Ireland's economy and the OECD

From bricks to brains

Written by: Michael Forbes, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Ireland to the OECD

Nothing has demonstrated Ireland’s shift to modern economic policies more concretely than our decision to become a founder member of the OECD in 1961. Since then the OECD has been a trusted partner in our economic and social policy evolution.

The year 2016 marks the 50th anniversary of an OECD report entitled *Investment in Education*, issued in 1966. It was the first major sectoral report by the OECD on Ireland, and set in train a new approach to education in our country and showed us how we could address economic and social development through education. To meet the challenges and opportunities of engagement in the world economy, Ireland would from then on use education to help propel our development—in other words, our economic policy and work focus would move from bricks to brains. Free secondary education, which was introduced in 1967/68, was a first step in a process that was to set off a profound and positive social transformation.

Since taking up my post as ambassador to the OECD in 2012, I have personally witnessed the importance of Ireland’s engagement with the OECD as we grappled with the consequences of the international financial crisis and worked our way...
back to economic health. I have seen how the organisation’s advice has helped our government in charting a reliable course out of those troubled economic waters to where we are now—the fastest-growing country in the OECD—and how working with the OECD helps bring about positive, transformative change.

In February 2014 a government team led by the Taoiseach (prime minister) and the Tánaiste (deputy prime minister) visited the OECD in Paris for a day of policy discussion. The visit, which came at the invitation of OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría as part of the OECD’s Leaders’ Forum programme, allowed us to assess the progress of our economic recovery and to exchange ideas on how the OECD could contribute further to improve domestic policy in Ireland.

As with all member countries, the OECD’s in-depth peer reviews on areas such as the labour market and job activation have informed this progress. The biennial Economic Surveys of Ireland have been of particular value to our government; the most recent edition was launched in Dublin by the OECD Secretary-General in September 2015, and it provided a further opportunity for meetings with the Taoiseach, finance minister, foreign affairs and trade minister, and leaders from trade unions and business.

Ireland will continue to draw upon the analysis and support of the OECD in our search for better public policies across government. We will forget neither the role the OECD played in the emergence of our modern economy and society in the 1960s nor its assistance more recently in our recovery from the 2008 economic crisis. The OECD remains key to our economic and social progress.

OECD (1966), Investment in Education: Ireland, Educational Investment and Planning series, OECD Publishing. Contact observer@oecd.org to request your pdf.