plan to Expand Apprenticeships and Traineeships launched

Unemployment Rate Reduced to 6.4%

DEIS Plan 2017 launched with additional 79 schools added

Creative Ireland launched

Action Plan on Rural Development launched

Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce report published

Making Partnership in Democracy Work and Political/Constitutional Reform

- Multiple Technical Groups can now be established in the Dáil consisting of a minimum of 5 T.D.s with Leader's Questions, Private Members Business and Priority Questions allocated on a proportionate basis to include such Groups.
- The Dáil meets at 12 noon to allow the morning for Oireachtas Committee Business.
- The number of Private Members Business slots has been increased to two every week with an additional weekly slot for Private Members Bills/Committee Reports selected by lottery.
- The Pre-Legislative Stage has been extended to Private Members Bills, allowing Oireachtas Committees to scrutinise these Bills after they have passed Second Stage in the Dáil but before the standard Committee Stage.
- 100 Private Members Bills have been published in the 10 months since May 2016 compared to 26 Private Members Bills published in a similar period from June 2015.
- Oireachtas Committees can also now have their Reports debated in the Dáil.
- Ireland's Open Government Partnership National Action Plan 2016-2018 was published in December 2016, setting out commitments to increase citizen engagement, promote open data and transparency, and strengthen governance and accountability.
- Revised Guidelines on Consultation for Public Sector Bodies have been published to improve the way Government Departments and other public bodies undertake public consultations, with an emphasis on real, meaningful, and targeted engagement.
- The Citizen's Assembly has met four times to-date to discuss the Eighth Amendment, with a final meeting due to take place on 22/23 April. Justice Laffoy has indicated that it is still her intention to provide a report with the Assembly's recommendations to the Oireachtas by June 2017. Following the final meeting to discuss the Eighth Amendment, the Assembly will commence its considerations of the remaining topics as outlined in the Resolution.
- The Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice, Defence and Equality held a pre-legislative discussion on the General Scheme of the Judicial Appointments Bill in January.

Housing

- Latest key indicators (planning permissions, housing commencements and housing completions) confirm that the upward trend in housing activity is continuing to strengthen. Importantly, housing output for 2016 rose by almost 18% to c. 15,000 homes.

- To better aid policy decision making, a new monthly Housing Activity Report is being published drawing together the most up-to-date data on residential planning permissions; housing commencements and completions, and social housing output.
- 23 Major Urban Housing Development Sites with the capacity to deliver 30,000 new homes in the medium term have been identified in the Greater Dublin Area, Cork, Limerick and Galway.
- The Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016 provides for the fast-tracking of planning applications for large-scale housing developments (100+ units) and the submission of planning applications for same directly to An Bord Pleanála. The new arrangements are expected to come into operation in May 2017.
- 34 public infrastructure projects across 15 Local Authority areas have been approved under the new €200m Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund
- The new Help to Buy Scheme opened for applications on 3 January 2017 with over 3,800 applications received in the first two months. In addition, 134 contractors have registered and been approved as 'Qualifying Contractors'.
- A report on unfinished housing developments was published recently and shows that in 2016 some 248 developments were resolved with 2,000 homes being used for social housing. There are 420 developments remaining, down from 3,000 in 2010, representing an 85% decrease.
- New Central Bank mortgage rules took effect on 1 January 2017 which mean First Time Buyers now only need a 10% deposit on the overall value of the property. The 20% deposit requirement still applies for all other buyers.
- As of 1 February 2017, new measures require mortgage lenders to explain to borrowers how their variable interest rates have been set, including in the event of an increase. The measures will also improve the level of information to be provided to borrowers about other mortgage products their lender provides that could provide savings for the borrower.
- The Central Bank review of Mortgage Arrears Solutions, published in December, found a comprehensive range of available restructuring solutions is being offered and delivered by both bank and non-bank entities and notes considerable progress in addressing mortgage arrears since the 2013 peak.
- The number of mortgage accounts for principal dwelling houses in arrears fell further in the fourth quarter of 2016; marking the fourteenth consecutive quarter of decline.
- The Competition and Consumer Protection Commission have commenced a study into the market structure, legislation and regulation of the mortgage market in Ireland and expects to produce its final report in May 2017.

- A Review of the Mortgage-to-Rent Scheme has been published and significant changes to the Scheme announced that will facilitate more households in long-term arrears to remain in their homes.
- A major public consultation was launched in February 2017 to inform the development of a new National Planning Framework '*Ireland 2040 - Our Plan*'. The consultation will discuss how to secure sustained, long-term and regionally balanced progress on social, economic and environmental fronts.

Homelessness and the Rental Sector

- During 2016, over 18,300 households had their social housing needs met, ahead of the target of just over 17,000 households set for the year. As part of this overall delivery some 5,300 homes were built, purchased or refurbished, exceeding the target for the year by over 1,000.
- Circa €200m was provided in 2016 under the Social Housing Investment Programme buying over 1,300 houses and apartments for use as social housing units by local authorities.
- An additional 12,075 households were supported by the Housing Assistance Payment scheme in 2016, meeting the Rebuilding Ireland Target. 3,568 of those additional households transferred from the rent supplement scheme (approx. 30%).
- Since 1 March 2017, HAP has been made available to all local authority areas with €153m provided for the scheme in 2017.
- 810 new tenancies were set up under the HAP Homeless pilot in 2016, significantly exceeding the target of 550 tenancies. A target of 1,200 additional households has been set for 2017, with 300 tenancies put in place since January 2017.
- At the end of 2016, a total of 350 rapid build homes were advancing through various stages of delivery, including construction.
- An Office of Government Procurement Framework Agreement has been put in place to facilitate accelerated delivery of rapid build homes during 2017 and 2018.
- Enabling infrastructure works are underway in Cherrywood, Dublin which will pave the way for the delivery of 7,000 homes, including 1,300 build-to-rent, 10% of which will be social housing units.
- With effect from 1 January 2017, planning authorities are required to establish and maintain a register of vacant sites in their functional areas. An information session was held for planning authorities and Guidelines have issued in relation to the practical implementation of the levy provisions.

- Under the Buy and Renewal scheme, €25m is being made available in 2017 to support Councils and Approved Housing Bodies purchase and renew housing units in need of remediation, and make them available for social housing use.
- A Repair and Leasing Scheme has been introduced, targeted at owners of vacant houses. €32m will be provided in 2017 to fund to repair of up to 800 vacant properties and make them available as new homes for families on local authority waiting lists.
- A one-stop-shop has been established within the Housing Agency to provide for enhanced cooperation between Approved Housing Bodies and local authorities to maximise potential yield from local authority lands.
- Three new homeless facilities were put in place and fully operational over the Christmas period, as well as a further upgraded facility, providing an additional 206 beds for those who were sleeping rough and providing for additional capacity for anybody else who might require assistance.
- An information campaign is underway to raise awareness for 'Abhaile', the new service launched in October to help homeowners find a resolution to home mortgage arrears.
- The Strategy for the Rental Sector was launched in December to provide rent predictability in areas of unsustainable rental inflation, as well as containing a number of measures to support supply by encouraging new investment and bringing unused capacity to the market.
- The Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2017 has been signed and will come into force on 1 July giving effect to commitments under the Governments' Rental Strategy 2017.
- A rent predictability measure came into effect on 13 December 2016 in the four Dublin Local Authority areas and in Cork city. It was further extended in January to a further 23 towns and all of Galway city. In these Rent Pressure Zones, rent increases will be capped at 4% per annum for the next 3 years.
- An Expert Group has been established to explore opportunities for developing a viable cost rental model for Ireland and a larger and more dynamic not-for-profit and Approved Housing Body sector.

Jobs and the Economy

- The unemployment rate in March 2017 was 6.4% and there was a monthly decrease of 3,900 claimants on the Live Register. This is an annual decrease of 48,162 since March 2016.
- The first progress reports on the implementation of the eight Regional Action Plans for Jobs were published in December. Employment increased in all regions and 70% of the

new jobs added in 2016 were outside Dublin. The fastest growing regions in terms of employment were the Mid-West (up 7.4%), the West (up 5.5%) and the South East (up 4.6%).

- By end 2016, there were 65,100 additional people in employment with total employment in the State increased to 2,048,100. Q4 2016 saw the 17th consecutive quarter of annual employment growth.
- A total of 19,244 new jobs in Enterprise Ireland supported companies were created in 2016 with almost two-thirds of these new jobs outside Dublin.
- IDA Ireland client companies now employ almost 200,000 people across a range of sectors with every region of Ireland posting net gains in jobs in 2016.
- Local Enterprise Offices created 7,883 jobs in 2016, compared to 7,122 in 2015. The total number of people employed in LEO supported small businesses stood at 34,634 at the end of 2016.
- The Action Plan for Jobs 2017, launched in February, sets out actions to create 45,000 jobs in 2017 and has a strong focus on addressing the immediate and medium-term challenges posed by Brexit, as well as a more volatile and changing global trading and investment environment.
- In December, an additional €1m in capital funding was made available to LEOs to support projects ready to commence and be funded before the end of 2016.
- An additional €4m in capital funding has been provided for LEOs in 2017 bringing their total capital allocation to €22.5 million, an increase of almost 22% over the 2016 initial allocation of €18.5m.
- An evaluation of the *Springboard+* programme, published in December, shows that 80% of *Springboard+* participants (2011 – 2015) are no longer on the live register. Over 30,000 course places were filled on 1,349 courses since 2011 and a further 5,825 place came on stream in autumn 2016.
- A network of nine Regional Skills Fora have been established to bring together employers and the further and higher education system to work together in building the skills needs of their regions.
- A Review of the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance, undertaken in 2016, found the scheme to effectively support jobseekers entrance to the labour market, as participants were twice as likely to be off the Live Register as non-participants both six and 18 months after the scheme.
- As of January 2017, the qualifying period for Back to Work Enterprise Allowance was reduced from 12 months to 9 months (for those with an underlying eligibility for

Jobseeker's Allowance).

- An interdepartmental group has been established and work is on-going with the Labour Market Council on drafting Action Plan on Jobless Households.
- Latest CSO figures show continued robust annual economic growth with real GDP rising by 5.2% in 2016 compared to 2015.
- An Exchequer surplus of €0.6bn was recorded in February 2017, a €277m year-on-year improvement primarily due to increased tax revenue. Budget 2017 projects we will achieve our Medium Term Objective of a balanced budget in structural terms by 2018. This represents a structural deficit of 0.5 per cent of GDP.
- The value of exports in 2016 totalled almost €117bn, the highest annual total on record. This is an increase of €4.5bn (+4%) over 2015.
- In January, Enterprise Ireland published its 2017-2020 Strategy, '*Build Scale, Expand Reach*' which aims to increase client company exports to €26bn per annum by the end of 2020, increase spend in the Irish economy to €27bn per annum, and create 60,000 new jobs.
- Ireland ranks 9th out of 137 countries in the Global Entrepreneurship Development Index which was published in November, a rise of 3 places on last year. Ireland was also ranked 6th of the 41 countries assessed in the European Region.
- In November, the European Commission published Ireland's 2016 Small Business Act Factsheet showing that Ireland has one of the most SME friendly environments in the EU.
- The SME Credit Demand Survey for April - September 2016 was published in December and shows 88% of SMEs report increased or stable trading conditions with 65% reporting a profit.
- Microfinance Ireland published its annual results in February showing a record 397 loans, totalling €5.4m, were approved in 2016. There was a strong regional spread with loans granted in all 26 counties with 82% of the loans were to businesses outside Dublin and almost 1,000 jobs created or sustained.
- By end September 2016, companies operating in Ireland had won €104m of an overall €336.7m in competitive Research and Innovation funding secured through Horizon 2020, with €74m of this going to Irish SMEs.
- The Financial Times fDi magazine's, "global cities of the future" rankings published in December, sees Dublin move up one place to third, in a list of world cities for Foreign Direct Investment for economic potential and business friendliness.

- In December, the National Competitiveness Council published its Competitiveness Challenge 2016 report, outlining a range of actions designed to boost Ireland's international competitiveness.
- A new Employment Permits Online System was launched in September 2016 achieving a 95% take-up rate in the first two weeks, a take-up rate which has continued since then. Under the new system, the application to decision time can take as little as 5 -7 working days to complete, an excellent timeframe by international comparison.
- There were a record breaking total of 9,584,400 overseas visits to Ireland in 2016, an increase of 10.9% when compared to 2015.
- A new direct route, Dublin – Miami, has been announced by Aer Lingus for 2017. This along with increased capacity on other routes will offer opportunity for increased growth in overseas visits from the United States to Ireland.
- Norwegian Air International have launched low-cost transatlantic services from Cork, Shannon and Dublin this summer to the east coast of the US, bringing additional capacity and connectivity into those regions, a major boost for Cork Airport, Shannon Airport and for local business and tourism.
- The process for the review of the Capital Plan has begun ensuring additional funding is allocated in line with national economic and social infrastructure priorities.

Rural Development

- The Action Plan for Rural Development, 'Realising our Rural Potential', was launched in January 2017 containing over 270 actions and is now being implemented. This is the first time a framework such as this has been developed to provide a co-ordinated approach across Government to the economic and social development of rural areas.
- In February, plans were announced for the injection of €27.3m in 2017 into towns, villages and rural recreation projects under the Action Plan for Rural Development. The various Schemes will be open for applications on a phased basis in the coming months.
- In 2016, €9.98m was provided to 170 projects nationwide under the 2016 Town and Village Renewal Scheme which aims to support the revitalisation of towns and villages. €12m has been made available for an enhanced Town and Village scheme in 2017. The first phase of the scheme is due to be launched in April 2017 with a second phase, a pilot to encourage residential occupancy in rural towns and villages, to be launched in the second half of the year.
- A Town Centre Revival Framework is being prepared to support towns and villages through their Local Authorities to address the challenges of creating a vibrant and viable town centre. The Framework is due to be published in April.

- In 2016, CLÁR funding of €8.24m was announced for 651 small infrastructural projects in rural areas that have experienced significant depopulation. The 2017 CLÁR programme was recently launched with €5m in funding.
- €7.44m in funding was approved in 2016 under the Rural Recreation Scheme for 117 projects to facilitate the development and maintenance of new recreational facilities.
- In 2016, €6.14m was approved to 47 projects nationwide under the REDZ initiative, which aims to stimulate economic development in rural towns and their hinterlands.
- In November, a new €10m fund was launched for LEADER Co-operation projects to encourage local action groups to work together.
- In 2016, over €1.4m was allocated through the Rural Innovation and Development Fund under CEDRA, supporting projects which promoted social farming, female rural entrepreneurs and agri-food tourism.
- In April, the Map of the Intervention Area for the National Broadband Plan State Intervention was finalised for the procurement process. This will allow bidders in the procurement process to develop their proposed solutions with greater certainty.
- The Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce published its final report in December, outlining 40 actions to alleviate barriers to improved mobile reception and broadband access. An Implementation Group has been established to drive and monitor the implementation of the report.
- A broadband officer is being funded for each local authority who will act as a single point of contact with telecommunications operators regarding the roll out of broadband.
- The Post Office Hub Working Group report has recommended piloting a Shared Value model in post offices, which would see local post offices act a multi-purpose space for the community. It is anticipated that four pilots would commence in 2017.
- The Department of Finance requested the Central Bank to review the continued appropriateness of the savings limits on Credit Union members.
- Grant allocations of €2.77m were made in December for regional Airports - Donegal, Knock, Kerry and Waterford.

Health

- The Oireachtas Committee on the Future of Healthcare published an interim report in January outlining areas of consensus including in particular the need for integrated care, and for the reorientation of services towards primary care. A final report is expected towards the end of April 2017.

- The next phase of discussions on a new GP contract is underway and initial engagement with GP representative bodies commenced in January 2017. The aim is to develop a new modern GP services contract which will incorporate a range of standard and enhanced services to be delivered. These discussions will address a wide range of issues, including the role of GPs in delivering chronic care within the community.
- In July 2016, the GP training intake increased from 157 to 172 places with the HSE's 2017 National Service Plan envisaging a further increase, to 187 places this year.
- Reducing waiting times for the longest waiting patients is one of the Government's key priorities. Under the 2016 Waiting List Action Plan, the number of patients waiting longest for an inpatient or daycase procedure was significantly reduced, from 4.5% of the total Inpatient/Daycase Waiting List in July, to 2% by the end of December. The NTPF Endoscopy Initiative for 2016 saw a 99.4% reduction in the number of patients waiting over 12 months for a routine endoscopy.
- In December 2016, approval was granted to the NTPF for a Daycase waiting list initiative with the aim of ensuring that no patient will be waiting more than 18 months by 30 June 2017. In excess of 2,000 Daycases will be managed through this process and patients will start to receive their appointments for procedures in March.
- Waiting List Action Plans for 2017, being developed in the areas of Inpatient/Daycase, Scoliosis and Outpatient Services in order to reduce the numbers of long-waiting patients, are expected to be published shortly.
- In 2016, over 23,100 people were supported under the Nursing Homes Support Scheme (Fair Deal) and time spent on a placement list for funding did not exceed four weeks throughout the year.
- The Health (Amendment) Bill 2017 is currently before the Houses of the Oireachtas. The Bill will provide a medical card to all children in respect of whom a Domiciliary Care Allowance payment is made.
- The extension of the childhood vaccination programme to include meningitis B and rotavirus vaccines commenced 1 December 2016.
- As recommended in the Herity Report, an additional €5m in funding has been provided to University Hospital Waterford in 2017 which will enable the hospital to provide 2 additional cath lab sessions (8 hours) per week.
- The National Patient Safety Office was launched in December to focus on leading key patient safety policy initiatives including progression of patient safety legislation, the establishment of a National Advisory Council for Patient Safety, and development of a model for Patient Advocacy Services.

- A National Healthy Cities and Counties of Ireland network was launched in November to develop a structure and provide supports at local level to implement Healthy Ireland, A Framework for Improved Health and Wellbeing 2013-2025.
- The Misuse of Drugs (Supervised Injecting Facilities) Bill 2017 which provides for the issue of a licence to operate a supervised injection facility was published in February and is before the Houses of the Oireachtas.
- An Interdepartmental group has been established to progress the Fit for Work Programme, '*Healthy You: Early Intervention*'. A stakeholder forum was held in December to obtain views about the scope of the programme as well as identifying issues around its design and operation.
- The Civil Liability (Amendment) Bill was published in January 2017 and is currently before the Houses of the Oireachtas. The Bill will provide for awards of damages in cases of catastrophic injury by way of periodic payments orders giving much-needed financial security to those who require life-long care.

Mental Health

- A new Wellbeing programme will be introduced to first year students from September 2017 as part of the new Framework for Junior Cycle. Guidelines will be published shortly for schools to help formulate their individual Wellbeing programmes.
- Since its establishment, the National Taskforce on Youth Mental Health has met monthly and commenced a series of consultations with young people, visited frontline services, and met with service users, parents and staff.
- The National Dementia Awareness Campaign – *Understand Together* has been launched as part of a 3 year campaign aimed at building awareness and understanding around dementia.
- A Recovery Education Project, funded by Genio, was launched for the Mid-West in November. The project will involve the development of courses on recovery in mental health that can be delivered across the region.
- A National Learning Set for Advancing Recovery in Ireland was launched to bring about organisational and cultural changes in mental health services to support those services in becoming more 'recovery-oriented'.

People with Disabilities

- The Disability/Equality (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2016 was published in December towards ratification of UN Convention on Rights of People with Disabilities.

- Two reports have been published into matters relating to the care of individuals with a disability in a foster home in the South East. It is intended to establish a Commission of Investigation into the matters which are the subject of these reports.
- The Access Inclusion Model has provided targeted support to children with a disability in accessing the ECCE programme in over 2,700 instances since its launch last June.
- As part of the Access Inclusion Model scheme, 18 new expert posts have been announced for the Early Years Service. By mid-March, the service had provided advice and guidance in the course of 4,149 visits to pre-schools.
- The Taskforce on Personalised Budgets has published a Work Plan for 2017 identifying seven work streams with timeframes. A Project Initiation Document was also published setting out the vision behind the formation of the Task Force, the Task Force structure, and the scope of the activities of the Strategy Group and the Advisory & Consultative Group.
- 73 people transitioned from institutional settings to community based living in 2016. The transition of further 223 people will be supported in 2017 in line with the policy as set out in *"Time to Move on from Congregated Settings"*.
- New housing design guidelines for users with mental disabilities were launched in November with a focus on home design that improves independent living and better quality of life for people with mental health issues.
- Since 2 January 2017, carers receive an additional 12 weeks allowance after the person for whom they are caring goes into long-term permanent care.

Children and Older People

- The report and Action Plan of the Working Group on School Age Childcare has been published and includes a number of recommendations and actions to assist in opening up accessible, high quality, affordable school age care for all children.
- The General Scheme of the new Affordable Childcare Bill was published in January. The Affordable Childcare Scheme aims to make childcare more accessible for families, by providing universal subsidies for all children between six months and three years of age, and targeted subsidies, based on net parental income, for children between six months and 15 years of age.
- A special provision was launched in January under the Community Childcare Subvention Scheme which provides access to free childcare for children of families experiencing homelessness.

- The General Scheme of the Child Care (Amendment) Bill, 2017 has been approved and published. The Bill will reform guardian ad litem arrangements to ensure the service meets the needs of the children and young people for whom it is intended.
- The Statutory Children First Inter-Departmental Implementation Group has been established and intensive work is underway to ensure that all sectors are ready for commencement of the Children First Act 2015 by end 2017.
- The Health (Amendment) Bill 2017 has been published which will reduce the prescription charge for medical card holders 70 years of age and over and their dependants. The new charge has been introduced on an administrative basis from 1 March 2017.
- In 2016, approximately 10.57 million home help hours were provided to 47,800 people. 16,450 people were in receipt of a Home Care Package and a further 190 people were in receipt of an Intensive Home Care Package.
- *Positive Ageing 2016*, the first Positive Ageing National Indicator report was launched in November and presents findings from a wide range of existing resources on what matters for older people.
- The Rebuilding Ireland Universal Design Challenge 2017 has been launched to stimulate and encourage innovation in designing and delivering housing solutions for older people.
- Funding for the Housing Adaptation Scheme was increased by 10% in 2016 to €55m, with 8,010 households benefiting from the scheme.
- There were 7,301 beneficiaries under the Senior Alert Scheme in 2016, with a total spend of €1.8m. A review of the Scheme is currently underway which will identify potential improvements, including technological advances.

Education and Training

- In 2016, 30 new schools and 20 large scale extensions/refurbishments were completed providing 15,290 additional permanent school places and 4, 746 replacement school places. Under the Additional Accommodation Scheme, 182 projects were completed providing 6,998 additional permanent school places.
- The new updated Action Plan for Education 2017 was launched in February outlining hundreds of actions and sub-actions to be implemented throughout the year. An end of year review on the Action Plan for Education 2016 was also published.
- In November, an additional 430 resource teachers were allocated to schools to support children with special needs. This brings the total number of resource teachers for the 2016/17 school year to 7,429 posts, an increase of 9% in twelve months.

- 115 additional Special Needs Assistants are being allocated to schools from January to June 2017. This brings the total number of Special Needs Assistants to 13,015, an increase of 22% since 2011.
- The DEIS Plan 2017 was published in February to tackle educational disadvantage by setting out new targets to further improve literacy and numeracy, improve school completion rates, and improve progression to further and higher education.
- 825 schools are included under the DEIS programme for the 2016/17 school year. An additional 79 schools will be added to the programme from the 2017/18 school year.
- The Interim Review of the National Strategy: Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life (2011-2020) has been published showing significant improvements in reading and mathematics over the period. New and ambitious updated targets have been set for 2017-2020 to keep the focus on the areas that need attention.
- The latest OECD PISA results, published in January, show that in 2015, Ireland's 15-year-olds are among the best in OECD countries in reading and are performing significantly higher than the OECD average in mathematics and science.
- The Student Assistant Fund Review has been published reaffirming that demand for student assistance remains strong and identifies future challenges. The Fund supports students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds with ongoing needs for financial support.
- New plans have been announced aimed at providing more multi-denominational and non-denominational schools across the country, in line with the choices of families and school communities.
- The General Scheme of Education (Parent and Student Charter) Bill 2016 was approved and published in December. The Bill will require schools to publish and operate a Parent and Student Charter which will set out the principles that will guide how schools engage with parents and students.
- €30m has been allocated to schools for the provision of ICT equipment under the Digital Strategy for Schools 2015- 2020.
- 4,600 coaching hours are being provided to 400 school leaders under a new coaching service by the Centre for School Leadership that is being rolled out from January 2017.
- Mentors have been assigned to newly appointed to Post Primary Principals across the country and Leinster-based newly appointed Primary Principals.
- A new Post Graduate Programme in School Leadership has been announced for teachers aspiring to senior school leadership positions. The first intake of students will be in September 2017 and it will be open to approximately 200 participants annually.

- The report of the STEM Education Review Group was launched with recommendations including the introduction of computer science, including coding, as a Leaving Certificate subject.
- 44 projects have been selected to receive up to €2.8m in funding to improve public understanding of science and technology, increase STEM uptake in education and improve diversity in STEM.
- The Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022 was launched in October setting out how Gaeltacht schools will be supported to provide high-quality, Irish-medium education.
- €28.5m was announced in November under the Minor Works Grant for primary schools throughout the country.
- The *Action Plan to Expand Apprenticeships and Traineeships in Ireland 2016 – 2020* was launched in January, aimed at delivering 50,000 apprenticeship and traineeship registrations by 2020.
- Two new apprenticeships, the Insurance Practitioner Apprenticeship and the Industrial Engineer Apprenticeship, were launched in 2016 with a further 13 new apprenticeships due to launch later this year.
- Following the favourable evaluation group report for the pilot Employment Support Scheme, two further iterations of the scheme are planned for 2017 – one in Limerick to begin in May and the other in North Dublin beginning in September.

Crime, Justice and Equality

- €55m in funding was allocated to the Gardaí to tackle gangland crime with measures introduced including the establishment of the Special Crime Task Force to enhance the response to organised crime, and the establishment of a dedicated Garda Armed Support Unit.
- The Bail (Amendment) Bill has been published to strengthen the operation of the bail system with the aim of making the law as effective as possible in protecting the public against crimes committed by persons on bail including electronic tagging where requested by Gardaí.
- The Criminal Justice (Victims of Crime) Bill 2016 has been published which will give effect to EU Directive establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime
- Over €1.7m has been allocated to fifty-eight organisations working with victims of crime.

- The Domestic Violence Bill has been published. The Bill will improve the protections available to victims of domestic violence and aims to make the court process easier for victims. The Bill is also a major step towards Ireland's ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention).
- A national awareness campaign, "*What would you do?*" was launched to increase the awareness of domestic and sexual violence, and to activate bystanders with the aim of decreasing and preventing this violence.
- The recently enacted Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017 enhances and update laws to combat the sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children.
- Further core funding of €2m was announced for the International Community of the Red Cross to support their humanitarian work in areas of conflict such as Syria and Nigeria. The ICRC received a total of €14m in funding in 2016.
- 240 asylum seekers were relocated from Greece in 2016, while over 510 Refugees from the Lebanon were resettled in Ireland last year.
- A Migrant Integration Strategy 2017 - 2020 and a Communities Integration Fund have been launched to provide a framework for Government action and to promote integration at local level. €500,000 will be made available in 2017 to local community based groups to promote integration in their area.
- The Single Application Procedure, provided for under the International Protection Act 2015, came into effect on 31 December 2016, streamlining the application process and reducing the time spent in State provided accommodation.
- A Strategy Committee was established to advise on the drafting of a new National Women's Strategy 2017-2020. Work is nearing completion and the Strategy is expected to be published shortly.
- On 1 March, the Taoiseach made a statement in the Dáil confirming the States recognition of Travellers as a distinct ethnic group within the Irish nation.
- A Traveller Counselling Service, '*Traveller Mental Health- Bridging the Gap through Partnership*' has been launched to address mental health issues facing the travelling community.
- The Government have appointed Judge Pat McCartan to conduct an assessment of the new evidence that the Stardust Relatives and Victims Committee assert that they have uncovered, in order to make a recommendation as to whether or not the establishment of a Commission of Investigation into the Stardust Tragedy of 1981 is warranted.

Agriculture

- Enhanced access was secured for Irish beef to Saudi Arabia during a Ministerial-led trade mission to the Gulf States with a delegation of over 30 Irish agri-food and agri-tech companies. This follows the reopening of the Egyptian market to Irish beef in January.
- An Agriculture Cashflow Support Loan Scheme has been launched offering low cost flexible loans up to €150k for a term up to 6 years at a rate of 2.95%. The new Scheme will alleviate some of the pressures being caused by the current market difficulties including currency fluctuation in the aftermath of the Brexit referendum.
- A new €25m Sheep Welfare Scheme was launched for Irish sheep farmers in January 2017 with 21,000 applications received.
- Rainwater harvesting systems are included in the new Tillage Measure launched on 8 March 2017 under the TAMS Scheme.
- €280m of fishing quotas have been secured for Irish fishermen for 2017, a 6% increase on 2016.
- €28m has been announced for on-going capital investment in Ireland's 6 fishery harbour centres and smaller harbours to support safety, maintenance and fisheries processing and development.
- €12m in funding is being provided for seven Fisheries Local Action Groups focused on local development in coastal areas and communities.

Climate Change

- A public consultation was launched in March on Ireland's first National Mitigation Plan with questions on how Ireland should position itself to take the key initial steps to achieve the national transition objective by 2050.
- The structure of the National Dialogue on Climate Action which will run initially for a period of two years was announced in March. A Steering Group will be established and a Secretariat will be put in place to administer the process.

An economic assessment has been undertaken and a public consultation concluded to inform the final design and implementation of a Renewable Heat Incentive Scheme as part of Ireland's commitment to ensure that by 2020, 12% of our heating demand will come from renewable energy sources.

- €54m was spent on the Better Energy Programme in 2016, facilitating the upgrading of around 21,000 households. A further 36 community groups received funding for energy efficiency upgrades under the Better Energy Communities programme. An additional €20m has been allocated for the Better Homes Programme for 2017 bringing the budget to €74m.

- The first Public Sector Energy Efficiency Strategy 2017-2020 was published in January providing new governance structures and enhanced supports to assist public sector bodies in achieving the energy efficiency target of 33% for 2020.
- Work is almost complete on a National Policy Framework for Alternative Fuels Infrastructure and will be published shortly. A transition to alternatively-fuelled vehicles will be required to effect a substantial reduction in Ireland's overall transport emissions.
- An Inter-Departmental Low Emissions Vehicle Task Force has been established to consider the range of measures and options available to Government to accelerate the deployment of low carbon technologies.
- Following public consultation, all 29 Draft Flood Risk Management Plans have now been submitted by Local Authorities to the OPW.
- During 2016, the Shannon Flood Risk State Agency Co-ordination Working Group identified a number of specific collaborative initiatives which include a pilot project on lowering water levels on the lakes, the assessment of identified “pinchpoints” and the development of a strategic maintenance programme.
- A major Review Report was published on the response to last winter’s flooding which describes the preparedness and the response of the State Agencies to the severe weather events while also detailing the recovery measures that were put in place by Government to deal with the aftermath of the flooding.

Investing in Society

- The North East Inner City Dublin Report prepared by Kieran Mulvey was published recommending a number of key areas for priority action including: tackling crime and drugs; maximising educational and training opportunities and creating local employment; creating an integrated system of social services; and improving the physical landscape. Work is underway to establish a new programme office to support the development of an implementation plan in consultation with the local community, business and statutory sectors.
- Funding of €1.75m was announced under the dormant accounts scheme to support social enterprises which provide services to tackle social exclusion, unemployment and disadvantage.
- The Communities Facilities Scheme has been launched with funding of €2m to provide capital grants for community groups and organisations in disadvantaged urban and rural areas.
- €5.1m has been allocated under Dormant Account Funding to the development of new innovative services for children and disadvantaged young people. Over €3m of the money will be targeted at the development of innovative services which will prevent

young people falling into trouble.

- A new €30m round of funding was launched in January under the Sports Capital Programme to develop sports infrastructure around the country for 2017. A record 2,320 applications were received and allocations will be announced later in the year.

A public consultation was launched on the development of a new National Sports Policy Framework which will provide a long-term framework for sport in Ireland and will set the strategic agenda for Sport Ireland. The Framework is expected to be published in mid-2017.

- Services on the new Phoenix Park Tunnel line have begun. Seven new morning peak trains and eight new evening peak trains now have a direct connection between stations in south-west Dublin and north Kildare and the central business district between Connolly and Grand Canal Dock.
- An Anti-Dumping Initiative 2017 has been launched with an initial allocation of €650,000 to provide funding for projects tackling illegal dumping and to target those who engage in this illegal practice.

Ireland and the World

- The Government's Legacy Programme for Ireland 2016, '*Creative Ireland*' has been launched. The five-year whole-of-government initiative aims to improve access to cultural and creative activity in every county across the country. Ten major initiatives including *Cruinniú na Cásca*, a new national day of culture and creativity, which will take place throughout the country on Easter Monday, will be delivered in 2017.
- Details of more than €9m in capital funding for arts and culture centres across the country were announced in February 2017 as part of the Creative Ireland programme. A total of 56 cultural organisations will benefit from this capital investment.
- Increases in funding have been provided across a range of arts and heritage bodies and cultural institutions including: an additional €5m for the Arts Council, an increase of €1m for Culture Ireland, an increase of €2m for the Irish Film Board, an additional €1m for the Heritage Council, and €2m to allow for the opening of the newly restored historic wings at National Gallery of Ireland and the opening of Killarney House.
- Funding of €850,000 has been announced to support the language planning process in Gaeltacht areas under the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish language.
- The Taoiseach attended the 23rd Plenary of the North South Ministerial Council in November where discussions included the implications of the UK Referendum for both jurisdictions, the overall economic picture North and South, a Report on Infrastructure Commitments in the Fresh Start Agreement and the North West Gateway Initiative.
- A clear and comprehensive plan has been put in place by the Government in response to Brexit, focused on protecting and advancing Ireland's interests at every turn. An intensive

process of analysis, consultation and engagement has been undertaken across Government, led by the Taoiseach.

- The Government has established our headline priorities for Brexit: Minimising impact on trade and the economy; Protecting the Northern Ireland Peace Process; Maintaining the Common Travel Area; and Influencing the future of the European Union.
- Now that Article 50 has been triggered, the Irish Government will publish, before the European Council meeting on 29 April, a consolidated paper providing more detail about our priorities and our approach to the negotiations ahead.
- The second All-Island Civic Dialogue on Brexit took place on 17 February in Dublin Castle and was attended by civic society groups, business groups, NGOs and the main political parties on the island.
- Fourteen Sectoral Dialogues on Brexit have also been held focusing on areas including agri-food, seafood, forestry, regional SMEs and border and rural communities.
- In the second round of 2016 funding, €1m was announced for Reconciliation Networking Forum in December to support 60 organisations working on peace and reconciliation.
- A joint North-South '*Concerned About Suicide*' leaflet was launched in November to help to raise awareness and put people in contact with sources of support.
- A new Trade and Investment Strategy, "*Ireland Connected: Trading and Investing in a Dynamic World*", has been launched providing an overarching framework to diversify into new markets and intensify growth in existing markets for Irish exports, inward investment, tourism and international education.
- There has been a focus on promoting Ireland's political, trade and economic relations with Ministerial-led trade missions including to Dubai, Beijing and Hong Kong, Paris, New York and San Francisco, Kenya, Warsaw, Vietnam, Shenzhen and Tokyo, the Gulf, India, North Africa, and the UK.
- Focus has also been on promoting Ireland as a location for international business and investment in the context of Brexit and other current global developments.
- Over the St. Patrick's Day period, there were 26 Minister-led visits to 27 countries, promoting Ireland and Irish business. The programmes included in excess of 120 business, economic and trade events, and 100 high-level political meetings.
- A record 290 iconic buildings and landmarks in over 44 countries around the world were 'greened' over the St. Patrick's Day period, enhancing Ireland's global visibility.
- Ireland has been granted a Chinese Renminbi Qualified Foreign Institutional Investor quota equivalent to approximately €6.8bn, allowing Irish-domiciled financial institutions to invest in China's domestic bond and equity markets using China's own currency.

Ireland is only the 17th jurisdiction outside of China granted an RQFII quota which will improve Ireland's funds services offering and our status as a major financial services centre.

- A number of Passport Service customer service enhancements have been introduced including an enhanced on-line application tracking service, as well as a web-chat social media service to facilitate "real time" communication between the Passport Service and passport applicants. An on-line application service for passport renewals was introduced at the end of March 2017.
- Some €190m was provided in 2016 for humanitarian assistance and new long term development programmes were approved for Uganda and Malawi. New programmes are being developed for Tanzania, Vietnam, Zambia and Mozambique.
- An additional €10m has been provided to Overseas Development Assistance for 2017 bringing the gross allocation to €651m. This is the second year running the Government has increased the overall allocation to the aid programme.