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Ireland's workplaces of the future

The Forum on the Workplace of the Future was established by the National Centre for Partnership and Performance at the request of the Government. The impetus for this initiative was the recognition that effective and appropriate workplace change is central to the realisation of the ambitious economic and social vision that has been set by the Government.

The *Forum's* report *Working to our Advantage – A National Workplace Strategy* provides a comprehensive evaluation of how work is evolving in Ireland and the challenges facing organisations and their employees in the emerging knowledge society. The report establishes a guiding vision for Irish workplaces and outlines a range of actions that Government, the social partners, employers, trade unions and employees need to undertake in seeking to realise this vision.

The *Forum's* report was the product of extensive research, consultation and debate with a range of public and private organisations. It marks the initial step in building a broad consensus in support of workplace change and organisational learning.

The *Forum's* detailed assessment of Irish workplaces reveals a strong awareness amongst employees, unions and employers of the need for workplace change and innovation. Despite some significant progress in this regard, the research undertaken by the Economic and Social Research Institute for the NCPP demonstrates the extent to which the Irish workforce is currently under utilised. The failure to fully utilise employee willingness to proactively engage with and manage change is the product of a combination of factors. It is, in part, indicative of the fact that the adoption by organisations of comprehensive 'bundles' of work practices, which have been shown to be associated with high performance, is quite

limited. There are clear deficiencies in areas such as childcare, lifelong learning, training and development.

The *Forum's* work also highlights a persistent 'opportunities divide' in the Irish workforce. In particular, women, older workers, people with disabilities, non-nationals and lower socio-economic groups all face various barriers preventing them from fully participating in the workforce and reaching their full potential.

In seeking to address the key issues identified by the report, the *Forum* has outlined an integrated set of forty-two policy recommendations that together constitute a new National Workplace Strategy. Significantly, this new initiative represents a co-ordinated and work-centred response to the challenge of accelerating the pace of workplace change and innovation across the entire economy.

Focused action

The strategy articulates the need for innovative and focused action on key areas such as:

- childcare
- lifelong learning
- employee involvement and participation
- training and development,
- dispute resolution
- flexible working
- leadership and management skills
- workplace diversity

A central theme of this Strategy for workplace change is the recognition that high participation, high involvement work practices within workplaces are key to generating mutual benefits for employers and employees in terms of increased

innovation, higher productivity and an enhanced quality of working life.

The *Forum* is aware that the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Strategy will be difficult and challenging. Achieving meaningful progress on complex issues such as childcare or lifelong learning carries with it serious financial implications. The *Forum* report clearly recognises the need for Government, employees and employers to work out a new three-way commitment of resources on such issues. This will require the relevant parties to develop an awareness of the medium to long-term benefits of incurring some of these costs now.

Taking effective action on the key priority areas identified by the *Forum* is necessary if Ireland is to develop an economy characterised by high quality, high skilled, well paid jobs. Progress in areas such as upskilling and reskilling will be critical in seeking to minimise the disruption associated with such a transition. Part of the success of the *Forum* is that it has fostered a shared understanding of the challenges facing Irish workplaces and has also built a momentum around the need to develop new approaches and initiatives.

Effective implementation

The effective implementation of the *Forum's* recommendations will also require that the various state bodies, agencies and social partners champion the agreed vision and make the case to employers, employees and trade unions as to the benefits of proactively engaging with workplace change and innovation.

Recognising the need to bring the various actors together in a new

way, the *Forum* recommended the establishment of a High Level Implementation Group to oversee the establishment of the institutional arrangements geared towards achieving the level of co-ordination needed for the successful implementation of this strategy. Significantly, this group, which is chaired by Minister for Labour Affairs, Mr. Tony Killeen, T.D., has been established and has already met on two occasions.

Workplace innovation and social partnership

Despite significant advances over the last two decades, Ireland continues to face real competitive and social challenges. In seeking to secure future progress and to maximise the potential of our workplaces, the National Workplace Strategy, although challenging, needs to be fully implemented.

In this regard, the national social partnership system, which has demonstrated its capacity to resolve complex problems, provides a strong platform. The *Forum's* recommendations could provide the basis on which Government and the social partners might agree a new set of joint actions under any new national agreement.

A key ingredient of the success of Ireland's system of social partnership has been its capacity to evolve and respond to changing economic and social circumstances. Negotiations on a new agreement will provide an opportunity to rebuild the consensus of social partnership around the need to stimulate workplace innovation and change.

Philip Kelly, Assistant Secretary, Department of An Taoiseach and Chairperson of the National Centre for Partnership and Performance.

Working to our Advantage – a National Workplace Strategy

The Taoiseach launched the final report of the Forum on the Workplace of the Future on the 9th of March, 2005. The *Forum* has set out a vision of the workplace of the future and has agreed an integrated set of recommendations, which form a new National Workplace Strategy.

The key message arising from the *Forum's* work is that the quality of our workforce and levels of innovation within workplaces are now critical to Ireland's economic and social success. The development of knowledge-based activities requires a capacity for innovation that extends far beyond technical innovation and investment in R&D, critical as these are. Emphasis must now be placed on the workplace and how we can promote innovation across the economy. The increasing importance attached to workplace innovation places workers and workplace issues at the centre. This gives everybody a role in contributing to our future success as an economy and society.

The *Forum's* final report outlines a vision of the innovative workplace, which is based on nine interlocking characteristics as outlined in the accompanying table. Public and private sector organisations that develop and embed these characteristics will achieve higher levels of performance and competitive advantage. The report outlines the practices and the 'bundles' of practices, which will help organisations, develop these characteristics. In this way it is a useful reference and guide for organisations in helping to manage change successfully

and building greater capacity for innovation. Moreover through its recommendations it has proposed a framework of support at national level and for the first time has developed a comprehensive national workplace strategy for Ireland.

“Emphasis must now be placed on the workplace and how we can promote innovation across the economy. The increasing importance attached to workplace innovation places workers and workplace issues at the centre.”

In its stated vision, the *Forum* recognises that in the future our workplaces will need to be more flexible, outward looking and open to change so that they can anticipate and adapt rapidly to new circumstances and develop a greater capacity for innovation. A high degree of 'fitness' and agility will be required to respond to new competitive challenges and to meet the changing needs of employees, employers and customers.

Vision of the workplace of the future		
Characteristics		Practices
All parts of the organisation and all employees are committed to the need for change and new ideas. Change is embraced willingly and all employees are constantly alert to opportunities for improvement and innovation.	Agile	Constant innovation in areas such as customer focus, learning, work organisation and management. Communication and dialogue with employees and investment in training to enable employees to absorb workplace change.
All decisions are informed primarily by a customer, client or citizen viewpoint, and all employees understand the impact of their work on the end-user of their organisation's product or service.	Customer centred	Positive approaches in areas such as fairness, equality, training, family-friendly practices and information and consultation have a significant impact on employee satisfaction and on employees' commitment to customer satisfaction.
The organisation and its people recognise that the knowledge content of all jobs is important to the organisation's performance and that the knowledge required for all jobs will change and adapt regardless of the nature of the work.	Knowledge intensive	Increasing scope for employee involvement, autonomy and input into decision-making. Internal relationships, formal and informal processes, and knowledge management systems which encourage employees to innovate and to share knowledge.
The organisation is alert to the needs and concerns of employees, and understands the importance of quality of working life for employees as individuals as well as for the overall well-being of the organisation.	Responsive to employee needs	Support for learning, access to opportunity and autonomy, work/life balance, health and safety and good quality employment opportunities.
The organisation and its people appreciate the need for external collaboration with business partners and suppliers, customers and research and educational institutions. The organisation is constantly alert to the possibilities associated with collaboration, networking and clustering of activities.	Networked	Cross-functional ways of working which establish opportunities for both formal and informal networking. Examples include shared service activities and public sector inter-agency working.
The organisation is structured around a high-performance ethos. High performance is actively encouraged and rewarded at all levels. There is a constant focus on opportunities for improvement and a bias towards implementation.	Highly productive	'Bundles' of practices which reinforce one another and which are customised to the particular requirements of the organisation. Practices include team-working, collaborative problem-solving, communication and sharing information, training and development, appraisal and feedback, and rewarding employees' contributions.
The organisation values and actively seeks involvement and participation by all employees. The culture, management systems and work processes are all designed to enable employees to become deeply involved in the search for sources of higher performance and innovation.	Involved and participatory	Culture of openness and employee involvement which encourages experimentation and innovation and builds employee satisfaction. New approaches to leadership and management and new management competencies to support forms of employee involvement and to build workplace partnerships, informal or formal.
Learning and experimentation are encouraged and there is an ongoing focus on training, skills and learning to increase the skill content in all work.	Continually learning	Informal and formal systematic processes of skills upgrading and continual learning centred on training plans, needs assessment, employee support and funding mechanisms.
The organisation understands the value of diversity in terms of business benefits and employee well-being. Diversity is approached as an integral part of the organisation's culture and management.	Proactively diverse	Equality and diversity linked to both the quality of employees' working life, and organisational performance in areas such as productivity, reduction in employee turnover, attracting and retaining high quality staff and organisational reputation.

“Fundamentally, as the knowledge economy and the knowledge workplace is essentially about people, the future workplace must involve all employees and must find ways for employees to participate and engage at all levels.”

The vision: an overview

The growing importance of knowledge-based work means workplaces will be more knowledge-intensive, accessing and harnessing knowledge from many sources including new technology but particularly from employees and customers. They will be proactively diverse because our workforce is becoming increasingly diverse due to demographic changes and the demands of a growing economy.

There will be much greater emphasis on training and up-skilling as companies will need to invest in developing their employees on an ongoing basis. Management styles will also change. In the future management styles will be more engaging and participative rather than hierarchical. More fundamentally, as the knowledge economy and the knowledge workplace is essentially about people, the future workplace must involve all employees and must find ways for employees to participate and engage at all levels.

The challenges

The challenge facing employers, employees and other key stakeholders is to enable workplaces in all sectors of the economy to embed these capabilities rapidly and successfully. This will require a more participative and engaging management style. It will also require new ways of organising work that

enable learning and creativity to motivate employees and attend to their changing needs, and build collaborative approaches to workplace change.

The *Forum* also acknowledges the important role of unions in the future workplace. However, there is clear evidence in the *Forum* surveys that employees expect unions to change. In particular, employees expressed their desire to see their unions adopt a proactive role in co-operating with employers in order to build the success of their organisation. They would like their unions to participate actively in decisions affecting the future success of the enterprise. Furthermore, employees would like a broader range of representation, beyond the traditional areas of pay and conditions. They would like their unions to work on their behalf in areas such as flexible working and work-related training and learning.

The New National Workplace Strategy

The *Forum* made 42 recommendations, constituting a National Workplace Strategy. A High Level Implementation Group, chaired by Ireland’s Minister for Labour Affairs, Mr. Tony Killeen, T.D., has been established to oversee work on the five strands of the Strategy as follows:

1. Increase commitment to workplace innovation

Ireland must dramatically improve innovation in public and private sector workplaces through encouraging the take up of ‘bundles’ of HR practices associated with high performance and innovation. These practices include the following:

- High levels of employee involvement and participation, enabling workplaces to gain maximum advantage from the knowledge, creativity and commitment of their employees.
- An understanding that up-skilling and continual learning for those already in the workforce is an essential and critical investment in our rapidly changing and increasingly knowledge-based economy.
- A genuine commitment to diversity and equality of opportunity as core aspects of organisational strategies for dealing with the changing labour market and the new competitive environment.
- Good communications, information sharing and consultation arrangements.
- Staffing, recruitment and retention policies, which are linked with strategy.
- Performance management and appraisal systems.
- Innovative reward systems including employee financial involvement.

Companies will need to review their current structures, work practices and systems of communication to ensure that they are sufficiently flexible and responsive.

The *Forum* recommendations include the establishment of a fund at national level to promote workplace innovation.

2. Build capacity for change

Irish organisations must improve their capacity to change by building leadership and management capacity, increasing employee involvement, and enhancing dispute resolution mechanisms.

3. Develop future skills

Eighty per cent of Ireland's current workforce will still be working in 2015, but Ireland ranks only 8th out of EU 15 for participation in lifelong learning. The *Forum* recommends that international approaches, such as Personal Learning Accounts should be examined, and that agencies must improve cross-cutting approaches to part-time access to learning, the cost of further education, and accreditation of work-based learning.

4. Improve access to workplace opportunities

The *Forum* identified an "opportunities divide" in the workplace whereby highly qualified and more senior workers have better opportunities for training, information, consultation and autonomy at work. In order to improve access to workplace opportunities for key sources of future labour, including women, non-national workers, older workers and workers with disabilities, the *Forum* recommends the development of further childcare supports, to improve the quality of working life for all workers, and to increase the participation of women in particular. In addition, Ireland must develop a policy framework that facilitates older workers who wish to remain in the workforce.

5. Improve the quality of working life

The *Forum* makes a number of recommendations to ensure good quality of working life for all workers, including increased access to learning and consultation, employee involvement and autonomy, as well as increased availability of work/life balance policies in Irish organisations.

Further information on the *Forum* can be found at www.ncpp.ie/forum.

*Lucy Fallon Byrne, Director,
National Centre for Partnership
and Performance*

Strategic priorities: Building commitment to workplace innovation

What is workplace innovation? The Forum has agreed a new goal for public policy and for practitioners, but what does it mean, how will it be measured and what will it deliver?

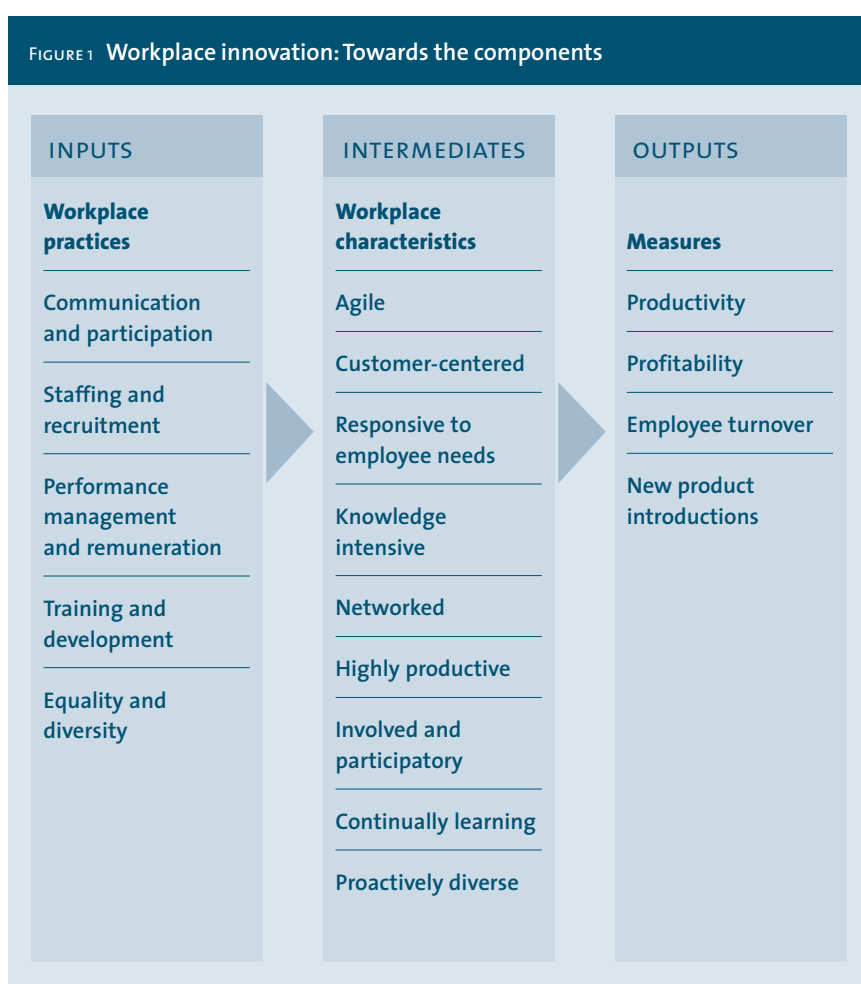
This article takes a closer look at workplace innovation; its main elements, its impact within organisations and the outcomes and results. It also highlights current levels of workplace innovation, and looks, in particular, at the differences between small, large, foreign and indigenous companies. It provides a brief overview of workplace innovation in the public sector. Finally, it concludes by noting the changing role of unions.

Workplace innovation – defined

Workplace innovation is the adoption of new workplace practices, new workplace structures and new ideas about how to do things. In short, workplace innovation is about doing things at work in a new way.

Workplace innovation is a process with inputs and outcomes (Figure 1). The inputs are essentially bundles of work practices in five broad areas, namely, communication and participation, training and development, staffing and recruitment, performance management, and equality and diversity.

Putting these practices in place produces results both for organisations and employees. Organisations can greatly improve productivity, can provide better customer service and can increase sales and profitability. Employees also gain as issues such as skills, development, education



and learning, autonomy, responsibility, mutual gains and quality of life become more central to the strategic agenda of the organisation.

The mechanism by which these outcomes occur is the creation of better internal workplace environments, the attributes of which were identified by the Forum. These include agility, knowledge intensity, work/life balance, and a proactive approach to diversity.

“A concerted effort is needed to develop awareness and understanding of the benefits of new workplace models and to encourage the spread of these progressive employment and human resource management practices — throughout all sectors of the economy.”

TABLE 1 Workplace innovation: Large and small companies

EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES	Companies employing 0-9	Companies employing 50+
Employee involvement/participation at work	%	%
■ Employee discretion in the way their work is carried out	70	56
■ Arrangements for direct involvement of employees in decision-making and problem-solving	61	64
■ Information and consultation with employees on change in the company	60	74
■ New work practices such as team working/multi-tasking/quality circles	19	39
■ Informal partnership-style arrangements between management and employee representatives	17	42
■ Formal partnership arrangements involving unions and employees	2	29
Employee-oriented practices		
■ Employee financial involvement	14	33
■ Explicit policy on equality/diversity in the workplace	40	61
■ Arrangements for work/life balance for employees	41	46
■ Annualised hours customised to the needs of management and employees	30	26
■ Formal dispute resolution procedures	26	70
Staff development practices		
■ Training and development for managers	47	84
■ Training and development for employees	60	94
■ Formal staff performance review	35	70
Flexible employment practices		
■ Use of part-time staff	58	77
■ Use of temporary/contract staff	33	64
■ Temporary layoffs/reduced working time when necessary	20	36

Source: ESRI/ NCPP (2004). The Changing Workplace - A Survey of Employers.

Workplace innovation: The challenge

A concerted effort is needed to develop awareness and understanding of the benefits of new workplace models and to encourage the spread of these progressive employment and human resource management practices — throughout all sectors of the economy.

Large and small companies

The Forum found that private sector companies, particularly larger companies, are experimenting quite extensively with new workplace practices. Smaller companies face a range of difficulties in relation to workplace innovation, particularly

with regard to investment in training, partnership, new work practices and employee financial involvement.

However, only a minority of companies appear to be using high performance work practices in the ‘bundled’ synergistic way that delivers most benefit.

For example, taking the combination of consultation and participation or partnership, the Forum found that employees in 4 out of 10 companies report that there is low consultation and no partnership-style arrangement (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2 Workplace innovation: Diffusion of best practice

		Partnership or participation	
		YES	NO
Consultation	HIGH	14%	19%
	LOW	39%	28%

These include:

- Partnership or participation
- Arrangements for direct involvement
- Employee discretion
- Training – managers or employees
- Work/life balance
- Policy on equality and diversity.

At the other end of the spectrum just one in five report that they work in companies where there are high levels of consultation and some arrangement for participation or partnership.

Foreign and indigenous companies

Foreign ownership is often seen as an important consideration in predicting companies’ use of workplace innovation. Research for the Forum found a convergence between foreign-owned and indigenous companies both in terms of the priority attached to product and process innovation and marketing¹, and the role of progressive employee practices in achieving these goals.

Professors Bill Roche and John Geary² have shown that in the late 1990s progressive employment policies and practices were significantly more common in foreign owned companies. The research for the Forum suggests that the differences are now less pronounced. It is still the case that foreign owned companies are more likely to have:

- New work practices
- Information and consultation processes
- Employee financial participation
- Formal performance review.

However, there are a range of other practices which are no more likely to occur in foreign owned companies.

Public service

Public service workplaces are responding positively to the need for change, with service quality and people management increasingly at the centre of the change and improvement agenda.

In the public service, practices such as performance management, team

TABLE 2 Employment practices in the public service

EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES	%
Employee involvement/participation at work	
■ Allowing individuals discretion in managing and organising their own work	14
■ Arrangements for direct involvement of employees in decision-making and problem-solving	28
■ Improving information flows and consultation	46
■ Moving to a team-based approach to work	
■ Informal partnership-style arrangements between management and employee representatives	23
■ Formal partnership arrangement involving unions and employees	40
Employee-oriented practices	
■ Explicit policy on equality/diversity in the workplace	35
■ Meeting employees needs for work/life balance	29
Staff development practices	
■ Training and development for managers	66
■ Training and development for employees	71
■ Performance related pay – increment related to annual review of performance	16
Flexible employment practices	
■ Open recruitment – all grades	19
■ Use of contract or temporary staff	6
■ Freedom to adjust employee numbers	29

Source: ESRI/ NCPP (2004). *The Changing Workplace – A Survey of Employers.*

1. Allowing for differences in size and levels of performance, foreign owned companies are seen to attribute less importance to innovation and marketing (NCPP/ESRI Employers’ Survey, 2004).

2. Roche, W. K. and John Geary. (1998). “Collaborative Production and the Irish Boom: Work Organisation, Partnership and Direct Involvement in Irish Workplaces.” Centre for Employment Relations and Organisational Performance Working Paper.

working, and more flexible recruitment and pay practices, are still at an embryonic stage in many organisations, and these will require more flexible and strategic approaches to human resource management if they are to develop.

“Workplace innovation must be part of the mainstream response to competitive pressures.”

Recent reviews in key areas such as health and education, and ongoing shortfalls in service provision across a range of public services, point up the need to accelerate the rate of progress with the workplace modernisation agenda.

Trade unions

Unions have an important role to play in supporting change and encouraging workplace innovation, particularly in terms of engaging

with employers in collaborative efforts, a development which their members appear to favour (Figure 3).

Workplace innovation: Next steps

Workplace innovation must be part of the mainstream response to competitive pressures. It must become an integral part of industrial policy and public service reform and modernisation. This requires the development of diagnostic benchmarking tools which will assist employers to identify their current level of workplace innovation compared to national and international best-practice benchmarks.

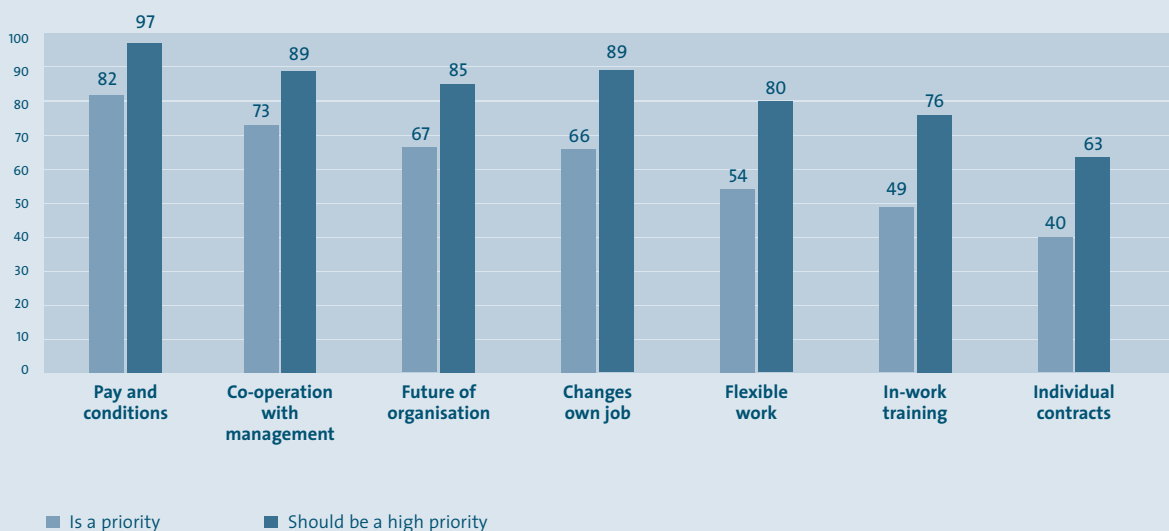
Building the research-based case for workplace innovation remains important. Specifically, more research is needed into the impact of workplace practices on productivity, innovation and corporate capacity for change. There is also a need for a more focused data infrastructure for the workplace as a means of supporting benchmarking and assessing progress on a regular basis.

A comprehensive set of indicators will now be developed by NCPP, NESDO and Forfás in conjunction with other experts and practitioners. This work will:

- Reflect the ongoing efforts of other agencies to provide benchmarks and guides for best practice.
- Help the development of funding criteria for the proposed innovation fund and any future changes to State funding awards in Science, Technology and Marketing.
- Influence the future workplace data collection exercises and in particular it should help inform future work within the CSO and subsequent versions of the workplace surveys carried out for the Forum.

*Dr. Larry O’Connell,
National Co-ordinator,
Research & Innovation*

FIGURE 3 Priorities of trade union / staff associations



Quality of working life – Meeting the needs of a changing workforce

Ensuring a good quality of working life for all workers must be a central part of Ireland’s economic and social agenda in the coming years.

This article summarises the critical workplace issues identified by the Forum that require new and innovative approaches in order to bring about gains for organisations, employees and society.

“Too often, employees do not feel empowered or listened to and the organisation’s performance suffers as a result.”

The workforce is a critical source of competitive advantage to Irish organisations and should be enabled to contribute more effectively to organisational success. Employers need to develop organisational structures and processes to encourage high involvement practices such as team working and joint problem solving. Increased employability and skills, broader acknowledgement of the need for work/life balance and a commitment to employee financial involvement are just some of the outcomes that would benefit the workforce.

In addition, the increased diversity of the workforce should be considered an important tool in identifying and meeting the changing needs of customers. Leveraging this diversity to gain competitive advantage in home and export markets should be an important objective for the public and private sectors.

Whole system effort

A whole system effort towards excellence and inclusion will improve performance at national and organisational level, while

maintaining and improving Ireland’s traditionally strong social cohesion. In parallel, organisations can begin to build the workplace of the future in consultation with their own workforce.

All Irish people are equally entitled to access to the workplace, to opportunities to learn and contribute, to be informed and consulted about change. However, people with disability, lone parents, and individuals with literacy difficulties find it difficult to access work for various reasons. The barriers to workforce participation for certain groups have been well rehearsed and should be removed.

Although good leadership is crucial to organisational success, organisations are, or should be, communities of people working together towards the same goals and objectives. Too often, employees do not feel empowered or listened to and the organisation’s performance suffers as a result. However, worldwide, the data consistently proves that increased employee involvement improves the bottom line for business.

“Employees are also parents, children, citizens, friends, and neighbours. The modern world, despite all its advances in communications technologies, is a more difficult and complex place in which to live, raise a family and be an active member of a community. Organisations have the right to expect a high standard of performance from employees, but also have a responsibility to facilitate workers as they manage the pressures and stresses of modern life.”

Workers also need to maintain a continuously updated, relevant set of skills and competencies in order to be effective employees. The State has a role in providing some of those competencies through its education and training systems. Individuals are responsible for ensuring that they access additional learning opportunities throughout their career and life. Organisations have a responsibility to ensure, through the provision of training and development opportunities, that their employees are capable of doing their job to the best of their ability.

Employees are also parents, children, citizens, friends, and neighbours. The modern world, despite all its advances in communications technologies, is a more difficult and complex place in which to live, raise a family and be an active member of a community. Organisations have the right to expect a high standard of performance from employees, but also have a responsibility to facilitate workers as they manage the pressures and stresses of modern life. Flexibility in the workplace offers benefits to both organisations and employees. Organisations can react more effectively to customer needs. If employees can balance their work commitments with their life commitments, society benefits too.

Innovative human resource strategies, that match the skills of the workforce with organisational objectives, are an effective way of enabling these outcomes in the workplace. Those strategies can be developed around four principles that underpin the Forum’s vision for the workplace of the future:

High skills and involvement for employability and innovation

In the workplace of the future, developing, maintaining and utilising the skills, knowledge, and abilities of all workers will be a core business activity. The impact of an organisation’s human capital will be maximised by increased employee involvement in the achievement of business goals. Learning and involvement will visibly contribute to employee success and continued employability.

Organisational and individual flexibility, adaptability and work/life balance

In the workplace of the future, organisational structures and cultures, career progression processes, and national policies will enable organisations to meet the changing needs of customers, while ensuring that employees can balance work and other life commitments.

Equal and diverse participation

The workplace of the future will harness the increased diversity of the workforce to create strategic advantage in the marketplace. It will provide opportunities for workers of all educational levels, age, gender, ability, and cultural background to achieve their full potential, thereby eliminating any ‘opportunities’ divide’ that may currently exist.

A partnership approach to implementing organisational change

In the workplace of the future all organisations, large and small, public or private, will meet the challenge of ongoing, rapidly paced change using a partnership approach. Activities that inform and consult with employees and trade unions will increase employee involvement and maximise the opportunities presented by a changing environment.

Lorraine Glendenning, National Co-ordinator, Training & Facilitation and Julia Kelly, Executive Officer

Address by the Taoiseach, Mr. Bertie Ahern, T.D.

at the launch of

“Working to our Advantage”

Report of the Forum on the Workplace of the Future

Wednesday, 9 March, 2005

The Helix, Dublin City University

“There are huge societal benefits to be gained from an improved quality of life for individual workers.”

Introduction

I am delighted to be here with you this afternoon in this wonderful facility to launch, ‘Working to Our Advantage’ – A National Workplace Strategy. This Report is the result of intensive work which has taken place at the Forum on the Workplace of the Future. It represents the most in-depth assessment of our workplaces to date. And it fulfils a commitment we made in both the Programme for Government and with the Social Partners in *Sustaining Progress*.

The basic premise underpinning the establishment of the Forum – a premise which I believe has been reinforced by its findings – is that the same energy that we have invested to date in Ireland’s economic transformation must now be brought to the transformation of the workplace and of the individual working lives of employees. At its simplest, there is a clear competitive advantage to be won from better deployment and development of our workforce. And there are huge societal benefits to be gained from an improved quality of life for individual workers.

Challenge for the Forum

The diversity of work, and the large number of bodies, laws and policies which impact on work life often act as barriers to taking a comprehensive and integrated view of the workplace. I believe that the Forum has provided a unique opportunity to get all of the relevant stakeholders talking.

We are all aware of the pressures for change, be it in the public or private sectors. Technology, globalisation, demographics and so many other factors are forcing the pace of change. We have had a series of reviews of industrial policy, substantial investment in education, major infrastructural programmes and, in recent years, we have been dramatically increasing our investment in research and development.

However, what we lack in many cases are practical coping strategies to respond to international and sectoral change at the level of the individual workplace. The challenge the Forum faced was to try to identify those workplace features that promote the successful adoption of change and innovation;



to identify strategies to deal with changing demographics; and to look at how national level policies, institutions and legislation could better support workplace change.

Work of the Forum

The Forum adopted a strongly evidence based approach to its work. For example, it utilised a comprehensive survey of employer and employee experiences and their attitudes towards the workplace. This survey was commissioned by the National Centre for Partnership and Performance (NCP) and carried out by the ESRI. Some 1,500 private sector employers from both large and small firms were surveyed, together with almost 400 public sector employers and almost 5,200 private and public sector workers.

The Forum also relied on international experience from across

the EU and OECD, and drew on an extensive body of Irish research, conducted by the NCP and by others. The Forum also benefited from the deliberations of four expert panels – examining the private sector, the public sector, demographics and Government supports, respectively. Finally, it also engaged in an extensive consultation process.

The scope of this exercise and the extraordinary level of interest it generated reflects the scale of the challenge the Forum faced. When I launched the initial consultation paper at the outset of this process, I reminded those present of the ambitious social and economic vision that we have set ourselves as a country. At the heart of this vision is the creation of a dynamic, inclusive and knowledge based economy, capable of sustaining competitiveness and maintaining social cohesion.

Key Findings

The Report has identified nine key attributes that will be the hallmarks of successful workplaces in the future. Regardless of their size, or whether they operate in the public or private sector, successful workplaces will be Agile; Customer-Centred; Knowledge Intensive; Responsive to Employee Needs; Networked; Highly Productive; Involved and Participatory; Continually Learning; and, Pro-actively Diverse.

The Report suggests five broad areas for action. And across these five areas, there are 42 separate recommendations which form the basis for a National Workplace Strategy.

The aim of this Strategy is the creation of a climate which supports change and new forms of work organisation at both national and organisational levels. This climate in

turn will promote a better quality of work, higher productivity and an improved work-life balance.

One of the key messages I take from the report is that action by Government, the social partners, employees and enterprises will be required to achieve its goals, not least in the areas of lifelong learning and childcare. To make greater progress in both these areas, a new balance between individual, employer and public provision will be necessary. In these, and in other employment-related areas, we should seek to gain early mover advantage from a broader mix of policies.

The areas of life long learning and childcare are, of course, issues of concern to society far beyond their workplace implications, but they are certainly a priority for an inclusive and innovative workplace.

Some of the other key messages include:

- Realising our investment in R&D will be increasingly dependent on new ways of deploying and developing people;
- The most adaptive employments are those where ‘bundles’ of new employment practices are used – team working, quality circles, delegation, training and feedback systems, information sharing and consultation. Such ‘high participation’ practices are more rare than we think but correlate highly with low staff turnover, high productivity, successful adoption of new technology and product and service innovation; and
- To increase labour force participation and realise its consequent social benefits, we need to focus more creatively on women, older

workers, workers from overseas and marginalised groups who experience barriers to employment.

These are just some of the key findings in the Report, and these and many more should be noted and acted on by the relevant stakeholders.

Driving Implementation

From a Government perspective, in order to pursue implementation of the recommendations contained in this Report, I have asked my colleague, Mr. Tony Killeen, T.D., the Minister for Labour Affairs, to chair a High Level Implementation Group.

This Group will consist of senior representatives of the Departments of Enterprise, Trade & Employment, Finance, Education & Science, Justice, Equality & Law Reform as well as my own Department, along with representation from Forfás, FÁS and IBEC, the CIF and ICTU.

I believe that it would also be useful for relevant agencies and parties in the areas of employment rights, training and education to participate as appropriate in the work of this Group. I know that Minister Killeen is looking forward to taking on this important role and he will address you shortly in this regard.

Conclusion

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Council of the National Centre for Partnership and Performance who constituted the Forum. I know that both Philip Kelly who has chaired the Forum over the past year and Peter Cassells before him are both eager that Lucy, as Director of the NCPP, and all of the staff of the Centre be commended for their creativity and drive in completing this task.

I would especially like to thank all those who made submissions, both in writing and in person and to everyone who participated in the various panels, surveys, conferences and sessions of the Forum. You have been generous with both your time and your expertise and I am pleased to see so many of you here today to see the results of your efforts.

This Report is the outcome of very detailed research and analysis. It contains a wealth of new and useful information on the current status and diversity of the Irish workplace and provides us with new insights as to how change can be managed to our advantage.

I am convinced, however, that the true value of this Report lies in the shared enthusiasm amongst the various stakeholders for early action in terms of its implementation. The central and co-ordinated response I have outlined, led by Minister Killeen and the Implementation Group, will ensure that this enthusiasm is actively working to our advantage.

Thank you for your attention.

Call for action

The report of the Forum on the Workplace of the Future was launched by An Taoiseach, Mr. Bertie Ahern, T.D. on March 9th, 2005 at the Helix, at Dublin City University.

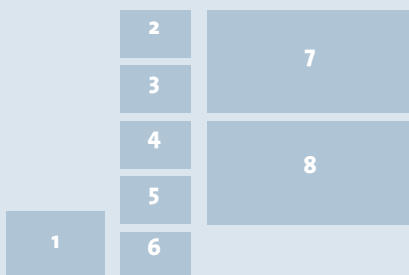
The report and its recommendations were given a ringing endorsement by speakers including the Taoiseach, along with Minister for Labour Affairs, Mr. Tony Killeen, T.D., Turlough O' Sullivan of IBEC, and David Begg of ICTU.

Almost 200 guests attended the event, which marked the culmination of 18 months of intensive work and consultation by the Forum and its four Expert Panels.

In his speech, the Taoiseach said that Ireland could and should gain 'early mover advantage' by addressing the challenges set out in the report. He highlighted that action would be required by the Government and the social partners, not least in the areas of life long learning and childcare, where new balances were required between the role of individual, employer and public provision.

The Taoiseach announced the establishment of a High Level Implementation Group, whose function will be to oversee the coordinated implementation of the Forum's recommendations, and he introduced Minister Tony Killeen as the Chairperson of the new group. The Taoiseach reiterated his view that "the true value of this Report lies in the shared enthusiasm amongst the various stakeholders for early action in terms of its implementation. The central and co-ordinated response outlined, led by Minister Killeen and the Implementation Group, will ensure that this enthusiasm is actively working to our advantage."





- 1. An Taoiseach, Mr. Bertie Ahern, T.D., with the Staff of the NCPP (L-R Larry O'Connell, Lucy Fallon Byrne, Cathal O'Regan, Gaye Malone, Edna Jordan, Damian Thomas, Lorraine Glendenning)
- 2. An Taoiseach, Mr. Bertie Ahern, T.D., Philip Kelly, Chairperson of the NCPP and Lucy Fallon-Byrne, Director of the NCPP.
- 3. Minister for Labour Affairs, Mr. Tony Killeen, T.D., David Begg, General Secretary, ICTU and Turlough O'Sullivan, Director-General, IBEC

- 4. Lucy Fallon-Byrne, Director, NCPP speaking at the launch
- 5. Lucy Fallon-Byrne, Director, NCPP, speaking to the media
- 6. An Taoiseach, Mr. Bertie Ahern, T.D. and the Director of the NCPP, Lucy Fallon-Byrne
- 7. Members of the NCPP Council with the Taoiseach (L-R Liam Doherty, IBEC, Brendan McGinty, IBEC, Lucy Fallon-Byrne, Director of the NCPP, An Taoiseach, Mr. Bertie Ahern, T.D., Philip Kelly, Chairperson of the NCPP, John

- Walsh, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Fergus Whelan, ICTU)
- 8. Turlough O'Sullivan, Director General, IBEC, Minister for Labour Affairs, Mr. Tony Killeen, T.D., Lucy Fallon-Byrne, Director of the NCPP, An Taoiseach, Mr. Bertie Ahern, T.D., David Begg, General Secretary, ICTU.

A National Workplace Strategy through consultation and deliberation

Since the launch of the Forum report there has been a lot of interest not only in the vision of the workplace of the future and the recommendations contained in the report but also in the process itself. The following is a summary of the structure, arrangements and activities that facilitated the identification of a vision for Irish workplaces in the future and the development of the National Workplace Strategy.

Discussion, debate and shared learning

Recognising that the introduction of successful and sustainable change depends largely on the process by which change is generated, the Forum set out on a journey that entailed the widest possible discussion and debate. This journey was characterised by high levels of interaction, consultation and deliberation amongst employers, employees, managers, unions, labour market and organisational change experts, and others with an interest in shaping the workplace of the future. This process was clearly influenced by

our successful experience of national-level social partnership which has demonstrated how intensive deliberation has the capacity to forge shared understanding and generate innovative consensus-based responses to complex problems. The *Forum*, however, provided an opportunity to engage with a broader set of actors than those who are formally involved in national level social partnership. The Forum marks an initial step in seeking to build a broad political and societal consensus around the need to focus our attention and energies on supporting and fostering workplace change.

A Taskforce consisting of NCPP's Council provided strategic direction for the Forum. The work of the Taskforce included organising and presiding over public hearings of the Forum, commissioning additional research, collecting information and evidence, harnessing the knowledge and learning that was being generated by the Forum's activities, and preparing the Forum's interim and final reports. Four expert panels were also established to assist and support the Taskforce in its work.

“The value of this report is clear from the novel and rich data it has provided on the current status and diversity of the Irish workplace. It also provides new insights as to how we can manage change to our advantage.”

**An Taoiseach,
Mr. Bertie Ahern, T.D.**

The first step on the Forum’s journey was the launch of a consultation paper in June 2003 which identified a set of questions that would frame the Forum’s work and deliberation by the expert panels under the following four broad themes:

- How private sector companies and organisations can anticipate and adapt to change
- How the public service and its constituent organisations can anticipate and adapt to change
- How workplaces can anticipate and meet the new and changing needs of the workforce
- How national policy and supports can help companies and organisations anticipate and adapt to change.

To facilitate the engagement of the broadest possible range of knowledge, experience and perspectives, the consultation paper also included details of how individuals or organisations could engage with the Forum. An invitation for submissions to the Forum was also published in the national newspapers in July 2003.

Many individuals and groups availed of opportunities to engage with the Forum in the following ways.

Forty-two written submissions were received by the Forum. These included submissions from:

- Trade unions
- Employers
- Management and professional bodies
- Agencies representing key groups such as the *Forum for People with Disabilities*, the *Crisis Pregnancy Agency*, the *Equality Authority*

- Individual members of the public.

Over a thousand people attended the following six public conferences that were convened under the auspices of the Forum:

6th/7th October 2003

Inaugural session of the Forum on the Workplace of the Future

17th November 2003

Achieving High Performance in Irish Workplaces

5th February 2004

Anticipating and Meeting the Needs of a Changing Workforce

28th April 2004

Meeting the Challenge of Innovation in Public Service Organisations

28th June 2004

Anticipating and Managing Change in the Private Sector

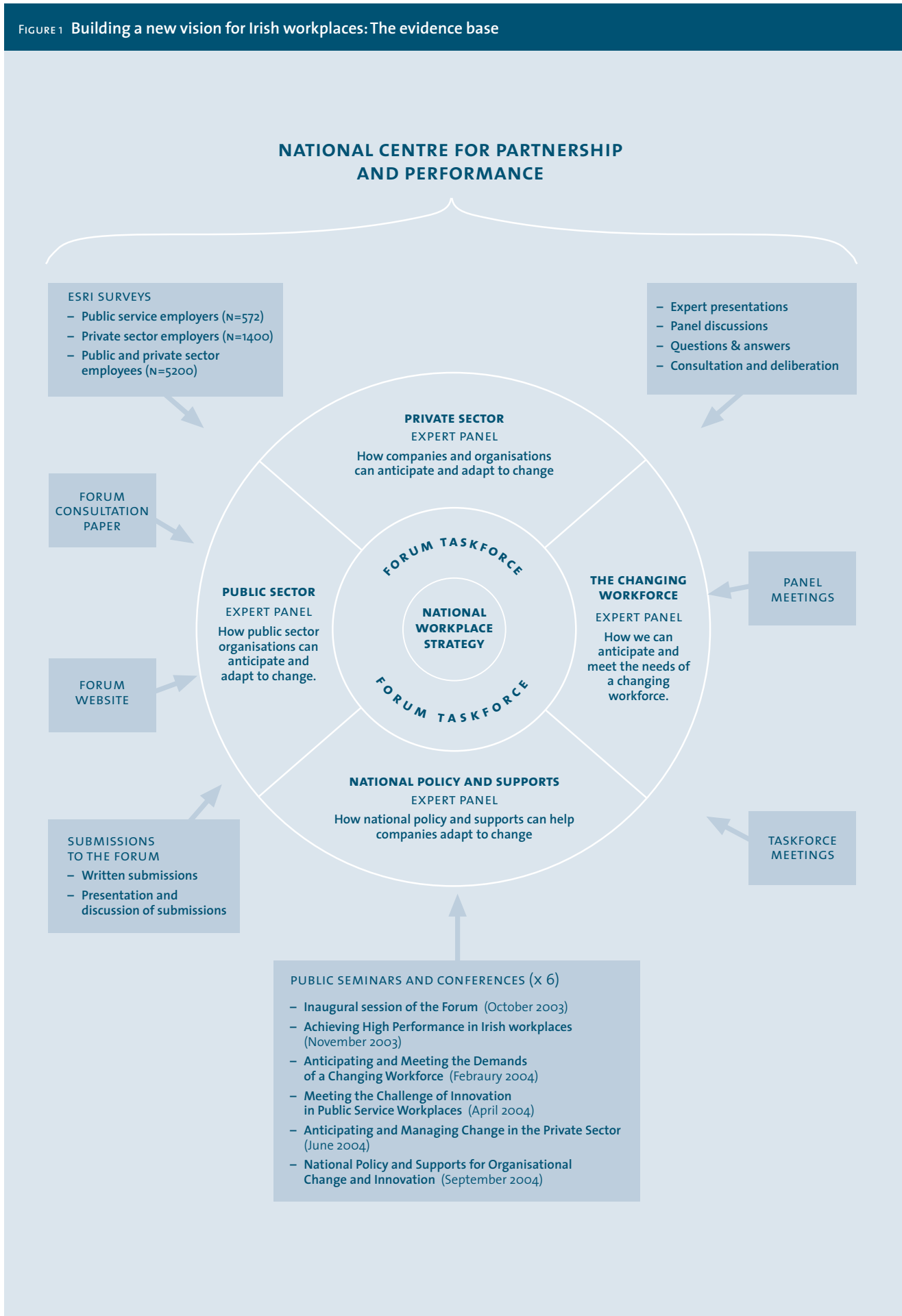
13th September 2004

National Policy and Supports for Organisational Change and Innovation

Each of these conferences was structured to include:

- Formal presentations
 - In total twenty-two national and international experts on workplace organisation and change made presentations during the public conferences
- Panel discussions on emerging themes and issues
 - The panels comprised employer representatives, trade union representatives, academics and other experts
- Opportunities for conference participants to engage in debate and discussion on conference themes

FIGURE 1 Building a new vision for Irish workplaces: The evidence base



Many people also accessed the information on all of the Forum's activities and documentation that was made available on the NCPP website: www.ncpp.ie/forum, including:

- Information about all of the Forum's activities and arrangements for the public conferences
- Documentation and presentations associated with each conference event
- Written submissions to the Forum
- Publications associated with the Forum's activities and research.

Taking stock

Clearly at the outset it was necessary to take stock of the current reality for public and private sector organisations and their employees. This was facilitated by a set of interdependent activities.

The ESRI was commissioned to carry out the largest ever research exercise undertaken in Irish workplaces to date. The research comprised three complementary surveys of employers and employees in the public and private sectors including:

- A survey of 5,200 employees, exploring their experiences and openness to change
- Two employer surveys, 1,400 private sector and 572 public sector, relating to their experiences of and attitudes to changes in their organisations

The headline results of these surveys were presented and discussed for the first time at the Forum's inaugural conference in October 2003 and the research reports informed much of the discussion and deliberation during the expert

panel meetings that took place during the lifetime of the Forum.

The presentations made during the public conferences and to the expert panels contributed to improving our understanding of what was occurring in Irish workplaces. Some of these presentations also provided opportunities to assess Irish workplaces against those in other countries.

The stocktaking exercise was further enriched by oral presentations to the Forum Taskforce of the key issues and concerns identified by the forty-two organisations and individuals who made written submissions.

Finally, the ongoing work of the NCPP in areas such as workplace partnership, employee financial participation, the information and consultation directive and organisational learning also contributed to the creation of a better understanding of workplaces in Ireland.

The current reality was more clearly visible and a vision of the Irish workplace of the future was beginning to emerge.

Towards a vision on the workplace of the future

Through the course of the Forum's work it became clear that there were key themes and issues at both national and organisational level that would critically influence the development of high performing public and private sector workplaces of the future. Members of the four expert panels met regularly to discuss and deliberate these emerging themes and issues in relation to their panel's specific area of interest. Through a process of dialogue, problem-solving and shared learning, this work culminated in the

“The launch of this report and its integrated recommendations represents not so much the end of the journey, rather the beginning of a new journey for employees, employers, managers and trade unions towards the Irish workplace of the future.”

development of four background reports that were submitted to the Forum Taskforce for consideration.

Drawing on all the evidence, experience and knowledge that was harnessed during the broad and diverse range of inputs and activities over a two year period, the Forum Taskforce published and launched its report entitled *Working to our Advantage: A National Workplace Strategy* on 9 March 2005.

The launch of this report and its integrated recommendations represents not so much the end of the journey, rather the beginning of a new journey for employees, employers, managers and trade unions towards the Irish workplace of the future. Indeed the Forum recognised that the same concerted effort that was invested in Ireland's economic transformation over the last two decades will now need to be applied to the transformation of our workplaces in the twenty first century.

Edna Jordan, National Co-ordinator, Training & Facilitation

Delivering the National Workplace Strategy

The new National Workplace Strategy provides for a comprehensive, joined up approach to workplace change. Successfully implementing this challenging strategy will require that all of the relevant policy actors – government departments, State agencies and the social partners – are fully committed to the strategic objective of modernising Ireland’s workplaces for the twenty first century.

It is essential that the various recommendations and actions contained in this Strategy are progressed in a co-ordinated and workplace-centred manner.

The Forum’s deliberations, however, clearly identified a number of limitations within the existing policy and supports infrastructure that would constrain its capacity to adopt such a co-ordinated approach.

- Public policy primarily addresses workplace-related issues in a discrete manner and as such there is a lack of a co-ordinated approach.
- The stimulation of workplace change has, to date, not been seen as a strategic goal of public policy.
- There has been no dedicated national programme to support workplace development and modernisation comparable to those established in some other countries, such as Finland.
- The current infrastructure of policy and supports relating to the workplace has evolved in a rather *ad hoc* manner. This, in conjunction with the proliferation of dedicated agencies dealing with specific aspects of the workplace, has

contributed to a complex and fragmented institutional structure.

- Key public policy initiatives in areas such as skills enhancement, and building our national R&D capability, tend to have rather tenuous links to the internal dynamics of workplace change.
- The existing data infrastructure for workplace and workforce change is rather fragmented and piecemeal.
- Finally there is a need to further develop key policy making skills and competencies, particularly those that will strengthen the capacity of the system to manage cross-cutting issues and engage in innovative problem-solving approaches.

Building a new consensus

It is important to stress that the various issues outlined above are not unique to the Irish polity. Across the EU, policy makers, in seeking to foster workplace modernisation, are struggling with the same complex challenges of enhancing policy

co-ordination and managing cross-cutting issues. The work of the Forum marks an initial step in the building of a broad political and societal consensus around the need for public policy to support workplace change in a more co-ordinated manner. The Forum strongly concluded, however, that the most critical challenge facing the policy system is how to implement a more co-ordinated and workplace centred strategy.

The Forum also recognised that Ireland lacks the appropriate institutional structures and arrangements for implementing the proposed co-ordinated joined-up policy response to workplace change. The Forum therefore recommended the establishment of a High Level Implementation Group to actively drive the implementation of the National Workplace Strategy. This high-level group was formally constituted in May 2005 and is chaired by the Minister for Labour Affairs, Mr. Tony Killeen, T.D. (see Table 1).

High Level Implementation Group

The assignment of the Minister of Labour to chair this high level group demonstrates the Government's commitment to the strategic goal of supporting workplace change.

It also serves as a basis for securing increased administrative co-operation across other relevant government departments. As the lead department, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment will be responsible for facilitating the operation of this grouping and the development of an integrated approach to policy implementation. The National Centre for Partnership and Performance, as the secretariat to the High Level Implementation Group, will also have a pivotal role to play in providing professional and executive support for the work of the group.

The High Level Implementation Group will oversee the establishment of the appropriate institutional arrangements geared towards achieving the level of co-ordination that is necessary for the successful implementation of the National Workplace Strategy. In particular, it will seek to enhance policy co-ordination by establishing formal mechanisms for multi-agency collaboration, with a clearer identification of the roles, responsibilities and competencies of each agency in relation to workplace change. The energies and attention of the High Level Implementation Group are clearly focused on delivering the range of recommendations that comprise the new workplace strategy. Following an initial meeting in May 2005 it was agreed that outline action plans for progressing each of the forty-two recommendations contained within the National Workplace Strategy would be developed

and presented to the High Level Implementation Group. Critically the effective implementation of these individual action plans will require the active co-operation and collaboration of a range of named participant organisations including social partners, government departments, State agencies and public and private sector networks.

Early mover advantage

International evidence suggests that designing and implementing effective policies for modernising work necessitates the early and ongoing involvement of the social partners. Ireland's successful experience of national level social partnership therefore offers a strong platform for supporting the National Workplace Strategy. Effective policy implementation in this area will require the support and leadership skills of the social partners, both at national and workplace level, to convince employers, employees and trade unions of the imperative for

organisational change and innovation. More generally the Strategy and associated policy actions need to be characterised by a partnership approach involving the relevant departments, agencies and social partners. Such a collaborative approach will ensure that the Strategy is underpinned by intensive engagement with a wide range of representative bodies and individual organisations.

The Forum has highlighted Ireland's potential for achieving early mover advantage in relation to workplace change and innovation. In this context the National Workplace Strategy and the associated implementation arrangements for delivering it, represent a significant step forward in providing the appropriate policies and supports to help build Ireland's workplaces of the future.

*Dr. Damian Thomas,
National Co-ordinator,
Organisational Change & Innovation*

TABLE 1 The National Workplace of the Future High Level Implementation Group

Name	Organisation
Tony Killeen TD, Chair	Minister for Labour Affairs
John Walsh	Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment
Breda Power	Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment
David Barry	Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment
Frances Gaynor	Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment
Philip Kelly	Department of An Taoiseach
Ciaran Connolly	Department of Finance
Noel Waters	Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
Paddy McDonagh	Department of Education and Science
Patricia Curtin	FÁS
Martin Shanahan	Forfás
Fergus Whelan	ICTU
Catherine Byrne	ICTU
Terry McEvoy	CIF
Brendan McGinty	IBEC
Lucy Fallon-Byrne	National Centre for Partnership and Performance
Secretariat to the Group	National Centre for Partnership and Performance

The National Workplace Strategy

Workplace innovation — Recommendations

- 1 Workplace innovation and the range of practices identified in this report – management and leadership capacity, employee involvement, training and lifelong learning, equality and diversity and quality of working life – must be promoted and disseminated widely across the private and public sector as key strategic responses to the economic and social challenges facing Ireland. (Departments of the Taoiseach, Finance, Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Justice, Equality and Law Reform and relevant agencies incl. NCPP, Social Partners) [ONGOING]
- 2 A three-year dedicated fund should be established under the aegis of the Council of the NCPP to promote innovation and research in human resource development, organisational change and lifelong learning at enterprise level. Public support for such activity would be conditional on the learning and experience from such initiatives being shared with other organisations and the policy community.
- 3 There should be more explicit recognition of workplace innovation in State funding awards for research and development in science, technology and marketing. (Forfás, IDA, Enterprise Ireland, Science Foundation Ireland) [IMMEDIATE]
- 4 Indicators and benchmarks which compare and illustrate the performance of Irish organisations with international best practice across the range of practices identified in this report – should be produced to support and mainstream workplace innovation (NCPP, Forfás, NESDO) [END-2006]
- 5 In the context of talks on a successor agreement to Sustaining Progress and a further benchmarking process, greater attention should be paid to performance management, knowledge management, value for money, improved customer service, and further devolution of the human resource management function in the public sector. (Departments of the Taoiseach, Finance and relevant Government Departments and agencies) [IMMEDIATE]

- 6 The National Statistics Board strategy for the development of the Irish Statistical System offers the potential to provide a consolidated and coordinated framework of workplace related information. The CSO (in conjunction with relevant departments and agencies) should, building on work that is already underway, bring forward proposals for integrated workplace data collection and presentation. (CSO) [END-2005]
- 7 Workplace surveys, similar to those carried out on behalf of the Forum, should be carried out every four years. (NCPP) [END-2007]
- 8 Enterprise-led networks and public service networks must be encouraged to increase their focus on workplace innovation. The promotion of effective tools, or standards such as Excellence Through People, represents practical ways to create an innovation focus at the workplace level. (Social Partners, Business and public service networks, Enterprise Ireland, FÁS, Skillnets, NCPP) [ONGOING]

Capacity for change — Recommendations

- 9 Public agencies with responsibility for enterprise and education should work with the social partners and education and training providers to identify priority areas to which resources should be channelled to support appropriate programmes for leadership and management development in public and private sector organisations. (Enterprise Agencies, Third-level Sector, Professional Bodies, Business Schools, Social Partners) [ongoing]
- 10 Public and private sector organisations should be encouraged to achieve a greater strategic HRM capability, informed by national and international best practice. (Public and private sector employers, relevant professional bodies)
- 11 All public service organisations should adopt accelerated initiatives for open recruitment and promotion at all levels to improve the leadership and management capacity of the public service. (Department of Finance, relevant Public Sector employers)

- 12 The process of professionalising the Human Resource function within the Civil and wider Public Service needs to be accelerated through open competition and internal professional development programmes. (Departments of the Taoiseach and Finance)
- 13 The implementation of the Information and Consultation Directive should be used as an opportunity to improve the quality of information and consultation within all workplaces. The Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment in conjunction with relevant public agencies, should devise a co-ordinated dissemination strategy that would seek to improve the level of understanding of the new legislation, make the business case for improving current practice and promote good practice within all organisations. (Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment)
- 14 There is a continued need for advocacy of partnership at workplace level, focused on its role in delivering mutual gains for employers, employees and union representatives, leading to quality of working life, high performance, and workplace innovation. (Relevant Government Departments, Social Partners, NCPP, LRC, sectoral partnership networks) [ONGOING]
- 15 Support for networking activities and formal training provision must be provided to enterprise-led training initiatives and partnership agencies seeking to promote workplace innovation and change. (Social Partners, NCPP, sectoral partnership networks) [ONGOING]
- 16 Operational concerns and perceived barriers to all forms of employee financial involvement must be identified through research and consultation. The issue of taxation in relation to gain-sharing is one of a number of areas that must be examined in this context. (Department of Finance, Social Partners, NCPP, Forfás) [END 2006]
- 17 The Labour Relations Commission (LRC) should afford greater priority to working proactively with employers, employees and trade unions to assist organisations in devising and enhancing their in-house approaches to dispute resolution and avoidance. Improving the quality of such enterprise level arrangements has the potential to enhance organisational capacity for managing change. (LRC, Social Partners)
- 18 Arising from the review of the Employment Rights Bodies, and the subsequent consultations with the relevant Bodies and the Social Partners, there should now be a commitment to early action by the parties concerned. This action should focus on institutional arrangements and the consolidation of primary and secondary legislation. (Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Labour Court, LRC, Employment Appeals Tribunal, Equality Tribunal, Equality Authority, Social Partners)
- 19 A range of actions and initiatives should be considered to ensure the continuance of the public dispute resolution machinery's capacity for resolving disputes fairly and expeditiously. This could include a commitment by the relevant public agencies and social partners to further experiment with joint-problem solving, mediation and informal approaches to dispute resolution and avoidance. These approaches must be developed in a manner that adds to and complements the existing range of services provided by the relevant public agencies. (Departments of Enterprise Trade and Employment and Justice Equality and Law Reform, Social Partners, Labour Court, LRC, Employment Appeals Tribunal, Equality Tribunal, Equality Authority).

Developing future skills — Recommendations

- 20 Government and the social partners must agree the practical arrangements that will increase levels of lifelong learning. International approaches based on a three-way commitment of resources from Government, employers and employees sometimes known as Personal Learning Accounts, merit consideration and should be examined with a view to informing policy development in Ireland. (Departments of Finance, Enterprise Trade and Employment and Education, FÁS, Social Partners) [IMMEDIATE]
- 21 The education and training sectors, in conjunction with experts in adult career guidance, should develop and promote resources to support individuals in the workforce in managing their lifelong learning progression. Such resources could include vocational education and training advice and counselling, and planning instruments such as Personal Training Plans. (Department of Education, National Centre for Guidance in Education, FÁS) [IMMEDIATE]

- 22 In further developing collaboration between business and education and to support regional development the Forum sees merit in analysing regional approaches which are based upon detailed assessment of technology trends, skill requirements and the needs of clusters of companies. (Departments of Enterprise Trade and Employment and Education and relevant agencies).
- 23 Higher levels of work-related learning and training among Irish employees and organisations will depend on the removal of existing barriers to learning. Key departments and agencies must develop a cross-cutting approach to issues such as part-time access to education and learning, the cost of further education and training, and the accreditation of work-based learning. This must occur alongside the continued rollout of the National Framework of Qualifications. (Departments of Enterprise Trade and Employment and Education, NQAI)
- 24 A key driver of innovation in work-related learning is successful interaction between the workplace and the education sector at the level of the enterprise. Examples of good practice in this regard should be identified by FÁS and the NCPP, and disseminated to a broad audience. This work should inform implementation of the 'One Step Up' initiative, as successful models of learning can be applied to meet the needs of specific groups of workers. (Departments of Enterprise Trade and Employment and Education, FÁS, NCPP)
- 25 The key recommendations of the Report of the Taskforce on Lifelong Learning, in particular the recommendations on basic literacy, numeracy and IT skills, must be implemented with renewed urgency by the relevant agencies. (Departments of Enterprise Trade and Employment and Education)
- 26 The National Training Fund should support a wider range of workplace training initiatives focused on enterprise needs and, as far as possible, leading to an accredited award. (Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment)
- 27 Further efforts must be made to develop enterprise-led approaches to training, such as the Skillnets programme, and to improve the take-up of such options by organisations and their employees, in line with the EU Memorandum on Lifelong Learning. (Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and social partners)

Access to the workplace — Recommendations

- 28 Organisations need to develop and implement workplace equality and diversity management strategies. A campaign promoting the benefits of diversity management, for employers, employees, and customers should be led by Government, trade union leaders, and business representatives. (Equal Opportunities Framework) [IMMEDIATE AND ONGOING]
- 29 The recommendations set out in the WorkWay project should be implemented as a matter of urgency in order to improve recruitment rates of people with disabilities by employers in the private sector. Greater promotion of existing measures to support employers in this regard is required to ensure full take-up by employers. (Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, FÁS, Social Partners)
- 30 The civil and broader public service must improve their recruitment rates in relation to workers with disabilities. Every Department must take appropriate action to ensure that agencies under its aegis achieve the 3 per cent target for the employment of people with disabilities. Appropriate measures must also be put in place to promote career progression. (Departments Finance and Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Social Partners, Public Appointments Service)
- 31 Enhanced measures are needed to actively support women returning to the workplace. Existing networking, coaching and mentoring schemes for women employees should continue to receive state funding. Interventions to support women in advance of their return to the workforce should be developed. (Equality for Women Measure, Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, women's organisations, professional organisations, employers, trade unions)

- 32 Childcare should be a key priority for all stakeholders at national, local and organisational level, and should be further addressed in any discussions on a potential successor to Sustaining Progress. All parties must work together to develop a multi-faceted policy response and practical solutions for the provision of effective childcare supports and arrangements as a matter of urgency. In this context, debate is required around the value systems in our culture as all childcare policies reflect the culture and values of a society. (Government, NESDO, Social Partners, childcare and parents representative groups)
- 33 In seeking to address the interrelated and complex issues of childcare arrangements, a wide range of possible policy responses should be considered by the stakeholders, including tax incentives, changes in the social welfare system, the role of employers in the provision of childcare, state provision of childcare, enhancing parental leave, career breaks and increased access to flexible work arrangements (Government, NESDO, Social Partners, childcare and parents representative groups)
- 34 Government and the Social Partners should explore new approaches to improving childcare based on a three-way commitment of resources by Government, employers and employees. As part of this exercise, recent recommendations by the OECD⁹¹ should be examined, as should the application of best practice, benchmarked against other OECD countries. (Government, Social Partners)
- 35 A successor to the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme under the National Development Plan childcare strategy should now be developed aimed at expanding further the number of high quality places and at making childcare affordable. The possibility of developing childcare facilities on a Public Private Partnership basis should be examined. (Departments Finance and Justice, Equality and Law Reform)
- 36 The Employment Permits Bill should be brought forward as a matter of urgency, to provide for a responsive labour market management strategy. Economic immigration should be treated as a critical cross-cutting issue involving a range of Government Departments and agencies, as well as the social partners. (Departments of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and Justice, Equality and Law Reform)
- 37 A policy framework that removes the barriers to continued participation in the workforce, and facilitates older workers who wish to remain in the workforce should be developed. (Departments of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Social Partners, Key Representative Agencies)

Quality of working life — Recommendations

- 38 The development for all workers of a high quality of working life needs to become a central policy focus for all key stakeholders. (Government, Social Partners)
- 39 Access to opportunities for learning, training, information and consultation and employee involvement and autonomy must be enhanced for all workers to address the opportunities divide. (Government, Social Partners)
- 40 Work/life balance policies should continue to be promoted, consistent with business needs, in a manner that ensures that the careers of individuals who take up flexible arrangements are not adversely affected. (Department Enterprise Trade and Employment, Social Partners, National Framework Committee for Work/life Balance)

Implementation arrangements — Recommendations

- 41 The Forum recommends that a High-level Implementation Group be constituted to drive the implementation of the National Workplace Strategy. This group should comprise senior representatives of relevant Government Departments, relevant agencies and the social partners.
- 42 The proposed High-Level Implementation Group should develop a comprehensive dissemination strategy for the Forum's Report. [IMMEDIATE]

Support for the new National Workplace Strategy

“ One of the key messages I take from the report is that action by Government, the social partners, employees and enterprises will be required to achieve its goals, not least in the areas of lifelong learning and childcare. To make greater progress in both these areas, a new balance between individual, employer and public provision will be necessary. In these, and in other employment-related areas, we should seek to gain early mover advantage from a broader mix of policies. ”

*An Taoiseach, Mr. Bertie Ahern, T.D.
speaking at the launch of the National Workplace Strategy*

“ I believe that the National Workplace Strategy provides a key to unlocking the challenges of enhancing Ireland's economic competitiveness and performance..., and I look forward to working closely with the people who have been responsible for producing the document, and those who will have a role in implementing the recommendations, over the next couple of years. ”

Minister for Labour Affairs, Mr. Tony Killeen, T.D.

“ I think the fact that we embarked on this journey is an extraordinary indication of our ability as a country to be strategic. The performance of this country over the last ten years has been extraordinary, and this is down primarily to the ability of our people to be innovative, to anticipate, and to be strategic.... the transformation that has taken place in Irish workplaces over the last ten to fifteen years has been remarkable, and this report provides us with the catalyst to enable us to work together to get to the next level. ”

Mr. Turlogh O' Sullivan, Director General of IBEC

“ The request by the Irish Government to the National Centre for Partnership and Performance to establish this Forum is an indication by government of its commitment to ensuring that Irish workplaces should become centres of excellence and champions of best practice. ”

Mr. David Begg, General Secretary of ICTU