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**Programme of co-operation between Ireland and the United Kingdom**

The Taoiseach and the Prime Minister have published a progress report on the wide-ranging programme of bilateral co-operation which the two Governments had agreed, earlier this year, to take forward and intensify.

In it they noted the historical and geographical links between Ireland and the United Kingdom, which were reflected in the common travel area, in reciprocal voting and residence rights and in social, professional and family ties which are uniquely close among European Union countries. It was appropriate that these links should be matched by similarly close co-operation between Government Departments in the two countries.

They welcomed the many personal contacts which had been established at Ministerial and official levels in the few months since their two Governments had come to office. They reaffirmed that there was mutual interest in building on those contacts in ways which would bring concrete benefits in the many fields where there is scope to develop further the significant co-operation which is already going on, as described in separate reports being released today. Transport links, the fight against crime and drugs, health and food safety, the protection of the environment in the Irish Sea, and school and youth exchanges are but a few of these areas.

The European Union Jobs Summit on 20-21 November had emphasised the need to improve the employability of people within a changing labour market. The Prime Minister and the Taoiseach noted that both Governments had accorded high priority to improvements in education needed to respond to modern demands. Both Governments had announced programmes of action, which recognised the important place of information and communications technology both as a tool of education, and as an essential skill for young people entering the jobs market.

The Taoiseach and the Prime Minister undertook that both countries would share views on the use of the new technologies in education, and would consider together how their potential might be used co-operatively in education, not only to develop individuals' capacities and sustain competitive advantage, but also to improve communication and to draw together the young people of their respective societies.