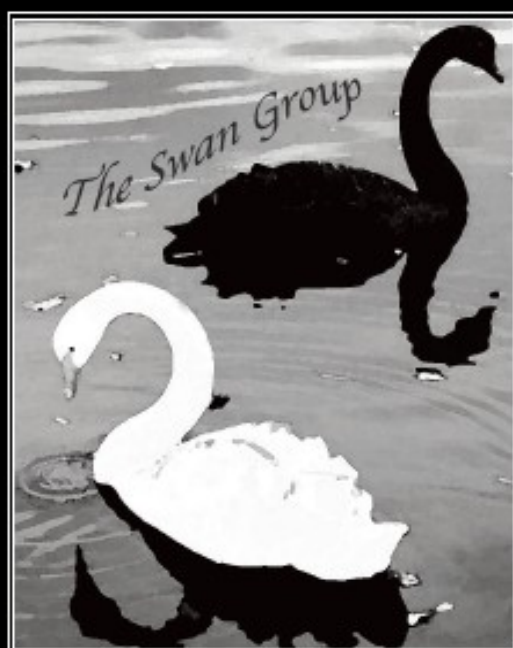


Executive Summary Document

Irish Education Policy for a Globalised World



A Policy for Chasing **Black** and White Swans

Ailbhe Kenny, Charles Larkin,
Daithí MacSithigh & Jacco Thijssen

Irish Education Policy for a Globalised World
Ailbhe Kenny, Charles Larkin, Daithí MacSíthigh & Jacco Thijssen

Executive Summary

The primary objective of this report is to debate the central tenets of the current educational policy that is employed within Ireland.

To this end, the first section of the report will deal with the concept of the creation of a 'knowledge economy' in order to achieve economic growth and the contribution that the model of a world class university makes to the establishment of this knowledge economy. The establishment of this belief encapsulated in the mantra of 'education-innovation-competitiveness-' has been the driving force behind educational policy in Ireland since the mid 1990s. Section 1 will firstly debate the theoretical foundations for this assertion, whilst comparing these assertions with both the successful and the failed manifestations of these policies at an educational level. The educational level will be examined from both a micro and macro-economic perspective. In order to fully illustrate the effects of these policies, the legal structures, namely the European Union's Bologna Process and Ireland's 1997 *Universities Act* which govern the educational system in Ireland will also be briefly examined.

Section 2 will initially focus on pre-third level education in Ireland, highlighting the mission statement of the Departments of Education and Science in relation to this sphere and

discussing the primary objectives and manner of education at pre-school, first-level and secondary level education. The manner in which each level operates will be given due consideration. There will also be a detailed analysis of whether or not this type of education is “broad” enough and whether the Leaving Certificate is conducive to the establishment of a knowledge economy.

The latter half of Section 2 will debate the function of a university in regard to society, polity and the economy. It will discuss how the university aids and abets the state in the creation of ‘innovation’ via research and trains future members of the labour market. The university as an entity in itself is now regarded as an essential element in the current labour market system within Ireland. The objectives of a university are twofold; firstly to educate students and help them to develop on a number of levels and secondly to provide a service to society in the advancement of knowledge and social welfare in conjunction with a series of secondary objectives. Whilst examining these objectives, there will also be a brief overview of the development of the objectives of a university throughout Europe and the United States within the twentieth century.

Having examined the role of the university within Ireland, we will examine policies governing third level education. These policies that have been initiated by the HEA, the Department of Education and the Department of Enterprise. Current policy structure is based on the idea that there is a direct causation between the number of scientific researchers and economic growth. We will contend is contrary to the actual evidence which is present in this area. We will also argue that the level of investment required to develop a knowledge economy is far too high particularly given Ireland's current financial situation.

Universities themselves have undergone significant structural changes throughout the twentieth century. In stark contrast to previous times when the focus of university education was on educational delivery there is little attention paid to the development of communication skills or to the types of courses that are considered immaterial in terms of attaining a “knowledge economy”. In addition to these substantial developments, the autonomy of universities has been increasingly eroded. The objective of education is no longer to simply acquire knowledge or to develop peoples’ minds but rather to simply furnish graduates with the necessary skills for the job marketplace. In order to highlight the enormous changes that the objectives of education have undergone, we will illustrate the historical methods of delivery and how people viewed the purposes of education, concentrating mainly on the French and German traditions. In addition to examining these traditions, we will also explore the ancient philosophies that underpinned the early educational model contrasting this with the current focus.

The next part of section 2 will focus on the development of a successful model of university financial management, concentrating on the Revenue Centre Management model that is currently the basis for the HEA Recurrent Grant Allocation Model, the HEFCE Model in the UK and the original Trinity College Academic Resource Allocation Model (2005/6) and highlighting the numerous inefficiencies that are present within this model. Following an analysis of this model, there will be an in-depth examination of the innovation institutional model. We will examine the excessive emphasis that is placed upon benchmarking, highlighting the fallacy of Ireland trying to adopt an approach that has been taken by other countries under entirely different circumstances. Within this discussion, we will analyse the impact of a state-driven approach to innovation and economic growth; examining the

oversight of Irish policymakers to factor in the importance of secondary school education within this framework.

The next section discusses the regulation of higher education in Ireland, detailing the patchwork of domestic legislation, administrative practices and international instruments that govern the HEA. The vast majority of funding has given by the State which gives “block grants” and funding in lieu of fees since the mid 1990s. A matter which has been the source of considerable debate in recent years with various institutions contending that due to this practice, their overall grant has diminished. We will then examine OECD recommendations in relation to both of these areas, which have not been implemented by the HEA. Having established the role of the State within the HEA, we will then discuss the influences of external sources such as the European Union and the most recent goals that were encapsulated within the Lisbon strategy. We will also discuss the question of potential reform, the role of non-governmental organisations within the area of higher education and the impact of the Bologna process on higher education in Ireland.

In section 3 we will discuss education and the role of human capital in economic theory. Within this sphere there are two main approaches to economic theory: macro-economic and micro-economic. Whilst the development of human capital and education are essentially separate entities, the manner in which they are linked together will be fully explored within these two theories. The important implications of these two economic theories on educational policy within Ireland will then be fully assessed.

Section 4 will centre around the concept of innovation, namely in relation to investment policy, education and governance. Two essential features of investment are that it is irreversible and that it can be postponed, both features which will be explained in further detail within the report. We will then proceed to discuss the important factors in determining the value of an investment project. By the very nature of investment, however, innovation will always take place in an environment of ambiguity.

The final section will firstly focus on the current state of higher education within Ireland. We will contend that the HEA has prioritised short-term policy objectives in pursuit of a knowledge economy but has failed to focus on deep knowledge and understanding within the university sector. This has been detrimental to educational policy within Ireland. The goal of a knowledge economy has proven unrealistic and has indeed blinded policymakers to the flaws within both the primary school and secondary school sector as they have concentrated the vast majority of their energies on the third level sector.