

Press Release

Wednesday, 9th July, 2003

Securing the future supply of engineers is crucial for the successful development of industry and infrastructure

At the launch of the report “**The Demand and Supply of Engineers and Engineering Technicians**” today (Wednesday 9th July, 2003) the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) in association with the Institution of Engineers of Ireland (IEI) emphasised that the future supply of engineering graduates must be secured to underpin the development of industry and the economy.

The report states that a continuation of the downward trend in output of engineers could also restrict Ireland’s ability to address current and future infrastructure requirements. The report examines how the future supply of engineers and engineering technicians will match future requirements for industry and public bodies and makes recommendations on addressing skills gaps.

“Ireland’s economic development since the 1980s has been built in large part on its supply of engineering graduates. A strong supply of skilled engineering graduates will have substantial impact on Ireland’s ability to succeed in attracting and maintaining high value-added industries, including research. We need to plan now so that we will be in a position to provide the intellectual capital needed to succeed in moving to the next stage of economic development - becoming a knowledge economy. This stage of our economic development will focus on higher value activities and will require greater numbers of highly qualified graduates, said Dr. Daniel O’Hare, Chairperson, EGFSN.

“Engineers play key roles across a broad range of industry that drives productivity and improvements in innovation and competitiveness. A sufficient supply of engineers will be a prerequisite for the type of industrial development Ireland is aiming for”, said Peter Langford, President of the IEI.

The report found that in addition to a demographically related decrease in graduate numbers in general that there has been a fall in the number of first preference applications to engineering and technology courses. This has meant that the supply of engineering graduates has not kept pace with the supply of graduates in general.

The report highlights the main potential gaps in the supply of engineers in the areas of electronic engineering and degree level telecommunications engineering. In these areas the main constraint is the number and quality of the applicants for these courses. Also highlighted is the threat of a continuing general decline in numbers graduating in engineering and the limiting influence this could have on a much wider range of sectors.

The report makes recommendations, targeted at Government, state agencies, educational institutions, employers and engineering professionals. They are aimed at increasing the up-take of engineering as a career by second level students and the output of engineers and engineering technicians by the Third Level system. Key recommendations include:

- **Expanding and reviewing the STEPS** (Science, Technology and Engineering Programme for Schools) so that the activities reach a higher proportion of second level students
- The development by the STEPS programme of engineering **taster courses**
- The provision of a marketing resource for Third Level Colleges to support engineering, science and computing faculties and schools
- Government and relevant funding bodies should ensure **sufficient funding** for research by engineering postgraduates. This will avoid making finance a constraint on the numbers and quality of people able to take up postgraduate research
- A **review of the space and other resources needed** for postgraduate engineering research should take place with a view to providing a separate fund for investment in upgraded and additional space where it cannot be sourced within the college
- Provision of a **labour market in-service training programme for guidance counsellors**, placing emphasis on careers available in engineering, science and technology
- Review by the Engineering Deans and Heads of School in Third Level colleges of the benefits, and obstacles of moving towards a more project and problem based **approach to learning**

“The findings of this study are important for Irish industry and the economy in general. I would encourage the speedy and full implementation of the recommendations”, continued Dr O’Hare.

Ends.