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Philosophy Essay due December 2018

**Outline the key developments in Irish secondary education since 1922 and discuss one of these developments in detail.**

There have been many contributions to the development of second level education in Ireland since ancient times. Over time education has become more crucial in our own development as human beings and in everyday life. Many establishments such as schools, colleges etc. have been put in place making it even more accessible for people all over the country to study in particular schools tending to the needs of their religion, background, abilities etc. These educational institutes were not as accessible during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, since the early 1920's a lot of developments have been made to adjust the educational system in Ireland.

Following the War of Independence in Ireland specific educational changes were put in place. In 1924 the department of education was founded which was an immensely productive change towards the development of education in Ireland. During the early 1920's many secondary school students were taught by priests and nuns whilst the Catholic Church had a major force in Irish politics and was answerable to the Vatican in Rome being the leading religion in Ireland. In 1924 The Intermediate education act was also passed which established the intermediate leaving certificate exams. The Schools Attendance act was passed in 1926 which made it compulsory to attend school from the age of six to fourteen.

During the 1930's the numbers of schools and pupils attending schools were constantly growing and in 1930 the Vocational Education Act was passed. Vocational education can also be referred to as career education and prepares pupils for work such as trading, craft or technician work. In 1938 the first schools to follow this act were originally in Gaelteacht areas and were not under church control. Further developments were made from 1948 to 1951 such as the Council of Education and free secondary education in Northern Ireland. Free education caused massive changes in economic and cultural development. In Northern Ireland it is compulsory to attend school from the age of 4 to 16, the same as Ireland. From early 1950's on there was a huge increase in secondary schools and pupils attending secondary schools in Ireland, carrying an average annual increase of 1,000 pupils although not all of them graduated.

In 1954 the number of students who sat the leaving cert was only 6098, due to a huge lack of investment in education and high emigration numbers of poorly educated youth. After WWII there was a natural annual population increase of approximately 25,000 but there was also an annual emigration increase of approximately 24,000. In 1963 the proposal for Comprehensive Schools came forward and the first schools opened in 1966 after a number of five 'experimental schools'. The aim of

Comprehensive schools was that the intake of students would not be based on academic achievement or religious beliefs. In these schools the curriculum involved a combination of both vocational and academic subjects, thus they were a model of education that was more inclusive and egalitarian than anything preceding them.

During 1965 the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) provided 'The Investment in Education Report, a report of a survey team appointed by the Minister of Education in October 1962'. This report was carried out in order to assess the contribution to Irish educational policy and to confront any issues found. In 1966 Donogh O'Malley, an Irish Fianna Fáil politician announced the Free Post-Primary Education scheme. He did this without formally speaking to Cabinet but the public response was so enthusiastic the government was forced to comply.

An introduction of Community Schools was brought forward in the early 1970's which resulted from the opening of Comprehensive and vocational secondary schools. These Community Schools were non-denominational and would cater for the whole community including children and adults.

The 'New' Primary School Curriculum was introduced and states 'Curriculum has always been the key to what occurs in schools.' This new curriculum was introduced in order to focus solely on the child's wellbeing and development, catering to the best interests of the child in the care of the school.

On Tuesday, 6<sup>th</sup> of March 1984 a Dáil Éireann debate was held on the Programme for Action in Education. In this long debate different points of view were put across and voices were heard. Philosophy of education was discussed as well as the effects of disadvantaged upbringings on pupils who attend post-primary school. The program for action in education would state various goals to achieve for academic exams as well as preparing pupils for the real world. Certain strategies that were mentioned would be put in place in order to achieve stated goals as guidelines for schools and teachers to carry out through teaching of both vocational and academic subjects.

'In recognition of this the National Development Plan provides £39 million for in-service training at primary and post-primary level, and £10 million at third level, over a six-year period.' Professor John Coolahan, in his authoritative volume Irish Education, [www.oireachtas.ie](http://www.oireachtas.ie)

During 1993 a National Education Convention was held. At this convention there was an announcement to produce a White Paper by the end of summer and then the first comprehensive education Bill in the history of Ireland. The White Paper Bill was passed in 1995, it was said to be 'chartering our educational future' while it was widely believed to reflect a desired agenda among all partners in education. Important developments in the White Paper also included an expenditure of over £2 billion going towards education. Philosophical principles such as pluralism, equality, partnership, accountability and quality were taken into account when planning to focus on a large base of knowledge and develop everyone's employability.

"We must have the courage to examine everything, discuss everything and even to teach everything" Condorcet, White Paper Education and Training, europa.eu

Following White Paper in 1995, the Leaving Cert Applied (LCA) course was introduced. LCA is a two-year course which involves a great deal of vocational learning, preparation involving work experience and general education, offering life skills, language and social education. Following LCA came Leaving Cert Vocational Programme in 1996 which consists of five leaving cert subjects including Irish and a continental language along with three modules including enterprise education, work experience and preparation for work.

In 1998 The Education Act was passed; this act was said to make provision in the interests of the common good and promote equality in gender roles both in students and staff etc. Following the Education Act, the Teaching Council Act was passed in 2001. The goals of this act are to promote teaching as a profession as well as professional development of teachers.

One point in time that significantly contributed to the development of second level education in Ireland is the first teachings of Relationships and Sexual Education. This had an improvement in the wellbeing of children and young adults as there were many cases of poorly educated youths being unaware of the circumstances of unprotected sex. In Ireland at this time pre-marital sex was seriously shamed upon which would lead to drastic actions due to lack of education.

Developments towards the wellbeing of the child were continuously arising. In the 1990s Relationships and Sexual Education as a subject was taught in post-primary schools, after serious cases including young pregnant women and abandoned babies. In 1985 the proposition was made by the Minister for Education, Gemma Hussey, but the Catholic Church demanded that Sex Education in schools must be given within the rules and ethos of the school. Between 1993 and 1995 the Minister for Education at the time, Niamh Breathnach, put Relationships and Sexual Education in place. This angered many conservative parents of pupils, they even formed an alliance against the programme called 'The Parents and Teachers of Real Education' and wrote many letters to the media.

After a lot of heated controversy, it was decided that RSE would be taught in all schools but it would be up to the school to interpret the subject according to their own ethos. It remains like this today. Following these events, a woman called Nora Bennis complained to An Garda Síochána the RSE subject being taught in schools was pornographic. In 2007 a study among fifth and sixth years in secondary school in Ireland was carried out. It found that 50% of Irish students were not receiving sexual education at all and knew nothing about contraception or homosexuality.

Until April 19<sup>th</sup>, 2018 the same information about RSE in the curriculum had been used up to twenty years ago. Despite Fianna Fáil's oppositions to the proposition, a bill was passed to update sexual education in Ireland which guarantees the right for each child to receive truthful and factual education regardless of the rules and ethos of the school.

In my opinion RSE as a subject is essential to youths of today, to possess knowledge about one's body and what it does should never have been questioned. From the historical evidence provided about Relationships and Sexual Education in schools, it is clear that the Catholic Church has had less and less control and power over subjects taught in schools and how they are taught. Hopefully there will be further improvements in developing the wellbeing of the child and encouraging self-direction as well as self-expression.

We are constantly taking steps and making changes in second level education in Ireland, from Post-Independence to present day. Although we may have a long way to go with regard to the Leaving Cert and second level education, we have still come a long way.