

# IRELAND'S YEARBOOK OF EDUCATION

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Mapping the past. Forging the future.

# 2017-2018

Edited by Brian Mooney

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The views expressed in this Yearbook are many, varied and sometimes contradictory. They are exclusively the views of our highly valued writers and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Editor or of Education Matters.



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# Foreword



**Mary Mitchell O'Connor**  
Minister of State for Higher Education

I am delighted to be invited to write a foreword for *Ireland's Yearbook of Education 2017-2018*. I hope you enjoy the wealth of contributions in this latest edition which demonstrates the breadth of talent and depth of thought that we are fortunate to have in our educational theorists and practitioners.

## Unfolding the powers of the mind

It starts as soon as a baby leaves the womb and continues throughout the lifespan. We are always learning. And as a society we guide and structure that learning from the first caregiver, through preschool, primary, secondary and tertiary education on into adult education and beyond. It is what sets us apart and enriches our experience. It is delivered by the battalions of committed and creative teachers, tutors, lecturers and professors who nurture our students in the country's educational institutions. Education does really matter.

Our challenge as parents, educators and policy makers is to help young people achieve their full potential. We must prepare them for the difficulties and demands that life will throw at them, make them ready to enter the workforce and able to take their place as active members of society when their formal education has finished. We must also be the gatekeepers of the quality of teaching and learning in all our institutions.

I am an educator by profession – I was a teacher – and so I have a deep understanding of the importance and value of education. I know that the mediocre teacher just *tells*, the good teacher *explains*, the superior teacher *demonstrates*, but the really great teacher *inspires*. Plutarch believed that the mind was not a vessel to be filled, but a fire to be kindled. The job of our educators is to inspire, to fire the imagination and curiosity of young people, to challenge them. We must teach them *how* to think rather than *what* to think. I have seen many of my former students' lives transformed because of the educational opportunities they have had.

This is made possible when education is supported, promoted, appreciated and valued highly both by the public at large and by your Government. Investment

in the teachers' delivery of programmes and in improving the craft of teaching will bring rich rewards. That is how we can ensure our teachers are truly inspirational educators. Now, after a long lean time, we are in a better position to give ballast to these initiatives.

The Department of Education embarked some years ago on a reform of the Junior Cycle to ensure that the learning experience in the first three years of post-primary education would best equip our students for their future. The new curriculum discourages rote learning and regurgitation, and emphasises instead engagement and participation, creativity and innovation. At every juncture we are encouraging our young people to be adaptable, flexible, creative and innovative. This reform ensures we are producing problem-solvers and better thinkers for the world ahead.

In our Republic of Opportunity, there are many paths to high achievement, both conventional and unconventional. For example, rather than going straight to college after the Leaving Certificate, a young person may enter a Further Education Institute to gain a diploma, and then move on to a Third Level Institute and progress through undergraduate study to post-graduate level and on to a doctorate. This does happen and I am keen to support all routes through our education system.

Education is the core of everything good we do as a society and an economy. It's the foundation stone that supports our cultural development and economic progress; it's the essential component to ensuring social cohesion and mobility; and it's our best weapon in the fight to ensure our workforce continues to be equipped for the challenges of the 21st century.

Education is not the concern of just one Government department: every policy and every initiative that is put forward to Government should be viewed through the prism of education. We need a voice that asks, "What impact will this have on our students and their ability to reach their full potential?" I'm proud to be representing Higher Education at the Cabinet table and I seek constantly to be that voice.

### **The New World**

The Third Level landscape of 2017-2018 is in continual flux. With no certainties in employment anymore, I see my role as facilitating both Third Level Institutions and industry in navigating an ever-changing terrain. The world of work in all its aspects is changing at a pace unseen in human history and traditional concepts no longer apply. During the 20th century most workers held two or three jobs during their careers. It is now estimated that many graduates will hold more than 10 jobs before they are 40! We must prepare students for jobs that haven't yet been thought of. As legislators we must try to anticipate the world as it will be, and look forward, not back.

Some of the occupations now in greatest demand are Data Analytics, Supply Chain Management, Biomedical Engineering, Cloud Computing. These careers did not exist a short number of years ago. We can have little or no conception today of many of the high-quality employment opportunities of the future. Computing, robotics and artificial intelligence are changing the very nature of work and many employment opportunities available

today will be swept away by scientific progress and technology. We must not, however, see such change as a threat, but as a great opportunity.

Steve Jobs said that, 'Innovation distinguishes between leaders and followers'. As a small island nation, we need to be at the forefront of innovation, creating the entrepreneurs of tomorrow. I want to preside over a purposeful, equitable Higher Education system that will prepare all students for such leadership. The Department of Education is initiating coherent well-supported policies that will enable our students to learn, create and invent for the new world they will enter.

It is my intention to continue constructive dialogue with employer representatives to ensure the closest possible alignment of our Higher Education programmes with their needs. In addition to meeting the needs of existing employers, we need to ensure that individuals have the skills and are appropriately supported to become the employers of the future. Entrepreneurship education is a vital component in delivering this objective, and work on an Entrepreneurship Education Policy Statement is due to be complete in 2018.

### **STEM v STEAM**

There has been much talk in education circles about the importance of STEM – Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics. Of course, promoting the STEM subjects is important, particularly for our female students. However, in the coming years, I want to lead the Department in exploring the intersection of the arts with STEM, to create STEAM – bringing the inherent creativity of the Arts to STEM. I believe that this synergy will enhance student engagement and learning, and unlock imaginative and creative thinking. Innovation is crucial to our future. STEAM will be a critical component of innovation. Through the Creative Ireland Programme, the Government has explicitly stated that creativity and innovation are key to our future as a society and as an economy – and indeed to the wellbeing of our people.

### **Gender Equality in our Higher Education Institutions**

Higher Education institutions need to attract, retain and progress the most talented people, regardless of gender. We will only have achieved gender equality in Higher Education when the most talented women and men are employed at all levels, in both academic and non-academic roles.

The achievement of gender equality will require a genuine commitment on the part of the institutions, and this needs to be driven from the very top. The ultimate responsibility rests with the Presidents of the Institutions.

Gender inequality exists, not because of a lack of talent or ambition, but because of systemic barriers and a culture that means talent alone is not always enough to guarantee success.

I am providing funding to support greater gender equality in the Higher Education sector via the Gender Taskforce which I have established.

I acknowledge the impressive body of work accomplished by Máire Geoghegan-Quinn and her team in the *National Review of Gender Equality in*

*Higher Education* (2016). Although that report includes 66 recommendations for action, there was unfortunately no real driver to change within the institutions. Therefore I deemed it was necessary to use that report as a springboard to devise a clear and achievable road map and action plan on how we will change the culture within our Third Level Institutions.

I want to implement change that outlives me and my tenure within the Department of Education and Skills. I want the Department to preside over a new regime that is a legacy for all our young daughters, and granddaughters, to all the female students who haven't been born yet, who will aspire to a further education in fair and equitable institutions.

The Universities and Institutes of Technology have a legislative responsibility to promote gender equality. It is imperative that our institutions – that receive public monies – not only invest in gender equality, but also aim for gender balance of a minimum 40% representation of each gender on their key decision making bodies.

My Department is working with the HEA to consider how performance on achieving gender equality can be most appropriately monitored and reflected in accountability structures. In particular, consideration is being given as to how best the System Performance Framework, the Recurrent Grant Allocation Model, and the Flexible Cascade Model can be utilised to advance progress in this area.

I am pleased that Ireland has the opportunity to host the 10th European Conference on Gender Equality in Higher Education in August 2018, which is being supported by my Department and the Higher Education Authority.

## **Wellbeing**

There is a huge gap between the culture and ethos of our Second and Third Level Institutions. Students often experience difficulty when they move from the pastoral care of Second Level to the self-management style of Third Level. I feel very strongly that we should be making a greater effort to help our students make the transition more successfully. We must always remember that there is more than one way of learning and some students may be more suited to apprenticeships or to starting their Third Level journey in an institute of Further Education. There is a route for all students and I intend to consider more solutions to ease the pathways from dependence to independence.

## **Budget 2018**

The investment that has been announced both in Budget 2018 and the multi-annual capital programme recognises the immense importance of our Higher Education Institutions. It demonstrates that we understand the vital role that our Higher Education system plays in driving our economy and sustaining our society and that we value the opportunities for advancement that education brings to everyone from all walks of life. It is proof that we are willing to invest in those opportunities now and into the future.

After a very difficult decade, we can now begin to focus on some of the challenges facing the sector and also seek out new opportunities.

We are providing substantial increases in funding to address national skills shortages and the priority needs identified by employers, to facilitate an expansion of apprenticeship programmes, and to provide a greater focus on in-employment training and up-skilling. We are also providing funding for 2,000 additional student places in higher education so that the system can continue to respond to changing demographics and provide a place for every student.

Increased funding is being provided within a changing funding model and a new System Performance Framework. A funding reform package will incentivise institutions to respond to national strategic priorities as well as strengthening the transparency and consistency of the method by which our higher education institutions are funded. The Department of Education is creating a new Performance and Innovation fund to encourage capacity building and reward exceptional performances.

The increased funding for Higher and Further Education from the National Training Fund is a key strategic element of the overall funding increases in education. I recognise and welcome that further reforms are required to give employers a greater role in determining the priorities and direction of the Fund.

In my former role as Minister for Jobs, I met with many employers, from indigenous SMEs to multinationals in every sector of the economy. I have seen first-hand how collaboration and engagement with higher education benefits companies by meeting their skills needs and providing access to research and innovation partnerships. It is my intention to continue constructive dialogue with employer representatives to ensure the closest possible alignment of their needs with our Higher Education programmes.

Working together we can plan and provide for the education and training that will enhance the lives of our young people and add to our economic performance, building a productive future for all of us.

Turning to capital funding, I am delighted to have been able to give the green light in Budget 2018 to eleven new PPP projects which, when completed, will significantly increase capacity and support skills development across a range of disciplines including STEM, design, entrepreneurship and culinary arts.

I saw at first hand over the summer, when I visited the institutions concerned, how infrastructure needs to be updated to keep our students to the forefront of learning. These eleven projects will contribute significantly to regional development, providing more opportunities for learners and enterprise to engage with our Higher Education institutions.

### **Technological Universities**

The new investment will also support the development of Technological Universities across the country. Our work towards creating Technological Universities will, I believe, transform the education landscape. Technological Universities will mark a step-change in scale, impact and influence. They have the ability to transform rural Ireland, enriching the lives of students, families and communities.

I have engaged with many Institutions on their aspirations for Technological University status and have seen the excellent work already undertaken by the consortia towards that aim. Many expressed concern around the quality of existing infrastructure, fearing it might impede those aspirations. I listened to and have responded decisively to the concerns of the consortia. The delivery of state-of-the-art infrastructure will directly support and advance the ambitions of the consortia of Institutes of Technology that are working to achieve technological university status.

The PPP announcement represents a phase of mammoth growth and development for the participating institutions. It means they will be able to showcase state of the art facilities to prospective students – not just from their regions, but from around the world. Indeed, I know that an enhanced capacity to attract and cater for international students will also be a key result of these new investments.

### **Internationalisation of Education**

Internationalisation of education brings direct economic benefits to Ireland. By 2020, our aim is for the total economic output value of international education to be worth €2.1bn. Internationalisation also creates links and relationships between Ireland and many partners at individual, institution and country level that will bring further engagement and economic activity in the future. Today's international students are tomorrow's entrepreneurs, investors and decision-makers. Bringing them to Ireland to study will give us the opportunity to demonstrate to them that Ireland can be a great place in which to invest and do business when they are in a position to do so in their future businesses and careers.

We are now in a position to increase investment substantially over the period 2018–2021, to fund significant infrastructure upgrades and replacement programmes. In addition to supporting a small number of new-build flagship projects, it will provide additional funding to support the continued development of the pipeline of researchers in our institutions.

We have a vision for Education, and indeed for this country. We want to ensure that we have equality of access and equality of opportunity, that regardless of background, geographical area, or social circumstance, every one of our young population has a clear path to fulfilment. Education is the key to achieving this vision.

### **Access to Education**

I have always been a strong advocate of making Higher Education Institutions more accessible for students from disadvantaged communities and we are continuing to invest substantially in broadening access by way of additional grants funding, support to lone parents, a new 1916 centenary bursary scheme that will be targeted at groups currently under-represented in higher education, and funding to incentivise higher education institutions to attract more students from disadvantaged communities. The budget also allows for the expansion of maintenance supports for the most disadvantaged postgraduate students. I will be overseeing a review of the National Access Plan starting in early 2018



to take stock of progress and identify new targets and indicators for the future.

## Conclusion

This is an exciting time to be Minister for Higher Education. I am ambitious for what we can achieve in the coming years to benefit our learners, our society and our economy. I am determined that in the years ahead we will see excellent outcomes for our students, our educators and Ireland Inc. from these wise investments.

I am pleased to know that the economic landscape into which this thought-provoking *Yearbook of Education* emerges bodes well for the future of education.



Pictured at Zeminar, an event for Generation Z which took place in the RDS in Dublin on 10-12 October 2017: Ian Fitzpatrick and Damien Clarke, co-founders of Zeminar, with Mary Mitchell O'Connor TD, Minister of State for Higher Education.

Zeminar is an education, empowerment and well-being movement aimed at 15-20 year olds along with their teachers, parents and youth leaders. The event in the RDS attracted over 16,000 young people from across Ireland over the three days. It included talks by influential speakers, essential resources, and fun activities. The aim was that attendees would leave with new knowledge to help them live happier, safer, and more fulfilling lives.



# Thirty years of Education Matters

An absorbing journey



**Brian Mooney**

Editor, Ireland's Yearbook of Education

Thirty years ago, in 1987, Phyllis Mitchell established *Education Matters*. She had perceived a need for a specialist publication which would bring together the various significant news stories across the education sectors, thus making it possible and easy for educators to keep abreast of all relevant developments, as well as providing them with a voice and opportunities for expressing themselves. There was no such vehicle in Ireland at that time.

## Gemma Hussey Interview

The first edition, in A3 newsprint format, featured Gemma Hussey talking to Phyllis about her three-year term as Minister for Education. Reading this interview from a 2017 perspective, along with a range of others with people such as Christina Murphy – a predecessor of my own in the *Irish Times* education pages – and a youthful Pat Kenny, it seems to me that the issues facing educators never really change, but that they renew themselves in every generation. This fact is alluded to by Gemma Hussey also in that first edition of *Education Matters*.

Hussey referenced her initiative to combat sexism and sex stereotyping in textbooks, and her initiative in establishing a working party to examine the position of women in Irish higher education. Today, these two issues of the unequal power relationships between women and some men in educational and other working environments, and the position of women in higher education, are at the centre of both national and international attention. On 6 November 2017, the Minister of State with special responsibility for Higher Education, Mary Mitchell O'Connor, announced the establishment of a Gender Equality Taskforce and appointed this high-level team to prepare a prioritised three-year action plan.

In that same 1987 interview with Phyllis, Hussey defended her most far reaching decision as Minister for Education to close Carysfort teacher training college on the basis that the three [unnamed] teacher training colleges had been half empty for some time. Irish primary school teacher training has never recovered from that grievous mistake on her part.

Since 1987 the remaining teacher training colleges have seen CAO points rocket for the remaining available places and these colleges have had to provide eighteen months graduate conversion courses to make up for the loss of training places resulting from Carysfort's closure.

Furthermore, Hibernia College has established itself as the biggest provider of high quality postgraduate trained primary school teachers, training more teachers than the other colleges do collectively, and still there are no teachers currently available to provide substitution cover for normal absenteeism in our primary schools today.

Following on from that first edition of *Education Matters*, I have identified a small selection of my personal preferences from profiles published over the years. Amongst those is the profile of Christina Murphy.

### **Christina Murphy Profile**

Cut off in her prime, Christina Murphy was a giant in Irish education journalism, serving as education correspondent for 12 years, in whose footsteps I have been honoured to follow for a similar period as Irish Times education columnist and analyst. I was privileged to work with her on a three-part series on Irish education for RTE in the mid-eighties.

Christina's energy and enthusiasm are well captured in Phyllis's representation.

"I love the challenge of a daily newspaper, sussing things out, researching, digging for news." This verbalises exactly the driving force behind those of us privileged to write on education for the Irish Times. "I like to think that we set the agenda for education coverage."

As with the Hussey interview, the themes identified by Christina are as relevant today as they were in the eighties: "One-year H. Dip is not enough by way of training"; "The Junior Cert is limited by lack of in-service training and the absence of classroom based assessment alongside the written exam." She supports the CAO points system as the best working system we've got, as opposed to the subjectivity of interviews in a small intimate society such as ours.

Christina had a somewhat rocky relationship with teachers, seeing them as a bit defensive and under-appreciative of the privileges of the job such as short hours and long holidays. And yet she acknowledged the enormous difficulty of being a good teacher.

On one issue, in my opinion, she got it totally wrong: "seeing teaching as lonely and isolating, lacking the compensation of the give and take and interaction among colleagues". After over forty years as a teacher from September to June each year since 1976, I cannot describe how supportive and collegial teachers are towards each other. The staffroom is a place of laughter, banter and mutual support.

Working in *The Irish Times* at a desk in August–September each year, devising the story that will appear under one's name the following morning concerning this year's Leaving Cert CAO College offers, is by

far the most isolating experience you can imagine. As you look around anxiously for inspiration, every colleague is in the exact same place as you with their head buried in their screens, and with deadlines only minutes away. Back slapping banter and mutual support is nowhere to be seen.

### **Ray Kearns Profile**

Another excellent encapsulation of a giant in Irish education is Phyllis's profile of my good friend Ray Kearns. She captures the sheer energy of the man. Leaving school after the Inter Cert to work on the railway, he was a docker in the North Wall when, in his own words, "he came to the use of reason."

Studying Maths as part of an Arts degree in UCD by day and working the night shift in the docks, Ray still managed to win the trust of his student colleagues and was elected president of the student council. From there to the H. Dip, to James Street as a maths teacher, at which point most men would have rested on their laurels – but not Ray Kearns. He went to Pittsburgh on a scholarship to achieve his Masters in Mathematics, three more summers in Fordham and Boston College, and from there to Gonzaga as head of the Maths department.

What a journey Phyllis describes, but that was only the beginning. In 1969, he rented the old Sacred Heart School building on Leeson Street, and thus was born the Institute of Education. I walked through that door in September 1971, after a day's work in an insurance brokerage firm, to add Latin to my Leaving Cert to enable me to register as an Arts student in UCD. Every evening he stood inside that door, hand outstretched to welcome the students, smiling broadly as he encouraged us, while at the same time finding out how we judged our teacher. Thus started a friendship that has lasted a lifetime.

What Phyllis did not capture – because he keeps it well hidden – is Ray's innate generosity and decency. I cannot recount the number of times he has responded to genuine need that I encountered and brought to his attention by providing totally free education and support. On one occasion, following a request from me, he fulfilled the wish of a dying Leaving Cert student to secure a place in Law in Portobello College, and a few weeks before the student died, Ray organised a half day one-to-one immersion experience for him in the content of the Law programme.

### **Pat Kenny Profile**

Still in the 1980s, Phyllis interviewed a youthful Pat Kenny titling her profile "That Mega-Man". Pat's *Late Late Show* years were still in the future, but he had already presented the Eurovision song contest. I have worked with Pat in RTE since my UCD student days, during the summers in the early seventies, as Pat's TV and radio career was taking off. We have become good friends over the years as we worked together on various programmes, and I feel that I now know the essence of the man. However, Phyllis's profile of Pat Kenny has given me a totally fresh insight into the forces that shaped him into the giant of Irish media that he is today. The O'Connell years and the experience of arbitrary and unjust punishments, with leathers and dusters flying in all directions, is an experience lived through by most boys of my generation who served our apprenticeship in

Christian Brothers' schools in the sixties. The brilliance of his academic achievements is captured in her piece, winning scholarships three times – on entry to secondary school, following the Inter Cert, and into university – all by the age of 17. He won a further teaching scholarship to Georgia University following his UCD Engineering years.

Phyllis captures Pat's detached and analytic mind perfectly. To this I can attest. When preparing a set of briefing notes for Pat Kenny, you know instinctively that he will cover every salient point in the interview and will do so within the allotted time. In contrast, the late lamented Gerry Ryan would get into the first paragraph of your briefing notes and then take off in a completely uncharted direction, leaving you wondering what he was going to ask you next, and his production team frantically hand signalling through the glass wall to get him to return to the topic and keep him from going seriously over time.

### **Mick Lally Profile**

Another star of stage and screen profiled by Phyllis was the late great Mick Lally of "Miley Byrne" fame. A favourite photograph of my 95-year-old mother-in-law shows her walking into her daughter's wedding in the Old Ground in Ennis on Mick Lally's arm. Phyllis interviewed him after a morning's filming of Glenroe in Kilcoole in Co Wicklow. She vividly chronicles the filming of a scene from the show, bringing it to life in her colourful description. She had to drive into RTE a few days later to complete her interview with Mick.

Born in the Mayo Gaeltacht of Tourmakeady, Mick went to take his BA in Galway and then spent six years as a teacher in Tuam. In a sign of things to come, Mick became deeply involved with his pupils in the writing and production of plays. From there onto amateur theatre productions in Galway and in 1975 the birth of Druid Theatre, at which point Mick decided to go full time into the theatre. From there he soon emerged into the giant of Irish theatre he became. To me Mick will always be the unassuming host who, along with his beloved wife Peggy, would welcome you back to their warm and welcoming home off the South Circular Road after a night's performance in "Observe the sons of Ulster marching towards the Somme" in the Abbey.

### **Bryan MacMahon Profile**

One of Phyllis's own favourite interviews was with the great Kerry teacher and writer Bryan MacMahon. I am of Kerry stock myself, my grandfather was born on a small farm outside Killarney, went on to teacher training in Waterford and eventually to become a Principal of a small school outside Tralee. He passed the teaching gene onto three of his children and onto me in the next generation – so I read the MacMahon interview as an insight into my own roots.

Having read it and reread it, I find it impossible to summarise in a few paragraphs. I cannot do justice to Phyllis's capacity to bring this writer, lecturer, poet, sage and great teacher to life in a short synopsis. So I have decided to use my prerogative as Editor of *Education Matters Yearbook* (now renamed *Ireland's Yearbook of Education*) to reproduce the Bryan Mac Mahon

interview in full in this year's edition, as a celebration of the first thirty years of her stewardship of *Education Matters*.

In addition to the series of profiles which Phyllis created in the early years of the publication, several now-famous people – then third level students and recent graduates – cut their teeth on *Education Matters* back in the late 1900s, including Pat Leahy (Sunday Business Post), Cormac O'Keeffe (Irish Examiner), Dara O Briain (famous comedian and mathematical genius), and others.

In 1997, *Education Matters* and *The Sunday Tribune* entered into an arrangement by which the monthly publication would be distributed as a supplement within the national Sunday newspaper. This involved a print run of more than 100,000 and had the effect of bringing *Education Matters* to a far wider audience and embedding the publication as a significant news medium in the entire education establishment.

A couple of years later *Education Matters* moved on from the *Sunday Tribune* to enter into a similar type of arrangement with *Ireland on Sunday*. This lasted until the end of 2000 when Phyllis decided to transfer the publication to the internet, a medium which at that time was beginning to penetrate the Irish market.

### **Yearbook**

EducationMatters.ie was very successful – but there remained a yearning for the print medium. In 2006, alongside the website, Phyllis established *Education Matters Yearbook*. This was a 250-page book that chronicled the key events of the year in education in Ireland across all sectors. Six years later the value of this unique annual publication was recognised by NUI Galway. The endorsement and support of this long-established and highly esteemed university was immensely important in increasing the credibility and raising the profile of *Education Matters Yearbook*.

I have been writing the executive summary for *Education Matters Yearbook* since 2007 and three years ago I accepted the offer of the position of Editor. I have been supported by many great teachers in shaping the emerging style and structure of the publication, who value what *Education Matters Yearbook* is and can be into the future, particularly by my good friend and initial main sponsor over the past three years, Brian Mac Craith, President of DCU.

I cannot conclude this overview of the first thirty years of *Education Matters* without stating that it has been an immense privilege to have worked with Phyllis Mitchell for the past ten years. She has brought a rich vein of insight and scholarship to the world of Irish education, and has more than fulfilled her initial ambitions for *Education Matters* and *Education Matters Yearbook*.

### **Education Matters Website**

In addition to the Yearbook, [www.educationmatters.ie](http://www.educationmatters.ie) continues to thrive, offering blog space to people interested in expressing themselves on education related subjects, a free download of the current edition of *Education Matters Yearbook* (now *Ireland's Yearbook of Education*), highlights from down the years, an events calendar, and – to pay the bills – advertising space.



# EDUCATION MATTERS

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## NEW MEDIUM FOR IRISH TEACHERS

Welcome to "Education Matters". We hope you will enjoy receiving your free monthly copy of this new paper. In launching this newspaper, one of our primary objectives is to provide a platform for educators to communicate their news and views to one another. Currently there is little or no scope for them to do this in a publication that deals with the entire spectrum of Education Matters. The structure of the educators' day tends to bind him to his books and his students. He lives in a child-orientated or adolescent world, and, he has little opportunity for meaningful exchange with colleagues. It is hoped that this newspaper will go some way towards alleviating the isolation frequently experienced by educators.

Many men and women involved in education at First, Second and Third levels are gifted and dedicated people. Over the years they have individually accumulated invaluable expertise in given areas. More often than not however, it is a case for them of "living and dying unwept, unhonoured and unsung". Through this newspaper we hope to explore and exploit such expertise, for the individual's own satisfaction, and the corporate benefit of the readers.

We also hope to provide up the minute information on educational trends, and particularly to highlight

policy documents and discussion papers issued by the Department of Education. At present teachers have to rely for such information on sporadic and often sketchy coverage in the national media.

### SELF-ESTEEM

Not the least of our aims is to stimulate, entertain and motivate educators, who often have to battle to preserve self-esteem in an unappreciative ethos.

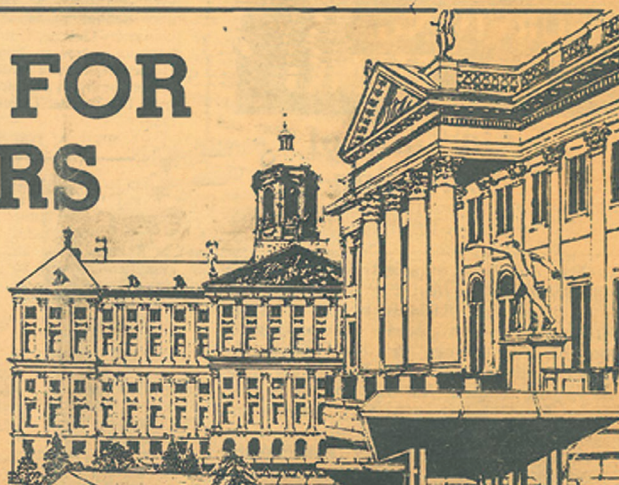
Vital issues such as stress in work, unmanageable numbers, lack of in-service training, feelings of inadequacy in the face of the new

technology, student apathy, the absence of a formulated philosophy of education within a particular school, lack of literacy at Third level, lack of integration between First, Second and Third levels, outdated curricula, the examination system — these and many other relevant topics will be aired in future issues.

### SUPPORT

This newspaper is essentially your newspaper.

We rely on your support and interest to make it a success, and invite you to write to the editor, sending your suggestions, comments and recommen-



**EDUCATION MATTERS**

**1987 - 2017**

and send your article to the editor at:  
Education Matters,  
56 Carysfort Avenue,  
Blackrock, Co. Dublin.  
Tel: 887247.

Our sincere good wishes to educators everywhere. If you wish to participate, or if you have any comments on the publication, please write to us.

We look forward to hearing from you.

## Talking with Gemma Hussey

Gemma Hussey is once again at the centre of the Irish educational scene, having been recently appointed by Alan Dukes to the Fine Gael front bench as Spokesperson for Education. A controversial figure in the eyes of many teachers, it was with considerable anticipation that I sought a conversation with her about matters educational.

CONTINUED ON BACK PAGE



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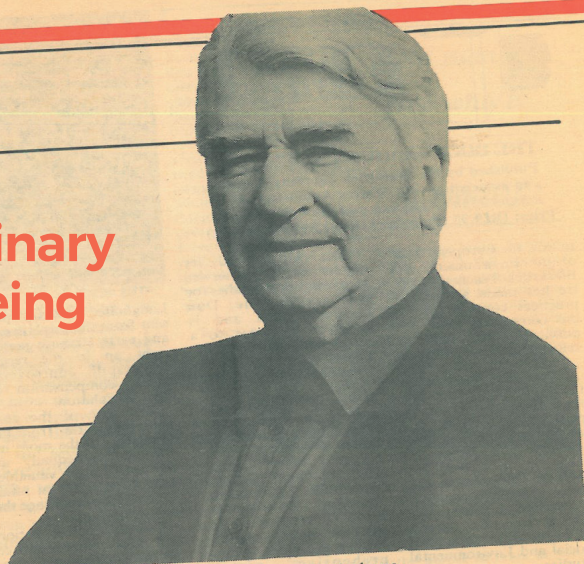
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## PROFILE:

# Portrait of an extraordinary teacher and human being

Bryan M MacMahon Spring 1988



**Phyllis Mitchell**

**T**his profile of the great writer and teacher Bryan MacMahon is taken from an early edition of *Education Matters*, the specialist medium for educators established by Phyllis Mitchell in 1987. Although the piece is 30 years old, it is in essence timeless. It is published here to mark and celebrate thirty years of *Education Matters*.

Bryan MacMahon's feet are deeply and firmly rooted in Kerry soil. Born in Listowel, seventy-eight years ago, he has lived and worked there all his life, as did his father and grandfather before him. This rootedness in a rural town has had a considerable influence on his personality, accounting perhaps for a certain down-to-earth solidity, and even pragmatism, in his character.

However, if Bryan MacMahon's feet are firmly on the ground, his head is surely in the stars. For his practicality is combined with a rare creative genius. He shows little trace of those characteristics associated with your proverbial mad artist, but nevertheless the irrepressible flame of his creative imagination lights up his personality and conversation, giving colour and vitality to his practical wisdom.

A husband and father of five, a teacher, bookshop owner, writer of poems, short stories, plays and novels and a lecturer – he has done the things he put his mind to superlatively well. Poet and sage, at 78 he continues to live a full rich life as writer, lecturer, guest speaker and adviser on literary subjects.

## THE QUALITIES OF A GOOD TEACHER

In his time, Mr. MacMahon has taught all classes at primary level, from kindergarten to sixth. He has a keen appreciation of the potential influence of teachers, and maintains that properly selected and trained, given proper working conditions and with the backing of people who matter, teachers could change the history of a nation in one decade.

“Children can  
teach each other  
for a while.”

To be an effective teacher, however, it is necessary to have certain qualities. A good teacher must first of all have a gift of communication. If a man or a woman can rivet the attention of students, so that his or her words are penetrating them like lances, that person can teach.

Alongside this ability to communicate there has to be the quality of infectious enthusiasm. It is out of his own experience that Mr. MacMahon’s conviction regarding this quality of enthusiasm is born. A highly disciplined man himself, in his early days as a teacher he “ran a tight ship”. But as time went on, he softened. He quickly came to realise both with regard to his own five sons and with regard to his pupils that over-pushing them academically was not a good idea. Communicating one’s own infectious enthusiasm is a much more vital way of motivating pupils and getting them interested. For learning really is “caught, not taught”.

Nobody can give what he hasn’t got, or in the pithy words of King Lear: “Nothing can come from nothing”.

Mr. MacMahon maintains that to feed this all-important quality of infectious enthusiasm, a teacher must have an intellectual life after school which is vital and stimulating. He maintains that it is absolutely necessary that educators take up a second activity in the evening so that their intellect may be nourished and the process of their own development may continue. Not to have such interests outside school is to vegetate, for the teacher who confines his intellectual life to the four walls of his classroom is inevitably doomed to become as puerile in mentality as the children themselves, despite the onset of grey hair and the odd wrinkle. He will certainly fail to keep himself, in Mr. MacMahon’s words, “bright and shining for the children”.

## **MOTIVATING CHILDREN**

Mr. MacMahon has an innate understanding of the psychology of the child. During his teaching career he conceived thousands of clever ploys to whet the interest of the children and spur them on to the heights of enthusiasm.

One day, for instance, during the course of a lesson, he ostentatiously withdrew a small red notebook from his pocket. Then he paused, looked very mysterious and retreated behind the blackboard. After a moment he reappeared and continued with the lesson.

Not for long, however, for his face was again suddenly shrouded in mystery, and once more he disappeared behind the blackboard.

As these surprising withdrawals continued the children grew increasingly agog with curiosity.

“What are you doing, sir?”

“Now, that’s a secret.”

“Tell us.”

“No, no.”

“Please, sir, please.”



“Well,” said Mr MacMahon, dangling the proverbial carrot, “if you’re very good I’ll tell you next Friday.”

At last Friday arrived. Eager faces awaited the revelation of the secret.

“Hands up those of you who collect anything.”

“I collect stamps.”

“I collect old coins.”

“I collect shells.”

“Well,” said Mr MacMahon, “I collect words.”

“Can we do that, sir?”

“Oh, no! You’re too small.”

“No we’re not, sir.”

In the manner of Tom Sawyer manoeuvring his mates so that he could enjoy the apple while they painted the fence, Mr MacMahon gave a little to the cajoling of his pupils.

“Well, if you’re very good, next Friday I’ll let the six best of you collect some.”

The following Friday the six best were duly chosen.

“Don’t collect too many. It’s hard work.”

The following week the next six got their chance, and eventually everyone had a go.

The children got words from sauce-bottles, from advertisements, from radio, newspapers and from all manner of unusual places. They set up contests with each other.

“I have 4,365 words.”

“I have 3,000, but mine are better ones than yours.”

They started swapping them and fighting over them. They compiled the most astonishing lists of words. Those children ended up with a vocabulary that even Mr. MacMahon himself found truly amazing.

Nor was Mr. MacMahon’s ploy of mysteriously retreating behind the blackboard lost upon the children. They appreciated it for what it was – a cunning ruse to arouse interest.

Part of Mr. MacMahon’s gift as a teacher was the ability not only to arouse interest but to sustain it. In the word-collecting incident, for example, he drove home his advantage by leaving boxes of coloured chalk at the disposal of the children in the early mornings before class formally began.

When he would arrive into his classroom he would find his blackboards transformed into seas of surrealistic colour, covered with words both in English and Irish.

Mr MacMahon concentrated on the humanities in his teaching, and used the story technique extensively. No Archimedes himself, his interest in the Maths programme was slight. He foresaw that the time was coming when machines would be used for calculations. And those hours spent

The ‘Cúntas  
Míósúil’ was the  
bane of his life.

In this rich environment of riotous colour the children came on in leaps and bounds.

teaching pounds, shillings and pence – were they a waste of time now that we have the *punt*?

The power of the story, however, he saw as universal and timeless. It appeals to the imagination, and the power of the imagination is incalculable, for all of our creative impulses have their origin there.

Mr MacMahon made everything a story. He also placed great emphasis on discussing the story.

In teaching reading, for example, it is the discussion of the story which brings the text alive for the children. The teacher's own intellectual knowledge and experience of life renders the subject matter vitally interesting for the pupils. The discussion, however, must be original and questions should not be asked in a predictable form. Stories such as King Midas and Christ among the Doctors are among Brian MacMahon's favourites for children.

'What do you think of Midas?' he might say to them. 'I'll tell you something, if I had his money I wouldn't be here teaching you lot.'

With the passage of years, Mr MacMahon learned to look with a detached eye on a class and on himself in relation to it, and to ask himself certain questions:

Exactly what am I doing here? Am I living their intellectual lives for them or am I stimulating them?

And finally he learned to ask himself the all-important question: How can I educate these children without killing myself?

He found the mould which was there, and which was necessary, had sometimes to be broken for effective teaching. The craft arose from breaking the mould. It was necessary to develop an elasticity and learn to forget the timetable when this was appropriate. For Mr MacMahon the idea of 'lay-bys' within the school day was important, for a teacher must have a rest. Children can teach each other for a while. Or if a teacher is, say, very tired indeed, he should get a box of library books and let the children teach themselves.

At another time, a teacher might turn around and say: 'Ah, I'm tired teaching you lads; let's have a chat about something interesting' – and that might be the most important part of the day.

Mr MacMahon avoided using a pedantically correct School Language in talking to his pupils. He spoke to them in the natural colourful idiom that was a product both of his native Listowel and his own rich imagination. He also used his own wide experience of life to enrich the children. He got them into the habit of asking him about trips he made from time to time with the permission of the Department of Education to American and European universities in connection with his work as a writer.

These journeys were a source of great interest to the children, especially since Mr MacMahon whetted their curiosity with his vivid descriptions and racy anecdotes. Informally they absorbed details of geography, history, literature and the irresistibly attractive area of human relationships.

Mr MacMahon talked to his pupils and listened to them in a personal way, and occasionally had to tell one of them that he was crossing the line. But in forty-four years of teaching he never had any trouble that couldn't be speedily resolved, and he never sent a child home feeling under a cloud.

### **A CAREER THAT WAS NO BED OF ROSES**

Mr MacMahon's teaching career was not all a bed of roses, however. He had to contend with the rigid inspectorate system which all national teachers were subjected to up to recent times. Many readers who have worked in primary schools will recall with Mr MacMahon the way in which a teacher's work was rated in one of three categories: Highly Efficient, Efficient, Inefficient.

Moreover, retaining your mark, Mr MacMahon reminisces, was 'a terror'. For an inspector could at any moment consider himself justified in giving a teacher six months' notice of a complete examination. It was a penal, medieval system, copied from the British.

A good teacher must first of all have a gift of communication.

Mr MacMahon, who was marked 'Highly Efficient' at his first examination, had a proud and independent attitude towards the inspectorate system. He declares now that had he been given six months notice of retention of his mark, he would have walked out and put all his effort into his bookshop and his writing. He 'didn't give a hoot', for 'they would have been doing him a favour'.

He dared to be himself, and clearly this was a recipe for successful teaching, for he retained his mark of 'Highly Efficient' right through his teaching career.

Mr. MacMahon remembers the 'Cuntas Míosiúl', or monthly progress record as 'the bane of his life', it was like an examination of conscience – what did I do last month? And the real advances he had made he couldn't record at all. As for yearly schemes and weekly schemes, they are all right for young teachers, but after a while they become unnecessary, 'I could write it all in three words', he declares.

Mr. MacMahon had other hardships too. For over twenty years he taught in conditions of appalling squalor. Children and teachers 'were in mud up to their knees'. They had no heat and no fire. The school building was totally unfit for human habitation, let alone to serve as a centre for the development of young minds.

At last Mr. MacMahon took up the cudgels himself. 'We told them all off, including the parish priest, and after a terrible fight, backed by the I.N.T.O., we got a brand new school in Listowel'. He found the change of atmosphere in the new school astonishing.

The brightly painted walls and the big picture windows of the new building were in total contrast to the squalor to which they had been accustomed. Goethe, Steiner and Luscher have all elucidated the importance of colour and those giants in their field would have recognised a kindred spirit in this Kerryman, who, after consulting with his staff, addressed the pupils of the new school on the loud-speaker: 'I don't like school uniforms', he told them. 'Your Mammies will be knitting you jumpers for the winter. Please tell them I don't want any blacks or browns. I'd like violet, indigo, blue, green, yellow, red, orange'.

Mr. MacMahon, who knew every person and every move in the town, was able to reinforce this message to the parents themselves in the course of casual chats in shop or post office. The following September, as 300 children filed into their shining classrooms the new school was a sea of brilliant colour. Inspectors seemed to blink on entering the rooms. In this rich environment of riotous colour, the children came on in leaps and bounds. Mr. MacMahon is on occasion more than modest about his own role in all this. 'There are times', he says 'when I think I was only a front man for a wonderful teaching staff'.

For the rest of his teaching career Mr. MacMahon felt as if he could breathe the clear fresh air.

## **A SECOND LIFE**

Mr. MacMahon's life has been an incredibly full one. For fifteen years he followed a routine that was truly astonishing. From nine o'clock to three he was a teacher. From four until nine he ran a bookshop. He walked for an hour and from ten until one o'clock in the morning he wrote. And he lived to tell the tale.

His wife once gave him what he now considers an excellent piece of advice. 'When you come in from school', she said, 'for God's sake go to bed and sleep for a while'.

He took her advice.

When he got up he would find the sediment had settled and the well was clear. He was able to begin his next activity with a *tubula rasa*.

The incentive of money played a role in Mr. MacMahon's long hours of labour, for he had five sons to raise and educate. On a teacher's salary alone he could never have finished their third level education.

His efforts to increase his income did not go unnoticed by the taxman, who harassed him in an arrogant fashion. Crippled by the super tax, Mr. MacMahon threatened to close his bookshop. He felt the penal income tax system was killing initiative in him.

But Mr. MacMahon's need to write was much stronger than his need to make money. The hunger of the imagination had to be appeased in him. If he hadn't had this creative outlet he would have been like a tiger in chains.

It is absolutely necessary that educators take up a second activity in the evening.

His first short stories were published by Seán Ó Faoláin in *THE BELL*. He wrote extensively for that magazine. He was welcomed by Frank O'Connor as a poet of merit, and he won *THE BELL* award for the best short story.

In 1948 his first book of short stories *The Lion Tamer and other stories* appeared in England and later in America.

His Play *The Bugle in the Blood* was produced in the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, in March 1949, and is still being produced.

In 1950 he published *Jackamoora and the King of Ireland's Son* in the United States.

In 1952 his novel *Children of the Rainbow* appeared in Britain, the United States and Canada. It was hailed as 'the richest and raciest book that had come out of Ireland for many years' in which 'the joy of living ran like a shout in the blood'. The book was published in German under the title *KINDER DER MORGENROTE*, and a dramatized version of it was serialised on Canadian and Irish radio.

His second collection of short stories, *The Red Petticoat* was published in 1955.

*Song of the Anvil* the choice of the Abbey Theatre for the international Theatre Festival in 1960.

His Play *The Honey Spike*, whose characters are Travellers, was produced by the Abbey Theatre in 1961. It has won major national and international awards and is still being produced at Irish Drama Festivals. Bryan MacMahon is very familiar with the tinker way of life, and is one of the few outsiders who can speak Shelta, the secret language of the travelling people. (He prefers the pure name 'tinker', which means one who works with tin).

In 1970 he published *Patsy O and his Wonderful Pets*.

In 1971 his impressions book on Ireland *HERE'S IRELAND* was published in London and New York.

Another selection of short stories *The End of the World* appeared in 1976.

His latest publication *The sound of Hooves* and other stories has been greeted as 'exhilarating reading and a crowning achievement'.

Bryan MacMahon has appeared on radio and television on innumerable occasions, and has lectured at home and abroad on literary subjects. At present he is very much involved in the Arts Council's project 'Writers in Schools', and has responded to invitations to speak to students in many parts of Ireland. Many readers will no doubt recall their captivation at his gripping style of lecturing.



On the day of his retirement RTE brought their cameras to Listowel and filmed the programme *My Own Place*. A teetotaler all his life, Mr. MacMahon celebrated the event by tasting his first glass of beer.

## MACMAHON, THE TEACHER

Mr. MacMahon was a great educator of the young. But his approach to teaching was delightfully sane.

Mr. MacMahon sees teaching as one component of the larger whole which constitutes a teacher's life. Alongside of taking a healthy pride in his work, the teacher has to protect and respect his own energies, maintain his space and ensure his own growth. Otherwise the child is impoverished as well as the teacher, and ultimately it becomes a case of the blind leading the blind.

## MACMAHON, THE ARTIST

As an artist, Mr. MacMahon ranks among the greatest. Unlike the sculptor of classical Greece who wished to freeze only the idealised and perfect in stone, MacMahon is more akin to Rembrandt, who looked at life unflinchingly as it is, and recorded it all uncritically and with compassion. The beggar, the young girl, the celibate, the ascetic, the debauched and the innocent child all provide the "substance of his tale".

\* THE FACT ON THE FACT ON THE FACT RTCs to upgrade. It would appear that policy makers for these colleges have lost sight of their original mission - to meet the industrial needs of the regions and provide suitable training at local level - and that they are failing to appreciate the sterling work that has been successfully carried out by them over the years in the area of vocational training.

The binary system of third level education which this country enjoys is ideal in providing for all. The task of the universities has always been to cater for the academic minority and the task of the RTCs has been to provide an education in more specific skills, the kind of vocational training that is a greater imperative today than ever if the economic buoyancy of Ireland's industrial future is to be assured.

Last July the Minister for Education, Micheál Martin, set up a joint education/industry task force with representatives from the business corporations as well as education. Its purpose was to improve the supply of technicians for high-technology industries. This task force is due to report back to the Minister this month. Hopefully its recommendations will be the catalyst for immediate, decisive and radical action.

## Education Matters

The medium of contact and expression for teachers, parents, students and all those interested in education.

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Design Editors

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Printers:

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## EDUCATION MATTERS relaunched with THE SUNDAY TRIBUNE



To celebrate ten years in print, the Minister for Education, Micheál Martin, formally relaunched EDUCATION MATTERS with THE SUNDAY TRIBUNE at a reception in Dublin last month. Pictured here are (left to right) Mr. Barney Whelan, Public Relations Manager ESB, - the official sponsor of EDUCATION MATTERS; Mrs. Gemma Hussey, former Minister for Education and member of EDUCATION MATTERS' editorial board; and the Minister for Education, Mr. Micheál Martin, TD. The reception was held in Regent House, Trinity College.

## What the media said...

### A very important programme: It woke me up!

A new, important view on discipline from Alfie Kohn deserves a wider platform

RTE gave us a fascinating *Open Mind* on 18th September (which I caught in the small hours of the 19th during those "Irish Collection" schedules for insomniacs or night workers). It woke me up. US former teacher Alfie Kohn discussed his ideas with John Quinn - "Beyond Discipline: Challenging the Traditional Paradigm". Briefly, Mr. Kohn's thesis is this: traditional ideas of punishments or rewards for pupils are destructive. Rewards make selfish people, punishment teaches bullying. Teachers should not be "in control" when one visits a classroom, one should have to look around to find the teacher who should be working with the students, not directing operations. We should not be "doing

should be a community effort. "When the point is to prove how smart you are, to get a good grade or test score, there is less inclination to engage deeply with ideas, to explore and discover" - in short, to be really educated. Sanctions, Kohn says, don't teach about right and wrong, only about power and self-interest.

'One should have to look around to find the teacher who should be working with the students, not directing operations.'

Congratulations to the



Gemma Hussey

well-attended symposium in Dublin Castle last May) and to John Quinn and RTE for the radio programme. There was such a packed hall for Dr. Kohn's lecture, he obviously touches a chord with educationalists here. Such is the importance of Mr. Kohn's very significant new approach, it deserves a much wider audience in mainstream radio and television broadcasting. The population in general needs to hear a great deal more of him and his six important books. Will RTE get him back again on to the Late Late or Pat Kenny?

Sunday Tribune on September 7, what else was engaging the media in this first month of the academic year?

The significant news of the Catholic hierarchy's backing the new ESE programmes for primary schools was generally welcomed, nowhere more so than in the *Irish Independent* (19th Sept): news report, news analysis piece and second editorial. And John Walshe in even-handed fashion giving due credit to former Minister Niamh Breathnach.

'when the point is to prove how smart you are ... there is less inclination to engage deeply with ideas, to explore and discover'

The bishops were congratulated for "rejecting advice from conservative quarters." Is there any

Rewards make selfish people, punishment teaches bullying.

hesitation?

The *Irish Times*' excellent Education & Living, on Tuesday, recommenced on 2nd September and was produced in lively format and full colour.

Yvonne Healy covered Alfie Kohn's thesis on 9th September. Síle Sheehy dispensed her wisdom every week and Andy Pollak addressed the challenge facing the first ever Minister for Adult Education, Willie O'Dea (23rd September).

On adult education - Green and White Papers are promised, while Mr. O'Dea warns that the Minister for Finance has the final say. In the meantime two figures stand out: AONTAS says that at least 40,000 people (most of them women)

finds that 25% of Irish adults surveyed have problems with deciphering simple instructions on things like over-the-counter medicines.

Mr. Pollak explains that the whole sector lacks a comprehensive statutory structure, has severe poverty problems, is scattered around among six main providers, has an accreditation deficit and is generally in need of a great deal of Mr. O'Dea's Tender Loving Care.

The *Education & Living* supplement is 16 pages of lively well produced material: well done, editor Ella Shanahan.

And if RTE continues with No Chalk no Chorus (Wednesdays at 12.30 on RTE Radio 1) in as brisk a fashion as it began on 3rd September, producer John McKenna will have done education a service in engaging the attention of those not in the classroom at that time.

He has decided that the general population has an attention span of about three minutes when it

# Editorial



**Brian Mooney**

Editor, Ireland's Yearbook of Education

*'Education has been central to Ireland's transformation over recent decades. It will be central to our ambitions as a nation (economic, cultural and social) over the coming decades. It will allow us to lead on innovation. It will help us to achieve social inclusion. In my view, this is the spirit that should prevail, not based on wishful thinking, but on hard evidence of achievement, and the sustained, combined efforts of key stakeholders. Let us go forward as one of the highest achievers in education of the most developed countries.'* – John Coolahan.

It was an immense privilege to be present this year, along with representatives of every strand of Ireland's education community, to hear Professor John Coolahan speak these words at the launch of *Towards the Era of Lifelong Learning*, his updated history of Irish education 1800–2016. Since I entered the education system in 1958, I have experienced as both student and teacher some of the enormous strides made during the past sixty years, described by John in his book.

In Ireland, we value what high-quality education contributes to who we are and what we can become in an ever-changing world. Consequentially, we seem to have the capacity to overcome what may seem at first glance the almost insurmountable obstacles facing our education system today.

As a nation on the verge of bankruptcy in 2011, which led to education budgets being slashed across the board, we have managed to sustain a very high quality of service to students despite seemingly insurmountable challenges. Many of those cuts are still in place and will shape our education system negatively, unless we find ways to overcome them.

At third level, State funding has been cut from €2 billion to €1.3 billion, and staff numbers in our Universities and Institutes of Technology have been slashed as student numbers have ballooned – particularly in the IOT sector, which admitted an additional 34,000 students to raise much-needed revenues. Sadly, many of these students were not ready for the challenges of independent learning which is the norm at third level and dropped out in large numbers.

Apart from scarring many of these young people for life, it also robbed the further education (FE) sector of many of these students. If they had not received that highly valued CAO offer, they may have had a more gradual immersion into independent learning and progressed successfully through third level, a year or more after finishing second-level education.

The Cassells report is under consideration by the Education Committee in Dáil Éireann. The hard political reality is that, notwithstanding recommendations in the report, there will be no substantial further increase in student fees in Ireland. Circumstances have changed, as the youth vote in the recent UK general election proved, and Cassells' recommendations are dead in the water awaiting a decent burial.

Post-Brexit we will be the most expensive country in the EU in terms of third level fees both at undergraduate and particularly at postgraduate level. Dutch universities are the next highest, at €2,000 a year, and in the past four years the number of Irish students studying in their universities has grown from zero to over a thousand. Most of the rest of Europe regard third-level access as an entitlement and charge no fees whatsoever. If we were to consider going down the UK route of sharply increasing fees and bringing in a student loan scheme to fund it, we would simply be encouraging our brightest and best to look to the Continent for their higher education.

Brexit may in fact offer a partial solution to our higher-education funding dilemma. Apart from tiny Malta, Ireland will be the only English-speaking country in the EU. The international market for English-speaking universities in the EU from the billion-plus citizens of China and India and the rest of the developing world is enormous. As the UK attempts to limit the number of foreign nationals entering, which triggered the Brexit process in the first place, we in Ireland are ideally placed to offer our third-level institutions as destinations for tens of thousands of international students.

We can also keep encouraging our diaspora to continue their hugely generous philanthropic support for our education system, which has been central to most capital development projects in the past twenty years. Potential employers of our graduates also have a self-interested role in investing in the development of their future employees, and recent moves to increase that support are to be welcomed.

A further consequence of the slashing of government spending in 2011 was the cuts imposed in the pay of all public servants, including teachers and lecturing staff. These cuts were targeted unfairly at new entrants but were imposed, it must be said, with the acquiescence of the trade unions representing teachers and lecturers. Their role after all is to protect the terms and conditions of employment of their existing members.

Six years on, there is a deeply held belief among the teaching profession that a great injustice has been done to young teachers and lecturers, many of whom subsist on part-time temporary contracts. It led to all three teaching unions voting against the recently ratified National Agreement.

Resolution of this issue is not just a matter of natural justice, it is also critical to maintaining a high-quality education system. In a strong recovering labour market, the opportunities open to graduates of all disciplines are growing daily. The teaching profession, like all others, is ultimately a market. Currently there are huge shortfalls in graduates of



STEM, Languages both Continental and Gaeilge, Home Economics, and so on, contemplating a career in teaching.

Many of those who qualify as teachers decide, as Kate McDonald describes in her article in this Yearbook, to travel abroad, where high salaries and tax-free benefits are freely available to Irish teachers. They will not return under the terms and conditions of employment currently on offer from the Irish State.

Solving the crisis in teacher supply in Irish schools and third-level institutions will not be just a matter of natural justice. It is the simple reality of sourcing any qualified teachers across a huge range of subjects, thus realising Minister Bruton's vision of creating 'the best education system in Europe'.

But all is not gloom, as John Coolahan rightly reminds us.

One of the most challenging goals within Irish education is to continue to expand its reach beyond the traditional communities where it has universal support. Over many years, Dr. Patrick Clancy has highlighted the low third level participation rates in various Dublin postal districts. Many families are being raised by parents who have themselves had poor education outcomes, but who are hugely receptive to improving the educational experience of their children. The work in Dublin's north inner city by Josephine Bleach and her team based in National College of Ireland, and the work of Dr Gerry Boland and his colleagues in the Limerick Enterprise Development Partnership, are but two examples of interventions with families at an early stage to offer transformational support, which will in time break the cycle of educational disadvantage.

Another initiative which is bringing about transformational change for less well off students is the JP Mc Manus All Ireland Scholarship Awards. This programme, now in its tenth year and operating in partnership with the Departments of Education in Dublin and Belfast, has awarded €6,750 per year to over 1400 students whose families hold medical cards, and who are educated in non-fee-paying schools in all thirty-two counties of Ireland, based on their Leaving Cert and A Level results. Sitting each year in a UL lecture theatre, observing each student going forward to accept an award from JP McManus, is to observe educational transformation in action. These awards are based solely on exam results. An amazing aspect of the programme is the growing number of new Irish of all cultures and races who are achieving 600 points in the Leaving Cert within a few short years of their arrival in Ireland. As graduates, these students will inspire many others from their communities to realise that they too can use education to reach for the stars.

Within every level of our education system there were positive developments in 2017.

The early-childhood sector is expanding and getting stronger every day, although we have yet to figure out how to pay its teachers appropriate salaries. Many of them are abandoning the sector shortly after graduation

and taking conversion programmes available to them to qualify as primary school teachers.

The experiment of the new Junior Cycle programme is finally under way, after the collapse of the futile last stand of the ASTI against its introduction following June's vote to suspend all industrial action.

The curriculum at Leaving Cert level continues to grow, with the planned introduction on a pilot basis of Computer Science in September 2018. The only problem is that nobody has figured out where the teachers to teach it are to be sourced.

The further education sector is rapidly developing links and relationships with third-level faculties across all disciplines, providing an alternative route into college for tens of thousands of our young and not-so-young people. The review of the FE sector is about to be published, and hopefully it will give further impetus to the improvement in opportunities available to all learners.

Finally, the most exciting development by far in 2017 has been the expansion of the apprenticeship model across a wide range of industry sectors, in cooperation with our FE and IT sectors. Hopefully our universities will overcome their reluctance to develop links with this exciting new model of learning in Ireland.

We face huge challenges in driving forward the development of Irish education, but working together we are up for that challenge, and we will in time realise John Coolahan's vision of becoming 'one of the highest achievers in education of the most developed countries'.

### All Ireland scholarship awards 2017



Pictured at the JP McManus All Ireland Scholarship (AIS) Awards in the University of Limerick in November 2017  
l-r: Gerry Boland AIS Trustee, Brian Mooney Editor *Ireland's Yearbook of Education*, Michael D Higgins President of Ireland, JP McManus Philanthropist, Roger Downer AIS Trustee, Pat Dowling AIS Trustee.

# THEMES

Ireland's movement towards Europe  
and away from the UK is a game changer.



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Patricia Reilly

# Impact of Brexit on Research and Education

## Getting Brexit right



**Jane Ohlmeyer**

Chairperson Irish Research Council and  
Professor of Modern History at Trinity College  
Dublin

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**P**rofessor Jane Ohlmeyer looks at what Brexit will mean for research and education, and examines what are the risks and the challenges. She looks also at the opportunities and what needs to be done to avail of them.

For many of us Brexit is intensely personal. I suspect that my own story is fairly typical. Though Dublin is now my home, I grew up in Belfast during the 1970s and early 1980s, the darkest days of the 'Troubles'. I received my undergraduate education from St. Andrews University in Scotland and my postgraduate degree from Trinity College, Dublin. My younger son, an Oxford graduate, lives in London while my mother crosses the border, sometimes daily, as she divides her time between Counties Armagh and Donegal.

As an historian of early modern Ireland, I have spent most of my career studying the interconnected histories of 'these islands'. I also have close professional ties across them. For nearly a decade I taught at the University of Aberdeen and I am a fellow of Magdalene College, Cambridge. Every year I take a group of graduate students from Trinity College Dublin and Queen's University Belfast for a residential 'reading party' on the Clandeboyne Estate, near Bangor. I collaborate and co-publish with researchers based in the UK and recently submitted an EU grant application led by a colleague working in a Welsh university.

As chair of the Irish Research Council, I seek to forge strong institutional relationships with our sister agencies in the UK and do everything possible to secure existing research collaborations, as well as nurturing new ones. Through our various excellence-based schemes, especially our Government of Ireland and Laureate awards, we aim to attract to Ireland from all over the world outstanding researchers from across all disciplines. As co-chair of the Royal Irish Academy's Brexit Taskforce, I am part of a group of academics from across Ireland assessing the impact that Brexit could have on research and education on the island.

What is clear is that research and education know no national boundaries. Moreover we have seen how, especially over the past twenty years, they have served as powerful integrators and, as such, have played an important part in the Good Friday Agreement (1998). Research and education are also fundamental to Ireland's continued prosperity and competitiveness

Research and education know no national boundaries.

869,093 people living in Great Britain were born in Ireland.

in Europe and globally. International education contributes €1bn to the Irish economy per annum and lays the foundation for future global relationships.<sup>1</sup> Academics in Irish-based HEIs have helped to achieve national Horizon 2020 targets and have won 57% of Ireland's total drawdown (2012–2017), which equates to €221m in funding and hundreds of high end jobs.<sup>2</sup> More generally, the availability of talent and the existence of a mature research ecosystem is a key future differentiator for Ireland to win foreign direct investment (FDI).

What, then, will Brexit mean for research and education? What are the risks and challenges? What opportunities might Brexit afford and what needs to be done to avail of these?

The historic and human links between 'these islands' date back to the Middle Ages. Ireland was England's first colony and from the mid-sixteenth century 350,000 people – from England, Scotland and Wales – migrated to Ireland. By the early eighteenth century, society in Ireland was ethnically diverse with nearly one third (c.27 %) of the population of immigrant stock. People from Ireland have also been colonising the UK for centuries. The 2001 UK Census shows that 869,093 people living in Great Britain were born in Ireland and that roughly six million people living in the UK have an Irish-born grandparent. This figure exceeds the current population of Ireland (4.75 million) and equates to nearly 10 per cent of the UK population.

Given our shared history and language, the educational and research systems are closely interconnected. It comes as little surprise then that the academic community would prefer Brexit not to happen and is deeply apprehensive about the impact it might have. In July 2017 the Royal Irish Academy published results from a survey of 390 academics in Ireland and Northern Ireland on the *Impacts and Opportunities for Higher Education and Research on the Island of Ireland post Brexit*.<sup>3</sup> Its results highlight significant concerns among the sector around the likely impact of Brexit on the ability of students and researchers to move freely for work and research on the island of Ireland and with the UK. Sixty-six per cent of respondents believe Brexit will have a negative impact on the Higher Education Sector in Ireland. This increases to 96% when asked this question in relation to Northern Ireland.

Retention of the Common Travel Area between Ireland and the UK was frequently cited as a way of overcoming some of these impacts, allowing Irish students and researchers to continue to study and train in UK universities on the same conditions as UK students and workers. Removal of these rights may mean for example, that Irish students in Northern Ireland and the UK would pay significantly higher fees (up to 100%) as 'international' (or non-EU) students. As someone who studied on both

1 International education money figure taken from Enterprise Ireland <https://www.enterprise-ireland.com/en/News/PressReleases/2016-Press-Releases/25-per-cent-increase-in-international-students-studying-in-Ireland-since-2012.html>. Includes EU students and those from Canada, Chile, Brazil, Russia, China, India, Germany, Malaysia, Nigeria and USA

2 Source: <http://www.horizon2020.ie/minister-halligan-welcomes-irelands-continued-success-winning-eu-funding-research-innovation/>

3 <https://www.ria.ie/news/policy-and-international-relations/royal-irish-academy-brexit-survey-results>

sides of the border, the prospect of anyone from Belfast paying an international fee, which is three or four times greater than the EU fee, to study in Dublin (or vice versa) is chilling.

The shared land border between Ireland and Northern Ireland was recognised as a unique and important issue: respondents frequently drew attention to the importance of an open border to allow academic and research staff and students to travel freely. Strong concern was expressed by survey respondents for future research collaborations north and south on the island of Ireland, and with the UK. Data demonstrates that the UK is our closest collaborator for research and higher education and a significant partner in successful bids for European research and innovation funding. The UK is also Ireland's number one collaborator on research papers.<sup>4</sup> In addition, the UK has frequently been a strong ally for Ireland in policy discussions. While Ireland has a good track record in building coalitions with other countries, including smaller ones, the loss of our nearest neighbour at the table could affect future EU policy development.

The UK is a significant partner in successful bids for European research and innovation funding.

Little wonder then that 79% of respondents 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that collaborations between UK and Irish higher education institutions (HEIs) are very important in their academic/research field, highlighting the need to continue to facilitate such collaborations post-Brexit. Furthermore, 77% of respondents either 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' with the statement: 'Brexit is likely to impact negatively on North-South collaboration in the medium to long-term'. In the event of a so-called 'hard' Brexit, Northern Ireland researchers were particularly concerned about losing access to European Union research and innovation, and structural funding, estimated as contributing significantly to the Northern Ireland economy. Equally, Irish researchers have been eligible for various UK-based funding programmes, including those by science-based foundations, such as: Wellcome Trust, the Arts and Humanities Research Council, and Economic and Social Sciences Research Council. If the UK decided to redirect its funding to UK-based researchers only, this could have knock-on consequences for Irish researchers.

Though we have not wished for it, Brexit does afford a unique set of opportunities for the Republic of Ireland. To avail of these and to protect Ireland's competitiveness, we need to do two things. First, to work with colleagues across the sector to make Ireland an attractive destination, a global hub, for the best students and researchers from around the world. Second, to maintain and develop further our educational and research relationships with the UK, Europe and rest of world.

In the global war for talent, we need to make Ireland the country of choice for the very best. International students are already voting with their feet. Recently the numbers applying to study in UK has dropped, with a corresponding increase in the number applying to be educated in Ireland. The anti-migrant sentiment in the UK is also deterring academics from moving there and encouraging those currently based there to relocate. There has never been a better moment to recruit these 'Brexit refugees'.

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4 Reference to the chapter by Alun Jones and Liam Cleere.



Brexit does afford a unique set of opportunities for the Republic of Ireland.

In the global war for talent, we need to make Ireland the country of choice for the very best.

It is time for Ireland to position itself as a tolerant, welcoming, and engaged multi-cultural country and leverage this to attract talent at all career stages and in all disciplines. We want to make Ireland the destination of choice for researchers keen to have an English-speaking partner in an EU H2020 research application. We want to support those eager to hold a highly prestigious and competitive European Research Council (ERC) grant at an Irish university or institute of technology. This might involve a researcher relocating to Ireland permanently or a on part-time basis, perhaps on a secondment from a UK university for the duration of the grant.

The challenge we now face — especially our politicians, government departments, universities and research agencies — is to realise these opportunities in a co-ordinated fashion and in a way that strengthens research relationships with the UK. And to do so without antagonizing our colleagues in Europe.

While we continue to be obsessed with Brexit, Europe has moved on. Hard though it is to shed 800 years of history, we need to recognise that Ireland's future lies with Europe. We need to encourage our young people to learn European languages and avail of study, placement and employment opportunities in Europe. We also need to enable researchers from Ireland to become more active in Europe, leaders in their fields drawing down even more EU research funding and collaborating more with European partners. The evaluation of EU bids is a complex and labour-intensive process and in the absence of UK evaluators, Irish academics need to step up to the plate. This will allow us to shape policy and future research and educational programmes.

At this exceptional moment, our government also needs to make significant investment to ensure that we benefit from the opportunities to position Ireland as a global hub for research, education and talent.

As the findings of the government's Expert Group on Future Funding Options for Higher Education (2016) and the evidence from university global rankings and current staff-student ratios demonstrate, Irish higher education institutions need immediate and significant investment if they are to address growing domestic demand for higher education on foot of demographic pressures, become the partners of choice for the best researchers, serve as the destination of choice for non-EU and other students and ensure that Ireland remains competitive in the attraction of FDI.

Moreover, if the c.11,000 Irish students currently studying in the UK, (never mind the 1000s of potential additional Erasmus students who will no longer be able to study in the UK) require provision here in Ireland – higher education institutions will need to deliver significant additional capacity (c.6%+). The sector can and will continue to play a role in this itself – as demonstrated by its success in growing alternative income streams via industry, philanthropy and international student recruitment. Nevertheless, growing capacity on the back of historical investment requires significant additional investment in physical and human infrastructure.



Investment in Ireland's research ecosystem is considerably below that of Ireland's European peers. In particular, public investment in research is falling well short in its support for basic frontier research – which is the type of funding most eagerly sought by world class talent as amply demonstrated by the success of the European Research Council. Only 4.3% of direct government funding in Ireland is invested in individual led frontiers basic research, in comparison with an average of 17% by other European Union (EU) member states. Put another way, the budget accorded to the agency that funds applied research in 14 priority areas (Science Foundation Ireland) is €167m; while funding for basic frontier research across 70 disciplines, awarded by the Irish Research Council is, €32m. The Government needs to move now to invest adequate funding to close this gap and ensure Ireland's future competitiveness vis-a-vis its EU counterparts.

Additional capital allocations are also required to support higher education and research. Consideration should be given to the reactivation of capital investment programmes such as the Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions to fund research infrastructure on a competitive basis across all disciplines in Ireland's higher education institutions.

While we continue to be obsessed with Brexit, Europe has moved on.

It is investment in the educational and research fabric of Ireland, together with bespoke, excellence-based programmes (like the Irish Research Council's Laureate awards), that will enable us to attract the best researchers. Without this they will relocate elsewhere in Europe or, more likely, to the US or other English-speaking countries where research, especially basic frontier research, is funded appropriately.

We must also work hard to do all we can to support the Peace Process, which, as recent political events highlight, is more vulnerable and fragile than some in Westminster care to acknowledge. Strand Two of the Good Friday agreement recognised education as a suitable area for all-island co-operation. Post-1998, research and education have helped to secure the Peace Process and contributed to economic competitiveness and social cohesion on the island of Ireland. The island of Ireland accrues significant benefits from the de facto all-island research system operating in sectors such as agricultural research, and from the social dividends arising from the cross-border flow of people to work, study and contribute to higher education and research.

It is thus critical that we do all we can to promote inter-community stability in Northern Ireland – via cross border education and research collaboration – and reinforce the Peace Process at this moment of intense instability and uncertainty. Now is the time:

- » To secure commitments as to the rights and entitlements of Irish citizens within the Common Travel Area.
- » To fund a bespoke suite of programmes for research and educational collaborations, including north-south, east west mobility and global mobility programmes to bring the very best research talent to Ireland.
- » To support critical pan-island bodies including the Royal Irish Academy and Universities Ireland in their endeavours to create meaningful all-island dialogue in respect of education and research.

We need to recognise that Ireland's future lies with Europe.

Brexit is occurring at a particularly sensitive time in the histories of these islands: as part of our 'decade of commemorations' (2012–22) when we remember key moments in the founding of the Irish state, including the 1916 rebellion, partition and civil war. Of course, commemorations occur in specific contexts. Thus the 50th anniversary of 1916, in 1966, formed the backdrop to the rise of republican nationalism in Northern Ireland and the outbreak of the 'Troubles' in 1969.

The political consequences of Brexit for Ireland could be very real. The securitization of the border with the North could negate many of the gains achieved as a result of the Peace Process. Sharing a common European agenda has provided Ireland, North and South, with great scope to work together, to find common cause and to play down our differences. It would take relatively little to destabilise Northern Ireland and the anxieties around Brexit could well fire up the nationalism, tribalism, sectarianism and inhumanity that characterised the 1970s and 1980s. If we have learned one thing from the study of Irish nationalism it is the way in which one generation of republicans passes the torch to the next. It is incumbent on us all to do everything possible to ensure that we create an environment in which peace, not physical force republicanism, continues to flourish. Here education and research have an important part to play.

If we can get Brexit right, the benefits are real.

With Brexit negotiations underway, the clock is ticking down towards March 2019. If we can get Brexit right – and that includes making significant provision for research and education over the course of the next 18 months – the benefits are real. Income from international education, which already contributes €1bn to the Irish economy every year, will increase. As world-class researchers make Ireland their home, our drawdown of European funding will grow. We will begin to compete effectively with the Dutch, Swiss and Israelis for prestigious ERC awards. Investment in research and education will build global reputation for excellence and result in improved research performance. It will also lower staff-student ratios, which is one of the key drivers for the global university rankings, along with: how international we are, publication citations, and our reputation for excellent research. The position of Ireland's universities will be enhanced as a result. This, together with the greater availability of world class talent, will be a key future differentiator for Ireland to win FDI.

In other words, appropriate investment now in research and education will increase Ireland's global competitiveness at a moment of great uncertainty and help to build a stable platform for future growth.

# Rethinking Foreign Language Proficiency

What the 'new' Irish can offer us



**Pat O'Mahony**

Education Research Officer, ETBI

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**P**at O'Mahony writes about the critical importance of foreign language skills for indigenous businesses as well as for multinationals. In view of Ireland's need for significant numbers who speak world languages fluently, the author suggests that in this regard young people from non-English-speaking homes can become one of the country's greatest assets.

Foreign language skills are in high demand in the employment market. This is hardly surprising, given the extent to which Ireland's prosperity depends on its capacity to sell products and services in the global marketplace. In fact, language skills are as critical to indigenous businesses as they are to multinationals because, to do business off-shore, a firm must be able to communicate fluently with customers and prospective customers in their own language.

Up till now, English has been the common means of communication for speakers of many different first languages across the globe. But its relative importance to our future is waning as the balance of economic power moves east and south. Today Ireland needs fluent speakers of virtually every international language if it wants to guarantee its prosperity and social cohesion, which depend on economic growth. The problem is that our schools have tended to concentrate on teaching French and German and, to a much lesser extent, Spanish. Language teaching here has also had a written rather than an oral focus, so a young person with a good Leaving Certificate in a language is often not well equipped to communicate fluently in it.

Producing workers who can speak fluently with non-English speakers in their own language has a significant lead-in time – at least four years, assuming the necessary aptitude and commitment. There is also the need to produce workers fluent in a wide range of languages, and ideally each cohort would need to comprehend people from a range of disciplines – business, engineering, science, and so on. If we want to engage with the Chinese about electronic engineering, we need electronic engineers who speak fluent Chinese. In this context, someone with even an A in higher-level Chinese in the Leaving Certificate (if we had reached that point in embedding Chinese in the curriculum) would be of little use. So what, if anything, can be done?

For a start, we need to be realistic. There is little point in the finger-wagging that many commentators engaged in last year when PayPal announced it would have to 'import' 500 employees from abroad to staff

The advantage of helping young people... to acquire written fluency in their heritage languages has been unrecognised.

Ireland should make it as easy as possible for children to develop heritage-language competence.

its new customer support office in Dundalk. PayPal's operation will require workers fluent in up to twenty languages, and it is unrealistic to think we could offer a school curriculum that is anywhere near meeting this kind of demand for business fluency. We also need to acknowledge that many PayPal jobs are essentially entry-level, as Richard Eardley (managing director of Hayes Ireland) recently pointed out in the Irish Examiner, and people working in them tend to move employment before long.

While a basic capacity to communicate in a foreign language will be beneficial in many work situations, we ultimately require significant numbers who speak these world languages with absolute fluency – irrespective of whether they are working in call or support centres, or engaging with foreign-language-speaking professionals at home or abroad. It would certainly be good if PayPal and the like could employ mainly Irish residents, but this will not be possible unless we radically rethink how we can produce enough workers with the requisite language skills. Beating ourselves up about why we are not achieving the impossible will not help.

The 2011 census figures show significant numbers of people resident in Ireland who are fluent in many of the languages we need in order to build economic prosperity. Table 1 shows the numbers of Irish residents, by age group, who speak English proficiently and are native speakers of languages that might be relevant to Ireland's economic development. It is possible to obtain similar statistics for virtually every world language from the census. Interestingly, over half a million (514,068) Irish residents live in homes where English is not the first language.

The benefit of teaching foreign languages to young Irish people from homes where English or Irish is the first language is widely acknowledged. However, the advantage of helping young people who already speak a language other than English at home to acquire full written fluency in their heritage languages has been unrecognised, to a significant degree, by the education sector, the State, and the media.

Some national groups, in particular the Polish, make valiant efforts to ensure their young people acquire written fluency in their heritage language, but they get little if any support to do so. Even gaining access to school buildings for their weekly classes can be problematic. The prevailing view seems to be that, while such classes are in the interest of families likely to return to their countries of origin, they are of little benefit to Ireland.

True, it is important that the offspring of immigrants from non-English-speaking countries develop excellent literacy skills in their heritage tongue so they are not disadvantaged if returning home. On that basis alone, Ireland, given its history of emigration, should make it as easy as possible for those children to develop heritage-language competence. As a former emigrant, I can attest to how much the vast majority of migrants cling to the idea of returning to their homeland one day – even if only some realise that dream.

It is not only ‘newcomers’ who can gain from such an approach: the Irish economy has even more to gain. Young people from non-English-speaking homes can become one of our greatest assets. If we help them acquire native-standard written competence in their heritage languages, we will be going a significant way to meeting our need for workers fluent in both English and a foreign language.

It should ensure we have not only entry-level workers in call and support centres, but also highly qualified professionals across disciplines who can communicate confidently with their colleagues around the globe, especially in Europe and the BRIC countries. These bilingual (and in a sense bicultural) workers will have a significant advantage over what we might term native Irish workers who are bilingual. Their roots in their families’ country of origin could provide business, cultural, and even political connections that would take non-natives a long time to develop.

In 2012, thousands of young people took a foreign language in the Leaving Certificate: French (25,977), German (6,787), Spanish (4,330), Italian (384), Portuguese (63), Dutch (20), Russian (269), Czech (14), Polish (794), Latvian (87), Lithuanian (262), Hungarian (33), Romanian (109), Japanese (239), and Arabic (149)<sup>1</sup>. These statistics, however, are misleading for a few reasons.

Our workers  
require not  
Leaving  
Certificate  
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proficiency.

Firstly, many students’ main reason for taking French, German, or Spanish is to satisfy a requirement for entry to university rather than to acquire linguistic competence. This is borne out to some extent by the relatively high percentage who sit the ordinary level paper in French (47%), German (36%), and Spanish (42%).<sup>2</sup> Ordinary-level competence after five years’ study is not a good basis for proficiency in a language.

Secondly, our workers require not Leaving Certificate higher-level standard but native-speaker proficiency. And this is the standard among those who come from homes where English is the second language.

Thirdly, it is not just three or four languages we need proficiency in, but thirty. Admittedly, the numbers needed in any particular language depend on its relative economic importance to us. For example, we need many more people proficient in BRIC-country languages than in Dutch or Swedish, where English is widely spoken.

As mentioned, some national groups make a big effort to ensure that their young people develop proficiency in their heritage language. But Polish and other groups need our assistance if they are to ensure native-standard written and oral proficiency, to their benefit and to Ireland’s.

The support they require has several dimensions. They need free access to suitable buildings to accommodate their language classes. Ideally, our school buildings should be made available, and if there is a cost, it is in the State’s interest to bear it. National groups should not have to beg for

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1 See: <http://www.examinations.ie/index.php?l=en&mc=st&sc=r12>.

2 <http://www.examinations.ie/index.php?l=en&mc=st&sc=r12>.

Could the NCCA... develop comprehensive curricula in these heritage languages?

teaching facilities; instead, the schools system should be proactive in making them available.

Availability of facilities for extracurricular classes can only achieve so much, however. We need to look at how teaching heritage languages can be integrated into the school curriculum, from Infants to Leaving Certificate. Given that the number of students with a heritage-language background in any school will be small, it will require real proactivity and creativity to achieve this.

What might be done? Could the NCCA, working with the departments of education in Poland, Lithuania, India, China, Portugal, and so on, through their national embassies and consulates, develop comprehensive curricula in these heritage languages? Certainly anyone who attended the annual conference of the network of Polish schools in Ireland at UCD last November could see the Polish Embassy's willingness to assist with programmes aimed at developing the Polish language skills of first-generation Irish from Polish backgrounds.

We would also need to develop a full suite of e-teaching and e-learning programmes, from Infants to Leaving Certificate, capable of online delivery. Within the next 18 months, most first- and second-level schools will have access to 100-megabit broadband. Learners would merely need access to a computer and headphones. This way, primary school students could devote time each day to learning their heritage language, without interfering with their classmates' learning. This should also be possible at second level, though with some added challenges.

Would the availability of high-quality distance-learning programmes in heritage languages encourage [native Irish] students to take up these languages?

Since the aim is to develop native-speaker proficiency, the language curricula should be aligned with those that apply in, for example, Poland or Lithuania. Similarly, examinations and accreditation would need to be set explicitly at this level. Could students taking Polish, for example, sit the Matura in Polish rather than the Leaving Certificate exam? To incentivise students to achieve a high standard in heritage languages, might we consider giving bonus CAO points for results in, say, the Polish Matura?

Would the availability of high-quality distance-learning programmes in heritage languages encourage other students, from 'native' Irish backgrounds, to take up these languages? Might we consider pointing students with an aptitude for learning languages in the direction of these programmes? Could third-level colleges make provision for students in any discipline taking on a heritage language as an optional part of their programme? The curricula developed for school students could be extended or adapted for third-level students, depending on their prior knowledge of the language.

One thing seems obvious: the efforts of our education system to date leave a lot to be desired when it comes to developing significant numbers of workers able to speak even French, German, or Spanish – not to mention the array of heritage languages we need to master. Also, recent initiatives to introduce Chinese in transition year and the new Junior Cycle, while



welcome, are unlikely to contribute in the medium term to generating a cohort with proficiency in Chinese.

We need to adopt more radical approaches. The arguments set out here are intended to catalyse radical thinking in this area. As W.L. Bateman noted, ‘If you keep on doing what you’ve always done, you’ll keep on getting what you’ve always got.’

We live in a globalised world, where our products can be sold in every corner of the earth. We can attract visitors and students from around the globe. The key to doing this, however, is the extent to which we develop the capacity to communicate proficiently in foreign languages. Our historical dependence on trade and tourism with the English-speaking world has left many of us convinced that because we speak English, we don’t need to worry about other languages. But to guarantee our prosperity and cohesion, we must disabuse ourselves of this view and do something effective to ensure we can communicate with people in their own languages.

**Table 1: Persons usually resident in the State who speak a language other than English or Irish at home – classified by age group, place of birth, language, and how well English is spoken <sup>3</sup>**

	Total	English Spoken		English Spoken (0-4 years)			English Spoken (5-12 years)			English Spoken (13-18 years)		
		V. Well	Well	Total	V. Well	Well	Total	V. Well	Well	Total	V. Well	Well
German	27,342	19,923	4,773	1,056	535	239	1,975	1,620	231	5,232	3,606	1,041
Yoruba	10,093	8,374	1,171	440	237	115	2,170	1,774	200	924	800	77
French	37,800	26,640	5,322	1,769	818	488	3,372	2,551	418	11,046	7,305	2,136
Italian	3,624	2,866	409	466	227	105	524	440	50	279	210	43
Dutch	3,522	2,868	554	56	18	15	236	189	43	179	153	22
Russian	18,850	6,612	7,491	201	25	42	1,187	729	342	1,046	809	199
Rumania	16,613	5,785	7,196	187	17	30	1,044	637	262	101	752	240
Arabic	8,958	4,201	3,310	212	18	47	822	496	204	732	548	142
Turkish	1,180	656	371	14	4	4	66	47	17	58	46	9
Urdu	6,726	3,784	2,230	87	20	27	598	441	118	562	462	81
Vietnam	705	149	224	14	7	3	22	11	9	37	18	15
Chinese	12,503	3,318	5,677	42	9	13	202	99	72	402	191	165
Japan	837	435	277	31	12	7	76	53	15	46	34	9
Portuguese	11,902	4,864	4,205	628	174	147	1,028	699	221	688	429	166
Spanish	21,640	14,981	4,313	1,170	515	295	1,846	1,472	209	3,226	2,139	679
Lithuanian	31,635	8,731	12,422	2,449	239	384	3,412	1,995	1,035	1,884	1,311	471
Polish	119,526	33,811	49,322	10,451	847	1,446	10,527	5,292	3,646	4,834	3,261	1,284

<sup>3</sup> The data included in this table is extracted from Table CDD46 of the Census 2011 reports. See: <http://www.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=CDD46&PLanguage=0>.

# Artificial Intelligence in Education

What is it, where is it now, where is it going?



**Brett A. Becker**

Assistant Professor, School of Computer Science, University College Dublin

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**A**rtificial Intelligence holds significant promise to revolutionise our educational systems, but are our educational systems ready for a revolution? Brett Becker explores current advances of AI in education and provides a forward-looking view on how AI might affect our educational systems in years to come.

Very few subjects in science and technology today are causing as much excitement, and as much misconception, as Artificial Intelligence (AI). It seems that everyone from Obama to Putin and Bezos to Zuckerberg are commenting on both the possibilities and the problems that AI could bring to humanity. In the past year Stephen Hawking and Elon Musk have both made global headlines voicing their concerns over the ramifications of AI. Also this year, Google's AlphaGo program beat Ke Jie, the world's number one Go player. This represents a significant AI milestone as Go is extremely complex, significantly more so than chess, and only 20 years ago some doubted that AI could master chess until IBM's Deep Blue beat world-champion Gary Kasparov in 1997.

An important distinction between the AI that Hawking and Musk are concerned with and the AI that powers AlphaGo and Deep Blue is that the latter are examples of narrow (sometimes called weak or domain-specific) AI – non-sentient AI that is focussed on a specific problem. The AI that Hawking and Musk warn of is strong (or general) AI – AI with the ability to perform so-called general intelligent action. It is important to remember this distinction when discussing AI in educational settings as we will soon see.

It is not only the different types of AI that make discussions on the topic fraught with misconception. The interdisciplinary nature of the field and the myriad definitions of AI complicate matters further. Even experts can find it difficult to define AI succinctly. In fact it could be said that AI suffers from a self-fulfilling misconception crisis, as Nick Bostrom, a leading AI expert from Oxford University, explains: "A lot of cutting edge AI has filtered into general applications, often without being called AI because once something becomes useful enough and common enough it's not labelled AI anymore".<sup>1</sup>

## What is Artificial Intelligence?

Quite generally, AI is programming a computer (or any device) to perform a task that traditionally is only possible with human intelligence due to its complexity. Complexity is the key word in the previous sentence. Summing the numbers between one and

one trillion isn't complex, but it is tedious and would be incredibly slow for a human to accomplish, however computers excel at this kind of task without the need for AI. What about grading thousands of online multiple choice tests? Again, tedious and slow for a human, straight-forward and fast for a computer. Still, because this task is not necessarily difficult for a human, it also would not require AI to be accomplished by a computer. If we increase the complexity more, and talk about grading a 10,000 word essay on one of Shakespeare's works, we enter the realm of tasks that are complex enough to require real human intelligence. Regardless of how tedious and time-consuming this task may be, it is the complexity that makes this task one that traditionally only a human could perform. To have a computer do so (properly, reliably, and perhaps not for just one specific work of Shakespeare, but any) would require AI.

AI affects most of us every day. If you talk to Amazon's Alexa or to your phone (not just through it) the software that interprets your voice is powered by AI. The reason that your inbox (hopefully) has a lot less spam than it did a few years back is probably due to AI. When you tag someone in a photo on Facebook, AI is used to identify that person in other photos. But what changes has AI had on education, and what effects will it have in the future? Before we answer these questions, we need to inspect today's educational practices and problems a little more closely.

Ireland happens to be global leader in AI, with dozens of companies and research centres focussing on AI highlighted in a recent article titled "Why Ireland is the AI Island".<sup>2</sup> These include companies such as IBM, whose Irish operations have a strategic focus on the Watson AI platform discussed later, and research centres such as CeADAR, the Centre for Applied Data Analytics, where as a collaborator, I have personally witnessed a remarkable increase in AI activity recently.

### Artificial Intelligence in Education

Picture a phone from 30 years ago and compare it to the one in your pocket today. The one in your pocket is quite different: it is not tethered to the wall with a wire; it has fewer buttons; it has a camera; it is a conduit to most of mankind's cumulative knowledge; it may be able to recognise your fingerprint or your face. It's also in your pocket! Now picture a classroom from 30 years ago and compare it to today's typical classroom. There are probably few striking differences: perhaps the colour of the board the teacher writes on; perhaps the classroom from 30 years ago has no projector, but maybe it does. Perhaps there are more computers in today's classroom. Perhaps the biggest difference is that everyone has a phone in their pocket! Nonetheless, that says more about the phone than the classroom. Either way, you probably pictured people in a room – a room with many students and one instructor. The students are probably sitting facing the instructor. Indeed, the typical classroom system has changed very little from that of 30, or even 60 years ago. Why is there so little fundamental change? This question reminds me of a quote from Henry Ford: "If I had asked people what they wanted, they would have said faster horses".<sup>3</sup> To effect a big change, as did Ford, we need a revolution – that revolution could be the application of artificial intelligence to education. For more on breaking free from our 19th century factory-model education, see.<sup>4</sup>

Ireland happens  
to be global  
leader in AI.

Luckin et al. describe Artificial Intelligence in Education (AIEd) as investigating learning wherever it occurs, in traditional classrooms or in workplaces, in order to support formal education as well as lifelong learning. It brings together AI, which is itself interdisciplinary, and the learning sciences (education, psychology, neuroscience, linguistics, sociology, and anthropology) to promote the development of adaptive learning environments and other AIEd tools that are flexible, inclusive, personalised, engaging, and effective.<sup>5</sup> At the heart of AIEd is the scientific goal to “make computationally precise and explicit forms of educational, psychological and social knowledge which are often left implicit”.<sup>6</sup>

### The two-sigma Problem

In 1984, educational psychologist Benjamin Bloom, best known for his taxonomy of learning domains, sought to determine if there were concrete adjustments to the traditional classroom format that would have positive impacts on student performance.<sup>7</sup> He found that a mastery learning approach (a category of instructional methods which establishes a level of performance that all students must master before moving on to the next unit) helped students by more than one standard deviation. When combined with personal tutoring this increased to two standard deviations, a so-called ‘two-sigma’ effect on performance. The major takeaway is this: the notion of categorizing students as “high” or “low” achievers was almost entirely incorrect. Students who perform in the 50th percentile in a traditional classroom could effectively perform in the 98th percentile with mastery learning plus one-on-one support.<sup>8</sup>

Had Bloom achieved the educational panacea? Not quite. Personalised tutoring and mastery learning are both problematic. The former is extremely financially expensive and the latter is extremely temporally expensive. Thus, the ‘two-sigma’ problem was born: What could be done efficiently, at scale, and be as effective as mastery-based personalised tutoring? For much of the last 25 years, the AIEd community has been focusing, to a large degree, on solving the two-sigma problem, moving towards creating systems that are as effective as human one-on-one tutoring.<sup>9</sup>

### Where is AIEd Today?

In the last decade, artificial intelligence and adaptive technologies have matured, making both mastery learning and one-on-one instructional methods more scalable than Bloom ever could have imagined [8]. However, these technologies have yet to coalesce into widely adopted systems to facilitate teaching. To a large extent, this is because our existing educational models and systems are still stuck in their traditional forms, hindering the true adoption of AI systems. There have however been major strides in technologies to help teachers currently teaching in traditional models, particularly in freeing up their time so that they can tend to tasks for which human intelligence is still required. AIEd is well placed to take on some of the tasks that we currently expect teachers to do – marking and record keeping, for example. In my research area of computer science education, I have personally witnessed an increasing interest in AI in recent years, particularly to gain insight from the vast

To effect a big change... we need a revolution - that revolution could be the application of artificial intelligence to education.

We see a future in which the role of the teacher continues to evolve and is eventually transformed.

amounts of data that students are producing during their learning, and to automate educator tasks.

As a specific example, Korn<sup>10</sup> reported on the work of Ashok Goel, a professor of computer science at Georgia Tech who last year used an AI program as one of the teaching assistants in his Artificial Intelligence class. The program replied to students' email queries regarding assignments. The program was given the moniker Jill Watson – a nod to the fact that 'she' runs on IBM's Watson AI platform.<sup>11</sup> Georgia Tech researchers began creating Jill using nearly 40,000 postings on a discussion forum, training her to reply to similar questions based on prior responses. Most students were surprised when they were told that Jill was a computer program. Goel explained that Jill only replies when she has a confidence level of 97%, which distinguishes her from customer-service chatbots used by airlines and other industries. He said "Most chatbots operate at the level of a novice... Jill operates at the level of an expert".<sup>10</sup> Goel estimates that within a year, Jill will be able to answer 40% of all the students' questions, freeing his human teaching assistants to tackle more complex technical or philosophical inquiries.

This is an example of AIEd that does not necessarily replace the teacher, but frees up time for those in teaching roles, akin to what Luckin et al. foresee: "Crucially we do not see a future in which AIEd replaces teachers. What we do see is a future in which the role of the teacher continues to evolve and is eventually transformed; one where their time is used more effectively and efficiently, and where their expertise is better deployed, leveraged, and augmented".<sup>5</sup>

### The Ethics of AIEd

No discussion on AIEd would be complete without mentioning the ethics of incorporating AI into our educational systems. A complete discussion of this is beyond the scope of this article, but as Luckin et al. point out, we have a new responsibility to ensure that society as a whole has sufficient AIEd literacy – that is, enough to ensure that we use these new technologies appropriately, effectively, and ethically.<sup>5</sup> The interested reader is guided to<sup>12</sup> for a comprehensive view on the ethics of AI.

### The Future of AIEd

As for the future of AIEd, some see AI technology not just augmenting the roles of teachers as Jill Watson does at Georgia Tech and as Luckin et al. foresee, but replacing at least some of their traditional roles altogether. Sir Anthony Seldon, vice-chancellor of the University of Buckingham, former master of Wellington College, historian, and well-known political commentator, sees intelligent machines taking over the inspirational role of teachers completely.<sup>13</sup> Certainly, in order for this to be the case, strong (general) AI must become a reality, and whether or not this will ever happen is debated. Keeping within the confines of narrow (domain-specific or weak) AI, Luckin et al. offer several predictions for the next phase of AIEd, noting that it will soon: help learners gain 21st century skills, support a renaissance in assessment, embody new insights from the learning sciences, and give us lifelong learning partners.

AIEd-driven assessments will be built into meaningful learning activities, such as games and collaborative projects...

Luckin et al. see AIEd helping learners gain 21st century skills by helping us develop reliable and valid indicators that will allow us to track learner progress on the skills and capabilities needed to thrive in the coming decades, including characteristics such as creativity and curiosity that are notoriously difficult to measure. It will also help us develop a better understanding of the learning contexts and teaching approaches that allow for these skills to be developed.

They also see AIEd techniques complementing existing learning analytics by providing just-in-time information about learners' successes, challenges, and needs which can be used to shape their learning experiences. For example, AIEd combined with learning analytics will allow us to identify changes in learner confidence and motivation while learning foreign languages, or complex mathematical concepts. This information could then be used to provide timely interventions to help students, perhaps in the form of individual attention from a teacher, technology-assisted support, or some combination of the two.

Luckin et al., also see data gleaned from digital teaching and learning experiences providing new insights that are difficult or impossible to ascertain from traditional assessments. For example, datasets could be analysed to help teachers understand how the learner arrived at their answer, not just if they selected the correct one. This data could also help us understand more fully the cognitive processes such as remembering and forgetting, and the key roles that these have on learning. AIEd analysis might also identify if and when students become bored, confused, or frustrated, to help teachers adapt to and enhance learners' emotional readiness for learning.

AIEd will help us do away with the stop-and-test approach that pervades assessment today. As described by Luckin et al, instead of traditional assessments which rely upon testing small samples of what students have been taught, AIEd-driven assessments will be built into meaningful learning activities, such as games and collaborative projects, and will assess all of the learning taking place, as it happens.

AIEd will provide learners with lifelong learning partners.

AIEd will also embody new insights from the learning sciences to allow us to better understand the learning process and build more accurate models that can predict and influence learner progress, motivation, and persistence. Luckin et al. highlight the work of Paul Howard-Jones, Professor of Neuroscience and Education at the University of Bristol whose work suggests that learning can be improved when it is linked to uncertain rewards, differing from traditional models that apply rewards consistently.<sup>14</sup> AIEd techniques could, for example, tailor the provision of uncertain rewards, calibrating them to a learner's individual reactions and behaviors, and increasing the effectiveness of such techniques even more.

Finally, Luckin et al. claim that AIEd will provide learners with lifelong learning partners. Although the concept of computer-based 'learning companions' is not new, the next generation of learning companions should offer much greater potential. These cloud-based systems will benefit from learner information gleaned not only from educational contexts but from all contexts: social, recreational, etc. Rather than



“Within a decade, AI will have transformed school and university life and given the biggest boost to social mobility our society has ever seen.” Sir Anthony Seldon

encompassing all subject areas, these learning companions may solicit specialist AIED systems or subject-specific expertise from humans where required. In addition, such systems could focus on helping learners to become better at learning through developing a growth mindset<sup>15</sup> or an impressive array of 21st century skills. Because of the adaptability of these systems, learning companions can be as suitable for struggling learners as they are for the most accelerated and high-achieving learners.

The examples given here are only a small subset of the many ways that AIED could transform the future of education. In this section, guided by Luckin et al. – which is highly recommended for more information – I have focussed on those that are quite feasible in the next decade or so. It promises to be an important decade according to Sir Anthony Seldon, who said: “Within a decade, AI will have transformed school and university life and given the biggest boost to social mobility our society has ever seen”.<sup>16</sup> Beyond this, AIED does have the potential to tackle some of the biggest challenges we have in education today, such as addressing achievement gaps, enhancing teacher expertise, as well as addressing teacher retention and teacher shortages.<sup>5</sup> Eventually AIED may lead to a complete reform of, perhaps even a revolution in, our educational systems.

Fullan & Donnelly describe three forces that must be combined if we are to deliver on the promise of technology to catapult learning dramatically forward: pedagogy, technology itself, and system change.<sup>17</sup> It is hard to resist the conclusion of Luckin et al.: The future ability of AIED to tackle real-life challenges in education depends on how we attend to each of these three dimensions. That is, we need intelligent technologies that embody what we know about great teaching and learning in enticing consumer-grade products, which are then used effectively in real-life settings that combine the best of human and machine.<sup>5</sup>

Ultimately, combining the best of human and machine for the benefit of the learner is the true goal of artificial intelligence in education.

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## IT Sligo Opens Constance Markievicz Building



The €7m refurbished school of Business and Social Sciences at IT Sligo was officially opened in November 2017 by Minister of State for Higher Education, Mary Mitchell O'Connor. The school is named after Constance Markievicz, one of Ireland's most influential female historical figures and one who had a deep association with the North West. The name was chosen following a poll of students and staff at IT Sligo.

Pictured here at the official opening of the 4,400 square-metre facility are Actor Maura Logue in the part of Constance Markievicz with Minister of State for Higher Education Mary Mitchell O'Connor.

# Leadership and Teacher Autonomy

## Sharing authority



**Jacinta Kitt**

Professional Development Facilitator and part-time lecturer at Trinity College Dublin

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**I**n this article, Jacinta Kitt explores three basic psychological needs - competence, autonomy and relatedness - necessary for motivation, effectiveness, job satisfaction and well-being.

Teaching is one of the most important and influential jobs that a person can undertake. Great teachers enrich the lives of those they teach by inspiring them to reach their personal potential. Through their enlightened attitudes, behaviours and methodologies, teachers also help students to develop an affinity for learning and to appreciate their self-worth and the worth of others. How often have we heard great achievers in a wide range of disciplines modestly acknowledge the contribution that their teachers made to their success?

Teaching, however, is not an easy job. It can be very demanding and stressful. In order to gain, maintain and enhance their commitment and enthusiasm and ensure they are the best they can be, teachers require conditions that foster and sustain high levels of personal motivation. This might sound like a contradiction, because effective teachers are usually considered intrinsically motivated and, as such, find their jobs interesting, enjoyable and challenging (Ryan & Deci, 2000). But intrinsic motivation, which manifests in a person being energised and performing well, does not occur in a vacuum. It arises when a person has their three basic psychological needs for competence, autonomy and relatedness fulfilled (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

### Competence and relatedness as basic psychological needs

The fulfilment of basic needs is essential for staff effectiveness, job satisfaction and well-being (Deci et al., 1996; Deci & Ryan, 2000). In a school context, when the need for competence is met, a teacher has a sense of self-efficacy. They feel able to develop and apply their abilities and skills to achieve their goals and do the job well (Aldrup et al., 2016). A teacher's sense of competence is conditional on being provided with regular feedback and acknowledgement, and opportunities for continuous learning and professional development.

When the need for relatedness is met, a teacher feels connected to others and part of a community in which they care for others and are cared for themselves

To be isolated in a classroom without collegial interactions... is not the intended spirit of autonomy.

(Deci & Ryan, 2002). Teachers' sense of relatedness is conditional on their capacity and that of others in the school to:

- » engage in positive and open discourse and interactions
- » build and maintain healthy interpersonal relationships.

Notwithstanding the self-determination theory context for the psychological needs fulfilment discussion, Deci and Ryan (2000) are clear that the satisfaction of basic needs depends on a person's social context.

### Autonomy as a basic psychological need

Autonomy as a basic need may be considered the odd one out, in its lack of a social dimension. If this view is prevalent, it is probably due to some theoretical and traditional definitions of autonomy, which equate it to individualism or independence. It may also be due to the long-standing practice of teachers working in isolation in their classrooms, where they were neither expected nor encouraged to consult or collaborate with colleagues or to give or receive collegial help, support or guidance. In this environment, many teachers felt helpless and powerless, particularly in staying motivated. On the other hand, some valued and guarded their autonomy in its self-reliant, self-sufficient and independent form. Some resented any encroachment into their domain and regarded questioning of any aspect of their practice as an infringement on their professionalism.

Conceptions of autonomy as isolation, alienation and independence are untenable in a context where collaboration and collegiality are becoming key (Vangrieken et al., 2017). As Fraser and Sorenson write, 'To be isolated in a classroom without collegial interactions and meaningful feedback is not the intended spirit of autonomy' (1992, p.40). It is vital that focus shift from independence to interdependence in the pursuit of fulfilling the essential psychological need for autonomy. It is worth reminding those who reject this that 'a school is not a formal organisation; rather, it is a community of people, inextricably linked and bonded together by the task of caring for, and teaching, the students' (Kitt, 2017, p. 142).

Independent people who do not have the maturity to think and act interdependently may be good individual producers but they won't be good leaders or team players.

Markus and Kitayama (1991) coined the term 'self-construal', which is generally thought to refer to how people regard themselves as being predominantly independent or interdependent. Those with an independent self-construal see themselves as self-sufficient and not dependent on others for their effectiveness, while those with an interdependent self-construal see themselves as connected to others and recognise that these relationships are integral to their effectiveness and competence. They like to work as part of a team and are able and willing, when appropriate, to change their behaviours and opinions in response to group discussions.

Covey (1992), in his seminal work outlining seven habits of highly effective people, writes about the maturity continuum from independence, described as inner-directed and self-reliant, to interdependence, described as a combination of our own efforts and those of others to achieve our greatest successes. He proposes that 'independent people who do not have the maturity to think and act interdependently may be good individual producers but they won't be good leaders or team players' (1992,

pp. 50–51). He further suggests that as they work away independently, they are denied the levels of good communication and collegiality that constitute effectiveness. By contrast, intellectually interdependent people realise that to be effective they need the best thinking of others to join with their own.

Vangrieken et al. (2017) distinguish between a reactive and a reflective autonomy attitude, in unravelling the confusion between autonomy as independent or interdependent. Those with a reactive attitude to autonomy perceive it as, for example, freedom from governance, non-reliance on others, and the promotion of individualism. Those with a reflective attitude to autonomy perceive it as, for example, freedom to self-govern, interdependence, and the promotion of connectedness.

In the spirit of true autonomy, it is never going to be about doing your own thing on your own.

Autonomy continues to be widely associated with discretion, choice and freedom as opposed to coercion and control. However, there is increasing awareness that those conditions are neither unfettered nor unlimited. They are always destined to be curtailed by departmental and managerial regulations, guidelines and structures. Outside of these constraints, teachers' discretion, choice and freedom have to be guided by best-practice standards. When these standards have been agreed after consultation with all staff members, and are outlined in the school's vision and mission statements, then they have the best chance of being adhered to in people's ideas and practice.

In the spirit of true autonomy, it is never going to be about doing your own thing on your own. It inevitably involves having the power to take initiatives and instigate innovative practices and changes. However, it also involves working with others in forming and realising those initiatives. It is important to see autonomy as having collective as well as individual components.

### **Structural empowerment and autonomy**

The key to autonomy is empowerment – a term bandied about indiscriminately in organisational and leadership language. It is generally understood to involve the authority or power given to someone to do something. Hoy and Miskel (2005) define teacher empowerment in terms of delegating authority to teachers. Rosabeth Moss Kanter, who has written extensively on structural aspects of empowerment, argues that for people to be empowered in a workplace, they must have access to the levels of information, resources, support and opportunities required to enable them to grow and develop (Kanter, 1993). They must also be able to participate in all aspects of their work, including decision-making and professional development (Short, 1994).

Autonomy is enabled and facilitated when individuals are empowered (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005). It can be presumed, therefore, that autonomous teachers have been given power – but by whom? Power can only be given by someone with power, not in a 'passing the parcel', abdicating way, or even in a 'lending the parcel', delegating way, but rather in opening the parcel and sharing its contents. Principals are the main source of power in schools. Where autonomy is facilitated, genuine empowerment is not associated with principals giving power to teachers



Servant leadership focuses on fostering followers' empowerment... and well-being by satisfying their needs.

to do what they like with it. Rather, it is given with a responsibility to use it positively and effectively in students' best interests. Decentralising and sharing power are important aspects of structural empowerment (Kanter, 1993), but for autonomy needs to be truly met, teachers also require psychological empowerment.

### **Psychological empowerment and autonomy**

Psychological empowerment is a person's sense of self-efficacy and self-determination and a sense that the work they do has meaning and impact (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). It is a cognitive state that can fluctuate and dissipate, depending in part on the person's self-esteem and locus of control, but more generally on the organisational conditions described above. When psychological empowerment is enhanced, it can have a very positive influence on teachers' attitudes, behaviours and performance. Autonomy and the ability to instigate innovative changes and improvements are necessary for psychological empowerment (Spreitzer, 1995; Ramamoorthy et al., 2005). Teachers' psychological empowerment is widely agreed to be influenced by the empowering behaviours of others in the school, especially the principal. Good school leaders recognise and support human potential and do everything they can to empower people and the school (Day, 2000). The question is, what leadership style or philosophy should principals use to empower the autonomy needs of their staff, given that this need is the most important one to be satisfied for intrinsic motivation to be present (Gagne & Deci, 2005; Ryan & Deci, 2006)?

### **Autonomy – supportive leadership styles (servant leadership)**

Many leadership styles have been endorsed and propagated over the years. The two associated most consistently with meeting basic psychological needs are servant leadership and transformational leadership. Servant leadership focuses on fostering followers' empowerment, growth, integrity and well-being by satisfying their needs (Gagne & Deci, 2005; Liden et al., 2008). Greenleaf (1998), the father of servant leadership, outlines it as a leader believing in the value and potential of those they work with and providing the environmental conditions necessary to liberate that potential. There is obvious merit in that aspect of servant leadership in fulfilling a person's autonomy needs. Similarly, the empowering dimension of servant leadership, which entails encouraging and facilitating a person's ability to take on responsibilities and handle difficult situations (Liden et al., 2008), can also enhance autonomy.

More generally, however, it might be considered naïve to think that the levels of selflessness required by servant leaders would become prevalent among leaders, even among those who seek to meet the autonomy needs of colleagues. A degree of altruism and selflessness are essential to effective leadership and evident in many school leaders. However, being able to consistently put others' needs before their own (Greenleaf, 1977), a requirement of servant leadership, might prove challenging for some. Also, despite increasing recognition of servant leadership's legitimacy as a mainstream leadership theory (Mayer et al., 2008), and the positive organisational outcomes associated with it, it is also reasonable to suggest that elements of servant leadership that incorporate the personal



development of staff might be beyond the scope and remit of school leaders.

Transformational leaders are proponents of developing individual staff members but they are equally focused on achieving organisational goals.

### **Transformational leadership**

Transformational leaders are also proponents of developing individual staff members. But they are also equally focused, perhaps understandably, on achieving organisational objectives. In the context of that dual aspect, and in line with self-determination theory, transformational leaders focus consistently on meeting the needs of their staff. Transformational leadership is considered especially relevant to the need for autonomy, because of its emphasis on developing and encouraging staff (Bass, 1997) and because it focuses on giving staff choice and decision-making opportunities (Hetland et al., 2010). Transformational leadership is about empowering followers. Not surprisingly, it is increasingly acknowledged – especially in educational leadership – to be the most effective and successful leadership philosophy in encouraging and promoting staff engagement.

### **Autonomy-supportive dimensions of transformational leadership**

Fulfilling teachers' autonomy needs is facilitated by each component of transformational leadership. The four 'I's', as they are called, constitute the four primary behaviours of transformational leadership: idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualised consideration (Avolio et al., 1991). Complex as they sound, their relevant elements can be discussed in clear and accessible terms, to provide guidance to school leaders on what is required to promote teacher autonomy. Idealised influence, for example, involves school leaders behaving in an ethical and moral way, thus gaining the trust of their staff. In that trusting context, they can encourage teachers to gain authentic interdependent autonomy, by aligning their personal values and interests with organisational objectives (Avolio & Bass, 2002). The main element of inspirational motivation is the provision of meaning and challenge to the work of teachers (Avolio & Bass, 2002). Meaningful work, combined with having decision-making possibilities, encourages teacher autonomy, which is manifested in taking initiatives and being creative.

Transformational leadership is increasingly acknowledged to be the most effective leadership philosophy.

Intellectual stimulation provides a range of incentives for staff to be creative and innovative. For example, ideas from staff are sought and shared, and staff members are encouraged and supported to try new approaches (Bass, 1990; Avolio & Bass, 2002). Finally, individualised consideration gives priority to the feelings and needs of individual teachers, and provides them with opportunities for growth and achievement (Avolio & Bass, 2002).

Transformational school leaders facilitate those opportunities by encouraging teachers to reflect on their practices and by emphasising the importance of participating in professional development initiatives. They also consistently outline the school's 'expectations for excellence, quality and high performance' (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006, p. 373), so that teachers can marry their practice to those expectations.

## Supporting autonomy

Keeping teachers empowered involves a continuous focus by school leaders on innovation, change and improvement, and a simultaneous discouragement of isolationism, fatalism and maintenance of the status quo. Kitt (2017) says it is important not to allow the fatalism and negativity of a small minority of teachers to silence the more innovative and positive members of staff when they present new ideas. The ‘tall poppy syndrome’, where ‘those who stick their heads up risk being cut down to size’ (Jumani & Malik, 2017, p. 30), still prevails in some schools. Indeed, in a worst-case scenario, a teacher voicing an alternative point of view can be regarded ‘as a declaration of war’ (Kitt, 2017, p. 19). Autonomous teachers need the constant support of the principal to remain autonomous. In that context it is worth reiterating that a key feature of transformational leadership is the ability to meet the needs of teachers, in particular their autonomy needs.

## Shared leadership

Linking various styles and philosophies of school leadership to the fulfilment of teachers’ autonomy needs provides valuable insights. However, it cannot be ignored that fulfilling autonomy needs requires from leaders, more than anything else, the ability to relinquish some of their power and to encourage and support others to become leaders also. Harris and Muijs (2002) write about the notion of collective leadership through which teachers can develop expertise. This is a highly unlikely scenario in schools where the principal’s leadership model is predominantly top-down. Unfortunately, even with widespread approval of forms of power based on collaboration and cooperation (Perrow, 2009), the notion of relinquishing power remains an alien concept to some school leaders.

Senge (1999) summed it up when he said it seems strange in this age of empowerment that we are still asked to accept the singular power of leaders. This insular attitude to power, while diminishing in schools, is still adhered to by those who perhaps cannot see the myriad benefits of engaging in a more contemporary form of leadership – where it is not about retaining power but rather about developing others to become accountable, productive and autonomous leaders in their own right (Jumani & Malik, 2017). Kanter (1993) suggests that leaders should always focus on providing opportunities rather than constraints.

## Conclusion

The role of school leaders is extensive and demanding. They cannot do everything on their own. They need the help and support of highly motivated, competent and enlightened teachers. They also need self-awareness, self-confidence and a good sprinkling of humility (Kitt, 2017) to enable them to recognise that the quality of their leadership depends on their ability to share power with others. Extending autonomy to teachers is conditional on school leaders’ confidence and trust in the professional judgement of teachers (Blasé & Blasé, 1998).

Building positive relationships with staff and creating a positive, supportive school environment have emerged as a key theme at conferences and professional development initiatives during 2017. Teachers’ psychological well-being has also been prioritised as a key element of effectiveness

The notion of relinquishing power remains an alien concept to some school leaders.

Building positive relationships... has emerged as a key theme at conference during 2017.

Fulfilling autonomy needs requires from leaders the ability to relinquish some of their power.

in schools. Empowered and autonomous teachers are committed and enthusiastic. They are not prone to emotional exhaustion, cynicism, disengagement or other manifestations of burnout (Maslach, 2003). Rather, they are associated with creativity, imagination and originality (Sayles & Strauss, 1986). They are both challenged and satisfied in their jobs and are major contributors to the ongoing success and reputation of the school. They make the job of the school leader less demanding and less stressful. Facilitating teacher autonomy should surely be a top priority for all school leaders.

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## Blackrock College of FE Graduation Ceremony



Blackrock College of Further Education (Dublin) held its graduation ceremony for its class of 2016-2017 on 1 Dec 2017 in the O'Reilly Hall UCD. Pictured here are l-r: Brian Mooney, Chairperson of the Board of Management Blackrock College of FE, Minister for Higher Education Mary Mitchell O'Connor and Deirdre Hamany, Principal, Blackrock College of FE.

# Social Media in Education

## Technology-Enhanced Learning



**Brendan Maguire**

Teacher, Blackrock Further Education  
Institute

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**D**rawing on the theories of Prensky, Oliver, Poore and others, along with the Digital Strategy for Schools (2015–2020) published by the Department of Education and Skills, the author builds a picture of the capacity of social media to radically impact the teaching and learning process, and – when used effectively – to enhance and enrich it.

### Introduction

What do you think of when you hear the term ‘social media’? For most people it brings to mind channels like Facebook and Twitter or sharing photos with friends and family. However, social media is a complex and much broader area which is often misunderstood.

Technology-Enhanced Learning (TEL) has become a catch-all term to describe all aspects of technology use in the classroom. The use of social media in education can therefore be classified as a TEL initiative. The momentum behind this area is growing enormously: last year SOLAS produced a strategy for TEL in the Further Education sector, and the Department of Education and Skills published the Digital Strategy for Schools (2015–2020) to encourage the integration of ICT into teaching, learning, and assessment practices.

When investigating Technology-Enhanced Learning, it is important to remember that it is not a new field. In 1922, Thomas Edison wrote:

The motion picture is destined to revolutionise our educational system and in a few years, it will supplant largely, if not entirely, the use of text-books.

This quotation, which predicted the demise of textbooks due to changes in technology, provides both insights and warnings for contemporary educators and teachers. It is interesting that even one hundred years ago, people were debating the use of technology in the classroom; while Edison’s prediction clearly did not come to pass, there was a feeling that persists today that technology can and should enhance students’ learning experience.

Edison failed to recognise that motion pictures, and even the later technologies of the 20th century, all lacked the ability to interact with the learner. While social media will not replace the textbook, it can make learning a more dynamic, collaborative, and engaging experience. This article will explore this potential.



When it comes to study and research, many students prefer to go online than pick up a textbook.

### Digital natives and digital literacy

In 2001, educational author and consultant Marc Prensky coined the term ‘digital natives’ to describe people who grew up in the digital age and are highly literate in the use of digital media. In his 2001 article, Prensky criticised American educators for failing to understand the needs of modern students. He believed that digital natives, who were raised in a digital-saturated world, needed a media-rich learning environment to hold their attention. Later, he introduced the concept of ‘digital wisdom’. He says it is no longer a question of whether to use the technologies of our time, but rather ‘how to use them to become better, wiser people’ (Prensky, 2012).

Oliver (2014), in his study of students’ day-to-day engagements with technology, discusses how their learning strategies have changed and developed over the years with a huge emphasis on online material. He calls this ‘digital literacy’. This is a slightly different interpretation from many, but Oliver’s research reinforces what we all suspect: when it comes to study and research, many students prefer to go online than pick up a textbook. His research focused on third-level students. An interesting observation from it was how students organise and study: some see the physical library as ‘irrelevant’, and for them the bigger problem is ‘information overload’ (Oliver, 2014).

### Approaches to the use of social media in education

In education, there are three broadly accepted theories of learning:

1. Behaviourism: Learning is largely a product of the stimulus response and can be achieved through reinforcement and repetition.
2. Cognitivism: Learning occurs in learners’ minds as they process information internally.
3. Constructivism: Learning occurs both internally and as part of a collaborative, interactive process in which individuals create knowledge and meaning through experience and incorporate them into their existing frameworks for understanding.

Learners can draw upon their own knowledge and experience to create new or different understandings of the world. (Poore, 2012)

Poore (2012) believes that while social media can support all three theories of learning, it lends itself more to the constructivist approach because it can support collaboration and interactivity. By using it to deliver, support, or enhance traditional teaching content, ‘learners can draw upon their own knowledge and experience to create new or different understandings of the world’ (Poore, 2012).

Social constructivism holds that social relationships and social interaction are key components of learning. According to Dr Derek Muller, a teacher, lecturer, and creator of the YouTube channel Veritasium (which as of September 2017 has over 4.3 million subscribers and a combined view figure of 380 million):

Education is not a commodity to be delivered to students and is not just the delivery of information. The way our brains work is that we interact with other people, we engage with our friends, with our families; we tell stories to each other. And through those stories, through those experiences, through those activities that we conduct together,



we form memories and our understanding of the world. Fundamentally education is a social process. (Muller, 2016)

A core principle of the Digital Strategy for Schools is to have ‘a Constructivist Pedagogical Orientation underpinning the embedding of ICT in schools’, in which ‘learners are actively involved in the process of determining meaning and knowledge for themselves’ (Department of Education and Skills, 2015).

This centring of the learner is fundamental, and is reinforced by multiple experts. Prensky (2012) says his vision for education is ‘bottom up – it begins with the students – what they need and how we can give it to them’. Muller (2016) believes:

Social media will transform the future of education, not in the delivery of information to the students, but what the students themselves will do with social media. Social media is a tool to enable students to develop content.

Prensky says his vision for education is ‘bottom up - it begins with the students - what they need and how we can give it to them.

### Teacher Training

The Digital Strategy for Schools advocates that teachers should engage in more ‘collaborative, project-based learning activities that go beyond the classroom’ (Department of Education and Skills, 2015). Prensky (2012) writes:

Reflecting on technology’s role in education led me – despite my being a strong proponent of using digital technology for learning – to the distressing conclusion that our educators, in their push to get our classrooms and educators up to date, too often add technology before the teachers know, pedagogically, what to do with it.

Prensky’s observations highlight the importance of training for teachers, not just on the technologies but on the pedagogy and approaches to how these tools should be used in the classroom. Poore (2012) suggests teachers should use ‘scaffolding techniques’ to help students understand what is required of them. These include:

- » explaining how the social media tool links to the curriculum and learning objective
- » having clearly defined goals for the task
- » describing the tool and its features
- » providing examples of good practice.

### Social media: pedagogical approaches

There are many negative perceptions of social media use in education. The first one to be challenged is the belief that it only relates to channels such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat. These channels do form a large part of the social media landscape, but it also includes activities such as blogging, wikis, recording podcasts and videos, and so on.

Poore (2012) identifies the following characteristics of social media:

- » Participation
- » Collaboration
- » Interactivity
- » Communication
- » Networking
- » Creativity
- » Community-building.

When we break down social media into these characteristics and qualities, we start to see its potential educational value.

### Wikis

Poore (2012) writes that wikis ‘have an architecture that coerces the social construction of knowledge, and social networking explicitly encourages the sharing of information’. Wikis are websites which allow for creation and collaborative editing of their content. Wikipedia needs no introduction, but teachers and classes can create their own wikis for free using websites such as <http://wikia.com> or <http://pbworks.com>. Whether it be for a history project on the Renaissance, or a science experiment, the student, by linking articles and content, can identify the relationships of these various elements in a deeper and more meaningful way.

This type of project will also support multiple types of learning, as follows.

### Active learning

Active learning involves students in the learning process more directly than other methods. The scope for active learning on a wiki project is obvious, with students directly participating and creating content for a digital medium.

### Peer learning

Collaborating on a wiki project facilitates peer learning, which again places students at the centre of the learning activity. A group wiki project requires students to work together in joint learning activities which promote collaboration and co-operation.

### Social bookmarking projects

Social bookmarking enables students to identify, collate, and share content from the web. Social media sites such as <http://pinterest.com> provide the facility to create boards on topics or projects which can then be populated by either websites, images or videos associated with that topic. Pinterest is associated especially with pictures but can also be used to bookmark videos, infographics, and even blog articles. In addition to active learning, social bookmarking projects help to facilitate discovery learning.

### Discovery learning

Poore (2012) writes that discovery learning ‘is constructivist in nature because it reinforces the idea that it is the meaning that learners create for themselves that is important in the learning process’. Social media can facilitate problem-solving and independence: activities such as

Wikis have an architecture that coerces the social construction of knowledge, and social networking explicitly encourages the sharing of information. (Poore 2012)

Poore identifies multiple motivational benefits to using social media tools in the classroom.

The scope for active learning on a wiki project is obvious, with students directly participating and creating content.

blogging and bookmarking can be used to foster exploration, discovery, and research.

### Blogging

Blogging is an interactive form of publishing content to the web. In a similar way to wiki projects, it can facilitate active learning, peer learning, and discovery learning through the creation of a website. While WordPress remains a popular blogging tool, free online sites such as <http://weebly.com> and <http://wix.com>, which use a drag-and-drop interface, provide much easier solutions for creating blogs. These could be reflective diaries, science experiment journals, digital portfolios, or collections of essays and stories.

### Motivational benefits

Poore (2012) identifies multiple motivational benefits to using social media tools and blogs in the classroom:

- » Control, ownership, and increased effort: By developing their own blogs, students will be motivated to work harder, especially as the work will be visible to a larger audience.
- » Responsibility, self-publication, and creativity: Through blogging and self-publishing, students feel more responsible for their content. They may also be able to express themselves in a more creative way through the use of videos, images, and rich content.

### Conclusion

The beginning of this article discussed Edison's quote on the use of technology in the classrooms of 1922. Now ask yourself: Until recently, how much did classrooms actually change since the 1920s? Blackboards may have been updated to smartboards with interactive features, but how often do you use these features?

The standard 'chalk and talk' method is no longer sufficient. As educators we need to adapt, innovate, and look at how we can incorporate new technologies into the classroom – logistically, technically, and pedagogically.

To conclude with the vision outlined by the Digital Strategy for Schools:

To realise the potential of digital technologies to enhance teaching, learning and assessment so that Ireland's young people become engaged thinkers, active learners, knowledge constructors and global citizens to participate fully in society and the economy. (Department of Education and Skills, 2015)

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# Travellers and Education

## Respect and Engagement



**Deaglán Ó Briain**

Principal Officer, Department of Justice and Equality.

**R**ecognition of Travellers as a distinct ethnic group, and the education actions in the new National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy call on schools and teachers to respond positively to the challenging needs of this small minority that has drifted further to the margins of society in the face of modernisation, the collapse of the economic basis for their traditional life, and the parallel growth of prejudice and discrimination.

Education is the key preparer and enabler to unlock every child's potential.

ESRI research commissioned by the Department of Justice and Equality<sup>1</sup> and published in January 2017 explored the high levels of disadvantage experienced by Travellers in four areas: education, employment, housing, and health. On education, the research found:

- » Travellers are more likely to have left school early and much less likely to have reached Leaving Certificate level: only 8 per cent of working-age Travellers, compared to 73 per cent of non-Travellers.
- » Levels of education have been increasing for Travellers and non-Travellers since the 1960s, but the improvement over time has been less for Travellers. While most non-Travellers aged 25–34 have completed second-level education (86%), less than one in ten Travellers in this age group have done so (9%).
- » 1 per cent of Travellers have a degree or higher qualification, compared with 30 per cent of non-Travellers.

Census 2011 indicates that Travellers are just under 30,000 people, or 0.6 per cent of the population. They are predominantly young (53% under 15, compared with 22% of non-Travellers), and families are typically large (51% with 6+ children, compared with 3% for non-Travellers).

Anecdotal evidence reported by Traveller community groups suggests that the level of retention of Traveller children in school had improved up to 2008, but disimproved again during the years of financial crisis.

The ESRI found that Traveller children's negative experiences in school are likely to be among the reasons for leaving school early. Traveller children (along with immigrant children and those with a

<sup>1</sup> Dorothy Watson, Oona Kenny and Frances McGinnity (January 2017). *A Social Portrait of Travellers in Ireland*. ESRI Research Series no. 56. ISBN 978-0-7070-0415-0. Available at: [www.esri.ie/pubs/RS56.pdf](http://www.esri.ie/pubs/RS56.pdf).

Census 2011 indicates that Travellers are just under 30,000 people, or 0.6 per cent of the population.

disability) are significantly more likely to report being bullied at school. The 2010 All-Ireland Traveller Health Study<sup>2</sup> pointed to a reluctance to continue in mainstream education, as Travellers feel it is not associated with any positive outcomes because of the high level of discrimination they face when seeking employment. We also know that in 2012 over two thirds (67%) of Traveller children lived in families where the mother had no formal education or only primary education.

Commencing in 2015, the Department of Justice and Equality co-ordinated a comprehensive public consultation on the drafting of a new National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy. Personal accounts by Traveller parents of their children's bad experiences in school – bullying by children and teachers, and inadequate responses by management – featured strongly in the public meetings held as part of the consultation.

The Strategy was published on 13 June 2017, following the Taoiseach's announcement on 1 March of formal recognition of Travellers as a distinct ethnic group of the Irish nation. Travellers had conducted a decades-long campaign to have their identity, culture, and unique position in Irish society recognised and valued by formal State recognition as a distinct ethnic group. Recognition is without prejudice to Travellers also being part of the Irish nation, and self-identifying as such.

The intention is that State recognition of Traveller ethnicity will help effect transformative change for the Traveller community. While it is not a legal or legislative issue, such a symbolically important gesture of respect by the State should also empower Traveller leaders to call on the community to rise to the challenge of transformative action on important issues, in partnership with the State.

The key argument for ethnic recognition was that recognition of Travellers' distinct heritage, culture, and identity, and their special place in Irish society, is hugely important symbolically to Traveller pride and self-esteem, and to overcoming the legacy of economic marginalisation, discrimination, and low self-esteem with which the community struggles.

This is not to ignore the real problems that Travellers face. But this recognition by the State creates a platform for the Traveller community and the government together to seek sustainable solutions to those problems based on respect and honest dialogue.

Ethnic recognition can create the circumstances for the Department of Justice and Equality and other departments and agencies to engage with Travellers on an action plan to tackle key problems facing the Traveller community – and Traveller leaders can credibly call on their community to participate.

It is also important to consider the position of the Roma community in Ireland. Ireland has a small population of Roma, mainly EU citizens from central Europe and the Balkans and their Irish-born children, who have

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2 Our Geels: All Ireland Traveller Health Study. Available at: <http://health.gov.ie/blog/publications/all-ireland-traveller-health-study/>.

More focused interventions are needed to retain Traveller and Roma children.

established a community here in recent decades. Some Roma are among the most deprived and marginalised people in our country. The new National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy addresses that community's needs, as will a Needs Assessment of Roma in Ireland, which is being finalised by Pavee Point partnering with the Department of Justice and Equality and will be published towards the end of 2017.

Arising from the consultation, the following ten overall themes were identified as central to the success of the new National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy<sup>3</sup>:

- » cultural identity
- » education
- » employment and the Traveller economy
- » children and youth
- » health
- » gender equality
- » anti-discrimination and equality
- » accommodation
- » Traveller and Roma communities
- » public services.

Implementation of the Strategy is overseen by a steering group on which Travellers, relevant departments, and key agencies are represented. The group is chaired by Minister of State David Stanton TD and will publish annual progress reports. The education theme includes five high-level objectives and 14 commitments for action. Among the key commitments in the new Strategy are:

Education – investment by the State in community-based support mechanisms to ensure earlier access and greater retention of Traveller and Roma children and youths in the education system.

Action no. 17 reads:

The intention is to pilot an agreed intervention in four to five areas, beginning in early 2018.

The Department of Justice and Equality will fund Traveller community groups to implement community-based supports to assist retention of Traveller and Roma children in the education system. The intervention and the supports to be provided will be designed in consultation with the Departments of Education and Skills; Children and Youth Affairs/Tusla, and Traveller interests.

This work is being taken forward by a subcommittee of the Inclusion Strategy steering group. The intention is to pilot an agreed intervention in four to five areas, beginning in early 2018. As I wrote above, Traveller outcomes have not kept pace with national improvements in school attendance and completion rates, including in other disadvantaged communities. More focused interventions are needed to retain Traveller and Roma children. An integrated approach and co-operation across organisational boundaries by a range of government departments and

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3 Available at: [www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/National\\_Traveller\\_and\\_Roma\\_Inclusion\\_Strategy\\_2017%E2%80%932021](http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/National_Traveller_and_Roma_Inclusion_Strategy_2017%E2%80%932021). Education actions are on pages 25–26.



agencies, and Traveller and Roma groups, are required to make a real impact.

A key finding from decades of community development and area-based interventions is that success in any social policy intervention requires full engagement and participation by people with lived and first-hand experience of the issue. Therefore, we recognise the importance of Traveller and Roma involvement in designing a successful intervention and, at local level, in the ongoing work of supporting attendance, participation, and school completion by children in the pilot areas.

The key partners for this pilot intervention are the Departments of Education and Skills (DES); Children and Youth Affairs; and Justice and Equality; Tusla Educational Welfare Services; and Traveller and Roma groups at national and local level in the pilot areas.

It is envisaged that each area will have a dedicated team comprising an Educational Welfare Officer (EWO) employed by Tusla, a Home School Liaison Coordinator (HSLC) funded by the DES, and two to three Traveller or Roma education workers drawn from the local communities and employed by local Traveller community projects. The Tusla Integrated Services Manager will oversee the pilot in each area.

Success of the pilot intervention will need schools and teachers also to rise to the opportunity and respond positively.

Empirical evidence of improved outcomes will be important in determining whether the pilots are successful, and can be extended to other areas where concerns exist about Traveller and Roma children's school attendance and completion. Baseline statistics will be compiled for each pilot area before beginning, and attendance and completion will be monitored and reported on annually. The Inclusion Strategy steering group subcommittee will monitor progress and evaluate the pilot.

Success of this pilot intervention – and indeed of all of the education actions in the new Strategy – will need schools and teachers also to rise to the opportunity and respond positively to the challenging needs of this small minority that has drifted further to the margins of society in the face of modernisation, the collapse of the economic basis for their traditional life, and the parallel growth of prejudice and discrimination.

#### JP McManus Scholarship

Recipients, Leah Lyne, Killarney Co. Kerry, Milan Kovacevic, Knocknacarra Co. Galway, Lucy Doyle, Belfast Co. Antrim and Germain Mosilevski, Balbriggan Co. Dublin with President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins and JP McManus.



# Towards the Era of Lifelong Learning

A History of Irish Education 1800–2016

written by John Coolahan, published by IPA

REVIEWED BY

**Dr Brendan Walsh**

FRHistS, Head of School, School of Policy  
and Practice, Dublin City University

This welcome volume spans the period 1800 to the present and is divided into three sections: Irish Education, 1900–1960; Educational Developments, 1960–1980; and Towards the Era of Lifelong Learning, 1980–2016. It develops much of the material in Coolahan's *Irish Education: History and Structure* (IPA, 1984) and provides a welcome overview of developments in the last 25 years, which Coolahan was often closely associated with, particularly the policy developments of the 1990s.

Unsurprisingly, given his involvement, Coolahan moves with aplomb through the period from the early 1990s to the present, rehearsing the almost bewildering array of policy announcements, papers, and plans. The period witnessed a striking increase in levels of political and public engagement with education at all levels. The National Education Convention of 1993 and the subsequent White Paper *Charting Our Education Future* (1995) reflected a culture of widespread consultation and engagement, combined with political ambition to make improvements in provision. The book discusses the context and challenges facing all parties as they attempted a significant reshaping of the school system, particularly at post-primary level, in areas such as curricular reform, management, and access. Some of the improvements became victims of the economic crash; Coolahan's noting that Pavee Point estimate that 'specific education supports for travellers were cut by 86.6 per cent' (p. 183) between 2008 and 2013 is but one disheartening example.

This book covers a vast period of educational change. Inevitably, much of the content is succinct and driven by macro changes, particularly those emanating from government. Especially useful are those sections dealing with technical and vocational education, although the work of Marie Clarke is a notable omission. Chapters on adult and early childhood education are welcome, as these represent more recent areas of scholarly interest in the history of education in Ireland; for those coming to the field for the first time, Coolahan presents a comprehensive and accessible overview of developments.

He is also engaging on the evolution of Further Education and Training (FET), although too reticent in his treatment of the demise of the VECs and their replacement with Education and Training Boards. Developments in further education across the sector are dealt with throughout the book, as are contemporary discussions on the status of non-university institutions. A particularly useful chapter on the Inspectorate and the Department of Education and Skills provides an overview of the work of the latter and how the former is now concerned with the evaluation of schools, particularly post-primary, in a way almost unknown when Coolahan's *Irish Education* was published.

For anyone making their first foray into the complex evolution of education in Ireland, this book is an invaluable resource. Though it does not fall within the field of history of education as presently understood and practised, it is nonetheless a detailed outline of educational policy. Given the author's long involvement in this arena, this is perhaps inevitable, but the strength of Coolahan's experience is also a weakness, as too often policy is presented as inherently beneficial and progressive. His claim, for example, that Irish universities benefited from the University Act of 1997 is highly contentious, as is the assumption throughout the book that educational provision and the economy are and should be closely linked, undermining notions of education as inherently valuable and standing apart, as Michael Oakeshott held, from the exigencies of the marketplace.

Given Coolahan's long service to education in Ireland, the reader would have benefited greatly from a chapter that sought to make sense of the changes he traces, particularly those in the modern period. What, for example, was the impact of free education on teachers and schools, and how did the teaching profession react to it? Post-primary teachers fiercely debated the possible outcomes, and the period Coolahan describes as 'a watershed in Irish education' was condemned in *The Secondary Teacher* in 1977 as 'mercenary' and one in which the 'educational economist was king' (vol. 6, no. 4, 24).

In this respect, *Towards the Era of Lifelong Learning* frustrates, because one senses that Coolahan, insightful and reflective as we know him to be, has decided not to commit his thoughts to paper. This is to be regretted, because a primary obligation of the historian is not simply to tell us what happened (itself highly contested) but why, to try to make sense of change, and to offer, if not judgement, then at least a considered view.

Nonetheless, this volume will serve as an excellent introduction to the discipline for students and as an invaluable source for general readers and academics alike. Nowhere else is the full sweep of Irish educational policy captured so succinctly. The depth of expertise in *Towards the Era of Lifelong Learning* is matched only by Coolahan's tireless commitment not only to recording educational change in Ireland but to being at the heart of it – a rare achievement for any historian.

# The Transformation of Irish Education Policy

**Professor John Coolahan**

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**T**his article contains the full text of the address by John Coolahan at the launch of his book 'Towards the Era of Lifelong Learning: A History of Irish Education 1800-2016' at the O'Callaghan-Davenport Hotel, Dublin 2, on 13 September 2017

A major feature of recent Irish education policy has been the extent and range of the education reforms which have been undertaken, and the manner in which the reforms have been conducted. Central to the new reform process was a strongly consultative approach, accompanied by official documents setting out proposals, or new lines of development, for a wide spectrum of the education system. The Clive Hopes Report of 1990 and the OECD Review of Irish Education, in 1991, gave valuable external perspectives on the need for reform. During the 1990's the state took up the challenge.

A Green Paper on the overall education system was issued in May 1992, which gave rise to nationwide meetings and discussions among stakeholders. Then, in October 1993, the National Education Convention proved to be a major event in genuine consultation, in which all key parties engaged. This writer (John Coolahan) and an independent Secretariat ran the Convention and published its report. The Report of the Convention was warmly welcomed and a great deal of consensus was achieved. This paved the way for the White Paper on Education, which won wide endorsement when published in June 1995. This was followed by Ireland's first comprehensive University Education Act in 1997 and Ireland's first comprehensive Education Act in 1998, which were landmark events for Irish education.

In 1998, the focus was put on early childhood education, with the establishment of the National Forum for Early Childhood Education. It was designed on the same consultative lines of the National Convention, with John Coolahan and a Secretariat, and proved equally successful. It led to the White Paper on early childhood, Ready to Learn, in 1999. This focus for early childhood education was further nurtured by the OECD Report in 2004 and a National Education Social Forum (NESF) Report in 2005. A Professor of ECE is now being appointed in the DCU Institute of Education. Early childhood education is now a formally structured part of the education system, with state provision for two years of pre-schooling.

Ireland had the EU Presidency in 1996, and it took the opportunity of proposing a strategy document for the Year of Lifelong Learning, and was warmly welcomed by the EU officials. Ireland convened a major international conference on the theme led by John Coolahan. Adult education came under new policy scrutiny. At the request of the Department of Education and Science, two academics, Tom Collins and John Coolahan prepared a Green Paper on Adult Education in 1998, and followed with a White Paper, *Learning for Life*, in 2000. In subsequent years adult education got increased attention and, in 2013, the Education and Training Boards Act was passed, institutionalising the Further Education and Training Sector (FET). The establishment of SOLAS created a new momentum for the Further Education and Training Area.

Other areas also got focused reform attention. A number of well-researched and authoritative reports led to improvements in the provision of various dimensions of special education. In 1999, a new primary school curriculum was published, which for the first time, was authored by a majority of primary teachers. The curricular content, methodology and assessment of the primary school continue to benefit from continuous appraisal and renewal.

At post-primary level, decisions have been made to reform the Junior Cycle, which is already underway. Transition year is well established, and the Leaving Cert Applied and the Leaving Cert Vocational operate alongside the traditional Leaving Cert. Furthermore, the points system for selection to higher education has been adjusted to reduce pressure on students.

Higher education experienced a remarkable range of changes in the modern period. This included huge expansion in undergraduate and post-graduate student numbers, structural and administrative changes, new emphasis on teaching and learning, qualitative reviewing structures, a massive increase in research activity in association with research councils, increased role of the HEA, including more strategic planning and expanded international partnerships. There are moves afoot to enhance co-operation and collaboration between individual higher education institutions, so as to maximise their contribution to contemporary societal, cultural and economic development. Among their roles, the Universities, Institutes of Technology and the FET institutes are making huge contributions to Lifelong Learning and CPD.

In 1997 and 1998 a Technical Working Group and a Steering Committee were established to advise on the provision of a Teaching Council. The Steering Committee's Report eventually led to the establishment of an Irish Teaching Council which became operative in 2005. The Council is a huge landmark for the teaching profession. In the context of major reforms in the conception of, duration of and qualitative changes in teacher education, the Council is implementing the lifelong learning concept of teacher education – initial, induction, and continuing professional development. Furthermore, teacher education institutions are in the process of forming more collaborative and co-operative units in the interests of greater synergies, qualitative changes and greater

research promotion. To date, this process has been most marked by the establishment of the DCU Institute of Education.

A further very valuable agency which evolved over these years was the National Qualifications of Ireland Authority (NQAI/QQI, 1999). This agency provides the framework for recognition of academic awards and facilitates the realisation of the era of lifelong learning, which Ireland now incorporates in its education system.

Another significant reform of the system, which incorporated a consultative approach, was the reform of the school inspectorate. Following its statutory establishment by the Education Act of 1998, the inspectorate has re-shaped and re-designed itself on best practice international lines. It has established new partnership relationships with schools, parents and relevant public agencies, and has withdrawn from the multifarious activities which frequently distracted it from its core professional role, so as to focus on its policy, evaluative and accountability roles.

A somewhat similar process, but of great significance was the re-structuring and redesigning of the role of the Department of Education and Science. A range of reports such as the Hopes Report, the OECD 1991 Report, the Green and White Education Papers, the La Touche Report and the Cromien Report, through the nineties, clearly highlighted the need to reform the work of the Department. It was urged to change its traditional role which tended to engage it in a hands-on-approach to a largely undifferentiated range of engagements and activities. The way forward in recent years was the establishment on a statutory basis of a range of agencies who took responsibility for specific functions such as the state examinations, special education, school welfare, and allowed the Department to focus more on policy, strategic planning, accountability and quality assurance. In a sense, a quiet revolution has been underway, to the great benefit of a system in a reforming mode. The key elements of which are seen to be progressing in constructive partnership.

To summarise, unlike previous eras, the 1990s ushered in a new approach to educational policy. In the course of the 1990s, two Green Papers and three White Papers were issued, all of which were well-focussed on a spectrum of policy reforms. As part of the consultative policy approach, four public consultative fora were convened – the National Education Convention (1993), the International Conference on Lifelong Learning (1996), the National Forum on Early Childhood Education (1998) and the Forum on School Patronage and Pluralism (2011). As well as this, a range of specialised reports were commissioned to guide good practice in various areas such as special education. The Universities' Act (1997) and the Education Act (1998) were of landmark importance to the modern Irish education system. These measures were followed by an unprecedented sequence of statutory measures establishing a range of specialist agencies. These included; the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) (1999), the National Psychology Act (1999), the Education Welfare Act (2000), the Teaching Council Act (2001), the Secondary Education Commission Act (2003), the National Council for Special Education Act (2004). As well as clarifying many aspects of the role of key stakeholders, the legislation had major impact on the Department of Education and Skills and on



the inspectorate. These agencies took the opportunity of major restructuring and reform, to the great benefit of educational policy and practice.

Thus, one can conclude that over a short period of years, in the recent past, through the agency of a consultative approach and informed planning guidelines, the Irish education system has been transformed. It has adopted the paradigm of being a lifelong learning system for the whole age spectrum, from early childhood to old age.

Ireland has benefitted from its international educational links with the OECD and the EU in recent times. The system has a rapidly growing student population at all levels. It is noteworthy that 90 per cent of boys and 92% of girls complete second level education which places us 2nd in the OECD. Over 60 per cent go on to higher education, which places it in the top third of 28 OECD countries. It is noteworthy that Irish people in the age group 25–34 years who have completed higher education amount to 49 per cent, well ahead of the EU average of 37 per cent and the OECD average of 39 per cent.

It may also be worth noting how Irish school pupils have been performing in the international tests PISA, PIRLS and TIMSS as the following pattern reveals.

#### **PISA 2015 (15-year olds)**

- » **Reading:** significantly above OECD average
- » 3rd out of 35 OECD countries, seventh out of all participating countries
- » **Mathematics:** significantly above OECD average (though not among high performing countries)
- » 13th out of OECD countries, 18th out of all participating countries
- » **Science:** significantly above the OECD average and significantly better than 2006 when science was first tested
- » 13th among the OECD countries, 19th out of all participating countries

#### **PIRLS 2011 (Reading at primary level, 4th grade)**

- » Irish students scored significantly above international average
- » Ranked 10th out of 45 participating countries
- » Students in only five countries scored significantly better

#### **TIMSS 2015 – Primary**

- » **Mathematics:** 9th out of 49 participating countries
- » **Science:** 19th out of 47 participating countries

#### **TIMSS 2015 – Post-primary**

- » **Mathematics:** 9th out of 39 participating countries
- » **Science:** 10th out of 39 participating countries

Evidence from international research also indicates the contemporary quality of Irish researchers' engagement. The international citation of Irish research findings for 2015 was recorded as 53% above average. Eleven Irish researchers are listed among the top one per cent of researchers currently practicing worldwide. As a country overall, Ireland is now listed in ninth place on the most recent Thomson-Reuters Indices Global Scientific Rankings.

In conclusion, one considers that there has been an underestimation of the range, extent and quality of the reforms which have taken place in Irish education in the recent past. There would also seem to be an undervaluation of the consultative and collaborative process within which the reform process was conducted. It is quite clear that so much significant reform could not have been achieved without the goodwill and the efforts of key stakeholders. So much sustained work was put in by the various sectors that, perhaps, the broad picture has been somewhat missed as concentration was focussed on specific concerns. One considers that the time is ripe for greater recognition of what has been achieved and how it has been achieved. One suggests that a sense of pride and ownership of the reforms in the public arena would not be out of place.

In this context, it is gratifying that the current Minister for Education and Skills, Mr. Richard Bruton in his Action Plan for Education 2016-19, sets out the vision "that the Irish Education and Training system should be the best in Europe over the next decade" – "Education has been central to Ireland's transformation over recent decades. It will be central to our ambitions as a nation (economic, cultural and social) over the coming decades. It will allow us to lead on innovation. It will help us to achieve social inclusion."

In my view, this is the spirit that should prevail, not based on wishful thinking, but on hard evidence of achievement, and the sustained, combined efforts of key stakeholders. Let us go forward as one of the highest achievers in education of the most developed countries.

# Celebrating Education at the Heart of European Union Policy

Shaping an exciting future for our young people building on the solid foundations of our diverse, complementary education systems



**Patricia Reilly**

Patricia Reilly is Deputy Head of Cabinet of Commissioner Tibor Navracsics, the European Commissioner with responsibility for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport.

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**H**eads of Government discuss the future role of education – as one of the foundation stones of Europe as a cultural community, with shared values, a sense of belonging together and an ability to respond effectively as a community when we are faced with global challenges.

Sixty years ago, a group of courageous and visionary Europeans resolved to lead their countries beyond conflict, protectionism and fear. They envisaged a union that would work together towards openness and trust, underpinning economic and social stability and enabling mutual understanding that was unimaginable to most people in post-war Europe. Starting with six members, the Treaty of Rome marked the beginning of Europe's most significant political project; one which has evolved on the basis of consensus to serve over 500 million European citizens today.

But from these lofty ideals, what has come of the European project? Is it all about free trade, food quality and banking? A complex animal, the European Union does indeed have a legislative role in many areas of our daily lives – we benefit from open markets and common standards in areas from air traffic control to environmental protection and consumer rights. What began as a largely transactional project, has gradually stretched out to cover more fundamental aspects of being European. Beyond competition policy and state aid rules, there is another layer of activity at European level that arguably has a more powerful, long term impact on people's day to day lives; activity in areas like research, culture and education.

Education was not mentioned in the Treaty of Rome that established the European Economic Area (which would become the European Union in 1992 following the Treaty of Maastricht). Member States were cautious; unwilling to cede control over a policy area they knew was about much more than imparting knowledge for the purposes of employment. They understood very well that a country's education system is inextricably linked to its citizens' culture, values and identity.

In 2002, Erasmus celebrated 1 million student exchanges.

Internationalisation should be about much more than driving up numbers.

Yet Jean Monnet, one of the EU's founding fathers, saw the importance of education from the outset, saying that he wanted European children to be *"untroubled from infancy by divisive prejudices, acquainted with all that is great and good in the different cultures"*.

So in an early example of how European partners found compromise and new ways to cooperate without encroaching on national autonomy, this sector put the principle of subsidiarity into practice long before the concept had been fully developed<sup>1</sup>. Education has since moved to the heart of European policy and is now enshrined in Articles 165 and 166 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union<sup>2</sup>.

The EU can, and does, do a lot to support individual students, teachers and researchers, as well as education policy makers and institutions across Europe, primarily through the Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020 programmes, which many of you know very well.

In this year of anniversaries, we are celebrating 30 years of Erasmus, the core European education instrument and probably the EU's best-known and most successful flagship. Built on a small pilot aimed at encouraging university student mobility, Erasmus was launched in 1987, enabling 3244 European students to travel abroad to study. Ireland was there from the very beginning, and remains one of the most active participants. In the early days,

Erasmus students were rare creatures – usually language or law students who got lucky with a tutor who had heard about this new idea.

By the late 90's, Erasmus had opened up to EU candidate countries, enabling Western European students to learn alongside and understand the cultures of their peers in Central and Eastern Europe. In 2002, Erasmus celebrated 1 million student exchanges, and by 2009, this number had doubled.

In 2014, the programme underwent a major overhaul and got a significant financial boost. Erasmus became Erasmus+, merging and streamlining a plethora of other programmes<sup>3</sup>, expanding to cover youth activities, volunteering and sport and introducing more tailored, demand-driven supports to policy-making.

Today, a semester or an academic year abroad has become part of the third level experience; more often than not, you will hear students planning their Erasmus year within weeks of starting third level studies, and for

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1 The history of European cooperation in education and training Europe in the making – an example. [http://biblioteka-krk.ibe.edu.pl/opac\\_css/doc\\_num.php?explnum\\_id=301](http://biblioteka-krk.ibe.edu.pl/opac_css/doc_num.php?explnum_id=301)

2 <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:12012E/TXT&from=EN>

3 Including Leonardo da Vinci, Comenius, Grundtvig, Jean Monnet, Erasmus Mundus, Alpha, Edulink, Youth in Action and Sport.

many, their student exchange proves pivotal in their personal, academic and professional development.

The impact of Erasmus has grown exponentially. Since the first, experimental phase, we have reached a total of 9 million beneficiaries of the Erasmus programmes. And in the period 2014–2020 alone, with a budget of €16.7 billion, Erasmus+ will offer opportunities for 4 million people across Europe in all fields of education, training, youth and sport. One important feature of the range of Erasmus+ actions is mobility, but in fact it goes beyond travel opportunities for individual people. Erasmus+ offers opportunities for education systems and individual schools and colleges to internationalise in many ways, including internationalisation at home. There are compelling and different reasons for developing internationalisation strategies. Some are obvious academic and scientific reasons; developing linkages and strengthening partnerships improves quality for all involved. There are broad societal and economic reasons, including for instance developing human resources capacity. And of course countries use their education policies as ‘soft power’ – part of their diplomatic policy, where education can help to influence the international agenda and build allies.

Countries use their education policies as ‘soft power’.

A good example of this is Iran. Despite fraught relations on most fronts for the last decade, Iranian and EU universities continue to cooperate in Erasmus+ and the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, and Iranians are the 16th most represented nationality in Erasmus Mundus. Since the diplomatic relationship with Iran was ramped up a few years ago, we have increased the EU budget for Iran in Erasmus+ to more than €5 million over 2 years, expanding the possibilities for Iranian higher education institutions to participate in European programmes. Crucially, the Erasmus+ programme is now open to Iranian nationals, with the very first exchanges between Iran and 33 European ‘Programme Countries’ starting this semester, and the jointly organised EU–Iran Higher Education & Research Event in Tehran in July 2017, with participation from over 250 Iranian and European universities, paved the way for further cooperation.

This is very much reflective of the growing importance of internationalisation globally, and numbers are increasing everywhere, bringing with it the challenge of increasing quantity while maintaining and building on quality.

The challenge of striking this balance worries me – internationalisation should be about much more than driving up the numbers. The success of internationalisation strategies is often measured in terms of ‘how many students went abroad’, and ‘how many publications did the mobile researchers produce’, driving a culture of internationalisation as a goal in itself and of course more and more courses delivered in one language.

I would like to draw on the work of Professor Hans de Wit, Director of the Centre for Higher Education at Boston College, who was among the

first to develop internationalisation as a concept and strategy, and who rather provocatively now talks about the end of internationalisation. The end, not because the concept is dead, but because he is concerned that internationalisation has just become a buzzword, with little real depth or meaning<sup>4</sup>.

He [Prof Hans de Wit] is concerned that internationalisation has just become a buzzword, with little real depth or meaning.

De Wit exhorts us to think about the context – why develop an internationalisation strategy? What is the context? Look at the external and internal factors. What are you actually trying to achieve. And what does an internationalisation strategy comprise. I am completely convinced of the unique value of Erasmus+ and the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions; mobility is, and always will be a cornerstone of international education policy. I would encourage any third level student or academic to take any opportunity they get, to study or work abroad, and we continue to work on mutual recognition of qualifications. But realistically, mobility is only a reality for very few.

There is much more to internationalisation than mobility. In fact, experts would argue that essential as it is, there is far too much focus on mobility, and we should invest much more policy activity in bilateral, multilateral and strategic partnerships across borders, and in the development of curricula for ‘internationalisation at home’.

There is a steady growth in mobility of degree-seeking students. In the 15 years 1999–2014, the number of mobile students more than doubled from 2 million to 4.3 million. But the total number of students also grew in that period, so in absolute terms, the overall proportion of mobile students remained steady, with no more than about 4% of students getting the chance to be part of the Erasmus Generation. And relatively small numbers of sending and receiving countries account for most of the flow.

Mobility is, and always will be, a cornerstone of international education policy.

Even the most dominant destination countries – France, Spain, and Germany, only 10% of students are international. Interestingly, despite the success of Erasmus, intra-EU mobility accounts for 25% of mobile students in Europe – 75% come from elsewhere, and this figure is skewed towards post-graduate students.

And there are significant imbalances within these figures – Ireland being a good example, where far more students are received than are outgoing; the picture is similar in the UK. For example, in the academic year 2012–13, over 6000 students were incoming, while fewer than 3000 left to study abroad. Susan O’Shaughnessy from DIT has done a very good piece of work on their student figures, highlighting the very low levels of outward mobility in particular faculties such as engineering<sup>5</sup>.

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4 'What is an International University?' <http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=2015031910180116>

5 An Insurmountable Gap: Can We Balance Incoming and Outgoing Erasmus Exchanges Among Engineering Students? [https://arrow.dit.ie/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=http://www.google.be/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0ahUKewiCqKblid\\_XAhXEbFAKHcweDJMQFggoMAA](https://arrow.dit.ie/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=http://www.google.be/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0ahUKewiCqKblid_XAhXEbFAKHcweDJMQFggoMAA)



When marking the celebration of 30 years of Erasmus earlier this year, and the 9 millionth beneficiary, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker said *“Every euro that we invest in Erasmus+ is an investment in the future — in the future of a young person and of our European idea. I cannot imagine anything more worthy of our investment than these leaders of tomorrow. As we celebrate the 9 millionth person to take part, let’s make sure we are 9 times more ambitious with the future of the Erasmus+ programme”*<sup>6</sup>.

Of course we will be fighting for a dramatically increased budget, but even if it is tripled in the next financial programming period, we would still only be able to fund mobility for fewer than one in ten European students.

This is partly why I agree with those who believe that even if we expand mobility programmes hugely, they should not be regarded as the only useful instruments of internationalisation. So how do we go beyond mobility?

If our educational institutions really want to internationalise, they need to look at their curricula.

If our educational institutions really want to internationalise, they need to look at their curricula. When designing a course, it is important to look at how it relates to your overall internationalisation strategy. What do you want for your students? By focusing on ‘internationalisation at home’, students can benefit from your outward-looking strategy, even if they cannot afford to spend time studying abroad for personal or financial reasons.

‘Internationalisation at home’ was defined by Beelen and Jones in 2015 as *“the purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for all students within domestic learning environments”*<sup>7</sup>.

The rationale of curriculum internationalisation should be ensuring outcomes that enhance the quality of education and research. But going beyond mobility is not a simple task. It requires careful curriculum design, incorporating aspects of a study area from other cultural or geographic perspectives, inviting international guest lecturers or speakers from different cultural backgrounds. And it means encouraging students to connect with their peers in other countries through digital learning and on-line collaboration – this can happen from primary school onwards. Full internationalisation involves the whole ethos of a school or higher education institution, impacting on life across the campus and on external connections, partnerships and relationships.

Of course this is easier said than done, especially in some disciplines.

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&url=http%3A%2F%2Farrow.dit.ie%2Fcgi%2Fviewcontent.cgi%3Farticle%3D1008%26context%3Dst2&usg=AOvVaw2G5SQ3wBXfaqaATgKe3sES&httpsredir=1&article=1008&context=st2

6 [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-17-1574\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-17-1574_en.htm)

7 Defining ‘internationalisation at home’. <http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20151202144353164>

Only education can equip people with the skills needed by a resilient society and workforce.

But it is undoubtedly worthwhile, and not just from the perspective of mobile employability – though that’s important too. Just a few weeks ago, European Heads of State and Government met in Gothenberg for Europe’s first ‘Social Summit’ since 2002, where political leaders got together with social partners, to discuss the way forward for a more social Europe; a Europe that supports fairness across labour markets and social protections systems. A Europe that is more tolerant; where different peoples understand and appreciate each other and are more engaged in society at local, regional, national and European level.

One key aspect of their discussions was the future role of education – as one of the foundation stones of Europe as a cultural community, with shared values, a sense of belonging together and an ability to respond effectively as a community when we are faced with global challenges. This is not about creating a single European identity. Quite the opposite. It is about nurturing and respecting each other’s own unique identities and finding unity in diversity.

Europe is experiencing a range of important developments, many of which can be described as both challenges and opportunities. For example, digitisation has been with us for some time, and is increasingly pervasive, bringing with it advancements in automation and artificial intelligence. We are really only beginning to come to grips with what this might mean for the next generations.

There is no doubt that we need more cross-cutting skills. Young people need much more than single-discipline knowledge. And as the demand for skills changes more quickly than ever, core abilities like creativity, analytical skills and ability to work in inter-disciplinary, inter-cultural teams, become increasingly important.

Europe has always been about overcoming borders.

Our societies are changing. Existing populations are ageing and we need to fully integrate our migrant populations.

We have new patterns of communication and sources of information from sources worldwide at the click of a keyboard. It is essential that students fully understand their digital environment, and are able to distinguish anecdote from evidence; facts from fake news. And linked to that, we see a worrying flaring up of populism and xenophobia. I read with horror about blatant displays of racism in towns and cities across Europe, and while the numbers involved are small, it is deeply troubling that anyone at all thinks it’s acceptable to whip up xenophobic fear and loathing. Education must be at the heart of tackling these challenges and indeed in taking full advantage and leading on the more positive developments.

Education is the basis for a creative, productive population – driving research and innovation, and driving (rather than following or reacting to) new technical and digital developments. Only education can equip people with the skills needed by a resilient society and workforce – people

and social systems that can deal with the shocks thrown at them by natural, economic or cultural shocks – enabling them to recover but also to transform into something better.

Education and culture make Europe an attractive place to live, study and work. In free societies that share common values, education forms the basis of active citizenship, helping to temper populism and prevent xenophobia and violent radicalisation.

We are very lucky here in Europe. As a union that largely embraces diversity, we can travel, work and share ideas freely. Europe has always been about overcoming borders, and the internal market is a reality for goods and the free movement of people. However, there are still obstacles to cross-border cooperation in some areas, notably in today's context, in education.

One real  
challenge is  
competence in  
languages.

That is why the European Commission set out an ambitious shared agenda for the future of education which formed the basis of discussion in Gothenberg<sup>8</sup>, and we expect the main points to be endorsed at the December Council of Heads of State and Government. We want to help Member States and individual Higher Education Institutions to work together more closely and easily, with automatic recognition of qualifications, from school diplomas upwards. At the Member States' demand, we will continue to support mobility for both academic staff and students through Erasmus+ and its successor – hopefully with an increased budget.

But we will also support actions that help European universities to 'internationalise at home'. One real challenge is competence in languages. Increasingly, high quality jobs require people to speak more than one language very well, and while English is often regarded as the language of research, those who are multi-lingual have a richer experience and deeper understanding of their collaborative partners.

Yet, almost half of EU citizens only speak and understand their mother tongue. The Commission aims to support measures that by 2025, will enable all Europeans leaving secondary school to have a good knowledge of two languages in addition to their mother tongue. This will be more of a challenge for some than others, and I'm thinking of my own educational background, and that of my nieces and nephews who are at school in Ireland today.

Internationalisation can start earlier than third level, and the Commission already has a major, successful programme called eTwinning<sup>9</sup> for teachers at primary and secondary level. eTwinning allows for collaborative, online international learning, where teachers link with their peers in another country, and their classes get together virtually. They work on projects,

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8 [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/communication-strengthening-european-identity-education-culture\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/communication-strengthening-european-identity-education-culture_en.pdf)

9 <https://www.etwinning.net/en/pub/index.htm>

eTwinning allows  
for collaborative,  
online  
international  
learning.

but they also learn about each other. Children in Galway can develop an understanding of what it's like to be a student in Tallin or Athens. They get to know a little of each other's cultures, and lay the foundations for life as European, as well as Irish, Estonian or Greek citizens. We plan to boost our support for eTwinning and also increase support for the teachers using the system, aiming to reach 600,000 users by 2020.

I can't predict with certainty the ambition with which the EU will be able to support Member States into the future – it will largely depend on the budgetary decisions made by our political leaders in the coming year or two. But the political signals are good; at the 60th Anniversary celebrations of the Treaty of Rome earlier this year, Heads of State and Government said *“We want a Union where citizens have new opportunities for cultural and social development and economic growth. [...] [We] pledge to work towards [...] a Union where young people receive the best education and training and can study and find jobs across the continent; a Union which preserves our cultural heritage and promotes cultural diversity<sup>10</sup>.”*

I look forward to building the solid foundations of our diverse, complementary education systems, and helping to shape an exciting future for our young people. A future that equips them to grow and learn as part of a diverse, tolerant and forward-looking Europe.

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10 (Rome Declaration, 25 March 2017) - <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/03/25/rome-declaration/pdf>



12 April 2017: Dr Katherine Zappone, Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, and An Taoiseach Leo Varadkar (then Minister for Social Protection) at the announcement of 'More Affordable Childcare'.

# CHAPTER 1 EARLY CHILDHOOD



# EARLY CHILDHOOD Contents

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Lyn Bowers



# 2017: A Year of Progress and Promise

Early childhood education is rapidly finding its feet



**Dr Thomas Walsh**

Lecturer, Maynooth University

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**D**r Thomas Walsh shines a beacon of hope on the early childhood education sector as he walks us through the rapid progress made in 2017 in the key areas of affordability, professionalisation, inspection, regulation, quality and inclusion.

Developments in the early childhood education (ECE) sector continued with a relentless momentum in 2017. Initiatives under way in 2016 have been progressed, and a plethora of new policy and practice developments have been mooted or introduced. The pace of development reflects the increased State involvement and investment in the sector and is having a profound effect on the expectations of early childhood professionals.

Given the extensive policy and practice developments for the sector in 2017, this chapter will trace thematically some of the key events affecting the sector. The four themes addressed here are:

- » Affordability
- » Professionalisation
- » Inspection and regulation
- » Quality and inclusion

## **Affordability**

Affordability of childcare and ECE for parents, while also being sustainable for the early childhood sector, has been a perennial challenge in Ireland. This is due in no small part to the long history of substantial State underinvestment in the early years sector in Ireland. The advent of the Free Preschool Year in 2010 and its extension in 2016 represented the first universal ECE provision for children in Ireland. The extension of this scheme to children from the age of three has led to an increase from 67,000 children participating in 2015–16 to 121,000 children in 2016–17.

A number of targeted schemes were also established to provide additional funding to parents and families, such as the Community Childcare Subvention (CCS) programme and the Training and Employment Childcare programmes. 2017 also saw the extension of the CCS programme to include the Resettlement, Relocation and Transition programme to support children and families experiencing homelessness.

In Budget 2017, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs announced the development of an Affordable Childcare Scheme (ACS) based on the principle of

Leaders in early childhood education settings must be qualified to level 6 on the National Framework of Qualifications.

Most early childhood professionals earn just marginally more than the minimum wage in spite of the increased expectations placed on them.

progressive universalism. The ACS has both a universal and a targeted component. The universal component relates to all children from six months until they enter the Free Preschool Year scheme and provides for up to approximately €1,000 annually to be paid directly to Tusla-registered settings. The targeted component applies to children from six months to 15 years of age and is means-tested.

The original intention of introducing these measures from September 2017 has not been met, due to the delay in developing an ICT system that can deliver the targeted elements of the ACS. In the interim, a scheme known as More Affordable Childcare will be implemented for 2017–18. While the introduction of the ACS has been delayed and its detail has caused much confusion and frustration in the sector, it is to be welcomed as a further commitment to more universal provision for ECE in Ireland from the age of six months that can be extended into the future. Consideration of its integration with the Free Preschool Year provisions is warranted, to ensure greater coherence for the sector. Further information is available at the website <http://affordablechildcare.ie>.

*A Programme for a Partnership Government* (Government of Ireland, 2016) committed to undertaking an independent review of the cost of delivering quality childcare, to be overseen by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA). This review was initiated in August 2017 and is expected to be completed in a ten-month timeframe. It will include an analysis of the current costs of providing childcare in Ireland, and an examination of the current State funding for ECE schemes and their impact on salaries, terms and conditions for ECE professionals. It is envisaged that this will be a strategic report for determining future policy and investment for the sector.

### Professionalisation

Allied to the rapid development of the sector have been increased efforts and demands for the professionalisation of the ECE workforce. The 2016 Preschool Regulations introduced for the first time a minimum qualification (level 5 on the National Framework of Qualifications [NFQ]) for ECE professionals, and this became operational in 2017. Leaders in ECE settings must be qualified to level 6 on the NFQ. Moreover, additional capitation is paid under the Free Preschool Year scheme to settings where the leader is qualified to level 7 on the NFQ and where all other staff meet the minimum qualification standard. These, among other measures such as targeted learner funds, have led to an increasingly well-qualified ECE workforce, with close to 20 per cent of ECE professionals now qualified to level 7 or above on the NFQ. In June 2017, a working group was established to develop draft professional award criteria and guidelines to inform the development and review of level 7 and level 8 ECE degrees in Ireland. The feedback and input of the sector will be sought on these draft criteria and guidelines by the end of 2017 before they are finalised.

An allocation of seven days for non-contact time per service per contract was paid to settings for the first time in 2016–17, in recognition of the need for time to administer the various ECE schemes and for planning within settings. The DCYA Early Years Forum established a Sub-group on Professionalisation in January 2017, and this has advanced a number

The More Affordable Childcare scheme, implemented for 2017-18, is to be welcomed as a further commitment that can be extended into the future.

of areas of work, including a research proposal for developing an Early Years Council, developing a Code of Ethics for the sector, and having a consultation process to elicit views on an agreed title for the profession. The DCYA commissioned the Early Childhood Research Centre at the University of Roehampton to prepare a report on occupational role profiles in the early years sector, and this was published in April 2017 (Urban et al., 2017). This provides a solid research basis for developing specific role profiles and criteria for the profession in Ireland.

Increased qualifications, however, have not led to any appreciable improvement in the salaries, terms, conditions or career prospects of ECE professionals. Most earn a salary marginally above the minimum wage in spite of the increased expectations placed on them by the new ECE policy and practice landscape. This has resulted in attrition from the sector as well as much frustration at the lack of recognition of the profession relative to other professional groups.

In 2017, two trade unions escalated their work to develop a pay model for the sector. SIPTU is operating a 'Big Start' campaign for fair pay, recognition and better funding for the sector. It aims to develop a national agreement or Sectoral Employment Order on the salary, pension entitlements, and conditions of ECE professionals. IMPACT is also campaigning for better pay and conditions in the sector. Both unions are actively recruiting members, and it is likely that the momentum for professional recognition will grow in the months and years ahead.

Wider political movements are also supporting increased professionalisation of the sector, such as the report on the working conditions of ECE professionals being undertaken by the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs. The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs will undertake a sectoral report on workforce planning for the ECE sector, and will put forward policy actions and structural changes required to ensure adequate workforce capacity for the sector into the future. There is considerable momentum at present for a breakthrough on salaries and conditions, but this will not be possible without substantial and sustained State investment.

## Inspection and Regulation

2017 is the first full year in which the education-focused inspections by the DES and the revised Tusla regulations have been in operation. Education-focused inspections were introduced in April 2016, and approximately 870 inspections had been undertaken by summer 2017. The DES is preparing a review of the themes emerging in the first year of operation, and this is scheduled to be published in autumn 2017.

The Tusla Preschool Regulations are inspected by the Tusla Early Years Inspectorate since June 2016, focusing on record keeping, Garda vetting, learning environments, and communications. Following Tusla inspections, settings are required to set out the corrective actions and preventive actions they will take in any area deemed non-compliant. A Quality Regulatory Framework has been promised to provide additional clarity and practical insight on the regulations, and this is being overseen by the Tusla Early Years Inspectorate Consultative Forum. In addition, ECE

Education-focused inspections were introduced in April 2016 and 870 had been carried out by summer 2017.

Better Start continued to expand in 2017 and now employs close to 100 early years specialists and mentors.

settings are subject to compliance, audit and risk visits by Pobal officials to verify compliance with DCYA-funded programmes.

The Operations and Systems Alignment Group, comprising DCYA, Tusla, DES, Better Start, and Pobal representatives, is currently investigating the merits of a single inspection agency that focuses on care and education needs. This is a very welcome review, considering the current level of regulation and inspection by a variety of departments and agencies. Moreover, the increased focus on self-evaluation and action planning as part of the inspection and regulatory framework is building the capacity of settings to identify and address quality issues. As the sector evolves, such a level of oversight should not be necessary. It should also be possible to recruit professionals from the sector who will have the professional expertise and experience to provide the full range of regulatory oversight necessary within a single system of inspection.

### Quality and Inclusion

Developing and ensuring quality of provision remained high on the priority list for the ECE sector in 2017. Better Start, a national initiative established by the DCYA to bring an integrated national approach to developing quality in the ECE sector, continued to expand in 2017. It now employs close to 100 early years specialists and mentors to work with services on quality development or the inclusion of children with additional needs under the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM).

AIM was introduced in September 2016 and developed the nature and range of its provisions significantly in 2017. Based on a continuum of support from universal supports to targeted supports, it seeks to support settings to deliver an inclusive ECE experience where all children can participate fully. By May 2017, 2,069 applications were approved for level 4 (expert early years educational advice and support), 200 applications were approved for level 5 (equipment, appliances, and minor alterations grants), 47 applications were approved for level 6 (therapeutic intervention), and 1,193 applications were approved for level 7 (additional assistance in the preschool room).<sup>1</sup>

As part of the universal supports under AIM, close to 900 ECE professionals graduated in September 2017 with a level 6 special purpose higher education award from the Leadership for INclusion in the Early Years (LINC) programme. These will be eligible to undertake the role of inclusion co-ordinator in their settings. A further 900 students are currently enrolled to undertake the LINC training in 2017–18. The City and County Childcare Committees (CCCs) are also delivering diversity, equality and inclusion training to providers based on the *Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter and Guidelines for Early Childhood Care and Education* (DCYA, 2016) to support the universal elements of AIM. The National Disability Authority has also begun work on Universal Design Guidelines to support the development of inclusive cultures in ECE settings.

The National *Aistear Síolta* initiative provides central support and co-ordination of *Síolta* and *Aistear* implementation across the early childhood

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1 Unpublished Weekly Report from Pobal to the DCYA, 8 May 2017.

The NCCA is developing reporting structures and templates to improve the transfer of information between early childhood education settings and primary schools.

sector. It is a joint initiative of the DCYA, DES, and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) and works closely with the Better Start initiative. This has led to the appointment of a national *Síolta* co-ordinator in the Early Years Education Policy Unit (EYEPU) and a national *Aistear* co-ordinator based in the NCCA. It has developed ten hours of workshops to support early years practitioners' understanding and use of the *Aistear Síolta* Practice Guide as well as on-site coaching support. This is delivered by a team of 68 *Aistear Síolta* mentors who are drawn from the National Voluntary Organisations and the CCCs. Work is also being undertaken on updating the *Síolta* manuals and the criteria for the *Síolta* Quality Assurance Programme.

Based on actions arising from the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (DES, 2011), the NCCA is currently working on developing reporting structures and templates to improve the transfer of information between ECE settings and primary schools. It is anticipated that this transfer of information to improve the transition experience of children will become a requirement into the future. Such transitions are also likely to be affected by the proposed changes to the structures of ECE and infant class provisions, on which the NCCA is currently undertaking consultation (NCCA, 2016). A working group has been established in 2017 to progress work on developing standards for School Age Childcare based on the DCYA and DES Action Plan on School Age Childcare published in March 2017 (DCYA and DES, 2017). A working group is currently developing a structured set of reforms and supports for the childminding sector.

As part of its quality remit, the DCYA has issued a request for tenders to undertake a measurement and assessment of the quality of early years provision in Ireland. This research is significant as it will provide a baseline for the present quality of provision in Ireland and identify best practice. This will be used into the future to inform policy development and to measure developments by the quality of provision.

## Conclusion

It is evident that the ECE sector has witnessed much development and initiative in 2017, with the promise of a similar trajectory in 2018. While this is welcome, the increasing expectations and requirements placed on the sector will need to be matched by increased and sustained State investment and support. Regrettably, another year has passed without publication of the promised National Early Years Strategy, which has the potential to offer a unifying vision for the sector. Even in its absence, however, there are reassuring signs, at both grass-roots and system levels, of an emerging unity and coherence that are so necessary for a competent system to thrive. The sector is confidently asserting its importance and professionalism and, hopefully, will continue to play a strategic and central role in developing its own destiny.

I would like to acknowledge the support of Ms Teresa Heeney and the staff of ECI in identifying the key themes for inclusion in this chapter.



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Pictured recently at Mary Immaculate College were Margaret O'Sullivan from Killarney, Co Kerry who graduated from the Leadership for INclusion in the Early Years (LINC) programme and received the overall Best LINC Portfolio Award in addition to the Best Regional LINC Portfolio Award for Kerry, and Dr Emer Ring, Head of Department of Reflective Pedagogy and Early Childhood Studies.





# Towards the Affordable Childcare Scheme

An opportunity to improve quality of provision for our youngest children



**Amy McArdle**

Policy Officer, Early Childhood Ireland

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**A**my McArdle has one big bone of contention regarding the Affordable Childcare Scheme – its total neglect of measures to support professionalisation or to improve the pay and conditions of the early childhood workforce. The current delay which has arisen in implementing the ACS should be used to redress this imbalance which is intrinsically correlated to quality of provision.

A single Affordable Childcare programme was first announced in October 2015 by the then Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Dr James Reilly TD, as part of an extensive package of childcare measures in Budget 2016. Dr Reilly stated that a dedicated project team would be established to develop the programme. It was hoped that the scheme would be introduced in 2017.<sup>1</sup> The current Minister, Dr Katherine Zappone TD, took up the baton and secured €19 million in Budget 2017 to assist parents with childcare costs from September 2017.

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) followed quickly with the publication of a detailed ‘Policy Paper on the Development of a new Single Affordable Childcare Scheme’ in October 2016.<sup>2</sup> According to the DCYA, ‘The Affordable Childcare Scheme will be a new, national scheme of financial support towards the cost of childcare. In line with the principle of progressive universalism,<sup>3</sup> it will encompass both universal and targeted elements which can be incrementally expanded over time.’<sup>4</sup> The policy paper sets out the intention of the new scheme, namely to:

Streamline the existing targeted schemes for parents and providers and replace them with a single, more user-friendly scheme of wraparound care for preschool and school-aged children.<sup>5</sup>

- » Provide a fair and consistent system of progressive financial support.
- » Provide a robust and flexible platform for future investment in childcare.<sup>6</sup>

## More Affordable Childcare

DCYA was unable to develop the necessary IT system for the Affordable Childcare Scheme in time for September 2017. Instead, More Affordable Childcare was introduced and was described by DCYA as the ‘first step toward the new Affordable Childcare Scheme’.<sup>7</sup> More Affordable Childcare comprises the originally planned universal subsidy, along with enhanced subvention rates and eligibility criteria

DCYA was unable to develop the necessary IT system for the Affordable Childcare Scheme in time for September 2017.

for the existing targeted supports. It will continue to operate throughout 2018, and until the Affordable Childcare Scheme is fully developed.

### **Towards the Affordable Childcare Scheme (ACS)**

The objectives set out in the DCYA's policy paper on the ACS remain critically relevant in the ongoing developmental period. They are to promote: (i) a reduction in child poverty, (ii) positive child development outcomes, (iii) labour market activation, and (iv) improved quality.<sup>8</sup> However, it does not appear that the focus of the scheme reflects the priorities in this order, or that the scheme, as currently proposed, can address all the objectives. Rather, as the name suggests, and as is abundantly clear in the policy paper, affordability for parents is the driving objective behind the ACS, with labour market activation a close second. Indeed, it is difficult to see what in the proposed ACS could be described as a quality enhancement measure. There is nothing to support professionalisation or to improve the pay and conditions of the early childhood care and education (ECE) workforce, which are intrinsically linked to quality.

### **Quality Early Childhood Care and Education (ECE)**

Early childhood learning lasts a lifetime and yields broad dividends for children, families, communities and businesses.<sup>9</sup> We know that investment in early years is investment in a public good and a cost-effective way of promoting economic growth. We also know that there is no return on investment if quality in early childhood services is not maintained.<sup>10</sup> An experienced, knowledgeable, and competent ECE workforce is one of the most influential determinants of quality in early years provision, and it is the qualification of the whole staff team that is key.<sup>11</sup> This poses a concern in the Irish context, and has been identified by the European Commission.<sup>12</sup> The most recent review of the ECE sector found that only 18 per cent of the workforce hold a level 7 degree or higher.<sup>13</sup> This is markedly lower than the EU recommendation for a 60 per cent graduate-led ECE workforce by 2025.<sup>14</sup>

There are many reasons for the low level of graduate qualifications in the sector. However, it ultimately pertains to poor pay and conditions, which is the result of historic underinvestment and fragmented policy development in ECE by successive governments. At 0.5 per cent of GDP, though including expenditure for children under 6 years of age in primary school education, the level of State investment in ECE is improving.<sup>15</sup> However, considering that 0.1 per cent of Ireland's current GDP is approximately €250 million, our gap behind the OECD average of 0.8 per cent and the UNICEF international benchmark of 1 per cent of GDP is significant.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, we still do not know how much it costs to provide quality childcare in Ireland that is consistent with the principle of ongoing professionalisation. Accordingly, State funding, albeit improving, continues to miss the quality-improvement mark.

### **Doing the sums**

The fundamental problem with the ACS, as presented in the DCYA's policy paper, is the cost model used to calculate the 'hourly' unit cost of childcare and thereafter the various subsidy rates.<sup>17</sup> The model was conceived on the inaccurate premise that the current financial models operating in the ECE sector are working. Research commissioned by Early Childhood

Affordability for parents is the driving objective behind the ACS, with labour market activation a close second. There is nothing [in the proposed CS] to support professionalisation or to improve the pay and conditions of the workforce.

The most recent review of the ECE sector found that only 18 per cent of the workforce hold a level 7 degree or higher.

Ireland (ECI) in September 2016 examined these models and found to the contrary. Among the findings were:

- » The average childcare service in Ireland, whether private or community, urban or rural, operates on a breakeven basis.
- » The professional workforce responsible for delivering quality ECE services for children is low-paid and employed increasingly on a part-time/38-week basis.<sup>18</sup>

If the ACS is to succeed in improving quality and positive child development outcomes, it is essential that its cost model does not perpetuate the status quo of a breakeven and badly paid sector, in which the highly qualified personnel necessary to ensure quality of provision to children are increasingly difficult to find.<sup>19</sup>

### **Opportunity**

The delay that has arisen with the ACS provides an opportunity to redress some of the imbalances and to think creatively about how the scheme can improve the quality of early childhood care and education in Ireland. The following are three examples of how the ACS can be strengthened to improve the quality of care and education for our youngest children.

### **Recognition that quality costs**

In August 2017, Minister Zappone announced that an independent review of the cost of delivering quality childcare would be completed in time to inform the 2019 Budget.<sup>20</sup> This is very welcome. It is essential that future budget considerations and the cost models underpinning future developments in childcare policy, not least ACS, be informed by an evidence base which takes account of the financial realities facing a very diverse sector. The review must look at the variations that impact the cost of quality childcare provision. These include whether the service is community or private; its location, including whether it is based in a socio-economically disadvantaged community; and future cost pressures such as wages. It must also be consistent with the principle of ongoing professionalisation of the sector.

### **Early Years Policy**

There is a proposal under ACS to reduce the means-tested subsidy to a maximum of 15 hours of childcare per week, inclusive of time spent in school or preschool, for children where one or both parents are not engaged in formal work or study.<sup>21</sup> This appears to be motivated by labour market activation without proper consideration of the many and complex reasons that keep parents, particularly woman parenting alone, distant from the labour market. Such reasons include poverty, domestic violence, homelessness, drug addiction, mental health difficulties, and disability.

To ensure a quality ECE experience for children, early years policy must be driven by the best interests of the child and by recognition that not all children receive the same start in life. While the best interests of the child depend on multiple factors, in the context of ECE and our youngest children, their physical, emotional, psychological, intellectual, educational, and social well-being should be the paramount consideration in policy development.<sup>22</sup>

A new universal subsidy for under-threes was introduced as part of More Affordable Childcare in September 2017.

ECE plays a specific and vital role in addressing the effects of poverty on children as well as on their families and wider communities. Access to quality subsidised childcare must be viewed as part of holistic support for low-income, disadvantaged families. Early years policy in Ireland must ensure that the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children and families are not penalised by a disproportionate focus on parental labour market activation. The 15-hour subsidy proposal should be removed in the further development of ACS.

### Inspections

A new universal subsidy for under-threes was introduced as part of More Affordable Childcare in September 2017. This is the first time the State has subsidised the care and education of our youngest children. The introduction of ACS and the legislation that will accompany it presents an ideal opportunity to extend the remit of the Department of Education and Skills' Early-Years Education-focused Inspection (EYEI), to inspect the quality of education to this cohort. The quality of education for under-threes is paramount to outcomes in later life and yields higher returns on investment in education and training than at any other life stage.<sup>23</sup>

Such a move would be in keeping with the position of the Expert Advisory Group on the Early Years Strategy (2013), which stressed the importance of standards across the entire early years age range:

*Quality matters for young children of all ages, equally for under-3s and for over-3s. It is essential, therefore, that quality standards apply equally to all age groups and that quality-raising supports are available equally to services working with all age groups.*<sup>24</sup>

There is scope to do this under Head 6(1)(c) of the Heads of Bill and General Scheme of the Affordable Childcare Scheme, which states that the written agreement for approved providers of ACS shall:

*Specify requirements that must be met by the provider in order to participate in the Scheme, which shall include requirements in relation to the quality of the childcare services which are subject to a subsidy under the Scheme.*<sup>25</sup>

This is the first time the State has subsidised the care and education of our youngest children.

### Conclusion

Enhancing the quality of early childhood care and education is clearly not the priority in the planned Affordable Childcare Scheme. However, it provides a significant opportunity to redress some of the imbalances in favour of improving quality of provision, and with it the quality of children's experiences. ECI will be working constructively on behalf of our members with other stakeholders, the DCYA, and the legislature to ensure that the rights and best interests of our youngest children are front and centre of the legislation that will underpin this new scheme. The Scheme will need to be implemented as part of a wider Early Years strategy which sees quality, sustainability, and affordability as interdependent priorities for future government investment in our vital sector.

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# Is it time to establish an Early Years Council?

A plausible solution to inordinate fragmentation



**Ian McKenna**  
Director of Saint  
Nicholas Montessori  
College Ireland



**Mary Moloney**  
Researcher, author  
and lecturer at Mary  
Immaculate College  
Limerick

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**I**an McKenna and Mary Moloney argue convincingly for the establishment of an Early Years Council, saying it would promote the standing of the Early Years Professional, establish a Code of Professional Practice and Responsibility for Early Years Teachers, and create a national register of Early Years Professionals.

## Achievements to date

In many ways, the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector in Ireland has come a long way in the last decade. Not only do we now have two national practice frameworks, *Síolta* (2006) and *Aistear* (2009), but there is also a universal Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme since 2010, the Access and Inclusion Model (2015), a minimum qualification requirement (2016), and Education-focused Inspections of settings participating in the ECCE scheme, also in 2016. Overall, the professionalisation of the ECEC sector seems to be on an upward trajectory. Or is it?

## Unsatisfactory image

In spite of the many initiatives mentioned here, it is widely acknowledged that the sector in Ireland is not perceived as a profession at either a macro (government, society, other pedagogical professions) or micro (local, setting) level. This overall lack of recognition can be traced to the traditional care and education divide, where mothers in the home cared for children, while education was seen to begin with formal schooling.

However, Ireland's entry to the EU, economic prosperity, and women – especially mothers – entering the workforce from the mid-1980s onwards dramatically challenged the State's position on care and educational provision for children outside the home, prior to school entry.

It can be argued that the State rose to this challenge, and invested heavily in developing a childcare infrastructure, which at the time (c.2000–2010) was essential to enabling mothers, in particular, to return to and remain in employment. Ireland can be justifiably proud of the physical infrastructure that has been established throughout the country.

## Developing the Educators

But quality ECEC is not just concerned with bricks and mortar: equal consideration must be given to those who work with young children in settings. What, then, of the ECEC educators? How has the ECEC profession been supported and developed over the years? It goes



Until December 2016 there was no mandatory training or qualification requirement for those working with children aged 0-6.

Regrettably, the notion prevailed that anyone can mind a child.

without saying that, while a parallel investment in staff training and development was required, little attention was in fact paid to this.

### Gaining qualifications

It is widely recognised that the early years, from birth to six years, are a critical period in a young child's development. It is recognised also that educator qualifications are a critical determinant of quality in early years settings. Remarkably, in spite of this, until December 2016 there was no mandatory training or qualification requirement for those working with children aged up to six years. Regrettably, the notion prevailed that anyone can mind a child, or that attendance at a one-off workshop or series of workshops was all that was required. Although the current level 5 mandatory training requirement is a welcome development, it falls far short of the training associated with being a professional, that is, advanced knowledge and rigorous training over a long period. Crucially, professionals hold a body of knowledge, skills, and expertise that is generally unknown to the lay public. They also enjoy the trust of the public that this knowledge will be exercised in a selfless and altruistic manner for the betterment of society.

### A Professional Association is the norm

One of the hallmarks of a profession is having a professional association which acts to protect the status and position of its members. Members tend to share a singularly focused interest, a common bond which sets aspirations for the occupation. But does this exist in the ECEC workforce, which includes employers and owners of small and large settings, community settings where employees are engaged under Community Employment Schemes, managers and employees with various levels of early years qualifications? Their interests are multi-faceted and do not always coincide.

### Challenges arising from lack of an Early Years Council

Contrast this with the State-regulated teaching profession, which is overseen by the Teaching Council. That council determines the entry criteria and licence to practise. There is no corresponding overarching body with decision-making power to determine the suitability of training, and fitness to practice, of ECEC educators in Ireland. When it comes to who can work with young children in ECEC settings, it seems that almost anybody can. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) maintains and regularly updates a recognised list of Early Year Qualifications. In 2017, this list indicates that more than 500 qualifications from across 37 countries are acceptable for working in the ECEC sector in Ireland. Is there another sector where this is the case? Of course there isn't. This is fraught with challenges relating to the following:

- a. Absence of assessment criteria to determine the suitability of these 500+ qualifications in the Irish context. This is especially important given the focus on implementing the *Síolta* and *Aistear* practice frameworks. How, then, can qualifications from outside Ireland take account of these critical initiatives?
- b. Absence of fitness-to-practice criteria which signify the validity and adequacy of the training. Indeed, fitness to practice is considered the

- ‘mark of a professional’ (Uhlmann Schuette and Yashar, 2010 , p. 468). It ensures a standard of practice, education and qualification.
- c. Lack of criteria for the hours of practice required for entry to the field. A recent study by PLÉ Ireland, based on fourteen higher education institutes (HEIs) offering full-time degree programmes in ECEC, found that practice in the field during the training period ranged from 540 to 1,000 hours. Findings from this study signify the need to establish a set of criteria for practicum across the HEIs in Ireland.

### Fragmentation at multiple levels

The sector is characterised by inordinate fragmentation at multiple levels, including qualifications, as outlined, but also in governance, inspection, and resourcing. It is governed by both the DCYA and the Department of Education and Skills (DES). According to Moloney (2016) , this dual governance approach perpetuates a traditional polarity of care and education in the sector, where those providing education and care for children under three years have been denigrated as ‘care’, resulting in a ‘dumbing down’ of their role vis-à-vis educational qualifications and a lack of investment in this aspect of the early years. Moloney also argues that educators working with older children in the ECCE scheme (aged 3+) have had their employability and skills status somewhat elevated through the payment of higher capitation to early years providers, based on their level 7 or higher qualifications.

### Disparate inspection systems

Adding to the fragmentation is the issue of inspection. Care and education quite rightly reside together in the core values of all educators in Ireland. But although the DES called for a unitary inspection system as far back as 1999, the opposite has happened. Today there are two disparate inspection systems, which further perpetuates the false perception of a care/education divide. Settings participating in the ECCE scheme are subject to DES Education-focused Inspections, while Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, continues to inspect services for younger children.

### Sector in crisis

Many working in the sector claim it is in crisis. Services report it is increasingly difficult to recruit and retain educators in a context where minimum wage prevails. The simple fact is, the sector is not given appropriate recognition or status, and educators – many qualified to honours degree level – are not appropriately remunerated for their contribution to the most formative years in a child’s life. The workforce is dispirited and disenfranchised.

### Functions of an Early Years Council

Could the establishment of an Early Years Council (EYC) address some of the fragmentation in the sector? Is the time right for such a council to be established? What contribution might an EYC make to addressing some of the issues arising from policy delivery fragmentation? At the outset, it is important to stress that an Early Years Council must be an autonomous single agency responsible for accrediting education and training providers, developing key standards for education and training programmes, and

When it comes to who can work with young children in ECEC settings, it seems that almost anybody can.

More than 500 qualifications from across 37 countries are acceptable for working in the early childhood sector in Ireland.

An Early Years Council must be an autonomous single agency responsible for accrediting education and training providers, developing key standards for education and training programmes, and handling workforce registration and fitness to practice.

handling workforce registration and fitness to practice. Its core functions would be to:

- a. **Promote the standing of the Early Years Professional.** This would include regulation to support minimum qualifications, promotion of a Code of Professional Responsibility, and promotion of best practice in education and care, innovative practice, and inspirational leadership in the sector.
- b. **Establish and maintain criteria for Early Years Professional registration.** This includes maintaining and improving standards of learning and care, through knowledge, skills and competence, accrediting programmes in education and care to be delivered by competent early years teachers, and developing agreed models of professional practice placement as part of pre-service training.
- c. **Establish and maintain a Code of Professional Practice and Responsibility for Early Years Teachers,** by establishing high standards of behaviour and professionalism, embedding the code in other public policies with education and care, and collaborating with other professional bodies to ensure shared values and codes
- d. **Establish and maintain a national register of Early Years Professionals.** This includes developing transparent criteria for registration, and establishing and maintaining 'fitness to practice' criteria, and procedures for removal from public register.

### Positive outcomes

The responsibilities outlined underscore the long-overdue development of the ECEC profession and could, over time, reduce fragmentation, redress the issue of 500+ recognised qualifications as an entry point to the field, promote a clearer identification of the workforce, and establish a more focused pathway towards enabling members of the profession to remain up to date with current and new information, practices and knowledge in order to maintain professionalism.

### Reducing bureaucracy

Naturally, the suggestion to establish an EYC will be met with some initial stakeholder resistance. People may see it as another layer of bureaucracy on top of a highly regulated sector. On closer examination, however, the purpose is to reduce bureaucracy. Remember, what is proposed is an independent, autonomous, statutory body with overarching responsibility for the sector into the future. Examples of such councils can be found in places like Australia and New Zealand, where they have been integrated with broader educational councils.

### Finding new ways forward

What is proposed here is an Early Years-specific council. This is an innovative approach that could be unique to Ireland. It is an opportunity for Ireland to lead the way, rather than follow what others are doing. It requires vision, commitment, and daring. Are we ready for the challenge? Do we want to promote and support the development of an early years profession in Ireland? If the answer to these questions is yes, then it is time to consider new and innovative ways of achieving these goals. It is time to consider establishing an Early Years Council.

# The proposed apprenticeship model

## Reflections on its introduction into the Early Childhood sector



**Mary Moloney**  
Mary Immaculate  
College Limerick



**Gerard O'Carroll**  
Institute of  
Technology, Tralee

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**W**hile the authors fully concede the value of the apprenticeship model per se, they argue strongly against its introduction into the Early Childhood sector. Their reasons are forceful and their conclusion is unequivocal – apprenticeships will not solve the supply problem in Early Childhood.

Has there ever been such focus on the Early Childhood Education and Care sector? The last two years alone have seen the introduction of the Early Years Services Regulations 2016, the expansion of the ECCE scheme, Early Years Education-focused Inspections, the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM), and the Diversity and Equality Guidelines and Charter. Change is ubiquitous, as initiative after initiative and scheme after scheme are introduced to an over-stretched, undervalued, underpaid and fragmented sector. Evidence is emerging of a sector in crisis, as providers articulate the challenge of attracting and retaining personnel who are no longer willing to work for €10.27 per hour.

The latest suggestion is to develop and introduce an apprenticeship model for the sector. The government claims that this will address existing and future skills needs, create an alternative source of varied skills supply for employers, and provide career options for young people. It is also thought that such a model will address the supply problem resulting from the increasing staff turnover which is all too common in the sector. However, it is difficult to see how introducing an apprenticeship in ECEC now can redress this issue or realise the ambitious government targets outlined here.

Let's be honest. An apprenticeship model is a tested and trusted mechanism of training or upskilling the early childhood education and workforce that is used effectively in many countries. Germany, for example, has a long tradition and proven track record in this area. So if it works for Germany, why not here? The fact is, in Germany the apprenticeship model is predicated on a well-developed, traditional system, input from stakeholders, and well-defined existing career pathways. This is not the case with the ECEC sector in Ireland.

As with all aspects of quality in ECEC, a competent system is a prerequisite for introducing an apprenticeship model. Unfortunately, Ireland does not have a competent system but one underscored by sectoral fragmentation, considerable variance in quality, and a dispirited and disenfranchised

Evidence is emerging of a sector in crisis.

A competent system is a prerequisite for introducing an apprenticeship model.

workforce. Not only that, but it seems almost anybody can work with young children in Ireland. Look no further than the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) (2017) recognised list of Early Year Qualifications, where over 500 qualifications from 37 countries are considered acceptable for working in the ECEC sector. Yet we are planning to introduce another qualification. This would not happen in any other sector. Clearly, Ireland is not ready for the requirements of an apprenticeship model, and the sector is not currently in a position to support such a model.

The apprenticeship model is packaged and promoted as ‘real life learning’, offering students a combination of ‘on-the-job’ and ‘classroom teaching’. The suggestion is that existing, pre-service training programmes are somehow lacking in this respect. The empirical evidence does not support this notion. The current model at all QQI levels incorporates elements of apprenticeship but with inbuilt quality control from educational institutions. In 2016, PLÉ undertook a study<sup>1</sup> across fourteen higher education institutions (HEIs) in Ireland offering full-time undergraduate degree-level programmes (QQI level 7 & 8) in Early Childhood Education and Care.

Interestingly, the findings indicate that across these various programmes, students undertake 540–1000 hours of supervised professional practice experience. This means they spend on average 40 per cent of their time engaged in professional practice placement – that is, working in settings and gaining practical experience. Opportunities already exist for upskilling via the Learner Fund at QQI levels 5 and 6, and PLÉ recommends that this be strengthened and extended to QQI levels 7 and 8 in the first instance. Blended learning opportunities can allow the existing workforce to upskill in a professional, reflective space appropriate to graduate education.

Task or performance achievement is a significant aspect of any apprenticeship model, so the question must be asked: Do QQI levels 5 and 6 currently not meet this approach? National and international research overwhelmingly points to the need for a more reflective, professionalised system rather than a focus on tasks alone. Some of the greatest advocates of quality in ECEC, such as Peter Moss and Helen Penn, argue that practitioners should be perceived as much more than task-oriented technicians. Moreover, the ‘Review of Occupational Role Profiles in Ireland in Early Childhood Education and Care’, which was presented to the DES and Early Years Advisory Group on 28 May 2017, advises that in terms of ‘the necessary systemic professionalisation of the sector, such initiatives [apprenticeship] should be approached with extreme caution’ (Urban, Robson, and Scacchi, 2017, p. 52). As noted by Murray (2017) and supported by the PLÉ research mentioned earlier, there is a shortage of excellent ECEC settings available to students while on training. This is especially problematic in an apprenticeship model, because while undertaking an apprenticeship, the ‘apprentice’ is supported, mentored, and coached by the ‘master’ while engaging in ‘on-the-job training’. This issue requires considerable attention before any attempt is made to introduce an apprenticeship model.

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1 Funded by the Teaching and Learning Forum.

Ireland is not ready for the requirements of an apprenticeship model in the Early Childhood sector.

A further consideration is the current climate of economic entrenchment and scarce resources. This calls into question the capacity of HEIs to adequately service the needs of an apprenticeship model in a new area such as ECCE. It would therefore be difficult to ensure quality.

We know of no empirical evidence of the demand from the sector for a new apprenticeship model. What the sector requires, and which is widely documented, is the strengthening of its professionalisation and identity. As indicated by Urban et al., an apprenticeship model, at this premature stage, could have the unintended outcome of weakening the emerging professional identity of the sector. The requirement of moving towards a graduate-led if not a graduate workforce is not immediately compatible with an apprenticeship model (CoRe, 2011).

As mentioned at the outset, the ECEC sector is beset by change, and many providers are struggling to embrace and comply with new and complex requirements from an increasing array of sources. Administrative and management survival is the order of the day in many services, and it is therefore unlikely to garner buy-in from the sector for introducing another initiative.

The concerns outlined in this article in no way take from the value of an apprenticeship model. Rather, they are intended to highlight the fact that the ECCE sector in Ireland is not presently in a position to manage and benefit from such a system. We believe that introducing an apprenticeship model now is premature and will not address the supply problem (deemed to be at the core of this initiative), which can only be addressed through better working conditions, better and fairer remuneration, clear career pathways, and professionalisation of the workforce.

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# Mentoring in Early Childhood Settings

A key support in achieving quality



**Dr Siobhán Keegan**

Coordinator, Better Start Quality Development Service

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**T**he mentoring role and process are addressed in this article along with the supportive, cooperative relationship between mentor and educator, ensuring opportunities for meaningful change and quality development.

Mentoring is internationally acknowledged as a key support in ensuring quality in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) settings. The OECD's (2012) Quality Toolbox for Early Childhood Education and Care Policy notes that mentoring is widely regarded as one of a number of mechanisms to ensure that educators remain aware of appropriate research, methods, and knowledge to inform their curriculum and practice. The Better Start Early Years Quality Development Service was established by Ireland's Department of Children and Youth Affairs in late 2014, to work alongside, and complement, existing national ECEC curricula and quality-inspection services.

Better Start adopts a voluntary, strengths-based, and whole-of-ECEC-setting approach to mentoring Irish ECEC services that apply for support to develop quality. It engages with an average of 250 ECEC services per year, and around 500 ECEC services to date have engaged with the support of a Better Start early years specialist for the purpose of quality development. The role of this specialist is to work directly with ECEC services to build their capacity to deliver high-quality, inclusive early education and care experiences for children and families. The early years specialist supports educators to engage in behaviours, practice, and thinking that lead to positive educational experiences for children, at the same time promoting in the educators a sense of personal accomplishment, competence, and empowerment to sustain and develop quality independently. This work is guided by the principles and standards of *Síolta: The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education* (CECDE, 2006) and *Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* (NCCA, 2009).

Better Start defines mentoring as:

*A supportive, relationship-based learning process between an early years educator and an early years specialist. This relationship is based on the values of respect, openness and a commitment of both parties to quality early childhood education and care experiences for children. The process is reflective, strengths-based and tailored to the individual context of each early years setting.*

Mentoring is a supportive, relationship-based learning process between an early years educator and an early years specialist.

The mentoring relationship is based on the values of respect, openness and a commitment of both parties to quality experiences for children.

## **Mentoring for quality**

Traditionally, mentoring in ECEC has been conceptualised in the context of the professional development of newly qualified ECEC teachers, as part of efforts to strengthen the pedagogical expertise of staff working in ECEC settings (European Commission, 2014). A move towards ‘mentoring for quality’ in education settings has begun (Achinstein & Athanases, 2006; ISSA, 2004; Peeters & Sharmahd, 2014 ; Shearsby, 2015). In the ECEC sector, mentoring for quality focuses on the quality development needs of individual ECEC services, staff, children and families. It offers opportunities for meaningful and lasting change in the ECEC sector, as well as a realisation of a vision of ECEC quality that is equipped to change in response to child, family, policy, and cultural needs.

Mentoring for ECEC quality helps to ensure that quality development can take place in diverse systems and settings. In Ireland and many other countries, quality development in ECEC has been associated with compliance with national curricula or frameworks, or with quality assessments or inspection processes. Such approaches, however, may not address the developmental needs of ECEC systems with widely varying degrees of compliance capacity between individual ECEC services (Urban et al., 2012). This may occur because the national ECEC system is in transition or still in development. It may also be relevant in the context of an ECEC system where individual services are challenged to achieve the desired standard due to inhibiting factors (such as funding constraints or availability of qualified staff) unrelated to the ECEC service’s commitment to quality development.

Mentoring programmes that focus on quality development in ECEC relate to five quality statements proposed in the EU Quality Framework for ECEC (European Commission, 2014). The statements cover key areas of ECEC quality (access; curriculum; evaluation/monitoring; and governance and funding). The statements on professionalisation of the ECEC workforce and the use of child-centred curricular approaches have particular relevance for the design and content of mentoring programmes focused on ECEC quality. The fact that mentoring is a flexible and open-ended process ensures that professional development can involve opportunities for observation, reflection, planning, teamwork, and cooperation as outlined in the proposed EU Quality Framework. When underpinned by a well-defined, child-centred curricular framework, mentoring for quality ensures that children and their development are kept at the centre, and that quality development can be structured around that same framework in a clear and consistent manner.

## **Research evidence to support mentoring for quality**

Research indicates that mentoring is an effective form of professional development in early childhood settings (Howe & Jacobs, 2014; Peterson et al., 2010). Historically, professional development initiatives for early childhood educators focused on transmitting knowledge through coursework and training. However, not all training courses have equal benefits for educators and children, because they differ in content, design, and delivery (Fukkink & Lont, 1997). Specifically, research indicates that the degree to which professional development is individualised, and emphasises the application of knowledge to practice, is a critical factor in

Better Start  
engages with an  
average of 250  
ECEC services  
per year.

ensuring effective and lasting professional development (Isner et al., 2011; Nolan et al., 2013; Peeters & Vandenbroeck, 2010; Vujicic, 2008). Change facilitated through mentoring is likely to be sustained, given that it takes account of individual circumstances and allows the change to be directed and realised by those responsible for maintaining it (Cameron, 2003; Chu, 2014; Ehrich et al., 2004; Knowles, 1970; Mezirow, 1985). A 'mentoring for quality' model is complementary to existing mentoring (pedagogical coaching) practice and compliance frameworks and is particularly suited to fostering the development of quality in ECEC services that are challenged to achieve social inclusion or in a context of resource gaps, as is the case in Ireland.

### Documenting the Better Start mentoring model

In 2017, work began to document a theoretical and implementation framework for the Better Start mentoring model. The objective is to allow for replication and evaluation of the model and sharing of the learning with national and international colleagues and academics. While articulating the Better Start approach to mentoring for quality development, it is also intended as a resource to help others interested in translating quality into practice. It is not intended as an out-of-the-box solution to ensuring quality, given that ECEC quality is complex and multi-faceted. It will add to the national and internal literature on ECEC mentoring and will have a particular focus on the Irish policy context. Regular updates on the work will be available from the Better Start website, and outputs (including the theoretical framework, implementation guide, and accompanying resources) will be disseminated free of charge to benefit national and international policy makers, researchers, educators, professionals, and parents with an interest in quality development in ECEC settings. For more information on Better Start, please go to: [www.betterstart.ie](http://www.betterstart.ie) or [www.facebook.com/BetterStartIreland](https://www.facebook.com/BetterStartIreland).

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## Celebrating Children's Stories

The *Wendy Lee Masterclass in Documentation* was presented by Early Childhood Ireland in partnership with DCU Institute of Education in September 2017. Participants gained an understanding of the philosophy and key elements of the Learning Story Approach.

Wendy Lee is Director at Educational Leadership Project, Waikato, New Zealand. She is a frequent keynote and conference speaker at international conferences around the world.

Pictured here are: Wendy Lee with Nickola Cullen, Manager at Beverton Preschool, Donabate, Co Dublin.



# Transition from preschool to primary school

## Optimising opportunities for mathematics learning



**Elizabeth Dunphy**

Associate Professor Early Childhood Education, Institute of Education, DCU

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**A**ssociate Professor Elizabeth Dunphy highlights issues for preschool and school-based early childhood education in Ireland that were raised in recent research in early childhood mathematics education, particularly during the period of transition to school.

The transition from preschool to school can happen at the beginning of the school year after the child's fourth birthday. But since the introduction of the *Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme* (ECCE) in 2010, and subsequent extensions in September 2016, children can avail of preschool education if they are aged over three years and under five and a half. The result is that many children who would traditionally have participated in early childhood education in schools now attend preschools. In 2015/2016 almost 74,000 children availed of the ECCE scheme. It provides three hours of preschool education to children, for 38 weeks of the year.

### The importance of transition

While no single definition of transition is likely to satisfy everyone, a consensus about what transition to school means is presented in the *Transition to School Position Statement* (Educational Transitions and Change Research Group, 2011). This brings together the views of an international group of researchers with collaborating policymakers and practitioners from preschools and schools. It characterises transition to school as a dynamic process of continuity and change as children move into their first year of school. The transition is understood to begin well before children start school, and to extend over time to the point where children and families feel a sense of belonging at school. Hopes and aspirations of adults during this period often focus on children's abilities to settle in to school, make friends, and meet the challenges of their new learning environment.

Starting school is a key step forward in children's learning journeys, and there is a growing body of research on how best to support children at the time of transition. Children's understandings of capability and maturity play an important role in transition. For example, they see starting school as about being big, and they focus in particular on literacy and numeracy skills (Dockett and Perry, 2007). Research indicates that parents can play a key role in what is termed *academic socialisation*, and that certain parental transition practices are positively



associated with achievement in reading and mathematics at the end of kindergarten (Puccioni, 2015).

### Supporting learning during transitions

The government too recognises the importance of the transition from preschool to school. ‘Literacy and numeracy for learning and life: The national strategy to improve literacy and numeracy among children and young people 2011–2020’ (DES, 2011) identified, as a key action to promote smooth transitions, the transferral of relevant information on the child’s learning and development from the home to the preschool, the primary school, and the post-primary school.

The effects of poor or misguided pedagogy in early childhood are likely to have detrimental effects on literacy and mathematical learning for many children.

The ‘Interim review on the national strategy for literacy and numeracy’ (DES, 2017) sets revised targets to 2020. It begins with the statement that ‘being literate and being numerate are key skills which enable our young people, as citizens of tomorrow, to learn to enjoy and confidently participate in the Arts, Sciences and every aspect of day-to-day life’ (p. 5). Pillar 2 of the Review targets the improvement of teachers’ and early childhood care and education practitioners’ professional practice in the areas of literacy and numeracy. Pillar 4 targets the improvement of the curriculum and the learning experience, and Pillar 6 targets the improvement of assessment and evaluation to support better learning in literacy and numeracy.

The actions outlined in Pillars 2, 4, and 6 of the Review are to be welcomed, and efforts here are timely given recent expansion of the preschool scheme. However, these actions will need to be appropriately focused, since the effects of poor or misguided pedagogy in early childhood are likely to have detrimental effects on literacy and mathematical learning for many children. The importance of a good start in these areas is well documented in the literature (Dickinson and Tabors, 2001; National Research Council (NRC), 2009).

### Supporting mathematics learning during transitions

The discussion which follows focuses on how high-quality mathematics learning and development might be secured in the year before primary school and the year after entry, that is, the transition period. I use the term *mathematics* as opposed to *numeracy* to describe the area under discussion. As Clements et al. observe (2013, p. 32), numeracy is not well defined but has extended over the years ‘beyond purely arithmetical skills to embrace not only other elementary mathematical skills but also affective characteristics such as attitudes and confidence’. While the development of numeracy is important, education and curricula at all levels, including preschool, should encompass a broader view of mathematics and of mathematics learning.

In 2009, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) introduced *Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*. Aistear defines numeracy as ‘developing an understanding of numbers and mathematical concepts’ (NCCA, 2009, p. 56). The framework draws attention to the development of children’s mathematical literacy as ‘children explore ways to represent their ideas, feelings, thoughts, objects and actions through symbols’ (p. 44). Goals are identified whereby young children, in partnership with adults, gradually learn to communicate using a range of symbolic means, including the mathematics sign system. While general



Research strongly supports a coherent curriculum for young children, rather than disconnected sets of activities.

Many early childhood settings do not provide adequate learning experiences in mathematics.

aspirations such as these are what framework documents offer, they can only be fully realised when educators are knowledgeable about how young children learn mathematics.

A focus on mathematics learning is timely for three reasons. First, research has resulted in great strides in supporting young children's literacy, but a similar effort is now required to raise awareness about the importance of paying far closer attention to research on early childhood mathematics than has been the case up to now (NRC, 2009). Second, this past year has seen the publication of the report *STEM Education in the Irish school system* (STEM Education Review Group, 2016), with consequent questions about the relationships between how children fare with mathematics in the school system, and the kinds of early learning experiences they have. Third, while the terms of reference for the recently established working group to develop a Draft Professional Award Standard and Guidelines for undergraduate programmes in ECEC acknowledges significant gaps in certain areas of study, there is no reference to numeracy or mathematics. This suggests there may be considerable scope for developments in thinking about the preparation of preschool educators.

### Pedagogy and curriculum

Over the last decade, research in early childhood mathematics education (ECME) is really beginning to have an impact on how countries provide for children aged 3–6 years (Perry, MacDonald, and Gervasoni, 2014). We know that opportunities for mathematics learning in early childhood settings must be prefaced on the mathematics that children have already acquired, through their play and their engagement in everyday experiences in the home and community (Dunphy, 2006). We know that noticing and extending children's freely chosen activities is essential if their mathematical potential is to be realised. We know too that research strongly supports a coherent curriculum for young children, rather than disconnected sets of activities (Dunphy, Dooley and Shiel, 2014). It supports a curriculum with a strong focus on engaging children in mathematical thinking processes, such as reasoning, explaining, and justifying (Dunphy, 2015).

### Shaping policy and practice in ECME

Research has provided clear pointers on the issues to be addressed in shaping high-quality mathematics education for young children in preschools and schools (NRC, 2009). Key findings include the following:

1. Most children can learn and become competent in mathematics, but this potential in the early years of school is often compromised by a lack of opportunities to learn mathematics either in early childhood settings or through everyday experiences in homes and communities. Economically disadvantaged children in particular need high-quality early mathematics experiences during the transition to school.
2. Young children can learn the ideas and skills that support later, more complex mathematics understanding. Two areas are particularly important for young children: (1) number, which includes whole number, operations, and relations; and (2) geometry, spatial thinking, and measurement.
3. Many early childhood settings do not provide adequate learning experiences in mathematics. There is a relative lack of high-quality

- mathematics pedagogy and a lack of attention to mathematics throughout the childhood education system, including standards, curriculum, pedagogy, and the preparation and training of educators.
4. Mathematics experiences and activities are often presented as part of an integrated or embedded curriculum, in which teaching mathematics is secondary to other learning goals. Emerging research indicates, however, that learning experiences in which mathematics is a supplementary activity rather than the primary focus are less effective in promoting children's mathematics learning than experiences in which mathematics is the primary goal.
  5. Extensive, high-quality early mathematics education for young children can serve as a sound foundation for later learning in mathematics and can help address long-term systematic inequities in educational outcomes.
  6. While research about how young children develop and learn key concepts in mathematics has clear implications for practice, the findings are not well known in the early education community.

In the terms of reference for the recently established working group to develop a Draft Professional Award Standard and Guidelines for undergraduate programmes in ECEC, there is no reference to numeracy or mathematics.

These findings, and corresponding recommendations, clearly have implications for preparing those who educate children in Ireland's state-supported preschool programmes and in the infant classes of primary schools, as well as implications for the curriculum implemented by those educators.

Until recently, the mathematics education of most four- and five-year-old children in Ireland has been addressed in line with many of the recommendations from the above report. Successive primary school curricula, since the foundation of the state education system, have recognised even the youngest children at school as mathematics learners. Cognitive science research has been used extensively in developing mathematics curricula for use with children aged 4–6 years in infant classes. But we also know that while teachers' understanding of optimal pedagogy for early mathematics is relatively well developed, structural conditions such as class size have been quite inadequate. This has resulted in considerable challenges, difficulties, and forced compromises for teachers in implementing the pedagogies that contribute to optimal learning (Dunphy, 2009). Better ratios exist in the preschool sector, but other serious issues arise, not least the current capacity of the workforce to deliver the kinds of experiences needed to secure optimal mathematics learning.

### Preparation for ECME

Against the background of a sector profile where only 15 per cent of the workforce is at graduate level (European Commission, 2016), the Early Years Sector Profile 2015–2016 (Pobal, 2016) provides an overview of over 4,300 facilities providing centre-based childcare across Ireland. Besides profiling qualification levels of survey participants, it sought childcare practitioners' perceptions of training programmes in higher or further education. Respondents were generally positive about how their qualification in early childhood care and education had prepared them for working in an early years setting, with nine out of ten indicating they felt well or very well prepared. On their level of preparedness 'to support the development of early mathematics skills and numeracy', 73 per cent of participants with further education felt adequately prepared, and 82 per cent of those with higher education felt well prepared.

Mathematical knowledge for teaching is as essential for preschool educators as it is for primary school teachers.

Mathematical knowledge for teaching can only be acquired through in-depth study of the wide range of issues pertaining to teaching and learning mathematics in early childhood.

While it is reassuring that these educators feel confident in supporting early mathematics learning, great care is needed in interpreting these figures. Information from surveys such as this must be viewed in the light of international research on the depth of knowledge needed to support mathematics learning and development of all children aged 3–6 years, as well as against the background of changes in the field of early mathematics.

Questions must be asked about how practitioners such as the survey participants above define mathematics skills and numeracy, how they understand mathematics education for young children, what mathematics they think young children can learn, what teaching and learning strategies they think are appropriate, how they view intentional teaching of early mathematics, and how they understand the role that play has in developing mathematical understanding.

Central to educators' capacities to develop young children's mathematical dispositions, knowledge, skills, and understandings are their conceptual frameworks of how children develop in this area of learning and how best to support it. This is often referred to as mathematical knowledge for teaching. This knowledge is as essential for preschool educators as it is for primary school teachers. We are fortunate in Ireland that all teachers in primary schools have had extensive opportunities to study these issues as they pertain to young children, in addition to the extensive study of mathematics teaching, learning, and curriculum for older children.

While such study is mandatory for teachers, and is constantly under scrutiny from the Teaching Council, this is not currently the case for preschool educators. They too must be given appropriate opportunities to develop their knowledge for teaching. The pre-service education of all those working in preschools is a crucial area to be addressed. Mathematical knowledge for teaching can only be acquired through in-depth study of the wide range of issues pertaining to teaching and learning mathematics in early childhood (Ginsburg, Lee, and Boyd, 2008). No amount of experience can compensate for this.

## Conclusion

The DES working group on Draft Professional Award Standards and Guidelines for undergraduate programmes in ECEC provides an opportunity to address the serious current deficit in ECEC undergraduate preparation for early childhood mathematics education. It is an opportunity to ensure that preschool mathematics education is of a standard to which all children are entitled, and that the preparation offered to preschool educators enables them to support optimal mathematics learning for children in their care.

At this key juncture in the development of the preschool service, the capacity and quality issues related to ECME must be addressed hand in hand. We know that professional preparation is a key concern if all children aged 3–6 years are to be appropriately engaged, challenged, and developed mathematically, regardless of educational context. No amount of talking-up of levels of qualifications in the preschool sector will change the reality that preschool educators have not yet been given appropriate opportunities to develop their understanding and pedagogy in the key area of ECME.

Preschool educators have not yet been given appropriate opportunities to develop their understanding and pedagogy in the key area of early childhood mathematics education.

In this article I have argued that it is critical to focus attention on children's mathematics learning and development during transition from preschool to primary school in Ireland. The issues involved are well signposted by research. They include perceptions of what early childhood mathematics education is and how best to do it. Arising from the public consultation on STEM education (STEM Education Review Group, 2016), it was noted that the transition to school is a key juncture at which children's engagement with, and motivation for, STEM can drop. Engagement and motivation are key to children's mathematics learning, and both are more likely to be secured when educators are knowledgeable about the mathematics learning that is appropriate in early childhood, and how it can be optimised.

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# Better Start Access and Inclusion Model

## One year on

Implementing the programme



**Dr Margaret Rogers**

National Manager, Better Start Access and Inclusion Model (AIM)

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**T**his article outlines the principles that underpin AIM and how they have guided its implementation to date, the implementation structures developed, and what has been achieved in AIM's first year, particularly in relation to targeted supports – levels 4–7 of the model.

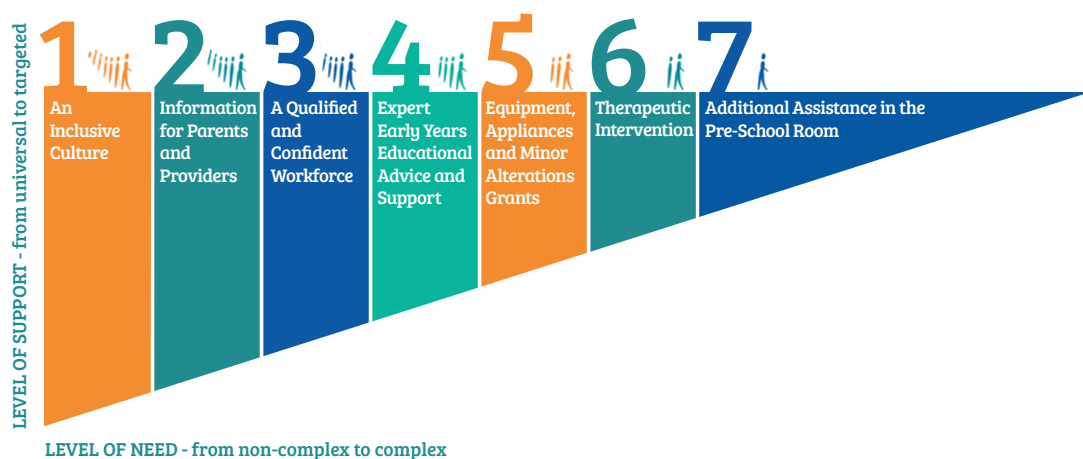
### Introduction

The Better Start Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) is an ambitious cross-government policy initiative, led by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA), to ensure that children with disabilities have equal access to the state-funded preschool Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme. Dr Katherine Zappone TD launched the programme in June 2016, and initial implementation commenced nationally over the following year. Full implementation will be achieved over the next three years through the collaborative efforts of all the key stakeholders. AIM is a child-centred model involving seven levels of progressive support, moving from the universal to the targeted, based on the abilities and needs of the child and the preschool setting.

Tailored, practical supports based on need are offered to all children who apply; a medical diagnosis is not required. The goal is to empower service providers to deliver an inclusive preschool experience, ensuring that every child can participate fully in the universal state-funded ECCE programme and reap the benefits of quality early years care and education. ECCE caters for children aged three to five and a half years, which means children can participate in preschool for up to two years before commencing primary school.

Because inclusion takes many different forms, and implementation is influenced by a wide variety of factors, there is significant learning to be gained from the operation of this new model at a national level. This article outlines the principles that underpin AIM and how they have guided its implementation to date, the implementation structures developed, and what has been achieved in AIM's first year, particularly in relation to targeted supports – levels 4–7 of the model.

## A Model to Support Access to the ECCE Programme for Children with a Disability



AIM is an initiative to ensure that children with disabilities have equal access to the state-funded preschool Early Childhood Care and Education programme.

### Why inclusion?

Inclusion has been defined as ‘the unified drive towards maximal participation in and minimal exclusion from early years settings, from schools and from society’ (Nutbrown and Clough, 2006, p. 8). *Aistear*, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework, notes that promoting equality is about creating a fairer society in which everyone can participate equally, with the opportunity to fulfil their potential (NCCA, 2009). Inclusion in early years programmes recognises that children with disabilities and their families are full members of their community, with equal rights to opportunities for learning, development, and belonging on a par with all children.

Participation in inclusive, high-quality early childhood settings enhances all children’s early learning experiences (DCYA, 2016, p. 4). In their early years, children are forming their identities and building social skills. They are becoming aware of differences, such as in gender, ethnicity, and ability, and of how they feel about those differences (Derman-Sparkes, 1989). In essence, they are learning to live as part of a diverse social group. Best practice in early years education is rooted in a commitment to recognise and work with children’s individual strengths, needs, and interests (NAEYC, 1996) and a commitment to equity which respects all children’s capacities to succeed (AGDEEW, 2009).

### AIM principles

AIM is underpinned by a set of principles that are informed by national and international research. These principles guide the operation of the model:





These principles are elaborated on in the interdepartmental group report (DCYA, 2015), as follows:

<b>Consistent:</b>	The provision of ECCE supports and services for children with a disability should be consistent across the country.
<b>Efficient and effective:</b>	Implementation, monitoring, and accountability mechanisms and lines of responsibility for the delivery of ECCE supports and services for children with a disability should be in place to drive timely and effective implementation.
<b>Equitable:</b>	All children should have equality of opportunity to access and participate in the ECCE programme.
<b>Evidence-informed:</b>	ECCE supports and services for children with a disability should be evidence-informed.
<b>High-quality:</b>	ECCE supports and services for children with a disability should be of high quality.

<b>Inclusive:</b>	Provision of the ECCE programme for children with a disability should be based on inclusion within mainstream preschool settings (apart from exceptional situations where specialised provision is valid for unavoidable reasons).
<b>Integrated:</b>	ECCE supports and services for children with a disability should be designed and delivered in partnership with all stakeholders, including families and preschool providers.
<b>Needs-driven:</b>	The provision of ECCE supports and services for children with a disability should be needs-driven.

### Translating principles to practice

The principles informed the development of systems, tools, and processes throughout the development and implementation of level 4–7 supports.

Tailored, practical supports based on need are offered to all children who apply; a medical diagnosis is not required.

Access to supports is equitable and nationally consistent, dependent neither on location nor on diagnosis. A single online application process was developed through the Pobal Programmes Implementation Platform (PIP), the system used by all ECCE settings to register their services. This facilitates direct and efficient access. As AIM is inherently strengths-based, the Access and Inclusion Profile<sup>1</sup> was developed to identify the abilities and support needs of children and the capacities of ECCE settings to meet their needs. This tool forms the basis of the application and appraisal process for targeted AIM supports. It looks at the child's abilities in the preschool setting and does not require a formal diagnosis – although health reports, where available, can be attached to the profile.

Early Years Specialists (n = 60) who implement level 4 – expert early years educational advice and support – are highly qualified and experienced early years professionals. They have undergone rigorous recruitment, selection, induction, and skills training to provide advice, mentoring, and support based on evidenced best practice in early childhood inclusion to ensure consistency and fidelity to the model's principles.

AIM is an integrated model, working in partnership with parents, ECCE providers, HSE services, and other professionals to ensure that children's access to ECCE is supported. Professional collaboration with colleagues in many agencies, both statutory and voluntary, is a key feature of the model, working across a range of disciplines in health and education. Access to critical therapeutic supports is facilitated through an interagency protocol, which allows Early Years Specialists to refer directly to HSE Children's Disability Network teams on a needs basis without the need for a medical referral or diagnosis.

<sup>1</sup> See: <http://aim.gov.ie/key-documents-and-resources/>.

## Translating research to evidence-based practice – the role of implementation science

Evidence-based practice (EBP) means applying the best available research evidence in the design and delivery of services in health or education to enhance outcomes for children, families, and communities. It refers to skills, techniques, and strategies used by practitioners when interacting with programme participants.<sup>2</sup> EBP has its roots in the medical field but has been increasingly adopted in implementing government policy and promoted in disciplines such as psychology and education to build quality and accountability (Metz, Espiritu, and Moore, 2007).

The challenge of translating evidence-based research into practice in real-world settings has been recognised across a wide range of human services, including early childhood education and care (Halle, Metz et al. 2013). Substantial evidence points to the need for more effective ways to ensure that programmes are implemented to best effect (Fixsen and Blase 2009).

Access to supports is equitable and nationally consistent, dependent neither on location nor on diagnosis.

Implementation science tells us that implementation of research evidence in practice happens in four distinct stages which are broadly common to many implementation frameworks (Fixsen et al., 2005). Aarons and colleagues' (2011) conceptual model of implementation in public-service sectors proposed four implementation phases: exploration, adoption/preparation, implementation, and sustainment. In addition, three core elements have been identified as essential to effective implementation:

1. Building and using implementation teams to actively lead implementation efforts.
2. Using data and feedback loops to drive decision-making and promote continuous improvement.
3. Developing a sustainable implementation infrastructure that includes general capacity and innovation-specific capacity.

Building an implementation team or teams who oversee and manage the process at various levels (oversight and governance, project management) is a crucial step. Essential characteristics of an implementation team include:

- » Knowledge and understanding of the selected programme or innovation, including the linkage of components to outcomes
- » Knowledge of implementation science and best practices for implementation
- » Applied experience in using data for programme improvement.

AIM's implementation teams consist of the following:

A cross-sectoral implementation group (CSIG) is chaired by DCYA and comprises representatives of the key stakeholders. It has an oversight function and directs the activity of the project team.

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2 National Implementation Research Network's Glossary of Terms, available online at: [http://nirn.fmhi.usf.edu/implementation/10\\_glossary.cfm](http://nirn.fmhi.usf.edu/implementation/10_glossary.cfm).

The project team is responsible for project management and driving the implementation of AIM on a cross-sectoral basis, ensuring that all delivery partners fulfil their commitments. It comprises stakeholder representatives at operational level, who are responsible for delivering on the implementation.

A number of working groups have developed and delivered on actions related to each of the model levels.

Data, consultation, and feedback loops from all stakeholders were used extensively in developing the model. Data on the prevalence of disability in young children was drawn from HSE and CSO population analysis. A knowledge management framework was created to monitor and analyse the implementation of the model as it progressed. Extensive consultation with parents, ECCE providers, and health and early years education professionals was carried out and continues through the implementation teams outlined above.

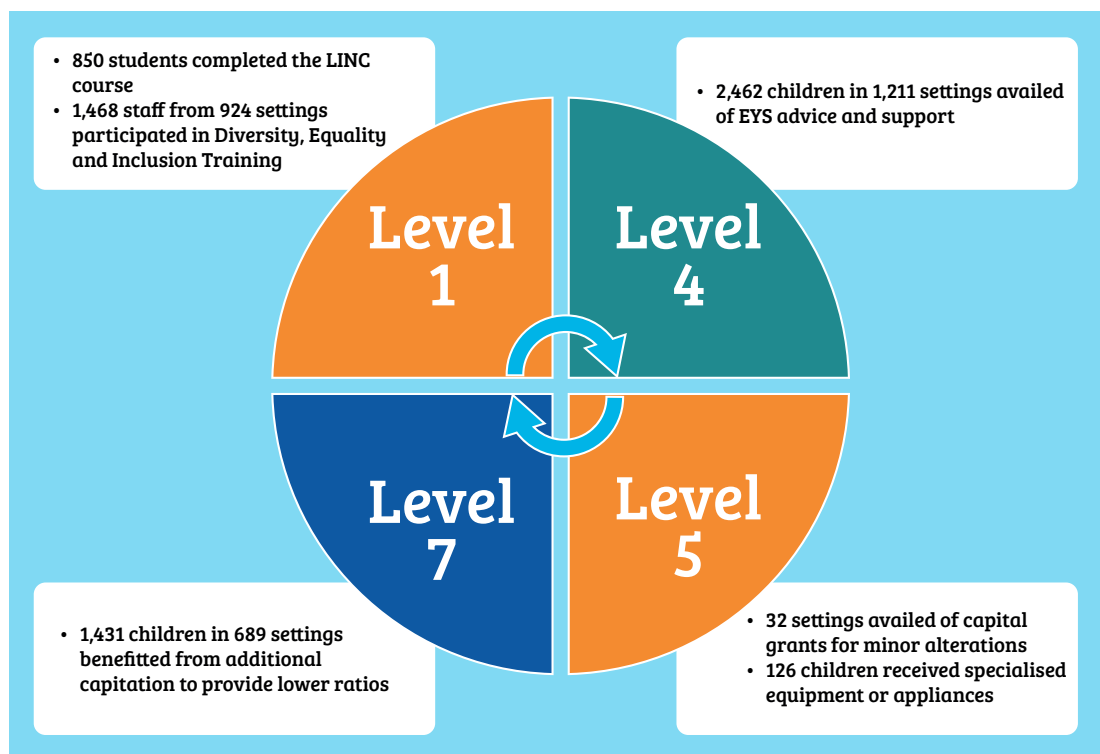
AIM is an integrated model, working in partnership with parents, ECCE providers, HSE services, and other professionals.

A sustainable implementation infrastructure, including personnel, technology, extended team locations, and expanded specialist, management and administrative capacity was developed by Pobal and other partners to ensure implementation of the model. Sixty early years specialists were employed, working nationally from eight locations, to provide prompt and responsive support to ECCE settings. Fifty additional posts were funded in the HSE to ensure that children's disability teams could provide advice or intervention critical to children's participation. Specific innovative processes were created to facilitate the model, such as the online access and inclusion profile.

### Looking at the numbers

Budget 2016 extended ECCE entitlement to two years by broadening the eligible age range of 3.2–4.7 years to 3–5.5 years, essentially expanding the provision from 65,000 to 120,000+ children by June 2017. Research undertaken to inform the development of AIM revealed that 3–5 per cent of children aged 3–5 years have a disability, and about one third of those have complex needs, requiring additional support (DCYA, 2015). It was estimated that 1–1.5 per cent of the ECCE population of 120,717 (June 2017) would require additional assistance in the preschool setting.

In terms of delivery of AIM supports in 2016/17, key elements of levels 1, 4, 5, and 7 are outlined in the diagram below. In addition to those supports, under level 2, a dedicated website ([www.aim.gov.ie](http://www.aim.gov.ie)) was created as well as leaflets, posters, and a nationwide 'roadshow' of presentations to providers, parents, and other professionals facilitated by HSE staff, city and county childcare committees, and Better Start teams. Additional training (level 3) is being developed and will be rolled out in 2017/18. For the 2016/17 preschool year, 2,555 level 4 applications were received from 1,211 services. Fifty-seven AIM referrals (level 6) were made to HSE teams (the vast majority of children with complex needs are already known to the HSE and in receipt of HSE supports, and therefore did not require an AIM referral) and the HSE were consulted on an additional 152 children. It should be noted that a HSE or visiting teacher recommendation is required for all level 5 grants.



#### AIM Supports 2016/17

### Learning and looking forward to the future

Much has been learned in the first year of implementation, and there is much more to learn. Throughout year 1, applications came in relatively consistent numbers from month to month, rather than (as anticipated) in peaks and valleys corresponding to intake periods. This can probably be attributed to the newness of the model and gradual growing awareness over the first year. Already in 2017/18 a different pattern is emerging. Parents and providers welcomed the model and the additional supports it provided to children.

The AIM programme, even in its early days of implementation, has contributed significantly to awareness and a growing knowledge and appreciation of the value of inclusive practice in early years programmes. Already more than 2000 children and families in Ireland have benefitted, and more than 1200 ECCE services have improved their capacity to be fully inclusive through universal and targeted supports. ECCE providers have demonstrated their openness, willingness, and commitment to offer early years programmes to all children, regardless of ability, knowing that supports are available, where necessary, to assist them to do so.

There were inevitable and understandable frustrations and challenges as new systems were established and brought on line. For the vast majority of cases, however, the response was within the committed timeframe. Nationally, delivery of health and disability support systems for children is mixed and uneven: some areas have excellent service offerings while

others are poorly served. This presents challenges primarily to families but also affects interdisciplinary and interagency working and therefore consistency of delivery to children.

On a positive note, significant improvements are being delivered through the HSE Progressing Disability Service for Children and Young People programme.<sup>1</sup> Securing appropriate, accessible, and integrated supports for children with medically complex conditions remains a challenge. Despite these real challenges, the national implementation of AIM is helping to alleviate gaps and align supports, thus creating more equitable and consistent access to ECCE programmes for children and families as intended.

AIM is an integrated model, working in partnership with parents, ECCE providers, HSE services, and other professionals.

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs is committed to fully reviewing and evaluating the impact of AIM at the end of the first three years of implementation. A formative review of the first year of operation has been commissioned which will seek the views of parents, ECCE providers, and stakeholder organisations. Its findings will inform ongoing implementation. Much has been achieved and good progress has been made in the first year of operation. Feedback from preschool staff, parents, and professionals indicates that children, families, and preschool providers all benefit from inclusive practice in many ways:

*[I felt] pride in seeing the child's achievements scaffolded by the supports we put in place. (Preschool staff member)*

*Increased confidence in our ability to include children with additionally complex needs. (Preschool manger)*

*A sense of relief at not burdening the service with additional strategies and recommendations. With level 7 in place, I could engage fully with the pre-school around goals and actions. (Parent)*

Understanding the benefits, challenges, and best practices of promoting inclusion in early years is still emerging, nationally and internationally. Questions about meaningful inclusion and its implications for policy, practice, and potential outcomes for children and families remain to be explored. However, the AIM programme has demonstrated the benefits and effectiveness that cross-government and interagency working can achieve in a relatively short time. As we move forward with the model implementation, we are informed by children's and families' experience, by ECCE providers, and by the many stakeholders who have contributed to the success of AIM to date.

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### DCU Lego Education Innovation Studio

Dr. Elizabeth Dunphy and Dr. Maurice O'Reilly, DCU Institute of Education, enjoy a round of Lego at the interactive Lego Learning Hub at DCU. The hub enables student teachers and Irish schools to develop innovative and creative approaches to teaching STEM subjects in the classroom.



# Promoting Active Citizenship in Early Childhood

## The changing discourse on children's citizenship



**Elaine Hynes**

Training and Practice Manager,  
Early Childhood Ireland

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**E**laine Hynes discusses modern interpretations of children's citizenship which emphasise children's rights and active participation in the present rather than the more traditional aspiration of developing active citizens for the future. 'An entitlement to recognition, respect and participation' is the way that Aistear, the early childhood curriculum framework, defines citizenship for children.

### The discourse of children's citizenship

Historically, discourses on children's citizenship have tended to focus on future participation and developing active citizens who would contribute to society in a meaningful and productive way. However, changing discourses on early childhood put children's rights and active participation at the heart of early-years policy development. This is reflected in Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (NCCA, 2009) and Sólta, the National Quality Framework (CECDE, 2006), both of which identify the rights of the child as a key underpinning principle. Citizenship for children is defined as 'an entitlement to recognition, respect and participation' (Willow et al., 2004).

Despite this, children's rights and citizenship are sometimes dismissed as lofty concepts, heavy with rhetoric and ideology and subsequently disconnected from practice. However, in Ireland in 2017, the evidence from both research and practice suggests that Early Childhood Education and Care settings are uniquely positioned to support the shift from rhetoric to reality and to ensure that children's rights are deeply embedded in practice with our youngest citizens.

Our view of children significantly affects how we engage with them on a daily basis. This is clearly borne out in our national practice frameworks, which describe children as competent and capable rights-bearing citizens. This represents a significant shift away from the view of children as dependent and needy. Children are seen not as preparing to be active citizens in the future but as being active citizens in the present. Children by their nature are active, and those working alongside them will recognise they are rarely passive in their approach to learning. However, while a rights-based approach to working alongside children is strongly underpinned by this view, it takes time to make this significant shift in thinking about how children learn and develop.

### Children's citizenship – from rhetoric to reality

The relational nature of early childhood settings make them uniquely positioned to develop children's citizenship.

Children are seen not as preparing to be active citizens in the future but as being active citizens in the present.

For many children, the Early Childhood Education and Care setting is their first experience with the world beyond immediate family. It is a place where they learn to be with others and that shapes their identity as an individual, as part of a family and peer group, and as a member of wider society. Early childhood settings play a significant role in our communities, in caring for and educating young children, while acting as a family support, embedded in a network of relationships and connections. The relational nature of early childhood settings makes them uniquely positioned to develop children's citizenship. These settings are not sites of technical practice, but dynamic, enabling, learning spaces, where children and families bring together the richness of cultural and social diversity. It is in this space that children learn about themselves and the world around them.

Right from the start, early childhood settings work to create a culture of democracy and respect. Early years educators constantly look for ways to give voice to our youngest citizens, by celebrating the uniqueness of each child, valuing their families, recognising and respecting children's likes and dislikes, and engaging them in warm, responsive interactions that show them they are important. In this way, children learn how to be with others in a respectful and compassionate way, and to make strong and meaningful connections with the people and places around them. Educators are sensitive to the needs of each child, recognising when they want to be alone and when they need support and friendship. They provide reassurance or comfort when needed. They invite children's opinions, listen intently, and build a curriculum based on their knowledge, interests, and experience of the world, then celebrate and make visible their learning. Early years settings provide a safe and welcoming space for children to take risks, to explore and learn about the world, and to learn how to be with others and belong to a family, a community, and a society.

Early years settings that are committed to promoting active citizenship give children opportunities to be visible in their community, to be independent, and to make choices in ways that are democratic and respectful. While such democratic models are celebrated in Germany, Sweden, and Norway, there are also many home grown Irish models which demonstrate how early childhood settings promote and support active citizenship. These include wonderful, innovative examples of partnerships with parents and families, community fundraising events, inclusive practice, and democratic approaches to children's participation.

### **Towards active citizenship**

Research tells us that actively challenging discrimination and developing empathy are a key role for early years settings in our increasingly diverse society (Derman-Sparks and Edwards, 2010). This important role has been supported by recent policy initiatives which recognise that early childhood is the place to start addressing inequality, bias, and discrimination. In 2016, the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) was introduced by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) to ensure that children can participate in Early Childhood Education and Care, in an environment that is inclusive and responsive to each child's needs.

As part of this initiative, training has been made available for early childhood settings on the Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Guidelines.

Educators invite children's opinions, listen intently, and build a curriculum based on their knowledge, interests, and experience of the world.

The LINC (Leadership for Inclusion) programme was also introduced in 2016 to train early years educators to upskill as inclusion co-ordinators by completing a HETAC Level 6 Special Purpose Award. More than 900 early years educators graduated from the LINC programme in 2017. These important initiatives continued to gain momentum throughout the year and are set to play a significant role in changing the landscape of early childhood in terms of participation, inclusion, and citizenship.

Early childhood settings clearly play a significant role in promoting active citizenship and making Ireland an inclusive place for our youngest citizens to grow up and live. While many early years educators will aspire to adopting this approach, there is little doubt that training, resources, and opportunities for shared conversations are integral to working in this way. Adopting this approach also requires educators to engage in ongoing reflection, which involves time and space to share ideas, question their practice, and plan for the future. The question arises of how we, as a society, can support ECEC settings in this important work. How can we bring children's participation more to the fore in society and ensure that children's views are reflected in the development of policies that affect them and their families? These questions are significant for all parents, educators, citizens, and policy makers if we are to continue to make progress and support the shift from rhetoric to reality.

## Conclusion

Early years settings play a key role in promoting active citizenship through daily practices which contribute to children's understanding of their world and the people in it. These are the practices that are to be celebrated, that build children's active citizenship from the beginning, and that continue to shape their lives into the future. There is much to suggest that raising the profile of early years settings as key to children's active citizenship, and investing in them accordingly, will benefit society well into the future.

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# The National *Síolta* Aistear Initiative



**Joanne Roe**  
National *Síolta*  
Coordinator



**Sandra O'Neill**  
National Aistear  
Coordinator

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**T**he authors provide information on the recently established National *Síolta* Aistear Initiative (NSAI), an exciting development for the Early Years sector. The NSAI aims to provide a coordinated approach to the implementation and development of *Síolta* and Aistear, the national quality and curriculum frameworks.

## Introduction

The National *Síolta* Aistear Initiative (NSAI) was established in 2016 to support the national co-ordinated roll-out of *Síolta*, The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education (Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education [CECDE], 2006) and *Aistear*: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment [NCCA], 2009). The initiative is being funded by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) and is being developed in collaboration between the Early Years Education Policy Unit (EYEPU) in the Department of Education and Skills (DES) and the NCCA.

## Rationale

*Síolta* was developed by the CECDE to provide a national quality framework for all types of early childhood settings for children from birth to six years. The initial implementation of the *Síolta* Quality Assurance Programme (QAP) was managed by the EYEPU. Working with the National Voluntary Childcare Organisations (NVCOs) and some of the Prevention and Early Intervention Programmes (now part of the Area-Based Childhood [ABC] Poverty Initiative), the EYEPU coordinated the pilot implementation of the *Síolta* QAP between 2009 and 2013 and provided training and continuing professional development opportunities for *Síolta* mentors<sup>1</sup> who supported settings through the pilot. Due to resource constraints, however, implementation of *Síolta* and the QAP was limited.

*Aistear* is the curriculum framework for children from birth to six years in Ireland. It supports adults to develop and enrich learning experiences for all young children. While its publication was widely welcomed, at that time limited funding was provided for its implementation. Since its publication, a number of developments have taken place:

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<sup>1</sup> Settings taking part in the QAP are supported by a mentor. During the *Síolta* pilot, these mentors (approx. 20) took on this work in addition to mentoring/support roles in the NVCOs and prevention and early intervention and ABC programmes. Since 2016, this number has been expanded to include mentors from City and County Childcare Committees, and the title has changed to *Síolta* Aistear mentor to signify their wider remit.

*Aistear* in Action (2011–2013): a collaborative project between the NCCA and Early Childhood Ireland. The initiative used on-site mentoring, cluster groups, and workshops to support curriculum development in several rural preschools. Samples of work created during the initiative were made available to the public to support other settings in using *Aistear*.

*Aistear Síolta* Practice Guide (2015–present): Available at [www.aistearsiolta.ie](http://www.aistearsiolta.ie), the Practice Guide supports practitioners to use *Aistear* and *Síolta* together to develop the quality of their curriculum and thereby better support children’s learning and development. The website provides tools, templates, and videos to enable practitioners to reflect on and improve their practice.

Whilst *Síolta* and *Aistear*’s principles have been linked to government funding schemes such as the free preschool year, the absence of a comprehensive and sustainable national implementation plan means the frameworks have been used inconsistently in settings.

### National co-ordinators and *Síolta Aistear* mentors

In September 2016, two co-ordinators were appointed to ensure the effective roll-out of the NSAI: a *Síolta* co-ordinator working in the EYEPU and an *Aistear* co-ordinator in the NCCA. The coordinators have complementary but distinct roles. Their key responsibilities are outlined in Figure 1 below.

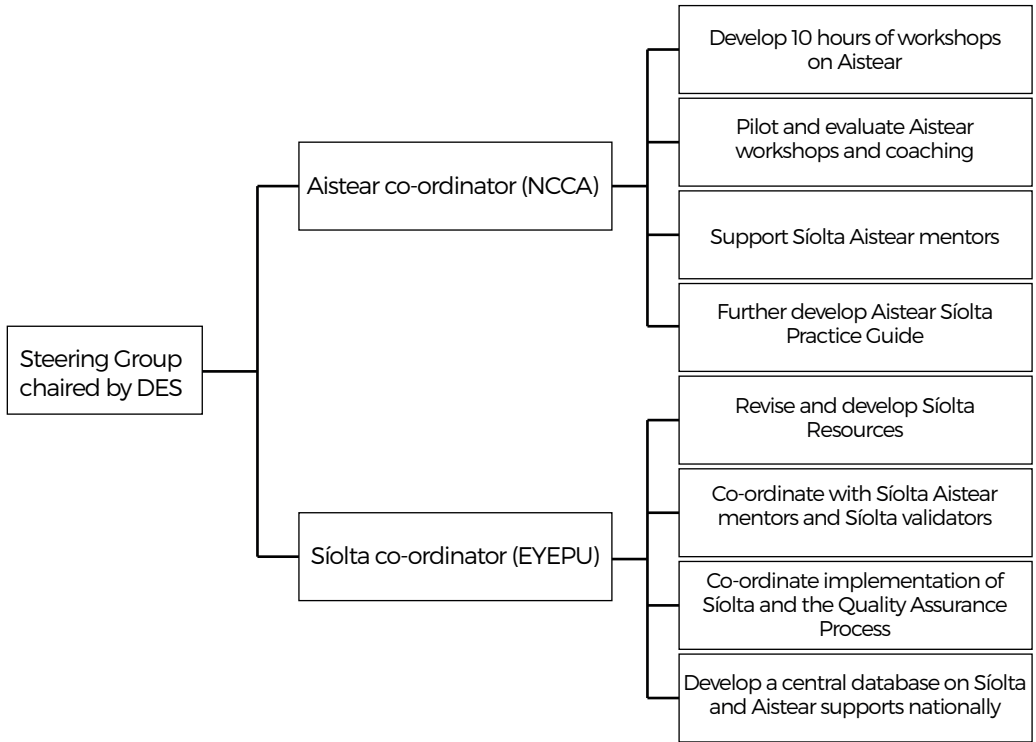


Figure 1: Structure of the National *Síolta Aistear* Initiative



Aistear is the curriculum framework for children from birth to six years in Ireland

*Síolta* provides a national quality framework for all types of early childhood settings.

In addition to the original cohort of *Síolta* mentors,<sup>1</sup> a number of *Síolta Aistear* mentors, nominated by City and County Childcare Committees (CCCs), NVCs, and ABC projects, have been working with the co-ordinators since 2016. *Síolta Aistear* mentors facilitate workshops; provide information, mentoring, and coaching for both frameworks; and make connections across the frameworks visible to the practitioners with whom they work. This group was brought together for four days of mentoring training by the EYEP in 2016, and participates in regular national and regional CPD.

### The purpose and detail of the initiative

The purpose of the NSAI is to co-ordinate the implementation of the two national frameworks. Central to this is the provision of clear messaging, centrally devised materials, and defined support structures to ensure that practitioners across the country have access to consistent information and support.

The co-ordinators work closely together on resource development, communication with the sector, *Síolta Aistear* mentor professional development, and the establishment of national and regional structures to support the initiative. For clarity in this document, their actions undertaken as part of the NSAI are described in separate strands below.

### *Síolta* strand

The *Síolta* co-ordinator is responsible for developing and implementing the *Síolta* framework, including the QAP. Key areas of responsibility include:

**Revise and develop resources:** The original *Síolta* user manuals were recently revised and combined into one user manual applicable to all types of early years settings.<sup>2</sup> New *Síolta* resources include four *Síolta* awareness-raising workshops, resources to support settings and mentors engaged in the *Síolta* QAP, and revised *Síolta* validation materials.

**Co-ordinate and support *Síolta Aistear* mentors and *Síolta* validators:** A priority in the *Síolta* strand was to increase the number of *Síolta Aistear* mentors available to support settings. Since the NSAI was established, an additional 56 *Síolta Aistear* mentors have been trained by the EYEP, increasing the number to 68. *Síolta* validators who externally assess settings that have completed the QAP are also given ongoing support, CPD, and training relevant to their role.

**Co-ordinate the implementation of *Síolta* and the QAP:** The *Síolta* co-ordinator oversees the implementation of *Síolta* and the QAP primarily through the mentors' work. Mentors facilitate *Síolta* introductory and awareness-raising workshops, provide tailored mentoring supports on a cluster or individual setting basis, and support engagement in the *Síolta* QAP. The QAP provides structured engagement

1 To be considered for the role, mentors had to have at least a level 8 qualification relevant to Early Childhood Education, plus relevant practice or mentoring experience.

2 Manuals can be ordered online by emailing [publications@opw.ie](mailto:publications@opw.ie), or by phoning the Government Publications office on 01 647 6834. Manuals cost €5, and postage is free.

The purpose of the National *Síolta Aistear* Initiative (NSAI) is to co-ordinate the implementation of the two national frameworks.

for early childhood settings that seek external assessment of their setting's practice against the *Síolta* standards of quality. Settings are supported by a *Síolta Aistear* mentor through a ten-step process to enhance quality and create a portfolio of evidence which is externally validated by *Síolta* validators. To date, 121 settings have completed the QAP.

**Develop a central database:** NSAI partner organisations submit quarterly progress reports on activity related to *Síolta* and *Aistear*. A central information database has been developed to gather information on *Síolta* and *Aistear* supports being provided nationally.

### ***Aistear* strand**

The *Aistear* co-ordinator is responsible for developing and implementing *Aistear*. Key areas in the *Aistear* strand include:

**Develop 10 hours of workshops on *Aistear*:** The NCCA was tasked with developing, piloting, and evaluating an *Aistear* CPD initiative (see the DES Action Plan for Education 2016–2019 for further details). The audience is primarily early childhood practitioners in sessional, and full- and part-time day-care settings. Five 2-hour workshops were developed using resources from the *Aistear Síolta* Practice Guide. Between workshops, the *Síolta Aistear* mentors visit each participant for an hour to support the development of emerging skills and apply learning from the workshops in their own room or setting.

Still in its infancy, the NSAI has achieved a great deal in a short time.

**Pilot and evaluate *Aistear* workshops and coaching:** In December 2016, 27 *Síolta Aistear* mentors were identified to pilot the *Aistear* workshops and coaching materials across the country. In early 2017, the NCCA facilitated three days of seminars for these mentors to further their understanding of the Practice Guide's key messages and structure. Mentors worked with 14 participants each (401 practitioners from 162 settings in total) from February to June 2017. The pilot is currently being evaluated, and a report will be published in autumn 2017.

**Support *Síolta Aistear* mentors:** *Síolta Aistear* mentors are supported in their role by the provision of a private online platform called NING, overseen by the NCCA. NING hosts *Aistear* workshops and coaching pilot resources, and provides an online forum for mentors.

**Further develop the *Aistear Síolta* Practice Guide:** The NCCA also continues to update and improve the Practice Guide. New tip sheets, videos, and updated templates and overviews have been added since the NSAI was established. Improvements to the website's ease of use and navigation are expected in autumn 2017.

## Conclusion

The NSAI is the first co-ordinated national implementation plan for *Síolta* and *Aistear*. Still in its infancy, the NSAI has achieved a great deal in a short time. Priorities for the next year include:

- » Increasing connections with other organisations providing supports related to *Síolta* and *Aistear* to support consistency and co-ordination at national and local level.
- » Further developing materials and resources which support implementation of *Síolta* and *Aistear*.
- » Reviewing the functionality of [www.aistearsiolta.ie](http://www.aistearsiolta.ie).
- » Developing resources to inform parents about *Síolta* and *Aistear*.

The national co-ordinators will continue to work together, under the direction of the NSAI steering committee, to achieve these goals.

## Rediscovering Empathy

The UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre biennial conference, 'Rediscovering Empathy', took place in June 2017 at the Institute for Lifecourse and Society, NUI Galway. The perceived decline in empathy, care and social solidarity across the globe is a cause for concern. Research has shown that empathy in individuals is essential to healthy social and emotional functioning and contributes to the enrichment of civic society.



Keynote speakers at the conference pictured here are:

(L-R Front Row) Ms Ciara Beth Ní Ghríofa, 17 year old youth researcher at the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre; Prof Kathleen Lynch, Professor and Chair of Equality Studies at University College Dublin; Dr Bernadine Brady, Lecturer at the School of Political Science & Sociology, NUI Galway; Ms Aisling Dunphy; Prof Pat Dolan, director of the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre at NUI Galway.

(L-R Back Row) Prof David Howe, Emeritus Professor of Social Work, University of East Anglia, Norwich, United Kingdom; Dr Jean Clinton, Clinical Professor, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioural Neurosciences, McMaster University, Canada; Prof Mark Brennan, UNESCO Chair in Community, Leadership, and Youth Development, Pennsylvania State University, USA; Ms Mary Gordon, Founder & President, Roots of Empathy, Canada; Dr Anantha Kumar Duraiappah, Director, UNESCO Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development;

# The Montessori Pedagogical Approach

## Integrating Montessori within the Aistear Curriculum Framework



**Lyn Bowers**

Owner, Montessori Alliance

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**L**yn Bowers demonstrates how Montessori and Aistear are indistinguishable from each other - both have the holistic development of the child at their core. The Montessori pedagogical approach fits seamlessly within the Aistear Curriculum Framework but Montessorians must have prepared themselves, have the knowledge required to embrace change, and must be actively engaging in speaking the new common language which unites the early years sector in Ireland.

The Montessori pedagogical approach is over a hundred years old. In many parts of the world it provides a structured learning methodology not only to children at preschool but also to those at primary and secondary level. In Ireland, Montessori and preschool are considered one and the same. Indeed, when Montessori is mentioned in an educational context, it is taken for granted to mean preschool. Despite being part of the Irish education system at both preschool and primary level since 1920, Montessori is most widely recognised as a pedagogical approach for children under six years of age. Nevertheless, Montessori schools for children up to 12 years exist in Ireland. They are few and far between, but they are there.

It is necessary to acknowledge the place that Montessori has in the continuum of education in order to appreciate that it is not a pedagogy which stops when the child turns six. It is in fact a method of building children's knowledge and awareness of the world around them while appreciating individual learning styles.

Maria Montessori observed children, appreciated where their passions and interests lay, planned and constructed learning opportunities to exploit these interests, observed the children interacting with the learning opportunities, altered the learning opportunities as a result of these observations, and reintroduced the learning opportunities to the classroom. This whole cycle of plan-do-review, a common practice in many pedagogies, continues in much the same way today.

The holistic development of the child is the central tenet of the Montessori approach and also of the Aistear Curriculum Framework. The child is considered an active agent in their own learning. By connecting with those around them in an interdependent and intradependent way, they develop the skills necessary for life. Montessori acknowledged the importance of the learning environment and its ability to impact on the child's development. She included everything the child came into contact with under the umbrella of 'environment', in much the same way as

Montessori  
and Aistear are  
indistinguishable  
from each other.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory links the child to society and society to the child. The Aistear Curriculum Framework was published in 2009, but the Aistear/Síolta Practice Guide, which supports practitioners in implementing the two national frameworks, was not launched until 2015. This left a sizeable period of time when practitioners were struggling to figure out how the curriculum and pedagogical approach they were using mapped to the Aistear Curriculum Framework. Montessori Alliance responded to the need for information and help by creating a suite of resources for Montessorians. These included a set of posters which linked the Montessori approach to the four themes of Aistear, and also the Montessori to Aistear Mapping Tool (MAT), both of which are available as downloads or in hardcopy format from the Montessori Alliance website ([www.montessorialliance.ie](http://www.montessorialliance.ie)).

The clear and simple format of the posters adds to their appeal and usability. Although there is no one way to do Montessori, the posters managed to link the core ideals common to Montessori and the Aistear Curriculum Framework seamlessly. An extract from one of the posters is shown in Table 1, showing the Aistear theme of identity and belonging linked to the Montessori approach.

Aistear Identity & Belonging & Montessori

Aims	Learning Goals	Montessori Approach
<p><b>Children will have strong self-identities and will feel respected and affirmed as unique individuals with their own life stories</b></p> <p><b>Montessori Classroom</b></p> <p>The child is gaining knowledge of himself, his environment and how to act &amp; interact with others within it. He is also developing internal and external skills. In essence he is constructing himself. Adult treats everyone with respect, actively listens, constructs learning opportunities for the child who hasn't yet found something that absorbs him both mentally &amp; physically.</p>	<p>In partnership with the adult children will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. build respectful relationships with others</li> <li>2. appreciate the features that make a person special and unique (name, size, hair, hand and footprint, gender, birthday)</li> <li>3. understand that as individuals they are separate from others with their own needs, interests and abilities</li> <li>4. have a sense of 'who they are' and be able to describe their backgrounds, strengths and abilities</li> <li>5. feel valued and see themselves and their interests reflected in the environment</li> <li>6. express their own ideas, preferences and needs, and have these responded to with respect and consistency</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Encourage active listening skills, opportunities to share thoughts &amp; feelings in a respectful way by being taught the skills of social engagement</li> <li>2. Circle Time - discussions which allow each child to take his/her turn and listen to others. Provide activities/pictures/games which enable children to identify that they are unique.</li> <li>3. Grace &amp; Courtesy exercises. Individual exercises allow the child to choose what he is interested in and progress as his own pace.</li> <li>4. Home from home - child is encouraged to be independent and self confident by the security &amp; consistency the setting provides.</li> <li>5. Adult models behaviour, gets down to child's level, listens to child &amp; acts on what child says/does. Environment is constructed so that it engages child, this is done by constructing learning opportunities that follow the child's interests.</li> <li>6. Free choice of work/activities. Freedom of speech, movement, thought, etc.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Children will have a sense of group identity where links with their family and community are acknowledged and extended.</b></p> <p><b>Montessori Environment</b></p> <p>The child discovers that everything &amp; everyone is interrelated and interdependent. Everyone has a part to play and work to do for the good of the whole. Each person is an individual who has a right to his own thoughts, actions, speech, but is also part of a community and a society and needs to respect the rights of others.</p>	<p>In partnership with the adult, children will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. feel that they have a place and a right to belong to the group</li> <li>2. know that members of their family and community are positively acknowledged and welcome</li> <li>3. be able to share personal experiences about their own families and cultures and come to know that there is a diversity of family structures, cultures and backgrounds</li> <li>4. understand and take part in routines, customs, festivals and celebrations</li> <li>5. see themselves as part of a wider community and know about their local area, including some of its places, features and people</li> <li>6. understand the different roles of people in the community</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Circle Time - discussions which allow each child to take his/her turn and listen to others. Topics initiated by adult &amp; child. The order of the environment gives the child consistency; he knows where to put something and where it can be found. Care of the environment exercises foster responsibility and love for the environment both within and outside the classroom.</li> <li>2. Diverse range of experiences including poems, rhymes, songs, bring the community into the classroom. Adult models behaviour and treats everyone with respect. Child is encouraged to bring in pictures, plants, leaves, objects from home. Things experienced at school are brought home, in this way home &amp; school become united.</li> <li>3. Freedom of speech enables child to share personal experiences. Circle Time &amp; culture exercises introduce children to various ways families are constructed.</li> <li>4. Culture materials</li> <li>5. Visits from guards/firemen/shopkeeper/parents/grandparents as well as trips to local parks/centres</li> </ol>

Table 1: Aistear's Identity & Belonging Theme linked to the Montessori Approach by Montessori Alliance



The Montessori to Aistear Mapping Tool which was published in 2010 is more comprehensive. It was designed to be a living document, to grow as our knowledge of child development grows. It was born out of a need for a common language, a way for the Montessori approach to be easily understood by everyone who works in the early years sector, especially the early years inspectorate.

The mapping tool takes the exercises and planned activities most commonly found in a Montessori setting and places them within the Themes, Aims and Learning Goals of Aistear (see Tables 2 and 3).

#### Aistear Learning Goals - Communicating

1	range of body movement, facial expressions and early vocalisation to show feelings and share information
2	understand and use non-verbal communication rules, such as turn-taking and making eye contact
3	interpret and respond to non-verbal communication by others
4	understand and respect that some people will rely on non-verbal communication as their main way of interacting with others
5	combine verbal and non-verbal communication to get their point across
6	express themselves creatively and imaginatively using non-verbal communication
7	interact with other children & adults by listening, discussing & taking turns in conversation
8	explore sound, pattern, rhythm & repetition in language
9	use an expanding vocabulary of words & phrases and show a growing understanding of syntax and meaning
10	use language with confidence and competence for giving & receiving information, asking questions, requesting, refusing, negotiating, problem-solving, imagining & recreating roles & situations & clarifying thinking, ideas and feelings
11	become proficient users of at least one language and have an awareness and appreciation of other languages
12	be positive about their home language and know that they can use different languages to communicate with different people and in different situations
13	use language to interpret experiences, to solve problems and to clarify thinking, ideas and feelings
14	use books and ICT for fun, to gain information and broaden their understanding of the world
15	build awareness of the variety of symbols (pictures, print, numbers) used to communicate, and understand that these can be read by others
16	become familiar with and use a variety of print in an enjoyable and meaningful way
17	have opportunities to use a variety of mark-making materials and implements in an enjoyable and meaningful way
18	develop counting skills & a growing understanding of the meaning and use of numbers and mathematical language in an enjoyable and meaningful way
19	share their feelings, thoughts and ideas by story-telling, making art, moving to music, role-playing, problem-solving & responding to these experiences
20	express themselves through the visual arts using skills such as cutting, drawing, gluing, sticking, painting, building, printing, sculpting and sewing
21	listen to and respond to a variety of types of music, sing songs and make music using instruments
22	use language to imagine and recreate roles and experiences
23	respond to and create literacy experiences through story, poetry, song and drama
24	show confidence in trying out new things, taking risks and thinking creatively

**Table 2: Aistear Learning Goals for Communicating in Montessori to Aistear Mapping Tool**



The holistic development of the child is the central tenet of the Montessori Approach and also of the Aistear Curriculum Framework.

As the Montessori approach is a child-centred and child-led curriculum, there is room in the mapping tool for the practitioner to add their own bespoke exercises or activities, mapping them on to the Aistear framework. As Table 3 illustrates, not all of Aistear’s Aims and Learning Goals attributed for each Montessori exercise or activity will be relevant every time the child engages with it. It is up to the adult to decide which Aims and Learning Goals are most evident and note these on the child’s learning journal. Heretofore the early years setting was a micro-community of which parents had little comprehension. The aim of the learning journal is to bridge the divide between children’s home and their early years setting. It offers a means of two-way dialogue between parent and educator and acknowledges the vital role of children’s first educators: their parents.

Montessori	Aistear																							
Area: Sensorial	<b>Communication</b> Children will use non-verbal communication skills. Children will use language. Children will broaden their understanding of the world by making sense of experiences through language. Children will express themselves creatively and imaginatively.																							
Exercise	Aim 1						Aim 2						Aim 3						Aim 4					
	Learning Goals						Learning Goals						Learning Goals						Learning Goals					
	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
Cylinder Block 1,2,3,4		●	●	●	●	●			●	●	●	●							●	●				●
Cylinder Blocks 2 together		●	●	●	●	●			●	●	●	●							●	●				●
Cylinder Blocks 3 together		●	●	●	●	●			●	●	●	●							●	●				●
Cylinder Blocks 4 together		●	●	●	●	●			●	●	●	●							●	●				●
Pink Tower Exercise 1		●	●	●	●	●			●	●	●	●							●	●				●
Pink Tower Exercise 2		●	●	●	●	●			●	●	●	●							●	●				●
Broad Stair Exercise 1		●	●	●	●	●			●	●	●	●							●	●				●
Broad Stair Exercise 2		●	●	●	●	●			●	●	●	●							●	●				●
Long Rods Exercise 1		●	●	●	●	●			●	●	●	●							●	●				●
Long Rods Exercise 2		●	●	●	●	●			●	●	●	●							●	●				●
Pink Tower, Broad Stair, Long Rods		●	●	●	●	●			●	●	●	●							●	●				●
Knobless Cylinders		●	●	●	●	●			●	●	●	●							●	●				●
Colour Box 1 - Matching		●	●	●	●	●			●	●	●	●							●	●				●
Colour Box 2 - Matching		●	●	●	●	●			●	●	●	●							●	●				●
Colour Box 1 or 2 - 3pl		●	●	●	●	●			●	●	●	●							●	●				●
Colour Box 3 - one shade		●	●	●	●	●			●	●	●	●							●	●				●
Colour Box 3 - colour wheel		●	●	●	●	●			●	●	●	●							●	●				●
Sound Boxes Exercise 1		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●							●	●				●
Sound Boxes Exercise 2		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●							●	●				●
Smelling Bottles Exercise 1		●	●	●	●	●			●	●	●	●							●	●				●

Table 3: Extract from Montessori to Aistear Mapping Tool (2010) created by Montessori Alliance

Montessori teachers are accustomed to observing and recording how children interact with the learning opportunities in a prepared environment. Historically these notes were written using Montessori terms and without photographic evidence. An example is shown in Table 4.

Name: Kirsty Smyth				
Exercise	Introduced	Practised	Mastered	Notes
Cyl blk 1 – promotes concentration; order; development of fine motor movements; perseverance; hand-eye coordination; awareness of shape, size, differences/similarities.	01/11/15	Yes	10/11/15	Pincer grip good; hand-eye coordination good; enjoyed the exercise; mixed cylinders and challenged herself; built in sequence from tallest-smallest & smallest-tallest on floor. Used language 'tall'; 'round'; 'smaller'; 'soft'; 'sequence'. Drew around each cylinder using pencil and paper. Took cyl blk 2 from shelf

**Table 4: Example of previous format of Child Learning Record**





Montessori Alliance responded to the need for information and assistance by creating a suite of resources for Montessorians.

Although the example in Table 4 is a clear record of what the child has done, it lacks depth and detail. If shown to a parent, it would have little meaning unless the parent had in-depth knowledge of Montessori pedagogy. The introduction of the Aistear Curriculum Framework heralded a revamp of how observations are communicated to parents. The ‘hidden purpose’ behind Montessori materials is no longer hidden. As the activity in Table 4 shows, the most straightforward purpose for doing the exercise is for the child to figure out which cylinder is suitable for each socket. But this activity has much more to it, which Montessorians were in danger of assuming everyone knew. The Aistear Curriculum Framework enables Montessorians to make the invisible visible – the development processes going on in the child who is using the Montessori materials in an environment prepared for them to optimise their learning.

The recording templates provided by the National Council of Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) and Early Childhood Ireland offered structure and guidance to practitioners. As shown in Figure 1, the information recorded is rich and multi-layered. The comments are extensive and add context to the work the child has been doing. More importantly, it enables the Montessori practitioner and the parent to become partners in the child’s learning and development.

The templates have been superseded by Learning Journals with less emphasis on identifying every learning goal the child attains. Flexibility in recording styles is built into the Aistear Curriculum Framework. This was deliberate and stems from the NCCA’s reluctance to provide a blueprint on how to do Aistear. The NCCA did not want Aistear to become a tick-box exercise; they wanted it to be thought about, to be discussed critically, for it to evolve, and for practitioners to find where their particular pedagogy fitted in to the framework.

The Montessori to Aistear Mapping Tool... was born out of a need for a common language; a way for the Montessori Approach to be easily understood by everyone who works in the early years sector.

  		<b>Learning Record Template</b>	
<b>1</b> Look at what I'm doing Include a short description and one or two photos of me as I learn and develop.	<b>Child/children</b> Kirsty Smyth	<b>Practitioner</b> Lyn Bowers	<b>Date</b> 26/11/2015
			<b>Description</b> Kirsty prepared her work area by laying a mat on the floor, chose the piece of equipment she wanted to use and brought it to her work space. Kirsty took out all of the cylinders using her pincer grasp and stood them between the two cylinder blocks. One of the cylinders fell over and Kirsty spent time trying to get it to stand up but eventually gave up and lay it on the mat. Kirsty chose each cylinder, looked at it and placed it in the socket she thought it belonged to. Through trial and error she successfully replaced all the cylinders.
<b>2</b> What does this experience tell you about me?  Think about my interests, dispositions, values and attitudes, skills, knowledge and my understanding. Link to Aistear's themes, aims and learning goals.	Kirsty likes working in a systematic way. She perseveres and works out things by creating her own way of doing things. With the smaller cylinders she used her pincer grasp and with the bigger cylinders she wrapped her fingers around the cylinder to lift it. She didn't speak during the time she was doing the exercise but seemed to be absorbed by the task. At times she had to stretch to reach the cylinders. She repeated the exercise a number of times and seemed to get great enjoyment from finding the right fit. When she had finished with the equipment she returned it to the shelf and spent a bit of time touring the room looking at what others were doing. Aistear Links – ET, A1 LG 1,5,6; A2 LG 1,4,6; A4 LG 1,2,3,5,6; IB, A1 LG5,A3 LG2, A4 LG3,4,6; WB, A1 LG4,5,6; A2 LG1,3; A3 LG4; A4 LG1,2,3,4		
<b>3</b> What will we do next to support my learning?  Think about how you can help me to learn more in ways that excite and interest me.	Kirsty will be introduced to the knobless cylinders and encourage to explore how these relate to the knobbed cylinders. The knobless cylinders will allow Kirsty to refine her pincer grasp, make judgements and give her the opportunity to build towers which will require dexterity. Her friend Jack will be introduced to this material at the same time as Kirsty and this will add a social element where they will cooperate, plan, discuss and what they are doing.		
<b>4</b> I want to show my family what I can do. Let me bring my learning record home so I can share it with my family. They love to see and talk to me about what I'm learning.	<b>Parent's/Guardian's signature:</b> _____ <b>Date:</b> _____  <b>Comment:</b>		

[www.ncca.ie/aisteartoolkit](http://www.ncca.ie/aisteartoolkit)
This resource was developed through the Aistear in Action initiative.

**Figure 1: Example of Evidence of Child's Learning Record**

Montessori and Aistear are indistinguishable from each other. Both have the holistic development of the child at their core, the appreciation of the child as an active learner and a social actor who has a place in society. They acknowledge the importance of creating an early years environment which encourages exploration, autonomy, self-directed learning, development of critical thinking skills, independence, and social awareness. The Montessori pedagogical approach fits seamlessly within the Aistear Curriculum Framework if the Montessorian has prepared themselves, accepted new ways of recording and corresponding with parents, equipped themselves with the knowledge required to embrace change, and is actively engaging in speaking the new common language which unites the early years sector in Ireland regardless of the pedagogical approach used.

## First ever conferring of LINC

Finian McGrath TD, Minister of State with Responsibilities for Disability Issues, was guest of honour at the first ever conferring of the Leadership for INclusion in the Early Years (LINC) programme which took place on 28 October 2017 in Mary Immaculate College Limerick. 847 students from 27 counties were presented with a Level 6 Special Purpose Award.

LINC is a higher education blended-learning programme established in 2016 and designed to enhance inclusion of children with additional needs in early years' settings through the development of the role of Inclusion Coordinator. It is offered by a consortium led by Mary Immaculate College and including Maynooth University – Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education, and Early Childhood Ireland.

The programme is free of charge to participants and employers, and is funded by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, Department of Education and Skills and the Dormant Accounts Fund. Settings with an ECCE contract can nominate an employee for LINC and the nominee must have a full Level 5 Award or higher in a relevant discipline.

While over 80% of the programme is delivered online, the classroom-based sessions are offered in nine regional centres in order to ensure access to practitioners across the country. The centres for 2017/18 are Cork; Dublin North; Dublin South/West; Galway; Kildare; Kilkenny; Limerick; Meath; and Sligo.

Pictured here are six LINC graduants from Limerick: Carol Lyons (Clever Cats Pre-School, Ballysimon Road); Rachel Cosgrave (Wilmott's Childcare, Annacotty); Sandra Gleeson (Castletroy View Montessori); Rosemarie Wilmott (Wilmott's Childcare, Annacotty); Pamela Walsh (Starting Small Standing Tall, Ballysimon Road) and Mary Cuddihy (Radharc Na Coille Montessori, Kildimo).

837 students from 27 counties graduated in October 2017 with a Level 6 Purpose Award (Higher Education)





The Discover Primary Science Course  
at Fota Wildlife Park runs  
from September to April

# CHAPTER 2

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Áine Hyland



# A 'Curate's Egg' of a Year

Grand plans must be backed up with finance



**Seán Cottrell**

retired CEO of  
Irish Primary Principals' Network

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**S**éan Cottrell provides a lively overview of the year in primary education with vital information and commentary on new and ongoing initiatives, including roll-out of Financial Support Services Unit, new Special Education Needs Model, Mentoring and Coaching for School Leaders, the Droichead induction process, Vetting, Action Team Partnerships, and more.

When a late-19th-century bishop apologised for serving a young curate a less-than-healthy egg, the timid underling hastened to reassure his superior by saying the egg was 'good in parts'. This was immortalised in a cartoon printed in the British satirical magazine *Punch* in 1895.<sup>1</sup> Curate's egg is a phrase much loved by opposition politicians seeking to undermine government budget proposals and by theatre critics not entirely convinced of the quality of a performance. It is an apt idiom with which to describe the primary sector education year 2017.

According to Minister Richard Bruton's ambitious Action Plan for Education, launched in 2017 and modelled on a similar plan for jobs introduced in his time as Minister for Jobs, his aim is to make the Irish education and training service the best in Europe by 2026. As educators, we hope that such grand plans are backed with the requisite finance to make them happen. In short, we hope the minister will prove to be a good egg.

## Financial Support Services Unit (FSSU)

DES Circular 0060/2017 legislates for the roll-out and operation of the Financial Support Services Unit (FSSU) from September 2017 over a three-year school period. It guarantees compliance with Section 18, Education Act 1998, to ensure that appropriate accounting and financial procedures are in place in schools. Following a bedding-in period for the new regulations, all schools will be expected to have appropriate accounting and financial procedures in place with full financial accounting compliance by 2019 – twenty-one years after the groundbreaking Education Act 1998. 'Twenty-one years is a mighty long time,' as Johnny McEvoy might still sing. While schools in the main have very good established practices of accounting, the FSSU can be expected to bring certainty to an area that caused schools considerable concern. The annual presentation of accounts by 2019 may also help to highlight how grossly underfunded primary education is and how much of the shortfall is made up from school fundraising activities.

The publication is a comprehensive overview and analysis covering contemporary early childhood, primary, and second-level education in Ireland.

### Review of the Irish school system

This year saw the seminal publication of 'Towards a Better Future: A review of the Irish school system'. It resulted from an initiative jointly supported by the Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN) and the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD), who were in turn inspired by a similar review of the Finnish education system by the renowned academic Dr Pasi Sahlberg. The publication is a comprehensive overview and analysis covering contemporary early childhood, primary, and second-level education in Ireland. The work was carried out by five distinguished educationalists – Professor John Coolahan, Professor Sheelagh Drudy, Dr Pádraig Hogan, Professor Aine Hyland, and Dr Seamus McGuinness – who, to their enormous credit, all worked voluntarily on the project. The review was conducted independently of the commissioning organisations and provides a conspectus for policy-makers, practitioners, and participants of the comprehensive range of issues and concerns relevant to achieving the ongoing reform programme.

The review comes almost 20 years after the 1998 Education Act and reflects on the many subsequent changes and reforms, including continual primary curriculum reform, substantial growth of national and international forms of assessment, school development planning, school self-evaluation, the formation and growth of IPPN and NAPD, the subsequent establishment of the Centre for School Leadership (CSL), the establishment of the Teaching Council, and substantial reforms in teacher education. Many of these reforms and changes came about as Ireland was experiencing unprecedented economic growth. When the Celtic Tiger economy collapsed in 2008, the financial, social, and employment consequences were devastating. Cutbacks affected many services, including education, bringing great stress at all levels to staff, pupils, and parents. It is a credit to all involved in education that significant reform took place in spite of the economic downturn, the fruits of which we enjoy today as the economic recovery continues.

Schools no longer need to wait for the arrival of a psychologist's report to support a child with obvious needs.

### Special Education Needs model

September 2017 saw the roll-out of the new Special Education Needs (SEN) model. It is designed to provide more equitable access to services for those most in need. Schools no longer need to wait for the arrival of a psychologist's report to support a child with obvious needs. Each school has secured its allocation for two years based on last year's resource allocations. No school lost out immediately, but the concern remains for those schools due to lose supports in September 2019.

All procedural change comes as a result of a process commenced in 2013 when the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) began a major review of special education. They consulted widely with all partners, and the most profound difficulty identified was the lack of clarity about which organisation was responsible for what service. The then Minister for Education and Skills, Jan O'Sullivan TD, agreed with the proposal that the Special Education Support Service (SESS), the National Behaviour Service (NBSS) and the Visiting Teacher Service for children who are deaf or hard of hearing and blind or visually impaired (VTSVHI) should join NCSE to form one support service for special education. On 20 March 2017, NCSE

assumed management of these services and since September has been providing support to schools.

### Centre for School Leadership

The Centre for School Leadership (CSL) has existed for only two years, but already much has been achieved in support of principals, particularly newly appointed ones. A total of 285 primary mentors have been trained, 135 of them matched with newly appointed principals this year. Newly appointed principals must engage with the Misneach programme to avail of mentor support. Mentoring involves a monthly meeting lasting up to two hours, phone contact fortnightly, and rules, procedures, and record-keeping for everyone's protection. The relationship begins in September and formally ends in June. Each mentor in turn has a cara from whom they get support and advice.

### Coaching

Coaching for school principals is a new and welcome support. It can be accessed through the CSL website, is freely available to 400 principals, and is aimed at those wishing to move their practice to a higher level or who are finding the role very challenging. Those availing of the service can have six free sessions with a coach they select, a service that is often seen as prohibitively expensive.

A level 9 postgraduate programme for aspiring school leaders is also available through CSL. The content is delivered by a consortium of UCD, UL, and NUIG, and is based on the Quality Framework for Leadership and Management. The course is part-time and blended and costs €2,000.

### Vetting

Vetting continues to be part of the egg that the curate might baulk at. The question is still asked why substitute teachers, SNAs, and sports coaches need to be vetted individually for every school they work in. Is there not a system whereby they can present a renewable card to all schools, clubs, or places where minors gather, guaranteeing their bona fides in child protection issues? One diocesan secretary reported processing a vetting application form for a substitute teacher on 16 occasions over a short period. It is in everyone's interest to create a more clear-cut and user-friendly process to alleviate the extra workload such duplication creates.

Retrospective vetting of teachers is expected to be complete by the end of 2017. By 11 September, 83 per cent of the 97,000 registered teachers had been vetted, with the remaining teachers receiving notice requiring them to complete the process within 28 days.

### National Induction Programme and Droichead

The National Induction Programme for Teachers (NIPT) continues to provide a quality support service for newly qualified teachers and the mentors and Professional Support Team (PST) who assist at school level. Since 2013, NIPT has been responsible for training PSTs in schools offering the Droichead process, with over 720 NQTs inducted via Droichead since 2015. Droichead remains a bone of contention for many principals in particular, who cite workload, staff relations, and fears over quality assurance as key issues. Many young teachers prefer it to the

Coaching for school principals is aimed at those wishing to move their practice to a higher level or who are finding the role very challenging.

Droichead remains a bone of contention for many principals.

traditional model involving the inspector and see it as a way to learn more collaboratively from colleagues.

Droichead is now national policy and, from this year, is the only route to induction for NQTs in schools of 24 classroom teachers or more and for all teachers in SEN settings. Two years from now, all schools with an administrative principal will be expected to provide their NQTs' induction. Those teachers on a school's PST will receive four days' training with sub cover to equip them with the skills and knowledge required to guide the NQT through the process. NIPT also provides advisory visits and support for PST members.

The Droichead process itself happens over an agreed time of not less than 60 consecutive days, if the PST decides the time is appropriate. The NQT will get a chance to observe quality teaching from experienced colleagues and be observed in turn by them. The NQT will keep a Taisce to document learning and reflective practice. At the end of the process, a joint declaration is signed by the NQT and PST confirming they have 'engaged in a quality teaching and learning process'. Doubts remain about the process, however, and many questions remain on the logistics of carrying through the Droichead process in a small school with a teaching principal.

### Children First Act 2015

Children are the primary focus of all schools, and their protection is paramount. The Children First Act 2015 will be fully commenced in November 2017. It places an obligation on all mandated persons (registered teachers) to report child protection concerns that meet or exceed defined thresholds. The Children First Act will function in tandem with Children First Guidance. Department of Education and Skills procedures are currently being revised in accordance with Children First. The role of the Designated Liaison Person does not change with the introduction of obligations on mandated persons.

Many young teachers prefer it [Droichead] to the traditional model involving the inspector.

### Children and Young People's Services Committees

Another positive development has been the Children and Young People's Services Committees. CYPSCs are a key structure identified by the government to plan and co-ordinate services for children in every county in Ireland. The overall purpose is to improve outcomes for children and young people through local and national interagency collaboration. The main statutory, community, and voluntary providers of services to children come together to co-ordinate activity to ensure that children and their families receive improved and accessible services.

Some counties have prioritised initiatives locally with success. In south County Dublin, for example, the CYPSC has worked to improve critical incident protocols by developing a community response. Cork has prioritised well-being, while Meath has concentrated on the transition from primary to second level. Through IPPN, a school leader in each county is appointed to the committee. Other agencies involved include Tusla, local authorities, HSE nominees, Education and Training Boards (ETBs), Gardaí, City or County Childcare committees, NEPS, Department of Social Protection, third-level institutions, and NAPD, as well as local community organisations and Local Development companies.

## Action Team Partnerships

Action Team Partnerships is a National Parents Council initiative which enables the whole school community to work together to improve teaching and learning. Members include teachers, support staff, parents, and members of the local community. They support the school plan practically by working on two academic areas and one behavioural area and making the school a more welcoming place. If the focus is on literacy, for example, the group might organise a storyteller, library visit, book fair, or website work. A behavioural area might include an anti-bullying week or games in the school yard. Though the project is in its infancy, it has the potential to involve many more people locally in the education of children.

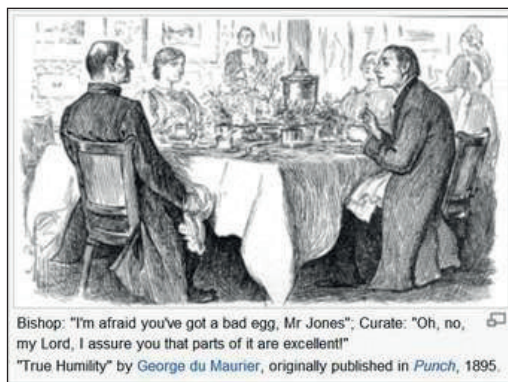
Though the project [Action Team Partnerships] is in its infancy, it has the potential to involve many more people locally in the education of children.

## Conclusion

Perhaps the curate was right. There is more to be positive about than negative. However, I wouldn't want any positivity to hide the simple fact that more money must be allocated to primary education, if the initiatives continue to arrive and costs continue to rise. We all know that implementing change is extremely challenging. Machiavelli said that the people who gain most from change are the ones who give the least support in bringing it about. In schools, sustainable change can come about only when staff is involved in identifying what must be changed, and takes ownership and responsibility for it.

In the Theory of Reciprocity, as outlined in IPPN's 'Quality Leadership – Quality Learning' study, every unit of capacity demanded of the school by the system must be provided in equal ratio to the school. Otherwise the natural conclusion is that constant change, which is often repetitive and time-demanding, results in the inevitable diminution of the school's core business. Too much of that egg would make anyone ill.

- 1 The origin of the phrase curate's egg is the George du Maurier cartoon 'True Humility', printed in the British satirical magazine *Punch* on 9 November 1895. The cartoon gives fuller insight into its meaning, which relies to some extent on an appreciation of irony.



Right Reverend Host: 'I'm afraid you've got a bad egg, Mr. Jones.'  
The Curate: 'Oh no, my Lord, I assure you! Parts of it are excellent!'

# Health and Well-being of School Leaders

Survey reveals urgent need to address structural problem



**Páirc Clerkin**

CEO, Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN)

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**P**áirc Clerkin outlines here the startling results to date of a survey being conducted by Dr Philip Riley from Monash University in Melbourne, Australia and commissioned jointly by primary and second level principals' networks, IPPN and NAPD. The findings highlight the pressing need for a reassessment of the punitive workload of principals, especially teaching principals.

Principals, deputy principals, and teachers deal daily with the lives and potential futures of the young – in which parents' greatest hopes and deepest fears are invested. This is an enormous responsibility which is taken very seriously and which, like all professional responsibilities, can be a heavy burden to carry. The *Irish Principals' and Deputy Principals' Health and Wellbeing Survey*, commissioned jointly by the Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN) and the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD), aimed to understand the occupational rewards and risks of this important role. The results presented here are taken from the survey, conducted by Dr Philip Riley, Principal Researcher, Monash University, Melbourne, Australia.

The research revealed that more than half of school leaders in Ireland work more than 41 hours a week during term, with almost one in five working more than 56 hours and nearly one in ten working more than 60 hours – that's 10 hours a day, 6 days a week. During school 'holidays', more than a fifth work more than 25 hours a week. It seems there is an issue with rest and recuperation, which we know is a recipe for poor health.

The sheer volume of work necessitating the long hours is the greatest stressor. The second-highest stress factor is the lack of time to focus on teaching and learning. Administration is consuming too much of school leaders' time. This is disproportionately affecting teaching principals, who have less dedicated time for administrative tasks. This is a structural problem in the system that needs addressing, because we know from 40 years of international workplace research that this kind of strain predicts increased coronary heart disease. One resource that can reduce health risks associated with high-stress work is professional support. Teaching principals report less support than their administrative colleagues, while all school leaders told us they need more support from their employers.

Irish principals and deputy principals score well above average on all the negative elements in the survey (burnout, sleeping troubles, somatic and cognitive



Irish principals and deputy principals score well below average on positive measures (self-rated health, mental health, coping, relationships, self-worth).

The research presented suggests that bullying and violence are a system-wide problem.

stress) and below average on positive measures (self-rated health, mental health, coping, relationships, self-worth). This is despite the fact that in general they have good support at home, relatively good remuneration, they are well-educated and in secure employment. School leaders have all the attributes of people who should be scoring well above average on these measures, but they are collectively below. Dr Riley's research identifies the extreme demands of the job as the likely cause.

### **What can be done immediately to deal with the stress?**

The medical profession tells us that stress increases cortisol production in the body. Cortisol is your enemy. It suppresses the immune system, decreases bone formation, and is correlated with diabetes, memory difficulties, heart disease, and increased chance of miscarriage. Too much of it and you cannot sleep properly, to recover and replenish your system. Cortisol levels naturally fluctuate during the day but need to be low enough at night for you to sleep well. Dr Riley suggests that mindfulness is an effective means of controlling cortisol levels. Mindfulness is really as simple as being fully present and aware of what is going on around us right now. We build up ways of operating in the world that become habit, and we become 'mindless'. Mindfulness is the opposite of that – it is a concentrated form of rest and recovery, the opposite of the fight/flight response.

### **Recommendations of the study**

#### **A. Increase professional support**

The survey shows that principals and deputy principals who avail of the least professional support have the greatest challenge in maintaining their mental health.

#### **B. Increase professional learning**

Provision of ongoing professional learning will help principals and deputies to deal with the identified stressors.

#### **C. Review the work practices of teaching principals**

The role of school leader has become increasingly complex over the last 15 years. The number of teaching principals deciding to step down, despite the consequent loss of seniority and negative financial impact, indicates that decision-makers need to do a lot more to support them, if we are to avoid further deterioration in morale and potentially a mass exodus from the role.

#### **D. Address bullying and violence**

The research presented in this report suggests that bullying and violence are a system-wide problem and therefore require a national approach.

Compared to other groups, principals and deputy principals experience nearly twice the prevalence of threats of violence and actual physical violence at work.

#### Snapshot of survey results:

- » 404 administrative and 284 teaching principals, as well as 38 administrative and 105 teaching deputy principals took part. 65% were from the primary sector. 40% were based in cities or large towns, 49% in small towns or villages or rural locations. 62% were female.
- » Average age: 48 years.
- » Most were quite experienced, averaging 12 years in leadership after 13 years in teaching.
- » They work long hours: 43% work more than 46 hours a week during term and just over 15% work more than 56 hours a week.
- » 37% volunteer their time for community support outside of their role.
- » 41% are active members of a formal community or sporting association.
- » They are generally very positive about their job, scoring higher than average.
- » Compared to other groups, principals and deputy principals experience nearly twice the prevalence of threats of violence and actual physical violence at work. The prevalence is higher for women.
- » Despite having many predictive attributes for high scores on well-being and quality of life, school leaders collectively score lower than average on both. Their mental health ranges from very good to very poor.

#### Wellbeing for Teachers and Learners Group

Members of the Wellbeing for Teachers and Learners Group (WTL) at their Wellbeing Seminar in Croke Park Dublin on Saturday 18 November 2017:

(L-R) Niall Muldoon Ombudsman for Children, Angela Lynch IPPN, Shay Bannon and Clive Byrne NAPD, Áine Lynch National Parents Council Primary, Tomás Ó Ruairc The Teaching Council, and Maria Doyle IPPN.



# The Devil's Advocate

Saying no to non-essential change



**Seamus Mulconry**

General Secretary, Catholic Primary Schools Management Association (CPSMA)

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**A**s general secretary of the CPSMA, an organisation that supports the boards of 2,800 primary schools across Ireland, Seamus Mulconry has a unique perspective on the primary system. His proposal is unique also - establish a person or a unit to test to destruction the new initiatives before allowing them through.

## Primary system working despite the odds

There is virtually a universal consensus that the Irish primary system is working. Though chronically under-resourced, it is delivering a high-quality education for most of our children. The available evidence supports this belief. For example, the chief inspector's report 2010–2012 clearly indicates that the overwhelming majority of parents and pupils find their schools to be well managed and welcoming. It states:

Some very positive findings were reported about the management of pupils in primary schools in the period 2010–2012. During notified Whole School Evaluations (WSEs), 96% of schools were found to be managing their pupils effectively by, for example, fostering pupil–teacher interactions, by cultivating an inclusive, child-centred ethos, and by using positive strategies to promote good behaviour. Incidental inspections similarly found that the management of pupils was effective in practically all (96%) of the classrooms visited.

The success of the Irish primary system is down to the quality and commitment of the people who teach in, lead, and manage our schools. As general secretary of the Catholic Primary School Management Association, I have a somewhat unique perspective on the primary system. CPSMA supports the Boards of 2,800 primary schools with training and advice. Our main service is a helpline which handles over 8,350 calls a year from principals and chairs of boards of management (BoMs) seeking advice on issues such as HR, governance, parental complaints, and child protection.

Most of our contact with primary schools is providing assistance when something goes wrong. One might think, therefore, that the perception of CPSMA staff would be focused on negative aspects of primary education, on all the problems that need to be solved. In fact, my experience has been the opposite – I have been filled with admiration for the principals and BoM chairs who routinely go the extra mile to provide

a quality education for children and who are dealing (and coping) with an increasingly complex and demanding environment.

The one observation I would have is that most principals and chairs get themselves into bother, not because they don't care about their work, but because they care too much and bend over backwards trying to accommodate the needs and requests, and occasionally demands, of parents and pupils (and sometimes members of staff). I mention this because the holy grail of public sector modernisation is to get to a place where the public no longer complain about you. The public will rarely praise a public service, but if they are not complaining, not only are you doing something right, you are doing a lot of things right.

Most principals and chairs get themselves into bother... because they care too much and bend over backwards trying to accommodate needs and requests.

The most recent figures from the Children's Ombudsman annual report 2016 indicate that education accounted for 46 per cent (754) of the 1682 complaints received. However, since 2012 the Ombudsman has found it appropriate to investigate only three complaints relating to primary schools. Given that there are over half a million children in the primary system, these figures are a ringing endorsement.

That is not to say the primary system is perfect: there are many challenges from lack of resources, especially for special needs education and in the ongoing shortage of teachers. The primary system cannot rest on its laurels. Like all systems, it must either improve or begin to fail: it cannot stay in stasis.

The external environment in which primary schools operate is changing rapidly, and the schools must change and adapt if they are to flourish. Intelligent policy-making is needed to support such change and adaptation. However, it is not easy to formulate and implement policy to drive positive adaptive change in complex systems.

### Operation Cat Drop

Anyone who has worked in public policy will be familiar with the story of Operation Cat Drop. In the 1950s the Orang Ulu people of Sarawak were suffering from an outbreak of malaria. The World Health Organisation (WHO) sprayed the area with the insecticide DDT, successfully killing the mosquitoes responsible for transmitting the disease.

The outbreak ended but roofs started caving in, the thatch having been eaten following an infestation of caterpillars – the DDT had killed the wasps that had kept the caterpillar population in check. Worse was to follow. Geckos ate the poisoned wasps, and cats ate the poisoned geckos. With the cats gone, the rat population exploded, leading to an outbreak of the plague. In the end, the WHO was forced to parachute cats into the area.

### Do good carefully

Who would have thought that a measure designed to kill mosquitoes would end in an outbreak of plague and parachuting cats? Perhaps as a result of this experience, the Orang Ulu people of Sarawak have a saying: *Do good carefully*. Well-intentioned changes to complex systems have unexpected consequences, which can often be serious. Education is nothing if not a

The Orang Ulu people of Sarawak have a saying: Do good carefully.

complex system, and the consequences of changes in education can be both unexpected and serious.

To take another example, on a lighter note, Alex Ferguson has claimed that Margaret Thatcher was the reason for the decline in the number of British footballers in the Premier League. He said, 'Following an industrial dispute with the government, many teachers stopped organising extracurricular sports activities. It had disastrous consequences.' The discipline instilled by teachers was lost, and the influence of family members increased.

Ferguson said, 'My experience was that young boys paid careful attention to their school teachers, and many of them became acquainted with the need to train and acquired substantial skills, discipline, and youthful experience playing in front of critical and demanding eyes. Much of that evaporated, and school teachers were replaced by fathers, uncles, and grannies.' Ferguson recognised that they were well meaning, but competitive school football was lost, leading to a decline in the quality of players coming through the system.

While there are undoubtedly other reasons for the decline in the number of British players in the Premier League, Ferguson's claims have a ring of truth. The anecdote illustrates not only how subtle changes can affect the educational system, but also how changes in the system can profoundly affect the wider community. Education matters, and policy-makers must be careful to 'do good carefully'.

### Strategy to drive positive change

So how do you drive positive change in complex systems? General George C. Marshall was one of the most successful managers and bureaucrats in history. He oversaw the growth of the US Army from 190,000 personnel to over 8 million – entailing profound organisational, cultural, and logistical challenges – and picked the men who would lead it to ultimate victory. His keys to success were simple: pick the best people you can, give them the authority to make decisions, hold them accountable, and support them with all of the resources at your disposal.

Marshall was particularly impressed by a letter sent by the Duke of Wellington to the government in London, which he forwarded to his staff for their guidance:

If I attempted to answer the mass of futile correspondence that surrounds me, I should be debarred from all serious business of campaigning.

I must remind your Lordship – for the last time – that so long as I retain an independent position, I shall see that no officer under my Command is debarred by attending to the futile drivelling of mere quill driving in your Lordship's Office – from attending to his first duty – which is, and always has been, so to train the private men under his command that they may, without question, beat any force opposed to them in the field.

These sentiments, expressed by Wellington and admired by Marshall, would probably be strongly endorsed by school principals around Ireland

who find themselves drowning in a sea of paperwork, form filling, and box ticking. The administrative burden on principals and BoMs has soared in the last 20 years, driven by new legislation, more emphasis on parental and pupil rights, and greater focus on transparency, openness, accountability, and measurement in the public service.

### Legislation since 2011

Since the 1998 Education Act, at least 19 pieces of significant legislation have impacted on schools. The next year or two will see the enactment of General Data Protection Regulation (EU) May 2018, Admissions Bill, and the Parent and Student Charter. Since 2011 schools and principals have also had to cope with:

- » 2011 Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011–2020
- » 2012 Report on Standardised Testing
- » 2012 School Self-Evaluation
- » 2013 Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools
- » 2013 Procurement
- » 2013 School Uniform Survey and consequential changes in uniform policy
- » 2014/15 SEAI Reporting on energy performance
- » 2015 Primary Online Database
- » 2015 Droichead
- » 2016 Primary Language Curriculum
- » 2017 Implementation of New Model for Allocating Resource Teaching to Pupils.

Principals... are spending so much time proving they are doing the right things, that they are losing the focus on doing the right things.

### Measuring or Managing?

From a government perspective, to manage you need to be able to measure. What happens, though, when the measurement is so onerous that what is measured starts to suffer? There is a widespread feeling amongst principals that they are spending so much time proving they are doing the right things, that they are losing the focus on doing the right things.

The world outside schools has changed and is changing greatly. Most of the focus and discussion has been about immigration and religion, but the growth in family diversity has posed major challenges for schools. Principals are now having to become experts in the intricacies of family law. In fact, over the last four years the fastest-growing type of query to CPSMA has been family law queries.

The growing complexity which schools have to deal with has driven a 72 per cent increase in the number of calls to CPSMA over the last four years. If CPSMA is a finger on the pulse of primary education, then it is clear that the pulse is racing faster than ever.

The policy environment has also changed. In the past, the Department of Education and Skills was the main policy agency, but in recent years a host of new actors have joined the policy community. These range from the NCCA to numerous NGOs who all believe that the solution to the problem they were set up to solve lies in education, and especially in changes to



Policy entrepreneurs tend to forget that the average 12-year-old spends less than 12 per cent of time in school.

If an idea is robust enough to survive rigorous interrogation, it could then proceed to official examination by the Department or other state agencies.

primary education. One small indication of this growth in outside interest in schools is that there are now approximately ten school flag schemes and two plaques (schools have run out of flag poles).

Primary schools are seen by some politicians and policy-makers as the one-stop-shop solution to all of society's challenges, from obesity to mental illness, to digital inclusion. These policy entrepreneurs tend to forget that the average 12-year-old spends less than 12 per cent of their time in school. The clamour for changes in the curriculum and in schools operations too often forgets that. Policy focus needs to shift to initiatives in the other 88 per cent of children's time and to take proper account of parental duties and responsibilities.

So what does all of this have to do with policy-making? Firstly, we all need to recognise and appreciate that the system is broadly working. What is needed is evolution, not revolution.

Secondly, we need to recognise that the great strength of the system is the quality of the people who teach, lead, and manage our schools. They have successfully absorbed an incredible amount of change over a very short period, and in doing so they have ensured that the system has adapted to change. However, if we load too much on them, we risk breaking the system.

Thirdly, the absorptive capacity of any system (and the people in that system) is limited. Given the rate of social and legislative change, it may well be wise to limit the number of initiatives hitting schools at any one time. In short, a policy of masterly inactivity for a period, to give principals the time to breathe, would greatly benefit the schools.

### The concept of the Devil's Advocate

This is where the concept of devil's advocate could be valuable. The *Advocatus Diaboli* was formerly an official position in the Catholic Church: one who 'argued against the canonisation of a candidate in order to uncover any character flaws or misrepresentation of the evidence favouring canonisation'.

What I am suggesting is that we need a person or small unit to test education policy initiatives to destruction, and act as a counterweight to the growing number of policy initiatives from NGO think tanks, the NCCA, and reflex-driven politicians. We need the policy equivalent of a devil's advocate. If an idea is robust enough to survive rigorous interrogation, it could then proceed to official examination by the Department or other state agencies.

This would kill bad ideas before they hit they system, not prevent innovation. Innovation in most industries is driven not by lone geniuses in the attic or expert academics pushing the latest theories, but by practitioners in the field. We need to find better mechanisms to identify and share best practice from the real experts in education: teachers in the classroom. Let teachers drive the change.

'The pressure on leaders to do 984 different things is unbearable, so the effective ones learn how to say no and stick with it.' - Peter Drucker

Furthermore, we need to focus on easing the administrative burden on principals, allowing them to focus on teaching, learning, and leading schools, not 'driving quills'.

Some initiatives, such as child protection measures, have to be progressed, but we need an agreed critical path that ensures the schools know what change is coming and when, rather than the current model of continuous change with no time for rest or reflection. The management guru Michael Porter said that the essence of strategy is choosing what not to do.

The educational system needs a strong voice, a devil's advocate, to say no to non-essential or non-productive change so that teachers, principals, and boards of management can focus on building on existing strengths, and on the things that matter, to deliver a better education for our children.

Peter Drucker once observed, 'The pressure on leaders to do 984 different things is unbearable, so the effective ones learn how to say no and stick with it.' Education needs to learn to say no, not in order to prevent change but to make sure we make the right changes and build on the very real strengths of primary education.

Minister for Education and Skills Richard Bruton with the winners of the Art Competition organised by the Catholic Primary Schools Management Association with the theme for 2017 'Celebrating our Local School'.



The Junior Category winner was Isabelle Maher, Senior Infants, St. Brigid's NS, Co. Westmeath; Special Education Category winner was Rebecca Hynes, Fifth Class, St. Patrick's NS, Co. Galway; Senior Category winner was Vicky Zimeng Lin, Sixth Class, Stanhope Street NS, Dublin 7. Stanhope Street NS also scooped the prize from Recreate.

# A Redeveloped Primary Curriculum

## Moving Forward

**Arlene Forster**

Deputy Chief Executive;

**Patrick Sullivan**

Director, Curriculum  
and Assessment;

**Iain Burns**

Former Education  
Officer;

**Dr Derek Grant**

Education Officer

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**T**his article provides a comprehensive overview of the wide-ranging work accomplished to date by the NCCA in devising a redeveloped primary curriculum. The work so far includes in-depth consultation with children, parents, teachers, researchers, and members of the public.

### Introduction

This year marks the eighteenth birthday of the primary school curriculum. Since its publication in 1999, the curriculum has underpinned teaching and learning in our schools. Informed by feedback from teachers and new research, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) subsequently developed supplementary curriculum and assessment materials which have supported teachers and principals in their work providing a quality primary education for children. These materials included guidelines on intercultural education (2005) and assessment (2007), as well as online tools such as the Curriculum Planning Tool ([www.nccaplanning.ie](http://www.nccaplanning.ie)) and the Report Card Creator ([www.reportcard.ncca.ie](http://www.reportcard.ncca.ie)).

In 2011, the NCCA issued an open invitation to interested individuals and organisations to have their say about priorities for a primary curriculum. Over a twelve-month period, 960 responses were received, analysis of which highlighted six key priorities and spotlighted ways the current curriculum could be improved. The results of that consultation, two curriculum reviews (NCCA, 2005, 2008a), and work with schools and other primary developments, have provided direction for NCCA's continued work in curriculum and assessment development.

### Curriculum developments

In the years since the primary school curriculum was published, there have been significant developments that affect the curriculum and how it is used in classrooms. For example, the implementation of *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* (2009) and a programme of reform at Junior Cycle create a need for greater curriculum alignment and continuity as children move from preschool to primary school and on to post-primary school. The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011–2020 called for a revision of the contents of the English and Mathematics curricula using a learning outcomes approach and providing samples of students' learning that demonstrate achievement of those outcomes (DES, 2011). The new Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile (PLC/CTB) (2015) for English and Irish

has been developed by the NCCA for use in the junior primary years. The new PLC/CTB for the senior primary years and new Primary Mathematics Curriculum are currently under development.

### Changing classrooms

Primary classrooms have changed significantly over the years. They are now more dynamic and busier places in which teachers support and respond to a greater diversity of learners, helping each to grow and develop. The last ten to fifteen years have also brought unprecedented technological advances, changing the way we communicate; the way we access, process, and manage information; and the way we ultimately think about and view the world around us.

This period has also seen significant change in social structures and situations. These changed and changing circumstances impact both positively and negatively on children's experiences of childhood and families' experiences of life. But the last two decades have seen not only significant change in who inhabits classrooms and the types of experiences they bring with them, but also increasing demands being made of the curriculum by a changed and changing society and its expectations of the education system. All of this creates an opportunity for revisiting and checking in with the primary curriculum to see if it is still fit for purpose. This posits the question: How can it be improved to support children's learning into the next decade?

### Consultation proposals

To support an initial conversation about the future of the primary curriculum, two sets of proposals were published by the NCCA, in December 2016, about (1) how the primary school curriculum should be structured, and (2) how time might be used across the curriculum. The proposals became a lever for all interested stakeholders to consider how a future curriculum can best support children's learning and development in a way that continues to engage and challenge them, and supports greater school autonomy in curriculum development. The proposals recognised acceleration in the volume of research on children's learning and development in their early childhood and primary school years.

While the proposals didn't indicate how new curriculum areas and subjects might be incorporated into a redeveloped curriculum, they did provide a space to consider the calls for more time to be allocated to existing curriculum areas such as Language and Mathematics; Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE); and Physical Education (PE), and to consider also demands for the inclusion of new curriculum areas such as Coding, Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, Modern Languages, and Well-being. These requests make reviewing and redeveloping the primary curriculum an important priority for the education system. A detailed description of the proposals is published in 'Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum: For consultation (2016)', available at [www.ncca.ie/timeandstructure](http://www.ncca.ie/timeandstructure).

To support an initial conversation about the future of the primary curriculum, two sets of proposals were published by the NCCA in December 2016.

The first set of proposals suggested moving away from subjects in early primary education, replacing them with themes or with curriculum areas.

A range of consultation formats using English and Irish were used to support dialogue and engagement with children, parents, teachers, researchers, and members of the public.

The first set of proposals considered the structure of a redeveloped primary curriculum. These proposals suggested the possibility of changing from the current structure of four two-year bands (infants, junior, middle, senior) to a new incremental structure of either two or three stages encompassing the two years of the *Early Childhood Care and Education Programme* (see Appendix 1). The proposals also suggested moving away from subjects in early primary education, replacing them with themes such as those in Aistear or with curriculum areas. In particular, respondents to the consultation were asked to consider:

- » Moving from the current curriculum structure of four two-year bands to an incremental model with either two or three stages
- » The benefits and challenges of the proposed models
- » Themes, curriculum areas, and subjects as curriculum organisers in the primary school.

The second set of proposals considered a different way to think about and use time in the school day. The proposals were designed to give schools more flexibility in deciding how best to use time to support children in their learning. Using time more flexibly may also give schools more support in using teaching methodologies such as child-led play in the early years of primary school, and projects in later years (see Appendix 2). In particular, consultation respondents were asked to consider:

- » Giving schools more flexibility in how they allocate time across the curriculum (see Appendix 2)
- » The possibility of having weekly time allocations for only language and mathematics
- » The possibility of having monthly or termly time allocations for all other areas of the curriculum
- » How much of the school week should be available for schools to use as they choose, and for what purposes schools might use this time.

### Consultation formats

The consultation on the proposals took place from January to June 2017. To ensure it was as far-reaching as possible, materials were developed to support all interested parties. The main section of the NCCA website was updated with a specific area on the consultation. The education correspondents of news media were informed, and articles were subsequently published in the national press. Partner networks also supported the dissemination of the proposals. A Twitter campaign was undertaken to generate interest and participation.

A range of consultation formats using English and Irish were used to support dialogue and engagement with children, parents, teachers, researchers, and members of the public regarding the proposals. What emerged was rich discourse, focusing not only on the proposals but on many other aspects of educational endeavour in primary education. The consultation formats, described in more detail below, consisted of:

- » Bilateral meetings with 33 stakeholders
- » Consultative conference in Dublin Castle for 190 delegates
- » Consultative meetings with children in three schools



- » 2,084 completed online questionnaires
- » Seven focus groups involving 48 teachers and principals
- » 109 written submissions.

### **Bilateral meetings**

Bilateral meetings with a wide range of interest groups took place throughout the six-month consultation period. Many organisations participated, either by invitation or through an expression-of-interest request, sharing their views about aspects of the proposals in which they had particular interest. Before the meetings, each organisation was given information detailing the consultation proposals. The meetings supported discussion, reflection, and commentary on both sets of proposals contained in the consultation document.

A significant aspect of the consultation involved conversations with primary school children.

### **Consultative conference**

A consultative conference took place on 28 March in Dublin Castle and was attended by delegates including teachers, principals, early childhood practitioners and managers, parents, researchers, policy-makers, and members of the wider public. John Hammond, chief executive of the NCCA, opened the conference, and Arlene Forster, deputy CEO, gave an overview of the consultation to date. Fergus Finlay, CEO of Barnardos Ireland, gave a keynote which was followed by children, teachers, and principals sharing experiences of the primary curriculum. These contributions provided food for thought, and delegates then participated in two discussion group sessions as they explored the proposals on structure and time in detail. A panel discussion in the afternoon provided an opportunity to continue the conversation on certain themes arising from earlier sessions. The Minister for Education and Skills, Richard Bruton TD, addressed delegates in the afternoon, before Brigid McManus, chairperson of the NCCA, closed the event.

### **Consultative meetings with children**

Another significant aspect of the consultation involved conversations with primary school children. This work didn't focus explicitly on the consultation proposals, but instead invited children to share their thoughts on curriculum content and pedagogy – why they thought school was important, what they liked doing at school, how they liked to learn, and what they would like to do more of. To support children in sharing their views, NCCA worked with schools on an ongoing basis to develop trust and build a rapport with the children. Previous work in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, which involved consulting with children, informed the process. The work included children in four schools across the contexts of English-/Irish-medium, DEIS/non-DEIS, and urban/rural. The children came from junior, middle, and senior classes.

### **Online questionnaires**

An online questionnaire was developed with the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI). It was available in Irish and English throughout the consultation period. The questionnaire was designed primarily for educators, to gather their professional opinions on curriculum change, and focused on the following three areas:



- » Structure and time in the 1999 curriculum
- » Proposed changes to the structure of the primary curriculum
- » Proposed changes to time allocation in the primary curriculum.

There were also questions about respondents' profiles. Respondents tended to be early-career to mid-career teachers, and there was a good representation of respondents across the years of primary education.

Teacher focus group meetings were another important feature of the consultation.

### Teacher focus groups

Teacher focus group meetings were another important feature of the consultation in supporting teachers to voice their views and responses to the proposals. The Association of Teachers' Education Centres in Ireland (ATECI) helped to organise and inform teachers about the meetings. Seven focus groups took place between 15 February and 15 March involving teachers and principals, in Cork, Drumcondra, Ionad Mhúinteoirí Chonamara, Limerick, Navan, Sligo, and Waterford.

Seven other groups were cancelled because of low numbers expressing interest. This may have been due to the busyness of schools at this time of year, or to the level of consultation more generally in the education system in recent times. In the case of these seven groups, teachers and principals who indicated their intention to attend were encouraged to use the online questionnaire to share their views on the proposals. The INTO and CPSMA also organised focus group meetings and shared feedback from teachers and principals.

### Written submissions

A facility for representative bodies, interest groups, and individuals to provide written submissions on the proposals was available on the NCCA consultation webpage. A template was provided to help respondents structure a written response. Some used an alternative structure. Written submissions were received by post and through a dedicated email address.

A number of key themes emerged. These will be presented in a report due for publication by the NCCA in late 2017 or early 2018.

### In conclusion

The significant engagement across the consultation formats generated rich data, and a number of key themes emerged. These will be presented in a report due for publication by the NCCA in late 2017 or early 2018. The themes, which focus on structural and organisational aspects of the curriculum, will feed into the next phase of work in redeveloping the primary curriculum. This follow-on phase will focus on further significant areas for consideration, including:

- » the purpose of a curriculum for this phase in a child's educational journey, taking account of policy developments in early childhood and at junior cycle
- » theories of learning informing the curriculum and resultant principles underpinning it
- » pedagogical approaches shaping teaching and learning.

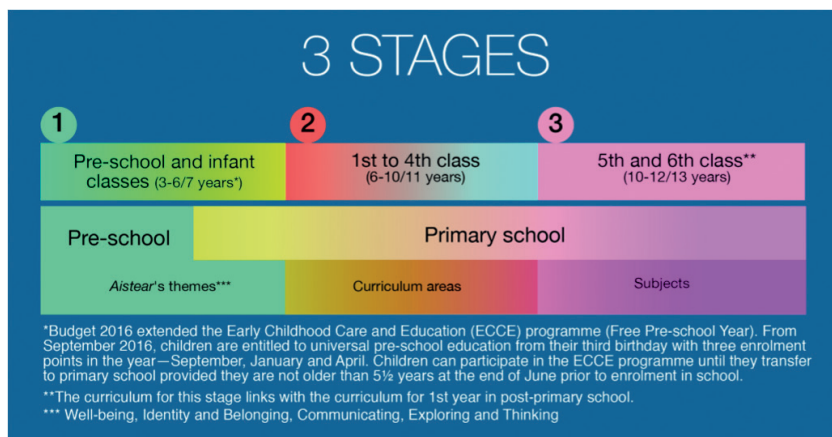
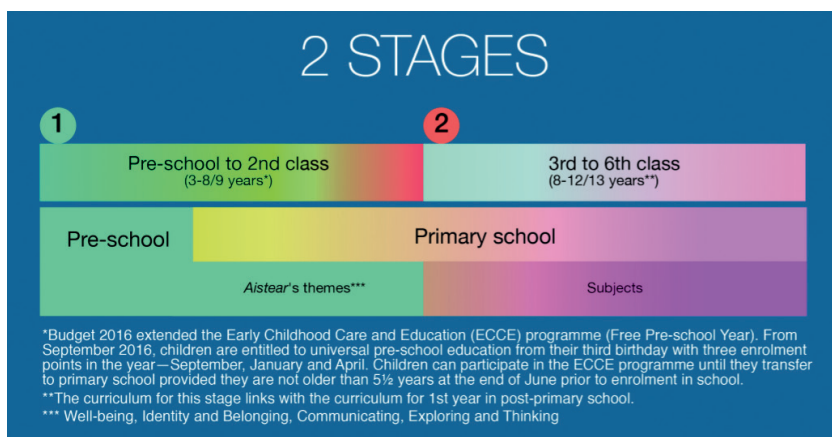
Research, consultation, and work with early childhood settings and schools will continue to inform the NCCA's work on redeveloping the primary curriculum. See [www.ncca.ie](http://www.ncca.ie) for updates on the work and how you can stay involved.

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## Appendix 1: First set of proposals on curriculum structure

The proposals recommended moving from four two-year stages to an incremental model which uses a differentiated curriculum structure. Two options were presented for consideration: a two-stage model and a three-stage model.



## Appendix 2: Second set of proposals on time allocation

The consultation proposed using two categories to present time during the school day: minimum state curriculum time and flexible time.

### Minimum state curriculum time

(60% of school time)

Including language, mathematics, social, personal and health education, social, environmental and scientific education, arts education, and physical education

The proposals referred to a:

- » Minimum allocation for language and maths on a weekly basis
- » Minimum allocation for other themes/areas/subjects on a monthly basis.

### Flexible time

(40% of school time)

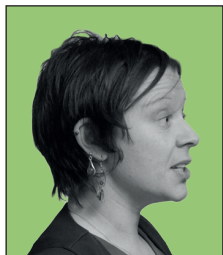
Including discretionary curriculum time, patron's programme, recreation, breaks, assemblies, and roll call

Sean Cottrell, retiring CEO of Primary Principals' Network, shares a word with Minister for Education and Skills Richard Bruton.



# STEAM-in-a-box

## Co-Teaching Inspires Children's Creative and Critical Thinking



**Alice D'Arcy**



**Colette Murphy**



**John O'Halloran**

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**S**TEAM Education<sup>1</sup> aims to inspire the next generation of scientists and artists using fun, hands-on, 'in-a-box' programmes. Co-teaching partnerships of science and arts professionals and academic experts, with teachers, are facilitated to deliver these programmes and enhance STEAM education in primary schools.

The vision of STEAM Education Ltd is to inspire our young children to become the next generation of Scientists, Technologists, Engineers, Artists, and Mathematicians. We develop innovative, fun, engaging educational resources in these areas specifically for upper-level students in primary schools. We facilitate co-teaching partnerships of science and arts professionals and academic experts with teachers to deliver these programmes, multiplying the benefits to all actors involved: the children, teachers, and outreach experts. To date we have delivered programmes to over 5,000 children in primary schools, with the support of over 20 companies, a number of higher education institutes<sup>2</sup>, a science foundation<sup>3</sup>, city and county councils, and private donors.

STEAM-in-a-Box (SIAB) was first introduced in a small school in west Cork in 2006. It was the brainchild of a parent-scientist, Seamus Devlin, who wanted to try teaching rocket science to children in fifth or sixth class aged 10–12 years. Each week, the scientist arrived with a box of science materials (including sheep's eyes!), many of them tailor-made for children to take home or to use in the classroom.

*'We need desperately to nurture the next generation of innovators, and this means starting at the earliest practicable age.'* — Seamus Devlin, co-founder and director, STEAM Education Ltd

From this small beginning in one primary school class, STEAM Education has gone on to develop a number of programmes and a framework for their delivery in schools around the country, supported by industry and other sponsors.

In Ireland, STEM has been the subject of increasing focus in recent years. We are directly addressing some of the proposed actions published in the STEM Review Group's recent report on Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Education in Ireland (2016)<sup>4</sup>. For example, we:

- » ‘Avail of partnerships with STEM enterprises (e.g. within the national Smart Futures initiative) to promote STEM careers at all levels in education.
- » Develop extensive curricular materials for teachers that operationalise learning outcomes in STEM subjects at primary and post-primary levels.
- » Promote and facilitate the “adoption” of a school, or a cluster of schools, by a local STEM industry/enterprise.’ (p. 45)

**Quote from an industry sponsor and mathematics co-teacher:**

*‘Personally what I find with the co-teaching was that it added a lot of value back to the community. ... I got a lot of satisfaction out of it. ... It is something I would recommend anybody to get involved in. From a company perspective there’s been a lot of advantages for the employees – there are other CSR initiatives but perhaps they are not as close to home as this one.’ —Dana Kelleher, data scientist at Trend Micro*

STEAM-in-a-box was the brainchild of a parent scientist, Seamus Devlin, who wanted to try teaching rocket science to children aged 10-12 years.

In addition, since our work entails co-teaching between primary school teachers and STEAM experts, we are also enhancing primary teacher Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in these areas, in relation to another issue identified in the STEM Review Group’s 2016 report:

An expansion of Science-based CPD and better use of CPD days would lead to improved science teaching in primary schools. Better use, and stakeholders, such as enterprise partners, will support CPD. (p. 33)

Research on co-teaching science in primary schools shows that extraordinary results can be obtained through external specialists working closely with the normal classroom teacher (Murphy, 2016)<sup>5</sup>. Murphy’s work also shows that co-teaching via shared expertise provides a pedagogy which can be used to promote both teacher and student development of 21st-century learning skills, which include skills in critical thinking and problem-solving, collaboration across networks, curiosity and imagination, empathy, persistence, grit, and global stewardship. In addressing these needs, the SIAB programme hopes to provide a sustainable solution to these problems.

**Quote from a principal involved in the pilot Science-in-a-Box programme:**

*‘The STEAM programme has surpassed our expectations in terms of: the level of scientific content and insights which the pupils have gleaned; the collaborative nature of the programme, which permeates throughout all aspects and interactions (tutor/teacher, tutor/class, and organisation/school); and the professional detail and attention afforded to the organisation, timetabling, resources, school/organisation feedback meetings, and other practical elements of the programme. STEAM has been a most impressive and beneficial learning experience at many levels for both pupils and staff. It will serve the sixth-class pupils well as they transition to secondary school in September, and I have no doubt that it will add to their interest in science. While at an early stage in its development, its impressive fledgling efforts bode well for the future of science in primary schools.’ —Diarmuid Hennessy, principal, Scoil Mhuire na nGráist, Belgooly, Co. Cork*

We also want to increase the focus on how the arts and creative thinking are addressed in addition to STEM.

We also want to increase the focus on how the arts and creative thinking are addressed in addition to STEM, and to supplement progress in STEAM development in primary schools. We do this by incorporating elements of art and design in each of our STEAM programmes, as well as developing Arts-in-a-Box programmes which incorporate elements of STEM.

In recent years, the very notion of science has been broadened to incorporate the other STEM/STEAM subjects of technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics. Collaboration in science education research and practice has also been broadened to include industry, along with academics and government agencies.

The importance of Arts to STEM is not a new idea. More than five centuries ago, the work of Leonardo da Vinci (1492–1519) combined art and science. More recently, C. P. Snow's lecture *The Two Cultures* (1959) spoke passionately against the fracture of intellectual life between sciences and the arts and humanities.

STEAM collaborations are even more relevant now in light of the need to find solutions to our most complex problems, such as climate change and achieving UN sustainability development goals. The arts and humanities disciplines can be energised by scientific understanding and by exploration and discovery; science can be improved through engagement with ethical and aesthetic insights, as well as uncertainties over the impact of science on society, and vice versa.

**Quote from a teacher involved in our Engineering-in-a-Box programme on the importance of arts in the approach:**

*“When I asked a few of the girls if they were interested in science and engineering, they said they hadn’t been but this year (through Engineering-in-a-Box) it had really come to life for them. They love art and creativity, doodling and drawing, and that aspect of STEAM has really appealed to them.” –Miriam Long, sixth class, Crosshaven NS, Co Cork. Sponsored by DePuy Synthes for Engineering-in-a-Box.*

The importance of Arts to STEM is not a new idea. More than five centuries ago, the work of Leonardo da Vinci (1492–1519) combined art and science.

We have developed a unique partnership that unites actors from STEAM research, science education research, formal and informal science education, artists, designers, and industry with one vision – to excite, inspire, and educate primary school children in STEAM through a direct connection with frontier research and development. The programmes, called STEAM-in-a-Box (SIAB), bring the relevant real-life experts into primary classrooms week after week during the academic year, with specially designed tools and content for each lesson, to co-teach STEAM with the primary teacher using 21st-century pedagogical approaches.

This connects industry and third-level institutions with schools to disseminate knowledge and leverage the capacity of our experts to enhance the education of our children and the capacity of our primary teachers. It also creates the pipeline for highly skilled graduates who will be required for future jobs.

Our framework seeks to make a step change in STEAM education in Ireland through new investment and the leveraging of existing resources.



SIAB also sets out an ambitious programme of research through practice that will have high impact and will be transformative in the science curriculum in Ireland.

We have shown already that some of the outcomes of the national STEM Review Group support our current approach and model. We hope this will help us reach as many schools in Ireland as quickly as possible. We suggest that policy-makers consider deeply and support projects such as STEAM-in-a-Box, which have been developed and refined in collaboration with industry, academic experts, and schools.

The ultimate goal of SIAB is to harness and share expertise via this public-private-industry collaboration to improve the STEAM learning of all students at every primary school, and thereby to increase diversity in STEAM fields and the STEAM literacy of the Irish nation. SIAB also sets out an ambitious programme of research through practice that will have high impact and will be transformative in the science curriculum in Ireland, with further opportunities for a global impact.

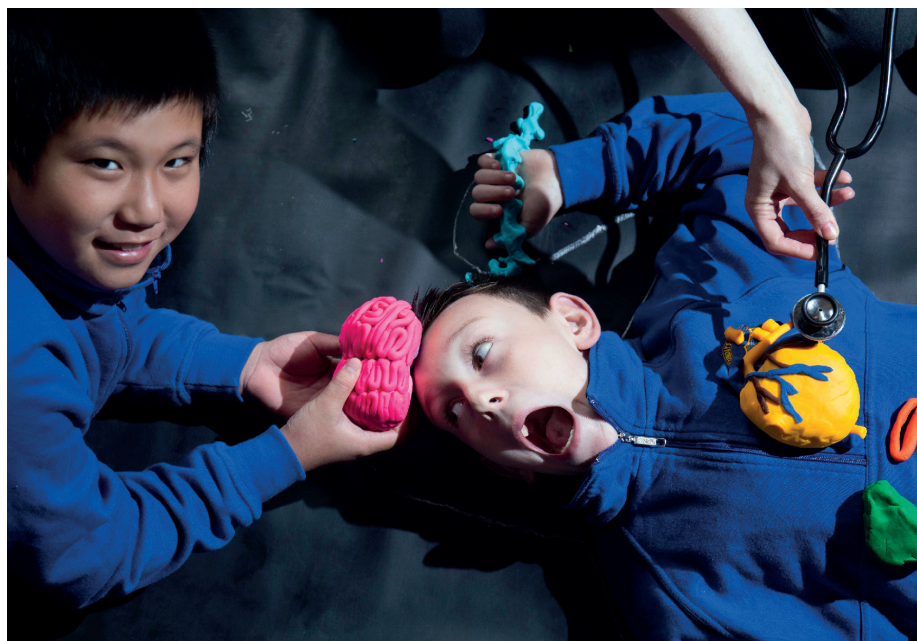
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## FOOTNOTES

1. STEAM Education Ltd is a not-for-profit company operating out of UCC Gateway Incubation Centre. [www.steam-ed.ie/](http://www.steam-ed.ie/).
2. Prof. John O'Halloran, UCC, and director of STEAM Education, on 'Why STEAM Matters': [www.youtube.com/watch?v=L7gE3juU0qM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L7gE3juU0qM).
3. [www.thenaughtonfoundation.com/resources/science-in-a-box](http://www.thenaughtonfoundation.com/resources/science-in-a-box).
4. [www.education.ie/en/Publications/Education-Reports/STEM-Education-in-the-Irish-School-System.pdf](http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Education-Reports/STEM-Education-in-the-Irish-School-System.pdf).
5. Murphy, C. (2016). *Coteaching in Teacher Education: Innovative Pedagogy for Excellence*. St. Albans: Critical Publishing

STEAM programmes provide fun hands-on learning experiences that promote creative and critical thinking in science, technology, engineering, arts and maths. This workshop was a colourful interactive exploration of human anatomy - and careers in medical science.

## STEAM introductory workshop at Sundays Well Boys' N.S, Cork



# Digital Strategy for Schools

2017 was the year when use of technology resources went mainstream



**Simon Lewis**

Principal at Carlow Educate Together School  
and Editor of Anseo.net

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**T**echnology is back on the agenda in the primary sector with the new digital framework and the delivery of grants to schools. Simon Lewis examines the technology landscape in primary education and the difficulties of school leaders as they forge their way haphazardly through increasingly complicated terrain.

With the new framework for ICT published in late 2015, and ICT grants delivered to schools in the last school year, technology is back on the agenda in education around the country. However, the landscape has changed considerably since the last tranche of funding came. How do school leaders navigate this area that has become even more complicated?

The Digital Strategy for Schools 2015–2020 was the latest attempt by the government to come up with a strategy for the use of technology in education. It was possibly of more interest to school leaders because, for the first time in many years, it was accompanied by money.

The strategy itself is a rather long document but very short on concrete plans. For the last number of years, primary school leaders have been calling for decent broadband, a good Wi-Fi infrastructure, funding for technology, and centralised technical support. However, apart from the money, primary schools were to be disappointed, with no clear indications that anything else would be forthcoming.

Schools were not going to refuse a cheque, however, no matter how small. Receiving a few thousand Euros per annum for a few years was welcomed, and it put technology onto the agenda of many schools for the first time in many years. 2017 was the year that school leaders were able to invest in new technology for the first time in nearly a decade.

The question most school leaders had was how to spend their money. Since the last technology grant, the whole technological landscape has changed and become much more complicated. For example, there are now at least three main providers of technology: Windows, Apple, and Google, each with its own strengths and weaknesses in what it provides.

The Internet has revolutionised how schools work. Until recently, if the connection went down, it might have been days before anyone noticed. These days, one almost has to close the school, we have become so dependent on the Internet for running everything:

2017 was the year that school leaders were able to invest in new technology for the first time in nearly a decade.

Many schools have all their policies and plans in online folders like Google Docs.

from student management systems with all the pupils' data, to accessing all the interactive lessons on the 'cloud'.

Tablets have been knocking at the classroom door since 2010 without much success, mainly because schools had no money to buy them. There are dozens of brands of tablets out there, including iPads, Androids and Surfaces, all of which have their strengths and weaknesses.

After the craze of interactive whiteboards in Ireland from 2008 to 2012, when over 90 per cent of schools scraped together money from cake sales and Who Wants to be a Thousandaire charity nights to have boards in their classrooms, in 2017 the interactive screen, if we are to believe the hype, has become the new must-have accessory of the primary classroom.

All this has given school leaders many questions to ask themselves, especially with the added pressures of all the companies trying to sell these new devices. 2017 was a year of many decisions, and schools unfortunately had to rely on the same haphazard approach as they have been relying on with every digital strategy published by the Department of Education.

Thankfully, many schools have been able to navigate the choppy waters of 2017, and there have been excellent examples of how technology has been integrated into the daily lives of primary school pupils around the country. Primary schools have grasped the power that technology allows them, and children have been able to create and share some valuable lessons that wouldn't be possible without it.

For primary school leaders, 2017 has seen a number of excellent technological advances, with more and more schools signing up to student management information systems such as Aladdin and Databiz. Many schools have signed up to either G Suite for Education (formerly Google Apps) or Microsoft Office 365, leaving behind the need for software on computers and switching over to completely cloud-based systems. It is now common for schools to communicate exclusively by email or online message boards.

Many schools have all their policies and plans in online folders like Google Docs, which can be edited by different users at the same time. Behaviour policies are integrating technological resources such as ClassDojo, while maths plans now contain links with services such as Mathletics and Khan Academy. Parental involvement has also become more technologically advanced, with schools using electronic forms to communicate with parents. More schools are surveying parents in areas such as school improvement plans. While many of these services have been available for years, 2017 could be said to be the year they went mainstream.

Principals have taken the leap in many cases and have invested in hardware in 2017, with a big interest in mobile devices such as tablets and laptops. Many schools have purchased class sets of iPads or Chromebooks and are using them to do many of the tasks mentioned above.

Activities in classrooms are being recorded by teachers in Ireland on a daily basis, and the results are being posted up on YouTube, ClassStories,

Twitter, and Facebook. In 2017, video was by far the most transformative tool used in classrooms. As a new generation of social media-savvy teachers cements itself into the educational landscape, their comfort with filming their worlds is combined with the same natural impulse as their pupils. Short, snappy videos of performing a poem or taking part in something like the 'mannequin challenge' are two examples of how video is becoming a central methodology in classrooms.

In an era of celebrity, when people can become famous overnight for a niche area, the Irish primary teacher has not been left behind. There are over a dozen Irish primary teachers with huge followings on the Internet, specialising in areas such as infant teaching, visual arts, and resources for Special Educational Needs. These teachers have thousands of followers who hang on their every word as they share their wisdom from their own classrooms, perhaps even more so than the government's own trainers in the PDST. They are able to speak the language and display their materials in a way that official lines cannot, and this is both an opportunity and a challenge for the school leader and the educational landscape in general.

The government must now prioritise the rollout of fast broadband to all primary schools as quickly as possible.

The year has ended with much talk about coding in schools. While many schools have been programming away for the last decade, government policy seems to be shifting towards adding a coding module to the Maths curriculum. This is an area of grave concern to school leaders, as it threatens our holistic primary system, bowing to the short-term demands of large multinational industries. It has never been more important for schools to ensure they teach children the skills they need for the 21st century, and coding in its current form does not offer these skills. We need to teach children how to think critically and creatively, not to become coding monkeys.

2017 has been a very exciting year to be involved in technology in education, and there is a positive feeling that this might have been the year when we have graduated from its infancy to embedding it into our everyday practice. Having a little bit of money to replace older equipment has further aided this. However, we have been relying on the goodwill and good luck of the educators who are bringing these developments to the fore.

Ultimately, schools cannot continue to prosper without basic foundations. For technology to become completely embedded in all schools, investment is not only needed in hardware; the government must now prioritise the rollout of fast broadband to all primary schools as quickly as possible. A Wi-Fi infrastructure is becoming as important as having a heating or plumbing system in a school. Similarly, not having technical support for when computer equipment breaks down is akin to not having a caretaker or cleaning staff. These areas must be provided for urgently.

The Digital Strategy for Schools gives little in terms of promises in these areas, but it does recognise that they are areas of need. In the meantime, however, it looks like we will have to continue to navigate our way haphazardly through the technology landscape and keep up the cake sales to pay for it.

# Proposed New ERB and Ethics Curriculum

Who Is It For? Who Will Avail of It?



**Dr Anne Marie Kavanagh**

Lecturer in Ethical & Intercultural Education,  
DCU Institute of Education

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**T**he proposed ERB and Ethics curriculum has been a hugely significant issue in 2017, not least because of the emotive and polarising nature of the debate surrounding the place of religion in primary schools. This article explores some of the complexities surrounding this debate, critically engages with developments in 2017, and asks questions relevant for 2018.

How nations facilitate the moral, ethical, and spiritual development of children is socially, politically, and culturally significant. It is especially so in an era of increasing ethnic and cultural diversity, as nations seek to reconcile unity and diversity (Parekh, 2006) and provide an education for children that is both inclusive and pluralistic (Irwin, 2015).

## Deficiencies in system's response to diversity

The Irish education system's deficiencies in responding to diversity, particularly increased religious diversity and secularism, have long been recognised (Coolahan, Hussey & Kilfeather, 2012; Irwin, 2015; Darmody & Smyth, 2017). Indeed, the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism report (2012) clearly highlights the system's inadequacies and cites the imperative for it 'to meet the needs and rights of citizens in a more pluralist society' (Coolahan et al., 2012, p. 53). One of the key shortcomings outlined in the report is the continued use of a confessional religious approach to children's moral and ethical development in approximately 90 per cent of primary schools, despite significant demographic change. Encouragingly, however, since the report's publication, the system has gradually begun to adapt – although it lacks the pace and radical approach which many individuals and interest groups argue is essential.

## Thrust towards pluralism

A range of recent developments appear to signify what Irwin (2015, p. 51) describes as 'a genuine thrust towards pluralism and progressive change in Irish schools'. 2017 has been a particularly significant year in this regard. Among the changes which have taken place this year have been the expansion of the multi-denominational Community National School (CNS) model of patronage and further development of its ethical curriculum; the proposed removal of the 'baptism barrier' by current Minister for Education and Skills, Richard Bruton TD, so that Catholic primary schools will no longer be able to discriminate on the basis of religion in their admission policies; and the continued development of a new State curriculum in ERB (Education about Religion and Beliefs) and Ethics, which is the focus of this article.



Both the NCCA and ERSI reports indicate that not all believe that the [ERB and Ethics] curriculum is necessary or indeed appropriate for all children.

Research shows that children want to learn about other religions and to do so in a classroom context.

### New State curriculum

The proposed new curriculum in Education about Religion and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics was recommended by the Forum report with responsibility for its development assigned to the NCCA. This is a challenging and problematic endeavour given the complexities of the current system, the emotive and polarising nature of the debate on religious pluralism and the place of religion in schools, and the range of epistemological and ethical issues which such a curriculum would likely engender. Following publication of the draft curriculum in November 2015, public consultation took place which culminated in the largest volume of submissions ever received by the NCCA in March 2016, highlighting the high level of interest in the area but also ensuring that a diversity of views could inform the new curriculum's development. A report by the NCCA based on this process and a report by the ESRI which analysed the views of teachers, parents, and the general public regarding the curriculum were published in early 2017.

### Not everyone is on board

The reports' findings indicate strong support for the broad aims of the proposed curriculum, the interactive teaching and learning methodologies proposed, and the skills and dispositions outlined, particularly those which enable children to flourish in a multicultural society (e.g. empathy, respect for diversity, acceptance, openness). Unsurprisingly, concerns were raised by those who engaged with the process around issues such as school ethos, curriculum overload, and time constraints. The opportunities and challenges presented by the curriculum as perceived by those who contributed to the public consultation lead to questions that are central to this article, as does the academic literature: Who is the curriculum for? Who will avail of it? The NCCA and ESRI reports indicate that not everyone believes the curriculum is necessary or indeed appropriate for all children, which leads to another salient question: Why is it important that all children have access to and avail of this curriculum?

### A curriculum for all children

From the outset, the advisory group to the Forum argued that the curriculum was for all children. Indeed, the group argued that children had a right to education in ERB and Ethics and that the State had the responsibility to provide it. The argument that all children should have access to Ethics and ERB is also supported by the literature, which, in short, argues that ERB and Ethics contribute to children gaining a deeper understanding of themselves, their peers and the wider world; facilitates moral development; provides opportunities to explore their own and others' value systems through respectful dialogue; encourages respect for the 'otherness of others'; challenges all forms of discrimination; and promotes development of the skills and dispositions necessary to live as proactive, empathetic citizens in a multicultural society, thereby contributing towards integration, peaceful co-existence, and social cohesion (OSCE & ODIHR, 2007; Arigatou Foundation, 2008; Fisher, 2008; NCCA, 2015). Engagement with such a curriculum therefore has the capacity to contribute to both the public and private good. Research also shows that children want to learn about other religions and to do so in a classroom context (Smyth & Darmody, 2010, cited in Darmody & Smyth, 2017). Indeed, consensus is growing internationally on the need for secular



ethical education. The UAE, for example, recognising the importance of this type of education, introduced its first ever curriculum in moral and citizenship education in September 2017.

### **Will all children be enabled to avail of ERB and Ethics?**

Despite the large body of evidence which attests to the benefits of secular ethical education, the question remains: Will all children be able to avail of this curriculum? This arguably depends to a large extent on the powerful interest groups involved in primary education, particularly the churches. The introduction of a curriculum in ERB and Ethics would mark a significant change to policy and to the status quo, that is, changes to a predominantly denominational system that has historically facilitated children's moral and ethical development through a confessional approach. Indeed, the ESRI points out the likelihood 'that some individuals or groups may actively oppose the introduction of the new curriculum' (p. 56). This would undermine the capacity of all children to avail of the curriculum given the significant number of schools under denominational patronage. However, it also depends on the NCCA and the Minister for Education and Skills and the extent to which they are willing to push the boundaries of the current system so that all children can avail of their right to education in ERB and Ethics.

### **ERB and Ethics should be discrete mandatory subjects**

While it is desirable that both Ethics and ERB would become discrete, mandatory subjects on the primary curriculum, it is likely that without radical reform, this is not a viable option, given the particulars of the current denominational system and resistance by powerful actors in key interest groups to the proposed curriculum. Instead, the NCCA has already capitulated to a certain degree and is proposing that 'the types of teaching and learning that received broad support in the consultation become a feature of primary education' as the structure of the primary curriculum is reviewed and redeveloped (2017, p. 52). If embedded in a revised primary curriculum, it should ensure that all children have access to and can avail of aspects of the curriculum, at least in theory. However, without skilful integration on the part of the NCCA, it is likely that the aims of moral education will be greatly undermined and may be entirely lost.

### **Conclusion**

If this proposed curriculum is to succeed, the NCCA will need to engage in a campaign to bring schools, teachers, parents, interest groups, and teacher educators along with them and draw on the available evidence to persuade those who are sceptical of the merits of this type of education in 2018. Moreover, precedent shows that significant Continuing Professional Development (CPD) which increases educators' knowledge, skills, and confidence in this area is essential. Rather than being seen as a threat to religious communities, this curriculum should be seen as offering a space for children to connect with and develop an understanding of themselves, their friends, peers, and others from different cultural and social groups who hold divergent values, beliefs, and perspectives, without having to compromise their identities, values, and sense of self.

If this proposed curriculum is to succeed, the NCCA will need to engage in a campaign to bring schools, teachers, parents, interest groups, and teacher educators along with them.

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Archbishop Eamon Martin, Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland, addressed the Irish Catholic Conference on Education on 26 October 2017. Speaking about Catholic Schools, he said:

"For decades the Catholic schools of Ireland have played an essential role in supporting parents and families in their role as first educators of their children. Despite a changed context, Catholic schools remain as vital centres for evangelisation and catechesis, closely linked to parishes and local communities. It is reasonable, then, for boards of management of Catholic schools, in establishing their admissions criteria, to be concerned about ensuring that pupils from the local parish, or group of parishes, are able to access their Catholic school."

# Children's Rights Online

## The Critical Role of Teachers and Education



**Edel Quinn**

Senior Legal & Policy Officer, Children's Rights Alliance

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**F**or the first time, an age of digital consent will be in place in Ireland as new EU data protection laws come into force from May 2018. How will this be implemented at school level, and what implications will it have for teachers and schools using technology to teach? In this article, Edel Quinn discusses the central role of education in ensuring that children will benefit safely from the opportunities that technology and digital media provide.

In 2017, children and young people in Ireland were more active online than ever before. Access to digital media is a major learning resource for children of all ages but it can also be the source of a new frontier of child protection concerns. A balanced approach must be taken to ensure that children can participate in and benefit from the opportunities that new technology and digital media provide, but in a safe way.

The Children's Rights Alliance believes that central to this is education: education on the rights of children online (the right to education, to play, to participate, to express themselves, to access information for example), education on critical digital literacy, on how to participate safely, as well as avenues of support if they are bothered by something they have come across in the digital space. Education should be provided not only for children and young people but for parents and in particular for teachers. In fact, recent research reveals that almost 70 per cent of teachers do not feel adequately prepared to effectively deliver internet safety education (CyberSafe Ireland, 2017).

While the Department of Education and Skills has undertaken welcome initiatives to address issues such as cyberbullying, the development of an overarching strategy is essential given the wide range of areas of a child's life that can be affected by digital media. This should bring all relevant government departments to the table with clear roles and commitments on their remit for children online. Education for children in this area should start early, in primary school. The Special Rapporteur on Child Protection recently suggested it should begin in pre-school. Given the myriad of issues that are impacted by digital media, education about the rights of children online could be an integrated part of related subjects. Given the centrality of the role of digital media in the lives of children, it should also be compulsory. In order to inform strategy or curriculum development in this area, research will have to be undertaken to develop an evidence base for the direction taken and consultation with children and young people, as well as teachers, must play a key element.

Underpinning all this must be the Continuous Professional Development of all teachers to ensure that they are ready to deal with the issues that are likely to arise with regard to child safety online. However, it needs to go beyond the narrow spectrum of online safety and incorporate areas relating to mental health, sexual health, civic participation and data protection, for example. The latter will come into sharp focus in May 2018 when new EU data protection laws come into force setting in place, for the first time, an age of digital consent in Ireland. This means that a parent or guardian will have to give permission for a child under 13 to access online services (where their personal data will be used). How will this be implemented at school level and what implications will it have for teachers and schools using technology to teach?

Today's children are the first to grow up online, to live and learn in a digital space. This is a new and evolving policy issue which will impact children in ways we cannot predict. This is why the role of education, and teachers, is critical to successful outcomes for children.

The Ulster Museum was one of the many venues across Ireland that opened its doors to Maths Week 2017.

Maths Week Ireland is an all-island celebration of Maths which promotes awareness, appreciation and understanding of the subject through a huge variety of events and activities. It is a partnership of over 50 groups - universities, institutes of technology, colleges, museums, libraries, visitor centres, professional bodies. Any group that sees the importance of maths and of promoting maths is eligible to participate.





# Quality Assurance in Schools

## 'Looking at Our School 2016' and School Self-Evaluation



**Dr Deirdre Mathews**

Assistant Chief Inspector

**Kate O'Carroll**

Senior Inspector, Evaluation Support and Research Unit, Department of Education and Skills

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### **L**ooking At Our School 2016: A Quality Framework for Schools

by the Department of Education and Skills provides a coherent set of standards in the two core dimensions of the work of schools: teaching and learning, and leadership and management.

2016 marked an important year for quality assurance in the Irish school system. It saw the publication of a set of significant documents: a Guide to Inspection, School Self-Evaluation Guidelines 2016–2020, and *Looking at Our School 2016: A Quality Framework for Schools*. These were prepared by the Inspectorate as part of an overall process of reform in the education system, and were published in primary and post-primary versions on the Department of Education and Skills website ([www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie)).

### How the quality framework has evolved

These publications do not mark the beginning of quality assurance in our schools, nor should they be viewed as the end of the road. Rather, they are a stage in the evolution of a quality assurance system that aims to help provide the best possible education for all our children and young people. We believe that articulating standards is fundamental to a quality assurance system. That's why we published the first *Looking at Our School* in 2003 and why a quality framework for teaching and learning was published in the school self-evaluation guidelines in 2012.

The content of the 2016 publications builds on previous guides and frameworks, and has benefitted from recent international research as well as feedback from schools, guidance from advisory groups, and extensive consultation with the education partners. We have learned from listening to schools and partners that a quality framework needs to be simple and clear. It needs to focus on the core work of schools, and it needs to provide meaningful guidance to school leaders and teachers as they develop and improve their practice. The intention in publishing *Looking at Our School 2016* is to better meet these needs.

The publication of the framework should help parents and others to understand the evaluative judgements in inspection reports and in schools' self-evaluation reports. It provides a common language which facilitates meaningful dialogue between teachers, educational professionals, parents, pupils/students, and school communities.

The framework will support the system in reaching its long-term goal: a situation where external inspection and school self-evaluation operate as complementary processes, giving schools increased autonomy while ensuring transparency and accountability.

### **How the quality framework is structured**

*Looking at Our School 2016* replaces earlier frameworks. It provides a unified, coherent set of standards under four domains in each of the two core dimensions of practice in schools: teaching and learning, and leadership and management.

The four domains of teaching and learning – learner outcomes, learner experiences, teachers' individual practice, and teachers' collective/collaborative practice – are particularly pertinent to schools as they engage in school self-evaluation (SSE).

The four domains of leadership and management – leading teaching and learning, managing the organisation, leading school development, and developing leadership capacity – will become increasingly important as schools review the role of their in-school leadership and management teams.

Each domain has a set of standards that encapsulate the qualities and actions relevant to that area of practice. And each set of standards is accompanied by statements of practice at effective and highly effective levels.

### **How the quality framework can be used**

The framework is designed for teachers and schools to use in implementing the most effective and engaging teaching and learning approaches and enhancing the quality of leadership in their schools. The descriptions of 'effective practice' and 'highly effective practice' should help schools identify their strengths and areas for development. This process should help schools to embed in their practice school self-evaluation, reflective practice, and responsiveness to the needs of their pupils and students.

The framework is also used to inform the work of inspectors as they monitor and report on quality in schools. Used in a range of inspection models, the framework helps ensure consistency across all external evaluations.

During the 2016/17 school year, inspectors and schools became increasingly familiar with the quality framework. The Inspectorate responded to many requests for input on *Looking at Our School* from a range of leadership and management groups, and from national support services and individual schools. These inputs provided an ideal opportunity to indicate how inspectors would use the domains and standards in the various inspection models. They also enabled inspectors to illustrate how the standards might be used in school self-evaluation, especially those in the dimension of teaching and learning, and in the domain of leading teaching and learning in the leadership and management dimension.

The framework is designed for teachers and schools to use in implementing the most effective and engaging teaching and learning approaches and enhancing the quality of leadership in their schools.



The quality framework recognises the importance of quality teaching on learner achievement, not only in academic success but also in developing aspects of well-being such as self-awareness, resilience, respect, and responsibility.

Some schools have been slow to engage with SSE.

## How the quality framework supports school self-evaluation

Crucially, the Inspectorate inputs facilitated discussion about how schools could use school self-evaluation and the relevant sections of the quality framework to introduce, develop, or advance new elements of work. The six-step SSE process, now familiar to many schools, provides a structure for schools to gather evidence about current practice in order to determine where change is needed.

In primary schools, for example, evaluating current learner outcomes in oral language will help to identify the elements of language teaching that are working well and are consistent with the requirements of the Primary Language Curriculum, and the elements that need to be developed. For post-primary schools, the teaching and learning domains and standards in the quality framework align well with the changes required in teaching, learning, and assessment practices in the Framework for Junior Cycle.

Likewise, the quality framework helps schools to focus on learner well-being as part of their SSE. The quality framework takes a holistic view of learning and the learner, emphasising the need to develop a broad range of skills, competences, and values. It sees learner well-being as intrinsic to this holistic view of learning, as both an outcome of learning and an enabler of it. Thus, the quality framework recognises the importance of quality teaching on learner achievement, not only in academic success but also in developing aspects of well-being such as self-awareness, resilience, respect, and responsibility.

## SSE: Where are we now?

So where are we now with SSE? Experience from other jurisdictions tells us that embedding SSE is a long-term process requiring ten years or more. While recognising the reality of that timeframe, we can also point to real progress.

SSE now has recognition and currency in our schools. Schools are taking ownership of the process to identify areas for improvement in their teaching and learning practices, and to plan, implement, and monitor the actions required to bring about improvement. And the SSE circulars and guidelines for 2016–2020 encourage schools to make the process their own.

We are aware that, for a variety of reasons, some schools have been slow to engage with SSE. The Inspectorate continues to provide advisory visits to schools, and the support services offer a range of professional development opportunities for school leaders and others who wish to strengthen the SSE process in their schools. Schools should now turn their attention to the requirements of the current circulars (0039/2016 and 0040/2016), bearing in mind that literacy and numeracy remain a consistent and continuing focus of SSE in all schools.

The publication of *Looking at Our School 2016* has provided clear and transparent benchmarks of effective practice in schools, which can be applied both by the schools themselves and by the Inspectorate. This shared quality framework promotes professional dialogue and enables

The Department's SSE website ([www.schoolself-evaluation.ie](http://www.schoolself-evaluation.ie)) provides a central location for information and resources, and a platform for sharing good practice.

schools to use external evaluation to inform their own improvement plans.

The Department's SSE website ([www.schoolself-evaluation.ie](http://www.schoolself-evaluation.ie)) provides a central location for information and resources, and a platform for sharing good practice. Sample templates seek to guide schools in areas where there have been difficulties in the first SSE cycle, such as the summary report and plan for parents and the school community. And schools have been generous in sharing their own SSE stories both in videos and in resources they have developed.

One of the most influential aspects of the SSE journey for many schools has been the extent to which pupil/student voices have become a guiding force in evaluating and developing teaching and learning practices. Interestingly, this was one of John MacBeath's key messages when he spoke at the Inspectorate national seminar on school self-evaluation in 2014, and it is central to learner well-being. Some of the school stories shared on the SSE website provide rich evidence of the powerful positive impact of learner voice on the development of really effective teaching and learning practices, and this is an area that we will continue to promote.

And so the journey continues, as schools gain confidence and reassurance from the positive impacts that are already evident: increased professional collaboration among teachers, greater understanding of the value of whole-school approaches to developing more effective practice, the positive and constructive involvement of learner voice, and a more structured inclusion of parents in their children's learning.

#### IPPN LEADERSHIP AWARD 2017

The recipient of the IPPN Leadership Award 2017 was Siobhan Keenan Fitzgerald, Principal of Eglish National School in Ballinasloe, Co Galway. This Award honours and recognises a school leader who demonstrates exceptional leadership qualities and influences others through their actions.



# Educational disadvantage and the DEIS programme



**Dr. Emer Smyth**

Research Professor, Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI)

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**A** review of the DEIS programme was completed in 2017 (DES, 2017) and a new way was introduced to identify schools eligible for support.

The DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) programme is the successor to a series of schemes designed to target additional resources to schools serving disadvantaged populations. 2017 saw a review of the programme (DES, 2017) and the introduction of a new way of identifying schools for support. It is therefore timely to look at what we know about the impact of DEIS.

## Background

In 2005 the Department of Education and Skills (DES) published 'DEIS: Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools: An Action Plan for Educational Inclusion' and introduced the programme from the academic year 2006/07. The plan brought together a number of schemes aimed at tackling educational disadvantage under a single framework, the DEIS School Support Programme (SSP). It was motivated by the fact that 'rates of educational underachievement and early school leaving remain much higher for pupils from disadvantaged communities than for other pupils' (DES, 2005, p. 8).

The case for targeted support was also based on the emergence of research indicating a 'multiplier effect': the effects of disadvantage on educational outcomes are worse if students attend a school with a concentration of other disadvantaged students (Educational Disadvantage Committee, 2003). A concentration of disadvantage in certain schools reflects two main factors: social segregation in residential patterns, with more marginalised groups concentrated in certain neighbourhoods; and the existence of active school choice, particularly at second-level, with parental choice patterns and between-school competition resulting in the concentration of more disadvantaged students in certain schools.

Initially, selecting schools for additional support through DEIS was mainly based on school principals' reports of the socio-economic profile of their student population (including unemployment, social housing, etc.). For second-level schools, objective information on rates of early school leaving and exam performance was also used. This approach proved controversial,

however, with much discussion of lack of transparency and instances of schools serving the same local area having different statuses.

### **New approach for selecting schools**

The DEIS review in 2017 led to the introduction of a new approach which uses data from the Population Census. This has the advantage of being based on objective information which can take account of changes in school intake characteristics and the establishment of new schools. The new identification process confirmed that most DEIS schools had levels of disadvantage which warranted their receipt of support, but also identified other schools with relatively high levels of disadvantage that had not been receiving such support. As a result, some new schools were included in the scheme and some were reclassified. The Department decided to maintain supports for schools already in the scheme, at least for the moment.

### **Evaluation**

Evaluation was built into the DEIS programme from the outset, with a number of evaluation studies conducted by the Educational Research Centre and thematic reviews carried out by the Inspectorate of the DES (DES, 2009, 2011a, 2011b). These evaluations have largely focused on the impact on student academic achievement, especially at primary level. There has been significant improvement over time (2007–2013) in the literacy and numeracy test scores of students in DEIS urban primary schools, with greater increases for literacy (Weir, 2011; Weir and Denner, 2013). National Assessment data from 2014 indicates an improvement in literacy and numeracy test scores for all primary schools, most likely because of the national literacy and numeracy strategy. Therefore, the gap in outcomes between urban DEIS and non-DEIS primary schools has remained relatively stable and performance levels remain particularly low among those in Urban Band 1 schools (Shiel et al., 2014).

Students attending rural DEIS schools were found to have significantly higher achievement test scores than their counterparts in urban DEIS schools (Shiel et al., 2014), a pattern that appears to reflect how cultural resources (such as reading behaviour and parental expectations) in rural households appear to compensate for low levels of income (Weir and McAvinue, 2013). Increases in test scores have been greater among lower-achieving students, most likely because of the targeted nature of literacy and numeracy initiatives. Differences have been greater for younger cohorts, suggesting the cumulative impact of exposure to interventions over the course of primary education. A further round of testing took place in urban DEIS primary schools in 2016 (Kavanagh et al., 2017). Results indicated a further improvement in reading and maths test scores between 2013 and 2016, but this improvement was much more modest than that found between 2010 and 2013. As before, test scores were lower in Urban Band 1 schools than in Urban Band 2 schools.

Among second-level schools, there was a slight but significant narrowing of the gap in average Junior Certificate grades as well as in English grades between DEIS and non-DEIS schools from 2003 to 2011 (Weir et al., 2014). There was no real change in Junior Cert Mathematics performance. Information has not been published to date on differences in Leaving Cert grades; this information would be very useful given the role of exam

grades in influencing access to post-school education, training, and employment.

Evaluations have also indicated an improvement in attitudes to school, reading, and mathematics among students in urban DEIS primary schools from 2007 to 2016, with a significant improvement in the level of student educational aspirations (Kavanagh et al., 2017). Attitudes to school are similar to those found across all primary schools, though fewer children in urban DEIS schools expected to go on to higher education than in other schools.

### Outcomes

Attendance rates have improved over time in Urban Band 1 primary schools. Trends in attendance levels in second-level DEIS schools are less clear-cut, though with some improvement in the most recent years (up to 2014/15, the most recent year for which data is available) (Millar, 2015). DEIS second-level schools have much lower rates of retention than non-DEIS schools; among those who entered second-level education in 2009, 97.3 per cent of non-DEIS students completed junior cycle compared with 94.3 per cent of DEIS students, while senior cycle completion was 92 per cent in non-DEIS schools and 82.7 per cent in DEIS schools (DES, 2016). It is positive to note that the gap in retention rates has narrowed significantly over time, from 22 per cent at upper secondary level for the 1995 school entrant cohort to 10.7 per cent for 2009.

In sum, research on the DEIS programme points to some improvements in attendance levels in Urban Band 1 schools, and in retention rates and overall Junior Cert grades at secondary level. Literacy and numeracy levels have improved in DEIS primary schools, although the gap in achievement between DEIS and non-DEIS schools has not narrowed over time. The DEIS programme has involved the provision of additional funding and multifaceted supports to schools serving disadvantaged populations, which means it is not possible to disentangle which elements of the programme work best (Smyth et al., 2015). It is likely that any changes in student outcomes reflect the comprehensive nature of supports, including the provision of additional resources, a focus on planning for teaching and learning, and schools offering socio-emotional as well as practical support (e.g. school meals) for students and their families.

The new approach to identifying schools provides a more objective and transparent way of targeting resources towards schools with a greater concentration of disadvantage. Research points to further lessons for the future development of policy. ESRI research points to the complexity of need in Urban Band 1 schools, with a greater representation of children from migrant and Traveller backgrounds and those with special educational needs. This suggests that the scale of additional DEIS funding may not be sufficient to bridge the gap in resources between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged settings (Smyth et al., 2015). Furthermore, there is much less evidence of an achievement gap in rural DEIS schools.

It is clear that policy approaches to countering educational inequality cannot necessarily rely on targeting individual schools alone. Research indicates that over half of disadvantaged groups attend non-DEIS schools;

Growing Up in Ireland data indicates that over two-thirds of children from semi-skilled or unskilled manual or non-employed backgrounds attend non-DEIS primary schools. Patterns are roughly comparable for second-level schools. Thus, a significant group of children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are not currently receiving any additional support on the basis of that disadvantage, an issue which needs to be reconsidered in the future.

### Role of school policy and practice

Finally, international research points to the significant role of school policy and practice in shaping student outcomes, so reducing social inequality in educational outcomes will depend on the extent to which school processes support that goal. Existing research points to a number of ways to further enhance practice in DEIS schools. Firstly, DEIS schools are more likely to use rigid ability grouping (streaming) than non-DEIS schools, and those allocated to lower-stream classes have worse academic outcomes than their peers (Smyth, 2016). Moving away from streaming is therefore likely to improve student achievement.

Secondly, working-class boys are more likely to get caught up in a negative cycle of acting up and being reprimanded by teachers, a process that often culminates in early school leaving or underperformance. A more positive school climate, based on positive feedback rather than negative sanctions, is therefore likely to promote student engagement, as is fostering high expectations for all students. More generally, efforts to tackle educational disadvantage need to be underpinned by broader policies to promote equity, with much greater potential for adopting joined-up thinking in policy development to promote social inclusion.

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### **'Providing for the Special Needs of Students with Gifts and Talents'**



This book, just launched, is a collection of essays by international experts in gifted education covering topical issues such as motivating gifted students and supporting their positive psychological growth and development. The book is aimed at researchers who wish to increase their knowledge of this important area of special education and also to support parents, educators and counsellors to help gifted students to fulfil their potential.

The book is edited by Dr. Colm O'Reilly of CTY Ireland at Dublin City University and Professors Tracy Cross and Jennifer Cross from the Center for Gifted Education at the College of William and Mary.

Dublin City University (DCU) hosts the largest programme for gifted students in Europe, while the College of William and Mary is the main provider of curriculum resources for gifted children in America.

This book is essential reading for anyone with an interest in gifted education.

Pictured at the launch of the book in DCU on 24 November 2017 are (left to right): Ciaran Cannon TD Minister of State in Department of Foreign Affairs, Professor Tracy Cross Executive Director Center for Gifted Education, College of William and Mary; Dr Colm O'Reilly Director CTY Ireland, Dublin City University; Professor Brian MacCraith, President, Dublin City University; Dr Jennifer Cross, Director of Research, Center for Gifted Education, College of William and Mary.

# Citizenship and Human Rights Education

The State has a duty to deliver



**Brian Ruane**

Co-Directors of the Centre for Human Rights and Citizenship Education, DCU Institute of Education



**Fionnuala Waldron**

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**T**he authors argue that the state's obligation to put children's rights at the heart of education has yet to be realised. They see current proposals as opportunities but also as causes of concern. They are resolute that, in any new frameworks that arise, attention must be paid to ensuring that children's rights are respected, promoted and fulfilled.

## Introduction

The current global climate of growing inequality, racism, Islamophobia, and populism, allied with the mounting threat of climate change, requires a response at all levels of education. In a world that is progressively more polarised, where equality, human rights, and global solidarity are increasingly seen as antithetical to national self-interest, the role of education in promoting values of inclusion, justice, and caring grows in importance. Nationally, the importance of schools and classrooms in promoting cross-community understanding and respect has been foregrounded as part of recent historical commemorations. The decade of centenaries has renewed public discourse on the nature of citizenship in Ireland, on what it means to be Irish, and on inclusion, exclusion, and social justice. Schools, in this context, become important sites where school communities and children can explore and envision their preferred futures, identifying shared values, key issues, and possible actions. This year is also the 25th anniversary of Ireland's ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989), and it is important to mark it by refocusing on the realisation of children's rights and children's rights education.

Across the sector, education is experiencing change under the banner of reform. At primary level, this includes a focus on curriculum. Responding mainly to claims of curriculum overload, the current Primary School Curriculum (PSC) (NCCA, 1999) has been deemed to be no longer relevant in terms of its research base (NCCA, 2017a, p. 1), though this claim is questionable. Given the many strengths of the current PSC and the Aistear Framework (NCCA, 2009) in recognising children's agency and capabilities, and their openness to children's rights (Waldron, Ruane, and Oberman, 2014), this article argues that children's rights should remain central to the reform, and human rights should be explicitly identified as an underpinning framework for primary education in any emerging curricula. Two consultative documents important in the current curriculum reform were published in 2017: 'Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum:

The state has a duty to ensure that from an early age all children have access to human rights education and human rights in education, including rights of participation

Green-Schools committees provide one of the few structures where children's participation is systematically promoted.

For consultation' (NCCA, 2017a) and 'Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics: Final report' (NCCA, 2017b). They present opportunities and concerns for children's citizenship.

### Children's learning, rights, and democracy

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is multidimensional in its approach to rights, but for this article the focus will be on rights of participation and voice (Art. 12, UNCRC) and on children's right to know their rights and to have access to education which is consistent with those rights (Art. 42 and 29). The state has a duty to ensure that all children from an early age have access to human rights education and human rights in education, including rights of participation. The view of education put forward by the UNCRC is elaborated on by the Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 2001). It includes a commitment to the holistic development of the child in contexts that are inclusive, non-discriminatory, and child-centred, with structures and processes that are empowering, rights-respecting and 'consistent in all respects with the dignity of the child', including children's right to 'participate in school life, the creation of school communities and student councils, peer education and peer counselling' and in school disciplinary structures. This offers a framework through which children can learn about and experience citizenship.

In recent decades, the idea of children as capable, competent social actors who have ideas about the world and emerging capacities as active citizens has gained traction in education (Prout and James, 1997). This has challenged, and largely replaced, more traditional, deficient views of children as incapable, with predefined, universal, and generally inflexible pathways of development. Rather than seeing citizenship as an adult status, the idea has emerged of children as present citizens with rights of participation and capacities for action (Howe and Covell, 2005; Waldron et al., 2014). This changing conceptualisation of children is evident in active and participatory pedagogies and in ideas such as child-led learning, where educators recognise children as citizens in the present, and enable them to experience and practise democracy as part of their everyday lives.

Although children's participation in their own learning is now a dominant idea in education, their engagement in school structures and decision-making requires attention and development. While the Education Act 1998 allows for student councils at second level only, some primary schools have established student councils or other representative structures. For most schools, however, Green-Schools committees provide one of the few structures where children's participation is systematically promoted. Indeed, the strong role played by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as An Taisce, and by state bodies such as Irish Aid and the Ombudsman for Children, in promoting citizenship and human rights education in Irish schools is a notable characteristic of the system (Hammarberg, 2008; Waldron et al., 2014). This is welcome, but in the absence of more formal structures of participation, children's rights under the UNCRC are not being realised.

### Curriculum reform

The recent publication of 'Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum: For consultation' (NCCA, 2017a) merits

The conceptualisation of children as rights-holders and citizens is notably absent.

Tensions between the views of the patrons of denominational schools and Irish children's rights to access rights-based education have yet to be resolved.

close attention as a pivotal moment in primary education in Ireland. The document makes visible many assumptions about how children are viewed as thinkers and learners and about what areas of learning are seen as valuable. While a full critique is beyond the scope of this article, some points are worth flagging: the reduced emphasis on the principle of children as co-constructors of knowledge about the world, which is strongly present in the current curriculum; the lack of acknowledgement of children as citizens and rights-holders, with the exception of a passing reference (p. 4); and the suggestion that different kinds of learning should predominate at different stages of education, leading to the potential absence of critical thinking or enquiry-based learning in early primary. Yet such approaches to education are crucial in challenging the early emergence of stereotypes, bias, and racism (see, in an Irish context, Ruane et al., 2010; Connolly and Hosken, 2006). Critically, the conceptualisation of children as rights-holders and citizens, which is fundamental to providing education that respects, protects, and fulfils their rights, is also notably absent.

The proposed restructuring of the PSC is occurring at the same time as the debate over how Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics will be implemented in Irish schools (see Anne Marie Kavanagh, this issue). Arising from the recommendations of *The Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector: Report of the Forum's Advisory Group* (Coolahan et al., 2012), ERB and Ethics can be seen as a manifestation of the rights of all children in pluralist societies to moral education and education about religions beyond a denominational, faith-based space, and also as a potential site of human rights education. However, as the 'Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics: Final report' (NCCA, 2017b) makes clear, ERB and Ethics is a contested space. The report shows the widespread support for children to have opportunities to develop dispositions on social justice, human rights, equality, empathy, non-discrimination, and tolerance (NCCA, 2017b, p. 57). Many respondents also noted the potential of ERB and Ethics to 'cater for the human rights of all children' in an Irish context. As one educator noted, ERB and Ethics 'offers schools like my own an opportunity to be more inclusive of children whose families do not conform to the single-faith ethos of the school and in so doing that ethos will become more welcoming and embracing' (p. 30).

These submissions are consistent with the Toledo principles (OSCE/ODIHR, 2007), which represent the international consensus on how pluralist democracies should integrate ERB and Ethics into education systems, and which were very evident in the recommendations of the report of the Forum (Coolahan et al., 2012). It is noticeable, however, that these legal obligations were not emphasised to the same degree in the consultation document. This is in the context of other submissions which argued that the human-rights-based approach, embodied in the Forum report, was incompatible with denominational education (p. 26). Tensions between the views of the patrons of denominational schools, as expressed in the consultation report, and Irish children's rights to access rights-based education have yet to be resolved, and this is a concern.

Schools should be required to create, and be supported in creating, participative structures for children.

## Conclusions and recommendations

This remains a period of considerable potential for children's rights and citizenship. Children's participation, for example, has seen several gains: their routine involvement by the NCCA in all consultations on curriculum change; the prioritisation of 'listening to and involving children and young people' as one of the six goals of Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014–2020 (DCYA, 2014); the commitment to student councils at primary level as part of that framework; and the launch in June 2015 of a National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making, 2015–2020 (DCYA, 2015).

This article has highlighted the range of reform processes which offer most challenges and opportunities to the full realisation of children's citizenship and education rights. It recommends that there be explicit reference to human rights and human rights education in any new framework that emerges for young children. It recommends also that ERB and Ethics should sit within a human rights framework, and that schools should be required to create, and be supported in creating, participative structures for children.

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# Children's Participation in Decision-Making

## The proposed Parent and Student Charter



**Niall Muldoon**

Ombudsman for Children

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**N**iall Muldoon explains his core roles as Ombudsman for Children along with the work of the Ombudsman's Office where education is the largest category in the area of complaints dealt with each year. He discusses children's right to be heard and advocates for stronger legislative provision for children and young people to be heard in school settings. He welcomes the proposed Parent and Student Charter which will provide for consistency across all schools without curtailing the unique characteristics of each school.

### Core roles of Ombudsman

The Ombudsman for Children's Office (OCO) is an independent statutory body, which was established in 2004 under the Ombudsman for Children Act 2002. As Ombudsman for Children, I am accountable to the Oireachtas for the exercise of my statutory functions. My core roles are to promote the rights and welfare of children up to the age of 18 living in Ireland, and to deal with complaints made by or for children about administrative actions of public bodies that have, or may have, negatively affected a child.

Because our work focuses on the public sector, and education is the area of the public sector that most children engage with for an extended time, education is necessarily a consistent focus of the OCO's work across our statutory functions. In the area of complaints, education is the largest category we deal with each year, accounting for 46 per cent of all complaints we handled in 2016. In the area of policy, we give advice on legislative and public policy developments affecting children's education; our recent work includes advice on the Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2016 and the General Scheme of the Education (Parent and Student Charter) Bill 2016. We also engaged with the Department of Education and Skills' consultation on the role of religion in school admissions. In the context of our role to promote awareness of children's rights, we run education workshops for children and young people visiting us through their schools, and we are developing a new suite of materials on children's rights for schools to use in curriculum teaching and learning.

Through this work, we understand that schools occupy a vital place in the lives of children, their families and communities. We understand the significant roles that principals, teachers, and other professionals in schools play in children's and young people's lives and the different ways in which schools promote and protect children's rights on a daily basis. In this regard, we see schools using varied and innovative approaches to supporting children and young people to be heard in different areas of school decision-making.



A core principle of the UNCRC, set out in Article 12, is that every child with the capacity to form a view has a right to express their views freely.

At a legislative level, there are significant deficits in provision for children and young people to be heard in the context of their formal education.

## Children's right to be heard in schools

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is an international agreement that lists the rights to which every child under the age of 18 is entitled. By ratifying the UNCRC in 1992, Ireland made a commitment under international law to respect, protect, and fulfil the rights of children set out in the Convention.

A core principle of the UNCRC, set out in Article 12, is that every child with the capacity to form a view has a right to express their views freely and to have due weight given to their views in all matters affecting them. Among the wide-ranging recommendations that the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child made in 2016, following its examination of Ireland's progress in fulfilling its obligations to children under the UNCRC, was that the State should strengthen legislative provision for children and young people to be heard in school settings.

At a national policy level, the national policy framework for children and young people, *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*, recognises the importance of children and young people having a voice in decision-making in their schools. *The National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision Making* identifies schools and the formal education system generally as one of four priority areas for actions focused on children and young people's participation in decision-making that affects their individual and collective lives.

At a legislative level, however, there are significant deficits in provision for children and young people to be heard in the context of their formal education, when viewed against the standard set by Article 12. For example, Section 27 of the Education Act 1998 permits students in post-primary schools to establish a student council and requires boards of management to encourage and help them to establish and operate it. However, the provision is limited to post-primary schools, additional mechanisms for hearing the views of students are not contemplated, and student councils are required to promote the interests of their school rather than those of students. While Section 28 of the 1998 Act never came into effect, it is noteworthy that it precludes young people under 18 from making a complaint to their board of management.

It is almost twenty years since the 1998 Act was enacted. The Education (Parent and Student Charter) Bill 2016 presents a vital opportunity for the State to legislate for mainstreaming a culture of children and young people's participation in school decision-making, in accordance with Article 12. In my view, it is crucial that we make the most of this opportunity.

## Participatory approaches to decision-making in schools

Children's right to be heard is not contingent on the added value that hearing any child's views may bring for the child, the decision-maker, or the wider environment in which decisions are made. While it is essential to remember this, it is also worth recalling the benefits that can accrue from taking participatory approaches to decision-making affecting children. Everyone who has developed effective ways of doing this knows that hearing children's views can support the development of their

Hearing children's views can support the development of their confidence, self-esteem, and self-efficacy, as well as their communication, cooperation, negotiation, and problem-solving skills.

Among the proposals for the Charter that I particularly welcome is that schools will actively seek to address the concerns of parents and students and to provide redress, as appropriate.

confidence, self-esteem, and self-efficacy, as well as their communication, cooperation, negotiation, and problem-solving skills. It can support more fully informed, child-centred decision-making and, with that, help improve policies, procedures, and practices affecting children and young people. Hearing the views of children and young people can also contribute to growing a cohesive community, which children and young people can feel a shared ownership of and stake in.

The proposed Parent and Student Charter provides a useful framework for promoting a culture of participation in schools and supporting efforts by schools to strengthen a sense of participatory belonging among all members of the school community. The fact that schools will be required to develop a Charter and to do so with the active participation of parents and students is welcome, since it provides for consistency across all schools without curtailing the unique characteristics of every school.

### Dealing with concerns and complaints

It is envisaged that Section 28 of the Education Act 1998 will be repealed and that alternative provisions will be made through the proposed Education (Parent and Student Charter) Bill for complaints-handling by schools. Among the proposals for the Charter that I particularly welcome is that schools will actively seek to address the concerns of parents and students and to provide redress, as appropriate. In light of our experience of dealing with thousands of complaints, I fully support an approach that focuses on the early resolution of concerns, and prevents their escalation into formal complaints where feasible. This approach is in the interests of all concerned, including the child or children affected.

The OCO's experience of dealing with complaints, including complaints about schools, also underscores the importance of schools having procedures in place, for formal complaints and corresponding appeals, which are accessible, transparent, and fair to the whole school community.

This autumn, we published a guide for public bodies, including schools, on child-centred complaints handling. I brought the principles set out in this guide to the attention of the Department of Education and Skills to encourage their incorporation, as appropriate, into the Education (Parent and Student) Charter Bill. One of these principles is participation: I firmly believe that a child or young person under 18 should be permitted to make a complaint to their school themselves, just as they can to the Ombudsman for Children's Office and indeed to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

### Conclusion

28 September 2017 was the 25th anniversary of Ireland's ratification of the UNCRC. Two important ways to mark this occasion would be for the Minister for Education and Skills and his department to seek the views of children and young people at primary and post-primary level on the proposed legislation, and for the government and the Oireachtas to ensure that the version of the Education (Parent and Student Charter) Bill they enact gives full legislative effect to providing for children's right to be heard in school decision-making.

# Buntús Cainte

Caoga Bliain ag Fás



**Áine Hyland**

Emeritus Professor of Education, University College Cork

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**A**ine Hyland (née Ní Dhomhnalláin), is a daughter of the late Tomás Ó Domhnalláin, creator of *Buntús Cainte*, a graded course in Irish for beginners. Fifty years after it was first published, she tells the success story of both her father and the publication itself, which continues to receive a 5-star rating on Amazon.

1967 was an auspicious year for Irish education, with the introduction of free post-primary education and free transport to post-primary schools. It was also the year the first edition of *Buntús Cainte* was published, a graded course in Irish for beginners, written by my father, Tomás Ó Domhnalláin. Fifty years later, *Buntús Cainte* continues to enjoy unprecedented popularity. It has been reprinted regularly – most recently in 2017 – and millions of copies of the book have been sold since its first publication. It is probably the most popular Irish language course ever produced.

*Buntús Cainte* is a self-taught language programme for adults, and was broadcast on RTE television from 1967 to the early 1970s. The accompanying books were produced by An Gúm (later the Stationery Office), eventually in three volumes. In later years, tapes and CDs were provided as a backup to the written text.

*Buntús Cainte* was based on a scientific analysis of the daily conversation of adults in Gaeltacht areas of Ireland. That scientific study had been published a year earlier, in May 1966, under the title *Buntús Gaeilge*. It was the culmination of three years of research carried out in An Teanglann, Gormanston, by An tAthair Colmán Ó hUallacháin, OFM,<sup>1</sup> Fr Fidelis MacEnrí, OFM, Gearóid Ó Cruaíoch,<sup>2</sup> and my father, Tomás Ó Domhnalláin, an inspector in the Department of Education.

The research was initiated by the Department of Education in 1963, following the recommendations of the *Commission on the Restoration of the Irish language* that a linguistic analysis of Irish as a spoken language be carried out, with the objective of devising a graded course of instruction in the language. A White Paper on the Restoration of the Irish language, published in 1965 during George Colley's period as Minister for Education, endorsed this recommendation.

The *Buntús Gaeilge* team researched the structures and vocabulary of informal spoken Irish by recording the conversations of some 180 native Irish speakers, young and old, in their own environments in the different Gaeltacht areas. A corpus of speech amounting to over 100,000 words in then-current

A corpus of speech amounting to over 100,000 words in then-current usage was analysed.

usage was analysed, focusing particularly on the frequency of specific speech structures and items of vocabulary. Each speech structure and item of vocabulary was written on an index card and coded manually. My younger sisters remember sitting around the table at home with my father, sorting and counting the cards and occasionally being paid a few pennies for their labour!

Computer analysis of the data would show that 50 per cent of this corpus of the casual conversation of native Irish speakers was made up of speech structures and vocabulary items utilising just 42 words in all, that is, the first 42 words on the frequency list. A person who knew the top 100 words on the list would, in theory, recognise 65 per cent of the conversation of a native Irish speaker – without reference to the issues of pronunciation and phonology that are a fundamental component of speech. 150 words would enable them to follow 75 per cent of a conversation, and 500 words would enable them to follow 90 per cent.

The research methodology of *Buntús Gaeilge* was similar to that applied in other countries, where research on the usage of other languages in their native contexts had been carried out. *Buntús Gaeilge* included academic references to G. Gougenheim, author of 'Le français fondamental', and to Noam Chomsky's early work on language acquisition.

While the basic work which resulted in the publication of *Buntús Gaeilge* had been carried out by the team in An Teanglann, subsequent work on developing Irish language programmes for primary classes I and II and classes III and IV (*Hóra, a Pháid!* and *Dúisigh, a Bhríd!*) was carried out by the primary school inspectorate in the Department of Education, initially led by Tomás Ó Domhnalláin. When Tomás was appointed by the Department as its first audio-visual officer (Oifigeach Closamhairc) in 1966, Seán de Búrca, inspector, took over the leadership role. Courses for post-primary students were subsequently developed by the post-primary inspectorate (*Bunsraith Gaeilge* and *Téanam Ort*), and the methodology was also used to develop courses in other European languages: *Écouter et Parler* (French), *Verstehen und Sprechen* (German), and *Entendir y Hablar* (Spanish). In an essay for a collection in memory of Conn Ó Cléirigh, who had been chair of An Institiúid Teangeolaíochta, Tomás Ó Domhnalláin later wrote that he had reservations about using the list of most frequently used words for courses for pupils up to age 14 or 15.<sup>3</sup> He felt there should have been greater progression for older pupils to include less frequently used words and phrases.

The work involved in developing the new Buntús school courses was considerable.

The work involved in developing the new Buntús school courses was considerable. As well as writing the script for the lessons, and preparing audio tapes for each lesson, visual aids were also provided in the form of 'deilbhíní' – cardboard cut-outs backed with Teflon and stuck on to black felt. The idea came from a visit by An tAthair Colmán to Morocco, where similar objects were being used to teach French to schoolchildren. For the Buntús courses, more than 600 separate illustrations were developed for each textbook. An alternative to the deilbhíní was provided in the form of filmstrips (stiallscannáin), for teachers who had access to a projector and screen. Material for the written elements of the course also had to be prepared, as well as handbooks for teachers.

In his now famous speech to the National Union of Journalists in Dún Laoghaire on 20 September 1966, where he announced the introduction of free post-primary education, the Minister for Education, Donogh O'Malley, referred to the development of the Buntús school courses. Having reassured his audience that he 'had not come to the post of Minister for Education to preside over the obsequies of the national language', he elaborated on the new method of teaching Irish through the *Buntús Gaeilge* method. All one had to do was to learn 900 words and phrases, 'and one can converse widely in Irish'. He explained that a pilot project was under way in 150 primary schools and 50 second-level schools using this method and that further trials would follow shortly.

Following the introduction of the school courses, Seán Mac Gearailt, then Assistant Secretary of the Department of Education, suggested to Tomás Ó Domhnalláin that he should consider developing a course for adult learners. By this stage Tomás was the audiovisual officer and was no longer involved with his fellow inspectors in developing or implementing language courses. On the other hand, he continued to be very interested in language teaching and learning, and the development of a course for adult learners would be a new challenge.

All one had to do was to learn 900 words and phrases and one could converse widely in Irish - Donagh O'Malley

During the subsequent months, Tomás immersed himself in this new task, which resulted in the three volumes of *Buntús Cainte*. These were entirely Tomás's work and were conceived and written in his spare time, outside of office hours. This fact was acknowledged by the Department. Tomás worked with William Bolger, whose unique illustrations, both in the book and on the RTÉ programme, became national favourites. RTÉ expressed an interest in broadcasting *Buntús Cainte* as a television programme and offered to pay Tomás £3 for every script, that is, one for every viewing. This was subsequently raised to £5 per script. In total, Tomás was paid about £700 by RTÉ for the three series of programmes (a series for each volume), which were broadcast in 1967, 1968, and 1969.

In August 1969, Tomás signed over the rights to the three volumes of *Buntús Cainte* to the Minister for Education for the sum of £654. The contract covered all aspects of Buntús and read as follows:

*Sannadh chun an Aire ar é sin uile an t-aoncheart chun Leabhair 1, 2 agus 3 den saothar dar tideal Buntús Cainte a chlóg agus a fhoilsiú i bhfoirm ar bith (lena airítear an ceart chun taifeadáin agus téipeann a dhéanamh agus cearta teilifíse and craolacháin) ar feadh iarmhar uile an téarma cóipchirt iontu ...*

*(This assigns to the Minister the sole rights to Books 1, 2 and 3 of the work entitled Buntús Cainte, its printing and publication in any form (including recording, the making of tapes, television and broadcasting rights) for the term of its copyright ...)*

All subsequent editions of the *Buntús Cainte* booklets indicate that the copyright is vested in the Government of Ireland (Rialtas na hÉireann), and Tomás Ó Domhnalláin never received royalties.

When the first edition of *Buntús Cainte* was published in 1967, 185,000 copies were printed. Each volume sold for 1 shilling and sixpence. On 8

November 1967, in a Dáil question to Donogh O'Malley, then Minister for Education, Oliver J. Flanagan TD asked if the minister 'was satisfied with the national response to the *Buntús Cainte* lessons; if he feels the lessons have been a success to date; and if 185,000 copies of the booklet have in fact been purchased'. O'Malley replied:<sup>4</sup>

*I am well satisfied with the national response to the Buntús Cainte lessons. All the reports which I have received, and they are very many indeed, indicate that this series of lessons and the television programme related to them, have been received with the greatest enthusiasm. The fact that the lessons are scientifically based and provide adults in a pleasant way with the minimum amount of spoken Irish necessary for everyday conversation are two major reasons for their success. The third is the high degree of good will for the language which exists among our people. In order to meet the demand for the booklet it has been necessary to produce five editions of it. To date, 218,000 copies have been sold and the sales are continuing.*

A short debate in Irish followed this reply, including contributions from Dr Patrick Hillery, Charles Haughey, and Mr Dillon, as well as Minister O'Malley and O.J. Flanagan. There seemed to be cross-party praise for the new *Buntús Cainte*.

Today, fifty years later, *Buntús Cainte* continues to sell well.

Today, fifty years later, *Buntús Cainte* continues to sell well. With an accompanying CD, each volume now costs €10. It is available for purchase online from the Stationery Office in Dublin, from Amazon, and in bookshops throughout the country. The popularity of the series continues unabated. At the time of writing this article, it receives a five-star rating on the Amazon website, with comments as follows:

*'I would strongly recommend Buntús Cainte to anyone starting to learn Irish.'*

*'An excellent publication. Easy to follow with excellent quality CDs.'*

*'Exercises are straightforward both for written and spoken Irish. Ideal beginners' book.'*

*'Great cartoons.'*

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## FOOTNOTES

1. An tAthair Colmán was appointed by the Minister for Education, Donogh O'Malley, as the first Director of An Institiúid Teangeolaíochta in 1967.
2. Gearóid Ó Cruaíoch was subsequently appointed as Professor of Folklore and Ethnology in University College Cork. During his career there, he was also visiting professor in Cornell University, UCLA, Boston College, and Notre Dame.
3. Anders Ahlqvist and Vera Capkova (eds.), *Dán do Oide: Essays in Memory of Conn Ó Cléirigh 1927–1999* (Dublin, ITE 1997).
4. *Dáil Éireann*, vol. 230, 8 November 1967.



Young singers from Coláiste Pobail Osraí  
entertain delegates at the NAPD  
Conference Gala Dinner in Killarney,  
October 2017.

## CHAPTER 3

# SECOND LEVEL



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Kate McDonald

# Overview of Second Level Education in 2017

A year that signalled a return to investment in people and plans



**Clive Byrne**

CEO, National Association of Principals  
and Deputy Principals

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**I**n his overview of 2017, Clive Byrne applies his broad-ranging knowledge and wisdom to a wide spectrum of issues in the second level sector including Minister Bruton's focused goals, welcome new investment, the fallout from the Junior Cycle dispute, leadership, school transport, substitute teachers and teacher supply, College Awareness Week, and more.

The economic recession had a very negative effect on education, but 2017 signalled a return to times of investment in personnel and funding initiatives. Minister Bruton's decision to publish his Action Plan for Education 2016–2019 signalled a clear intent to progress initiatives which had been on the back burner for a long time. The Plan assigned timelines and lead responsibility to ensure that actions were delivered. It references well-being, technology, disadvantage, apprenticeships, after-school care, languages, Gaeltacht, infrastructure, and special needs, among other areas. Being the best system in Europe by 2026 is undoubtedly a tall order, but by setting specific goals we can more easily aspire to it – and goals allied with the necessary investment means we can all be heading in the same direction.

The aims are all doable: improving the learning experience and success of learners, focusing on disadvantage and special educational needs, helping those delivering education services to continually improve, strengthening bridges between education and the wider community, and improving national planning and support services. But we need to work together and have joined-up thinking.

## Junior Cycle dispute

Working together proved difficult at second level this year. The ASTI dispute had a profound effect on all schools and reduced morale among teachers. Curricular reform was hampered by the dispute, which curtailed the ability of schools in the voluntary secondary and community and comprehensive sector to participate in in-service training for the new junior cycle. This caused real difficulties in schools, particularly in English, where there was genuine alarm over how assessment for the exams would take place. Suspension of all ASTI directives in June should allow for a more positive climate in schools.

The controversy over Croke Park hours meant that planning and organisation meetings didn't take place in most schools, particularly ASTI and dual union schools where meetings to plan, parent-teacher meetings and staff meetings were deferred in the interest of maintaining harmony. The drip

We need to work together and have joined-up thinking.

The ASTI dispute had a profound effect on all schools and reduced morale among teachers.

effect certainly affected morale. Ironically, in the ETB sector, the TUI – though still in dispute with the department – was able to reach an accommodation that allowed participation in training for the new junior cycle developments.

Parents and students expressed concern at the development of a two-tier system whereby students' progress and experience differed depending on the school's union affiliation. In the end a compromise was reached that allowed each side to save face, but the real benefit of junior cycle reform is in the professional dialogue as a result of different teaching and learning methodologies, and almost 60 per cent of schools lost out on this. There is likely to be better dialogue among teachers as additional subjects are introduced at junior cycle, and it isn't only English teachers in the firing line. The Junior Cycle for Teachers team, the support service for junior cycle reform, is doing great work. But many members have moved to leadership positions in schools, and they have insufficient personnel to meet the demand for in-service from teachers who were unable to participate in training heretofore. It is likely to be December or 2018 before this demand can be met.

### **Welcome investment**

At a time of continued cuts to staffing in other sectors, the decision to invest in leadership, guidance and special needs is most welcome. One of the worst decisions of the austerity era was the cut to the guidance service. Restoring posts will serve students well and will allow for increased one-to-one counselling – we all realise the importance of our students having access to one good adult, and this is often the guidance counsellor. The role of the counsellor in pastoral care and well-being programmes cannot be overestimated, and the investment in guidance is a good step towards restoring the service.

### **Special Educational Needs (SEN)**

Last year a pilot programme was undertaken in 40 schools on the best use of SEN resources. It generated good discussion and good ideas, and the announcement of the new model of allocating resources to schools is welcome. Some unease was expressed about the school-profile component, but in general the block allocation and the autonomy granted to schools to distribute resources according to need is welcome. It will also eliminate a soft barrier to admission, because if each school is allocated a baseline and then further resources according to its profile, then no school can legitimately say that your child might be better served in the school down the road.

### **Deputy positions in schools**

The final major investment in staffing was in granting 200 additional deputy positions in schools of a particular size but with pro rata additional hours for smaller schools. I think this will pay rich dividends in time. We are lucky in Ireland to have such a professional and supportive Inspectorate. During their school visits they realised that where there was a deficit in teaching and learning, there was often also a deficit in leadership. Providing additional personnel at deputy principal level will help free up the school leader to be responsible for students' educational outcomes.

In the ETB sector, the TUI was able to reach an accommodation that allowed participation in training for the new junior cycle developments.

## Centre for School Leadership

The Centre for School Leadership has come to the end of its second year as part of a three-year pilot programme. Highlights were the successful launch of the mentoring programme for newly appointed principals, the successful tendering of Postgraduate Programme in School Leadership based in the University of Limerick but available nationally, and the launch in January of a national programme of coaching for school principals. The Centre is an important professional resource for school leaders, who are happy to be accountable for the additional resources provided and will work to improve outcomes and increase standards in the coming years.

## School transport

In parts of the country, the long-running Bus Éireann dispute caused major headaches for parents and students. Many were discommoded and innovative ways to get pupils and staff to schools were employed. As we start another school year with thousands of students denied places on school buses, we have to ask ourselves whether the service is there for the benefit of the pupils or of the bus owners. Despite investment in upgrading the fleet, routes have remained the same for years, resulting in ridiculous anomalies where students get overlooked and left behind. The amount of time the buses are off the road is daft. The service to communities, especially in rural areas, could be vastly improved if people are willing to look afresh at the current scheme.

## HPV vaccine

The controversy over potential dangerous side effects of the HPV vaccine raged throughout the year and resulted in a massive decline in uptake in many schools – so much so that the HSE expressed fears for the future risks to the current generation of schoolgirls unless the uptake can be increased. There was also lower uptake of other vaccines, such as measles, as all programmes were being tarred with one brush. A high-powered publicity campaign has been undertaken, assuring parents and students that the vaccine is safe, but the controversy shows how difficult it is to contradict successful negative campaigns on social media.

## College Awareness Week

College Awareness Week (CAW), which takes place each November, has established itself as a vibrant national campaign. It aims to inspire and inform all students of the importance of a post-secondary plan, and advocates for the choice to pursue a course best suited to each student's interests, abilities and dreams. Many communities have strong college-going cultures, but this 'expectational culture' is not universal, especially in lower-income communities. Students deserve the best possible chance in life, and most will require a college education to compete for the jobs of the future and live satisfying, healthy lives.

A pillar of CAW is that it is a collaborative and multi-sectoral initiative. In three years, it has received support and endorsement from over 30 organisations, including the Department of Education and Skills, Institute of Guidance Counsellors, National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals, Irish Second-Level Students Union, Solas Further Education and Training Authority, National Parents Council, and Local Government Management Agency. CAW has seen 50 per cent growth in activities



The real benefit of junior cycle reform is in the professional dialogue as a result of different teaching and learning methodologies.

One of the worst decisions of the austerity era was the cut to the guidance service.

during the central week and an approximate doubling of the number of participants in all counties.

Its social media community is equally vibrant, with almost 3000 followers on Twitter who have been grown organically and represent a dedicated cohort of people and organisations with an interest in education and equality. These followers helped the campaign to ‘trend’ on its launch day in 2016 and to reach nearly 2 million people overall as a result of the media campaign. CAW’s objectives include celebrating the importance of going to college, showcasing local role models who have gone to college, creating a college-going culture in communities, helping students to become college-ready, and supporting an increase in the number of students who progress to FE and HE.

### **Substitute teachers**

‘Where have all the substitutes gone’ is a popular refrain at primary and post-primary level, as many principals struggle to find sub teachers to cover for in-service, leave, or illness. From INTO research it seems the answer is Abu Dhabi, Australia, Dubai, England and Scotland. Cuts to salary for newly qualified teachers have had an impact, but many younger teachers are heading abroad not for enormous salaries but because the salary is tax free. They feel that a few years overseas will kick-start savings to invest in a house when they return to Ireland – as most do. At second level, evidence tells us it is almost impossible to get a sub to teach Irish, Maths, continental European languages, Physics, and so on. The subs just aren’t there, so non-subject-specialists are often employed just to have a body in the classroom. This is unsatisfactory but understandable.

### **Teacher Supply**

Younger teachers on part-time or reduced-hour contracts see little hope of permanency and are more likely to head to the UK from the end of October, confident of getting full-time work there even if the hours and school year are longer and the paperwork much more bureaucratic. The report of the technical working group working on Teacher Supply, published in June, doesn’t make for happy reading at second level. There is a lack of data on the retirement plans of teachers aged 50+. To ensure that pension lump sums weren’t taxed, many took advantage of the rule whereby if you were 55 and had 35 years’ service, you could retire without your pension being actuarially reduced. The department and indeed most schools can’t tell where subject shortages will exist over the next decade, and so far no steps have been taken to advise education providers on what subject areas they should prioritise over the next few years.

Teachers are one of our greatest national resources. It seems a pity to be educating them for export when our growing population means that our education system should be well able to absorb college output for the foreseeable future. It isn’t easy compiling an overview of second level in a 3000-word article, but I’m glad to say that while the last school year was extremely challenging, our improved economic situation means there can be greater investment in education in the short term. Additional staff and resources will pay dividends so we can realistically aspire to being top of the class over the next decade.



# Irish Trade Unions

## From Resistance to Rapprochement through Renewal



**Fintan O'Mahony**

Teacher of English and History, member of the ASTI's Central Executive Committee, currently on secondment to the JCT History team.

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**F**intan O'Mahony proposes a new unionism that is organised around members' needs, is internally at peace, and that facilitates the discussion between educators and the public.

Teacher trade unions have served a valuable purpose in Irish life. They have been responsible for establishing the professionalism of teachers, moving away from clerical domination in Irish education, and supporting the work in classrooms that improves students' lives and secures their futures.

But of late, these unions have become identified with intransigence, obduracy, and saying no. They are perceived to be acquisitive and to focus entirely on pay and conditions, to the exclusion of advocating for students and teachers. The view has gained traction that their progressive role as shapers of education in Ireland is, at best, secondary.

Those of us who, at one time or another, have been heavily involved in teacher union leadership know that this view is skewed away from the constructive work unions do in education reform. We know it suits people who wish to demonise teachers to drive on with reform without consulting those who will be delivering the reforms, to present teacher concerns as plainly black against the white of reform. But I would rather say we all exist in the gray in between.

Challenges to unions' standing can be summarised like this: teachers are militant, unprofessional, selfish, and afraid of change. Some of this negativity is self-inflicted, but these charges against unions are difficult for many teachers to relate to; they do not fit with their experiences in the classroom or at parent-teacher meetings. The view of teacher unions as the villains in the education discourse is unhelpful and often unwarranted, but for some it is a badge of honour.

In Ireland and across Europe recently it has become the norm to challenge teacher unions on their zeroing in on pay and conditions – rightly in some instances. But these objections have undermined unions' ability to speak about teaching, learning, and specifically curricular change. We are fortunate in Ireland that no explicit link has been made between curricular reform and pay and conditions. Keeping these issues separate was a key feature in the success of secondary union opposition to Junior Cycle. Only when a concerted

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effort was made to keep curricular reform and pay and conditions separate at second level did the ASTI and TUI make progress in negotiating changes to Junior Cycle reform. This success was founded on last-resort action and subsequent negotiation, and that strategy was successful until the ASTI and TUI diverged on Junior Cycle reform once a final agreement had been reached. Secondary teachers went to war on Junior Cycle, and though the TUI escaped with its reputation largely intact, the ASTI did not.

What is expected from unions is that they fit in with the prevailing political direction; those that don't are often presented as backward looking. Breaking out of this box to adopt a reform agenda is difficult, because the public and teachers themselves aren't used to it and the official side don't want it. How teacher unions present themselves as reformers is crucial and will have the broader effect of establishing them as credible in other areas of education policy.

When teachers are viewed as obstructing reform, they are easier to marginalise, and when they set themselves against curricular reform, they often find themselves outside the reform process entirely. The obvious result of sidelining teacher unions is that teachers' knowledge of what works is also neglected.

When unions begin to view engagement as a positive process, that negative perception will fade. A union is doing its work effectively when the public barely knows it is using influence positively. But what these negative views do to undermine the work of teacher unions in other areas, like curricular reform, is worth further examination. How do teacher unions challenge the charge of acquisitiveness and having their bona fides on education written off?

Teacher unions have three choices when faced with reform, whether curricular or broader: reject policies or proposals developed by officials; try to shape them; or accommodate the reforms. They can **Resist**, they can engage in **Rapprochement**, or they can **Renew** themselves.

## Resistance

Irish secondary teacher unions are well used to resistance. The type of resistance matters, though: too often it has been reactionary, just saying no, becoming the Ian Paisleys of Irish trade unionism, turning inward to defend what you have in the face of reform. This path has been explored to the furthest extent recently by the ASTI. The extent to which pursuing this course is justifiable or sustainable should matter to those on both sides. It is definitely not progressive. No alternative to the status quo is offered; if it were, the accusations of simple obduracy would be easier to counter.

For their part, the DES and allied bodies have often adopted a take-it-or-leave-it stance on reform: This is happening, get on board, or the train will leave the station without you. The increased centralisation of education reform and the cut-and-paste nature of some reforms, borrowed from or justified because of other countries' education policy, represent a significant challenge for teacher unions. The opportunity to suggest reforms of their own has rarely been possible in Ireland. Teacher unions are now habituated to 'chasing the reform', waiting for the official side to

A union is doing its work effectively when the public barely knows it is using influence positively.

Teacher unions are now habituated to 'chasing the reform', waiting for the official side to propose changes and then taking issue with what they see as unworkable.

propose changes and then taking issue with what they see as unworkable. Reform therefore becomes something to rail against on one side and to defend to death on the other.

Whether marginalisation is a technique used by advocates of reform or not, marginalised is how many teachers describe their interaction with reform. Some begin to see themselves as defenders of what is good about what we have now in the teeth of a disaster. This is why the view of teachers as self-serving and backward gains traction, when in fact the position in which classroom teachers find themselves is a function of dysfunction: unions without the expertise or interest to shape reform, and officials who press on with reform even if it is imported from very different systems.

### **Rapprochement**

The opposite of resistance is rapprochement, an ideological or pragmatic acceptance of the reform proposed. This requires a new type of trade unionism. Teacher unions that focus on organising in schools, political campaigning, and building alliances with those in the gap between politics and education, with external bodies like the NCCA, will ultimately become a full contributory partner in the renewal of Irish education. This is to arrive at a point where the reform is acceptable and accommodations are made with the official side, while remaining aware of teachers' concerns.

One way secondary teacher unions could address their distance from external curricular and educational bodies is by tackling the dearth of provision of professional learning for their members. Creating a group of teachers who have been trained in and who understand education reform will give teacher unions an expertise and a right to advocate for reform on behalf of their students which they know through their classroom experience will work when implemented. There is an old argument that it is the work of the employer to provide professional development, and it still is, but if teacher unions want to end the cycle of chasing the reform, they should move into that space too, training teachers to critically look inward at union education policy and outward at wider education reform.

There are huge gaps there to fill. Examples include: intervention programmes for experienced teachers who are closer to retirement; support for subject teaching; developing programmes that will be tested in schools by union members; training experienced teachers to mentor new teachers in policy, gleaning from them what they see as relevant to reform; and taking a hand in training their members for leadership roles in schools.

### **Renewal**

None of this is possible for teacher unions, though, until they turn outward. Saying partnerships should be formed with statutory bodies is the easy part. The challenge is getting the two sides to set aside years of confrontation and bitterness. It will involve reimagining the role of teachers themselves and their unions in the education landscape. This will require a serious shift in thinking by teacher unions, and decisive leadership in moving from transactional to relational connections. By this I mean moving from self-interest to mutual interest, from distance to understanding.

**Dysfunction:**  
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Successful teacher unions organised around members' needs can keep a number of pots on the boil, are internally at peace, and have a coherent, constructive message about all the facets of education. One fine day there will be one teacher union in Ireland, and it will have to facilitate the discussion between educators and the public so that education reform is accessible and less fraught. The sooner that dialogue is opened, the better.

It is a constant gripe of teachers that their unions have lost touch with them, or that unions focus on one group or cause to the detriment of another. The new or renewed relationships (both internal and external) that I am proposing will help to build confidence inside the unions, which will lead to respect from outside and mutual respect. This inside-out reform will produce a more fruitful view of teachers, schools, and unions.

At the moment, unions have to cover so much ground that the only way to react is by handing their decisions to a small number of people: unions which appear participatory are in reality autocratic. This sends a signal to union members that they can't trust this organisation. This demoralises union staff, and we are in the downward spiral to eventual lashing out. Unions end up having to prioritise their resources for a few or even a single agenda priority. This often backfires, and when it does the union loses face with its members.

Proposing a new unionism isn't without its problems, either. It requires a culture change both inside unions and in dealing with them from the official side. If combative relationships have become the norm, attempting to work constructively will challenge officials on both sides. However, working strategically with others in education moves us away from the traditional confrontational relationships. Rather than signing away teacher union influence, such a shift will enhance unions' standing, allow them to insert their own reforms into the agenda, and gain for them an esteem that lets them speak to parents, officials, and politicians with authority on policy and the cornerstones of union work, pay, and conditions.

### **Thinking unions**

But teacher unions should not wait. Becoming reforming unions could start with reforming how unions treat research. Becoming unions that foster research among teachers and with allied bodies (the Nevin Institute, for example) would demonstrate willingness to show a modern face, but changing just because it looks good is not enough. Supporting the views of teachers in classrooms through research-driven reform will further show teacher unions as responsible participants in the education debate.

Changing union structures and culture will require strong, outward-looking leadership and a sympathetic, unsuspicious reception. Leaders of teacher unions will have to be able to prioritise union-led reform and research if we are to resist new managerialism and the neoliberal agenda. The rewards will be huge: teaching and teachers will move on from feeling acquiescent in the face of new proposals to being accepted as agents of change themselves. Relationships in the education system have almost been designed for confrontation, and no one is comfortable with change until the moment it is necessary has almost passed. Leaders who want

The challenge is getting the two sides to set aside years of confrontation and bitterness.

to support positive engagement will need to be supported and to have that engagement reciprocated. Teacher leaders must think politically and not just selfishly in engagement with others. No teacher union curricular reform proposal will be accepted just because teachers proposed it.

The official side will have to be receptive to unions which are willing to move into this space. They will have to set aside their suspicion of unions and welcome the engagement of teacher representatives. There will still be resistance, and there will still be dispute, but with the buy-in of all education partners, it should be possible to build a structure for resolving disagreement on reform. Then, nothing less than broad agreement on the direction Irish education should take into the 21st century could be in our sights.

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### Joint Union Protest



Equal Pay for Equal Work (ASTI, TUI, INTO) on 17 May 2017. The three teacher unions took to the streets on 17 May 2017 in a joint protest against unequal pay for newly qualified teachers.



# Why Teaching?

The seed sown early that attracted me to Teaching



**Alison Cosgrave**

Teacher of Politics at Second Level

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**I**n this article Alison Cosgrave gives a rare insight into the job of teaching.

She confides to the reader her priorities as a teacher and the fulfilment and professional satisfaction she enjoys in her work. She also discusses challenges of the job, the lack of job security for many, and her own worry about the new Junior Cycle which has, she believes, been rolled out by policy-makers without fully realising the consequences for the future of education in Ireland.

Why did I choose teaching, when there are so many other opportunities open to graduates, and the cost of taking a two-year Professional Master of Education (PME) could run to €100,000, including fees, living expenses, and income foregone for the duration of the course? What drew me inexorably to teaching is not so much the desire to impart knowledge in my subject areas, but the nature of the relationship between the teacher and each student in their care.

Beyond that, there is the professional satisfaction of teaching my subject content, the resources I use in delivering each class, the use of information communication technology (ICT) which is now part and parcel of teaching, and the textbooks which are still at the core of students' learning. If the past year has taught me one thing, it is the value of building a quality relationship with every student, and the personal and professional fulfilment this gives me as a recently qualified teacher.

As a child I was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukaemia, which necessitated months-long hospital stays and 'holidays' home for a few nights, where I was hooked up to feeding tubes; an array of medication tubs was the norm in my house. Surprisingly, my memories of this time aren't all negative. Two people, one of them my aunt, came to the hospital and did small bits of school work, or taught me what I was missing in class, so I wouldn't be so far behind when I eventually did get to go to school. I loved it. It took my mind off being sick and made me feel more normal. This experience as a young child was the seed which led me to always want to teach. It's that simple.

I have always known that I wanted to be able to help other children like I had been helped, and to pass on some knowledge and passion; or failing that, to make students feel good about themselves. Teaching lends itself to being organised, because teachers are expected to fill many roles, some of which have little to do with the subject matter. Thankfully, I am organised by nature: I enjoy sorting things out, planning activities, and making the resources needed to go along with them.



What sets teaching apart is the relationships you create with students.

The glue that can hold all of this together for teachers is the ability to organise themselves, their students, and their classroom. You can argue that to be an events manager, or to work in a hotel or even the medical profession, you need to be organised too – and that is true. The ability to organise is needed in nearly all professions, but what sets teaching apart is the relationships you create with students.

As a manager you have to be sociable and easy to approach. You need to be able to develop an easy rapport with your clients so that they trust you and are willing to do business with you. Those relationships, and more often acquaintances, are made quickly and then forgotten when the business has been handled.

For teachers, you are on a journey with your students for up to six years. You literally watch them grow from children to young adults. You see them change, flourish, and thrive in the environment that you create – you build a relationship with them that is on a whole other level that no profession could possibly compete with. It is long-term, lasting, and the foundation to my teaching.

Students need to know that you care about them and what they have to say, before they start to care about what you have to teach and say to them. You cannot have teaching without that relationship. Often the dynamic can take a while to build – for me, with a certain year group, it has taken two years. Once they know you are there to help them learn, develop, and thrive, and they trust and respect you, something clicks into place. You begin to love having a class with them and being able to discuss things in class without worrying about behaviour and management issues.

Having said that, every class has children of a wide range of abilities, students who could read at their required reading age and those whose abilities could rival a college student's. At times I felt like handing them my books and letting them take over. I have taught students who were eager to learn and soaked up every word I said, students with a 'who cares' and 'why do I even need to know this' attitude, and students who were just plain angry about having to be in my presence. Some teens in front of me benefited from strong support systems, while others struggled to function given their family situations.

Teaching is much more complex than those outside can imagine.

Teaching is much more complex than those outside can imagine. Every day, you are running five to eight different classes, designing and adapting learning activities that you hope will meet your students' needs, while simultaneously fulfilling departmental, management, and curriculum standards.

Despite the lack of sleep, you need to maintain an energy level that matches that of teenagers, while remembering to remain the 'adult' (I've yet to figure out the true meaning of that word) in the classroom. You must also constantly remind yourself of the power you have to affect your students, for better or worse. You can't afford to be careless, indifferent, hurtful, fake, or oblivious – as you might on an off-day with adults – because children never get over it.

Teaching currently does not provide any long-term security of employment for many young teachers

This was a huge driver for NQTs joining the Teachers Union of Ireland last year.

The realisation came to me, growing gradually from unwanted doubt to certainty, that even though I can make a difference for some students, I am never going to be able to turn everyone around. One teacher simply can't do it – no matter how much they may want to. In the real world, it takes a whole school to turn things around. It takes teachers and administrators working together, and lots of parent and community involvement to make the kind of difference for all students that will stick. It takes time.

### Why not teaching?

I am not blind to the negatives that are creating such a crisis in teacher supply right now. Teaching currently does not provide any long-term security of employment for many young teachers who have spent four years taking an undergraduate degree followed by a two-year PME. After each school year, many teachers are left wondering if the hours and contract will be there for them the following year.

Some may need to spend the summer months searching for a new job while not getting paid, filling in and sending off up to a hundred CVs, just in the hope that one school principal will take a chance on them and call them in for an interview. The sad thing is, this is a reality for many newly qualified teachers (NQTs) in the early years of their profession. This was a huge driver for NQTs joining the Teachers Union of Ireland last year. At that time it was the only union offering some security, with the promise of a Contract of Indefinite Duration (CID) after two years served in a school, as opposed to ASTI's offer of four.

Sadly, this created tension between teachers of varying ages and experiences in most staffrooms. Accusations of 'Why would you join the TUI if we're actually fighting for teachers your age with ASTI?' were made. While this was a fair point, most young teachers, myself included, stayed out of the arguments and heated debates. We had to think about our job security and the possibility of some form of wage restoration.

Being able to pay your bills is a basic entitlement for those who have up to six years of third-level education, and currently teachers are not in that position. I was fortunate, not only in being offered a contract of substantial hours in my first year out of college, but also in having to pay only a small amount of rent. Rent was a challenge for many of my friends, who struggled to pay large sums per month while earning small wages.

Once a teacher has received their qualification, they still must fulfil certain requirements set down by the Teaching Council to become 'fully recognised' in their eyes. Typically an NQT has three years to complete 300 hours of teaching in recognised subject areas and attend a number of workshops. I had a contract for the year I qualified, so those hours would be ticked off. For a teacher starting out who hasn't found a contract and must rely on subbing, this presents a huge challenge.

Efforts have been made to improve on this regulation, mainly in the form of the Droichead programme which reduces the hours required to 200 and asks teachers to complete one course of CPD and attend three cluster meetings. But it can still be an obstacle to teaching and needs to be looked at again.

The new Junior Cycle is now the biggest cloud hanging over not just my teaching career, but the future of education in Ireland.

While Droichead seems good in theory, and its aim is to provide a support network for NQT teachers in Ireland, to me it seemed like another tick-the-box exercise. Those facilitating the cluster meetings I attended for Droichead covered topics such as parent-teacher meetings and how to deal with behaviour in the classroom – all topics that we had covered in our two-year training course. I wondered why I was sitting there, and what good this was to me when most of my learning about how to teach came when I was physically in the classroom teaching.

As a young and as-yet inexperienced teacher, the new Junior Cycle is now the biggest cloud hanging over not just my teaching career but the future of education in Ireland. You would think that as a new teacher I am on board with these new changes and policies. I'm not.

Yes, I agree that you should adapt your classroom to suit your learners, and not everything should rest on a final exam. And yes, I think it is great that students who have SEN needs are given help and support where needed and are no longer left to fall behind in the back corner of the classroom. But I don't think students going through the new Junior Cycle will be challenged enough. Why offer only Maths, English, and Irish at higher and ordinary level? Why are other subjects and languages not given that choice too?

Do teachers not already challenge their students to think? Do they not already offer different and continuous assessment in their classrooms? Yes, the drive is to push away from students simply memorising information for the sake of regurgitation in the exam, but what happens when they go on to sit the Leaving Certificate? Again, it falls back on policy-makers devising new structures without fully realising the consequences when they are rolled out. Will this create more tensions in staffrooms? Will it further discredit the teaching profession in the eyes of those on the outside if industrial action takes place?

Having said all that, I am where I have always wanted to be and where I hope to remain for many years to come.

#### NAPD Annual Conference

Minister Bruton with his three wise men: Seán Ó Foghlú, Martin Haney and Alan Wall



# Leadership in Our Schools

The emergence of a new realm of possibilities



**John Curtis**

General Secretary, Joint Managerial Body

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**J**ohn Curtis signals the inexorable movement in the education sphere towards a more distributed model of leadership. He examines the concept of distributed leadership and its key principles of inclusivity and distribution across a range of personnel who share common goals and commitments, with school principals inhabiting a leadership space that focuses on teaching and learning and the well-being of students.

In many respects, we have much to be thankful for as we survey the educational landscape in this country 50 years on from the advent of free education. The value placed on education, and the confidence in our teaching workforce, have us poised for significant future progress. I should say that throughout the recent contentious period of industrial dispute, the JMB has consistently made the point that our teachers are our greatest resource, and that is why they are always best placed to look after the students in our care through all aspects of their time in school. As the years of austerity thankfully recede more and more in our rear-view mirror, resourcing is improving, which should help to impel us into a more generative space in our schools.

The allocation of extra deputy principals to our sector and the restoration of middle-management posts are most welcome. These should allow our principals to increasingly inhabit a leadership space that focuses on teaching and learning and the well-being of students in our schools. Furthermore, we are inexorably moving towards a more distributed model of leadership in the education sphere. In this context, the recently published document from the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills, *Looking at Our Schools 2016: A Quality Framework for Post-Primary Schools*, has the potential to prove especially useful. It provides a reference frame of standards and domains that helped schools to ascertain their needs and priorities as they recruited at deputy principal level, and will again prove useful as they plan for recruitment at post of responsibility level, now that we are in the Elysian fields of industrial peace.

## **Distributed leadership**

Leadership, and how it might be managed, assigned, shared and devolved, has always been fundamental to how schools operate and subject to reflection and analysis as a matter of course. Even a cursory look at relevant documents and circulars shows how this has been the case, but it has been subject to increased emphasis and definition of late. Much of how best practice might be manifest in school organisation has coalesced around this concept of distributed

International research concludes that effective school leadership should be inclusive and distributed across a range of personnel who have a shared understanding, ownership, and commitment.

It will allow us to progressively move away from more hierarchical modes that over-rely on the ability and acumen of the principal.

leadership. A literature has developed around it which incorporates much of what school planning should entail. Crucially, as a means of examining how we operate, it has become the focus of what improved middle-management structures in our schools might imply, and it presents us with an opportunity to signal to our school communities that change is not only possible but necessary in how we view and imagine leadership in the future.

### Key principles

The concept of distributed leadership is predicated on several key principles: international research concludes that effective school leadership should be inclusive and distributed across a range of personnel who have a shared understanding, ownership, and commitment to providing a high-quality learning and teaching environment; distributed leadership allows senior leaders to focus more on leading learning in their school; and it should have strategic benefits for a school in the context of the level of pedagogic leadership necessary to support and embed evolving curricular developments in Irish schools.

In the foreword to *Looking at Our Schools*, Minister Bruton acknowledges:

We are very fortunate in Ireland to have an education system that is held in high regard by parents, students, teachers and the wider community. ... Teachers, parents, students and all stakeholders can justifiably be proud of our schools and of the ongoing work by teachers and others to make learning experiences for all students relevant, challenging and imaginative.

In the context of the standards that the document aspires to, there is the ambition that the principal empowers teachers to take on leadership roles and to lead learning through the effective use of distributed leadership models. This provides us with an interesting matrix or diagnostic tool for how we might now look at leadership in our schools. It will allow us to progressively move away from more hierarchical modes that over-rely on the ability and acumen of the principal, and to redress what may have been systemic inertia in capacity-building in this area among colleagues on staff.

Spillane reminds us, 'What matters for instructional improvement and student achievement is not that leadership is distributed, but how it is distributed', and this points us to preparatory work that will need to be undertaken at local level. Every school and every staff has its own dynamic and a unique place on the educational spectrum. In the role of principal, the most effective leaders seem to have an innate or learned sense of how to initiate and measure the pace of change, and the wisdom to know the parameters of what is possible. At its core, there will have to be this focus on the particular needs of the school at the particular time, while also allowing flexibility for the organic change that progress must always allow in schools and in the broad educational and societal spheres.



Much of Junior Cycle reform is predicated on teachers becoming involved in more collaborative activities.

If a paradigm shift is necessary in how we understand leadership in our schools, its most important aspect may be how we countenance the role of the teacher. As the primary contact with our students and through their engagement with the teaching and learning process, they are unquestionably our key leaders. Every teacher has a leadership role in the school community and in student learning and this should be acknowledged. What occurs in the other spheres of leadership should facilitate and augment their core function.

Consequently, it is perhaps in this space that work in the area of distributed leadership can be most fruitful. As well as exploring avenues towards more distributed practice, this will acquaint staff with the modes of evaluation that will increasingly become the norm in school inspection. Much of Junior Cycle reform is predicated on teachers becoming involved in more collaborative activities that should evolve from subject department engagement, such as modelling of best practice, team teaching, and peer support. Consideration could be given to how a more collaborative philosophy might be supported with all of the teachers in our schools, and how dialogue in this space might be encouraged.

Much of what distributed leadership is meant to encapsulate is already evident in our schools. Nonetheless we now have an opportunity to bring into sharp focus what leadership should and must mean, and to engage in informed, cogent, and meaningful dialogue. It is an occasion for a board of management to reflect and to steward change. The more the concept is given life – perhaps through discussion at Parents' Association and Student Council level as well as appropriate school management and staff channels – the more fruitful and productive any endeavour might be. Hopefully, what is opening up to us now is a realm of new possibilities and the beginning of a conversation that will improve mission, professionalism, efficacy, and outcome in our schools. In many respects, in our schools we are all called to be leaders.

It is a privilege to be involved in education and to work with colleagues and officials whose collective aim is to improve the quality of education we can offer to those who depend on us. There will inevitably be discussion and different interpretations of how that might be arrived at, and the JMB, as always, looks forward to continuing to engage with the dialogue that this implies in a constructive and positive manner.

John Curtis, General Secretary JMB, and Paul Connell, President JMB, with Minister Richard Bruton (centre) pictured in Killarney at the JMB Annual Conference 2017.





# Adapting the Balint Model to Head Teachers

'A Very Precious Freedom Not to React, Not to Say Anything At All'<sup>1</sup>



Michael Redmond



Belinda Moller

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**T**he Balint group for school principals is explained and described in this article, along with the compelling reasons for employing this unique resource to support school leaders in the multidimensional context in which they currently work. An important element of the group is that it does not try to solve a case or interrogate the presenter; the emphasis is on tolerating and 'sitting with' the uncertainty, the tensions, and the challenges.

## Introduction

Michael Redmond and Belinda Moller met in Dublin in 2015. Belinda, a group analyst, had recently run a year-long support group for head teachers who had found it a useful experience. Michael, a former principal now involved in management support, had recently conducted and completed his Ed.D. research on the emotional landscape of school leadership. In January 2016, they began to co-facilitate a Balint group with eleven head teachers from Dublin secondary schools. The schools serve students aged 12–18 years. The average school has 600 pupils and 36 teaching staff. The schools represent a mix of socio-economic locations. The group meets every six weeks for an hour and a half in a neutral venue, and at this point in 2017 is the longest-running Balint group for principals in the world. This paper explores the context of the group and the assumptions and theoretical extensions that may influence its operation and approach.

## What is a Balint group?

Michael Balint, an English psychoanalyst, developed a model of group work in 1948 to support GPs in their training and work with patients (see [www.balint.co.uk](http://www.balint.co.uk)). He observed that, for GPs to truly assist a patient, they had to understand more about the emotional relationship between them – to bring compassion and warmth, and generate a deeper understanding of what it really feels like for those involved. Balint groups are increasingly being made available to a wide variety of professionals, including school principals: there are now four active Balint groups for principals in Ireland and two others about to begin.

The task of the Balint group, made up of perhaps eight to twelve school principals meeting once every six weeks or so (and preferably during school hours), is to provide a confidential, peer-based setting to reflect on the emotional experience of work. The group sits in a circle. A member offers a current or past case, presenting it informally for a few minutes. One of the leaders asks the group if there are any questions of fact. Then the presenter is asked to push their chair back from the circle. The group free-associates on the case for about 20 minutes, then the presenter is

invited back into the circle to respond to the group's ruminations. The whole group considers the case for a further few minutes.

As the group free-associates on the case, members focus on feelings rather than advice, questions, similar experiences, or solutions. They do not try to solve the case or interrogate the presenter. The emphasis is on tolerating and 'sitting with' the uncertainty, the tensions, and the challenges while reflecting compassionately on the emotions of the presenter and others involved.

The task of the Balint group is to provide a confidential, peer-based setting to reflect on the emotional experience of work.

### **Why would head teachers benefit from a Balint group?**

Michael's recent research project into the emotional competencies of secondary school head teachers in Ireland<sup>1</sup> emphasised the need for 'career-long, safe and affectively articulate peer-delivered dialogic support', a model supported by Spindler and Biott<sup>2</sup>:

Reformers must acknowledge that it is the resilience and emotional engagement of head teachers, and teachers, rather than training programmes, which helps them to go beyond the call of duty when they are being subjected to relentless imposed change and to the ratcheting-up of targets. Instead of emphasising accountability measures and common sets of technical competencies for all head teachers, the focus should be on how to engender and support inter-generational learning in local districts.

Head teachers in Irish voluntary secondary schools<sup>3</sup> have access to a range of opportunities for meeting one another. A frequently cited by-product of these usually agenda-driven events is the opportunity to engage with peers in a collegial and safe environment. That such encounters fulfil the requirements for 'inter-generational learning' is doubtful, however. We cannot improve on Spindler and Biott's identification of head teachers' developmental needs in groups constituted with this work in mind, that is, allowing veterans to connect with the concerns of new head teachers; embracing emotional dimensions of starting out and keeping going in demanding circumstances; and making connections between repertoires of accumulated capital as part of the reservoir from which all head teachers can derive sustenance.

As the group free-associates on the case, members focus on feelings rather than advice, questions, similar experiences, or solutions.

Thus, while some pairings and small groups of head teachers have doubtless conspired to construct ad hoc relationships achieving these aims, most school leaders in Irish secondary-school settings have no access to such a resource. The challenge of meeting such developmental needs therefore involved seeking to build a fit-for-purpose model of appropriate, workable, and acceptable professional networks supporting the long-term sustainability of individuals, and it is in this space that the Balint group emerges.

### **The context for head teachers in Ireland**

The porous boundaries of contemporary schools admit successive waves of influence emerging from the external environment. In Ireland, the imposition of a national austerity programme; significant hegemonic change in church-people-state relations; loss of trust in fiscal, ecclesial and political authority; and the emergence of a neo-liberal,

The head teacher's role has been reconstituted as supporter, reinforcer, and facilitator of school-wide change efforts.

evidence-based policy framework driving educational reforms<sup>4</sup> have all conspired to produce a perfect storm of unremitting change impacting on the psychological and emotional health of school communities.<sup>5</sup> This state of flux coincides with an already challenging set of factors uniquely impinging on schools in the voluntary secondary sector in Ireland, such as inequitable resourcing, inapt middle-management structures, and diminishing commitment to ethos.

Such contextual factors are not, of course, unique to Ireland except perhaps in degree. A set of perennial human and organisational factors are universally intrinsic to school leadership. Key dimensions of the affective landscape of headship, as are revealed in the theatre of the school, require the attention of practitioners themselves in seeking to discover sources of personal and professional sustainability.

### **Taken-for-granted occupational assumptions**

For the past two decades, emotions have been largely regarded as feminine, private, and irrational, and therefore remained outside the domain of public, masculinised work.<sup>6</sup> There has since, however, been an endorsement of soft skills achieving hard targets, demanding a new 'leaderliness' in schools – one that replaces distance with empathy, aloofness with warmth, and power with partnership. The head teacher's role has been reconstituted as supporter, reinforcer, and facilitator of school-wide change efforts, as opposed to the more authoritarian approaches of the transactional leader.

Such occupational assumptions inevitably bring with them projections and fantasies in which the head also becomes either the saviour of the school or the focus of everything that is wrong with it. The crucible of the Balint group offers a rare opportunity to safely unpack such emotional intricacies.

### **Theoretical extensions**

Wilke observes, 'The biggest success story in applied psychoanalysis has been the Balint group ... no comparable success story of applying the psychoanalytic method in organizations can yet be told.'<sup>7</sup> The model rests on analysing the interaction of the transference phenomenon between doctor and patient, viewed as part of the healing process. At institutional and system level, however, organisation-psychology consultants are reporting on the damaging consequences of unconscious anxieties and the social defences constructed to defend against them, right across the private sector, public education, health, and welfare.<sup>8</sup>

Wilke is a group analyst. He argues that the original Balint model needs to be adapted because the practice environments of GPs, psychiatrists, mental health professionals (in both public and private sectors), and in fact all professionals has changed dramatically. More and more professionals practise their craft in groups, multidisciplinary teams, virtual networks, and complex organisation systems that no longer provide regular or secure holding structures.

Head teachers work in just such a multidimensional context. They are required to attend not only to the academic needs of students and the

Head teachers are required to attend not only to the academic needs of students and the resource needs of staff, but also the psychological, moral, and emotional health of the whole school community...

The group is instructed to respond to the presenter's case by sharing responses such as images, symbols, metaphors, and emotional feelings.

resource needs of staff, but also to the psychological, moral, and emotional health of the whole school community and often its wider social system, such as families and social structures.

Foulkes, the father of group analysis, said:

No wonder the modern individual is afraid of the group – is afraid of losing his very existence, of his identity being submerged and submitted to the group. The individual, while helplessly compressed into a mere particle of social groups and masses, is at the same time left without any true companionship in regards to his inner mental life.<sup>9</sup>

Bion's group analytic/group relations concept of container-contained<sup>10</sup> is most applicable<sup>11</sup> to the adapted Balint group. It refers to the mother as bearing the feelings and emotions of the infant in a holding environment. By containing the feelings and emotions of the child, the infant's experience of persecutory anxiety and the ever-present threat to survival are contained.

All our human relationships, whether in a dyad, friendships, collegial or peer groups, or in complex interdependent or interdisciplinary professional networks, can be viewed through Bion's concept of container-contained. As social beings we have an innate and social need to be 'met' and held, and to seek in others the capacity to bear our anxieties and acknowledge and tolerate our emotional experiences of life.

In the Balint group, the presenter is protected from the feeling of being submerged or having to submit to this level of complexity. The companionship that Foulkes refers to is possible because the presenter, having presented their case, moves outside the group and listens in silence to the interaction. R  th<sup>12</sup> has written about the Balint model viewed through Bion's thinking. He says that with this simple act, 'all the problems, feelings, and even projections of the patient and the doctor are handed over to the group and its members symbolically, but also in a very concrete manner, to be discussed – the group now serving as a "container".'

The group is instructed to respond to the presenter's case by sharing – through words, silence or gestures, random thoughts, and felt associations – responses such as images, symbols, metaphors, and emotional feelings.<sup>13</sup> This gives participants 'the ability to think their own thoughts, and not to think what has been projected on to them'.<sup>14</sup> Without this special instruction, the group will be activated by the institutional stress and anxiety in the system and resort to reactive approaches such as interrogating the presenter, giving advice, recalling a time when something similar happened, and so on.

One head teacher presented a case involving students from different religious, social, and ethnic cultures. The issues were deeply shocking, grave, and complex. After the presentation, the group remained silent. It was an opportunity for 'dreaming, thinking, and building the apparatus to produce thoughts and linkages'<sup>15</sup>, and for the silence of the presenter

listening to her own internal dialogue alongside the silent dialogue of the group.

### **Operational adjustments**

This group is run along classic Balint lines, more or less. Initially, however, the group struggled to bear the presenter's dilemma and inner turmoil, and an adjustment was made. Their difficulty in sitting with the uncertainty of not knowing, of not being able to fix or rationally resolve the problem, mirrored the complexity of the presenting cases. Rather than pull the chair back, the presenter and one of the facilitators sat outside, adjacent to the circle. This was designed to help the group respond without focusing on or fixing it for the presenter. The arrangement prevented the group from seeing the presenter directly but did not impede on hearing. After the group's rumination, both retook their seats in the circle.

This adjustment was used twice. In subsequent debriefs between the facilitators, it was evaluated as having some potential, though not strictly adhering to the pure Balint model. The group has developed to the point where it is capable of such experimentation, and insights gained from a recent Balint training weekend have also informed our testing of the model. At the time of writing, the group has reached its first anniversary, and a case-free meeting may help evaluate developments and future approaches.

### **Learning to repond and manage desire to react**

It is unreasonable to expect that overburdened head teachers will retreat from their roles to comprehend and discover how to implement models of effective practice. What is feasible is that practitioners begin to develop their own continuing theory of action under real-time conditions. It means the professional must learn to develop micro-theories of action that, when organised into a pattern, represent an effective theory of practice.<sup>16</sup> The aim is to identify emotionally attuned cognitive learning strategies which can set a pattern of successful behaviours. The discipline of the Balint group, where participants are encouraged to 'feel, don't fix', represents precisely such a micro-theory which may be replicated in daily practice, with potentially transformative effects.

### **Conclusion**

The classic Balint model, used with the container-contained concept and a group analytic lens, facilitates the group to think about the interpersonal complexities of organisational and institutional life. We are social beings, we crave connection, and we crave to be understood and seen. Our need for relatedness is a given, but we now work mostly in organisations that have dismantled regular, supported structures for relating and for interpersonal work.

It is remarkable how, in this application of the Balint group to head teachers, the benefit has stood out over other forms of support and training. The case presentations indicate high levels of institutional and systemic stress in schools that evoke strong feelings of persecution and considerable threats to occupational and emotional survival. We do not yet fully understand the workings of this adapted group, but we are convinced

We are social beings, we crave connection, and we crave to be understood and seen.

of its goodness of fit for this cohort of professionals. Recent unsolicited commentary from group members affirm this:

‘I am delighted to be part of this group and wish to thank you both for making it happen and supporting us in making every session such a cathartic and enriching experience.’

‘Long may it continue. It is the greatest source of professional support I have experienced, because it is about the whole person. We bring our whole selves to the job but have to keep most hidden. Balint is a realistic and supportive group to be in.’

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Delegates from  
Bray Branch at ASTI  
Convention 2017 (L to  
R): Michael Browne,  
Michael Berigen-  
Welkier, Melissa N    
Chreanna.





# Have we too many schools in Ireland?

## Should we centralise resources to cater for larger numbers?



**Clive Byrne**

CEO, National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals

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**C**live Byrne explores the notion of reducing the number of schools in Ireland. He suggests that a single school in a modern building would be the way to go, with appropriate facilities, an appropriate leadership team, and pastoral/guidance support to meet the needs of students, who would also benefit from a broader curriculum.

Three years ago I visited Macedonia as part of a European School Heads delegation. Macedonia has applied for membership of the EU and NATO, so it sees itself as a member of the European family of countries. I was there to study aspects of its education system, but one thing stood out. Ireland has a population of 4.5 million people and 730 second-level schools. Macedonia has a population of just over 2.5 million but only 90 second-level schools. I know their system is different; there is a lot of political interference in the running of their schools, and many are much bigger than we might think wise. But only 90 schools! This got me thinking about why we have so many schools in Ireland, both primary and secondary, and what the implications might be if we were to try to reduce that number.

At primary level almost 70 per cent of school leaders are teaching principals. This imposes a great burden, because as well as being a classroom teacher, the principal has responsibility for all administrative tasks required by the department, and for the welfare requirements of staff and students – not to mention responsibility for insurance and the safety of the plant and the school. I know that a key demand from such colleagues is for sufficient release time to undertake the admin work without interfering with students' progress. But the cost and scarcity of suitable substitutes make it difficult to find a resolution.

At second level there are slightly different issues. Of the 700+ schools, just under 100 are Community and Comprehensive schools, around 250+ come under the Education and Training Boards umbrella and just under 400 are Voluntary Secondary schools. What is the ideal size for a viable school, and why, when there is talk of amalgamation, is nothing ever easy and many different obstacles are put in the way?

There is an element of 'things happen in Irish education because it has always been so', but in 2017 do we have the vision to review the organisation of our schools and give political direction on the best way forward? There are examples of recent school amalgamations where the talks went on for over a decade – frustrating, no doubt, for all concerned,

In 2017 do we have the vision to review the organisation of our schools and give political direction on the best way forward?

with each party adopting a ‘what we have, we hold’ attitude, particularly in the area of governance. If there is an all-boys and all-girls school as well as what is now characterised as an ETB school, which body will have the patronage? The combined numbers of all three might correspond to a decent-sized school, but barrier after barrier is erected to delay progress. This is most unfortunate, because parents in each town believe there is a hierarchy of schools, a preferred school for their son or daughter, and in this situation the magnet school will prosper at the expense of others. Experience shows that in parents’ minds, the least-favoured school is the ‘former Tech’, and the weakest-ability or more socially disadvantaged students will usually end up there.

To our shame we must admit that when it comes to second-level education, our schools are obsessed with competition rather than collaboration, and that the concept of System Leadership promoted by Professor David Hopkins – whereby the magnet school is responsible for raising standards of all schools in the area – doesn’t exist. It’s no surprise then that the patronage of the largest number of amalgamated schools has been awarded to the ETB sector, far fewer in the Community and Comprehensive sector, and to my mind there has only been one new Voluntary Secondary sector school in the last two decades. It’s almost like an educational Grand National, where each sector is looking to consolidate the hold it has on the schools in their sector.

In a changing Ireland where Educate Together, An Foras Pátrúnachta and an increasing Muslim and non-religious population are also looking for the state to invest in second-level education, we need to rationalise what will be best for the country as a whole. In a town with three schools catering for a population of 900–1000 pupils, each has a principal, deputy principal, school secretary, school caretaker, a budget for the care and uptake of each building and so on. A single school in a new modern building would be the way to go, with an appropriate number of labs and physical education facilities, sufficient classrooms with appropriate broadband connections, an appropriate leadership team, and pastoral/guidance support to meet the needs of students who would study a broader curriculum more appropriate to their needs. As well as being more cost-effective, the local community would benefit from the wider range of facilities and resources available: surely a win-win for all.

In recent times the concept of the educational campus has found favour with the department.

In recent times the concept of the educational campus has found favour with the department. This seems a good way to go, centralising resources and facilities to cater for larger numbers. Educational visitors to Ireland find it difficult to understand that the state pays but doesn’t control. The contribution made in the past by religious and local organisations and institutions has been immense and should be acknowledged. But we live in different times, and the department’s investment on behalf of the state must be matched by a willingness to rationalise the large number of schools by clustering if necessary at primary level, or amalgamation at post-primary, with the curricular flexibility of enabling appropriate religious instruction to meet the requirements of each patron body. It will be a political hot potato, but I believe that as a society we are recognising that the way things have been done in the past doesn’t meet our current expectations or needs, and communities are willing to compromise.

# Cosán: The Teaching Council's Policy on Continuing Teacher Education

## New Pathway to Validate Teachers' Learning



**Beth Cooney**

Teacher and member of The Teaching Council

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**B**eth Cooney reflects on the current stage of development of Cosán, the Framework for Teachers' Learning. The policy, she argues, has great potential to recognise and support professional learning, empowering teachers to define and choose their own learning pathways. It is the aim of The Teaching Council that standards implemented will be developmental as opposed to regulatory, they will be concerned with improvement not measurement, and they will emerge through consultation and be professionally led.

As a post-primary teacher, one of the most sustaining aspects of my practice has been my learning. Formal or informal, collaborative or individual, in lecture halls and education centres or in corridors and the staffroom, learning nourishes me and equips me for the most complex, challenging, and important profession of all. I return often to Chris Day's 1999 writing on being a teacher and developing as a professional; he encapsulates teachers' learning in a holistic way:

... all natural learning experiences and those conscious and planned learning activities which are intended to be of direct or indirect benefit to the individual, group or school and which contribute through these, to the quality of education in the classroom. It is the process through which, alone or with others, teachers review, renew and extend their commitment as change agents to the moral purposes of teaching; and by which they acquire and develop critically the knowledge, skills and emotional intelligence essential to good professional thinking, planning and practice with children, young people and colleagues through each phase of their teaching lives. (p. 18)

### What is Cosán?

The Teaching Council's Policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education incorporates all aspects of teachers' learning throughout their career, from initial teacher education and induction to in-career professional development.

Cosán is the national Framework for Teachers' Learning; launched by the Teaching Council in March 2016, it is the policy document underpinning professional learning in practice. Teachers' views have informed its content, language, and structure, as well as all aspects of its development. We have said that our learning is ongoing, non-linear, and the hallmark of our professionalism. Cosán will develop to support that learning by recognising and providing a context for learning in the coming years.

Cosán is underpinned by these key assumptions:

- » It will recognise teachers as autonomous, responsible learning professionals.
- » It will be a flexible framework.
- » It will facilitate teachers in identifying and pursuing relevant, rich, varied, and quality learning and will allow for innovative approaches to quality assurance.
- » It will provide an opportunity to formally acknowledge and recognise teachers' learning and to facilitate teachers in recognising its value in the broadest sense.

Cosán should not be a bureaucratic, box-ticking exercise... and it should not be mired in paperwork.

At the Cosán development day held on 13 May 2017, Declan Kelleher, chairman of the Teaching Council's Education Committee, was clear that Cosán should not be a bureaucratic, box-ticking exercise of little use or meaning to teachers in their professional practice. Consequently, Cosán may be characterised as 'growth-based', wrapping around the breadth of teachers' learning as it already exists. It is not based on an hours culture and it should not be mired in paperwork; it should allow teachers to demonstrate a commitment to these holistic standards:

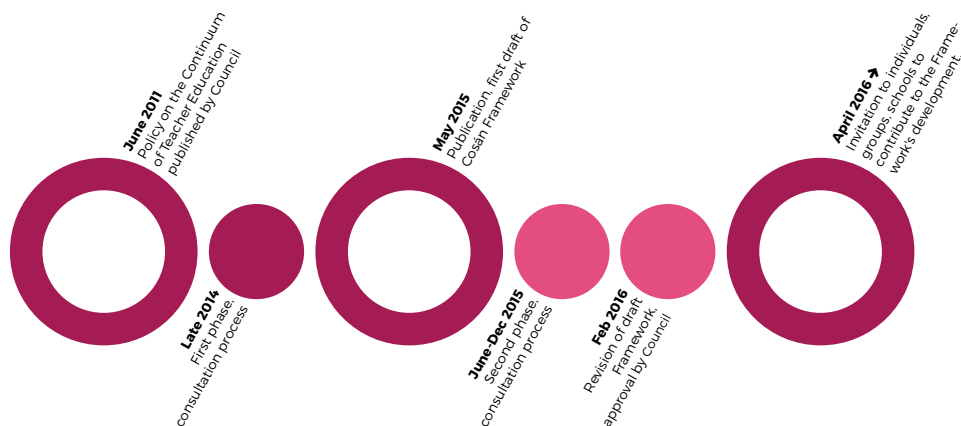
1. quality teaching and learning for their students and themselves, and
2. continued professional growth for enhanced professional practice, to support that quality teaching and learning in a sustainable way.

The Council has begun the process of policy development with a blank page; teachers are being entrusted to develop a model that is meaningful to us, specific to our individual contexts and sustainable for the future.

In my view, Cosán should, and does, envisage the implementation of what Sachs (2005) calls developmental, as opposed to regulatory, standards. These are concerned with improvement, not measurement; they emerge through consultation and are professionally led. This approach aligns with the Teaching Council's core values of shared professional responsibility, collective professional confidence, and professionally led regulation.

## The development process

Timeline of development so far:



I believe that teachers must decide for themselves what it is they need to learn and why.

The Teaching Council continues to welcome expressions of interest from teachers, groups, or schools that wish to participate in the development of Cosán.

The development process began in April 2016 and will be completed in 2019, with a view to implementation in 2020. Varied approaches to teachers' learning will be explored, trialled, and adapted to different contexts, all encompassed by five overarching aims:

- » To explore the use of the holistic standards in guiding teachers' learning.
- » To identify appropriate and sustainable mechanisms for recording and reflecting on teachers' learning.
- » To explore and identify mechanisms and criteria for the accreditation of teachers' learning.
- » To explore the development of an appropriate and sustainable link to registration.
- » To trial all aspects of the framework, with specific emphasis on exploring scalability issues, including the opportunities and challenges in moving from development to implementation.

Some teachers have expressed concerns about two of these aims: recording and reflecting on learning, and linking learning to registration. This has already become part of the professional learning landscape in other jurisdictions; in Scotland, for example, Professional Update requires maintenance of such records and five-yearly confirmation of engagement in the Professional Update process with the GTCS. Given the recent experience of educational initiatives, increased teacher workload, and low morale, concern about Cosán is understandable. How will the Teaching Council address this?

### **Working from a blank page**

The Council has been clear about the need to resist standardisation as we carve out a new professional space where teachers' learning is recognised and valued. Throughout the remaining years of the framework's development, all dimensions of learning will have to be accommodated, all contexts explored, and a broad range of individual, school, and systemic issues addressed. Cosán distinguishes itself from other policy initiatives in this regard; it is not a matter of prescription and compliance but an innovative attempt to allow teachers to frame our learning in ways that are meaningful to us.

### **Become involved**

The Teaching Council continues to welcome expressions of interest from teachers, groups, or schools that wish to participate in the development of Cosán. This period of research and development is open and democratic. It is also critical to Cosán being understood as a framework that describes learning, in the variety of formal and informal ways that teachers experience it, without reducing it to quantification. [See: [www.teachingcouncil.ie](http://www.teachingcouncil.ie); under Teacher Education, more information is available under the Teachers' learning (CPD) tab.]

### **Relevance, meaning and sustainability**

For teachers, educational innovation must make sense; we have to see that it will improve our practice. Taking part in the development of Cosán provides a sense of agency, as teachers are entrusted with ownership of the framework (Ketelaar et al., 2014). These are not changes imposed from

the outside: as originators, teachers can ensure that our own learning is relevant, meaningful to us in our individual context, and sustainable over the long term.

## Resourcing

At the development day on 13 May, Declan Kelleher emphasised that Cosán should be supported by appropriate structures and processes at local, regional, and national level and adequately resourced to meet teachers' needs. In this context, the voices of teachers must be heard, as we are best placed to identify what those resources should be.

Cosán is an innovative attempt to allow teachers to frame our learning in ways that are meaningful to us.

System-wide innovation is challenging. Lessons have been learned from the initial implementation of Croke Park hours, with increased flexibility and trust in the profession to determine what learning is required and how to achieve it. Professional trust and flexibility underpin the Cosán framework. I would like to see Cosán as a catalyst for authentic and dynamic professional learning, an opportunity to open our practice to collaboration, discussion, and improvement, and to reject the 'one size fits all' approach to teachers' learning.

## Empowering teachers as learners

Every day, teachers determine and embody what it means to be professional. We model learning for the children and young people on whom we exert such a powerful and lasting influence. We sustain and motivate each other with professional conversations and meaningful collaboration. Our lived experience must make us the agents of professional learning policy and implementation. For that reason, I believe that teachers must decide for themselves what it is they need to learn and why. They must have the time, resources, and flexibility to engage in learning that has a chance to embed itself into practice and transform it. Anything less will not be true to the spirit and intent of the policy and will risk diminishing its transformative power. It is the responsibility of all stakeholders to ensure that this does not happen.

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# Hearing Views of Children and the Young

The importance of this occurring within the Education System



**Julie Ahern**

Membership and Public Affairs Officer,  
Children's Rights Alliance

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**J**ulie Ahern highlights the key themes in a 124-page report, *Picture Your Rights*, which captures children's experience of being young in Ireland. Young people's wish to be heard is a dominant theme. They are frustrated by their lack of voice in the education system. The report indicates a hunger amongst young people for change in the education system.

*'It's important that we are listened to, that we have a say in our lives and the decisions that affect us.'*

When you want an honest opinion of what life is like for children in Ireland today, ask the experts – the children and young people. In 2015, that is exactly what we did.

The Children's Rights Alliance is a national membership-based organisation working to make Ireland one of the best places in the world to be a child. Working with UNICEF Ireland, the Alliance supported more than 500 young people to prepare a 124-page report, *Picture Your Rights*, which captures their experience of being young in Ireland. It was submitted to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child as part of the examination of Ireland's progress in implementing children's rights. The report, made up of pictures and quotes, provides a snapshot of what life in Ireland looks like for children aged 0–18 and, importantly, contains recommendations for change.

One of the key themes of *Picture Your Rights* was being heard. In particular, the children and young people highlighted the lack of voice they feel they have when the government is making decisions about their local communities and also about national policy:

*'Parents, teachers and decision-makers need to consult us more when they are making changes that affect our lives.'*

The frustration of young people about their lack of voice in the education system was evident in a number of submissions made to the report:

*'Teachers are striking about the reform of the Junior Cert, but who asked the people sitting the exam what we think?'*

*'Consult with us about changing the education system.'*

The hunger for change across the education system was evident among the children and young people who took part in the report. They raised issues such as not feeling safe at school, educational disadvantage,

Children have a right to be heard... their honesty is inspiring.

"We also have a right to an education that helps us care for ourselves and the world."

lack of subject choice in the school system, religion in schools, exam stress, and the need to be more involved in how schools are run.

Most importantly, the children and young people made clear recommendations for change that they felt could create a better educational system that would be more responsive to students' needs. These included the need to be respected more in school, to be more involved in decision-making, and the need for greater respect for people's identity in the educational system.

Gaps in the school curriculum were highlighted throughout the report. Recommendations from the children and young people included:

*'Every child of school-going age must be educated on an annual basis about online safety and privacy.'*

*'We feel the following subjects should be taught in schools: water safety; mythology; self-defence; interview prep; life skills, like paying bills, budgeting, changing a tyre, drivers' education; mindfulness; and art classes.'*

Following the publication of Picture Your Rights, five young people from the project team of 31 travelled to Geneva with the Children's Rights Alliance to present the report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. They presented the key themes and recommendations of the report. In particular they highlighted the need to reform the education system and to address exam pressure. The Committee took on board what the young people had to say, and recommended that the Irish government consider reforming the Leaving Certificate to reduce the stress it places on children and young people.

Children have a right to be heard, be it in their local communities, in school, or in the development of wider government policy. As the only true experts in their own lives, their honesty is inspiring and they deserve to be listened to.

*'We also have a right to an education that helps us care for ourselves and the world. Our views and opinions need to be heard and we need to have more of a say in the decisions and choices that are affecting our future.'*

#### Picture your Rights

A 124-page report that captures the experience of being young in Ireland.



# Teachers' Perceptions of Whole-School Guidance Counselling in Second-Level

## Why Teachers' Perceptions Matter



**Dr Lucy Hearne**

Course Director of  
MA in Guidance  
Counselling and  
Lifespan Development,  
School of Education,  
University of Limerick



**Tom Geary**

Emeritus Lecturer,  
School of Education,  
University of Limerick



**Paul King**

Course Director of  
MSc in Guidance and  
Counselling, School  
of Education Studies,  
Dublin City University

**T**he authors report on a case study of a whole-school approach to guidance counselling in second-level education which they carried out in a DEIS school in which this model of guidance counselling was in place. Their study examines the views of different stakeholders, including teachers, and discusses the implications of these views for future delivery of guidance counselling.

### Introduction

This article will report on findings from a recent explanatory case study (Hearne et al., 2016) carried out against a background of policy, practice, and research on a whole-school approach to guidance counselling in second-level education. The collaborative research study examined the views of different stakeholders, including teachers, and considers the implications for future guidance delivery in the sector. Since teachers are identified as key stakeholders in whole-school initiatives, their perceptions of whole-school guidance counselling matter greatly.

The concept of whole-school guidance counselling in secondary education as everybody's responsibility has become more pronounced in recent years (ACCS et al., 2017; DES, 2005, 2012). In reality, implementation of this vision in the school system is somewhat disparate (Hearne et al., 2016). One reason for this may be a lack of policy direction by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) in assisting schools to realise this vision, as well as reactive measures since Budget 2012's re-allocation resulting in the decentralisation of decision-making on guidance counselling resources to school management. However, to maximise guidance resources in schools, greater deliberation is needed on the specific roles and responsibilities of the key stakeholders in whole-school guidance to students. This key finding emerged in a recent in-depth case study that sought to examine whole-school guidance counselling provision in one DEIS voluntary school involving a number of stakeholders from the school (Hearne et al., 2016). The perceptions of teachers and support staff (n = 37 out of 61 staff) were collected through an online survey on the delivery of a whole-school approach to guidance counselling, guidance-related activities, professional roles, and the impact of the 2012 Budget re-allocation on guidance provision.

### Collaboration

The emphasis on a whole-school approach to guidance counselling, encompassing various roles and responsibilities for school management, school staff, and external stakeholders, mirrors other whole-school curriculum initiatives such as the Transition Year Programme (Jeffers, 2010), literacy

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and numeracy strategies (DES, 2011), Junior Cycle Wellbeing Programme (DES, 2013), and Student Support Team system (DES, 2014). Teachers are being tasked with engaging in diverse curriculum activities to support both the academic and the personal, social, and emotional development of students in their care. It is envisioned that the board of management and school management are responsible for overseeing guidance provision by working with the guidance counsellor and school staff to manage guidance planning, develop a School Guidance Plan, and ensure its consistent implementation (ACCS et al., 2017; NCGE, 2004).

The proposition is that subject teachers can support the delivery of the guidance programme to students through classroom engagement (e.g. SPHE, RE), provision of relevant subject advice for course and career-related decisions, and formal management or pastoral care roles (ACCS et al., 2017; NCGE, 2004). Research also suggests that respectful, empathic relationships between teachers and students play an important role in student well-being (Headstrong, 2015). Students may request advice from teachers, and teachers are expected to work collaboratively in seeking advice from the school guidance service for issues deemed outside their professional competencies (NCGE, 2004).

### **Holistic and Integrated**

Guidance counselling in Irish schools is quite unique, as it is holistic, incorporating personal and social, educational, and career guidance (Hearne and Gavin, 2014; NCGE, 2004), and it is integrated, involving the whole school community (ACCS et al., 2017; DES, 2005, 2012). In the case study school, the school management viewed guidance counselling as a whole-school responsibility, and it was being delivered to students across the curriculum through processes that involved guidance, teaching, and support staff (Hearne et al., 2016). However, the teachers in the school held a multiplicity of perspectives on their understanding of guidance counselling. The school has its own Whole School Guidance Programme, which concentrates on supporting students' education and career development for future progression; it has a Student Support Team (SST) structure; and some teachers reported referring students directly to the school guidance service. Although 63 per cent of the teachers perceived that there was a whole-school approach to guidance counselling in the school, a significant cohort (36%) perceived there was not. These conflicting views may be due to diverse understandings of the aims and scope of guidance counselling in the school. Some teachers believed there was more emphasis on career guidance to students on college course choices (CAO) and the dissemination of careers information. Others suggested the emphasis was more on supporting student well-being or personal counselling. The ongoing issue of equitable guidance counselling provision in Junior and Senior Cycle also emerged (Hearne et al., 2016; McCoy et al., 2014). In terms of the Junior Cycle, many teachers (77%) perceived counselling as the most important aspect, with personal and social guidance (59%) and advice-giving (50%) also deemed important. In contrast, 91 per cent of the teachers rated the provision of career information equally important as counselling in Senior Cycle.

## School Guidance Plan

The School Guidance Plan is a central component of whole-school guidance counselling to facilitate students' access to a developmental guidance programme (ACCS et al., 2017; DES, 2005, 2012; NCGE, 2004). In the case study school, only 12 per cent of teachers were aware of the Plan's existence, and 20 per cent did not know who should be involved in its development (Hearne et al., 2016). Given the significance of a School Guidance Plan in communicating roles and responsibilities, this might account for the divergent perceptions on the presence of a whole-school approach to guidance counselling. These findings need to be considered in the context of the levels of engagement across the school community in whole-school guidance counselling provision.

## United staff response to serious issues

Students value their relationships with teachers, and many teachers view pastoral care and student well-being as an important element of their professional role (Hearne and Galvin, 2014; Lam and Hui, 2010). A whole-school approach to guidance counselling can therefore provide a united staff response to serious issues for students; but it is a complex endeavour and assumes a significant level of professional commitment from teachers (Hearne and Galvin, 2014; Hearne et al., 2016). Previous research indicates that due to staff shortages, time pressures, and increased paperwork, teachers may be hesitant to become involved in pastoral care and student support activities (Hearne and Galvin, 2014; Hearne et al., 2017). This is particularly relevant regarding teachers' professional competencies, and whilst education and training to support teachers in whole-school activities is recognised, there is divergence about the form of training required (Hearne and Galvin, 2014; McCoy et al., 2006; Teach First, 2015). For example, counselling requires specialist training for effective implementation and does not form part of initial teacher education programmes, whereas it is included in initial guidance counselling training programmes.

Many teachers view pastoral care and student well-being as an important element of their professional role.

## Defining roles

Greater transparency on the roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders in whole-school guidance provision is also an issue (Hearne et al., 2016). In the case study, 16 per cent of the teachers indicated they did not know what their role was in relation to whole school guidance. Some identified it in terms of academic-subject-related guidance, whereas others viewed it as an overall pastoral care role with students. Some teachers were directly involved in the Student Support Teams as Year Heads, whilst others viewed their role as one of referral to the guidance service. Some identified a more general supportive role in contributing to a positive and caring school environment. None of them referred directly to the school's specific Whole School Guidance Programme and the associated activities that involved teaching staff.

## Erosion of guidance counselling provision

Although DEIS schools did maintain their allocation of 18.25 hours (DES, 2012) in Budget 2012, the erosion of guidance counselling provision in general has been consistently reported (ASTI, 2013; IGC, 2016; NCGE, 2013; TUI, 2014). In the case study school, teachers' perceptions of changes in its guidance provision varied from 68 per cent who were unsure of any

changes, to 18 per cent who had not seen any changes, to 14 per cent who had noted changes (Hearne et al., 2016). The issue of adequate time and resources to deliver the school guidance service was highlighted as a key challenge, with some teachers referring to the extensive role of the guidance counsellor for a large cohort of students.

### CPD on whole-school approaches

To conclude, the increasing attention now given to promoting well-being in secondary schools is to be welcomed. While well-being promotion is a plausible concept, there is a propensity for confusion over how guidance counselling can make a specific and distinctive contribution to students' well-being, and a lack of clarity on how this is manifested in reality. With regard to delivery of a whole-school approach to guidance counselling, the challenges for school management and staff are significant, as teachers need to embody a shared understanding of the concept and its implications in their practice (Hearne et al., 2016). An appropriate starting point could be in initial teacher education, which is a fertile ground in which to introduce these concepts and practices. Ongoing school-based CPD for teachers on whole-school approaches in the curriculum can also ensure they are equipped with the necessary skills to contribute in a meaningful and holistic way to students' development.

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### Educate Together Conference on 'Gender Matters'

Dr Debbie Ging, Associate Professor of Media Studies in the School of Communications, delivered the keynote address at the Educate Together annual Ethical Education Conference in Malahide in November 2017.



The annual Educate Together Ethical Education Conference focused this year on 'Gender Matters'. It was held in Malahide, Co Dublin, in November 2017 and was attended by over 200 teachers, students, educators and exhibitors from all over Ireland.

The keynote address was delivered by Dr Debbie Ging, Associate Professor of Media Studies in the School of Communications, DCU. Dr Ging spoke about gender issues around social media, cyberbullying, the harmful stereotyping (gender straight-jacketing) of both boys and girls and the sexualisation of children. She challenged the conference attendees to address the power relations that underpin sexism and the systemic, institutional, societal nature of gender discrimination.



# SUSI - Student Universal Support Ireland

## Role and Work of SUSI

Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) is a business unit of the City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDETb), which is designated by the Minister for Education and Skills as the single Irish national awarding authority for student grants in further and higher education. Since 2012, SUSI has replaced 66 former local grant awarding authorities. Its role is to enable students to receive financial support for their studies in accordance with the eligibility criteria of the Student Grant Schemes prescribed annually by the Minister.

SUSI was established in challenging times, both nationally and in terms of the public service staffing moratorium, and experienced acknowledged operational difficulties in its first year. In subsequent years however, SUSI has improved its performance and is now regarded as an example of successful public service delivery transformation.

## Outputs

The core work of SUSI involves the processing of large numbers of grant applications from April to October each year and the payment of awarded grants from September to June. More than 105,000 grant applications were received for the 2016-17 academic year and approximately 84,000 grants were awarded, representing student grant funding of €365m.

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18 (Est)
<b>Grant Applications</b>	69700	92200	103800	108200	105300	103200
<b>Grant Awards</b>	40600	59900	75200	83900	84100	84200

## Resources

SUSI has administration costs of approximately €8.5m annually and an approved staffing complement of 100 Full Time Equivalents (FTE). Temporary additional staff are recruited annually to meet seasonal workflow requirements.

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18 (Est)
<b>Cost per Application</b>	€115	€117	€89	€81	€78	€78
<b>Cost per Grant Award</b>	€197	€180	€122	€105	€98	€96

## Cost of Outputs

While the numbers of grant applications and awards have increased from 2012 to 2017, the average SUSI processing costs per application and award have generally declined year on year.

## Performance

Under a Management Framework Agreement implemented between the Department of Education and Skills and the CDET, SUSI has met and exceeded its key annual performance targets for the timely processing of grant applications and for the payment of awarded grants.

## Service Delivery

SUSI is a modern, centralised government service that seeks to achieve continuous improvement in its service delivery for students and other stakeholders. The grant application process has been fully online since 2012. The eligibility assessment process is streamlined through the use of integrated ICT systems, quality assurance systems and other controls. There is currently a project underway to deliver a new fully integrated SUSI ICT system for 2019, which will further streamline the end to end process, providing a "best in class" customer experience.

Performance Metric	Target (2013-2017)	Service Levels Achieved					
		2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	New Target (2017->)	2017/18
Application Processing:							
% of <b>new</b> applications completed	55% by 31 Oct	55%	56%	58%	81%	55% by 30 Sep	69%
	75% by 30 Nov	77%	75%	76%	90%	65% by 31 Oct	84%
	85% by 31 Dec	88%	87%	86%	97%	85% by 30 Nov	-
% of <b>renewal</b> applications completed	95% by 31 Oct	94%	92%	95%	96%	90% by 31 Dec	-
	(30 Nov)	(97%)	(95%)				96%
Grant Payments:							
% of total anticipated <b>new</b> awards paid	40% by 31 Oct	44%	43%	53%	77%	30% by 30 Sep	42%
	65% by 30 Nov	71%	69%	70%	88%	55% by 31 Oct	73%
	85% by 31 Dec	84%	85%	85%	94%	75% by 30 Nov	-
% of total anticipated <b>renewal</b> awards paid	80% by 31 Oct	92%	86%	95%	96%	90% by 31 Oct	95%
	95% by 30 Nov	98%	94%	96%	98%	75% by 30 Nov	-
	(31 Dec)		(98%)		(100%)	95% by 30 Nov	-

The SUSI support desk service provides advice and information for students, and other stakeholders, at all stages of the grant application and payment process through telephone, e-mail, social media and website communications. SUSI implements broad-spanning stakeholder engagement structures and, through its student outreach programme, attends at many college open days and other information events nationwide.

As a consequence of these changes, the average number of student interactions arising per grant application (calls, e-mails, social media and supporting documents) have reduced significantly.

The requirement for supporting documents from students has been significantly reduced through advanced data sharing with other government agencies (the graphic bellows identifies some of these data sharing partners) and monthly grant payments are made directly to students' bank accounts by electronic transfer.

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
<b>Student Interactions per Application</b>	8	6	5	4	4

For further information on SUSI, please visit its website [www.susi.ie](http://www.susi.ie)



# The Politics and Society syllabus post-Brexit

Learning social sciences in an age of upheavals



**Roland Tormey**

Centre d'appui à l'enseignement, Ecole polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL), CH-10105 Lausanne, Switzerland

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**T**he political upheavals of Trump and Brexit have called into question so much of what we think we know in political and social sciences. What does this mean for the Politics and Society syllabus, launched only a year ago, but before the world turned upside down?

Almost 30 years ago, when I was a first-year university student, our lecturer began the term by explaining why we were studying the politics of France but not Germany. The course, we were told, had previously dealt with both, but since nothing ever happened in Germany, they had decided for our year to restrict the focus to France. It was easy to detect the savage irony in the lecturer's voice: this was taking place in the academic year 1989–1990, as the Berlin Wall was being torn down amidst discussions of German reunification and the end of history. Sometimes political events move a lot more quickly than curriculum can be reformulated.

The Irish senior cycle Politics and Society syllabus provides an interesting window into this same question. It was formally launched in February 2016, and within a few months the Brexit vote delivered what was referred to as 'the biggest shock to the political establishment in Britain and across Europe for decades'.<sup>1</sup> The roll-out of Politics and Society into schools began in September 2016. Two months later, it seemed as if everything we knew about politics was wrong when a man described by allies and foes alike as unelectable became President of the United States. The Trump election caught many political and social scientists by surprise: as *Politico* magazine put it, 'If political scientists are supposed to help us understand trends in American politics and society, the blindsiding 2016 presidential election was a reminder that their work often can only go so far.'<sup>2</sup>

Six months later the focus was back in Europe, where the anti-immigrant and anti-EU candidate Marine Le Pen got over 10 million votes in the presidential election second round, finishing second to the political neophyte Emmanuel Macron. Macron's party was only a year old when it destroyed the two parties which had dominated France's politics for two generations, and swept to a landslide overall majority in the National Assembly. Politics and Society has not yet even got to its first Leaving Certificate exam sitting, but after a year of upheavals, it is not shocking to ask if it is already out of date. This question becomes all the more pressing when one realises that, while the syllabus was launched in 2016, work on developing it

began in 2006, and a draft for consultation was published as far back as 2009.

When the world moves so fast, how can a curriculum specification stay relevant?

## Ideas, grounded in lived experience

After a year of upheavals, it is not shocking to ask if it [Politics and Society syllabus] is already out of date.

*I don't want to work directly out of a book – it only provides one side of the debate, and it gets outdated.* (Student quoted in the NCCA's research on young people's interests in Politics and Society).<sup>3</sup>

*Politics and Society* was seen from the beginning of its development as a concept-based curriculum focused on enabling students to come to grips with particular ideas and to use those ideas to try to explain or understand the social and political world they see around them. The challenge in framing a curriculum this way became evident during consultation on the draft syllabus. While it was explicit in noting, 'Politics and Society is characterised by an exploration of different ideas regarding the most appropriate means and ends of human participation in civic, social and political life' [emphasis added],<sup>4</sup> it was criticised by some as being a syllabus about theorists rather than ideas. In response, the syllabus was reframed to give prominence to thinking rather than to thinkers.

We can see this with an example. One section in the draft for consultation was framed like this:

Students should be able to describe the political philosophies of Plato and Thomas Hobbes, with reference to

- » the need for a state to maintain order
- » the need for enlightened leadership to make decisions on behalf of the population
- » the views of these writers on whether this state needs democratic decision making

*Politics and Society was seen from the beginning as a concept-based curriculum.*

Students should be able to critique the political philosophies of Plato and Thomas Hobbes with respect to

- » the inequalities of power within their proposed political models
- » the likelihood of their ideal societies giving rise to security and peace
- » Hobbes' views on human nature
- » Plato's characterisation of different 'classes' of humanity.<sup>4</sup>

The same material was later framed in the actual syllabus as follows:

Students should be able to apply in their own words and to their own environment the following arguments about rules and the process of making rules:

- » rules provide protection for weaker members of the community from stronger members and provide a framework for orderly engagement in learning at school
- » those who have the most knowledge and wisdom should play the strongest role in making rules



There are gaps in the [Politics and Society] syllabus that clearly suggest it originated in a BT or BB world.

- » there should be very few rules and then only concerned with keeping people safe; any more than that is an infringement on people's freedom
- » those who have the most power or influence can make rules that suit their own interests and not the interests of everyone in the community
- » there is a danger of those with power enforcing rules arbitrarily.

Students should be able to describe in brief and general terms the contribution of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, [and others] to the discussions in this strand and the contexts in which they made their contributions.<sup>5</sup>

This focus on ideas rather than specific events, and on local and lived experience (politics with a small 'p') rather than only on big national and international events, may ensure that the syllabus can remain relevant in a world of upheavals – so long as the ideas presented are actually useful to help understand this rapidly changing world. So are they?

### **Fake news, algorithms, and emotions**

There are many ideas in the syllabus that do help to make sense of recent political upheavals. Someone seeking to understand Trump and Le Pen would probably find it useful to explore the strand on globalisation and localisation and ideas such as ethnic identity, cosmopolitanism, migration, the construction of 'us' and the 'other', and the 'clash of civilisations' hypothesis, all of which are referenced in the syllabus. Likewise, a discussion of Brexit would be informed by knowing how executives are selected at national and European level, and this is prominent in the strand on power and decision-making.

At the same time, there are gaps in the syllabus that clearly suggest it originated in a BT or BB world (Before Trump, or Before Brexit). The first is the role of non-traditional media and 'fake news' in both elections. Trump's political rise was linked to his promotion of the false idea that Barack Obama was not born in the US, and his election was associated with a storm of fake news: one study of news items which were fact-checked and deemed false found 115 pro-Trump fake stories shared on Facebook 30 million times, compared to 41 pro-Clinton fake stories shared 7.6 million times.<sup>6</sup>

The curriculum takes for granted that it is human actors that make editorial decisions.

In France, the second round of the presidential election was marked by the circulation online of forged tax documents in an attempt to smear the front runner, Macron, and to benefit Le Pen. The forgeries were released in the final days of the election, leaving only hours for the Macron campaign to identify their source and discredit the forgeries before the blackout on election-related news items. The dramatic story of their investigations produced an election finale worthy of any Hollywood blockbuster film.

Although dramatic, it is debatable whether fake news had a real impact on either election. What is not debatable is that this storm of fake news is intrinsically linked to the rise of social media as a news source. In the US election, an estimated 42 per cent of referrals to sites with a high percentage of factually incorrect news came from social media, compared



This storm of fake news is intrinsically linked to the rise of social media as a news source.

to only 10 per cent of referrals to top news sites.<sup>6</sup> In 2016, 62 per cent of US adults said they get some of their news from social media,<sup>6</sup> and it seems particularly susceptible to fake news. This is partly because it costs little to create fake news and disseminate it through social media, and partly because many viewers will only look at a snippet of the news item, so they get little information which might allow them to check its veracity.

So does *Politics and Society* adequately treat the political and social impact of social media? The curriculum specification does refer explicitly to new and traditional media, and requires exploration of their role, control, regulation, and the kinds of principles under which they should operate. It also explicitly links these questions to questions of power. At the same time, given what we have seen, asking students to apply concepts like ‘freedom of the press’, ‘social responsibility of the press’, and ‘accountability of the press’ to social media seems incredibly challenging and maybe even too idealistic. It might also have been worth asking what principles social media news producers apply to themselves (for example, ‘net neutrality’ or the ‘dumb pipe’ concept).

Nor does the syllabus explicitly indicate that students should be aware of the role of the algorithms that underpin social media and online recommenders in framing what information they and potential voters will see. Given the pace of change, this is perhaps inevitable. The iPhone had not been invented in 2006 when work began on *Politics and Society*, whereas today mobile connectivity is a pervasive norm throughout much of the world, with an estimated 2.32 billion smartphone users worldwide<sup>7</sup> and an estimated 4.2 billion Google searches every day in 2016.<sup>8</sup>

These changes have clear political and social impacts: the UK Leave campaign spent over half of its £7 million official budget on social media data analytics, with far more being apparently channelled into the same source through non-official sources.<sup>9</sup> This is important to consider in part because the curriculum takes for granted that it is human actors that make editorial decisions. How do our reference points change when decisions are taken by algorithms, not people who can be held accountable against ethical standards? In this context, teachers should probably be encouraged to consider the curriculum’s reference to ‘consumer-targeting strategies adopted by the media’ as encouraging an understanding of such algorithms.

The focus on fake news is linked to a second issue in *Politics and Society*: the role of emotion and emotional attachment in contemporary politics. Any analysis of Brexit or the Trump election would have to identify that the rational modelling of potential futures based on a dispassionate analysis of prior patterns did not play a large role in the decision of many voters. When the UK’s official statistics agency indicated that the claims of the Vote Leave campaign were misleading, the Leave campaigner and then UK minister Michael Gove dismissed concerns for factual accuracy by saying, ‘People in this country have had enough of experts.’<sup>10</sup>

In the US, the term ‘post-truth’ was coined to make sense of what was happening in an election in which Donald Trump was derided for speaking untruths 69 per cent of the time and Hillary Clinton was congratulated for

Students should be aware of algorithms that underpin social media.

being truthful about half of the time. Yet fact-checking seemed to have little impact on Trump supporters, and there is evidence that even if voters accept that their candidates' pronouncements were factually inaccurate, it didn't really affect their support.<sup>11</sup>

*Politics and Society* does not ignore the role of emotion and rhetoric in decision-making. However, it does not explicitly provide conceptual tools for making sense of why many people seem to ignore evidence and rationality in making political decisions. What conceptual tools might we use to understand this? The role of intuition in decision-making has been the subject of much recent work in social psychology and behavioural economics. In social and political science, Jonathan Haidt's moral foundations theory provides a framework for thinking about how non-rational features influence political decisions. It proposes that voting behavior can be explained to a significant degree by the extent to which a person responds emotionally to particular moral triggers such as care/harm, fairness/cheating, loyalty/betrayal, authority/subversion, liberty/oppression, and sanctity/degradation.<sup>12</sup> If the syllabus were written today, it is likely that concepts such as Haidt's would have to be considered.

### Do we need yearly senior-cycle syllabus revisions?

The question of whether we need yearly syllabus revisions is clearly tongue in cheek, and with the benefit of hindsight, we may at some stage in the future conclude that 2016–17 was far less dramatic than 1989–90. At the same time, it is reassuring that the decisions that led to shaping *Politics and Society* were often good ones: the focus on local and lived experiences of decision-making, power, and inequality helps to prevent it going out of date, while many of the conceptual tools needed to make sense of 2016–17 can be found in its pages.

The school student in the NCCA's research on young people's interests in *Politics and Society*, cited above, said, 'I don't want to work directly out of a book ... it gets outdated'. The challenge for teachers will be to use the events of the last year to bring these ideas to life with students. Ultimately, how much the syllabus can respond to a changing world will depend on teachers' ability to apply these ideas to contemporary events. This may even be easier to do without a textbook.

"I don't want to work directly out of a book... it gets outdated."  
(Student)

Part of bringing the syllabus to life may mean ensuring that teachers feel enabled to reinterpret learning outcomes in light of changed circumstances. References to decision-making in new media can be used in looking at the roles of algorithms in shaping information flows. Likewise, references to identity and the role of emotion in arguments may have to be used as a basis for thinking about non-rational political and social decision-making.

With respect to the thinking and thinkers described in the curriculum, the final syllabus states: 'It is not intended that these [writers] would be regarded as the definitive selection of great thinkers in the field; rather it is intended that they would demonstrate some of the diversity of, and ongoing change in, thinking on social and political issues.' This spirit will need to be brought to life by teachers and enabled by examiners if a syllabus is to remain relevant in a rapidly changing world.

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The **Irish Science Teachers' Association, Eol Oidí na hÉireann**, is the professional association for teachers of science in the Republic of Ireland. As such it is represented on the relevant subject development groups of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. Since its foundation in 1961 it has been providing continuous professional development and support for its members at both national and branch levels.

The Association has close affiliations with the Association for Science Education in the UK and is a founding member of ICASE, the International Council of Associations for Science Education. It is also represented on SCIENTIX which promotes and supports a Europe-wide collaboration among STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) teachers, education researchers, policymakers and other STEM education professionals.

Members are also supported and informed of developments through the Association's website ([www.ista.ie](http://www.ista.ie)) and through its Journal, *SCIENCE*, which is posted to members three times per annum.

The major national ISTA events are the Senior Science Quiz - held during Science Week since 1990 and the Annual Conference which provides members with the opportunity to hear and meet national and international experts in areas relevant to science education.

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# Playing Catch-up or Overspending?

## Managing the Cost of Special Education



**Joanne Banks**

Research Officer at the Social Research Division of the ESRI



**Selina McCoy**

Research Area Coordinator for Education Research at the ESRI and Adjunct Professor at Trinity College Dublin

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**H**ugely increased government expenditure on

Special Education since 2004 raises the question of whether the money is being spent effectively, or what do we want to achieve with the additional resources. While recent focus has been on inputs resulting in the introduction of the new model of resource allocation, the authors suggest that it may now be time to focus on outcomes.

This year saw the publication of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) spending review of special educational needs provision (DPER, 2017). The report highlights the 260 per cent increase in spending on special educational needs (SEN) since 2004 (from €465 million to €1.68 billion) and notes that the expenditure is greater than government spending on higher education (€1.58 billion).

Surprising as these figures may be, concern over the increasing cost of special education is not new. There has been growing pressure on the Department of Education and Skills (DES) and the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) in recent years to address how we finance special education and create a more sustainable resource allocation system in schools. A first step has been the introduction of a new, 'more equitable' model of resource allocation to schools that removes the requirement for students with SEN to get an assessment and diagnosis in order to access resources (NCSE, 2014). Introduced in September, it remains to be seen how this new model will affect students' education and the cost of special education in the coming years.

The publication of the DPER spending review at this time is significant, however. It provides an important starting point to examine not only how much we spend on special education but whether we spend it effectively. The purpose of this article is to highlight the importance of using evidence to inform debate and policy decisions on SEN funding. Our research uses two main data sources: the Growing Up in Ireland study, the national longitudinal study of children (Williams et al., 2009), and the National Survey of Schools (McCoy et al., 2014; Banks et al., 2015), to gather detailed information on the number and profile of students with SEN and examine how these students fare in school compared to their peers. In the context of increasing resources, it is important to understand the nature and characteristics of the target population before we assess the adequacy of those supports.

Concern over the cost of special education is not new.

Playing catch-up?

Any discussion of the rising costs of special education must occur in the context of the changing profile of mainstream schools over the last two decades. Until the early 2000s, policy and legislation for students with SEN lagged behind other European countries, as did the level of supports and resources provided in schools. The publication of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (EPSEN Act) in 2004 changed the policy landscape around special education and led to major reform of how we resource students with SEN in mainstream schools. A key aspect of the Act was that it introduced a much broader definition of SEN:

*A restriction in the capacity of the person to participate in and benefit from education on account of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability, or any other condition which results in a person learning differently from a person without that condition. (EPSEN, 2004)*

This meant that far more children were considered to have an SEN than had been previously. Using the *Growing Up in Ireland* data for nine-year-old children, our research was able to identify, for the first time, the number of students considered to have an SEN under this new definition. Our findings found that one in four children has some form of SEN (Banks and McCoy, 2011), a rate comparable with prevalent estimates in England and Wales (Croll and Moses, 2003) and the Netherlands (Van der Veen et al., 2010). Following publication of the EPSEN Act, the nature and profile of the student population in mainstream schools became more diverse, thus increasing the need for additional resources.

One in four children has some form of SEN (special educational needs)

During this time, special education became a major component of mainstream education, with students with SEN educated either in mainstream classes, special classes, or special schools. The government’s response to this increased demand for supports was to expand existing SEN resources, resulting in sharp increases in spending over the last decade. Table 1 highlights how these resources came mostly in the form of school personnel, such as learning support teachers and, in particular, resource teachers, whose numbers increased from 2,115 to 3,077 (up 45%) in the five years from 2011 to 2016. Another significant development was the expansion of the Special Needs Assistants (SNA) scheme. Since 2001, the number of SNAs increased from 2,988 to 13,015 currently (an increase of 336%) (Byrne, 2016).

Table 1: Increasing SEN resources over time

SEN Personnel	2011	2016	% increase
Learning Support Teachers	675	742	+10%
Resource Teachers	2115	3077	+45%
Special Class teachers	159	462	+190%
Total teachers	2949	4281	+45%

(Byrne, 2016)

One of the most dramatic increases in provision was in the area of special classes. These operate in mainstream schools but are intended to cater exclusively for students with SEN, with most classes admitting only students from one specific category of need, such as Autism or Mild General Learning Disability (Ware et al., 2009). Since the mid-2010s, the network of special classes (NCSE, 2013) has more than doubled, from just over 500 in 2013 to over 1200 in 2017. In particular, the number of special classes for students with Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD) has increased considerably in the last decade (Parsons et al., 2009), accounting for over 75 per cent of all special classes (McCoy et al., 2014; Byrne 2016).

One of the most notable financial changes has been the increased cost of pay for resource teachers.

### Overspending?

The DPER review details how current spending on special education is at €1.68 billion, or 18.9 per cent of the education budget. This has been increasing steadily from €605 million in 2005, €900 million in 2008 and €1.3 billion in 2011 (DES, 2011; Banks et al., 2015). One of the most notable financial changes has been the increased cost of pay for resource teachers, which currently accounts for 61 per cent of the total special education budget (€1,022 million). Ireland is not distinct, however: special education budgets tend to make up 12–20 per cent of education budgets internationally. For example, special education accounts for 15 per cent of the education budget in England and Wales (Audit Commission, 2002) and 20 per cent in the US (Chambers et al., 2004). Like Ireland, other countries are also grappling with increases in the proportions of students eligible for additional resources, often as a result of improvements in data collection and diagnosis (Croll and Moses, 2003; Ahearn, 2010), and there is little consensus on the most effective way to fund these resources. National systems tend to either directly resource students (or parents), provide block grants to schools to allocate resources, or combine these (Banks, Frawley, and McCoy, 2015).

The question of whether too much or too little money is being spent on special education depends on whether the money is being spent effectively. In Ireland, however, how decisions are made around investment in special education is unclear. The NCSE, the body responsible for allocating resources to students with SEN, also commissions research and provides policy papers on various aspects of SEN in Ireland. Despite the expansion of personnel and in particular the adoption of special classes as a form of provision (NCSE, 2011, 2013), there is little evidence of the educational impact of such increases in spending or whether additional supports improve the outcomes of students with SEN in mainstream settings (McCoy et al., 2014; Banks et al., 2015).

In Ireland, how decisions are made around investment in special education is unclear.

Our research highlights key issues in relation to teacher qualifications, skills, and capacity for teaching students with SEN, particularly those working in special class settings. Our findings suggest a link between appropriate teacher placements, teacher qualifications, and positive student experiences (Banks et al., 2015). Furthermore, our findings using Growing Up in Ireland data show that children with SEN are not as happy as their peers in school, are more likely to report not liking school (McCoy and Banks, 2012), have fewer friends, and experience more negative peer relations (Banks et al., 2017). We also know that school experiences vary according to the type of need, with children with physical disabilities having



similar social and academic outcomes to children with no disabilities. Compared to children with other type of SEN, children with emotional and behavioural difficulties fare the worst in academic engagement and social participation (McCoy and Banks, 2012; Banks et al., 2017). Our research has also consistently shown that boys, and children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, are more likely to be identified as having SEN, with higher concentrations of children with SEN in disadvantaged (DEIS) schools (Banks and McCoy, 2011). This would suggest that any attempt to resource these students must take into account the intersection between social class, gender, and SEN.

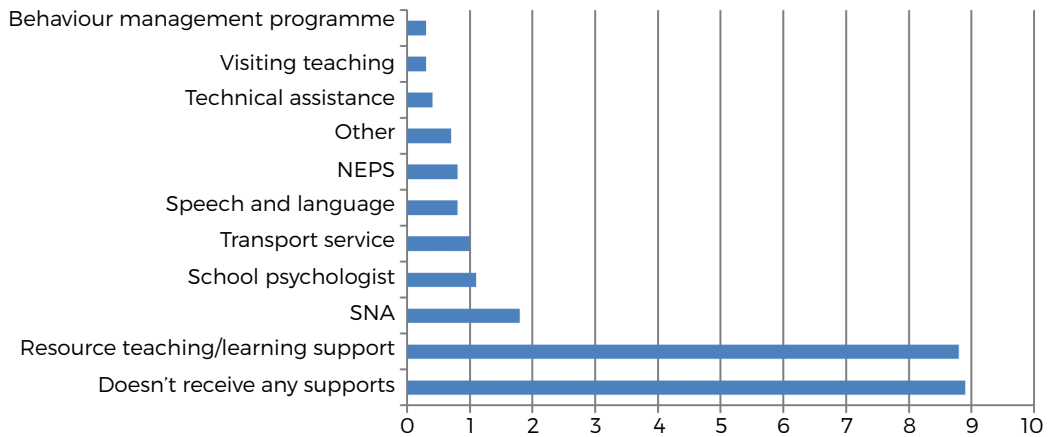
It is important however to acknowledge that some of these aspects of the profile and distribution of the SEN population are addressed under the new model of resource allocation. Schools receive baseline support, with additional teaching resources allocated to schools based on a formula linked to a range of school factors, including the numbers of pupils with complex needs, the outcomes of standardised tests, the social mix of pupils, and gender mix. The new model means greater autonomy at the level of the school, where resources can be allocated on the basis of need as identified by the principal or teachers. Our research highlights a lack of consensus amongst principals on what SEN resources can achieve, and little clarity about what can or should be delivered (Banks et al., 2015). This may result in variation in provision between schools and suggests the need to monitor how this new system of resource allocation is working in the coming years.

There is little evidence of the educational impact of increases in spending.

### **Using evidence for effective resource allocation**

In light of our research findings that show that students with SEN struggle socially and academically compared to their peers in mainstream classes, we sought to examine the resources available to students and whether these resources are perceived as adequate. Using the Growing Up in Ireland data for 13-year-olds, Figure 1 highlights the range of resources available to students with SEN in mainstream schools. Interestingly, of the 28 per cent of students reported to have an SEN, 9 per cent do not receive any supports. In line with Table 1 above, the most common support accessed by students is resource teaching or learning support. Despite this investment, it is worth noting that although resource teachers are qualified teachers, they are not required to be specially trained in special education. How they operate in a school can vary: some resource teachers work in classrooms with children, while others withdraw children on a one-to-one basis or in a small group with other children with resource hours. After resource teaching hours, the most common form of provision is SNA support; however, just 2 per cent of 13-year-olds report having an SNA, and 1 per cent have seen a school psychologist.

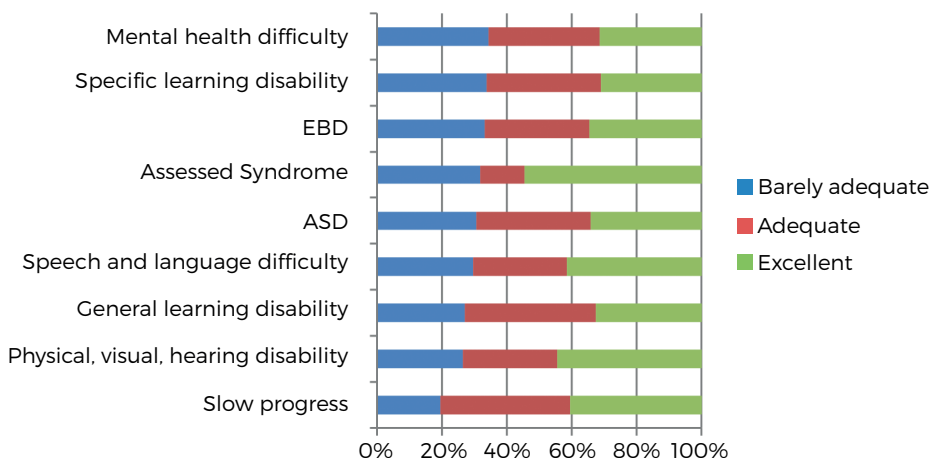
**Figure 1: Special education resources available to students at 13**



*Source: Growing Up in Ireland, 13-year-olds*

One of the most difficult questions in special education at present is whether the funding is well spent. Growing Up in Ireland data provides a measure of effectiveness, by using information from parents of children with SEN that focuses on their views of the adequacy of supports. Figure 2 shows that of those in receipt of resources, parents of children with mental health difficulties, specific learning disabilities (including dyslexia, dyscalculia, dyspraxia), and emotional and behavioural difficulties were most likely to describe the supports as ‘barely adequate’ (32–34% of parents). The views of parents of children with assessed syndrome (including Down Syndrome and Tourette’s Syndrome) appear to be polarised, with 32 per cent describing supports as ‘barely adequate’ and 55 per cent as ‘excellent’.

**Figure 2: Adequacy of supports by SEN type at 13**



One of the most difficult questions in special education at present is whether the funding is well spent.

There is need for a renewed debate on the use of Individual Education Plans for students with SEN.

## Conclusion

Now is an opportune time for debate on the future of special education funding in the context of the government's commitment to inclusive education. Our attitude to spending on special education resources may need to change. Responding to media reports of the 'alarm' in government at the increasing costs of special education as outlined in the DPER spending review, Impact, the SNA Trade Union, responded by emphasising that the €1.68 billion should be viewed as an 'investment not a cost'. Young people with SEN can face additional health issues, social isolation, and lack of qualifications or experience (Watson et al., 2015), and limiting special education spending may lead to poverty, deprivation, and dependence on social welfare. Young people with SEN also have higher rates of early school leaving (Dyson and Squires, 2016) and exclusion (Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2013) than their peers, with potential costs through unemployment, welfare dependency (through unemployment and inactivity), and other social costs such as crime. International evidence consistently highlights the substantial societal benefits from investment in special education, particularly early intervention.

The DPER spending review compares special education spending to current spending on higher education; this is perhaps unhelpful, however, given the lack of investment in special education prior to 2004 and the need for the education system to 'catch up' in order to meet the needs of students. A better comparison may be between the 18.2 per cent (of the overall education budget) and the most recent SEN prevalence estimates of 25–28 per cent of the school population. Furthermore, our research shows that what Ireland spends on special education is not atypical and is in line with spending in the US and England.

With much of the recent focus on inputs in special education resulting in the introduction of the new model of resource allocation, it may be time to focus on outcomes and ask what we want to achieve with additional resources. It is well acknowledged that measuring the outcomes of investment in special education is complex, given the diversity of the population of students with additional needs (Douglas et al., 2012). The potential benefits of additional supports for students with SEN can be measured using data on attendance, retention, and the numbers achieving formal qualifications and progressing to further or higher education and employment. But this only tells half the story. Our research shows that success in school for students with SEN is often based on more subtle measures of social and academic achievement for an increasingly diverse population. Any understanding of 'effective targeting' points to the need for a renewed debate on the use of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for students with SEN, so that individual learning goals are identified for students, as are the 'teaching strategies, resources and supports necessary to achieve those goals' (NCSE, 2006).

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# Ireland in context of large-scale immigration

How do immigrant-origin children fare?



**Dr Merike Darmody**

Research Officer at the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) and an adjunct Assistant Professor at the Department of Sociology, Trinity College Dublin (TCD)

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**A**n overview of the experience of immigrant-origin children in Ireland's schools, based on research conducted by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI).

Over recent decades, Ireland has been transformed from a country of emigration to one of immigration. The process has been shaped by various push and pull factors, often to do with improving individual circumstances. People settled in Ireland are highly heterogeneous in nationality, language skills, ethnicity, religion, and legal status.<sup>1</sup> According to the latest (2016) Census, non-Irish nationals make up 11.6 per cent of the total population, a slight decline from 12.2 per cent in 2011 (CSO, 2017).

## Origins, Languages and Religions

Over the years, the largest group of non-Irish nationals has come from the new member states of the European Union. In recent years, however, the main countries of origin have included the UK, Brazil, and Poland (CSO, 2017). Most migrants in Ireland are from non-English-speaking countries and have a variable command of English. Of the non-English-speaking households, Polish is the language most often spoken (*ibid.*). While Ireland is still a predominantly Catholic country, the 2016 Census indicates that the percentage of the population who identified as Catholic has fallen from 84.2 to 78.3 per cent since 2011. At the same time there has been a 73.6 per cent rise in the number of people reporting having no religion (up 198,600 from 269,800 to 468,400). The fastest growing religious groups in recent years were Orthodox, Hindu, and Muslim (CSO, 2017). This multidimensional diversity among the people settled in Ireland is likely to pose both challenges and opportunities to Irish schools. This article gives a brief overview of research conducted by the Economic and Social Research Institute on the experiences of immigrant-origin children to date.

## Immigrant-origin children in Ireland

In step with general immigration patterns, there has been a marked increase in the numbers of immigrant-origin children and young people attending Irish primary and second-level schools. In the academic year 2015–2016, non-Irish children made up 11 per cent of students in primary schools and 12 per cent in second-level schools (Department of Education and Skills, personal correspondence).<sup>2</sup> These young people represent multiple countries, nationalities,

linguistic groups, and religions, and have diverse needs in terms of educational and social supports.

Foreign-born mothers in Ireland are educated to a higher level than native-born mothers.

The first national study on the experiences of immigrant-origin children and youth in Irish primary and second-level schools, *Adapting to Diversity*, was conducted in 2007–2008 (see Smyth, Darmody, McGinnity, & Byrne, 2009) and provided vital empirical evidence for policy-making at the time when Irish schools were becoming increasingly diverse. The results pointed to variation between schools and educational sectors regarding the proportion of immigrant-origin children among the student body, with a number of primary schools (especially small rural schools) having no migrant students but several urban schools having a high concentration of pupils born outside Ireland. This gave rise to concern about emerging segregation, whose negative effect on student outcomes has been highlighted by multiple international studies. The report provided a useful insight into academic and social integration of immigrant-origin children and youth. Now, ten years later, another national study is warranted to see what changes have taken place in Irish primary and second-level schools and how successful the schools have been in promoting diversity and tolerance.

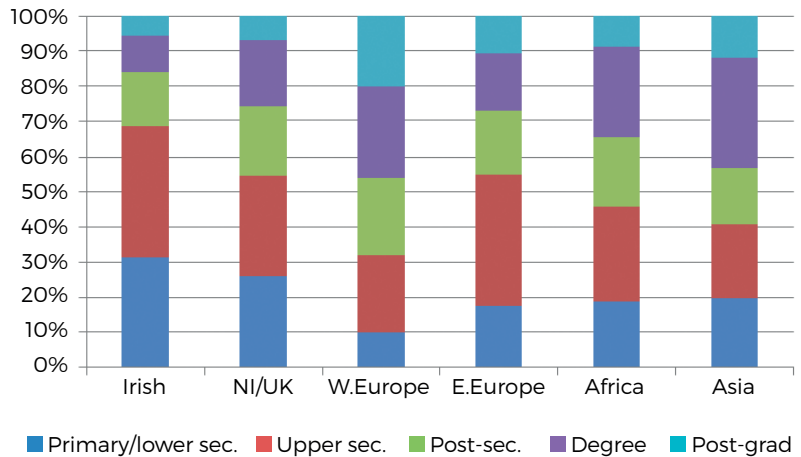
Most immigrant mothers of nine-year-old children expect their child to go on to third level education.

### **Data from *Growing Up in Ireland* study**

Availability of the national longitudinal study *Growing Up in Ireland* enables us to add to the existing body of research by exploring how immigrant-origin children and youth fare in Ireland across several dimensions, including academic and social spheres. International studies have shown that educational outcomes of immigrant-origin children are associated with parental education and their expectations for their children. Drawing on the survey data of nine-year-old children, Darmody, McGinnity, and Kingsdon (2016) show that foreign-born mothers in Ireland are educated to a higher level than native-born mothers (see Figure 1). The levels of attainment vary by national groups. Those from Western Europe and Asia are more likely to be educated to degree level (under- or postgraduate), while Eastern European mothers have the lowest levels of educational attainment – though still higher than those of Irish mothers. Considering the relatively high level of education among the immigrant population, it is not surprising that foreign-born parents tend to have high educational expectations for their children. Most immigrant mothers of nine-year-old children across the national groups expect their child to go on to third-level education (see Figure 2). This can be explained by the fact that first-generation migrants tend to hope for an improved situation for their children; this is often referred to as ‘immigrant optimism’, whereby aspirations of immigrant families and their children are higher than their native peers (Storen, 2011).

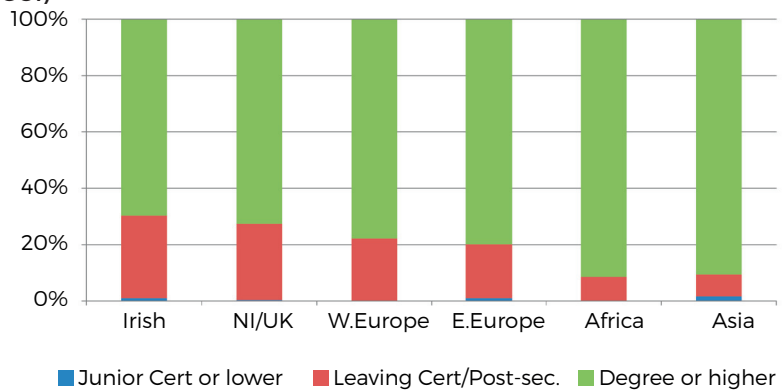


**Figure 1: Education of mothers of nine-year-olds (Ireland, GUI data)**



Source: Darmody et al., 2016

**Figure 2: Educational expectations of immigrant parents v. Irish (age nine, GUI)**



Source: Darmody et al., 2016

Having high expectations can sometimes result in an aspiration–achievement gap among immigrant-origin children and youth. Looking at the academic performance of nine-year-old children, the existing research shows a modest immigrant–native achievement gap, although differences exist in standardised test results by national groups – particularly in English reading for Eastern Europeans, and Mathematics for African-origin children (McGinnity, Darmody, and Murray, 2015). Tests in verbal and numerical reasoning of the same students at the age of 13 showed that the immigrant–native gap remains (Darmody and Smyth, forthcoming, 2018).

Language barriers make it difficult for parents to get involved in school activities.

### Language proficiency

While the gap is driven by a number of factors, it does not come as a surprise that language proficiency is important for academic performance – students from families where English was spoken in the home tended to perform better in reading and verbal reasoning. In the same vein, Smyth et al. (2009) found that while Irish teachers and principals consider immigrant-origin students as highly motivated and ambitious, language proficiency was often seen to hold students back. This highlights the importance of sufficient English language support for students who need it. For children, low proficiency may mask their levels of knowledge and ability, so the language support provided in schools cannot be underestimated. To facilitate English language acquisition among immigrant-origin children and young people, the vast majority of primary and second-level schools provide formal language support, with students being withdrawn from regular class for supplementary tuition in most cases.

Support with English is also important for foreign-born parents. The latest Census indicates that immigrants' proficiency levels vary between countries of origin. International studies indicate that parents with low proficiency levels may find it difficult to assist their children with homework (Suárez et al., 2016). The *Adapting to Diversity* study indicated that parental lack of English was seen to contribute to academic difficulties of immigrant-origin children (Smyth et al., 2009). Language barriers make it difficult for parents to get involved in school activities and to access relevant information about the education system in order to plan the educational careers of their children.

Because of the small number of non-Catholic primary schools, many multi-denominational and minority faith schools are oversubscribed.

### Diverse Religions

In addition to national and linguistic diversity, there are now increasing numbers of students from different faith backgrounds in Irish schools (Smyth et al., 2013). This has resulted in some concern, especially in primary schools, that schools do not meet the needs of the diverse student body. While parents have a right to withdraw their children from religious education classes and sacrament preparation, this may single out some children as 'different' (Smyth and Darmody, 2011). Some schools have also been criticised for operating the 'baptism barrier', thus disadvantaging students who do not belong to organised religion or who have different faith systems. The new School Admissions Bill is expected to make access to schools more equitable. Availability of different types of primary and secondary schools gives parents more choice, at least in principle. Because of the small number of non-Catholic primary schools, many multi-denominational and minority faith schools are oversubscribed, which limits the choices available to families (Darmody and Smyth, forthcoming, 2017).

### Social life of immigrant-origin children

School results, while important, form only part of the life of immigrant-origin children. Participation in various leisure activities has been found to benefit immigrant-origin students in various ways. Many make lasting friendships through it. Strong and supportive friendships can enhance children's socio-emotional well-being (Armsden and Greenberg, 1987). Research by Darmody and Smyth (forthcoming, 2017) shows significant

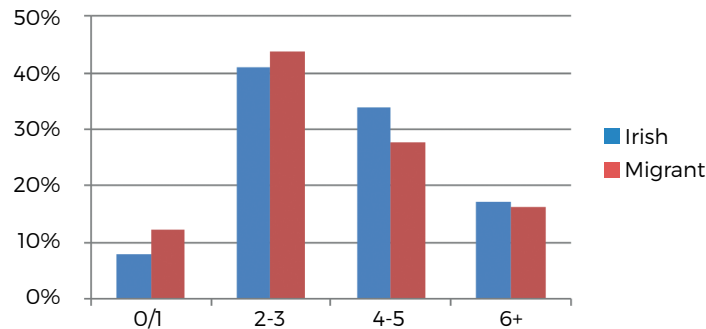
Immigrant-origin children are more likely to report having either one or no friends.

differences in the number of friends between nine-year-old native Irish and immigrant-origin children, with the latter more likely to report having either one or no friends (see Figure 3). Language proficiency may play a part here too. Interactions with peers can also be problematic: some students tend to experience racially motivated bullying, even if staff is not aware of the incidences. In addition, while Irish students report making friends with their immigrant-origin peers, many know relatively little about their background (Smyth et al., 2009; Darmody, Tyrell, and Song, 2011).

### General Wellbeing

There is also some indication that immigrant-origin children feel more negative at the age of nine across different dimensions, including popularity, happiness, academic abilities, and body image (see Smyth, 2015). They also report poorer behaviour and being more anxious than Irish children of the same age.

Figure 3: Friendship groups at nine years of age



Source: Darmody and Smyth, forthcoming in 2017

Low self-confidence and low levels of English proficiency may influence students' participation in various out-of-school activities. Recent research has shown that immigrant-origin children aged nine are less likely to take part in organised sports or structured cultural activities (such as music or dance classes) than their Irish peers, especially if they come from non-English-speaking backgrounds. The immigrant-native gap remains at the age of 13, albeit narrower than at nine (Darmody and Smyth, forthcoming). The study also establishes a link between engagement in sport and student popularity. Sharing similar activities encourages social interaction between students from different backgrounds. By sharing activities and interests, students can get to know each other and develop respect and recognition of different cultures.

### Good academic performance

The studies referred to in this paper indicate that most immigrant-origin students fare reasonably well in the Irish educational system and beyond. While international studies find that these children tend to lag behind their native peers, it is important to note that immigrant populations across countries differ in a number of dimensions, and how immigrant-origin children perform academically varies with country of origin, parental level of education, social class, and so on. Proficiency in

Migrant children can often find themselves as an 'out group'.

the language of the receiving country plays an important role, as is also demonstrated by research from Ireland. While somewhat lagging behind academically, immigrant-origin students are highly motivated and are often seen by teachers as model pupils.

### Barriers to social engagement

In the social sphere, things are a bit more complex. Social interaction provides a variety of protective functions: a sense of belonging, emotional support, and a source of information. While this is important for everyone in society, the protective functions provided by social interaction are of particular importance for newly arrived migrant families and their children. The extent to which social contact is desired, however, may vary across groups. While some desire outward engagement as well as engagement with those from shared cultural backgrounds, for others this can be more complex, depending on their place of birth, migrant status, and religion (Kirpitchenko & Mansouri, 2014). Migrant children can often find themselves as an 'out group', especially if they do not share common interests or activities with native children. Social engagement can be problematic for some migrants, as migration can be transient, whereby people often move from one country to another and need to adapt to new systems and networks and to make new friends.

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## FOOTNOTES

1. The author acknowledges the difficulties involved in defining individuals on the move. The definitions vary among different data sources, between datasets, and within public discourses. In general terms, immigrants may be defined as foreign-born, foreign nationals, or people who have moved to the receiving country from other jurisdictions. In Ireland the situation with rights and opportunities varies between EU and non-EU individuals; furthermore, asylum seekers and refugees form another distinct group. Most immigrants in Ireland tend to be labour migrants.
2. These are approximate figures, as different information is collected in primary and second-level schools. While primary schools record children's nationality ('Irish' possibly including individuals with dual nationality), second-level schools record country of birth.

## Mayo student wins SciFest 2017



On 10 November 2017, Aaron Hannon from St Muredach's College, Ballina, Co. Mayo was named the overall winner of SciFest 2017 for his project EnableArm – a shaving device for people with limited hand dexterity. Aaron will go on to represent Ireland at the Intel International Science and Engineering Fair in Pittsburgh Pennsylvania next year.

Funded primarily by Science Foundation Ireland (SFI), Intel Ireland and Boston Scientific, SciFest is an all-island STEM initiative which fosters active, collaborative and inquiry-based learning among second level students.





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# From Erasmus to Erasmus+

A story of 30 years



**Jim Mullin**

Executive Director, Léargas

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**I**n 1987, the European Union member states agreed the Erasmus programme, which focused initially on exchange of university students. Now, thirty years on, all sectors of Education Training and Youth work are included in today's Erasmus+. Jim Mullin discusses the programme's wide-ranging agenda which includes travel to other countries for staff training and teaching activities, workplace traineeships, youth exchanges, cooperation projects between schools, universities, research institutions, community groups, national authorities, and more.

It may be hard to imagine, particularly for younger readers, but thirty years ago we didn't have a simple name for the practice of heading off to another European country for part of your education. But since the European Union member states agreed the programme in 1987, 'Erasmus' has become a widely accepted term for travelling abroad for a period of study, job-shadowing, training or exchange. Even more importantly, it has become a widely accepted concept. The programme may have begun with a focus on exchange of university students, but today's Erasmus+ takes in all sectors of Education, Training and Youth work. It is a wide-ranging programme that allows people to travel to other countries for staff training and teaching activities, workplace traineeships, youth exchanges, cooperation projects between organisations like schools, universities, research institutions, community groups, national authorities and more.

More than nine million people from schools, adult education organisations, youth groups and vocational colleges, as well as universities, have taken part in these activities since 1987. These participants' enthusiasm for exchanging learning, and experiencing different cultures, has helped make European mobility a normal part of educational life.

That figure of nine million indicates the popularity of Erasmus+, but it was the diversity and wide reach of the programme that really stood out at the official 30th anniversary celebration in Strasbourg, France in June 2017. Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission, and Antonio Tajani, President of the European Parliament, presented 'nine millionth Erasmus+ participant awards' to one person from each of the 33 countries in the programme. Ireland's recipient was Michael Ward, a 23-year-old youth worker. Michael participated in a European Voluntary Service exchange to Estonia in November 2013, and went on to lead youth exchanges in Finland and Georgia. As an Irish Traveller, Michael believes that international exchanges help to remove prejudices and give participants opportunities they might otherwise not have known existed. He was

The traineeship not only improved her language skills but gave her confidence to live and work internationally.

Erasmus+ continues to change and innovate in response to the needs of communities.

recognised for his extraordinary Erasmus+ story and for inspiring others with his experience and achievements.

Michael's fellow recipient Katja Nigsch from Liechtenstein had a similarly inspiring story, which began in the offices of the Connacht Tribune in Galway! She completed a traineeship at the newspaper in 1999 as part of her vocational training to become a graphic designer. Initially shy when speaking English, the traineeship not only improved her language skills but gave her the confidence to live and work internationally.

These stories, along with those of the 31 other award winners, were a testament to the transformative power of Erasmus+ on a personal level. Erasmus+ brings people from different backgrounds together and provides them with the competences they need to lead independent, fulfilling lives. Experiencing life in another European country opens the eyes of Erasmus+ participants: it provides them with a fresh look, new ideas and an eagerness to contribute to their communities. In fact, 88% of those who took part in European school partnerships say that they increased their social skills and four out of five participants in youth exchanges say they are more likely to participate in society.

However Erasmus+ has also had a wider impact on the organisations that run projects, and the programme has shifted its focus in recent years from individual beneficiaries to building Eu-ropean experience into the life of an organisation, and ultimately into the wider community. In Ireland we often think of com-munity as a shared locality, like a school, club, parish or workplace. But there are other things that bring us together, whether a shared identity, a passion, or a goal to be achieved, and communities form around these too. The effect of Erasmus+ on these communities is striking.

In a recent Léargas study of Erasmus+ Vocational Education and Training (VET) work placements, Irish organisations active in VET highlighted that the programme had helped them connect with local employers and consequently improved job prospects for all their students, not just those who had travelled on placements. Erasmus+ work placements in Europe have also had a direct effect on VET courses in Ireland: for example, Greenhills College of Further Education in Dublin decided to add the computer scripting language PHP to their Software Development course because of feedback from VET students who had found it essential in their software work placements in the Netherlands.

This move from an individual to organisational focus shows one of the strengths of Erasmus+: it continues to change and innovate in response to the needs of the education, training and youth work communities as well as the wider societies we live in. Erasmus+ long ago moved beyond straightforward mobility exchanges between countries and now has three distinct project types, known as Key Actions. Key Action 1 allows organisations to send staff, trainers, students, or young people abroad on exchanges, placements, to study, or for professional experience, such as job shadowing, training, volunteering, or work experience. Key Action 2 is for strategic partnerships that facilitate cooperation between

organisations for innovation and the exchange of good practices. Key Action 3 supports policy reform and is open to the youth sector only.

From 2018, a new strand will be added to Key Action 2 that will directly address the needs of schools to carry out partnerships with other schools. This strand will be part of Key Action 2 and called “School Exchange Partnerships”. These partnerships will enable schools across Europe to work together directly on projects that address key issues like reducing early school leaving, improving attainment of literacy and numeracy skills, and increasing participation in Third Level education. Organisations can get support for international meetings, joint learning activities, and short-term staff and pupil mobilities. Crucially, the new strand will make it easier for schools to run these kinds of projects on a smaller scale. There will be a shorter and simpler application form, and project applications will be assessed only against those of a similar type – making for a more level playing field. The European Union have allocated €280 million in funding to schools in all programme countries for Key Action 2 partnerships in 2018, so there will also be a significantly increased budget.

A successful Erasmus+ project is one that sets out to achieve real change in an organisation and its target group.

The best advice we in Léargas can give to schools that want to get involved in these partnerships—or to any organisation that wishes to take part in Erasmus+—is to ‘start with the end in mind’. Erasmus+ is a programme with a clear mission of change: to modernise teaching and learning across Europe, to improve key competences and skills, and to support social equity and inclusion. Similarly, a successful Erasmus+ project is one that sets out to achieve real change in an organisation and its target group. This might be a change in the skills and competences of learners; of knowledge about a particular educational issue; or of behaviour and attitudes. Projects need to address the identified needs of the entire organisation rather than of individuals. Organisations must agree what their development or strategic priorities are, and use Erasmus+ to pursue these goals.

Europe has changed immensely in the last thirty years; and the last few years in particular have brought a new wave of economic and social uncertainties, from bailouts to Brexit. However there are always others in the world that share the values of our communities and are equally committed to them. If you don’t know those people, perhaps it’s just that you haven’t found them yet. Perhaps the greatest strength of Erasmus+ is that it can connect you with other people who share the same goals, and allow you to actively work together to achieve them.

# Teaching in the Middle East

Opportunities and challenges facing Irish teachers working abroad



**Kate McDonald**  
Teacher in Oman

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**I**n this article Kate McDonald outlines her decision to teach abroad and describes life in the Middle East, the opportunities and challenges facing Irish teachers working abroad, and the challenges for those who decide to return to Ireland.

## Introduction

I completed my two-year Professional Master of Education (PME) in June 2016 as I outlined in the *Education Matters Yearbook 2016–2017*. As I was in the first group of students to complete the new PME course, the previous article reflected on the new course and discussed what worked well and what could be improved. This one sees me at a different stage in life: I am now a newly qualified post-primary teacher (NQT) and teaching abroad.

After completing the PME, I faced a dilemma. Do I try to find work in Ireland and progress towards permanency, or do I take the jump and seek work abroad while I still have no serious commitments? This decision was not easy. I had always dreamed of travelling the world, and teaching abroad would give me a great platform to do that. However, teaching jobs in Ireland do not come easy and when I was fortunate enough to be offered a teaching position in Ireland, it made for some sleepless nights. Not only that, but I was a member of the Kilkenny senior camogie panel which was still on track to win the All-Ireland after a 22-year drought. Besides family and friends, these were the two main factors in deciding whether I would leave Ireland or not. Could I possibly turn down a great opportunity in Ireland? Would I regret leaving the team after giving a decade's commitment to the cause if they finally reach the ultimate goal?

With these questions going over and over in my head, I decided to leave. I felt that it was now or never, and I knew I would regret it if I did not go. That said, the advice and support given to me from the principal offering the position in Ireland was more than I could have asked for, and for that, I am extremely grateful. Needless to say, the Kilkenny senior camogie team went on to climb those hallowed steps of Croke Park and lift the O'Duffy Cup! Do I regret leaving? Absolutely not.

This article outlines my decision, what my life as an Irish teacher abroad, the very different nature of the job teaching teenagers in the Middle East, and the opportunities and challenges facing Irish teachers working abroad – those considering their options to

Most expats in the Middle East fly east, seeing countries in Asia or Oceania.

put down long-term roots abroad, and those returning home to Ireland to secure a teaching post and establish a new life at home. In telling my story, I hope to reflect on the collective experience of my generation of young Irish teachers, some of whom chose to leave Ireland initially to work abroad, and others who opted to seek a teaching post at home, similar to my co-author last year Alison – who thankfully succeeded.

There are many reasons why a young Irish teacher might choose to up sticks following qualification and teach abroad. These are some of my main reasons, and also the reasons of many others.

### Travel

The number one reason: travel. For many people, the opportunity to travel and see some of the world is too appealing to ignore. In Ireland, the academic year allows for a considerable number of holidays, and in most cases the same applies to teaching in the Middle East. Each holiday brings an opportunity to jump on a plane and explore another corner of the world. Most expats in the Middle East fly east, seeing countries in Asia or Oceania. Another popular destination is Africa. As a lot of Irish expats go home eventually, it makes sense to visit countries in these continents, as they are a lot closer to the Middle East than to Ireland. There are also the travel opportunities in the Middle East itself. These destinations are perfect at the weekend or over a long weekend.

One of the best ways for me to explore new countries was by getting involved with the GAA. There is a GAA tournament held every month in a different country or area. This allowed me to see a new part of the world while also getting to play my favourite sport. Without the GAA, starting life in a different country would have been a lot more difficult. It was my saving grace, my home away from home when I needed it most. It allowed me to find the Irish community and have a shoulder to lean on when I did not even know my new address.

It allowed me to find the Irish community and have a shoulder to lean on.

For some teachers, travel can be the main factor in choosing to teach abroad. Although it is still very much available while teaching in Ireland, there is the idea that a broader experience can be had if teaching abroad. The road to becoming permanent can be a long one, and usually requires a few years at the one school, so there is a sense of ‘now or never’ for a lot of teachers when it comes to travel.

For me, travel would still be on hold if I had stayed in Ireland for the same reason that always stopped me travelling: camogie. Playing a sport at a high level restricts the holidays you can take. I do not regret a second of my playing career as it has taught me so much in life, but I also do not regret taking a break from it to explore the world.

### Finance

I believe happiness is far more important than money. That said, when you get to fulfil your main dream and still come home with money in your pocket, it is a win-win situation. For many expats, the financial aspect of teaching abroad is a deciding factor. This may be to pay off a loan they took out to complete their teaching degree, to support a family, or simply to save money for the future. There are many financial advantages in

comparison to teaching in Ireland. The following points apply to most scenarios, though not all:

- » There is no tax on the income of a teacher in the Middle East.
- » Holidays are paid, including summer holidays.
- » Accommodation is covered, either by the school or by allowance.
- » All bills and maintenance are covered.
- » Return flights are covered, either by the school or by allowance.
- » There is a considerable financial bonus if a teacher completes two consecutive years in the school.
- » A teacher receives a gratuity when their contract ends based on the number of years worked.
- » Health insurance is covered.

With the current situation of accommodation in Ireland, especially in city areas, a teacher on a starting salary would be only working to cover accommodation. In the Middle East, there is a great opportunity to save money and go home with a substantial amount for whatever the next stage in life is.

For many expats, the financial aspect of teaching abroad is a deciding factor.

### Experience

Teaching in the Middle East involves living in a Muslim country. Although this can be a challenge at first, the benefits it can bring to a person's outlook on life are huge. Travelling the world and experiencing new cultures and religions opened my mind to the bigger picture. Though this cannot be measured in terms of countries visited or money saved, it is one of the greatest advantages in terms of personal development.

There is also the teaching experience, which I will learn from and take with me wherever the next chapter may bring me. Teaching in a mixed post-primary school, where there are at least ten different nationalities in a 40-student classroom, one is bound to pick up a few tricks of the trade when trying to teach and control the class. Teaching students where English is their second language will stand to teachers who return to Ireland. It is an area which is constantly growing in Ireland and which will continue to grow as migration becomes a topic of everyday life.

Teaching abroad guarantees work for the academic year, whereas a contract in Ireland may not guarantee a full academic year. This year's work will stand to a teacher, both in their teaching practice and with future job prospects.

### Job Progression

Depending on one's ambitions and life plans, the opportunity to move up the ladder can be a lot more achievable than is the case in Ireland. In schools in the Middle East there is a much more hierarchical structure, which allows teachers to move from teaching into teaching and managing. It is a great opportunity for teachers who choose to settle abroad.

Teaching abroad has its advantages, but if there were no disadvantages then the whole country would be doing it. As I mentioned, a teaching position and my sporting career made my decision extremely difficult. Of course, there is the obvious disadvantage of having to leave family and



The opportunity to move up the ladder can be a lot more achievable than is the case in Ireland.

friends. The biggest fear for anyone who leaves home is the thought of a tragedy or death occurring in the family. Such an event usually cannot be predicted or helped, whether the person is at home or not. However, it is by far the biggest fear which plays in all emigrants' minds.

Other factors play a part in the greater scheme of things, and can stop someone from choosing to teach abroad or from returning to Ireland. The factors we can look at with a reflective and critical eye are the ones related to teaching. Because so many Irish teachers are choosing to teach abroad, the main question to reflect on is: What are teachers who are working abroad looking at in Ireland when reflecting on whether they will come home to work or not?

### **Securing a full-time job**

To return to Ireland to teach, a job must be secured or the possibility of one must be high. This relates to the demand among teachers for each subject. For example, my two subjects are Mathematics and Geography. During my PME, my Mathematics class had nine trainee teachers compared with over 40 in Geography. This was in one university out of many which produce post-primary teachers.

If each university admitted graduates to teacher training based on the projected needs of the system, then there would be a far greater opportunity to secure a teaching position after your PME. A quota of trainee teachers, based on the current and future needs of the teaching profession, based in turn on pending retirements and subject shortages, would be a good idea to get the numbers right per subject area. It would mean a fairer playing field in obtaining a teaching position in Ireland.

### **Starting at the bottom on returning to Ireland**

For teachers who left Ireland straight after qualifying, or for those who left before gaining permanency, the harsh reality on returning to Ireland is that they will have to start at the bottom of the pay scale, despite the years accumulated teaching abroad. There may well be a process in place by the Teaching Council which allows teachers to recognise their years of teaching experience abroad. I have not considered such a process yet, but it would be extremely welcome by returning teachers.

### **Different Education System**

The difference in the education system is a concern. Although there are advantages to working with different systems, there is a concern for teachers who wish to return to Ireland that they will soon forget the educational system and curricula in Ireland and they will have to start from scratch to get back up to pace. The constant refining and improving of curricula and programmes in the Irish system is also a concern for teachers who have been a few years out of the system. Returning teachers fear they will be too far out of the loop to secure a teaching position in Ireland in the near future.

In conclusion, teaching abroad can provide great opportunities to explore both yourself and the outside world. It allows you to experience things that you may have never believed possible. It opens your eyes and your mind to the bigger picture and gives you an understanding of how the

It opens your eyes and your mind to the bigger picture.

The experiences and skills which expat teachers bring back with them would be hugely beneficial.

different cultures and religions of our world are moving closer together. It also gives you a great start financially, whether that is to pay off debts or start up for the future.

### **So why is it in Ireland's interest to get these teachers back to Ireland?**

Ireland cannot continue to produce such highly qualified teachers through the new PME course and watch them bring their skills abroad. It cannot end up in a situation whereby there is a shortage of teachers in a certain subject area despite having several universities and colleges qualifying teachers for those subjects. It is in the interest of Ireland's education system to try to hold on to those highly qualified teachers or at least entice them back to the country we all know and love. The experiences and skills those expat teachers can bring back with them would be hugely beneficial to all parties involved; students, teachers, schools, education system, etc.

How can we do this? By making job opportunities more realistic and evenly spread per subject area, and by having a pay scale which reflects the years of experience of teachers who have taught abroad.



### **New Chair elected to Teaching Council**

Noelle Moran, teacher of Irish and Accounting at St Jarlath's College, Tuam, Co Galway, has been elected Chairperson of The Teaching Council.

The Teaching Council is the regulatory body for the teaching profession in Ireland. Its functions include regulating and promoting the teaching profession and the professional conduct of teachers.

Ms Moran is a nominee of the Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland (ASTI), and succeeds Mr Gerry Quinn. She has been a member of the Council since April 2016.

She is also a member of ASTI's Standing Committee and Central Executive Council.



# CHAPTER 4 FURTHER EDUCATION & TRAINING

Apprentices earn while they learn and build valuable skills in their chosen occupation.



# FURTHER EDUCATION & TRAINING Contents

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Niamh O'Reilly

# The Further Education and Training Sector

## Highlights from 2017



**Justin Sinnott**

Manager Further Education and Training  
Strategy, Policy, Research and Evaluation,  
SOLAS

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**T**he author provides a very comprehensive overview of highlights in the FET sector in 2017, including funding, strategic planning, regional skills fora, apprenticeships, employee development, literacy and numeracy, research, CPD development, programme evaluations, and more.

### Introduction

Further education and training (FET) programmes and services continue to be delivered in communities in every county in Ireland. They are a crucial component of the education and training landscape in Ireland and an important enabler of government economic and social priorities.

In 2017 funding of around €800+ million will be invested in FET. This means SOLAS-funded FET provision encompasses over 20,000 courses and over 300,000 beneficiaries across 28 FET programme types, such as Apprenticeship, PLC, Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS), and Youthreach. The vast majority of publicly funded FET provision through SOLAS is from the 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and covers many disciplines, from engineering to business, from technology to performing arts.

Many courses are aimed at skills development for those looking to re-skill or up-skill, including workers, jobseekers, and job changers. Equally important are FET programmes that primarily support social inclusion or personal development. ETB-run community education programmes are important for social inclusion and are focused on, among other things, providing the skills to access further education and employment.

### Strategic planning of FET in 2017

A career-themed approach to classifying FET provision, as recommended by the National Economic and Social Council (NESC), will be implemented as part of the 2017 service planning exercise. These 'skills clusters' have been introduced to help identify and design education and training that gives FET participants the skills, knowledge, and competences that increase their mobility across employers and sectors. It has potential to communicate to a wide audience how the national economy is structured and expected to develop, and thus to give learners, parents, educators, and trainers a framework in which to make decisions.



The key components of a new SOLAS funding model were developed in 2017 for implementation across all 16 ETBs in the latter stages of the 2018/2019 annual service planning exercise.

High-level mid-term review will enable DES, SOLAS, and other FET partners to assess the impact of strategy implementation to date.

One of the crucial jobs that SOLAS does, in conjunction with ETBI and its member ETBs, is ensuring that provision and funding for the sector is strategically planned against identified skills needs. In 2017 the sector completed a strategic pilot initiative to increase strategic planning capacity in the sector. Based on its success, SOLAS and ETBI decided to proceed with the next phase in developing and installing a ‘strategic inputs and outcomes-based’ planning and funding model.

This is made possible by the insights gleaned from the pilot, the successful ongoing roll-out of the Programme Learner Support System (PLSS), and the commencement of development work on counterfactual impact evaluation of FET. The key components of a new SOLAS funding model were developed in 2017, in consultation with the Department of Education and Skills (DES), for implementation across all 16 ETBs in the latter stages of the 2018/2019 annual service planning exercise.

### FET highlights 2017

As this year is the midpoint of implementing the FET Strategy 2014–2019, SOLAS, on behalf of the DES, began a high-level mid-term review. It will enable the DES, SOLAS, and other FET partners to assess the impact of the strategy implementation to date, and seek to improve it to 2019 in the context of a much-improved economic and labour market.

A related initiative, the new SOLAS Corporate Plan 2017–2019, was completed in 2017. In conjunction with a wide range of stakeholders – including ETBI and its member ETBs, other FET partners, the DES, and the National Skills Council – SOLAS is working to deliver on Ireland’s stated ambition of having the best education and training system in Europe within 10 years. The new corporate plan is designed to enable, support, influence, and lead the sector towards achieving this.

**New national skills identification infrastructure:** Regional Skills Fora now have representation from every ETB. A protocol between ETBI and Local Government Management Agency has also been developed, as has a protocol between ETBI and Enterprise Ireland which identifies the priority actions and areas of focus for ETBI and each member ETB. A memorandum of understanding (MOU) between ETBI and FIT has been agreed and signed. Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) has completed a series of bilateral engagements with key stakeholder groups, including SOLAS and ETBI, to assess the contribution of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) to date and to identify future policy priorities for NFQ development on awards at levels 1–3.

**Apprenticeship:** SOLAS Apprenticeship Services Unit is currently engaged in diverse work, including quality assurance, developing occupational standards, and developing, validating, and implementing existing and new apprenticeship programmes. In response to the Action Plan to Expand Apprenticeship and Traineeship in Ireland (2016–2020)<sup>1</sup>, four new apprenticeship programmes were validated in July 2017: Commis Chef, International Financial Services Associate, International Financial

1 [www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/Action-Plan-Expand-Apprenticeship-Traineeship-in-Ireland-2016-2020.pdf](http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/Action-Plan-Expand-Apprenticeship-Traineeship-in-Ireland-2016-2020.pdf).



The new SOLAS Corporate Plan 2017-2019 was completed in 2017.

Services Specialist, and Accounting Technician. Two Industrial Training Orders (ITOs) from Q1 2017 were also approved by the SOLAS board: Butchery Industry, and Information and Communications Technology Industry.

The SOLAS board previously approved the adoption of ITOs designating new industrial activities, to enable the development and implementation of new apprenticeships. Per the requirements of the 1967 Act, these ITOs have been laid before both houses of the Oireachtas.

Consequently, consortia have been able to develop and submit their proposed apprenticeship programmes to QQI, directly or by delegated authority, for validation. Over the last year, eleven new apprenticeship programmes have been validated. Some fall within the scope of ITOs adopted prior to 2016.

At the time of writing, the following were submitted to the SOLAS board for ratification as programmes in respect of which SOLAS will give consent under Section 31 of the 1967 Act to the employment of apprentices, that is, Statutory Apprenticeship Programmes:

Apprenticeship title	Award title
Insurance Practice	B.A. Insurance Practice
Industrial Electrical Engineering	B.E. Industrial Electrical Engineering
Polymer Processing Technology	B.S. Polymer Processing Technology
Manufacturing Engineering	B.E. Manufacturing Engineering
Manufacturing Technician	H.C. Manufacturing Engineering
*IFS Associate	H.C. International Financial Services
*IFS Specialist	H.D. Financial Services Analytics
Commis Chef	A.C. in Culinary Arts
Accounting Technician	A.C. in Accounting

*\* International Financial Services*

*H.C. = Higher Certificate; H.D. = Higher Diploma; A.C. = Advanced Certificate*

A second call for apprenticeship proposals was made in 2017 and remained open through an online proposal system. The 'Developing a National Apprenticeship' handbook and '2017 Call for Apprenticeship Proposals' guidance document were also developed. SOLAS, ETBI, and the ETBs finalised an agreed Apprenticeship MOU for delivering the apprenticeship programmes.

Other FET-enabling strategic partnerships in the form of MOUs and Service-Level Agreements for delivering National Craft Apprenticeship have been agreed between all ETBs and SOLAS. MOUs have been agreed by ETBs, Department of Defence, Foróige, Department of Children and Youth Affairs, and the Joint Further Education Representative Group. A collaborative framework has been formally established with QQI. Eight

Over the last year eleven new apprenticeship programmes have been validated.

ETBs are currently involved in Erasmus+ projects on both Key Action 1: Mobility, and Key Action 2: Strategic Partnerships (ETBI).

**FET employee development:** SOLAS gave the DES a combined document containing a draft FET Policy Framework 2017–2025 and Implementation Plan Priorities 2017–2021.

**Literacy and numeracy:** The DSP and ETBI protocol for learner referral is fully operational across all 16 ETBs. Pilot projects continue to progress literacy schemes focused on including adults with general learning disabilities. CPD for literacy and numeracy personnel will be contained within the Professional Development Strategy 2017–2019, while ETBI has agreed a programme of CPD for the FET sector in literacy and numeracy. This is being delivered by the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) to all ETBI FET providers.

**Improving the evidence base in relation to FET:** independent research commissioned by SOLAS to identify best practice education and training for entrepreneurship in FET provision was published in 2017 and is available at: [www.solas.ie/SolasPdfLibrary/TMA\\_EET\\_in\\_FET\\_final\\_report.pdf](http://www.solas.ie/SolasPdfLibrary/TMA_EET_in_FET_final_report.pdf). SOLAS also published research into the ‘Barriers to Participation in FET’ in 2017, and it is available at: [www.solas.ie/SolasPdfLibrary/Barriers%20to%20FET%20Final%20June%202017.pdf](http://www.solas.ie/SolasPdfLibrary/Barriers%20to%20FET%20Final%20June%202017.pdf). Independent research commissioned by SOLAS to expand the evidence base to inform literacy policy and provision in embedding literacy and numeracy provision across all FET provision began in 2017. The aim of this research is to increase the evidence base on how literacy and numeracy education can best be developed and integrated for learners across all levels of FET provision, including programmes at levels 5 and 6 on the National Framework for Qualifications. The research is being undertaken by ICF Consulting on behalf of SOLAS.

**FET CPD strategy:** A national FET co-ordinator for professional development was appointed in ETBI and is collaborating with SOLAS, ETBs, and the National Steering Group on implementation of the FET CPD Strategy. Working groups have been established or planned for staff development plans, quality assurance, leadership and management (ETBI).

**FET programme evaluations:** SOLAS’s response to the PLC evaluation commissioned by SOLAS and undertaken by ESRI was submitted to the Minister for Education and Skills and DES in 2017. The National Youthreach programme tender has been finalised, with the contract awarded to the ESRI. The purpose of the Youthreach programme evaluation is to generate policy-relevant knowledge on the outputs and outcomes of the programmes and their effectiveness. SOLAS is preparing to commission an independent evaluation of VTOS for completion in 2018.

## Conclusion

2017 represents another positive step in the reform of FET, thanks to the dedication, commitment, and professionalism of the entire sector, including support partners such as DSP, DPER, QQI, Aontas, NALA, employers, and local communities.



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# Are current demands being met?

## Reflections from the front line



**Pat Maunsell**

Principal, Limerick College of Further Education

**S**peaking from the coalface, Pat Maunsell welcomes the new structural changes and policy initiatives in FET, but warns of the danger of initiative overload. He recommends a 'strategy pause' for a few years to enable management at colleges and centres to implement what has already been rolled out. And while structural change at a national level was an important first step, it will only be effective if the structural, funding, and operational reforms that are needed within the colleges and centres themselves are addressed now.

### Introduction

There has been substantial change in Ireland's further education and training (FET) landscape since 2012. Legislation such as the Quality and Qualifications Act 2012, the Education and Training Boards Act 2013, and the Further Education and Training Act 2013 have all impacted on FET providers in one way or another over recent years. The national strategy for FET<sup>1</sup> "follows a radical overhaul of the structures of the sector by the government, which included streamlining 33 existing Vocational Education Committees (VECs) into 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs), the abolition of FÁS, and the creation of SOLAS, the Further Education and Training Authority".

### National FET Strategy

SOLAS launched its national strategy for FET in May 2014. Its main focus is "to plan, fund, and drive the development of a new integrated and accessible FET service". The aim is to provide a framework to develop a modern, fit-for-purpose FET sector to meet the needs of today's and tomorrow's learners.

The FET strategy has five key goals:

- » Skills for the economy
- » Active inclusion
- » Quality provision
- » Integrated planning and funding
- » Standing of FET.

The five goals have been broken down into 52 separate, yet interlinked, actions and are set out in a detailed FET Strategy Implementation Plan. The recently launched National Skills Strategy 2025<sup>2</sup> and the Action Plan for Jobs 2017<sup>3</sup> also set out clearly defined targets for the FET sector. I am also mindful of the EU Agenda (in particular the ESF PEIL 2014–2020 programme) in striving for excellence in Vocational Education and Training (VET), which is a guiding force behind strategy development and implementation in Ireland.

The backdrop to this structural change in FET has been the recent recession and the government's drive since then to improve the national economy and

employment figures. The national policy position is therefore underpinned by a strong economic imperative, and although social inclusion is mentioned, it is in a context of skills for employment. This national policy for FET appears to be situated in what Fairclough<sup>4</sup> describes as ‘part of the neo-liberal discourse of economic change ... which demands “adjustment” and “reform” to enhance “efficiency” and “adaptability” in order to “compete”’.

### As economy improves is this the right approach?

The question needs to be asked, though, if this neo-liberal approach to policy and national strategy in FET is the best approach. As the Irish economy comes out of recession, the strong economic orientation of the national strategy may need to be revisited as employment figures rise and new demands are put on the FET national service, such as a focus on re-skilling and up-skilling in the workplace, which require a rethink and review of how FET programmes are delivered into the future.

Is this neo-liberal approach to policy and national strategy in FET the best approach?

Since the formation of ETBs and SOLAS, changes, advancements, and supports for FET have been rolled out, with mixed success. Some of the key initiatives are listed below:

Employee Engagement Development	ETBI QA Developments
FET Professional Development Strategy	Annual FET Services Plans
Programme Learner Support System (PLSS)	National Integrated Guidance Strategy
Funding Allocation Model	New Apprenticeships
Numeracy and Literacy Strategy	Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) Strategy
New Career Traineeships	Regional Skills Fora

### Regional Skills Fora

The setting up of the Regional Skills Fora is a good initiative because no one can deny the relevance of local employer input to local education and training. These nine fora are tasked with aligning educational provision (both FET and higher education) with the existing and emerging needs of industry in each region. Providers do, however, find themselves stretched through engaging with this process. The restrictive nature of the management and operational models of some providers poses challenges. For example, in the PLC sector, releasing teachers from an academic timetable to engage with the fora and employers can prove challenging. Each year, a principal and his/her staff must try to find a balance between the immediate needs of existing learners and the development of relevant courses for the next academic year. While the stated needs of employers include flexible provision, accelerated programme development, and embedded industry expertise, the structure and nature of the FET state-funded system is, at times, at odds with these demands.

### Continuous Professional Development Strategy

The FET Continuous Professional Development Strategy, rolled out in 2016, is welcome. There has long been a need for professional development specifically for the teachers and trainers in our sector. But it must be provided in a flexible mode and at times which do not affect tuition or training time. What is surprising in this strategy is that the need to have

What is surprising in this strategy is that the need to have Teaching Council registration for all teachers in the FET sector is not explicit.

Teaching Council registration for all teachers in the FET sector is not explicit. Under Section 30 of the Teaching Council Act 2001, commenced in January 2014, all teachers must be registered with the Council if being paid by State funds. This limits the FET sector's flexibility, as schools and colleges cannot hire industry experts to deliver up-to-date expertise as they are not Teaching Council-registered. The reality is that an IT expert, for example, is not going to work within the education system as they can earn a better income in the private sector. However, some experts are willing to engage in teaching or training for a small number of hours a week, and our systems in FET need to facilitate this industry specific expertise and allow FET providers flexibility in terms of engagement with part-time and occasional industry experts who are not Teaching Council-registered.

### **Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) Strategy**

The Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) Strategy<sup>5</sup> acknowledges the excellent work already being done in the use of technology in FET. This strategy will, however, need to be broken down into key actions and goals at local ETB level if it is to have a meaningful impact on the provider and learner. It will also need to be resourced. The Digital Strategy for Schools<sup>6</sup> was rolled out in 2015 for the post-primary sector, and each school has received a yearly budget to implement it. Yet the FET sector has to apply for funding and justify why it needs it. Surely this has to change?

### **Programme Learner Support System (PLSS)**

The Programme Learner Support System (PLSS) is a joint initiative from SOLAS and ETBI to develop a suite of applications designed to provide, for the first time, an integrated approach to collecting key data on FET programme outputs, outcomes, and performance. For years, the sector has been burdened with a plethora of databases developed organically, creating administrative and organisational headaches. Whilst the PLSS is a work in progress, it is very welcome and is beginning to play an important role in the planning and integration of FET programmes. It must be said, though, that principals and managers are challenged with the roll-out of this new integrated database, especially with the ongoing moratorium on posts of responsibility and administration posts.

### **FET image**

The FET sector has a major image problem. For many years, it has been the neglected middle child of the Irish education system. It lacks the resources and status of schools and universities. Traditionally, it is the old run-down buildings which were allocated to FET providers while second-level schools and Institutes of Technology moved on to new sites and buildings. This needs to change if we are to have a first-class FET sector in Ireland. Structural change was an important first step, but capital investment must accompany it if we are to achieve the vision of a world-class FET sector in Ireland. The author acknowledges the allocation of a small capital budget of €8 million in the FET sector this year and hopes that this will increase substantially in the years ahead.

Many young school leavers and their parents see FET as a last option or another route to get into higher education. However, the recent overhaul of State-sponsored apprenticeships and the setting up of the National

Resources will be the key ingredient for success.



Many young school leavers and their parents see FET as a last option or another route to get into higher education.

Skills Council should give school leavers a positive alternative path to third-level education, as well as better meeting the needs of industry. Some 35 new apprenticeships are now available in areas such as software development, polymer processing, and insurance, alongside more traditional apprenticeships for bakers, chefs, and plumbers. Developing and sustaining a world-class apprenticeship system will be crucial to enhancing the status of FET over the coming years. Equally, the results of the recent SOLAS PLC review need to be released. Despite some serious resource and operational issues, initial indications are that the PLC sector is contributing significantly to the FET landscape and has been for many years.

I believe the image is changing slowly. At FET Centres level, parents are asking more questions about FET in general. More needs to be done by the DES, SOLAS, and ETBI to promote the FET sector to the wider public. Principals and guidance counsellors in the post-primary sector also have a role to play, by telling young school-leavers and their parents about the value of an FET education.

## Conclusion

The author cautiously welcomes the new structural changes and policy initiatives happening in the FET landscape in Ireland. However, there is a real danger of initiative and policy overload. There are so many strategies emanating from SOLAS and ETBI. Should there be a 'strategy pause' for a few years to enable management at colleges and centres to implement and embed them? The reality is that it is proving very challenging to implement what has already been rolled out because of the lack of action on the operational, funding, and structural changes which are needed at this level. Despite the best efforts of the ETBs, college principals and managers of centres do not have the means to fully implement the strategies and initiatives without proper support within the centres themselves. Structural change at a national level was an important first step, but it is time for key stakeholders to bite the bullet and address the structural, funding, and operational reforms that are needed at the coal face.

Not surprisingly, resources will also be a key ingredient for success. There were considerable cut-backs in education during the recession and the FET sector did not escape. It is laudable to have goals, action plans, and strategies in FET, but if they are not backed up with proper resources, they will remain pipe dreams. The author acknowledges that resources are finite, but it is important to educators such as myself that the goals and plans laid out are achievable. Otherwise, our leadership in our colleges and centres will not be seen as trustworthy and authentic by those whom we lead. As educators, we cannot allow this to happen.

I say I cautiously welcome the changes in FET. I would argue that education policy in Ireland, especially FET policy, is based on economic, market driven, neo-liberalist imperatives. According to Andreas Schleicher, deputy director of the OECD, 'skills have become the global currency of 21st-century economies'.<sup>7</sup> This is fine to a degree. No one could deny that obtaining key skills and good employment is important for economic and social well-being. However, I agree with Murphy when she argues that

The effective Principal/Manager will have to make sense of these changes with staff.

if the only FET education policy rhetoric ‘is that education equals skills, we risk ignoring the fundamental purpose of education that prepares individuals to become responsible citizens, improve social conditions and ultimately enhance individuals and society’.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, the manner in which current policy is understood and translated to the teachers and trainers in schools, colleges, and training centres in Ireland is central to its success. The effective Principal/Manager of today will have to conceptualise and make sense of these changes with staff. Policy must be explained in intelligent ways that align with the values of the colleges and centres as agreed by all staff. The goals and targets set at this level will have to make sense and be owned by the people who work there. This is why it is imperative that there is real, meaningful collaboration, discourse, and dialogue between the policy-makers and the practitioners at the coal face. The success of the implementation of the FET strategy depends on this dialogue – without it, the desired changes in FET will remain an aspiration.

## FOOTNOTES

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## DCU STEAM Hackathon

DCU students from diverse disciplines came together in November 2017 for a STEAM hackathon, powered by Intel Ireland. The 72-hour ideas marathon brought together student innovators, creatives, entrepreneurs and developers to explore the intersection between arts and technology. The overall hackathon winner was D’ArtSpace (above). The group created a digital art space using Intel technology.



# Initial Teacher Education in FET settings

## Affirmation and Aspiration



**Dr. Justin Rami**



**Dr. Jane O'Kelly**

Further Education & Training Research  
Centre (FETRC), Institute of Education, Dublin  
City University

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**I**t is important, write Drs Justin Rami and Jane Kelly, that government and educational bodies acknowledge and affirm the wealth of experience and knowledge accumulated by practitioners in FET settings.

In recent years, a number of higher education institutions (HEIs) and further education and training (FET) settings have begun to forge mutually enriching relationships in the placement of students who wish to obtain a teaching qualification for FET. Traditionally, the focus of debate between the two settings relates to access routes for students from FET into higher education. Placing HEI students in initial teacher education (ITE) in FET settings, to understand and experience teaching and training across a complex range of courses and levels, is providing new opportunities for both sectors to learn from each other about the innovative and learner-centred approaches used by current practitioners in FET and the educational and vocational theory that underpins and informs that practice.

This article outlines why it is important that government and educational bodies acknowledge and affirm the wealth of experience and knowledge accumulated by practitioners in FET settings. The initial training of teachers for FET would benefit from formative research and dialogue with practitioners in the sector who can contribute their experience and views of learners' needs to the ongoing discussion on appropriate and relevant instructional strategies and optimum organisation of the learning environment.

SOLAS is the state organisation responsible for funding, planning, and co-ordinating FET in Ireland ([www.solas.ie](http://www.solas.ie)). It has three strategic objectives:

1. Leading and co-ordinating the change management process of integrating FET institutions and programmes.
2. Co-ordinating and managing the funding and performance of FET programmes.
3. Leading the modernisation of FET programmes to ensure they are focused on the lifelong needs of learners, especially jobseekers, and are flexible and relevant to the needs of the labour market (McGuinness et al., 2014).

Recent statistics indicate that over 339,000 learners are undertaking 22,000 courses in education and training delivered through Education and Training

Boards, Colleges of Further Education, Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) colleges, programmes such as Youthreach and the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS), and community education programmes, as well as private sector companies and teaching and training organisations (SOLAS, 2016).

The Teaching Council of Ireland is the professional standards body for the profession. It promotes and regulates professional standards in teaching, and 'acts in the interests of the public good while upholding and enhancing standards in the teaching profession' (Teaching Council, 2016). It published 'Further Education: General and Programme Requirements for the Accreditation of Teacher Education Qualifications' in March 2011 in preparation for the requirements for Further Education to be in place with effect from 1 April 2013. The Teaching Council recognised the complex and unique nature of FET and its teaching:

Teaching in further education is characterised by learner–teacher relationships based on mutual respect and equality. ... Certification of programmes of further education study is based on the achievement of stated learning outcomes rather than on coverage of centrally defined syllabi. A crucial requirement of the further education teacher therefore is the capacity to analyse learners' needs, to develop a programme of study in response to those needs and to assess learner progress. (Teaching Council, 2011, p. 9)

As part of the modernisation of FET programmes, SOLAS must also 'provide or assist in the provision of training to those charged with the delivery of further education and training programmes' (McGuinness et al., 2014, p. 21).

The placement of students undertaking initial teacher education (ITE) qualifications for recognition as teachers in the FET sector is relatively recent. Many of the students entering ITE courses are experienced practitioners employed in FET but who – owing to the nature of the sector and the complexity of courses, levels and access routes on offer – may not have any formal Teaching Council–recognised teaching qualifications. Some will be students who have entered higher education through the CAO directly from second level. Research conducted in DCU's Further Education and Training Research Centre (FETRC) suggested that the age profile of FET practitioners tends to be older, and younger novice teachers may be seen as unsuitable for the learner profile. The FET Strategy 2014–2019 (SOLAS, 2014) acknowledges that there are 'a number of dimensions to qualifying and up-skilling FET tutors, namely, subject-specific (vocational) competence, pedagogical competence and the potential barriers to deploying teaching/training resources to meet business needs' (p. 110).

The CEDEFOP (2016) ReferNet thematic articles on professional development of VET teachers and trainers show that most European countries regulate their teaching profession, setting qualification requirements by legislation (Croatia, Malta, Austria, Finland), by specific regulations (Estonia, Iceland, Poland), through professional standards (Estonia, Ireland, Netherlands, UK), or by defining specific requirements

Eight Higher Education Institutions now provide Initial Teacher Education programmes, with embedded work-based placement, to individuals wishing to train as teachers and gain Teaching Council recognition in FET.

in vocational training programmes or curricula (Slovenia, Lithuania). Accreditation of ITE programmes in Ireland for FET by the Teaching Council began in 2013. Consequently, eight HEIs now provide ITE programmes, with embedded work-based placement, to individuals wishing to train as teachers and gain Teaching Council recognition in FET.

There is much for academics and teacher trainers to learn from the FET practitioners who are entering ITE courses to obtain qualifications to meet a professional standard in teaching. There are discussions about terminology and nomenclature, as the word ‘teaching’ is often associated with compulsory education. The teaching and instruction role in FET can be a tutor, educator, practitioner, facilitator, and trainer; they may be part-time or full-time. There is an opportunity for HEIs to understand how a diverse group of teachers and tutors not necessarily trained in pedagogical competences and theory are providing engaging and valuable education and training programmes to distinct and challenging sets of learners. In the Education Matters Yearbook 2015–2016, Bryan Fields from SOLAS wrote:

All of the good work that has taken place in 2015 to fully integrate the ‘FE’ and the ‘T’ – and it is substantial – is aimed at improving learner access and outcomes for all who will engage in FET so that they too can fulfil their potential and meet their career employment, personal or developmental aspirations.

With the introduction of SOLAS in 2013 came a drive to join the ‘T’ of training with the ‘FE’ of education, though it is suggested that there are still legacy issues delaying the acceptance of this paradigm shift from FE to FET (Rami and O’Leary, 2017).

There is an opportunity too for FET settings to affirm existing practice and contextualise pedagogical and andragogical innovation as part of a unique approach to learners from differing backgrounds, age groups, cultures, and experiences. Tutors and trainers in FET settings who have not obtained teaching qualifications are unfamiliar with ITE placement programmes and, as such, may need to add skills such as mentoring, supervision, and feedback to their skill sets. HEIs are in a position to offer these skills as CPD to tutors and trainers and to improve existing HEI practice in line with FET innovation. Bathmaker and Avis (2007), in their examination of schooling cultures in further education, explore the identity of teachers and point out that for the teacher, ‘there is a need to engage with the socially and historically situated experience that learners bring with them to the learning context, and the wider social context in which that experience is rooted’ (p. 515).

At present, qualified teachers from second level are able to work in the FET sector, as they are recognised as teachers by the Teaching Council of Ireland. It could be queried whether second-level teachers have sufficient ITE training or teaching practice experience and are equipped to work with adult learners or young people who may have found the formal education system unsuited to their personal, social, and vocational needs. The



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teaching of adults as opposed to the pedagogy of teaching children needs to acknowledge specific aspects of the learner as an adult.

Malcolm Knowles's theory of andragogy is as a 'constructivist approach to learning which involves facilitating adults to draw on their own experience and so create learning based on new understandings' (Cox, 2015, p. 29). Knowles presented six characteristics of adults that influence their learning: adults need to know; they are self-directed; they have an abundance of prior life and work experience; they learn when they are ready and have a need to learn; they are life-centred in their orientation to learning; and they respond well to external motivators but are primarily intrinsically motivated (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2011). It could be argued that learners of different ages, including adolescents, would appreciate the recognition of some or all of these characteristics.

It has also been acknowledged that there is a need to focus 'on training competency in subject matter areas and an appropriate pedagogical approach in the delivery of training to various cohorts, i.e. a standard professional qualification and CPD requirement for those employed in the FET sector' (SOLAS, 2014, p. 111). This professional qualification may be vocational and skills-focused, either industry- or university-accredited.

The challenge for HEIs lies in providing an appropriate teacher training programme that ensures the student teacher understands and appreciates the ethos and values of the placement setting as well as the needs of each learner in the learning environment. There is no one-size-fits-all for learner need or teaching strategy in FET. FETRC's research outlines that FET providers have expressed the need for students on placement to be intrinsically motivated, flexible and responsive to learner need, and willing to research and read into a subject where necessary (O'Kelly, Rami, & Lalor, 2016).

Acknowledging and affirming this wealth and diversity of experience and knowledge accumulated by practitioners in FET settings is crucial for an integrated approach to supporting educators and trainers in the FET sector. Part of this integration needs to come from government ensuring that all aspects of the system are in synergy with the aims of our national education and training strategies. Steps are being developed to help address some of these issues, such as the work being conducted by the HEI FET Forum (made up of the FET ITE HEI providers).

The Teaching Council is represented on this forum, and *Guidelines on Student Teacher Placement in the Further Education and Training (FET) Sector*, in partnership with the ETBI, has been produced and is currently being circulated to the sector. This publication does not seek to address the wider concerns of FET teacher/trainer sectoral competence in terms of vocational and subject-specific knowledge, but rather sets out a clear overview of what a placement for students undertaking an ITE qualification in FET might entail for the student, the designated teaching and learning practitioner, the placement setting, and the HEI.

Research centres such as the Further Education and Training Research Centre (FETRC) in DCU's Institute of Education work closely with stakeholders in



FET to ensure that initial training and continuing professional development are responsive to the needs of the sector and ultimately of wider society. Research and continual feedback and improvement of initial and continuing training for practitioners, through HEIs, SOLAS, the Teaching Council, and other stakeholders, will ensure that practitioners in the sector preserve their flexibility and innovative approaches through the support of evolving theory and proven pedagogical and andragogical practice.

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## 2017 Student Media Awards

Joanna Gnasiuk, Level 5 Photography student at Stillorgan College of Further Education (2016-17), wins the News Photographer of the Year award.



# Supporting Progression from FET to Higher Ed

## Bridging the Gap



**Rose Ryan**

Director of Access at Maynooth University  
and Chair of FET2HE Network

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**T**he author discusses the increasing opportunities for the Further Education and Training (FET) sector and the Higher Education (HE) sector to collaborate with the aim of enhancing access, transfer, and progression prospects for students. A formal network, FET2HE, established in 2015 in the Leinster region with the support of the HEA, aims to identify and address barriers to seamless progression from FET to HE.

The overhaul of the Further Education and Training (FET) sector with the establishment of SOLAS, the new Education and Training Boards (ETBs), and Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) offers the opportunity to develop a new approach to providing lifelong learning in Ireland. The National Strategy for Higher Education had also emphasised the importance of opening up higher education to more diverse groups of learners, an objective which was repeated in the National Access Plan published by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) in 2015.

### New target set

This Plan has set a target that new entrants to higher education whose basis for admission is a further education qualification will increase from the current target of 6.6 per cent to 10 per cent from 2015 to 2019. It identifies that collaboration between QQI, SOLAS, the HEA and the higher education institutions (HEIs) in each region will support the achievement of this target. In numerical terms it represents an increase of about 2,000 new-entrant students progressing to higher education on the basis of their further education award over the next five years.

### FET2HE Network established

Responding to this need, a formal network, FET2HE, was established in 2015 in the Leinster region with the support of the HEA. It includes representatives from eight ETB partners (Cavan/Monaghan, City of Dublin, Dublin/Dun Laoghaire, Galway/Roscommon, Kildare/Wicklow, Laois/Offaly, Longford/Westmeath, and Louth/Meath) and the four HEIs in the region: Dublin City University, Maynooth University, Dundalk Institute of Technology, and Athlone Institute of Technology. The FET2HE Network also has representatives from QQI and SOLAS, who signed a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in 2015. The Network's overall aims are to identify barriers to access, transfer, and progression, to identify good practice in this area, and to see how, as a region, we can create more transparency, more certainty, and more opportunities for students in FET to progress seamlessly to higher education.

'For many students who go on to further education, their FE qualification is an end in itself, and with it they can achieve an entry qualification for the labour market; for others, it is a step along a pathway to higher education.'

(National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-2019, HEA, December 2015, p. 19)<sup>1</sup>

The further education sector needs to know that for many students this qualification is a route to higher education and not a full stop.'

(Anthony Barrett, second-year Social Science student at Maynooth University)

## Shared commitment to improve progression opportunities

The development of key relationships between the two sectors across the region has been notable over the last three years. The regional approach has focused on students' experience across the region, how they see and access pathways and progression opportunities, rather than the experience in one institution. The signed MOU was important because it was a tangible reflection of a shared institutional commitment to improved and transparent progression opportunities across the region. The FET2HE Network is aware that many people undertake programmes of study in FET as a second-chance or indeed first-chance education opportunity. For some students, it is the start of a journey to higher education, an aspiration acknowledged in the National Access Plan:

For many students who go on to further education, their FE qualification is an end in itself and with it they can achieve an entry qualification for the labour market; for others, it is a step along a pathway to higher education<sup>2</sup>.

## Barriers to progression

The opportunity to use FET to access HE is very important for students who are the first in their family to progress to higher education, for mature students, for lone parents, and for students with disabilities, among others. This diversity of the student cohort in FET creates an additional imperative for more equitable opportunities to progress to higher education. Research by the FET2HE Network, however, identified many barriers for students who wish to use a further education qualification to access higher education. These barriers can be financial; they also include the lack of consistency in entry requirements across the sector, and the lack of information and certainty about progression opportunities to HE.

## Importance of information and advice

Anthony Barrett is a second-year student doing a degree in Social Science at Maynooth University. After losing his job in 2011, Anthony started a VTOS course in Leixlip. Even at the open day for that course, he was struck by the fact that before starting the course he was given advice about progression to third-level education. The progression opportunities were simplified for him, and any concerns or fears about possible next steps were addressed. From the outset, Anthony was clear that he wanted to use this route to get into university. He feels that the lack of certainty about progression opportunities holds back many students who need to know at the outset how the further education qualification can be used to continue to higher education. As he noted, 'There is no consistency across the further education sector, no clear pathway.'

## Further Education is a pathway

Anthony's VTOS course had a broad curriculum which allowed him to take subjects that he had never studied before, such as psychology and sociology. These linked in well with the voluntary work he was doing in his community, particularly in the area of addiction. Anthony was elated when he was offered a place at Maynooth University, and he completed his first year as one of the best students on that course. Although he knew it was another step up academically, he felt ready for it because the further

education course he had completed prepared him so well for third level. He wants to encourage others, particularly those whose experience of education might not have been positive, to think about further education as a pathway: 'The further education sector needs to know that for many students this qualification is a route to higher education and not a full stop.'

### Need for clear and transparent movement opportunities

There is an opportunity now, as universities, as institutes of technology, as ETBs, as policy makers, and as practitioners, to identify how we can best support progression between FET and HE in this region and nationally. We have a responsibility to ensure that as a sector we not only reach but exceed the 10 per cent target for progression from FET to HE. Pathways from FET to HE should not just be aspirational for some learners: they must become the expectation for all learners who wish to progress their education. These pathways from FET to HE should be clear, transparent, and tangible, with opportunities for all learners to flexibly move between, forwards and backwards and through FET and HE, appreciating the strengths of both sectors. Such a policy will support better choices and more opportunities for many thousands of students in the future.

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### FOOTNOTES

1. *National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015–2019*, HEA, December 2015.
2. *National Plan*, HEA, p. 19.

### 4-Day WorldSkills Competition 2017

The WorldSkills Competition is essentially the Olympics for apprentices, craftspeople and trainees. The 2017 event took place in Sao Paulo Brazil, with Ireland scooping two Gold Medals and eight Medallions for Excellence.





# Generation Apprenticeship

Expansion project to more than double the number of apprentices



**Maria Walshe**

Communications Manager, SOLAS

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**T**he author portrays apprenticeships as attractive, exciting and fulfilling experiences. People choose apprenticeships because they like the particular work, and they are apt to progress to great careers.

## Introduction

When we look beyond a young person's time in education towards the commencement of their working lives, what are the main things that parents want for their child?

We recently asked this question during a focus group with parents of students completing secondary school education. Financial stability was an important element, but job satisfaction was the primary wish of parents for their children. "There needs to be some form of contentment from a job" said one parent whilst another felt that "It's not all about financial factors but about the love of something".

If you were to ask any of the 14 young people that will be representing Ireland in the WorldSkills Competition this October how they feel about their apprenticeship, they would be unanimous in talking about their love for what they are doing. It is why they have worked hard to develop and hone their skills, competed to be the best in their apprenticeship in National Skills competitions and this year are part of the Irish WorldSkills Team.

## WorldSkills competition

The four-day WorldSkills competition dates back to 1953 and sees 1,200 competitors from 60 countries facing 1,100 expert judges. It is essentially the Olympics for apprentices, craftspeople and trainees. Ireland has a strong success record at WorldSkills competitions, having won to date 61 Gold Medals, 53 Silver Medals, 79 Bronze Medals and 160 Medallions for Excellence. In the last competition in Sao Paulo Brazil, Ireland won two Gold medals and eight Medallions for Excellence.

The skills, competence and technical abilities demonstrated not only by WorldSkills competitors, but by over 100,000 people who have come through Ireland's apprenticeship system since the 1970's, are the very reasons why any negative image around apprenticeship has no validity.

An average of 4,000 new apprentices register every year – and these figures are increasing. Graduating

“There needs to be some form of contentment from a job,” said one parent whilst another felt “it’s not all about financial factors but about the love of something”.

The WorldSkills competition... is essentially the Olympics for apprentices, craftspeople and trainees.

apprentices have learnt their occupation in both on- and off-the-job training. Many people are unaware of the number and variety of great careers that apprentices pursue after they qualify.

## Rewarding careers

Apprentices go on to become employees, employers, sole traders and company owners. These are young people who have pursued their interest and followed their own path through the apprenticeship route and into careers they find rewarding. They are the people who keep the national electrical supply working, they fix our cars, they fix and maintain the planes in which we fly around the world, they work with cutting edge technology in pharma and bio pharma plants nationwide, and they are the people who will help bring Ireland’s housing stock back up to sustainable levels.

## Generation Apprenticeship

Many students and their families see the Central Applications Office (CAO) college route as the primary route into their chosen career. Apprenticeship in Ireland has traditionally been seen as the path to skilled occupations in a range of industries and sectors such as construction, engineering, motor and electrical. But things are changing with an expanded model of apprenticeship, where a wider range of occupations are attracting more people into apprenticeships. Since 2016 the range of apprenticeship options in Ireland has expanded into areas such as Insurance Practice, Electrical Engineering, Polymer Processing, Manufacturing Engineering, International Financial Services, Hospitality and Accounting with many more on the way.

This follows a review of apprenticeship training in Ireland (Department of Education and Skills, 2013) which made recommendations to expand the apprenticeship model, as is being done in other countries around the world, in order to meet both the needs of people and society’s future skills needs, which are developing at an unprecedented pace. Generation Apprenticeship is a renewal guided by the Apprenticeship Council to meet these skills needs. Following a call for apprenticeship proposals in 2015, the first of these apprenticeships was launched in 2016 and will continue into 2018. A new call for apprenticeship proposals was completed in September 2017. This call will further expand the options for Generation Apprenticeship with more occupations becoming available through the apprenticeship route.

The National Skills Strategy 2025 includes a target of 50,000 apprenticeship and traineeship places to be provided over the period 2016–2020. The benefits of apprenticeship training in matching skills formation to the specific needs of companies, the productivity of apprentices as well as recruitment and retention savings, are all positive elements that companies and people can benefit from.

Education offers individuals a way to pursue their interests, develop their knowledge and skills and move into satisfying careers. The ever expanding apprenticeship route is one that more and more people should be considering. Apprentices earn while they learn and build valuable work-ready skills in a chosen occupation. Apprenticeships open up exciting and rewarding careers, with learning grounded in the practical experience of undertaking a real job.



# Learner-Informed Policy Evaluation

2017 marks the second year of the National FET Learner Forum (NFLF)



**Benjamin Hendriksen**  
AONTAS Advocacy Lead

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**T**he author explains the important role of the annual National Learner Forum in amassing qualitative data through listening to Learners which, alongside quantitative metrics, will inform future policy for the Further Education and Training sector.

Throughout the development of the Further Education and Training (FET) Strategy 2014–2019, SOLAS, as the national FET authority, committed to hearing the voices of learners in FET as part of the ongoing evaluation and future development of FET policy in Ireland. This commitment created a unique space for learner participation in government policy-making that has been realised through the creation and implementation of the National FET Learner Forum (NFLF), starting in 2016. The forum was held in 2016 and 2017, with a further two-year commitment in the current FET Strategy for 2018 and 2019.

## Forum for Learners

Based on our expertise in engaging with learners and highlighting their voices in policy evaluation, AONTAS<sup>1</sup> was asked to lead on the establishment of the NFLF for the duration of the current FET Strategy. By creating this annual forum, the government has indicated the importance of evaluating policy not only through the vital lens of quantitative metrics such as course attendance, completion rates, and employment targets, but also through qualitative data. It is critically important to speak with learners participating in FET and understand more deeply the issues affecting them as they work to succeed in education.

## Ascertaining the needs of Learners

In keeping with best practice of public policy development across Europe, AONTAS believes that citizens must be the focus of policy development and evaluation. In the case of FET, the citizens who must be consulted are learners. Without learners the FET service would not exist. It is therefore important that the FET service meets their needs. For this reason alone the forum is vital to the success of the FET service, while also helping to establish a new best practice in policy development and evaluation here in Ireland.

Una Buckley, adult learner representative on the project advisory group, said:

It is critically important to speak with learners participating in FET and understand more deeply the issues affecting them as they work to succeed in education.

While formal learner representation on decision-making and governance structures is a welcome development, representation must be supported through a number of activities to ensure that the representation is meaningful, accountable and reflective of the diversity of learner issues.

### Meaningful representation of Learners

In collaboration with one another, AONTAS and SOLAS, along with a project advisory group that includes critical stakeholders, have been building an NFLF that provides an open and engaging environment for learners to share their experiences and opinions on the FET service. It is equally important to ensure that the information collected from learners is useable for policy makers responsible for implementing the FET Strategy as a whole.

### Qualitative Learner feedback

The work of AONTAS, with support from SOLAS, aims to create a space for qualitative learner feedback that leads to responsive policy action from those responsible for implementing the FET Strategy. This work will continue in 2018 and 2019, and perhaps beyond, in order to ensure that learner voices are central to the future of FET development.

### Contact

If you are an FET provider and would like to ensure that learners connected to your Education and Training Board (ETB) participate in the NFLF, please contact Karen Williams, Learner Supports Officer: [kwilliams@aontas.com](mailto:kwilliams@aontas.com).

1. AONTAS is the National Adult Learning Organisation, a non-governmental, voluntary-membership organisation with almost 500 members from across the lifelong learning spectrum. As the voice of adult learning, AONTAS advocates for the right of all adults in Ireland to quality learning throughout their lives, and promotes the value and benefits of lifelong learning.

The National FET Learner Forum, held annually, creates a unique space for learner participation.



# Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)

2017: A Year of Transition



**Dr Padraig Walsh**  
Chief Executive, QQI

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**D**r Padraig Walsh explains the remit of QQI, its areas of responsibility, new initiatives in 2017, and updating of legislation.

Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) is a state agency responsible for quality assurance and qualifications in education and training. The agency was established in November 2012.

QQI has oversight of the quality of Ireland's universities, institutes of technology, private higher education institutions, and the further education and training (FET) colleges operated by the Education and Training Boards (ETBs). QQI also makes awards in the private FET sector.

QQI is responsible for the ten-level National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). It maintains Qualifax, the National Learners' database of course and career information, and it manages NARIC Ireland, which gives advice to help graduates from overseas get their qualifications recognised and understood in Ireland. It also provides information for Irish graduates to get their qualifications understood if they choose to travel and work or study abroad.

The QQI provider base currently consists of close to 50 higher education providers (both public and private) and approximately 450 FET providers.

## Quality and qualifications

QQI has responsibilities in both the quality assurance and qualifications domains. The 2012 Act establishing QQI enshrines the principle that providers of education and training have primary responsibility for the quality and assurance of their provision. QQI's responsibility, following consultation with providers, is to issue quality assurance guidelines. Providers in turn are responsible for developing quality-assurance procedures consistent with these guidelines and for agreeing them with QQI. QQI is then required to review the effectiveness of these procedures periodically and to publish the outcome of any such reviews.

In the case of providers without their own awarding powers, QQI is required to validate programmes of education and training and to issue certificates to providers on behalf of learners who have successfully completed programmes of education and training

2017 saw the publication of guidelines for research degree programmes and for ETBs.

QQI is always conscious of its role of helping providers to enhance quality. It held its first Further Education Quality Enhancement Seminar for the ETBs in Farmleigh House.

that entitles them to a QQI award. In 2016, QQI award certificates were issued to 174,815 learners.

### Quality assurance guidelines

In 2016, QQI published core quality-assurance guidelines for all providers of further and higher education and training and supplemented these with separate bespoke quality-assurance guidelines for independent and private providers, for statutory apprenticeship programmes, and for universities and institutes of technology.

2017 saw the publication of guidelines for research degree programmes and for ETBs. To further complement the suite of QA guidelines, QQI will publish guidelines for flexible and distributed learning later in 2017.

This full suite of quality-assurance guidelines is now available in an interactive form<sup>1</sup> which gives education and training providers a fit-for-purpose set of guidelines they can incorporate as appropriate to the diversity of their education and training offering. Providers are expected to review their current quality assurance procedures in the light of these guidelines, amend and improve them where necessary, then submit them or agree them with QQI.

This formal re-engagement will mark a clean break with the past and put the relationship between QQI and its provider base on a new statutory footing under the 2012 Act. In spring 2017, QQI engaged in regional briefings with providers who currently deliver QQI programmes in the community and voluntary sector and with private further and higher education and training providers. Almost 85 per cent of the 450 invited providers attended one of the 11 briefings sessions on re-engagement that were held.

### Programme validation and institutional review

In 2016, QQI published core policies and criteria for the validation of programmes of education and training that apply to all programmes leading to QQI awards. The new policies commenced in 2016 for apprenticeship programmes (leading to QQI awards at NFQ levels 5 to 9), English Language Education (ELE) programmes (leading to QQI awards), and programmes of higher education and training (leading to QQI awards). A new challenge will be the roll-out of the new validation policy and criteria for FET providers. To assist with this, QQI worked in 2017 with several ETBs in a pilot exercise. This resulted in the successful validation of a level 6 Advanced Certificate in Digital Media in July 2017. From December 2017, all FET programmes will be validated under the new policy.

The publication in 2016 of QQI quality-assurance guidelines, policies, and criteria for programme validation and policy for reviewing the effectiveness of providers' quality-assurance procedures marked a formal break with the previous mechanisms of QQI's antecedent bodies and presented a unifying approach to quality assurance in Irish further and higher education and training.

In 2017, QQI validated new apprenticeship programmes in international financial services and for accounting technicians and commis chefs.

Following the annual dialogue visits to the universities, the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI), and the institutes of technology, in late 2016 and early 2017, QQI noted the establishment of quality-assurance procedures by the universities (under the 2012 Act) and received and formally approved the procedures for the institutes of technology and RCSI. These engagements allowed the cyclical review of the effectiveness of quality assurance in the country's public-regulated HEIs to begin. This is QQI's primary quality-assurance relationship with the universities, RCSI, and institutes of technology.

QQI has developed a methodology and a timetable<sup>2</sup> of institutional reviews under the brand CINNTE (Irish for 'sure') that began in 2017, with self-evaluation reports from two institutes of technology due at the end of the year. Site visits to Letterkenny Institute of Technology and Institute of Technology Sligo will take place in early 2018, with the first reports under the CINNTE cycle due to be published in summer 2018. The remaining 20 publicly regulated HEIs will be evaluated as part of CINNTE over the next five years. One requirement of the 2012 Act relates to quality assurance of linked providers and institutions that receive awards from one of the universities. In 2016, QQI undertook an institutional review of one such provider, Mary Immaculate College, at the request of their awarding body, the University of Limerick. The report was published in summer 2017.

### Apprenticeship

Soon after its formation in 2016, the new government announced its *Action Plan to Expand Apprenticeship and Traineeship 2016–2020* and published a *Handbook on Developing a National Apprenticeship*.<sup>3</sup> QQI is the quality-assurance agency for further and higher education and training in Ireland, including apprenticeship. In 2016, QQI revalidated five of the main craft apprenticeships (including for plumbers and electricians) under the existing validation policies. In 2017, 14 craft apprenticeships are undergoing revalidation under the new QQI validation policy that was published in 2016.

As part of the government policy of expanding apprenticeship beyond its traditional (male-dominated) craft base, the Apprenticeship Council launched a call for new apprenticeships in 2015. This has resulted in 2017 in the QQI validation of new apprenticeship programmes in international financial services and for accounting technicians and commis chefs. One of the apprenticeships in financial services was validated at level 8 in the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), the first time QQI will make apprenticeship awards beyond level 6 in the NFQ. Further apprenticeship programmes for bakers, ICT network engineers, and software developers are envisaged for validation later in 2017.

### Quality enhancement

QQI is always conscious not only of its role in quality assurance but also of how it can help providers enhance quality. In 2016, it held its first Further Education Quality Enhancement Seminar for the ETBs in Farmleigh House. This was followed in September 2017 with an event focusing on governance for private providers offering FET programmes. QQI will also host its second annual enhancement events for higher education and English Language Education providers at conferences in December.



In 2017, QQI expanded its National Student Engagement Programme, where it is working with students to help learners discover how they can engage most effectively with HEIs.

QQI developed a new Infographics service on its website which provides a convenient interface for seeing what awards it is making and where.

In 2017, QQI expanded its National Student Engagement Programme, where it is working with students (with the support of Sparqs: Student partnerships in quality Scotland) to help learners discover how they can engage most effectively with HEIs.

## Standards and qualifications

One of QQI's main functions under the 2012 Act is to develop award standards in partnership with stakeholders. In 2017, as part of its evaluation of the impact of the National Framework of Qualifications, QQI published the *National Qualifications Frameworks, Reflection and Trajectories*<sup>4</sup>. Later in 2017, QQI will publish the *Policy Impact Assessment of the National Framework of Qualifications* by Indecon Consulting that was commissioned by QQI in 2016. In October 2017 QQI hosted its Digitalisation Agenda conference on the theme of *Re-thinking the Role of Qualifications and Skills*.<sup>5</sup>

A proposed schedule of review of awards standards for 2017–19 was accompanied by a discussion paper on the *Review of QQI Award Standards*. QQI is the main provider of awards and certification in the FET sector in Ireland and makes higher education awards, mainly in the private sector. In 2016, QQI developed a new *Infographics*<sup>6</sup> service on its website which provides a convenient interface for seeing what awards it is making and where. This service was expanded in 2017 to show the certification volumes at the level of provider and centre. Data on the 181,207 QQI awards made in the calendar year 2016 were published on *Infographics* in February 2017.

## Updating of legislation

Following an adverse High Court ruling in January 2015, QQI reviewed its powers under the 2012 Act. The review identified several issues impeding QQI's role in quality assurance and qualifications. These issues were confirmed in 2016 by the Attorney General's office.

Amendments are required to QQI's existing legislation to, among other things, give QQI the explicit authority to recognise awards in the NFQ and to provide for the introduction of the International Education Mark (IEM) for higher education and English Language Education providers. The amended legislation, to be introduced in 2017, is designed to strengthen QQI's role in regulating providers' access to QQI awards and to improve procedures for protecting enrolled learners in the private education sector.

The new legislation will help QQI realise its vision of extensive high-quality education and training opportunities with qualifications that are widely valued nationally and internationally.

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# The Societal Role of Lifelong Learning

## The broader purpose of lifelong learning



**Niamh O'Reilly**  
CEO, AONTAS

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**T**he author discusses the role of Lifelong Learning, the danger of narrowing its focus to work skills, and the importance of broadening its remit to embrace the holistic vision reflected in the Delors report (1996), with its four pillars of knowledge: learning to be, to know, to do, and to live together.

The term *work-life balance* is a common way to describe the tension of rationalising work and life commitments. However, in *lifelong learning policy*, the life part becomes synonymous with work. Lifelong learning has increasingly been interpreted as relating principally to its role in employability, causing significant concern for adult and community educators. The resulting imbalanced focus on upskilling and skills-matching detracts from the concepts of consciousness-raising, citizenship, cohesion, cultural development, and community-building as set out in White Paper (2000).

Adult and community education practitioners and learners have long argued for learner-centred approaches, adapted to the needs and interests of the individual and encompassing a wide range of skills and training, rather than traditional subject-focused learning where the only goal is major award accreditation. However, and crucially, the broader perspective of lifelong learning can no longer be ignored, given the post-financial-crisis context where we witness increasing social inequality and precarious working conditions (TASC, 2016), in addition to worrying impacts of climate change, and political uncertainty in an increasingly populist post-Brexit Europe. Increased recognition of the importance of the broader outcomes of learning can no longer be seen as an extra – it is a pivotal aspect of lifelong learning policy.

### Supranational lifelong learning policy

Supranational organisations have played a significant role in shaping lifelong learning policy. The wider benefits of adult learning have been extensively acknowledged, from the broad, all-encompassing views of lifelong education in the UNESCO reports *Learning to Be* (1972), to the holistic, integrated vision in the Delors report *Learning: The Treasure Within* (1996), with its four pillars of knowledge: learning to be, to know, to do, and to live together. Perhaps unsurprisingly in a neo-liberal policy era, the dual economic and social drivers in the EU Memorandum of Lifelong Learning (2000) have increasingly been replaced by a more employability-related skills focus

per the Renewed Agenda on Adult Learning (2011) and the new Upskilling Pathways (2016).

Although EU lifelong learning policy has been widely criticised by academics and educators, the EU has a history of providing vital funding for adult learning, for example the European Social Fund and, more recently, financially supplementing policy development and implementation via Erasmus+. In a recent AONTAS Erasmus+ mobilities project, winners of the AONTAS STAR Awards can now avail of a fully funded continuous professional development programme from across Europe, thus improving their practice, developing intercultural competences, and developing links with their European counterparts.

As part of the AONTAS project *Making an Impact at European Level (2016–2018)*, funding of €24,365 directly supports seven Community Education Network (CEN) organisations, 16 community education practitioners, and their 63 colleagues, benefitting 1,494 learners who will gain from newly upskilled tutors and best-practice teaching methods. This is a relatively small but important investment for improving the learning experience of the most educationally disadvantaged learners, enabling them to reach their potential.

The EU has a history of providing vital funding for adult learning...

### Widening participation in lifelong learning

Mirroring the Education and Training 2020 European target, the Action Plan for Education's (2016–2019) goal of increasing the Irish lifelong learning participation rate is set at 15 per cent – albeit by 2025, rather than the EU-wide target date of 2020. The lifelong learning participation rate in Ireland is currently 6.4 per cent (Eurostat). This is almost 2.5 times lower than that of our closest neighbours, the UK, at 15.7 per cent, and lags behind the European average of 10.7 per cent.

More pressing is the need to widen access particularly for those who finish school early. The unequal participation in lifelong learning is closely linked to prior educational experience (Cedefop, 2017). In Ireland, statistics for 2015 reveal additional widening in educational inequality, with higher-level graduates four times more likely to participate in lifelong learning than those who held qualifications at lower secondary or less (EU Education and Training Monitor, 2016), even though the benefits of lifelong learning are far more impactful on people with low skills (BeLL, 2014).

Although Ireland's participation rate in formal learning is the sixth highest in the EU, it lags behind in non-formal learning. In the Irish context, community education offers non-formal adult learning which takes place in local community settings across the country. It is learner-centred and responds to the needs of the local community. The proposal has been made that 'the greatest progress towards improving the lifelong learning rate could be expected to come from expanding opportunities for non-formal learning'. Engagement of socially excluded adult learners and those with previous negative experiences of education is apt to increase in the non-threatening and supportive environment in which community education takes place.

Although Ireland's participation rate in formal learning is the sixth highest in the EU, it lags behind in non-formal learning.

AONTAS learners and practitioners express their fear that that lifelong learning is increasingly being viewed narrowly as a tool only for economic growth.

Whilst recognising the recent developments in further education, with the establishment of SOLAS, Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), it is vital that we continue to promote the right of all adults to learning, and its value. We must also acknowledge the important role of higher education in improving participation rates in lifelong learning. Increasing access to higher education for mature students could be strengthened with extended grant support, fee assistance for part-time learners, and many other potential policy tools.

### Lifelong learning and employability

The value of lifelong learning has been extensively debated and researched, from the perspective of civic, social, health, and well-being benefits to increasing tolerance, trust, and community engagement. Adult and community education practitioners and academics frequently debate the impact of neo-liberal policies on education systems, particularly their negative impact on critical pedagogy but also their further disenfranchising of educationally disadvantaged learners.

Adult learners and practitioners tell AONTAS that effective adult learning requires time, resources for outreach to the hardest-to-reach potential learners, spaces for dialogue, and learner-centred accreditation processes. AONTAS members express their fear that lifelong learning is increasingly being viewed narrowly by policy-makers and subsequently by society as a tool only for economic growth rather than for the wider personal and societal benefits it offers.

Learner voice, Imani Tutu:

*I decided to do English classes in the Cavan Adult Learning Centre. Learning a new language was not easy, and I put a lot of effort into learning English. I had a great tutor who gave me a lot of support, and I will not forget him. I started learning English as a beginner (QQI level 2), then I progressed to a QQI level 3 course. To further improve my English, I decided to take some other modules such as IT, cookery classes, communications, and maths, and continued to complete my QQI level 4 Major award. ... I have benefited a lot from learning English. I no longer need an interpreter to express my feelings, and I can now give my own opinion or converse in English with a group of people. Learning English has given me the confidence to talk in front of people without feeling sorry for myself.*

Imani progressed to level 5 PLC Pre-law and is now doing a degree in law in University College Cork (UCC).

It is fair to say that at EU policy level, the level of apprehension among AONTAS members and other like-minded people in Ireland and elsewhere has some basis. The recent move of the adult education unit from the European Commission Directorate General for Education and Culture (DG EAC) to the Vocational Training and Adult Education Unit in Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion signals how the Commission views the role of adult learning. Furthermore, the language of lifelong learning and adult education is taking a back seat to vocational

education and training and adult skills, as evidenced in the European Vocational Skills week, rather than perhaps a lifelong learning week.

Has this caused a hollowing out of the wider benefits of lifelong learning? On the one hand, at this year's European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) General Assembly, a high-level EU Commission policy-maker said the move means a potentially higher place on the political agenda and increased funding for supporting policy implementation. Also, the value of high-profile conferences and EU weeks appears to have helped keep adult learning on the European political agenda. A move to reassess the role of lifelong learning seems to be emerging and is featured in other EU policies and statements. The EAEA welcomed the inclusion of lifelong learning as one of the 20 key principles of the European Union's Pillar of Social Rights, stating: 'Everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and life-long learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and manage successfully transitions in the labour market.' EAEA cautioned that those who benefited least from schooling also need a range of non-formal learning offers, outreach, guidance, and validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Adult learners returning to education not only develop and increase their confidence, but also gain the necessary building blocks for learning to learn.

Lifelong learning is essential for fair, secure, good-quality work, which is critical for social cohesion. With the increase in precarious work, particularly for women low in basic skills (Cedefop, 2017), it is vital that all have an opportunity to engage in learning opportunities. Vocationally oriented courses, and particularly QQI major awards, are increasingly seen as vital for upskilling, whereas learners and practitioners say that a range of provision is required for the heterogeneous needs of learners.

Interestingly, the World Economic Forum (WEF) has pushed back to what some consider a traditional adult education approach for creating learning cultures, advocating for 'learner-centred approaches, adapted to the needs and interests of the individual and encompassing a wide range of skills and training, rather than traditional subject-focused learning' (2017, p. 9)<sup>1</sup>. The language of education for employment has been replaced with education for employability, and from job security to career security, indicating the need for transversal skills. Vocational programmes are undoubtedly important for supporting sustainable employment opportunities. Adult learners returning to education engaging in non-vocational, non-accredited courses not only develop and increase their confidence, but also gain the necessary building blocks for learning to learn – a skill often overlooked and perhaps taken for granted. The need to develop learning-to-learn skills, and other factors including employer investment, can in part explain the dominance of the most educated in lifelong learning participation rates.

The World Economic Forum (2017) put forward its new thinking on skills for the Fourth Industrial Revolution (by 2020), noting the need for complex problem-solving, critical thinking, creativity, and cognitive flexibility, together with communicative skills of people management,

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1 World Economic Forum (2017). Realizing Human Potential in the Fourth Industrial Revolution: An Agenda for Leaders to Shape the Future of Education, Gender and Work.

It is not simply about matching skills [but is also about] achieving your educational aspirations and greater participation in society...

coordinating with others, service orientation, and negotiation. Such 'new thinking' is perhaps exasperating for adult and community education practitioners in Ireland who have long sought greater recognition for such transversal skills gained from a range of education provision, including non-accredited programmes, which is primarily facilitated in a dialogical pedagogic process. Practitioners will tell you that the heart of adult learning is based on a philosophy of dialogue from Dewey (1933) and Brookfield (1980s+), to its more radical role in social change (Freire, 1971). Differing from the WEF view on individual learning responsibility, practitioners know that for such learning outcomes to take place, there is no quick fix; self-directed learning is part of the education process (Knowles, 1973), not an initial starting point or indeed the responsibility of learners.

Learners tell AONTAS that it is not simply about matching your skills. Achieving your educational aspirations and enabling greater participation in society take time, and for the most marginalised it is resource intensive.

Adult Learner John Connell:

*When I began my journey back to learning, I couldn't even type or send an email, but after receiving great encouragement, my eyes have been opened. I have gained great qualifications but also acquired important life skills, such as sticking to deadlines, broadening my mind and way of thinking, and developing friendships. It's been a great experience with many benefits.*

Learners tell AONTAS that a variety of education provision is needed to make lifelong learning a reality, similar to the newly proposed education ecosystems needing a mix of formal, informal, in-person and digital delivery, self-paced autonomous learning, community-based courses, workplace learning schemes, and adult learning colleges (WEF, 2017). Ireland is well placed to develop its education ecosystem further, with its already-established and internationally regarded community education system that offers QQI minor awards similar to the purported new concepts of micro-credentials aligned to national standards and qualifications frameworks (WEF, 2017). The importance of ensuring that community education organisations can offer QQI minor awards is re-emphasised with this purported shift in thinking.

What about the 'live together' aspect of adult learning, essential in an uncertain world?

Although diverging in views of public funding processes and personal responsibility for learning, there are interesting similarities between the long-established philosophy of adult learning and new concepts of effective education systems of the World Economic Forum. It seems that the long-held views of AONTAS and its members on lifelong learning are once again becoming understood as best practice.

### Learning to live together

But what about the 'live together' aspect of adult learning which is also essential in an uncertain world? Growth in far-right populism, attributed to economic inequality and cultural backlash (Inglehart and Norris, 2016)<sup>2</sup>, has been seen in the US and across Europe, with rising support for right-wing and predominantly anti-EU political parties such as Front

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2 [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2818659](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2818659).

The role of adult learning in equipping citizens to critically assess the media is vital for a functioning democracy.

The potential of adult learning to offer space for dialogue on critical issues is needed now.

National in France, True Finns in Finland, and the Party for Freedom in the Netherlands.

Ireland is not insulated from rising populism, considering the catalysing role in Brexit of the right-wing party UKIP. The potential of adult learning to offer space for dialogue on critical issues is needed now. Recently, setting the context of challenges for adult learning, Professor Tom Collins spoke of a society where people are increasingly stakeless, stateless, and homeless, which results in reckless decisions with grave consequence (DCU, 2017).

Adult learning has many benefits, but forefront to my mind is that it provides a place for intercultural dialogue and education that supports critical thinking and reflection. Last year, at a QQI minor award certificate ceremony in Warrenmount Community Education and Development in the heart of Dublin's liberties, I listened to music played by a Brazilian Fáilte Isteach learner whilst eating the Arabic dessert Zainab's fingers in a warm collegial environment. In a microcosm of multicultural Ireland, 43 nationalities were represented by 400 learners, two thirds of them female. It must be recognised that such an environment enables intercultural engagement and dialogue.

We should consider the potential of adult learning, and specifically critical thinking, as a factor not only for employability but also, importantly, for enabling criticism of populism and far-right nationalistic sentiments. The education theorist Henry Giroux argues that critical pedagogy, common in community education, has an important role for enabling liberal democracy by critiquing structural inequalities and supporting solidarity and collaboration in the face of increasing support for authoritarianism and illiberal democracy. The role of adult learning for equipping citizens to critically assess the media is vital for a functioning democracy in an era of 'information explosion'.

### What's working?

Lifelong learning has a part to play in society, but how can we widen participation? Adult learners are telling AONTAS that a broad range of learning options are needed, not only specific, vocationally orientated courses but also non-accredited courses where they can build confidence, gain learning-to-learn skills, and take time to decide which area to focus on. Learners cite the key factors in access and retention as learner supports (childcare, transport, funding, guidance), learning methodology (dialogical, respectful, supportive), and collegiality (peer support, peer learning). Learners need to be part of the dialogue on how we can widen participation in lifelong learning to all of society, not just increase participation among groups who are already likely to participate.

### The future of lifelong learning

It is vital to keep learning provision diverse and the purpose of adult learning broad. To build a quality system for supporting lifelong learning, we need a range of flexible, accredited, and non-accredited provision that enables a return to learning with effective supports and a learning methodology that supports collegiality. This learner-centred model, perhaps no longer viewed as a relic of an idealistic past but now a stated



requirement of supranational organisations with an employer focus, may gain greater credence among policy-makers, sceptical groups, and individuals in civil society.

Offering the kinds of learning needed for personal growth, social and civic engagement must also be centre stage. Shaping the discussion on the future of Europe, with the role of lifelong learning noted in the European Commission's Reflection Paper on the Social Dimension of Europe (2017), there may be increasing space for the broader purpose of lifelong learning. Are we coming full circle: from a holistic, integrated vision of learning to a narrower, instrumental view, albeit more pronounced in a time of financial collapse, to a rediscovery of the potential of adult learning? I hope so, and I hope we can hold on to this new evolution. The benefits of lifelong learning for individuals, families, communities, and society are too important not to.

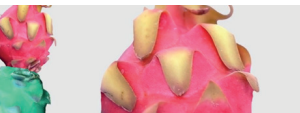
*AONTAS is Ireland's national adult learning organisation for adult and community education providers and adult learners. It promotes the value and benefits of adult learning, and advocates on behalf of the sector. Founded in 1969, it is an independent NGO, with 500 member organisations nationwide.*

#### Honorary Conferring at DCU



At a special ceremony in the Helix, Dublin City University conferred honorary degrees on Bill Clinton, 42nd President of the United States; Sr Stanislaus Kennedy, social innovator and founder of Focus Ireland; and Mr Martin Naughton, entrepreneur and founder of Glen Dimplex.

Pictured here are l-r: Prof Brian MacCraith, President DCU; Martin Naughton, Founder of Glen Dimplex; Bill Clinton, former USA President; Sr Stanislaus Kennedy, Founder of Focus Ireland; Martin McAleese, Chancellor, DCU.



Animation

Applied Entrepreneurship

Applied Psychology

Art

Arts Management

Creative Computing

Creative Media Technologies

Creative Music Production

Design for Stage + Screen  
[Production Design / Costume Design /  
Character MakeUp Design]

English, Media + Cultural Studies

Entrepreneurship + Management

Film + Television Production

New Media Studies

Photography

3D Design, Modelmaking +  
Digital Art

Visual Communication Design

# Innovative Creative + Entrepreneurial



The Trinity Centre for Gender Equality and Leadership (TCGEL) was officially launched at a special event at Trinity College Dublin in October 2017.

Professor Eileen Drew Director of TCGEL, Dr Mary Robinson (former President of Ireland), and Provost of Trinity Dr Patrick Prendergast.

# CHAPTER 5 HIGHER EDUCATION







# A Year of Magical Thinking?

Higher Education: An Overview. Not an Inside View



**Dr Anne Looney**

Executive Dean, DCU Institute of Education

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**I**n her review of the year, Dr Anne Looney reflects on the ‘magical thinking’ that has marked policy in higher education over the last 12 months. Avoiding tough decisions on funding and system structure may make life easier for politicians, she writes, but it is generating uncertainty and hard choices in the HE sector.

## Introduction

From August 2016 until March 2017 I served as interim chief executive of the Higher Education Authority (HEA), filling a gap between the retirement of Tom Boland and the appointment of Graham Love. During that time I had the privilege of working with the talented and committed team at the HEA and Irish Research Council, and a privileged insight into the HE system and policy processes. That insight remains privileged; this overview draws on the debates conducted in public and the reports published by government, the HEA, and others. Inevitably my commentary will be shaped in some way by HEA experience and the wisdom of HEA colleagues, as it will by my 14 years as CEO of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, but it will also be shaped by my recent months as executive dean of the Institute of Education in Dublin City University.

With apologies to Joan Didion, preparing this overview of the year in higher education in Ireland has served as a reminder that the belief that inevitable events can be deferred or controlled by symbolic or ritual actions is alive and well in Irish education policy circles. To be fair, such ‘magical thinking’ is a feature, to differing degrees, of most public policy processes – particularly in the modern era of relatively unstable coalition governments, and new forms of social activism that make governments increasingly nervous when faced with difficult and controversial choices. Magical thinking was most evident in the discussions about the funding of the HE system, and in the increasingly complex and contentious debates about system structure. But amid the magical thinking were some magic moments. Below, I offer a personal selection.

## Gender equality

First, a couple of magical moments in the past year are worth flagging. The publication by the HEA of the Report of the Expert Group on Gender Equality in Irish Higher Education Institutions, in June 2016, generated a wave of commentary in traditional and social media and in higher education institutions (HEIs). While the controversies at NUIG that led to the appointment of an expert group had been discussed in the sector and more widely, the publication of the report – with

In December 2016 three major research bodies announced that HEIs would be required to have a bronze institutional Athena Swan award by the end of 2019, and a silver institutional Athena Swan award by the end of 2023, to be eligible for research funding.

its accessible and dramatic infographics showing the gender gap in the academy and quotations from an online survey – generated national and international interest. Because it foregrounded the issue from within the system, the HEA was flooded with invitations from across the globe to share the review process and findings.

The report gained even more attention in December 2016 when the three major research bodies – Science Foundation Ireland, the Health Research Board, and the Irish Research Council – announced that HEIs would be required to have a bronze institutional Athena Swan award by the end of 2019 and a silver institutional Athena Swan by the end of 2023 to be eligible for research funding. Athena Swan involves benchmarking by external reviewers of progress by an institution or department towards a set of equality principles. The announcement that funding for research would be linked to gender equality accelerated engagement with Athena Swan by Irish HEIs. It remains to be seen whether other funding for HEIs will be linked to equality indicators.

For me, a further magic moment came when, as CEO of HEA, I presented UCC with its Athena Swan award in the Royal College of Physicians in Dublin. In a room dominated by pictures of past presidents (all male) of the RCPI, Prof. Michael Murphy, now retired president of UCC, shared my observation that the room's iconography reminded us that gender equality had a way to go. He told the audience that Prof. Mary Horgan of the College of Medicine in UCC was running for president of the RCPI, and that if elected, she would be the first woman to hold that office since 1654. Prof Horgan is now president-elect, and due to take office in October 2017. To quote Nick Lowe, 'I love the sound of breaking glass...'

### New apprenticeships

A second call for new apprenticeships closed on 1 September 2017. The new model of employer-led apprenticeships in partnership with educational institutions has been slow to embed, requiring as it does the forging of new relationships and structural and funding arrangements. But the early signs are promising, with the leadership of the Institute of Technology (IoT) sector notable. The new model has allowed the IoTs to address their particular regional remit. Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology is partnering in an apprenticeship in medical technology, for example. Sligo continued to develop its innovative blended learning apprenticeship in partnership with the Insurance Institute. To date, the universities have not featured. It remains to be seen whether such reluctance is a result of cautious watch-and-see, or of a step too far in partnering with industry and employers, or of good old-fashioned education vs training divides. The announcement of the next round is awaited. Either way, these new approaches to apprenticeships are a welcome development in the system.

### Rankings

The admission of Trinity College into the League of European Research Universities (LERU) at the end of 2016 was a significant achievement, not just for Trinity but for the Irish higher education system. In the last ten years only two universities – Trinity and Copenhagen – have been admitted to this group of 23 research-intensive institutions across Europe. Institutional wins like this, along with progress or relatively



The significant contraction of state investment in higher education, has destabilised the financial foundations of the system.

The admission of Trinity College into the League of European Research Universities (LERU) was a significant achievement, not just for Trinity, but for the Irish higher education system.

steady position in some rankings (with contrasting fortune in others), new international partnerships, and major research initiatives, combine to generate a narrative of steady progress for universities in particular. But these are ‘magic’ moments, breakthroughs for single institutions or research groups, while the ‘magical thinking’ on funding and structures continues.

### Magical thinking about funding

These ‘magic moments’ are a personal selection. Magical thinking is far more serious. Irish higher education has been the subject of magical thinking about funding and structural reform over the last 12 months, and for at least the last five years. This has resulted in uncertainty about the future shape of the higher education system and serious concern about the level and mechanism of funding.

For a number of years, Ireland’s HE system has seen a serious decline in funding against a backdrop of debate about how HE should be funded. But in the last year, some tipping points have been reached. To some degree, the university sector has been protected in this period by its capacity to borrow for capital projects. Prohibited from borrowing by virtue of being state-owned, the Institutes of Technology survived by using any reserves available to them, and by increasing student numbers, with most of the additional 34,000 students over the last number of years heading to IoTs.

A financial review of the IoTs published by the HEA at the end of 2016 revealed that six faced immediate sustainability challenges, and four others were potentially at risk due to limited reserves. The HEA has taken action to agree three-year financial turnaround plans with the six most vulnerable institutions. But with limited funding available, and no viable plan emerging for future funding at this stage, the HEA has stated that there are risks to whether these plans can be delivered.

The significant contraction of state investment in higher education, declining 38% from €2bn in 2009 to €1.3bn in 2016 at a time of rising student numbers, has destabilised the financial foundations of the system. The decrease in state funding was compensated somewhat by an increase in student contribution, which currently stands at €3,000 per annum. However, even when this is taken into account, overall funding per student has declined by around 20% over eight years to 2016, from over €12,000 to under €10,000. For the IoT sector, this drop, adjusted for their additional student numbers, is 30%.

The publication of the Cassells Report in March of 2016 was followed by a period of government procrastination. A further review of the funding mechanism (rather than scale) has recently been completed by the HEA. While the publication of the final report of that review, chaired by Brid Horan, is awaited, the useful series of working papers published had strong overtones of ‘deckchairs on the Titanic’. Developing new means to allocate the resources is not solving the problem that there are simply not enough resources to allocate.

Recent whispers about increased employer contribution to, and involvement in, higher education have grown louder as this chapter moves

Mergers take time, sustained goodwill, energetic and committed leadership, and human and capital resources.

towards publication. But there is a deafening silence on student loans, graduate contribution, higher fees, or greater government investment. To imagine that the HE system can continue to expand and diversify to meet a rising population and complex national and international challenges, in the absence of decisions about a sustainable funding model, is indeed magical thinking. No surprise then that DCU's new strategic plan includes income generation as a strategic goal for the next five years.

### Magical thinking about structure

The other tough decision awaiting a call is the structure of HE and the final shape of the diversified system. The National Strategy for Higher Education 2030, or Hunt Report, published in 2011, set the system on a course for fewer merged IOTs, and the possibility of universities of technology. The legislation to enable the latter is now pending. Work has progressed on amalgamations in Dublin, but slowly, and there has been active resistance to other clustering. Five years post-Hunt, and two coalition governments later, there seems little appetite to push institutions into mergers. Whether the publication of the legislation acts as an incentive to form relationships remains to be seen.

The lessons from my own institution, DCU, and the creation of the Institute of Education from the incorporation of St Patrick's College, the Church of Ireland College of Education, Mater Dei Institute, and the DCU School of Education, are that mergers take time, sustained goodwill, energetic and committed leadership, and human and capital resources. The magical thinking about mergers is easy. The dark art of delivery is a different matter.

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# The Trinity Education Project

University learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century



**Patrick Prendergast**  
Provost, Trinity College  
Dublin



**Chris Morash**  
Vice-Provost/Chief  
Academic Officer,  
Trinity College Dublin

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**T**rinity College Dublin is in the process of implementing a renewed curriculum that will embed redefined goals in its teaching practice and student learning experience. Professors Prendergast and Morash discuss the fruits of this work, including the simpler system of entry routes for Science beginning in 2018-2019, and new entry routes for other programmes opening up in 2019-20.

## Renewing the Trinity Education

The 2014-19 Strategic Plan for Trinity College Dublin set out an ambitious goal for the university: to renew the Trinity education. We knew, of course, that the teaching mission of the university was already performing well. Trinity courses have already proven their attractiveness for students, and growing numbers from outside of Ireland testify to the global reputation of our courses. At the same time we do see that much of this is related to reputation and “brand” rather than any actual measure of quality, and in a world in which the nature of knowledge is changing in unprecedented ways, staying as we were was not an option: as a character in a well-known novel says: “If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change around here”.

From the outset of the renewal process, it was clear that students came to Trinity not simply because they wanted to acquire a certain set of facts or skills: they came because they had an understanding of the sort of person they wanted to become. Our first step, then, was to try to codify something that almost eludes definition: an answer to the question, “what kind of person can I be?” We distilled this sense of transformation into four graduate attributes:

- » to think independently;
- » to communicate effectively;
- » to act responsibly; and
- » to develop continuously.

If our graduates can lay claim to these four attributes by the time they walk out Front Gate for the last time, we believe we will have done them some service.

Achieving this goal, however, is a complex task, and we were conscious that two competing values had to be accommodated in a Trinity education. On one hand, throughout the university community there is a strong value placed on the importance of a solid disciplinary formation. Students told us that they want to become experts in their discipline, and that they want to engage in research alongside their

... to think independently, communicate effectively, act responsibly, and develop continuously.

We are building a more flexible programme architecture to allow students to explore more subject areas and shift focus or pick up a minor subject area in later years.

teachers and “become” a historian, or a sociologist, or engineer. For many, this was a defining feature of Trinity’s offering.

At the same time, as their professors, we know we are in an era when the ability to reach out from a secure disciplinary base to other areas is important. This is true not simply in respect of future employability, but in terms of what it means to be educated in our changing world. In addition to identifying the importance of a solid disciplinary formation with points of contact beyond itself, the view quickly emerged that, to achieve the graduate attributes to their fullest, we should redefine the learning experience to include co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. Finally, we recognised that any review of our curriculum provided an opportunity to examine the ways in which students can experience a wider range of teaching, learning and assessment methods so that they can take an active, self-directed approach to their learning and thereby develop twenty-first century transferable skills.

In short, in a world in which the nature of work, and the nature of knowledge, is in a state of flux, we want our students to have both the solid foundation and the mental flexibility to live fully their responsibilities and potential as global citizens.

### The Mechanics of Change

Trinity is now in the process of implementing a renewed curriculum that will embed these goals in our teaching practice and student learning experience. One immediate fruit of this work will be a simpler system of entry routes for Science beginning in 2018–19, with new entry routes for other programmes opening up in 2019–20. The simpler system of entry routes for Science starting this year is described in greater detail by Dr Kevin Mitchell farther on in this chapter – see p18. Briefly here, in 2018–19 students will be admitted to Year 1 of the new programme architecture for Science via the four new Science streams: Physical Sciences; Chemical Sciences; Biological and Biomedical Sciences; Geography and Geoscience. These new entry routes will not only simplify student choice, they will allow for better decision-making, in that the four entry points correspond to existing second-level Science subjects. So, where a prospective student might not be expected to know what Nanoscience is, they will have already studied Physics or Chemistry. This means that they can enter through a familiar Physics or Chemistry route, and then progress to specialise in less-familiar Nanoscience in their final years. And so too with other more specialised areas, such as Immunology, Astrophysics, Medicinal Chemistry or Geoscience.

The new Science architecture exemplifies the greater degree of pathway flexibility for which we are striving. Enabling this involved much energetic work beneath the bonnet to standardise processes and procedures across the university. In the Arts and Humanities, we are also building a more flexible programme architecture to allow students to explore more subject areas and shift focus or pick up a minor subject in later years.

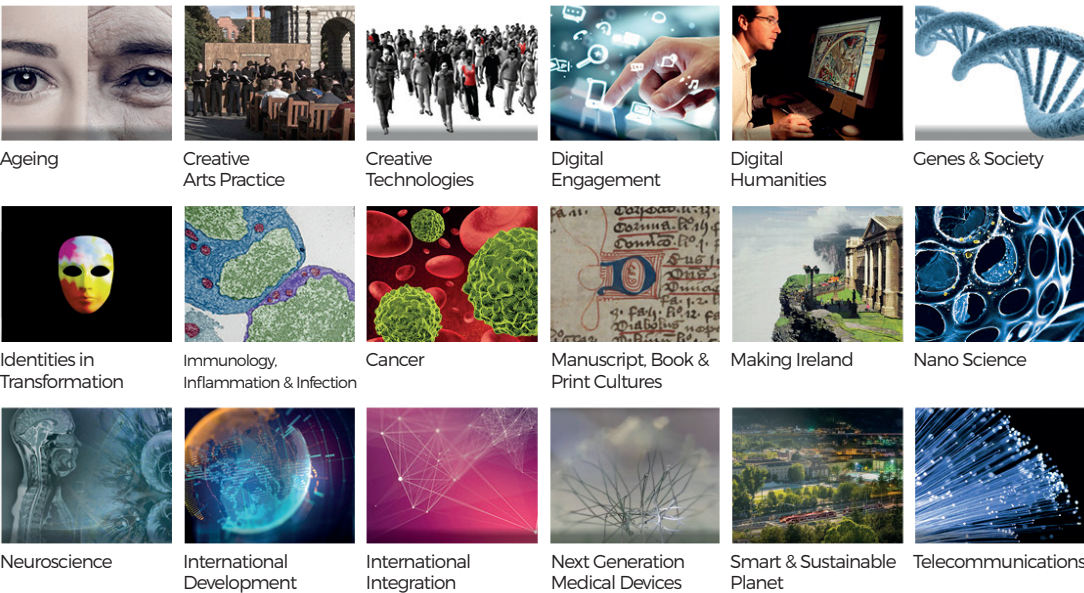
Achieving this kind of flexibility in our programme design and systems will also enable more students to avail of study abroad and internship opportunities, and we are vigorously pursuing these avenues as well. The

It was clear that students came to Trinity... because they had an understanding of the sort of person they wanted to become.

work necessary to put in place the mechanics for this kind of syllabus is not simple. However, in examining our rules, regulations and procedures, we have applied four simple criteria: simplicity, transparency, consistency, and fairness. When we have embedded these principles across the board, and opened up our structures, the effect on student experience will be transformative.

A more flexible programme architecture will also allow students to avail of specially designed modules that will be open to all students, to be called 'Trinity Electives'. Trinity researchers have, over the past few years, created a series of cross-institutional Research Themes. Currently there are nineteen research themes, ranging from Identities in Transformation, to Cancer, Ageing, and International Development (Fig. 1).

### Research Themes



**Fig. 1: Trinity's 18 research themes that will drive the undergraduate modules as 'Trinity Electives'**

We are currently developing new undergraduate modules from these research themes led by some of the country's leading researchers, providing an innovative conduit for world-leading scholarship to find its way into the undergraduate curriculum. In this way Trinity will further live its mission as a research university.

Trinity is diversifying its assessment strategies to include a greater range of formative assessment. The distinction between 'formative' and 'summative' assessment is crucial to pedagogical practice in the contemporary university. Where once assessment was simply about determining the extent to which a student had (or had not) learned the required material ('summative'), and assigning this a grade, formative assessment takes a wider view of assessment. Formative assessment is part of the learning process, not its endpoint. So, instead of simply

The distinction between 'formative' and 'summative' assessment is crucial to pedagogical practice in the contemporary university.

In Spring 2017, a dozen ideas exchanges were held around the University, involving academic staff, students, administrators, and those involved in supporting student learning.

receiving a grade, the student undertaking a piece of formative assessment (typically in the middle of a module) will not only be given feedback on how to improve, but also the opportunity in a subsequent piece of assessed work to build on what they have learned through the assessment process. The culmination of this reform of assessment will be the introduction of a 'capstone' project for every student (already in place in many parts of the university), which will take the form of an independent piece of research-as-learning, which all students will complete in their Senior Sophister (final undergraduate) year. Depending on the discipline, this may take the form of a minor dissertation, a performance, a recital, a set of experiments, or a design project.

### Let's Talk...

The most visible part of the Trinity Education Project over the first two terms of the 2016-17 academic year has been the work dealing with structures and systems: the shape of the academic year, programme pathways, progression routes, and related matters. However, ticking along beneath the surface there has been an equally important piece of work underway, involving colleagues sharing their most innovative assessment practices with one another.

In Spring 2017, a dozen ideas exchanges were held around the University, involving academic staff, students, administrators, and those involved in supporting student learning. The formats of these idea exchanges varied, including workshops, seminars, discussion groups and fora, and collectively they have enabled the Trinity community to come together to discuss approaches to assessment in Trinity, and to explore how innovative approaches to assessment can make us better teachers. Themes to date have included assessment variety, programme assessment, the capstone, self and peer assessment, technology-enhanced assessment, and assessing graduate attributes, creativity, and reflection.

Such consultation is very important to us within and outside Trinity. Transformational changes are occurring in the educational context: some are the effect of developments in technology and globalisation, others are a result of the changing needs and expectations of students, employers, and of society at large. Trinity has always made changes to its educational offering to ensure that we are at the frontiers of learning. The Trinity Education Project in renewing our undergraduate education is part of that tradition.

More information available from: [trinityeducationproject@tcd.ie](mailto:trinityeducationproject@tcd.ie) and [www.tcd.ie/academic-services/tep](http://www.tcd.ie/academic-services/tep)



# World-Class Universities

What are they, and why are they relevant?



**Professor Andrew J Deeks**  
President, University College Dublin

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**T**his article discusses the characteristics of world-class universities, how these are measured, the challenges facing world-class universities, their core role, and their contribution to the economy and society.

The term ‘world-class’ is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary in a competitive context as something ‘that is of a quality or standard regarded as outstanding throughout the world; comparable to or able to compete with the best in the world’. Based on this definition, it is interesting to consider the characteristics that make a university world-class.

Universities are widely and traditionally considered to be places of learning, scholarship and research, institutions which are both transmitters of knowledge and creators of knowledge. Through a sequence of degrees, students become experts in their selected discipline, contribute to knowledge in that discipline and become transmitters of knowledge themselves. Academics (or faculty) are generally involved in both creation and transmission of knowledge.

As it is difficult to measure and compare the effectiveness of transmission of knowledge, creation of knowledge as measured through research performance has become a defining characteristic of world-class universities. Many would argue that world-class research performance is the defining characteristic of a world-class university.

## Research performance

Of course, research performance is multifaceted, and only certain facets can be measured. We inherit a system of research publication in academic journals that dates back to 1665, when the Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society were first published. Research results are described in articles or papers, and these articles are reviewed or refereed by other experts in the field, then published if they are considered to be accurate and of sufficient interest.

Consequently, one way of measuring research productivity is to count the number of refereed journal articles produced by the academics and students of a university. However, just because research is being undertaken and written up does not mean it is ‘world-class’. There are now at least 25,000 peer reviewed journals publishing academic research in every conceivable sub-discipline and in many languages. Only a few of journals in each discipline are generally

Research performance is now overwhelmingly measured by number of refereed journal publications and number of citations.

A world-class academic is one who has a world-class research record, and who may or may not be a good teacher.

considered to be ‘world-class’, and this opens up the question as to how to measure the quality of different journals.

Even if a research paper is published in a world-class journal, the results may be of little consequence, and have little impact. One facet of the impact of a paper can be quantified by looking at the number of times the paper is referenced or cited by other papers.

If the impact of a paper is taken as measured by the number of citations, then the impact of a journal can be measured by the average number of citations received by the papers published in that journal – a number known as the Journal Impact Factor.

Research performance is now overwhelmingly measured by number of refereed journal publications and number of citations. Complicating the interpretation of these two measures of research performance is the fact that the number of publications and number of citations indicating ‘world-class’ varies dramatically between disciplines and even sub-disciplines, and so the numbers should only be compared directly within sub-disciplines. One attempt to do this in a rigorous way is the field-weighted citation impact (FWCI), which compares the number of times a paper has been cited with the average number of times similar papers (i.e. papers published in the same year and in the same discipline) have been cited in the three years following publication.

Academics in some disciplines, particularly those in the arts and humanities, argue that the use of journal paper numbers and citations to measure research productivity does not recognise research disseminated by way of research monographs (books), a publishing channel traditionally used in these disciplines. As book numbers are small and citations of books are small, these numbers do not make effective ranking measures. In addition, while book proposals are reviewed prior to acceptance, the books themselves are only reviewed once published. Consequently research published via monographs cannot be evaluated in quite the same way as journal papers. There is now a trend where academics in disciplines that would traditionally publish books are increasingly publishing journal papers, due to their value in rankings. This is not necessarily a bad thing.

Research publication statistics are just one way of looking at ‘world-class’ research performance. Any statistic can be gamed. A journal can increase its journal impact factor by asking authors to include more references to papers published in that journal before accepting their papers. An academic can publish review papers reviewing other research rather than reporting new research, as review papers on average receive more citations than original research papers.

As a result ‘world-class’ research performance as measured by research publication statistics should be considered a necessary but not sufficient characteristic of a ‘world-class’ university. In other words, just because the research publication statistics of a university are world-class, that does not mean it is a world-class university, but if a university’s research publication statistics are not world-class, then it is certainly not world-class.

To be world-class, a university must be funded at a level which is competitive with other world-class universities.

## International reputation

So what other characteristics does a world-class university have? A world-class university must have a good international reputation. The university name is a brand. People trust degrees issued by reputable universities and publications by academics who are part of a university with a good reputation. Both the QS and the THE world university rankings employ reputation surveys for this reason. The reputation of a university is important in attracting world-class students and world-class academics.

## Talent

This raises two more characteristics of a world-class university – world-class academics and world-class students. A world-class university will be competing with universities around the world for talent, and attracting some of the very best. Counterintuitively, it will also be losing academics and students to other world-class universities around the world. If no other world-class university wants to take a university's undergraduate students as postgraduate students, postgraduates as junior academics, or to poach associate professors as professors, then that university is not world-class.

## Facilities

To compete for students and academics against other world-class universities requires that a world-class university have world-class facilities. Academics need facilities that allow them to achieve their research goals and transmit knowledge effectively. Students will judge the quality of the university by the quality of the infrastructure they see.

Finally, to be world-class, a university must be funded at a level which is competitive with other world-class universities. Funding reductions lead to increases in the student: faculty ratio, deterioration in the facilities, and decreases in competitiveness in each of the characteristics outlined above. While universities can and will survive at reduced funding levels, their ability to be a world-class university is severely impacted.

In summary then, a world-class university has world-class research performance as measured by conventional research statistics, an excellent international reputation, attracts world-class academics and students from around the world, has world-class facilities, and is funded at a level which is comparable with other world-class universities.

Consider now the challenges facing a world-class university. The caricature of a university professor interested only in their research and having little time or patience for their students is one that has been around for a long time, indicating that the tension between teaching and research is longstanding. Nevertheless, global competition (driven both by the opening of the international student market and by the creation of the rankings tables) has increased the importance of research for universities attempting to become world-class.

A world-class academic is one who has a world-class research record, and who may or may not be a good teacher. A university looking to be world-class is motivated to hire such academics as they will contribute to three characteristics of a world-class university: research performance;

A world-class university resolves the tension between teaching and research by seeing the two as complementary activities.

World-class universities are long-lived institutions which outlast individuals, governments and sometimes nations.

reputation; and of course world-class academics. Nevertheless, as the university also wants to attract world-class students, it cannot afford to let its teaching quality slip, particularly in this age of social media.

### Teaching and Research: Complementary Activities

A world-class university resolves the tension between teaching and research by seeing the two as complementary activities, with the academics bringing the latest research into the classrooms, and by the students being inducted into research communities of practice through their academic programmes.

There is increasing awareness of the need to adopt interdisciplinary approaches to address significant global issues such as climate change and sustainability, and so there is increasing pressure for world-class universities to undertake interdisciplinary research and to facilitate interdisciplinary studies. This is a significant challenge for a number of reasons. First, research publication statistics for interdisciplinary research tend to be poorer than for disciplinary research, as the whole publication system works to drive deep disciplinary research. Second, world-class academics working in interdisciplinary areas are very hard to obtain. Finally, interdisciplinary research must be based on strong disciplinary research, and interdisciplinary studies run the risk of educating students who do not have sufficient depth of knowledge in any one area to be useful.

A world-class university resolves the tension between disciplinary and interdisciplinary research by focusing on strong disciplinary research and then creating mechanisms to bring disciplinary researchers together in interdisciplinary teams to address global challenges, and similarly by creating interdisciplinary studies opportunities at graduate level after students have established some disciplinary expertise.

### Arts versus Science

Another tension is that between Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (AHSS) subjects and the Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (the so-called STEM subjects). The STEM subjects tend to be higher cost to teach, but attract more research grants and produce more research output. The quality of the students entering also tends to be higher. However, due to more universities competing in the STEM space and hence higher competition in these subjects, in a comprehensive university the STEM subjects may be ranked lower than the AHSS subjects, despite performing much better in measures of research performance. Depending on the funding model operating, a university may question why it is supporting lower-ranked expensive STEM subjects rather than further building the higher-ranked cheaper AHSS subjects.

On the other hand, a utilitarian government may look for more graduates in the STEM subjects for economic reasons, and may question public investment in AHSS education. Such governments may put pressure on universities either through a funding model or through policy decisions to change the mix of graduates.

A world-class university recognises the value of having a broad mix of disciplines, and also recognises that students perform best in subjects that

they are interested in and enjoy. A world-class university also recognises that strong interdisciplinary research is built on strong disciplines, and that without a broad range of disciplines, interdisciplinary research opportunities will be limited.

In a similar way, government policy may seek increased emphasis on innovation, entrepreneurship and applied research for economic reasons, and may reduce the support given to blue-sky research and curiosity-led scholarship.

### Blue-sky versus Applied

A world-class university, while recognising the value of innovation, entrepreneurship and applied research, sees these activities as part of a broader mission. Governments must understand that successful research commercialisation is often dependent on the outputs of blue-sky and curiosity-led research, and should seek to encourage and cultivate both applied and blue-sky research and scholarship.

A world-class university recognises the value of having a broad mix of subjects, and also recognises that students perform best in subjects they are interested in and enjoy.

World-class universities also face increasing pressure to engage and contribute to the local community, and to contribute to national policies and initiatives. Since each of these activities can complement the central mission of the university, many universities have embraced some or all of these opportunities.

Nevertheless, one should bear in mind that in terms of scale, such activities are relatively small scale compared with the central teaching and research activities of the university. For example, UCD has a very active enterprise incubator where 30 companies are based, and these companies employ some 200 people. However, including students, faculty and staff, we have more than 30,000 people based on our campus, and so enterprise comprises less than 1% of the activity on campus. We have a Director of Major Strategic Partnerships who facilitates the engagement of the university with a handful of major strategic industry partners. However, perhaps 1–2% of our faculty are engaged in these partnerships.

World-class universities are long-lived institutions which outlast individuals, governments and sometimes nations. UCD, for example, was founded in 1854 at a time when Dublin streets were lit at night by gas lights, and transport around the city was by horse and cart. The Irish nation was only established in 1926, and there have been an extraordinary number of technological, political and social developments since that time.

Five years ago many people in higher education circles were talking about the rise of MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses), and predicting that these would lead to the demise of the traditional university within a decade. Such forecasts have proved to be misguided, and traditional university places are more sought after than ever before. The number of people attending traditional universities has increased over the last five years, not decreased.

### Fourth Industrial Revolution

There is now much talk about a Fourth Industrial Revolution. The Fourth Industrial Revolution is said to build on the Digital Revolution

The Fourth Industrial Revolution is said to be marked by emerging technology breakthroughs in artificial intelligence, robotics, nanotechnology, quantum computing, biotechnology, the Internet of Things and 3D printing...

The global research system, which consists largely of the universities, is the primary generator of the advances which are said to underlie the Fourth Industrial Revolution...

(which is now recognised at the Third Industrial Revolution), and will result from new technology being embedded within societies and in the human body. The Fourth Industrial Revolution is said to be marked by emerging technology breakthroughs in artificial intelligence, robotics, nanotechnology, quantum computing, biotechnology, The Internet of Things and 3D printing, among others. Indeed, research in world-class universities is contributing to developments in each of these areas, and degree programmes are now available in each of the areas. UCD recently introduced an Internet of Things Engineering degree, which is taught at our Beijing Dublin International College in China.

However, claims that the Fourth Industrial Revolution will make traditional disciplines and/or traditional universities obsolete, again far overstate the case. Although the digital revolution has taken away much of the drudgery involved in computation, programmes in Maths, Statistics, Accounting, Engineering, and so on remain just as popular and just as important as ever. This is because we still need our engineers, mathematicians and accountants to understand the principles of their subjects, even if they use digital tools to take care of the computation. In the same way, even if our Doctors have artificial intelligence assistance and various other technologies available to help diagnose and treat patients, they will still need to be trained in the principles of medicine.

### Central role of transmitting knowledge and skills

World-class universities develop thinking skills and people skills, and despite the advances in artificial intelligence, the need for these skills is increasing rather than decreasing. Industrialisation, mechanisation, digitalisation and globalisation have removed large numbers of jobs that involved repetitive processes. Many of the jobs that remain involve higher level thinking and/or human interaction, and these are not going to be taken over by machines in the foreseeable future. The role of the world-class university in transmitting knowledge and skills therefore remains secure.

Similarly, the global research system, which consists largely of the universities, is the primary generator of the advances which are said to underlie the Fourth Industrial Revolution and the generator of new knowledge and technologies which are global common goods. These advances are not achieved by any one person, but through an iterative process whereby one researcher or research group builds on the advances of another, with these advances being reported in international journals where they are available for access by researchers and developers around the world. Without this system progress would quickly come to a halt.

### In Summary

In conclusion, while broad engagement of a world-class university with its local, national and international communities is important, and pursuit of solutions to global challenges is also expected, the core mission of a university remains creating and transmitting knowledge across a wide range of disciplines. World-class universities are characterised by world-class research performance as measured by conventional metrics (which are based on the number of refereed journal papers and the number of times those research papers are cited by other research



When appropriately funded, world-class universities contribute significantly to the economy and society.

papers), but also by high reputation, high quality students, world-class academics (measured by research performance) and world class facilities. Developing and maintaining a world-class university requires funding at a level comparable to other world-class universities as such universities compete with each other for students and faculty. When appropriately funded, world-class universities contribute significantly to the economy and society on local, national and global levels, and governments around the world must recognise that university funding is an investment in the future which will repay itself many times over and in many ways, rather than a cost.

### Inaugural UCD Bord na Gaeilge International Summer School

In July 2017, Bord na Gaeilge UCD ran its first ever international summer school, Tionól Gaeilge 2017. On-campus accommodation at Belfield, Dublin 4 was provided for those who required it.

Clár Ní Bhuachalla, the university's Irish Language Officer said: "Bord na Gaeilge is very excited about Tionól Gaeilge UCD. We believe that the Tionól will prove popular and will continue to grow in the years ahead. The summer school is particularly attractive to those who would like to learn a lot of Irish within a short period of time and to make new Irish-speaking friends. It is of particular interest to those who may have done quite a few language courses in the past and who would like to experience a new approach to course delivery."



Pictured at the inaugural UCD Bord na Gaeilge International Summer School l-r: Ms Clár Ní Bhuachalla, Bord na Gaeilge UCD; Professor Mark Rogers, UCD Registrar and Deputy President; Ambassador Helmut Freudenschuss, Austrian Ambassador to Ireland; Ashling Hartevelde, Bord na Gaeilge UCD.



**Ollscoil na hÉireann**  
National University of Ireland



# The National University of Ireland – Ireland's federal university

The National University of Ireland (NUI) is a federal university with campuses spread across Ireland and with over 350,000 graduates across the world. There are four constituent universities and a number of other associated colleges in the federation, making NUI the largest element of the Irish university sector.

As a unique and historical focal point in Irish higher education, the NUI central organisation serves the interests of the member institutions, by providing services to them and to their graduates. NUI's role and activities also include the following:

- ▶ as a Designated Awarding Body, awarding degrees and other qualifications in NUI Recognised Colleges
- ▶ awarding higher doctorate degrees such as the DSc and DLitt
- ▶ administering an extensive annual programme of awards for students and graduates, including fellowships, travelling students, scholarships and prizes
- ▶ providing a forum for research, debate and discussion on major issues of importance to Irish society as a whole.
- ▶ administering the matriculation regulations and providing an information service on university entry.

**NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND | OLLSCOIL NA HÉIREANN**

49 Merrion Square, Dublin 2 D02 V583

**T** (353 1) 439 2424

**E** [registrar@nui.ie](mailto:registrar@nui.ie)

**www.nui.ie**



## NUI Constituent Universities

### *Na Comb-Ollscoileanna*

#### **University College Dublin**

An Coláiste Ollscoile, Baile Átha Cliath

#### **University College Cork**

Coláiste na hOllscoile, Corcaigh

#### **National University of Ireland, Galway\***

Ollscoil na hÉireann, Gaillimh

#### **Maynooth University**

Ollscoil Mhá Nuad

## Other NUI Member Institutions

### *Baill Eile d'Ollscoil na hÉireann*

#### **RECOGNISED COLLEGES** COLÁISTÍ AITHEANTA

**Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland** - Coláiste Ríoga na Máinleá in Éirinn

**Uversity** - Uversity

#### **COLLEGES LINKED WITH CONSTITUENT UNIVERSITIES**

COLÁISTÍ CEANGAILTE LEIS NA COMH-OLLSCOILEANNA

**National College of Art and Design** - Coláiste Náisiúnta Ealaíne is Deartha (UCD)

**Institute of Public Administration** - An Foras Riaracháin (UCD)

**St Angela's College, Sligo** - Coláiste San Aingeal, Sligeach (NUI, Galway)

**Burren College of Art** - Coláiste Ealaíne na Bóirne

\*including **Shannon College of Hotel Management** - Coláiste Ósta na Sionna

# Reimagining Science Education at Trinity College Dublin

Preparing Graduates for a Scientific Future



**Kevin J. Mitchell**

Associate Professor of Genetics and Neuroscience and Associate Dean of Undergraduate Science Education, Trinity College Dublin

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**I**n 2018, Trinity College Dublin will launch a redesigned science programme, aimed at preparing graduates for a dynamic future in which scientific skills and thinking will be ever more important in an increasingly diverse range of careers.

## Science in Modern Society

We live in a rapidly changing world, one in which scientific proficiency and literacy have become increasingly important. The pace of scientific discovery and technological advances is ever increasing, providing tremendous opportunity for those prepared and equipped to avail of them, while also presenting society with important new approaches to tackling emerging challenges.

Ireland has positioned itself as a knowledge economy, successfully building up a thriving high-tech sector, with world-leading international and indigenous companies in information technology, pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, medical devices and related areas. Thus, science graduates are in high demand, and have excellent career prospects, not just in existing industries, but in new ones that we cannot even yet imagine. These will continue to transform all our lives in the unexpected ways we have witnessed over recent decades.

Revolutionary developments in areas like artificial intelligence, nanomaterials, precision genome editing, and brain-machine interfaces will provide great opportunity for those capable of taking advantage of them, thereby placing a premium on a scientific education. This will apply not only to those working directly in these areas, but also to those in related areas such as business, law, healthcare, agriculture, education, entertainment, and many others, which will also experience the impact of such advances.

The goal of science education in Trinity therefore is not just to train the next generation of scientists, but also those who will work in other careers enabled by and impacted by advances in scientific knowledge. In doing so we hope to instil an understanding and appreciation of how science works in all our graduates and provide the ultimate in transferable skills – an ability to evaluate and synthesise evidence, think critically and learn rapidly and continually. In addition, the new Science programme will provide science students with the opportunity to engage with



broader societal and ethical questions and to consider the responsibilities associated with scientific and technological advances.

### The New Science Structure at Trinity

Over the past year, staff at Trinity College Dublin have come together to reimagine the undergraduate science education programme, focusing on the future needs of our graduates and resulting in new course structure, content, and teaching and assessment methodology. The objective is to provide our graduates with an education that equips them with the knowledge, skills and flexibility to avail of increasingly diverse career options arising from advances in science and technology. The redesigned set of science offerings at Trinity will be introduced in 2018.

The signature development of the new Science programme is that there are now four entry routes, each focusing on one distinct area of science: Physical Sciences, Chemical Sciences, Biological and Biomedical Sciences, and Geography and Geoscience. Each stream leads to a wide choice of possible degree specialisations, which include those previously accessible only through direct entry, such as Human Genetics, Nanoscience, and Medicinal Chemistry. (Mathematics and Theoretical Physics will remain as additional direct entry courses due to their highly specialised nature).

Within each stream, students will engage in a customised foundational curriculum in the first two years. This will centre on core modules relevant to each major subject domain, as well as mathematics, statistics, data analysis and computing modules. Students will also be able to take elective modules from the other streams or from related areas such as education, entrepreneurship, science communication, or the history and philosophy of science.

		1st Year	2nd Year	3rd and 4th Year	
TR060	<b>Biological and Biomedical Sciences Stream</b>	40 Core + 20 Elective Credits	40 Core + 20 Elective Credits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Biochemistry</li> <li>Botany</li> <li>Environmental Science</li> <li>Genetics</li> <li>Human Genetics</li> <li>Immunology</li> <li>Microbiology</li> <li>Molecular</li> <li>Medicine</li> <li>Neuroscience</li> <li>Physiology</li> <li>Zoology</li> </ul>	Quota 235
TR061	<b>Chemical Sciences Stream</b>	40 Core + 20 Elective Credits	40 Core + 20 Elective Credits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Chemistry</li> <li>Chemistry with Molecular Modelling</li> <li>Medical Chemistry</li> <li>Nanoscience</li> </ul>	Quota 72
TR062	<b>Geography &amp; Geoscience Stream</b>	40 Core + 20 Elective Credits	40 Core + 20 Elective Credits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Geography</li> <li>Geoscience</li> </ul>	Quota 54
TR063	<b>Physical Sciences Stream</b>	40 Core + 20 Elective Credits	40 Core + 20 Elective Credits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nanoscience</li> <li>Physics</li> <li>physics and Astrophysics</li> </ul>	Quota 52

We live in a rapidly changing world, one in which scientific proficiency and literacy have become increasingly important.

Students will be brought right to the forefront of knowledge in that field by world-leading researchers.

At the end of their second year, students will choose a degree subject in which to specialise and are eligible to enter all those offered within their chosen stream. These span all areas of modern science and reflect the cutting-edge expertise of Trinity's scientists. They range from studies on the subatomic scale to the exploration of the cosmos; from the design and development of new chemical entities to their application in medicine; from the inner workings of cells at the molecular level to the evolution of species over millions of years; and from the geological forces that shape our planet to the environmental and social dynamics of our own species.

### Research-led Teaching

Whatever degree subject students choose, they will be brought right to the forefront of knowledge in the particular field by world-leading scientists. In effect, they become members of a department in their third and fourth years, engaged in learning in small classes in a collegiate relationship with faculty members.

Lectures, practicals and tutorials will focus on a practical understanding of the scientific method, its use in the development of fundamental concepts and its application in a wide variety of fields. Students will become skilled in designing experiments, evaluating scientific research, analysing data, assessing evidence for various claims, and synthesising knowledge across domains. The use of online and blended learning resources will facilitate a stronger focus on active engagement with and mastery of scientific concepts and methods. The new structure will also involve more formative assessment, with individual or collaborative coursework forming an important part of the learning process itself.

In their final year, each student will undertake a capstone research project. It is at this point that they move from just learning about science to becoming practitioners, applying their scientific understanding and skills to an original problem. This affords an opportunity to learn how scientific research works in practice at the highest level, and to make their own contribution to the discoveries shaping our world. In some disciplines, students will be able to carry out their projects in clinical research labs in Trinity's affiliated hospitals, in industry, or in collaborating institutions worldwide.

### Research Excellence at Trinity

Trinity has a worldwide reputation for academic excellence and is ranked within the top 100 universities in the world. It has a rich scientific tradition, exemplified by alumni such as Ernest Walton, Professor of Physics, who received the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1951 for his work on splitting the atom, and by William Campbell, who received the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 2015 for his discovery of a novel therapy against roundworms. This work, carried out at Merck pharmaceuticals, was a direct extension of his education in parasitology in the Department of Zoology at Trinity. Campbell was instrumental in convincing Merck to make this therapy available at no cost to developing countries, resulting in the effective treatment of hundreds of millions of people for the otherwise devastating disease of river blindness – as example of the profound effect that individual scientists can have on the lives of millions.



Each stream leads to a wide choice of possible degree specialisations.

The ultimate in transferable skills - an ability to evaluate and synthesise evidence, think critically and learn rapidly and continually.

Professor Kerstin Mey, Pro Vice-Chancellor and Dean at University of Westminster, has been appointed to the new role of Vice President for Academic Affairs and Student Engagement at the University of Limerick.

Trinity's scientists continue to build on that tradition of discovery and impact of research on the world. Their achievements have been recognised nationally by strong support from Science Foundation Ireland and internationally by prestigious funding awards from the European Research Council, the Wellcome Trust, and other agencies. Trinity is the only university on the island of Ireland to be one of the 23 members of LERU, Europe's network of world-leading research-intensive universities.

Students will become part of Trinity's community of researchers from all across the globe, training in world-class facilities, including dedicated research institutes and centres, such as the Trinity Translational Medicine Institute, the Global Brain Health Institute, the Centre for the study of Advanced Materials and Bio-Engineering Research, and the Centre for Research on Adaptive Nanostructures & Nanodevices, among others. Trinity's strong links with the European Space Agency and with NASA also provide unique opportunities for students to engage in cutting-edge space-related research.

### Preparing Graduates for the Future

Trinity Science graduates are well prepared to take advantage of current and future scientific developments. They are equipped with the skills and knowledge to develop their careers in existing areas and in those fields yet to be developed. Approximately a third of our graduates become practicing scientists, in academia, industry or in clinical settings. A similar number go into aligned areas, such as teaching, medicine, science journalism, patenting law or forensic science. The remainder proceed to a diversity of careers not directly related to science but for which their scientific education makes them eminently suitable and highly sought after.

The curriculum design outlined above will allow students to explore areas outside their scientific discipline and will place an emphasis on transferable skills like data handling, statistics, computation, writing, and presentation, which are valuable in any career. More fundamentally, it will foster in graduates the ability to think independently, communicate effectively, develop continuously and act responsibly, not just in their careers, but in their future lives as individuals and members of society.

### Vice President for Academic Affairs appointed at UL



# Internationalisation and Higher Education



**Associate Professor Marie Clarke**

Dean of Undergraduate Studies, University College Dublin

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**P**rof Marie Clarke defines internationalisation as “the process of integrating an international, inter-cultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education”. She looks at the ways in which internationalisation is promoted in different countries and at the critical component of internationalising the curriculum.

## Introduction

Internationalisation is recognised as a key component of higher education institutions (HEIs). As defined by Knight (2003), it is ‘the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education’. Internationalisation has the capacity to enhance the learning environment for all students, deliver an internationalised curriculum, and prepare students for future roles in a global economy and as global citizens (Warwick and Moogan, 2013). Yet the term is contested (Robson, 2015), as internationalisation is influenced by the wider global context and institutional rationales and practices.

The influences of changing political, economic, socio-cultural, and academic needs have ensured that internationalisation is promoted in various ways in different regions, countries, institutions, and programmes (Teichler, 2004). In Australia, a focus on graduate attributes (ensuring students leave university with a global perspective) has underpinned much recent work on internationalisation in higher education (Crossling, Edwards, and Schroder, 2008), alongside efforts to internationalise the curriculum (Leask, 2007). In Scandinavian countries, internationalisation has focused on student mobility (Tossavainen, 2009). Many of the recent internationalisation efforts on mainland Europe have concentrated on delivering academic programmes in English (Dobson and Hölttä, 2001). In the UK, internationalisation has tended to focus on student recruitment (Warwick and Moogan, 2013).

The future of internationalisation of higher education will be challenged by economic crises, and the need to justify international activities will become essential in an era of high student demand (Brandenburg et al., 2013). There are also ethical implications, requiring a balance in responding to local, regional, and national needs with international competitiveness in order to mitigate the inequalities between the developed and developing worlds (Naidoo, 2011).

Internationalisation in an institutional context can be challenging. In some cases, institutions adopt a symbolic approach to internationalisation and

Some institutions make little effort to internationalise the experience of domestic students.

fail to address the needs of international students. Some faculty view international students as problematic, and culture shock is a significant factor of the international student experience (Kelly and Moogan, 2012). The internationalisation of the curriculum, according to Leask (2013), is a critical component of any university's internationalisation strategy, and discipline communities are central to the process. She defines internationalisation of the curriculum as the incorporation of an international and intercultural dimension into the preparation, delivery, and outcomes of a programme of study (Leask, 2009). For Robson and Turner (2007), internationalisation calls for a range of pedagogies and explicit induction into the discourse communities of the institution. Jones and Killick (2013) suggest that the internationalisation of the curriculum needs to be linked to discussions about pedagogy and contexts that shape disciplines. There is still much to be achieved in this area (Marginson and Sawir, 2011).

Some institutions make little effort to internationalise the experience of domestic students (Hyland et al., 2008). The 'Internationalisation at Home' movement which developed in Europe (Nilsson, 1999) focuses on the local context, recognising that not all students can avail of opportunities to study abroad (Beelen, 2007). Where internationalisation is promoted in an environment of equity, equality, and diversity, the learning experience is enriched for students and faculty alike (Jones and Brown, 2007). However, government policies on internationalisation provide the context against which institutions formulate policy (Leask and Bridge, 2013), and this is the case in Ireland.

### Government policy and internationalisation in Ireland

There are more than 40 HEIs in Ireland; 24 are public HEIs, comprising seven universities, fourteen institutes of technology, and three specialist higher education colleges (two focused on teacher education, one on art and design) (HEA, 2017). In 2015/16, there were 222,618 student enrolments in public HEIs in Ireland (119,798 in universities, 90,150 in institutes of technology, and 12,670 in the specialist higher education colleges). In 2014/15, 8.8% of all full-time students (15,095) in HEA-funded higher education institutions were international students. Of these, 2,097 were undertaking advanced research (1,943 PhD students and 154 research master's students) and 2,989 were enrolled on taught postgraduate programmes (HEA, 2016). There were also 10,055 incoming exchange-students, 48% of whom (4,900) were Erasmus students; 2,501 outgoing exchange-students, 73% of whom (1,835) were Erasmus students; and 2,628 students registered on Irish programmes in campuses overseas (HEA, 2016).

Ireland has supported international student mobility through Erasmus for more than two decades, during which time 44,944 students from Ireland have pursued an Erasmus study or work placement in one of 30 countries (HEA, 2016). A range of scholarship schemes support international students to study in Ireland, including the government's international scholarships, the Brazilian government's Science Without Borders programme, the Saudi government's King Abdullah Scholarship Programme (KASP), the US Generation Study Abroad initiative, and the programmes of the Fulbright Commission of Ireland, the Deutscher

Ireland needs to be positioned as an attractive, knowledge-intensive economy underpinned by a research-rich but restructured higher education system.

Akademischer Austausch Dienst (DAAD), and Campus France, with whom the HEA has signed an agreement in the area of hospitality management and culinary science (HEA, 2016). International cooperation in teaching and administration has been supported through the Erasmus, Erasmus Mundus, and Tempus programmes, now amalgamated into Erasmus+.

There has been an explicit policy commitment to facilitate and support the development of Ireland as an international education centre for over 20 years (Clancy, 2015). Since 1987, Ireland has participated in the European Commission's Erasmus exchange programme, was a signatory to the Bologna Declaration in 1999, and set up a National Framework of Qualifications in 2003, establishing a key system-level infrastructure for supporting international student mobility (Mernagh, 2010). Internationalisation comes under the remit of not just the Department of Education and Skills (DES) but also the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and a wide range of government agencies. The publication of *Investing in Global Relationships: Ireland's International Education Strategy 2010–2015* set out the first coherent government strategy on internationalisation and was the first of its kind in Europe to set targets (Finn and Darmody, 2017). Most actions focused on increasing the recruitment of international students and were viewed as successful in exceeding set targets. In support of national objectives, the Irish Research Council (IRC) and Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) have focused on collaborative research relationships between researchers in Ireland and in partner countries (Yang, 2017).

The most recently published strategy document, *Irish Educated, Globally Connected: An International Education Strategy for Ireland 2016–2020*, is specifically linked to the *National Skills Strategy 2025*, the forthcoming *Foreign Languages Strategy*, the *Trade, Tourism and Investment Strategy*, and labour market strategies. A strong economic theme underlies this document. It refers to Ireland as an open economy, reliant on international trade to build sustainable long-term growth. It emphasises the economic value of the international sector, currently worth approximately €1.58bn a year, and has set an annual income target of €2.1bn. The strategy aims to increase the numbers of international students and researchers coming to Irish HEIs, increase outward mobility for Irish students and academics/researchers, and connect the benefits of internationalisation with enterprises in support of national economic ambitions. The *Action Plan for Education (2017)* published by the DES commits to introducing the International Education Mark and amend the current 12-months stay-back permission for international students to meet current skills and language shortages. HEIs are expected to embed internationalisation in strategic plans and across their three core roles –teaching and learning, research, and engagement.

### **Institutional responses to internationalisation: Context and provision**

The Irish higher education sector sustained severe cuts to resources during economic austerity. From 2008 to 2015, state grants to the sector declined by 38% (Clarke et al., 2015). The Employment Control Framework (ECF), introduced in 2008 and still in place, resulted in a decrease of core staff by 12%, a real-term reduction of 4,000 staff (Boland, 2015). Staff–student

HEIs are expected to embed internationalisation in strategic plans and across their core roles - teaching and learning, research, and engagement.

The presence of international cultural centres on Irish campuses makes an important contribution to the internationalisation of the higher education community at home.

ratios in HEA-funded institutions have deteriorated significantly in recent years, rising from 1:15.6 in 2008, which was in line with the current OECD average, to 1:19.8 in 2013/14 (HEA, 2017). In addition to cuts to resources, successive governments recommended reforms for the sector through the publication of reports (*The National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030: Report of the Strategy Group*) and a series of policy initiatives, including a performance framework where HEIs set targets and reflect progress towards national goals.

The need for structural change and accountability in the sector was a recurrent theme and promoted the view that Ireland needed to be repositioned as an attractive, knowledge-intensive economy underpinned by a research-rich but restructured higher education system (Harkin and Hazelkorn, 2014). In the national policy context of increasing domestic demand for higher education, which is expected to rise year-on-year until 2027, and of national targets for widening participation, there are a number of demands on the system. The future funding of the sector is currently under review. The DES (2017) has indicated that the funding approach will be underpinned by core principles, including the need for it to be metric and outcome-based and reflective of national education policy. A key consideration of the review will be the development of a funding model to ensure that HEIs are agile and responsive in meeting evolving skills needs (DES, 2017). Many HEIs have pointed to the challenges they face, due to lack of resources, with increasing student numbers and the many demands of meeting national objectives. Under the Higher Education System Performance Framework 2014–2016, HEIs were expected to be globally competitive and internationally oriented so the country would become recognised as a world-class centre of international education (HEA, 2013).

Despite the very difficult circumstances in which Irish HEIs have operated in a period of prolonged cuts to resources, they have been very successful in their internationalisation efforts. Recruiting international students was perceived as an important element of revenue generation in this context. Internationalisation is a key component of institutional mission statements. International offices are now well established on higher education campuses. The Royal College of Surgeons has a strong international presence, with a university in Bahrain, two medical schools in Malaysia (at Perdana University and, jointly with UCD, at Penang Medical College), and an institute in Dubai (HEA, 2016). Other institutions have also developed important global relationships, establishing campuses and international officers overseas and offering programmes in partnership with institutions and providers abroad. In 2014/15, 2,628 students were registered on Irish programmes in campuses overseas (HEA, 2016). The presence of international cultural centres on Irish campuses, such as the *UCD Confucius Institute for Ireland* and DCU's *Ireland India Institute*, makes an important contribution to the internationalisation of the Irish higher education community at home (HEA, 2016).

From 2000/01 to 2012/13, the number of international students attending universities increased from 4,184 to 10,981 (Finn and Darmody, 2017). The Irish higher education sector has performed very well in increasing the recruitment of international students from a diverse range of countries,

In 2011-12, 10% of NFQ level 8 graduates studied or undertook a placement abroad, a mobility rate in line with the European average.

It is recognised that the internationalisation of curricula will enhance the skills base of Irish graduates through foreign language acquisition, internships, and personal development.

such as India, Brazil, the US, Saudi Arabia, and China – the British Council noted Ireland as one of the top ten partner countries for co-operative education institutions in China (HEA, 2016). In terms of outward mobility, the sector also enjoyed success. In 2011/12, 10% of NFQ level 8 graduates studied or undertook a placement abroad, a mobility rate in line with the European average (HEA, 2016).

Irish HEIs have been successful in European Commission-funded international, collaborative research consortia through the Framework Programmes, significantly enhancing research capacity. This is complemented by national schemes such as the IRC's Ulysses Research Programme, which supports the exchange of Irish and French early-stage researchers, and SFI's US-Ireland Research and Development Partnership Programme (HEA, 2016). The development of joint degree programmes by Irish and international HEIs is another indicator of success in internationalisation (McMahon, 2014). Irish HEIs have contributed to capacity-building in countries with less highly developed higher education systems, through the Programme of Strategic Cooperation between Irish Aid and Higher Education and Research Institutes, and through initiatives previously funded through the Tempus programme (HEA, 2016). Despite real successes in internationalisation, though, a number of issues need to be addressed at both structural and institutional levels.

### Areas for consideration in internationalisation

While HEIs have been very successful in student recruitment, some structural issues impact on internationalisation. These include a shortage of affordable accommodation, particularly in Dublin (HEA, 2015), and the need to establish efficient systems for student visas, student immigration, and student registration at the Garda National Immigration Bureau. More government investment in scholarships is also required. Outward mobility is a significant challenge for institutions, and this is reflected in the operation of the Erasmus programme.

Erasmus, since its inception, has been very successful in Ireland. The programme has diversified the student body and contributed to the economy. HEIs absorb the cost of incoming Erasmus students, which is not fully off-set by the savings made from out-going Erasmus students, who are fewer in number (HEA, 2016). This needs to be addressed. Outward mobility is a particular challenge for disadvantaged students, due to lack of finance and a reluctance to forgo part-time employment opportunities (HEA, 2015). The European Social Fund should be used to provide structured supports for these students to avail of international educational experiences.

Recruitment of full-degree students and short-stay credit-mobility students presents distinct challenges for HEIs. Short-stay credit-mobility students are supported through programmes such as Erasmus+, Science without Borders, and the Junior Year Abroad scheme (HEA, 2016). It is important that these students are encouraged to avail of educational opportunities in Ireland. This will require additional supports for HEIs as they continue to meet the needs of increasing numbers of domestic students.



The HEA and institutions recognise that internationalisation goes beyond recruitment.

To successfully internationalise the curriculum and develop inter-cultural learning, academic staff must possess the necessary expertise. This requires investment in professional development. The National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning, with the appropriate allocation of resources, can play an important role in supporting this activity. It is recognised that the internationalisation of curricula will enhance the skills base of Irish graduates through foreign language acquisition, internships, and personal development. This requires HEIs to engage in regular curricular review at programme and institutional levels, to ensure all students will benefit from internationalisation experiences at home and abroad.

Irish HEIs have made a significant contribution to capacity-building in other countries. The eligibility of a range of non-EU partner countries (across the Western Balkans, Eastern Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and Russia) to participate in a limited number of actions under Erasmus+ creates new opportunities for Irish HEIs to continue this work. Through participation in the Scholars at Risk Network, HEIs across the island of Ireland have provided placements for refugee scholars fleeing war and persecution (HEA, 2016). The Programme of Strategic Cooperation between Irish Aid and Higher Education and Research Institutes requires continued and sustained investment so that Irish HEIs can continue to build capacity with developing countries.

## Conclusion

The internationalisation of higher education comprises many components and is influenced by the wider global context and institutional rationales and practices. Ireland is well placed to attract international students, and Irish HEIs have been very successful in doing so, despite austerity. The HEA and institutions recognise that internationalisation goes beyond student recruitment. As Warwick and Moogan (2013) suggest, internationalisation is an ongoing process; it includes teaching and learning, research collaborations, curriculum development, student experience, and faculty and staff development. Internationalisation in higher education requires more investment and support from government, to ensure that Irish higher education institutions can continue to deliver and enhance the educational experience of all students.

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# The Educational Turbulence from Brexit

## 'A Europe of Education'



**Alun Jones**

Professor of  
Geography, UCD



**Liam Cleere**

Senior Manager -  
Research Reporting  
and Analytics, UCD

Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty was triggered by the UK government on 29 March 2017, with unpredictable consequences for the higher education sectors in the UK and Ireland, north and south. Political negotiations over Brexit and their reporting have emphasised the 'hard' politics of trade, investment, and business consequences for the UK economy, whilst apparent 'softer' issues such as education have seemingly merited less attention. Yet education has been at the heart of European integration since the 1960s, through the sterling efforts of Altiero Spinelli, a founding father of the European project. For Spinelli, a 'Europe of Education' required student and teacher mobility, research cooperation, and knowledge dissemination linking European science and culture and underpinned by a set of core beliefs and values.

**E**ducation has been at the heart of European integration since the 1960s, and to date the UK has played a key role in delivering a 'Europe of Education'. Given our proximity and shared history and language, it is not surprising that Ireland enjoys close educational ties and strong collaborative research links with the UK. In this article, the authors examine the possible consequences for the Republic's universities, research networks, and researcher migration arising from Brexit.

The UK has to date played a key role in delivering a 'Europe of Education'. Its universities rank among the world's finest. According to the latest QS rankings, four British universities are in the world's top 10, and 13 are in the top 100. No European country can match this. A 'Europe of Education' has been crucial to the success of British universities. This relationship works both ways, as the UK has made a significant and long-standing contribution to the EU's higher education and research sector. There are currently 125,000 EU students in the UK, of whom approximately 9% are from Ireland. Currently 17% of all UK academic staff are from the EU, while at the most prestigious UK universities this figure exceeds 20%. In Irish higher education institutions (HEIs), around 7% of academic staff are British, making them the largest nationality group after Irish; this figure strongly indicates the close cultural and professional ties between Ireland and the UK. Half of the European Research Council's (ERC) mid-career grants in the UK are held by EU researchers, and over 60% of the UK's internationally co-authored papers are with EU partners.

In research terms, the UK has been a net beneficiary from EU funding, collaboration, and supports. In Framework Programme 7 (2007–2013), the UK contributed nearly €5.4 billion to EU research projects but received nearly €8.8 billion back in the same period. Over the last decade, the UK research base's

dependence on funding from EU sources has increased significantly. The headline figure is now approximately €1 billion a year of EU money spent on research and development in the UK. This equated to about 15.5% of UK higher education's research income in 2015. Crucially, the UK heads the EU table for research grant allocations from European research programmes and frameworks, including the latest Horizon 2020 scheme.

Given our proximity and shared history and language, it is not surprising that the UK and Ireland enjoy close educational ties and strong collaborative research links. But what are the possible consequences for the Republic's universities, research networks, and researcher migration arising from Brexit? What are the implications for student mobility, particularly in the Erasmus programme of exchange, between the Republic and the UK? And what might be the impact of changes in fee status for Irish students wishing to study in the UK after Brexit, not least the additional pressures on the Irish higher education sector's capacity to absorb the non-migrators?

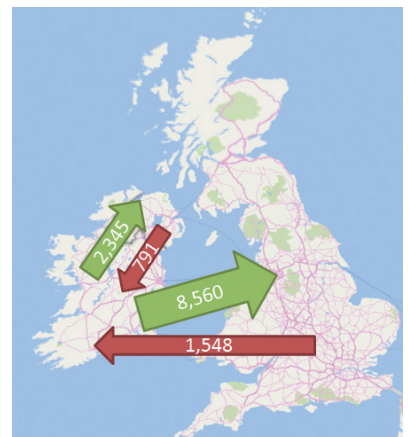
As things stand, students, academics, and HEIs in Ireland will find it difficult to avoid the educational turbulence from Brexit. Around 11,000 Irish students are studying in UK HEIs; this is approximately 9% of all EU students enrolled in the UK. Under the current EU residential rules, all EU students studying in the UK must be charged the same fees as British students. Under a 'hard Brexit' with no special arrangement between the UK and Ireland in place, Irish students would be faced with three options:

1. Pay the full international student fees to study at a British university (£20,000–£30,000 a year, on average).
2. Apply to a different EU country, notwithstanding language differences and challenges.
3. Stay in Ireland and search for places in the Republic's universities through the CAO entry route.

Should most Irish students choose to apply through the CAO, this would put more pressure on the Irish undergraduate system. In this scenario, HEIs in the Republic would have to provide 6% more student places – worsening the student–staff ratios in the system, which are already poor by international standards.

Simultaneously, British students hoping to study in Ireland would be subjected to non-EU fee rates. These range at present from €10,000 to €30,000, depending on institution and course. In this scenario, around 800 Northern Irish students and 1,500 students from mainland UK who are currently studying in Ireland would be affected.

**Figure 1: Student flows between Ireland and the UK. Sources: 2015 figures from [www.hesa.ac.uk](http://www.hesa.ac.uk) and [www.heai.ie](http://www.heai.ie) (not including Erasmus)**



The flagship Erasmus programme for student mobility is also likely to be put into some turmoil by Brexit. The UK is a popular destination for Erasmus students, taking more than 27,000 EU students a year. While the UK is currently the fourth most popular destination for Erasmus students, after Spain, Germany, and France, these countries send out almost as many students as they receive through Erasmus. By contrast, the UK receives almost twice as many students as it sends to other EU countries (Figure 2).

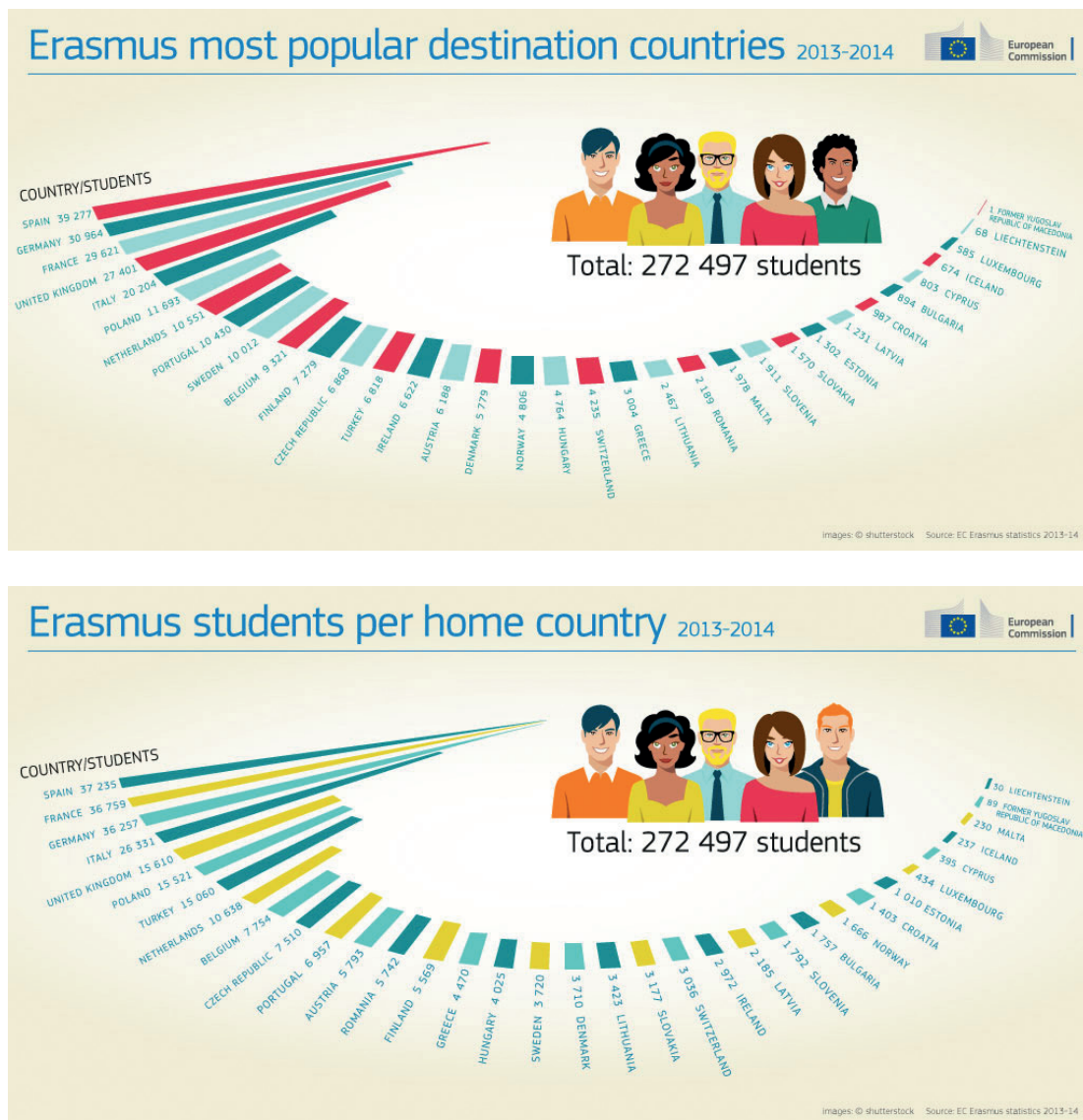
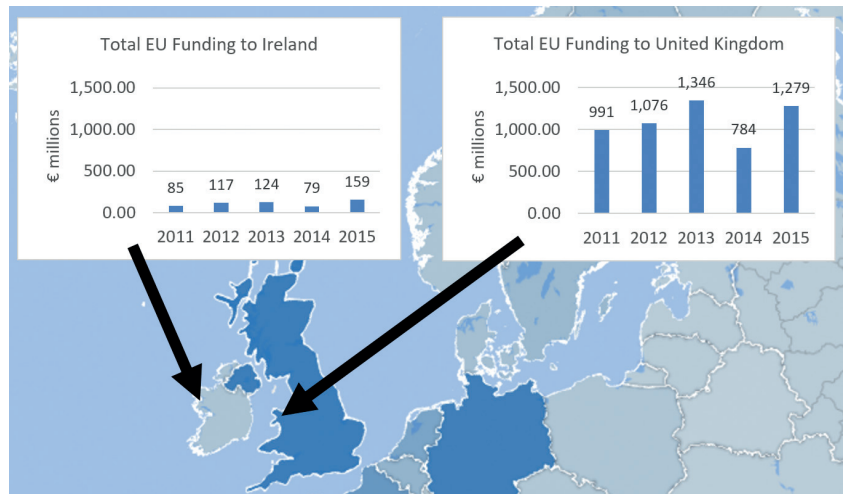


Figure 2: Erasmus students' destination and home countries. Source: [http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/about\\_en](http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/about_en)

This asymmetry is a further indicator of the substantial role UK HEIs play in the EU marketplace for higher education. Similarly, Ireland receives double the number of Erasmus students as it sends out, with many, according to recent EU surveys, citing the desire to study in a natively English-speaking country as the reason. There are pressing issues for Ireland from Brexit if, as anticipated, the UK chooses not to participate in the Erasmus programme after 2019. How might Irish HEIs cope with the diversion of Erasmus students away from the UK? How might this Erasmus diversion compound the pressures on the Irish higher education system?

Decoupling the UK from a highly interconnected European higher education system presents profound challenges. This can be observed most readily in the research domain, especially through research collaboration. For many reasons, serious consequences for European research are envisaged as a result of Brexit. At a member state scale, the EU-funded research landscape is dominated by six countries: the UK, Germany, France, Spain, Italy, and the Netherlands. Ireland's annual EU research funding is about 10% of our nearest neighbour's, the UK (see Figure 3).



**Figure 3: Competitive research funding won from the EU from 2011 to 2015.** Source: <http://cordis.europa.eu/>

Significantly, in the five-year period from 2011 to 2015, the UK received the most research funding from the EU of any country, including Germany. In Europe, Ireland was in 17th place, behind states such as Greece, Austria, and Denmark in the EU, and Switzerland, Norway, and Israel outside the EU (states that bought in to EU research funding programmes with significant conditions attached) (see Figure 4).



Rank	Country	Total EU Research Funding 2011-2015 (€ millions)
1	United Kingdom	5,476.18
2	Germany	5,442.23
3	France	3,625.04
4	Spain	3,122.54
5	Italy	2,926.34
6	Netherlands	2,618.20
7	Belgium	1,558.80
8	<b>Switzerland</b>	<b>1,385.69</b>
9	Sweden	1,263.96
10	Austria	952.17
11	Denmark	864.4
12	Greece	815.57
13	<b>Israel</b>	<b>683.65</b>
14	Finland	683.21
15	Portugal	600.07
16	<b>Norway</b>	<b>581.56</b>
17	Ireland	564.47
18	Poland	465.15
19	Hungary	312.84
20	Czech Republic	306.88

**Figure 4: Top 20 EU research funding per country. Source: <http://cordis.europa.eu/>**

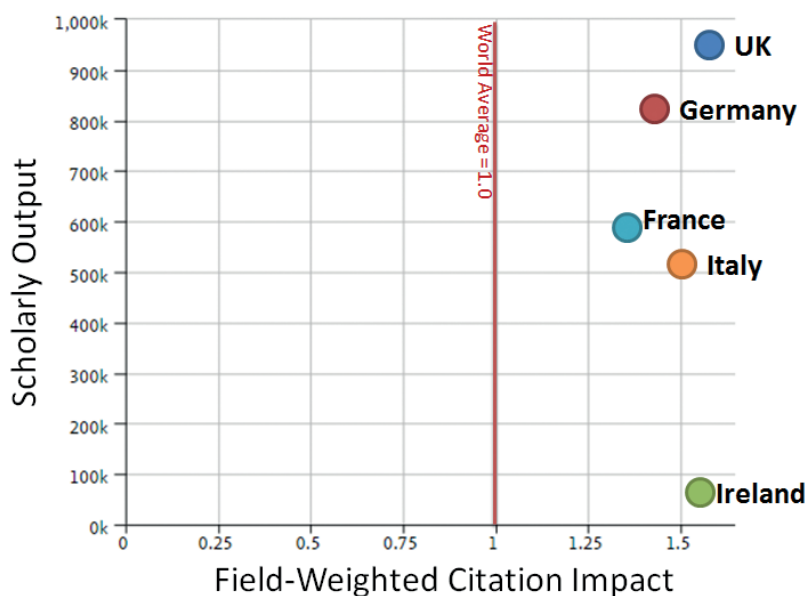
It is interesting that while non-EU countries such as Switzerland and Norway appear in the top 20 of EU-funded countries, the percentage of EU projects co-ordinated there, particularly in the case of Switzerland, is relatively low, at 16.5%. The top-funded EU countries typically have co-ordination rates of more than 30%. The UK has the highest percentage of project co-ordination in the top 20 grouping, at 47.5% (see Figure 5).

Ranking	Country	No. of projects in 2015 only	% Co-ordinated	% Sole Partner	% Participant
1	UK	1,795	47.50%	34.40%	18.10%
2	Germany	1,530	34.60%	17.10%	48.40%
3	Spain	1,229	45.30%	27.70%	27.00%
4	France	1,158	34.50%	20.40%	45.10%
5	Italy	1,135	36.70%	18.70%	44.70%
6	Netherlands	896	34.60%	17.70%	47.70%
7	Belgium	620	24.00%	11.80%	64.20%
8	Sweden	490	26.50%	16.70%	56.70%

9	Austria	438	26.50%	12.80%	60.70%
10	Greece	404	22.00%	4.50%	73.50%
11	Denmark	367	37.60%	27.50%	34.90%
12	Switzerland	345	16.50%	11.60%	71.90%
13	Portugal	335	23.30%	10.40%	66.30%
14	Finland	331	29.00%	16.30%	54.70%
15	Ireland	277	35.70%	20.20%	44.00%
16	Poland	254	17.70%	9.40%	72.80%
17	Norway	238	28.20%	12.20%	59.70%
18	Israel	233	41.20%	34.30%	24.50%
19	Czech Republic	196	11.20%	7.10%	81.60%
20	Hungary	184	21.70%	15.20%	63.00%

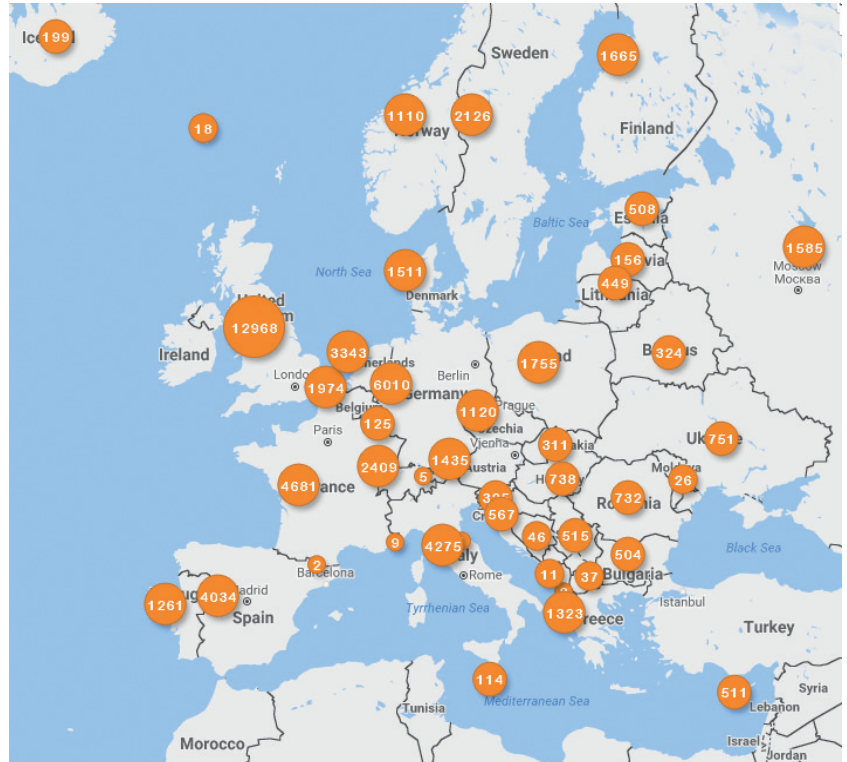
**Figure 5: Numbers of projects per country in 2015.** Source: <http://cordis.europa.eu/>

The significance of the UK in European research terms is also apparent from data on the quantity of research output and the scale of its citation impact in Europe. Again, the primacy of the UK in a ‘Europe of Education’ is clear (see Figure 6).



**Figure 6: Scholarly output vs field-weighted citation impact per country.** Source: Elsevier SciVal 2012 to 2016

Research collaborations between Ireland and the UK are particularly strong. According to Elsevier SciVal data, 12,968 papers were co-authored between academics from the two countries between 2012 and 2016. This represents 20% of Ireland's total output of 66,251 papers in the period. The UK is our number one collaborator on research papers, and the volume of this collaboration is more than we have with Germany and France combined, as illustrated in Figure 7.



**Figure 7: Ireland's collaboration on academic papers 2012-2016 per country. Source: Elsevier SciVal**

Brexit is also likely to seriously disrupt patterns of research collaboration across the EU. Here there will be particular problems for Irish HEIs. UK and Irish researchers collaborate extensively, especially under EU programmes. There are currently over 900 collaborative links between Irish and UK researchers under the Horizon 2020 programme. UK research partners are involved in 13.4% of all projects that include Irish partners in Horizon 2020, making the UK Ireland's closest and strongest research partner country in the EU.

Brexit therefore poses very real risks to Ireland's position in the 'Europe of Education'. Much depends on the precise terms of Brexit and how the UK's future relationship to European integration is conceived. The UK research community understandably does not want to lose access to EU research funding, which is pivotal to its research reputation; the political stakes are thus high in Brexit negotiations over education and research. Naturally there are also concerns among the Irish research community,

given that the UK is our number one collaborator on research grants and papers. For example, if the UK is unable to negotiate some form of associate membership of H2020 and other EU research programmes, then Irish researchers will have to seek new partnerships elsewhere across the EU after Brexit. The challenges and costs could be high.

Sleepwalking into Brexit is not an option. The educational fallout from Brexit is already under way. The prospect of participative ineligibility of UK researchers in EU research framework programmes after 2019 is, according to anecdotal evidence, already prompting EU researchers to exclude UK-based research groups from consortia inclusion in H2020 applications due to uncertainties about their status after Brexit.

Strong educational leadership is needed in this period of uncertainty if Ireland is to capitalise on any opportunities emerging from Brexit by (re-) positioning itself in the European education market. Here there are hard choices to be made at all levels of the higher education and research system. Many institutions in the UK and across Europe are already planning for Brexit. Ireland too must mobilise its resources with a minimum of delay to take advantage of the strategic opportunities presented by Brexit – to explore innovative ways to sustain its research partnerships in the UK and at the same time pursue a growth strategy in Europe.

#### Launch of University for All at UCD

At the launch of 'University for All' in the UCD Access and Lifelong Learning Centre on 30 Nov 2017 (l-r) Minister of State for Higher Education Mary Mitchell O' Connor, UCD Registrar Professor Mark Rogers and Director of Access and Lifelong learning Dr Anna Kelly.



# New Impetus for Language Learning in Ireland

## Why Language Learning is valued by Universities



**Dr Attracta Halpin**

Registrar, National University of Ireland

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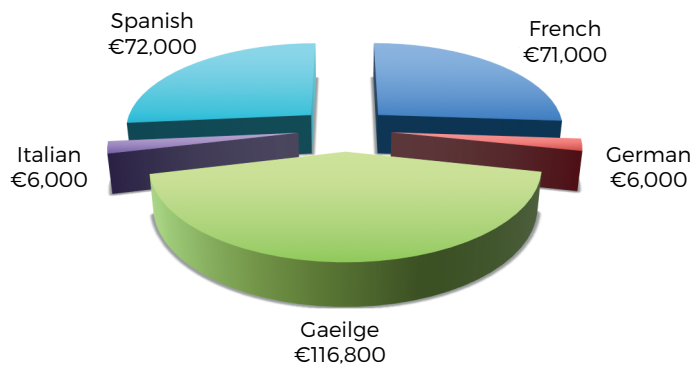
**L**anguage learning in Ireland has received fresh impetus through the launch of a range of initiatives in April 2017, as part of Government's ten-year Action Plan for Education. In this article, Dr Attracta Halpin discusses the many reasons why language learning is valued by universities and the importance of universities catering within their overall educational strategies for the broad spectrum of student needs in the area of languages.

The languages of classical antiquity were at the heart of the medieval universities and continued to be primary areas of scholarship until the 19th century. Since then the focus in higher education has broadened, to include a range of modern languages and their associated literatures and cultures. Language learning is valued by universities for its intrinsic intellectual and educational value; as a gateway to cultures other than our own; as a means of deepening intercultural understanding; and ultimately of heightening our awareness of what it means to be human. Universities today also recognise the practical economic benefits of language skills as a means of communication. In a globalised world, with increased travel, trade, services and communications across language borders, even allowing for the emergence of English as a global language, proficiency in a language or languages other than English has been seen to have grown significantly in importance.

The languages of Europe are important in the context of our EU membership, while growing markets particularly in Asia strengthen the claims of other languages, such as Chinese, for attention on our educational system. This new government impetus for the study of modern languages throughout our education system is therefore timely and appropriate. Particularly in higher education, it will provide encouragement for universities to review and refine their approaches to language provision. A broad spectrum of needs has been identified among university students ranging from those who wish to study languages and literature from bachelor's degree up to the highest levels of scholarly research, and who traditionally have been the major concern of language schools and departments to those across the range of disciplines who are interested in, and would benefit from, acquiring varying levels of language proficiency. The universities have a major role to play in catering for these varying needs in the context of their overall educational strategies.

NUI has a long and proud history of valuing the study of languages and of supporting and rewarding language learning and language-related scholarship and research. Awards from undergraduate to

post-doctoral level are made across the range of languages studied in the NUI universities, where language study has always featured prominently. These awards are funded through bequests from private donors, with additional funding coming from NUI's own resources. NUI is also fortunate to enjoy the support and collaboration of the French, and more recently Spanish, Embassies in rewarding proficiency in those languages. In the five-year period from 2012–2017, over 150 students from first year to post-doctoral level in the NUI universities will have benefited from awards in the form of travelling studentships, fellowships, scholarships, prizes and medals. At the end of 2017, NUI awards relating to languages will have a total value nearing €272,000. These awards have focused on the languages of Europe, including Irish. In preparing its next strategic plan, NUI will consider their extension to the other languages now taught in the constituent universities.



**Figure 1: NUI language and related awards 2012-2017 and monetary values. Source: NUI Statistics**

NUI will accept any language studied at Leaving Certificate or equivalent level as meeting 'third language' requirement.

NUI's constituent universities – UCD, NUI Galway, UCC and Maynooth University – provide Irish society with the majority of its language graduates and accordingly of teachers of languages at second level. In 2016, almost two thirds of those graduating in languages across all Universities, Colleges and Institutes of Technology came from NUI institutions: 290 from a total of 454.<sup>1</sup> The numbers graduating in languages are comparable with those graduating in highly popular subjects such as Psychology, Management & Administration and Biology, indicating continuing strong interest among third-level students in studying languages.

Reflecting the value placed by NUI on languages, the University has always included language requirements for matriculation, being alone in requiring Irish. This has provided a major incentive for language learning at second level. As an aside, it may be noted that NUI will accept any language studied at Leaving Certificate or equivalent level as meeting its 'third language' requirement. Increasingly the need for a language for matriculation has

<sup>1</sup> Source: HEA Statistics [www.hea.ie/statistics](http://www.hea.ie/statistics). The ISCED (International Standard Classification for Education) field of study used is 0231: Language Acquisition. This definition includes graduates of language degrees only, including classical languages. It does not include graduates of joint degrees where a language is a component subject or teaching awards with subject specialisation in languages.



been challenged in the context of widening participation and greater diversity in the student body and also with growing national emphasis on mathematical and scientific knowledge and competence. Accordingly, in recent years, acting on the recommendations of the Academic Councils of the constituent universities, NUI has removed the requirement for a third language for entry to degrees in science, engineering and a number of other specified areas.

While a third language is no longer a general matriculation requirement, this should not be taken as an indication of a lessening of commitment to the study of languages at different levels. The NUI universities have broadened the range of languages available and are increasing their efforts to provide ‘elective’ opportunities for students to study a language and to have to access a range of levels and credit volumes of language learning, irrespective of their chosen degree subjects. This will make a major contribution to government’s plan to support 20% of the entire Higher Education cohort to study language as part of their course.<sup>2</sup> It gives effect to the 2011 Royal Irish Academy (RIA) recommendation that institutions should be “*encouraged to exploit the capacity for, and to build space into programmes for students to pursue language subjects which, while possibly outside their specialist fields, may well be of interest due to their educational, social, personal and economic value*”.<sup>3</sup> It is also consistent with the view expressed by the Irish Business and Employer Confederation (IBEC) during the 2014 consultation on foreign languages in education that “*there is a clear need for languages in business, but the requirement may not always be for a very high level of proficiency*.”<sup>4</sup>

A quarter of all employers surveyed indicated that they had a specific requirement for foreign language proficiency skills in their organisation.

The National Employers Survey in 2015<sup>5</sup> found that approximately a quarter (25%) of all employers surveyed indicated that they had a specific requirement for foreign language proficiency skills in their organisation, noting that 60% of this cohort required at least full professional proficiency in their graduate recruits. Enabling graduates to achieve this level of proficiency is resource intensive, requiring the expertise of qualified academic lecturers, language assistants and indeed facilities and technological support. Possibilities of extended periods abroad through Erasmus+ are also a major support.

In the context of Brexit, the global rise of “non-Western powers”, and the strength of Ireland’s immigrant communities<sup>6</sup>, the Irish government is now challenging the apparently widely-held belief that “English is enough”. Similarly, there is evidence of growing concern in Britain at the damaging consequences of Brexit for the language skills of its citizens.<sup>7</sup> However, sustaining a public discourse in Ireland about the wide benefits

2 <https://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Press-Releases/2017-Press-Releases/PR17-04-19.html>

3 Royal Irish Academy “National Languages Strategy”, 2011: 12.

4 IBEC “Submission on a foreign languages in education strategy for Ireland”, 2014: 8. See: [https://www.ibec.ie/IBEC/DFB.nsf/vPages/Education\\_and\\_training~Policy\\_positions~foreign-languages-in-education-04-12-2014/\\$file/Foreign%20Languages%20Strategy\\_ibec%20submission.pdf](https://www.ibec.ie/IBEC/DFB.nsf/vPages/Education_and_training~Policy_positions~foreign-languages-in-education-04-12-2014/$file/Foreign%20Languages%20Strategy_ibec%20submission.pdf)

5 See page 10 of the Survey, accessible at: <http://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2017/06/National-Employer-Survey.pdf>

6 See: <https://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Press-Releases/2017-Press-Releases/PR17-04-19.html>

7 See <https://www.britishcouncil.org/education/schools/support-for-languages/thought-leadership/appg/news/brexit-languages> accessed 22 September 2017

The integration of the Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative into the mainstream would mark a significant step forward.

Since its foundation in 1908, the NUI has sought to encourage, recognise, and promote scholarship in the field of language learning.

of language learning is challenging. While Ireland is a signatory to the EU Council's 2002 objective for proficiency in "*mother tongue + 2*" (2002 Barcelona EU Council:19), in a 2012 Eurobarometer survey on Languages in Europe, Ireland (with Denmark) ranked lowest at 51% of respondents<sup>8</sup> compared with the 72% of Europeans who supported the idea of "learning more than one language other than their mother tongue". Whether a university student in Ireland considers his or her mother tongue to be Irish, English, or in the case of immigrants to Ireland, their heritage language, this survey finding illustrates the efforts that will be required across the education sector, with government and other agencies, to increase public enthusiasm for language learning and appreciation of its benefits.

In this context, NUI strongly supports the government's commitment that all Irish Junior cycle students will study a foreign language by 2021. While a high proportion of post-primary students currently study a third language, predominantly French, this new government commitment marks a significant public policy shift towards the necessity – as opposed to the desirability – of plurilinguistic competence among a higher proportion of the population than at present for the future of Irish economy and society. The integration of the Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative (MLPSI) into the mainstream curriculum would mark a further, significant step forward.

Since its foundation in 1908, the NUI has sought to encourage, recognise, and promote scholarship in the field of language learning. Sustaining this tradition is a continuing belief in the intellectual, cultural, social and economic benefits gained from the acquisition of languages other than the mother tongue. In contemporary conditions, the constituent universities of the National University of Ireland are adopting broader approaches to language learning and encouraging language acquisition at different levels of language proficiency. At the same time, they are committed to supporting scholarship and research in languages and literature up to the highest level.

We welcome the renewed focus on foreign languages in second- and third-level education, emerging from government policy and student motivation and interest. We look forward to further developing our contribution and collaborating with interested parties, in a renewed national and European policy environment for languages over the coming years.

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8 See: Special Eurobarometer 386 "Europeans and their languages" (June 2012); accessible at: [http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/archives/ebs/ebs\\_386\\_sum\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/archives/ebs/ebs_386_sum_en.pdf)

# Demographic Trends

## Possible Solutions to Urgent Higher Education Access Challenges



**Dr Fiona O'Riordan**

Training and  
Education Faculty,  
Griffith College Dublin



**Professor Diarmuid  
Hegarty**

Chairperson of HECA

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**I**n response to the conclusion in the Cassells Report that the current Higher Education system is unsustainable, this year's HECA conference focused on ways in which the sector might change in order to meet the urgent challenge of vastly increasing numbers without compromising the quality of the learning experience for students.

This year, the Higher Education Colleges Association (HECA) organised its annual conference to address the challenge of provision for the projected increase in students accessing Higher Education over the next 10 years. The conference title was 'Demographic Trends: The Urgent Agenda of Higher Education Access'.

### Background

By way of context, HECA was established in 1991 to represent the independent third level sector on a variety of HE topics. HECA proactively engages with higher education (HE) stakeholders such as Higher Education Authority (HEA), Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), the Department of Education and Skills (DES), and the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in HE nationally, as well as seeking to deliver on the objectives of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) internationally.

The establishment of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) impacted on the HE sector in many different ways including a call for all EHEA members to develop a national action plan for wider access and lifelong learning. In 2004 the HEA produced an ambitious national plan setting out targets and goals to be reached in order to improve HE participation. Particular attention was given to Ireland's poor performance with regard to access for mature students and students with disabilities.

Ireland experienced similar difficulties to other EU countries in terms of achieving equity of access in HE. Today, the HEA remains firmly committed to the ongoing agenda of promoting wider and equitable access to HE. This commitment, combined with a peak of births in Ireland in the 1980s, has led to a situation where HE demand exceeds current provision. This is dubbed the 'Cassells Bulge' by this co-author (Diarmuid Hegarty) and this was the term I used in my opening address at the 2017 HECA conference.

### Cassells Report

The Cassells Report, officially titled 'Investing in National Ambition', calls for additional annual core funding of €600 million by 2021, and €1 billion by 2030, to meet the increased demographic demand for

The HECA 2017 Annual Conference offered an opportunity to discuss and explore possible solutions on how to practically address the access challenges identified in Cassells report.

Beausang recognized the need to find a robust, sustainable, equitable and predictable long-term funding model that was cognisant of finite resources.

HE. In addition, there is a requirement for €5.5 billion in capital funding and €100 million to underpin an effective system of student financial aid (2016, p.7). Furthermore, the Report's Authors state that the sector cannot continue in the current status quo mode because the system will continue to deteriorate. In an interview with the College Tribune in July 2016, Minister Bruton said he believed the solution could be found through a political system built on consensus and he called for a debate to advance possible solutions.

### Possible Solutions

On the basis that the current system is unsustainable, as acknowledged in the Cassells Report, the question is how is the sector to change in order to meet the urgent agenda of HE access without compromising the quality of experience for learners. The HECA 2017 Annual Conference offered an opportunity to discuss and explore possible solutions on how to practically address the access challenges identified in Cassells report. Peter Cassells was keynote speaker on the day and he set the context for subsequent contributions. He did so by presenting the volume and timing in which the additional demand for third level places will present over the period 2018 to 2028. In addition he provided a summary of conclusions arrived at by the Expert Group as to ways in which the excess demand could be met. He stressed that a quality HE experience for learners offers the potential to generate '...positive economic, social and cultural outcomes' through developing informed and engaged citizens.

William Beausang, Head of Central Expenditure Policy Division in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, called for new and innovative models and mechanisms for meeting the economy's HE and FE needs. He drew attention to the juxtaposition of increased student numbers from 150,000 to 190,000, and reduced staff numbers by 15%, resulting in increased student to staff ratio from 16.1 to 20.1 over the last ten years. This is of concern, given the views of the Expert Group in the Cassells report regarding the need for Ireland to provide a quality HE experience in order to attend to the collective and individual good of Irish citizens. Beausang recognized the need to find a robust, sustainable, equitable and predictable long-term funding model that was cognisant of finite resources.

Conference speakers focused on ways of expanding full-time provision other than through the traditional full-time offerings, and in particular on new and innovative learning approaches. The following alternative learning contexts were among those envisaged:–

- » Online learning
- » Blended learning
- » Part-time provision
- » Geographically distributed provision
- » Apprenticeships and
- » Progression Pathways from Further Education

Conference speakers focused on ways of expanding full-time provision other than through the traditional full-time offerings and, in particular, on new and innovative learning approaches.

## Scalability

Brian Mulligan from the Centre for Online Learning in IT Sligo shared some thought-provoking comments and ideas on possible efficiencies in the national HE spend, in particular the ability for technology to address capacity and costs. He was concerned that given the limited resources available to government the totality of the problem could not be addressed by simply throwing substantial additional funds into full-time provision. He urged the audience, and policy makers, to consider the notion that excellent learning does not necessarily have to be in a college setting; he proposed scalability through elearning allowing investment in producing learning resources and tools. Mulligan contends that scalability should not be something HE providers are fearful of and claims it is a myth that scale can be damaging. In his experience, technology (i.e. online learning) can and does reduce costs through scalability. Furthermore, he suggested that students are actually 'blending' themselves through their use of online resources, such as YouTube, Wolfram Alpha and Wikipedia, to learn.

## Apprenticeship

Mulligan also considered apprenticeship and work based learning models. Tony Donohoe of IBEC picked up this theme by exploring the role apprenticeship programmes can have as part of the solution, although he did highlight some challenges associated with this model that must be overcome first. These include bureaucratic processes, institutional structures, outdated legislation, education silos and traditional views of the level of educational attainment associated in the public mind with apprenticeships. Donohoe pointed out that the number of apprenticeship places actually created to date was well short of expectations and targets set by the Department of Education and Skills. This underlined the urgency of addressing these challenges in order to advance this part of the mix.

## Overcoming Barriers

Dr Justin Rami, DCU Institute of Education, presented findings from collaborative research conducted to identify barriers of access and progression from FET colleges to HE institutions. Rami stated that PLC programmes are designed specifically to include the preparation of learners for progression to HE. However, the research found that barriers exist for PLC learners progressing. To help overcome barriers, recommendations from this research include standardization of requirements sought by HE institutions, simplification and communication of pathways from FET to HE in order to build capacity between both sectors. In particular, the research findings call for more equitable and transparent pathways to be identified and communicated to the different socio-demographic groups seeking to access this model of HE.

## 24,000 Additional Places

The final presentation at this session was by Dermot Douglas who shared research undertaken by the independent sector showing how they could provide an additional 24,000 places over the next ten years. These 24,000 places are in addition to the current provision of approximately 15,000. Douglas proposed that this additional provision can be undertaken by the independent sector in a cost-effective way using multiple modes of delivery including traditional full and part-time, blended and online, off



Online learning can and does reduce costs through scalability - Brian Mulligan

peak and distributed, and apprenticeship models. It should be stressed that these additional places would be neither required nor provided in the immediate future but rather on a progressive basis over the 10-year horizon period from 2018 to 2028.

### Inhibitors

Douglas shared insight into significant inhibitors, which included new QQI course validation process which was seen to require some degree of rationalisation, streamlining and speedier implementation; lack of availability of grants to students in the independent sector; and a dearth of availability of rental space in the current market. He continued by recommending enablers, one of which is to seek better alignment of the requirement of QQI and Professional Bodies to minimise duplication of effort.

To facilitate quality enhancement of capacity in private providers, a HECA-commissioned teaching and learning resource was launched at the conference.

### Conclusion

It is obvious that this conversation between stakeholders needs to continue. It is also clear that if HE stakeholders wait too long to actively implement solutions, the weight of the consequent burden may become unsustainable.



Pictured (l-r) at University College Dublin are three of the twelve TEDxUCD 2017 speakers;

Colin Keogh, award-winning engineer, consultant, lecturer and innovator, currently completing a PhD in the UCD School of Mechanical and Materials Engineering. His TEDxUCD 2017 talk is titled 'Helping people help themselves: technology enhanced global development'.

Dr Bahareh Heravi, data and computational journalism lecturer, trainer, practitioner and innovator at UCD's School of Information and Communication Studies. Her TEDxUCD 2017 talk is titled 'How is data journalism changing the newsroom?'

Dominic O'Connor, a Marie Curie Research Fellow at the CATCH Innovative Training Network (ITN) and a PhD student in UCD's School of Public Health, Physiotherapy and Sport Science. His TEDxUCD 2017 talk is titled 'How can neuromuscular electrical stimulation (NMES) help accelerate cancer rehabilitation?'



# Philanthropic Funding

The National University of Ireland



**Dr Maurice Manning**

Chancellor, National University of Ireland

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**D**r Maurice Manning looks at the benefits for universities of philanthropic funding which - when married with public investment - allows them to go that extra mile and to create cutting-edge infrastructure and compete on the world-stage.

*In planning strategically for the future, political decisions are needed on the extent of the Irish state's contribution to funding our higher education system. However, if the system is to be enabled truly to deliver for our students, for Irish research and Irish society, the decisions on funding must acknowledge that mixed funding regimes are the norm across most higher education systems globally<sup>1</sup> and that an element of private funding will be essential to the wellbeing of Ireland's universities and colleges. It is not a question of private funds replacing the public purse for essential public provision, but of complementarity to enable strategic goals to be met in a sustainable way.*

The National University of Ireland (NUI) today is a federation of four, autonomous universities: University College Dublin (UCD), NUI Galway, University College Cork (UCC) and Maynooth University (MU); and two recognised Colleges, the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) and University. We represent a majority of the total student body in the Irish sector and we are proud of our national and international reputation for quality teaching and learning; research and scholarship and economic, social and cultural impact.

The 2016 Cassells' report into the future funding of Irish HE<sup>2</sup> estimated that €5.5bn capital investment would be needed over the 15 year period from 2016 onwards, simply to meet student-related teaching and learning requirements in terms of buildings and supporting technological requirements. It is clear from current state capital spending plans that exchequer investment alone will not come near this sum. As the Joint Oireachtas committee on Education and Skills continues to consider the findings and recommendations of the Cassells' report, it is timely to remind ourselves of the major benefits already gained by NUI students, academic faculty and staff by virtue of private donations to our universities and recognised colleges.

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1 <https://www.education.ie/en/The-Education-System/Higher-Education/Higher-Education-Review-of-International-Funding-Models.pdf>

2 <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/Investing-in-National-Ambition-A-Strategy-for-Funding-Higher-Education.pdf>

NUI's constituent universities and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland owe an enormous debt of gratitude to the extraordinary generosity of Irish-American Chuck Feeney.

NUI's constituent universities and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) owe an enormous debt of gratitude to the extraordinary generosity of Irish-American Chuck Feeney through his charitable foundation, Atlantic Philanthropies (AP). The total financial contribution of €231.5M<sup>3</sup> into NUI institutions' capital funding programmes enabled major advancements, and Chuck Feeney's remarkable legacy provided a very tangible base for future success and development funded by new benefactors who have since responded to the considerable efforts of the universities and their Foundations. It must be acknowledged that these successes are hard won. Funding from private donors ranges from hundreds of small, but annual, contributions made by hundreds of alumni on foot of alumni campaigns, to the large, one-off "lead gifts" made by high net-worth individuals. Regardless of the amount, attracting and sustaining private funding happens as a result of significant university resources invested in alumni relations offices and charitable foundations, deploying sophisticated marketing techniques and the development of legal, financial and technical expertise. Success also requires expertise from outside of the institutions themselves, typically via the Boards of university foundations – comprising individuals with a range of business, industry, financial, social and cultural expertise.

At a strategic level, it is undoubtedly when collaborative initiatives between private benefactors, state capital grants and competitive research funding come to fruition that major impact on the strategic development of a university can be demonstrated. In 2013, UCD opened the O'Brien Centre for Science, a world-class facility for teaching and research across



The O'Brien Centre for Science at UCD (photo: courtesy of UCD)

3 Source: *Laying Foundations for Change: Capital Investments of the Atlantic Philanthropies: Compendium*. 2014

Denis O'Brien, Irish businessman and entrepreneur, provided the lead "gift" for the [O'Brien] Centre for Science at UCD.

UCC's Plus Programme for disabled students is majority-funded by UCC friends and supporters.

many of the university's broad-ranging science subjects. Denis O'Brien, Irish businessman and entrepreneur provided the lead "gift" for the centre; one of a number of gifts from a range of private benefactors whose names are displayed on the wall of the impressive atrium. On a day to day basis, the scientists in this centre are competing – and winning – research contracts from national and international programmes that require full use of the centre's facilities and equipment.

Orla Tighe, Director of UCD Foundation, comments that, *"Private funding allows us to go that extra mile and to create cutting-edge infrastructure that can compete on the world-stage. It is crucial to allow the university to leverage vital funding from government and to deliver on bold plans"*. This point – that private funding works best when married with public investment – is clearly made in the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 (HUNT report), which states that *"any credible effort to expand the role of philanthropic funding is critically dependent on the continuation of sustained public investment – this reassures potential benefactors that they are funding additionality rather than replacing an exchequer contribution"*.<sup>4</sup>

Private funding also benefits students directly by enabling scholarships and support programmes, such as University College Cork (UCC)'s Plus programme for disabled students. This flagship programme is majority-funded by UCC friends and supporters. UCC is particularly proud of the range of technology and other supports provided for students with physical and intellectual disabilities. Dr Jean van Sinderen-Law, Director of UCC's Development and Alumni Relations explains:



Séamus and Marie Heaney viewing the Great Book of Ireland, which was restored at University College Cork (photo: copyright UCC).

<sup>4</sup> National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 (HUNT report) (2011); page. 117.

As part of its approaching 21st birthday as an NUI university, Maynooth is now launching its Annual Giving campaign... the primary purpose of which will be to fund access bursaries and scholarships...

Since its establishment in 1998, Galway University Foundation has raised €145 million directly from philanthropy, leveraging additional matching funds.

*“For us in Cork, it’s about more than buildings – we have used gifts from generous individuals to restore and promote items of cultural heritage, the Great Book of Ireland being a recent prime example. Crucially, the generosity of our alumni and friends makes it possible for us to provide best-in-class financial supports for students who have made it as far as university in spite of disadvantages arising from disabilities and other constraints”.*

Maynooth University also highlights the growing link between private funding and an enhanced student experience. As part of its approaching 21st birthday in 2018 as an NUI university, Maynooth is now launching its Annual Giving campaign. While also funding other projects of strategic importance to the university, the primary purpose of the Annual Giving programme will be to fund access bursaries and scholarships, and specifically to help support students like Leon Diop.

Leon graduated in autumn of 2017 with a degree in Psychology and is the first in his family to attend university. Serving as the new 2017–18 President of Maynooth Students’ Union, his campaign centred on social justice issues. He grew up in a one-parent family, the son of an Irish mother and a Nigerian father, and attended St Mark’s Community School in Tallaght where his guidance counsellor encouraged him to apply to university through the Higher Education Access Route (HEAR) scheme.

Since its establishment in 1998, Galway University Foundation has raised over €145 million directly from philanthropy, leveraging significant additional matching funds, thus enabling over €200 million of investment for flagship university buildings. In 2017, the university opened the O’Donoghue Centre for Drama, Theatre and Performance, a €5.5m investment to transform a former limestone 19th century textile mill, into a state-of-the-art theatre facility for NUI Galway drama students, including Ireland’s first LED theatre lighting system. The Centre recently scooped the winner of the Public Choice award at the 2017 RIAI Irish Architecture Awards.



NUI Galway’s O’Donoghue Centre for Drama, Theatre & Performance (photo: courtesy NUI Galway).



Maynooth University is proud to have the highest percentage of students from disadvantaged and underrepresented populations of any university in Ireland at 30%, and the highest proportion of students in receipt of a grant in the university sector, at 49%. Securing additional private funding will further enable Maynooth to provide world-class supports and services to these students.



**Maynooth University Access students (photo: courtesy Maynooth University)**

Our universities and colleges must be enabled and encouraged to seek additional funding from private sources, both in Ireland and elsewhere.

As Ireland's Higher Education sector embraces record student enrolment in the decade to come, and continues to attract highly competitive research funds globally, we must collaboratively support the efforts of our institutions to diversify their funding sources and enhance and ensure quality. NUI is proud of the work of its constituent universities and colleges in attracting substantial funding to complement that provided by the State. We believe that the government must continue to provide substantial funding for higher education. However, while acknowledging the need for a robust regulatory framework, in a growing sector our universities and colleges must also be enabled and encouraged to seek additional funding from private sources, both in Ireland and elsewhere. This is essential if higher education is to enjoy the levels of investment necessary to remain internationally competitive. If we get the balance right, Ireland will be able to provide, for its growing population, education and research opportunities at a level comparable to those available in other countries at a similar level of development, and higher education will make a full contribution to social, economic and cultural advancement.

# A Renewed Technological Focus in Education and Training

## Developments in Technological Higher Education



**Dr Joseph Ryan**

CEO, Technological Higher Education Association

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**T**his contribution from Dr Joseph Ryan, the inaugural CEO of the Technological Higher Education Association traces the progress in technological higher education in 2017. He looks in particular at income-contingent loans, a path outlined in the Cassells report on funding.

The past year has proved momentous for the technological sector in Ireland. 2017 saw the emergence and formal launch of the Technological Higher Education Association (THEA) as the representative and advocacy body for all institutes of technology in the state. It replaced a legacy body, Institutes of Technology Ireland. After dissolution of IoTI, the new body was created through a voluntary association of the thirteen institutes of technology that had comprised IoTI and the Dublin Institute of Technology, which operates under separate statute. THEA was formally launched by the Minister for Education and Skills, Richard Bruton TD, in early April 2017.

There has been a strong and generous welcome for the new body, which has emerged at a most interesting time in the history of higher education (HE) in Ireland. The sector is negotiating major challenges, at a time when it is weakened by the entrenchment occasioned by the economic crisis. The scale of the impact on higher education has been often rehearsed. The system has moved from 20 per cent participation in 1980 to the massified system of today, which accommodates 60 per cent of the age cohort. But that growth has come at a price: core funding per student fell 22 per cent in the seven years to 2015.

At one level, the mass participation has given Ireland competitive advantage. The OECD reports that attainment at higher education level (whether university or other) was particularly high among 25–34-year olds in Ireland, at 52 per cent (the OECD average is 42 per cent). But Ireland's advantageous population profile has had consequence for relative spending on education. Using OECD figures from 2013, Ireland's expenditure on education, public and private, was 5.2 per cent of GDP, but proportionately more of this goes towards pre-HE levels, with expenditure on HE in Ireland being 1.2 per cent of GDP in 2013 – below the OECD average of 1.6 per cent. This manifests as a loss of staff, an increase in students, and a pupil–teacher ratio now around 1:20 compared to the OECD average of 1:17. The recent review of



The system has moved from 20 per cent participation in 1980 to the massified system of today, which accommodates 60 per cent of the age cohort.

At one level, the mass participation has given Ireland competitive advantage.

future funding for HE voiced concern over the danger of a negative quality impact.

But that review and 2017 have also held promise. Recovery has been flagged, and higher education has seen additional monies being devoted to the system. Its scale is modest compared to the identified needs, but the trajectory is positive and the budget statement in 2017 gives further promise of both capital and current injection into higher and further education. The year has also seen consideration of the findings from the Expert Group on the Future Funding of Higher Education, chaired by Peter Cassells, which reported in March 2016. The full title of the report refers to investing in national ambition, which is an admirably succinct summary of the necessary intention. The estimate here is that additional monies to the tune of €600 million by 2021 and €1 billion by 2030 are required if Ireland is to maintain and enhance its reputation as an educational centre and continue to catalyse economic growth.

Concentration has predictably focused on the three paths outlined in the Cassells report to securing the monies required to fuel such a sustainable infrastructure. Whether one should look at the options in isolation or together is moot, but the concentration has – again inevitably – fallen mainly on the prospect of introducing income-contingent loans. Underlying this are the principles that the individual beneficiaries of a publicly funded higher education might contribute something to their education and training, but that that contribution should not represent a barrier to accessing the system. Effectively this represents a deferred fee for higher education.

The debate over income-contingent loans has attracted considerable attention and has been contentious. That it would represent a momentous cultural change is not the least of the challenges. The technological sector has been represented as inimical to income-contingent loans and even, by extension, as being against a universal student contribution. This is too simplistic a reading. Given its presence throughout the country, the technological sector caters for students from all socio-economic backgrounds, but it would not be unreasonable to say that compared to the traditional university sector, it accommodates proportionately more from the lower and lower-middle socio-economic classes. In doing so, the sector has been instrumental in offering access to opportunity for so many, and with a geographical reach across the land.

A further point worth weighing is that with the increasing diversity of the Irish population, the technological sector is playing a commendable (if largely unrecognised) role in the assimilation of new communities and thus in the cohesion of Irish society. Our THEA institutions have noted in recent years, as the fee contribution reached its declared ceiling of €3,000 per annum, that more students and their families were reporting this to be a burden, and the experience of member institutions was that this was becoming a barrier to entry. To the students and families concerned, the student contribution was but one element in a basket that included accommodation, travel, living expenses, material and other sundry costs which, taken together, represented a considerable demand. Allied to this

THEA is not against a form of learner contribution, but the amount and mode of that contribution should not represent a regressive barrier to access.

The Taoiseach 'could not stand over an outcome that left Irish students graduating with the kind of debts that American and English ones do'.

was the expectation that access to higher education was now the default path, not just for one dependant but for all children in a family.

In the light of this lived experience, the Council of THEA, comprising the presidents of the fourteen institutions, the chief executive, and an independent chair, has sought to foreground the potential impact on access in this debate. The perception of Council is that international experience, and modelling of income-contingent loans in an Irish context, suggest that such a departure should be explored carefully before such a decision is taken, because the indications are that this will be more expensive and carry an administrative burden to a degree that warrants deep consideration. For clarity: THEA's position is not against a form of learner contribution; but the amount and mode of that contribution should not represent a regressive barrier to access.

The speech delivered by An Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar TD, at the symposium on 26 September 2017 marking 425 years since Trinity's foundation, noted that 'the issue of third-level funding is one of our great challenges'. He continued, 'the government is committed to putting in place a sustainable multi-annual funding base to cater for the continuing demographic expansion of the higher education sector, while at the same time protecting and improving its quality'. The Taoiseach said that some contribution from students (as currently exists) is warranted, given the private and public benefits from higher education, but that he 'could not stand over an outcome that left Irish students graduating with the kind of debts that American and English ones do'.

The increase to the National Training Fund mentioned in the Taoiseach's speech, and formally announced on 10 October 2017 in the budget statement by Paschal Donohoe TD, the Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform, is welcome, but it suggests we have some way to go to agree an equitable and sustainable funding model for higher education, which is likely to be some blend of the options proposed in the Expert Review on Future Funding.

Another reason for optimism is the structural changes that are now proposed in technological education and training. Considerable advance has been made this year towards creating Technological Universities. This is a tale with a long gestation, with its genesis in the recommendations from the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 published in 2011. That strategy noted the progress and maturity of the institutes in the technological family and envisaged their evolution into a 'smaller number of stronger amalgamated institutes [that] should be promoted in order to advance system capacity and performance'. Not all institutions or their regions will elect such a path, but those that have committed to exploring this option have undertaken considerable work that has won support from stakeholders, both internal and external.

The proposed Technological Universities Bill has now earned enough political support to suggest we can look with confidence to 2018 as the year that will deliver significant progress in this regard. The advent of Technological Universities will add to the commendable diversity in our small higher education sector. The anticipation is that these new dynamic

The advent of Technological Universities will add to the commendable diversity in our small higher education sector.

entities will prove seminal in enhancing cooperation with enterprise, in advancing standards, and in supporting the broad regions in which they will be centred. Technological Universities will also have a scale that can win greater international recognition and thus add to Ireland's reputation as a high-end educational provider. They can also advance the burgeoning cooperative work that is forging better continuity and pathways between higher and further education.

The prospect of such a significant change to the higher education landscape requires considerable discussion and preparation. Ireland's technological education provision is a broad church, not just covering the obvious STEM areas but playing a critical role in supporting the cultural richness of our society, in delivering both plastic and performing arts. The advent of the Technological University must be realised in a manner sensitive to those institutions that elect to serve their communities and regions in other constructs. Equally, the staff who will be required to deliver upon this brave new world, and their representative organisations, are actively co-creating this future. It is a future that will complement existing provision and can offer enhanced opportunity for future generations of learners.

#### NUI Galway Launches Community-led Sustainability Strategy



On 15 November 2017, NUI Galway launched a wide-reaching Sustainability Strategy setting out a vision to establish NUI Galway as a leading green, smart and healthy campus. The university already has a groundswell of research, events, activities, societies and building initiatives which are related to sustainability. It offers almost 200 courses covering environmental and/or sustainability issues, and has won the top award for most biodiverse campus at Ireland's InterVarsity BioBlitz competition. Earlier this year it announced plans to divest from fossil fuel shares.

Pictured at the launch of NUI Galway's Sustainability Strategy are l-r: Professor Pól Ó Dochartaigh, Registrar and Deputy President, NUI Galway, Dr Frances Fahy, School of Geography and Archaeology, NUI Galway, Senator Alice-Mary Higgins, Seanad Éireann and Professor Colin Brown, Ryan Institute, NUI Galway.

# Meeting the Challenges for the Social Sciences in Ireland

Distinctiveness, Research, Education and Engagement



**Professor Colin Scott**

Vice President Equality Diversity and Inclusion, Principal UCD College of Social Sciences and Law, Dean of Social Sciences University College Dublin

I am indebted to my colleagues Maria Baghramian, Bryan Fanning, Eilis Hennessy, Imelda Maher, Sara O'Sullivan and Sarah Prescott for comments on an earlier draft of this piece. I remain responsible for the content.

**P**rofessor Scott discusses the challenges that the social sciences face, as a field of education and research in Ireland: to be better known as a distinct field of knowledge; to sustain and develop vital research; to enhance social sciences education; to ensure effective engagement between the social sciences and wider society.

## The Social Sciences

The social sciences transform our understanding of societies: how they function, how they are governed, how we work, how and where we live, how we communicate, how we learn and so on. Ireland was among the earliest testing grounds for new approaches to collection and analysis of data to understand economic development and to support the implementation of policies. Notably Sir William Petty's Irish projects in the second half of the 17th Century<sup>1</sup> anticipated the Scottish enlightenment of the 18th Century and the statistical revolution in government in the 19th.

This revolution combined the normative imperative to address 'social evils' with the technology to understand their scale and scope. It did this through institutionalising capacity and processes for collection and analysis of data enabling assessment of the effects, positive and negative, of governmental and other interventions for modern societies.<sup>2</sup> These changes underpinned both the growth and the differentiation of the social sciences from humanities and from early political economy. Today, the capacity for collecting and analysing data, and acting on it to improve society, is a core competence of the modern state.<sup>3</sup> The social sciences include a range of core academic disciplines which overlap in some of the skills they use and teach whilst also being concerned with distinct domains of knowledge vital to understanding human societies, cultures and economies. These include separate but interdependent specialisms – such as economics, geography, politics, psychology and sociology – whose collective contribution can be greater than the sum of their individual parts.

1 Fox, Adam. 2009. "Ireland and the Making of a Political Economist, 1653-87." *Economic History Review* 62:388-404.

2 McDonagh, Oliver. 1958. "The Nineteenth-Century Revolution in Government: A Reappraisal." *The Historical Journal* 1:52-67.

3 Scott, James C. 1998. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

The focus of the social sciences on the study of individuals, human society and social relationships ranges between the micro-level (for example, understanding the conditions under which families and their members either thrive, or where family relationships break down through mid-level concerns, with how organisations such as clubs, firms and government agencies function and affect both our economic development and our social bonds) through to macro-level concerns with why people vote the way they do, what causes economic growth – and financial busts – and how the behaviours which cause climate change can be addressed.

Within the social sciences it is commonly asserted that this range of concerns – and many others – is inter-related in understanding how our societies function. A central aspect of the social sciences is a concern for observation and rigorous methods of understanding social phenomena. These methods use both quantitative data, particularly, but not limited to, social and economic statistics, and also qualitative methods such as interviews and participant observation, to seek stronger understanding of why societies have developed as they have and with what effects. Research in sociology has critical, policy, public and professional strands.<sup>4</sup> In the social sciences more generally, critical approaches, looking to normative ideals, challenge taken-for-granted assumptions. In contrast policy research tends to work within accepted paradigms to better understand social phenomena and to evaluate what kinds of intervention might be expected to best meet public policy objectives for social and economic development. A particular focus of policy researchers in Ireland and elsewhere has been to persuade governments to pay more attention to evidence in developing public policy.<sup>5</sup>

## Challenges

The social sciences in Ireland face a number of challenges today. First there is the challenge of being recognised as a distinctive and valuable field of knowledge. Second is the challenge of sustaining and developing a relatively small research base in the social sciences to better understand and enhance key aspects of contemporary society. Third is the challenge of further enhancing educational opportunities in the social sciences at second and third level (and indeed in graduate studies) so graduates are well prepared for rewarding careers that will make a difference to the societies in which they live. Fourth is the challenge of public engagement with social sciences so as to understand problems identified, the research used to address them, and how that research can provide solutions, leading ultimately to a better society.

## The Distinctiveness and Value of the Social Sciences

The social sciences in Ireland have progressed from a somewhat stunted position arising from clerical dominance and anxieties that social sciences knowledge might contradict church teaching,<sup>6</sup> to a position where the

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4 O'Connor, Pat. 2006. "Private Troubles, Public Issues: The Irish Sociological Imagination." *Irish Journal of Sociology* 15:5-22.

5 Lunn, Pete, and Frances Ruane (Eds.). 2014. *Using Evidence to Inform Public Policy*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan

6 Fanning, Bryan, and Andrea Hess. 2015. *Sociology in Ireland: A Short History*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, chapter 3; Garvin, Tom. 2004. *Preventing the Future: Why was Ireland Poor for So Long?* Dublin: Gill and Macmillan.



Social sciences are a distinctive and core aspect of higher education and are increasingly being developed at secondary level.

The distinctiveness of the social sciences lies in their emphasis on observation of social phenomena and explanation and prediction of human behaviours deploying scientific methods.

distinctiveness and value of the social sciences is better known.<sup>7</sup> Social sciences are very much a distinctive and core aspect of higher education and are increasingly being developed at secondary level. International factors have underpinned this transition, including networks between Irish social scientists and colleagues in North America and in Europe and the role of international public policy organisations include those of the European Union and the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development.<sup>8</sup> Higher education institutions, industry, government and NGOs increasingly value the social sciences for their ability to help us understand our society through their methods and knowledge and to offer and enhance education in the fields of this knowledge. Social sciences are thus distinct from the physical sciences and the humanities while also a vital complement to both these fields of knowledge.

The distinctiveness of the social sciences lies in their emphasis on observation of social phenomena and explanation and prediction of human behaviours deploying scientific methods. This emphasis contrasts with the interpretive and critical apparatus focused on understanding the meaning we impose on experience within the humanities disciplines. This distinction has significant implications for what we can expect of the discipline groups.<sup>9</sup> To assert this distinction is not to deny that there is overlap between the social sciences and not only the humanities, but also the Science, Technology, Engineering, Maths and Health Sciences (STEMH) disciplines. Thus, while some of the social sciences disciplines such as anthropology, business, economics, education, sociology, social policy, and social work might be characterised as more or less purely of the social sciences, others have significant cross-over with other discipline groups. Thus history, law, linguistics, and media and communications are each strongly overlapping between the humanities and the social sciences, while geography, health systems, information systems, psychology and statistics each have strong overlap between the social sciences and the STEMH disciplines. Archaeology and architecture may be characterised as straddling all three discipline groups (to varying degrees, depending on their focus).<sup>10</sup> Philosophy has a unique position, deploying methods of critical thinking and analysis familiar in the humanities, but giving them a wider reach by addressing fundamental questions about the methodologies of the natural and social sciences, the very standing of knowledge claims and their normative and ethical consequences.

### **Sustaining and Developing Research in the Social Sciences**

The second challenge, sustaining and developing the research base in the social sciences in Ireland, has a number of dimensions and is concerned both with advancing the theory and methods of core disciplines whilst also demonstrating the value to society of social sciences research in understanding and addressing key societal opportunities. In the UK the Campaign for Social Science was established in 2011 to raise the profile of

7 Brewer, John. 2013. *The Public Value of the Social Sciences*. London: Bloomsbury

8 Murray, Peter, and Maria Feeney. 2017. *Church, State and Social Science in Ireland*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

9 Kagan, Jerome. 2009. *The Three Cultures: Natural Sciences, Social Sciences and the Humanities in the 21st Century*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

10 Bastow, Simon, Patrick Dunleavy, and Jane Tinkler. 2014. *The Impact of the Social Sciences: How Academic and their Research Make a Difference*. London: Sage, p3.



A new Applied Social Sciences Programme opened in NUI Galway in 2017.

the social sciences, to inform public policy with evidence, and to promote the benefits of investment in social sciences research and education.<sup>11</sup> This campaign involves the articulation of the value of social sciences research on societal issues such as families, health, migration, the economy, governance and inequality, but also demonstrating the importance of understanding social dimensions of wider issues such as causes of climate change and how they may be ameliorated. The demands for understanding our societies and their opportunities require large scale research funding both for single discipline and interdisciplinary research, including the very costly longitudinal studies of key societal features such as child development and inequality. For Irish universities to have international standing this also requires the sustaining and development of a critical mass of social sciences disciplines and infrastructure for teaching and research to an excellent standard. Equally it requires the social sciences to take advantage of new interdisciplinary opportunities, for example for mining new large data sets<sup>12</sup>, and in developing experimental and behavioural social sciences to better understand social phenomena and the potential for public policy.<sup>13</sup>

### Reforming Educational Programmes in the Social Sciences

For the social sciences to be an effective part of public policy making and wider knowledge in Ireland, there must be effective educational programmes in the social sciences. There has been rapid growth in demand, with Pat Clancy noting that the share of higher education students in social sciences, business and law grew from 12 per cent in 1960 to 28 per cent by 2009, when numbers of those in higher education had increased rapidly also<sup>14</sup>. Responding both to growing popularity and also a changing environment there has been considerable reform of social sciences education in Ireland in recent years, with, for example a new Applied Social Sciences Programme opened in NUI Galway in 2017 and a new Social Sciences Programme commencing at UCD in 2018. These new programmes are a significant supplement to successful applied educational programmes in fields such as business, education, social policy and social work. There has, at times, been a risk that the important task of preparing students for careers in the social care professions was defining of the social sciences, where in truth their reach and value is much more extensive. Thus these new programmes typically permit the study of economics, geography, politics, psychology, sociology, and other fields and require four years of study in order to promote increasing emphasis on engaging students with the linkage between different fields in order to develop their ability to analyse and understand societal phenomena. These programmes also engage students with the worlds of research and practice, including opportunities for internships, with the benefits of developing substantive knowledge in contexts where students can also develop both research skills specific to the social sciences and more general transferrable skills such as communication, team-working and leadership, for example through internship programmes. Increasing opportunities for study abroad are

11 <https://campaignforsocialscience.org.uk/>.

12 Kitchin, Rob. 2014. *The Data Revolution*. London: Sage.

13 John, Peter, Sarah Cotterill, Alice Moseley, Liz Richardson, Graham Smith, Gerry Stoker, and Corinne Wales. 2011. *Nudge, Nudge, Think, Think*. London: Bloomsbury; Lunn, Pete, and Frances Ruane (Eds.). 2014. *Using Evidence to Inform Public Policy*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan

14 Clancy, Pat. 2015. *Irish Higher Education: A Comparative Perspective*. Dublin: IPA, p110.

The pipeline of effective and well trained social scientists is supported by the introduction of social sciences into the secondary curriculum.

Social scientists increasingly demonstrate the significance of their research and the importance of social sciences for our understanding of our own and other societies.

important for increasing comparative knowledge of societies and their challenges and also a much sought after competence in working across more than one culture. The pipeline of effective and well trained social scientists is supported both by the introduction of social sciences into the secondary curriculum, for example the new Leaving Certificate subject in Politics and Society and new Junior Certificate subject in Philosophy, new undergraduate programmes and the sharpening of taught graduate and doctoral education in the social sciences in higher education institutions.

### **Engaging the Social Sciences with Society and Public Policy**

Addressing the fourth challenge is to recognise that a well-functioning social sciences eco-system which values research and education for the social sciences, must involve social sciences knowledge with the wider world. This includes engagement of key users in the identification of societal issues and the design of effective research to better address and understand social problems. Related to this, we must enhance the capacity of users of social sciences research to engage, through enhancing the literacy of key policy practitioners and professionals in the knowledge of the social sciences, so that they better understand their own needs and how they may be more effectively addressed both through recruitment of social scientists and, equally important, continuing education for employees around key social sciences issues and methods.

### **Conclusions**

With so much interest in understanding our societies, so many societal challenges apparent to us, and the concern to ensure that public policy is backed with evidence, we should be living in a golden age for the social sciences. In Ireland we are continuing to develop education and research in the social sciences so they are better known for what they distinctively offer, even in this financially constrained environment, for learning and research. Despite the challenges, social scientists increasingly demonstrate the significance of their research and the importance of social sciences for our understanding of our own and other societies and the shaping of society in Ireland and internationally. There is a continuing need to enhance educational programmes, to ensure effective funding, both from national and EU sources, for social sciences research, and to engage social and policy groups effectively with social sciences knowledge and research so we may collectively better understand our societies and the options to better them.

# Undergraduate Education in Arts and Humanities

## Re-thinking the Value of the Arts and Humanities



**Professor Sarah Prescott**

Principal, UCD College of Arts and Humanities and Dean of Arts and Humanities, University College Dublin

**T**his article speaks to recent developments in educational strategy and policy in Ireland which concern the broad value of the Arts and Humanities, and creativity in general, in society, culture and the economy. The debate around the value of the Arts and Humanities is a topic which also has global resonance in an international context. The article focuses particularly on undergraduate education in the arts through an exploration of the employability agenda as it impacts on Arts and Humanities students. The recent curriculum innovation in this area at UCD is used as a brief case study.

The value of the arts and humanities in Ireland is most often viewed in terms of the cultural and artistic contribution they make to the nation, and the concomitant development and promotion of a distinctive and creative national identity with major global impact. The arts and humanities have been described as ‘a cornerstone of Irish social, cultural, and political history’ and are often presented as ‘one of the country’s unique selling points’ since austerity<sup>1</sup>. The cultural values of these disciplines are seen to have an important role to play in public life, as well as adding economic value to Irish society and global engagement. Similarly, scholars and practitioners in these areas are viewed as major contributors to public life and civil society, primarily in the fields of media, performance, and cultural industries (including tourism and cultural heritage), but also more broadly in influencing educational and public policy and business and corporate practice.

Informing this overall sense of the value of the arts and humanities is the less quantifiable quality of the intrinsic value of arts and humanities subjects. The study of art, music, literature, creative writing, history, folklore, drama, theatre, philosophy, languages, culture, and so on, provides a unique and nuanced perspective on our past, present, and future and what it means to be human throughout time. From these broad perspectives, studying the arts and humanities at third level in Ireland can demonstrate all these different yet connected interpretations of the meaning of ‘value’ in various contexts. Here the context is undergraduate education in the arts and humanities and how its particular values can be supported effectively by rethinking how we deliver and structure degree programmes in this area.

### Arts and humanities programmes: The Irish context

The publication of *The Employment and Economic Significance of the Cultural Industries in Ireland* indicated that the arts had become part of public policy dialogue on economic growth and employment<sup>2</sup>. The publication of the *Assessment of the Economic Impact of*

The arts were viewed as central to foreign direct investment, to creating an imaginative labour force...

*the Arts in Ireland* pointed to the arts as important to the economic policies that the government had identified as crucial to economic recovery.<sup>3</sup> The arts were viewed as central to foreign direct investment, to creating an imaginative labour force, and to establishing an innovative environment in which the creative and cultural industries could thrive.

The second and third Global Irish Economic Forums (held in 2011 and 2013) highlighted the role of arts and culture as a key vehicle for economic growth and recovery and a means of restoring Ireland's international reputation<sup>4</sup>. The fourth pillar of the Creative Ireland Programme, launched in 2016, focuses on establishing Ireland as a centre of excellence in media production. The initial focus in 2017 is on Ireland's potential to be a global leader in film production, TV drama, documentary, children's storytelling, and screen animation. As part of this process, more attention is now being paid to the role played by the arts at all levels in the education system. For example, the Arts in Education Charter (2013), co-signed by then Ministers of the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (DAHG) and the Department of Education and Skills (DES), acknowledged the need for an education system that promoted creativity<sup>5</sup>.

In higher education, arts and humanities remain a popular choice for Irish students. In 2015/16, 19% of new undergraduate entrants (8,432) enrolled in arts and humanities programmes<sup>6</sup>. Arts and humanities full-time enrolments at undergraduate level totalled 18,575 students in universities, 7,492 in institutes of technology, and 2,387 in colleges, representing 18% of all students. At postgraduate level, 12% opted to study arts and humanities during 2015/16, equal to those opting for natural sciences, mathematics and statistics (HEA, 2016). At part-time level, 11% opted for arts and humanities at undergraduate level, 6% at postgraduate level. These figures indicate that students are confident about their choice of arts and humanities programmes, and rightly so: in higher education, Irish curricula in arts and humanities programmes are internationally resonant and are developed and led by the research excellence of internationally recognised scholars who bring their research immediately to their students through their teaching. In all international rankings, disciplines in the humanities enjoy higher ratings than those achieved by Irish universities generally. According to the QS World University Rankings in 2015/16, humanities departments outperformed science and technology subjects in Irish universities<sup>7</sup>.

### The value of undergraduate education in the arts and humanities

It is no longer wise or appropriate to dismiss humanistic approaches to problem-solving in the modern workplace.

As the Irish educational context has begun to demonstrate, recent thinking about the value of the arts and humanities recognises their importance to current and future educational, social, economic, and technological challenges. Commentators are starting to argue that it is no longer wise or appropriate to dismiss humanistic approaches to problem-solving in the modern workplace. In a reversal of the narrative which privileges vocational degrees and direct training, the disciplines which comprise the arts and humanities are increasingly being recognised as equipping graduates not only with a deep knowledge of their subjects and rigorous intellectual training, but also with diverse and flexible skills, stemming

from this intellectual training, which are highly desirable to a broad range of employers.

Foremost is the current political and educational emphasis on the importance of creativity and innovation to a sustained future for Ireland in a globalised world. Such a creative and innovative ethos is at the heart of the arts and humanities and fosters an ability to bring these attributes to bear on the various professional contexts of the modern workplace. Working in tandem with a broad humanistic ethos, therefore, is a demonstrable range of diverse skills which particularly characterise the arts and humanities graduate: a creative mindset, critical thinking, excellent written and verbal communication, collaborative creativity and innovation, cross-cultural and multi-linguistic understanding, effective research techniques and content analysis, depth and breadth of historical knowledge, flexibility, and empathy.

What many employers are looking for is precisely the flexibility and diversity of skills that arts and humanities graduates possess.

In a further challenge to the narrative which views a broad-based 'arts' education as the antithesis of vocational training and thus not a clear route to employment, it is increasingly recognised that what many employers are looking for is precisely the flexibility and diversity of skills that arts and humanities graduates possess. Indeed, given that the jobs of the future are no longer set in stone nor simply replicate the jobs of the past and indeed present, it is almost impossible to predict the range of different careers the 21st-century graduate may encounter. The fact that most will not work in the academy 'means that interdisciplinary studies, internship opportunities, improving qualitative and quantitative skills, in addition to communication and presentation skills are all vital'<sup>8</sup>. Arts and humanities graduates are extremely well poised to take full advantage of the need for these flexible, collaborative, and interdisciplinary skills.

It is against this broader context of rapid change in the workplace that universities now need to position undergraduate education in the arts and humanities. The potential for arts and humanities graduates to excel in this changing environment is rich, but it is important that during their time as students they are enabled to respond to these future opportunities appropriately and effectively. Success in the workplace of the future will result not only from a dedicated and enthusiastic study of their carefully chosen subjects, through which the skills listed above are inculcated, but also from the structured support they receive as part of their degree. Students of computer science or engineering, for example, are familiar with this kind of structured support in the form of Year in Employment schemes or internship opportunities, most often taken within the framework of an extended four-year programme.

Up to this point, the arts and humanities equivalent has been the year abroad or international year that is usually, but not exclusively, for students of modern languages. The value of the study-abroad year cannot be overestimated and has a proven track record of increasing graduate employment rates, due to the desirability of language skills for employers. The desirability of these graduates is further increased by the cross-cultural understanding they develop in an international environment and the fostering of a global outlook which facilitates communication and interaction with different societies and cultures.

## Curricular change in the arts and humanities: a case study

A major part of the last academic year in the College of Arts and Humanities at UCD was taken up with a collective reimagining and reinvigorating of how we deliver undergraduate education in these disciplines in the 21st century. The curriculum review of the UCD Arts and Humanities programmes was broadly informed by the ongoing aim to provide choice, flexibility, and intellectual excitement for students, through a carefully structured framework which promotes coherence in subject combinations and produces excellent results and impressive graduates aware of the value of what they have learned. In the BA Humanities (first intake in September 2018), for example, UCD students can now study innovative interdisciplinary three-subject pathways, such as ‘Languages, Linguistics, and Cultures’, ‘Music, Film, and Drama’, ‘Classics, English, and History’, and ‘Celtic Studies, Art History, and History’.

The interdisciplinary nature of these extended pathways fosters exactly the kind of cross-cultural and flexible creative thinking being asked of graduates, and develops a reciprocally enriching understanding of cognate subjects and thus a breadth and depth of expertise. Students will be able to test this flexible thinking in extended interdisciplinary research projects or take advantage of shorter periods to study abroad to enhance their international experience over the course of a semester. The four-year duration of the degree also creates space for the internship opportunities familiar to STEM students, which are now to be made available to arts and humanities students.

The overall aim was to create a practical, employer-facing component in the Humanities programme which works ‘to consolidate and complement academic learning, knowledge and skills with experience’<sup>9</sup>. The internship module centres on a 10- or 14-week internship with an industry partner (state body, charitable organisation, arts or cultural organisation, or industry partner) and is supported by pre-placement workplace training. Its purpose is to enhance core skills, attitudes, and competencies that are not only fundamental features of the degree programme but are also portable, relevant to diverse workplace settings, and important for deepening understanding of what constitutes active and engaged critical citizenship.

Part of planning for the internship module was talking to a diverse range of employers about what arts and humanities students can offer.

The objective is that students will develop personal organisational and communication skills (written and oral) through continuous work practice, and will cultivate awareness of the intellectual, cultural, social, and practical requirements of specific working environments. Students are expected to reflect actively and critically on skills and knowledge in ways that will help them to engage in planning future learning and career pathways. Students on the programme will show consolidation and enhancement of this learning experience by means of critical, reflective writing and presentations on their working experience.

One of the most enjoyable and informative parts of planning for the internship module was spending time talking to a diverse range of employers about what arts and humanities students can offer. A key principle is that the type of employers approached does not simply replicate the stereotypes about career destinations for students in our disciplines,



It is precisely because arts and humanities degrees do not follow clearly defined career pathways that it is crucial to recognise and clearly articulate the broader values they provide.

although of course ‘traditional’ destinations such as teaching and cultural industries remain centrally important. These employers, from industry, banking, tech, and human resource management, to creative industries, tourism, media, and community and charitable trusts, all share a common interest in the attributes of arts and humanities students for precisely the diverse skills identified here. It is therefore crucial to give students practical experience in a structured and reflective context so that they become aware of the value of their skills and can articulate why, as arts and humanities graduates, they are desirable to the employers of today and tomorrow.

## Conclusion

As arts and humanities teachers and scholars, we need to articulate more clearly and loudly the value of what we do as researchers, the importance of what and how we teach, and the value of the graduates we produce – graduates who in turn add their own value (in its fullest meaning) to the intellectual, social, cultural, economic, and public life of Ireland and the world. It is precisely because arts and humanities degrees do not follow clearly defined career pathways that it is crucial to recognise and clearly articulate the broader value they provide. What the curricular innovations at UCD will give to arts and humanities undergraduates is the time, space, and support within the degree structure to make the connections and build the language they need to articulate their own value and explain the significance and relevance of the subjects they have studied. Recognising the value of the arts and humanities is thus significant not only to the workplace but also to the renewed attention being paid in Ireland to the importance of creativity in public life and discourse in the 21st century.

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# Dance Residencies in Initial Teacher Education

## Need for Effective Partnerships between Residency Facilitators



**Susan Marron**

Lecturer in Physical Education, School of Arts Education and Movement, Institute of Education, DCU



**Dr Triona Stokes**

Lecturer in Educational Drama and Dance, Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education, Maynooth University

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**A**s the two recent Irish Arts Council initial teacher education dance residencies culminate, this article serves to review, reflect and highlight the unique yet shared experience of the residency facilitators. Effective partnership is investigated and its tenets discussed with reference to both residencies.

### Introduction

Collaboration across the arts and education sectors, as represented by the *Arts in Education Charter* (2013), has been promoted in various guises since the launch of the Charter by the Departments of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, and the Department of Education and Skills. Further to the publication of *Artists-Schools Guidelines* (2006) and *Points of Alignment* (2008), the Charter prompted the establishment of *Encountering the Arts Ireland* in 2013 and the *Arts in Education Portal* in 2015. The Charter also developed partnerships between the Arts Council and Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) through the funding of artist residencies within initial teacher education. According to Kenny and Morrissey (2016:10):

*‘Such residencies have enlivened provision for the visual and performing arts in initial teacher education programmes and enhanced the arts cultures of the HEIs in which they are based’.*

This article will outline the background of two residencies with dance as the shared art form where the nature of partnership in Arts Council residencies situated within HEIs is highlighted. It will examine key tenets of effective partnerships with a focus on the achievements and challenges. From the outset it must be stated that The Irish Primary Physical Education Curriculum (1999) strand of dance is reflected across both residencies as pillars guiding planning and emphases. Since 2013 there have been two national three-year dance residencies within Bachelor of Education and Professional Master of Education programmes. The DCU Institute of Education hosted CoisCéimDance Theatre Company 2013–2016, and Maynooth University Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education hosted Dance Artist Lisa Cahill respectively, from 2014–2017. With the support of their colleagues, lecturing staff in the respective host institutions, Susan Marron and Triona Stokes, became the facilitators of the residencies.

In addition to the essential partnership of the Arts Council and university educational institution, a web of other necessary, and sometimes unforeseen,

partnerships emerged within (*intra*) and beyond each institution (*inter*) which are highlighted in Table 1. In this regard, a collegial relationship developed between the residency facilitators at the two universities. The performance and sharing event allowed for opportunities to invite additional guests including facilitators from other institutions. The relationship between the facilitators culminated in the writing of this article providing opportunity to reflect on what makes an effective partnership.

## Effective Partnerships

Hallam's (2011) definition of effective partnership within music education is drawn upon for the provision of a common framework under which to analyse each of the dance residencies outlined in Table 1. Hallam (2011:155) states:

*'Effective partnership working takes account of context, requires good communication, time, leadership, mutual trust, clarity of roles and responsibilities, and the support of senior management...'*

For the purpose of this article, each of these component headings of Hallam's (2011) definition is discussed. Initially the context of the residencies is described with reference to the nature of professional degree programmes and the opportunities and constraints therein. Leadership and mutual trust are brought together for ease of discussion. Then a focus on communication and its importance in building effective partnership is followed by an analysis of the implications. Time and its many implications were necessary items for consideration under context and leadership and mutual trust.

**Table 1: Overview of the Arts Council HEI Dance Residencies**

<b>Host University</b>	Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education, Maynooth University	Physical Education Unit, School of Arts Education and Movement, Institute of Education, DCU (Formerly St. Patrick's College)
<b>Collaborating Artist(s)</b>	Lisa Cahill, Individual Dance Artist	<i>CoisCéim</i> and Philippa Donnellan <i>BroadReach</i> (individual artist and Dance Company)
<b>Artist Background</b>	Dance Artist and Producer; co-founder of Spoken Dance company; former primary school teacher	Dance Organisation Teacher, Facilitator and Director; Founder of <i>BroadReach</i> - access and participation programme
<b>Background of residency facilitator</b>	Former teacher; Lecturer in Drama Education and Dance	Former teacher; Physical Education Lecturer
<b>Annual student intake</b>	70 Bachelor of Education	420 Bachelor of Education
	35 Professional Master of Education (Primary)	65 Professional Master of Education (Primary)
<b>Residency Duration</b>	January 2014- January 2017	September 2013- May 2016
<b>Departmental structures involved in the Residency</b>	4 person committee comprising	2 person committee comprising
	Professor Marie McLoughlin, Head of Department; Tony Sweeney, Lecturer in Physical Education; Dr Triona Stokes, Lecturer in Drama Education Residency Facilitator; Laura Thornton, Lecturer in Visual Arts Education	Lecturers in Physical Education, Dr. Frances Murphy and Susan Marron (Residency Facilitator), with express support from the Head of the Education Department and the University President

<b>Role and Responsibility of the Facilitator</b>	Documentation and administration; coordination of Arts Residency committee meetings and weekly planning meetings re content and schedule; monitoring budget; booking facilities; liaison with partner schools; ethical permission processes; monitoring and reporting on progress;	Documentation and administration; planning programme pedagogy, content and schedule; budget planning and administration; liaison and briefing with schools, teachers and children; ethical matters for photographer; booking facilities; monitoring and reporting on progress;
<b>Intra: (University level)</b>	Co-plan and co-facilitate course content with staff members from curricular areas of PE; SPHE; Drama; Visual Art and Gaelige; Liaison with A.V. Technician; Health/Safety Officer	Co-plan and co-facilitate course content with PE lecturers Co-ordination with the Estates Office, Theatre Technician, Audio Visual Technician
<b>Inter: (Cooperation at local and national levels)</b>	Liaison with Lisa Cahill, Dance Artist; Local Schools in Kildare; Brenda Brady and Arts Officer Lucina Russell, Kildare Arts Service	CoisCéim: Sarah Latty Company Manager, Bridget Webster Executive Producer and Philippa Donnellan, BroadReach Director; Students Union; Social Media platforms and local school
<b>Admin.</b>	Triona Stokes	Susan Marron and Gaye Ashford
<b>Residency Pillars</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Developing dance pedagogy and resources</li> <li>2. Integrating dance into university modules</li> <li>3. Dissemination of practice</li> <li>4. Engaging with the Arts Education community</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Seeing dance events for students, staff and schools</li> <li>2. Dance education workshops building on core PE modules to increase confidence to teach dance</li> <li>3. Dance club (2013-2014)</li> <li>4. Ticket availability to Dublin dance performances</li> </ol>
<b>Aspects of the Residency</b>	<p>Guest speakers, Visual Artist, Vera McEvoy and Arts Officer, Lucina Russell at <i>Creative Textiles Exhibition Launch 2015; 2016</i>;</p> <p>Co-taught cross-curricular workshops</p> <p>Dance artist working with artist mentor, Dr Mary Nunan (2016)</p> <p>Performances:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Your Turn My Turn</i> with Deirdre Corry (May 2014)</li> <li>• <i>Finding our Way</i> (Dec. 2015)</li> <li>• <i>Connect/Disconnect</i> duet with Choreographer Vivien Brodie Hayes (March 2016)</li> <li>• <i>Unfolding</i> by Lisa Cahill (December 2016)</li> </ul>	<p>Dance Education thematic out-of-class 2-hour workshops</p> <p>Dance Club performance (2013)</p> <p>In-class work with Major and Minor PE Specialist modules</p> <p><i>Talking Dance</i> with David Bolger: Following the screening of <i>Deep End Dance</i> and <i>Hit and Run</i> the making and choreographic process was discussed</p> <p>CoisCéim Performances:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Missing</i> by David Bolger</li> <li>• <i>The Wolf and Peter</i> by David Bolger</li> <li>• Initial development sessions and showing <i>Body Language 101</i> by David Bolger &amp; Christopher Ash Open Door rehearsals</li> </ul>
<b>Community Engagement</b>	Annual local school engagement: <i>Dance Surprise</i> for Culture Night Kildare, 2015; 2016; Bursaries awarded to four B.Ed. students to attend Kildare Community Laban Dance Summer School July 2016.	St. Patrick's Boys N.S.
<b>Sharing Experiences</b>	<p><i>Artbeat symposium</i> attendance (March 2015)</p> <p><i>Finding our Way</i> Presentation by artist and facilitator at the First Arts Portal National Day (April 2016)</p> <p><i>Dancing around the World</i> InTouch lesson plans (March 2016)</p> <p><a href="https://www.into.ie/ROI/Publications/InTouch/2017/March2017/InTouchMarch2017.pdf">https://www.into.ie/ROI/Publications/InTouch/2017/March2017/InTouchMarch2017.pdf</a></p>	<p>Arts Portal National Day (2017)</p> <p><i>Dance and story Telling...Creative Dance Tales</i></p> <p>InTouch (June 2017) <a href="http://intouch.freeflowdp.com/intouch/3686793193352355?pg=44#pg44">http://intouch.freeflowdp.com/intouch/3686793193352355?pg=44#pg44</a></p>
<b>Artefacts Arts Portal Website</b>	<p>Finding Our Way</p> <p><a href="http://artsineducation.ie/en/project/finding-our-way/">http://artsineducation.ie/en/project/finding-our-way/</a></p>	<p>Creative Tales: The Wolf and Peter online digital resource <a href="http://artsineducation.ie/en/project/creative-dance-tales/">http://artsineducation.ie/en/project/creative-dance-tales/</a></p>

## Context

The generalist primary teacher must be imbued with the confidence to teach dance and provide quality dance experiences for children.

[Students'] availability to attend evening dance events was limited.

This initial investment of time was crucial in building a strong working relationship.

Hallam (2011) believes that effective partnerships work if they take account of the context. The unique local circumstances with the inaugural HEI dance residencies are summarised in Table 1. With dance as a singular aspect of a degree component, mirroring its curriculum status, the generalist primary teacher must, nonetheless, be imbued with the confidence to teach dance and provide quality dance experiences for children. Timetabling and the truncated nature of semester time due to School Placement and the assessment demands of the academic year present considerable challenges in terms of time available to a residency within initial teacher education.

In terms of lecture input, co-teaching and mentoring opportunities worked best with elective and major and minor arts and physical education 'specialisms'. Considering the volume of student numbers alone it would not have been possible, for either residency to offer all students opportunities to engage with in-class programme content. Therefore, it was envisaged that multiple means for engagement beyond course structures would be the principle means to extend the reach of the artist(s) on campus. This resulted in establishing evening workshops and a dance club. However, as many students live some distance from their universities or return home at weekends, their availability to attend evening dance events was limited. This was evidenced by low numbers attending the dance club (2013) at St. Patrick's College and the early workshop events in the Froebel Department. It also manifested itself in the limited uptake of free tickets by students via CoisCéim to attend other professional dance performance events.

The residency models in adapting to their particular contexts took cognisance of the workings and values of their partners, and the unique blend of personal and professional relationships created. Planning a year ahead for events was crucial to effectively accommodate the residency within the academic year amid the multitude of roles and potential commitments of artists thereafter.

There was a sense of trepidation in initial meetings, as it was the first time the partners had met to work together. While each brought the expertise of her own field, it was acknowledged that each partner felt a limited understanding of the work of the other. This initial investment of time was crucial in building a strong working relationship, affording opportunities for reciprocity where shared understanding emerges from engaged pedagogy (Kind et al., 2007). A desire for 'deepening understanding of the other's craft' underpinned these initial planning meetings, as the schedule of work necessarily forged ahead (Kind et al., 2007:844).

As the first year progressed, experience revealed patterns of success and aspects for improvement. It became apparent to both parties what was working best, with latter phases involving further negotiation of facilitator-artist identities. Each partner's unique perspective largely represented her expertise and background, namely, the skill and artistic expertise of the artist and the pedagogic understanding and skill of the facilitator. Towards the end of the residencies, facilitators reported that

Shared ownership [of school-based arts education partnerships] can only occur where sustained relationships have been established over time.

Accessing the student voice in terms of evaluating initiatives [was critical].

their professional and personal relationships became ‘inextricably linked’ (Teaching Council of Ireland, 2016:11). Partners’ skills and creativity complemented one another resulting in shared learning and richer collaboration, recalling the Aristotelian adage, ‘the whole is greater than the sum of the two parts’.

### Leadership and Mutual Trust

Leadership of the residency took many forms, from listening and consultation, to negotiation, problem-solving and reflective thinking. Each was required to respond to the needs of both the artist and the department in meeting agreed outcomes. Regular sharing of ideas and building initiatives collaboratively allowed each partner to lead and follow, learning by using her particular strengths and expertise in pedagogy and the creative use of the art form.

Time is required to build and jointly lead a trusting and productive relationship of any kind, and those within effective partnerships that allow each partner to flourish, are no different. It has been well documented regarding effective school-based arts education partnerships that shared ownership can only occur where sustained relationships have been established over time (Wolf, 2008; Bamford and Glinkowski, 2010; Kenny and Morrissey, 2016). Contrary to an assumption that partnerships ‘... evolve overnight, they take time to initiate, nurture and grow’ (Morrissey, 2013:31). This can equally be said of effective partnerships between facilitator-artist at HEI level, where different backgrounds, expertise, and complementary strengths merge.

Time was necessary for the artist(s) to become accustomed to working in an academic institution, and in negotiating institutional structures, from understanding the course outcomes and demands to the process of acquiring a work space and accessing resources. Sharing departmental and programme documentation of the host departments helped direct the artist’s focus to provide a clearer sense of purpose (Hallam, 2011).

The facilitating lecturer became accustomed to liaising within and beyond the department in establishing resources, coordinating with colleagues to secure spaces and establishing footholds for the residency to take roots. Facilitators sought alignment with relevant electives or ‘specialisms’ in order to bring depth and richness of experience for all, while responding to the preferences of the artists regarding the identification of potential school, student or community groups.

With time and the experience of the first year, review meetings and reflection made smoother the management of subsequent years. As relationships strengthened between the facilitators and artists, confidence built making possible the sharing of observations and reflections to be held in trust by the other. Critical to this was accessing the student voice in terms of evaluating initiatives. This was undertaken largely via feedback sheets to inform planning and to reshape and improve the experience of the residency for all stakeholders. The importance of monitoring and evaluation is emphasised as crucial by Hallam (2011).



## Communication

Hallam's (2001) further tenet of effective partnerships is good communication which is discussed with reference to communication between all stakeholders. Initial communication between partners took the form of planning meetings which have been described under context.

Clear communication with the student body was required to highlight scheduled dance events. Administrative support was required by facilitators in the creation of attractive publicity documentation for access via notice-boards, email and social media. The purpose was to motivate university-age student teachers to learn more about dance by participating in out-of-class dance workshops and to inspire students to access dance performances, thus 'seeing dance'. Assistance was sought by facilitators in the management of students signing up. As residency outcomes included support of student teachers in the teaching of dance on School Placement, the development of ensuing online resources and lesson plans were instrumental to furthering the teaching of dance on School Placement, and beyond.

The purpose was to motivate university-age student teachers to learn more about dance by participating in out-of-class workshops.

Communication was required with other stakeholders in the institutions through convening internal and external meetings (See Table 1). It also involved writing regular reports for newsletters and websites for the wider institutional bodies, governing bodies and the Arts Council. Public relations and communication opportunities emerged to share works created, including resources and performances. These public events, to which multiple stakeholders within and beyond the host university were invited, thus highlighting:

*'the status of the arts within education as well as the obvious pedagogical benefits of allowing students the opportunity to engage with working artists; gaining a 'lived' understanding of the arts in education settings (Kenny and Morrissey, 2016:11).*

The 'living through' aspect of the residencies in students seeing and creating dance provided a 'value-added' dimension for facilitators in promoting dance as part of teacher formation. In providing additional arts experiences through the residencies, it was endeavoured that student teachers' confidence in their own artistry and skill would grow, alongside the value they attribute to dance. From the perspective of Arts Council residencies serving to extend the reach of the Arts in Education Charter (2013), there is a 'multiplier effect'. Student teachers emerging as qualified teachers with increased exposure to, and skill in, arts education, in turn, can facilitate the development of skill and artistry in the children they teach.

## Conclusion

The Arts Council residencies in initial teacher education provide a unique opportunity for all involved. For teacher educators, having access to the work of an artist or company of artists is both a privilege and a learning tool for all involved. In addition to opportunities for artistic engagement, student teachers are exposed to arts-rich learning and can gain insight into how an idea is brought from inception, through different iterations and processes, to its staging as performance. These steps mirror the

In providing additional arts experiences... it was endeavoured that student teachers' confidence in their own artistry and skill would grow, alongside the value they attribute to dance.

processes of any process-based, arts education performance initiative in schools. Further, with the launch of Creative Ireland Programme 2017–2022 highlighting current policy emphasis on teacher–artist partnerships, experience of an arts residency locates an emerging teacher favourably to engage in such partnerships. By enhancing the quality of teacher preparation in dance, experience of an arts residency can equip him or her to invite artist(s):

*'...into their classrooms to add another dimension/perspective to the classroom conversation and explorations in which children are already engaged'* (Morrissey, 2013: 31).

Despite the challenges evidenced, HEIs have an important role to play nationally in building capacity for both future teachers and artists to work in partnership to witness meaningful arts education practice modelled through an integrated and collaborative approach. Increased confidence in student teachers' own skill and artistry as a shared aim of both dance residencies, and representative of Arts Council residencies in HEIs, promotes the generation of children's creativity and their lifelong physical activity.

## NOTES:

-Research data is being analysed on data collected during the dance mentoring in-class teaching element of the residency at DCU

- The online digital resource Creative Tales: The Wolf and Peter will be integrated into the Bachelor of Education Year 2 lectures from September 2017 by the Physical Education Unit, School of Arts Education and Movement, Institute of Education, DCU.

-Story-maker, Peter Hussey commenced his residency in September 2017 at Maynooth University Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education.

*Facilitators Susan Marron, School of Arts Education and Movement, Institute of Education DCU and Dr Triona Stokes, Maynooth University Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education would like to thank the Arts Council of Ireland for their continued support.*

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# Professional Development Framework for Teachers in HE

## The Unique Features



**Dr Roisin Donnelly**



**Dr Terry Maguire**

National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education

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**I**n this article, the authors discuss the formation and early implementation of the National Professional Development Framework for all who teach in higher education - a key strand of the work plan of the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning.

*'Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?'*

*'That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,' said the Cheshire Cat.*

*'I don't much care where,' said Alice.*

*'Then it doesn't matter which way you go,' said the Cat.*

*'So long as I get somewhere,' Alice added as an explanation.*

*'Oh, you're sure to do that,' said the Cat, 'if you only walk long enough.'*

*Lewis Carroll (1865)*

## Introduction

In higher education, we have become increasingly aware of the narrative of being part of a knowledge-based economy, and know there are strong, compelling reasons for continuous professional development (PD) to support our role as educators. For anyone who teaches and supports learning in Irish higher education, PD is fundamental for remaining current in their role, it provides the drive to progress their career, and to deal with change in the sector.

Prior to 2016, there has not been a mechanism or route in place nationally to give structure, focus and support to individual academic staff members to avail of relevant PD and utilise it to realise their full potential in their teaching role. Promisingly, there are more PD opportunities to choose from nowadays for those teaching in Irish HE than ever before, but negotiating the labyrinth can remain difficult.

This article discusses a key strand of the work plan of the National Forum (NF) for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning - the formation and early implementation of the National Professional Development Framework (PDF) for all who teach in higher education (HE). This important work is leading towards national recognition of an individual's commitment to professionalism in teaching. By deepening sectoral understanding of the PDF itself, and raising awareness of the recent pilot

The Professional Development Framework is about promoting a culture of sustainable engagement for teachers to take ownership of their personal and professional development.

study implementation with staff who teach in universities, institutes of technology and private colleges, we are adding to the long-standing debate about the possible connections between professionalisation of teaching and improvements in student learning experiences and outcomes.

We have structured the article using a series of questions to highlight what is unique about this PD Framework, its underpinning values, and distinctive domains.

### **Why is a national PDF important for Teaching & Learning in HE in Ireland?**

At the forefront of this work by the National Forum is an aim to drive and maintain engagement in professional development initiatives for teachers to support their career-long growth. With competing forces and priorities in HE today, it can be the case that initiatives related to professional development become sidelined or relegated to an exercise in compliance. Against the backdrop of increasingly demanding job requirements, the PDF is about promoting a culture of sustainable engagement for teachers to take ownership of their personal and professional development.

The rapidly changing environment of HE in an increasingly digital world requires those who teach to have a personal commitment to professional development. The National Forum responded to this need, and an extensive consultation process with the HE Sector across 2014–15 (NF, 2015) highlighted a range of (often contradictory) views about a national PD Framework. What emerged was the need for a values-based framework, underpinned by scholarship that was flexible enough to be inclusive of all those who teach in HE, one that included all types of professional development, and that encourages those who teach to engage in a continuous cycle of evidence-based reflection on their practice over the lifelong learning process. There was a need for flexibility for institutions to interpret the framework for their own context.

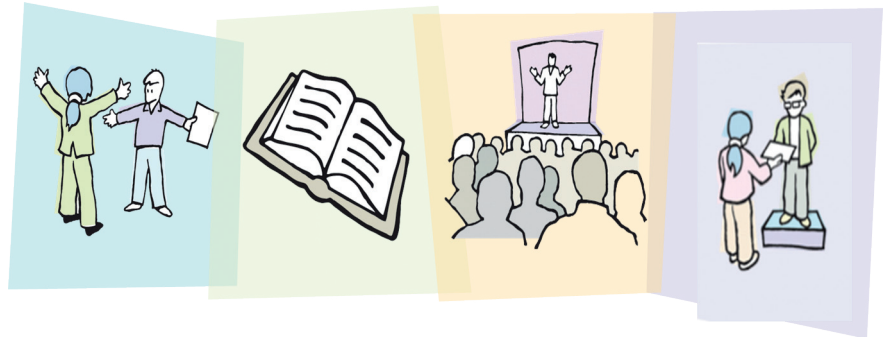
The rapidly changing environment of Higher Education requires those who teach to have a personal commitment to professional development.

There was less agreement about whether the need to develop personal and professional digital capacity should be included explicitly or be integrated across the framework. The diversity of opinion about what the national framework would look like (the form it took and its content) means that the framework as developed may not be considered perfect, but importantly it is accepted by all those who teach in the sector as usable for their practice.

The PD Framework was published by the National Forum in mid-2016 [<http://www.teachingandlearning.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/PD-Framework-FINAL.pdf>] to provide guidance for the professional development of individuals and give direction to other stakeholders (e.g. institutions, higher education networks, educational/academic developers, policy makers and student body representatives) for planning, developing and engaging in professional development activities. As requested by the sector, the PDF provides descriptions of the domains of PD activity, elements and professional values associated with the performance of teaching, and associated leadership roles.

## What do teachers in Irish HE consider as a viable PD opportunity?

Figure 1 below shows the types of professional development opportunities incorporated in the framework which include activities which are non-accredited (including collaborative, unstructured and structured) and those which are accredited.



1. Collaborative Non-Accredited	2. Unstructured Non-Accredited	3. Structured Non-Accredited	4. Accredited
<b>Examples</b> Conversations with colleagues, peer networking, peer observations, online blogs/discussion forums, mentoring, critical friends where you engage in informal dialogue with peers on how to improve teaching	<b>Examples</b> Reading articles, following social media, self-study, watching video tutorials, keeping a reflective teaching journal/portfolio, preparing an article for publication	<b>Examples</b> Workshops, seminars, MOOCs, conferences, summer schools, structured collaborative projects, research project on a topic of professional interest	<b>Examples</b> Professional Certificate, Graduate Diploma, Masters, PhD, EdD in: Teaching and Learning, eLearning, Leadership in Education, Education Policy

**Figure 1: Types & examples of PD identified in NF consultation**

Staff members that teach develop their knowledge, skills and competencies in their teaching through a range of learning activities. Each learning activity can be described by different types of learning, singly or in combination. The framework identifies and recognises four types of learning associated with any professional development learning activity ('new learning', 'consolidating learning', 'mentoring' and 'leading').

## What are the unique features of the Professional Development Framework?

There are other PD frameworks in place in HE internationally, so what makes this Irish framework so distinctive? Its uniqueness is in reframing the PD conversation through a shift in discourse to one of advocacy, and it repositions professional development in Irish HE so that it places priority soundly on the individual's needs. The PDF (illustrated in Figure 2 below) presents a holistic approach to professional development, incorporating the five domains with the individuality of the staff member at its core.

A key feature of the framework is its flexibility in how it uses a domain-based approach to professional standards in T&L. There are five PDF domains, each of which is applicable to a wide number of staff roles and to different

career stages of those engaged in teaching and supporting learning. The standard domains and elements are underpinned by professional values, all of which emerged from the extensive and concentrated sectoral consultation. By setting objectives and charting progress towards their achievement, identifying strengths and development needs and enabling discussion of career aspirations, the PDF can support individuals to be responsible for determining what they need to learn, for managing and undertaking their own PD activity, and to consider how best to incorporate innovations to their professional practice.

Individuals can interpret the framework in his or her unique way, depending on disciplinary background, and can showcase their engagement with relevant domains of the PDF. The framework enables individuals to show how they learn in diverse ways and represent knowledge, so teachers and those working in learning support can take differentiated approaches to using the framework, and engage at times that best suits their schedules in the cycle of the busy academic year.



**Figure 2: The five domains of the national PDF**

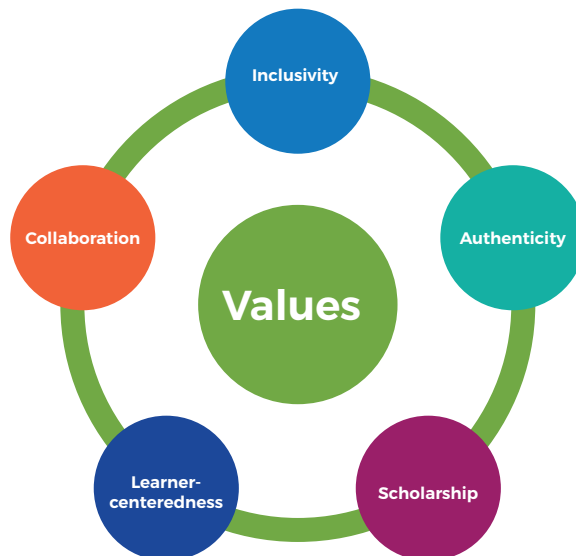
- » At the core of the domains is the centrality of the Self recognising that the professional and personal values that the individual brings to their teaching are pivotal in their development as a teacher.
- » Professional Identity and Development captures the development and self-evaluation of professional identity and recognises that an individual's professional identity can change at different stages of their career.
- » The Professional Communication and Dialogue domain emphasises the need for those who teach to be able to communicate, and collaborate through a range of media.
- » Professional Knowledge and Skills ensures the individual remains current in terms of their professional/disciplinary knowledge and can implement teaching, learning and assessment approaches which are reflective and underpinned by a strong evidence base.



- » The explicit inclusion of the domain Personal and Professional Digital Capacity recognises that we live and work in a digital world, and that teachers must develop digital skills to have the self-assurance to harness the potential of technology for learning impact. This domain has made explicit the need to develop skills and confidence for those that teach in Irish higher education.

The development of an individual's engagement with the scholarship of teaching and learning is an integral component of each of the five domains.

The PDF is underpinned by five key professional values which act as a guide for individual staff, academic departments and institutions to recognise, inform, enhance and sustain PD in Irish Higher Education (Figure 3 below):



**Figure 3: The underpinning professional values of the national PDF**

The framework is for all staff members who teach regardless of their employment contract.

A glance at each value below reveals why teachers in Irish HE identified these as fundamental to their PD:

**Inclusivity:** The framework is for all staff members who teach regardless of their employment contract, the stage they are at in their career or their professional identity. It is just as relevant to learning support staff and management as lecturers at different stages in their career, and this is evidenced in the pilot study implementation discussed in this article.

**Authenticity:** The PDF recognised that PD must allow for genuine and personally relevant engagement by participants; opportunities for PD must be real, useful and valuable to individuals in their practice.

**Collaboration:** Although focused around individual staff, the approach supported by the PDF aims to emphasise the social learning that is key to learning in the workplace context. Being continuously productive in busy academic roles can be overwhelming, so having the support of colleagues

One of the first steps taken this year was the formation of an independent Professional Development Expert Group to develop sectoral capacity to support the PDF in the HEIs.

through engagement with the framework can sustain our instructional vitality. The PDF can encourage staff peer dialogue and support the mentoring of other staff.

**Scholarship:** The framework emphasises the importance of teaching having an evidence base and supporting the scholarship of T&L. It encourages staff to link with established best practices in professional development while also fostering innovation on the basis of evidence.

**Learner Centredness:** If those who teach in higher education are always encouraged to be student-centred in all that they do, then it naturally follows that the PD opportunities provided for them must position the learner at the core.

### Implementing the PD Framework across the sector

Once the PDF was developed, the challenge for the National Forum was how to implement the framework across the sector. Considerable thought went into planning the early implementation of the PDF, and we feel that the connections formed through each stage contribute to the uniqueness of the work. One of the first steps taken earlier this year was the formation of an independent PD Expert Group with 10 academics and education experts to develop sectoral capacity to support the PDF in the HEIs. The work of group is crucial for guiding sustainable engagement with the PDF throughout the sector. Working closely with staff in the NF dedicated to the PDF pilot studies, the PD Expert Group scheduled for the initial implementation of the PDF to be completed in the timeframe February–June 2017. The pilot studies were designed to capture how individuals (from a range of individual professional identities) navigate the PDF with a view to informing future support material and resources to guide others using the framework in the future. There were 22 pilot groups formed in the HE sector from universities, institutes of technology and the private colleges:

There were 22 pilot groups formed in the HE sector.

- » New and experienced academic staff from a wide range of disciplines;
- » Heads of Department;
- » Part-time lecturers from industry;
- » Teaching staff from the Health Professions;
- » Academic Writing Tutors;
- » Maths Learning Support Tutors;
- » Learning Technologists;
- » Nurse Educators;
- » Educational Developers;
- » Careers Advisors;
- » Disability Liaison Officers;
- » Teacher Educators;
- » New Teachers in the HECA Colleges;
- » Librarians;
- » Work Placement Co-ordinators;
- » Art & Design Practitioner-Educators;
- » PhD Supervisors;
- » Teachers who research;
- » Researchers who teach.

Clear benefits are emerging in terms of collaboration, authenticity, and learner-centeredness.

Each of the 22 pilot study groups gave the participants an opportunity to begin a professional development portfolio (PDP) to explore the domains of the framework, using it to think about how they can develop as teaching professionals. Those involved were encouraged to develop their PDP in any format and media that enabled them to collect their evidence in a way that suited their needs and context, and allowed them the space to undertake the continuing process of assessment, analysis, action, and review of their practice, at a time and pace that suits them. Compiling the PDP reinforces professional learning by directing the teacher's attention to strengths and gaps in their knowledge and skills and enables them to set clear goals for their own development. It is also evidence of the teacher's development and commitment to PD and to keeping up-to-date with rapidly changing knowledge, and the need to maintain and develop skills. Arguably, such a PD record is something that can support national professional mobility.

While the evaluation phase of this work is currently taking place, some early insights come directly from the 210 participants who engaged with the pilot studies. Clear benefits are emerging in terms of collaboration, authenticity and learner-centeredness which are a great endorsement of the underpinning professional values of the PDF.

### **The participants were asked why the PDF matters to them**

The following insights were shared from across the participating professions:

- » Encourages critical reflection on practice, training, experience, educational history, skills, knowledge over professional lifetime
- » Promotes collaboration with colleagues
- » Leverages individual's strengths and recognises areas for development
- » Keeping people fresh and engaged as mid-career professionals
- » Builds personal and professional support systems for role
- » Enables reviewing, planning and taking responsibility for personal and professional development & learning
- » Considers knowledge and skills gaps and barriers
- » Supports habits of recording and evidencing work and interactions
- » Identifies the core values that drive teaching
- » Serves as a jumping-off point for future professional plans
- » Helps navigate through the overall scope of work activities
- » Aids evaluating, better understanding and continuing to develop contributions to T&L
- » Awakens conversations and discussions on PD and a curiosity to explore the connections between T&L and the potential interchangeableness of these roles
- » Instils a sense of appreciation for what is being achieved in T&L practice
- » Provokes discussion on the diversity of the teacher/researcher role
- » Collaborative exercise with colleagues from other schools and disciplines – to be able to learn from others
- » Is a user-friendly framework to categorise, manage and disseminate PD activity in a consistent and transparent way across the sector
- » Recognises the educator in all higher education professionals and their activities

Institutions are being financed through the T&L Enhancement Fund to map their existing professional development provision onto the PD framework.

The incorporation of a peer triad support mechanism will allow teachers to work together in bringing their PD further into their practice.

Complementing the work taking place on the PDF through the pilot studies, an innovative initiative that has really grabbed the collective imagination of the sector is the design, development and delivery of a series of national digital badges on PD. From February–June 2017, fifteen development teams from across the sector have collaborated to produce open access PD programmes (each requiring 25 student effort hours) on key topics which can be delivered across all institutions. Completion of these programmes will earn participants a National Forum digital badge matched to the domain it relates to on the PD Framework. These badges can improve the mobility and recognition of non-accredited professional development of staff across the sector.

Two further PDF initiatives have gained significant traction in the sector in recent months. Institutions are being financed through the T&L Enhancement Fund 2016 to map their existing professional development provision onto the PD framework, to develop specific resources for those in a leadership role as well as entry programmes for graduate assistants. Ten collaborative projects are underway involving 22 HEIs. In addition, full details of these projects are available at <http://www.teachingandlearning.ie/digital-enhancement-funding/2016-tl-fund-proposals/>

Professional development has also been included as a funding stream the 2017–18 national funded seminar series and will enable colleagues to make connections throughout the sector and focus on shared interests in both the research and practice of T&L enhancement, and specifically building capacity through professional development. We strongly feel this work is important to keep up the momentum going of implementing the PDF, and to continue to give more and more teachers the chance to opt use the framework.

Ultimately, our aim is to develop a PD Recognition Framework informed by the pilot implementation and other initiatives. The PD Recognition Framework will acknowledge an individual's commitment to continuous professional development. The incorporation of a peer triad support mechanism (September 2017) will allow teachers and those in learning support from different disciplines to work together in bringing their PD further into their practice; this is key because bridging the theory–practice gap and the transfer of new ideas to the f2f, blended or fully online classroom is perhaps one of the most challenging areas that a teacher can face. The PD Recognition Framework will nurture and accelerate good ideas, showcase innovative practice, and encourage collaborative networks and partnerships among HE teaching staff. Having the opportunity for input and discussion with colleagues as a support system for this will be hugely beneficial. It will enable a sector wide learning community to form that will enrich the practice of the immediate three individuals involved, but also the profession as a whole. Through the triads, teacher success stories, as well as the challenges and how they overcome them, can be shared for the benefit of all involved.

Figure 4 (overleaf) provides a synopsis of the unique PDF characteristics to date. We are expecting and will welcome further insights which emerge from the ongoing full-scale evaluation of its early implementation in the sector.



Figure 4: Summarises the areas that show the uniqueness of the national PDF

### Recommendations for the HE Sector

Implementing the PDF in the HE sector is undoubtedly challenging; but the unparalleled enthusiasm and commitment of the teachers who have embraced the challenges and engaged in all stages of the PDF pilot implementation has reinforced belief that this is the way forward for the sector.

- » **Encourage staff to engage with the framework:** The PDF is important to the professional identity of all staff that teaches or supports learning. As well as engaging in formal accredited PD, committed T&L staff members in Irish HE are learning on the job all the time, and the PDF allows this informal learning to be recognised, valued and recorded. The PDF can empower individuals to take ownership of their PD to create, discover and engage in meaningful personal and professional development as a career-embedded commitment.
- » **Senior management should provide strong leadership:** Policymakers and institutional leaders must take some a leadership role to encourage and enable the sector wide implementation of the framework. They must support all educators within their institutions to engage in continuous professional development and apply that learning to improve student learning. The national PDF offers a clear definition and roadmap for engaging with professional development within Irish HEIs for the future.
- » **Learning Communities can support those involved:** Learning communities at discipline, programme or department/faculty level, together with communities of practice are the major engines of change.
- » **Emerging theme of professionalization of teaching in HE:** Progress on the theme of professionalisation has been positive and visible

in the period 2014–2017, and there is strong support for retaining this theme in the foreground of activities at institutional, regional and national levels. A more nuanced understanding of PD needs is now evident, with an emphasis on support for specific areas and on the development of academic teams. There is openness to mapping existing and future PD provision to the Framework.

- » The concept of a staff ‘PD portfolio’ is regarded positively, with the PDF supporting individuals to evolve their own PD portfolio as an excellent opportunity to reflect on achievements to date, receive feedback from peers, explore issues in their T&L practice, and decide on priorities and objectives for the future.

## Conclusion

‘An education system is only as good as its teachers’ (UNESCO, 2014: 9), and inspiring and informing teachers is the most important institution-related factor influencing student achievement today. This belief is reflected in the Irish context with the National Strategy drawing attention to the importance of professional development for academic staff, and recommends that all higher education institutions...must ensure that all teaching and learning staff are both qualified and competent in teaching and learning, and should support ongoing development and improvement of their skills’ (Department of Education and Skills, 2011: 18).

The take-away message about the PDF, the recent pilot study implementation, and the range of ongoing PD projects and seminars funded by the National Forum are that it can encourage those who teach in HE across all disciplines and professional roles in teaching and learning to grow, and to develop their careers. The significance of this work is the continuous improvement of teaching staff, students, institutions, and the Irish higher education community. We firmly believe that this national PDF is essential for driving future improvement in, and continuing to raise the profile of T&L across the Irish HE sector.

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# From the Margins to Mainstreaming

## A Universally Designed and Inclusive Approach to Access and Participation in UCD



**Dr Anna M Kelly**

Director, UCD Access & Lifelong Learning

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**T**he Higher Education sector in Ireland is seeking to open opportunities to under-represented groups. The vision for access in HE is that the student population will reflect the diversity of the country's population. Dr Anna Kelly discusses this vision and how UCD is moving access from the margins to the mainstream by developing a universally designed and inclusive approach.

### Introduction

Over the past decade, the higher education (HE) sector in Ireland has endeavoured to respond to a more diverse student population, and to open opportunities to under-represented groups, including students with disabilities, adults, those from communities experiencing low progression, part-time and flexible learners, further education award holders, members of the Traveller community, and asylum-seekers.

The vision for access in HE is that the student population will reflect the diversity of Ireland's population<sup>1</sup>: a key element of the *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* (2011) and the *HEA National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015–2019* (2015). This access policy document sets targets to increase participation by under-represented cohorts. It identifies integrating and mainstreaming access as a key goal. The HEA acknowledges the priority of establishing access infrastructure in higher education institutions (HEIs), and states: 'The next step is to integrate the principle of equity of access more fully into the everyday life of the HEIs so that it permeates all faculties and departments' (HEA, 2015a, p.25). Five HE policy objectives, one of which concerns participation, equality of access, and lifelong learning, are monitored via the 'institutional compact' (HEA, 2013a).

Internationally, Education for All urges the development of inclusive education systems (UNESCO, 2010), and the Bologna Process is aligning system components, including implementation of a two-cycle system, credit ranges, quality assurance, student mobility, and the social dimension, albeit slowly (European Commission, EACEA, & Eurydice, 2015).

There is increasing literature on the need for changed institutional practice as a key to ensuring access and participation of under-represented groups in HE (Bamber & Tett, 2001; Callaghan, 2000; Clarke, 2003; EAN, 1999; Gorard et al., 2006; HEA, 2006c; Osborne et al., 2007; Skilbeck & O'Connell, 2000; Verbeurgt,

The UCD Widening Participation committee offers a formal mechanism to oversee and promote progress.

2014; Wagner, 2002; Woodrow, 1999). Some studies point to the impact of institutional culture on widening participation and suggest that developing awareness of its influence is a prerequisite to a more inclusive institution (Greenbank, 2004, 2007; Wray, 2013). Leaders' awareness and understanding of access are also crucial (Aguirre & Martinez, 2002; Foucault, 1972; Pasque, 2010; Pasque & Rex, 2010; Bourdieu et al., 1994; Burke, 2012; Butcher et al., 2012; ECU, 2014).

Frameworks to support inclusion, and embed and mainstream equality of access in higher education, are also evident (Baker et al., 2004; Blythman & Orr, 2002; Bohle-Carbonnell & Dailey-Hebert, 2015; Clayton-Pedersen et al., 2009; Duvekot, 1999; EUA, 2008; Garvey & Treanor, 2011; Hill & Hatt, 2012; Jones & Thomas, 2005; Kelly, 2017; Layer et al., 2003; Lynch, 2005; May & Bridger, 2010; Schroeder, 2012; Shaw et al., 2007; Thomas, 2011; Thomas et al., 2005, 2009; Thomas & Tight, 2011; Tuitt, 2016; Williams et al., 2005; Woodrow & Thomas, 2002). Areas highlighted include institutional vision, leadership, culture, structures, staff development, admission policies, pedagogy, curriculum, assessment, student supports, targets, data collection, and resource allocation.

Nationally and internationally, there is agreement on the need to integrate the principle of equity of access into HEIs' everyday operations. Implementing this goal, however, presents challenges. As Osborne, Gallacher and Crossan (2007, p. 10) observe, 'It is not simply a question of the preparedness of students for the HE experience, though clearly many are not prepared for the demands of a still largely inflexible system, but it is also the degree to which institutions respond to the challenges of diversity.'

## **1. UCD's approach to mainstreaming the principle of equal access**

UCD, with its proud history of inclusion and diversification, is well placed to address mainstreaming equity of access throughout the campus. This iterative process has involved interventions across key institutional dimensions, summarised below.

### **1.1. University strategy and structure**

UCD's strategy commits it to becoming 'a pre-eminent diverse and inclusive scholarly community of students, faculty and staff' (UCD, 2015). This means designing the educational experience, student supports and facilities, and the built and technological environments around the needs of all students (Kelly, 2017). Such an approach ensures that access is embedded and mainstreamed throughout the university and is thus promoted, supported, and the responsibility of all (Kelly, 2017). Fundamental is the belief that equality of access incorporates both entry to UCD and access to an inclusive learning environment designed for all students, not just 'typical' or 'traditional' students.

The university established the UCD Widening Participation (WP) committee, which offers a formal mechanism to oversee and promote progress towards diversifying the student profile to reflect the general population's. The committee, led by Professor Grace Mulcahy, is aligned with the university's academic programme structures, and reports to the

UCD's building programme addresses all relevant issues, including accessibility.

Alongside CAO, UCD offers seven entry pathways.

University Management Group, Equality, Diversity & Inclusion subgroup. This structural change ensures equality of access and participation is embedded in academic structures. Membership also includes the Graduate School Boards and policy and support services: Admissions, Recruitment, Teaching & Learning, Communications, Library, Access & Lifelong Learning (ALL)<sup>2</sup>, and Student Access Leaders.<sup>3</sup>

Specialised services for students with disabilities, adult students, part-time students, and those from communities experiencing disadvantage have been reconfigured to reflect the *student lifecycle* model, that is, preparing for and entering higher education, graduating, and progressing their career, postgraduate study and personal goals. Services that were developed separately in response to the needs of particular student cohorts are now consolidated and located in the ALL Centre, whose mission is to be the 'bridge to inclusion' building relationships between communities that are 'distant' from higher education and the university community. This is done primarily by:

- » Developing and implementing responses to widen access and ensure participation by diverse student cohorts, including students with disabilities, mature and part-time students, and those from communities experiencing disadvantage
- » Supporting the university to integrate and embed the principle of equity of access throughout the institution.

## 1.2. Built and technical infrastructure

UCD's building programme addresses all relevant issues, including accessibility. Accessibility issues with existing built infrastructure were identified and prioritised through a campus audit. Accessible signage (on information and orientation) is also being developed. A project by students and staff led to the publication of Getting Around UCD Videomap Series.<sup>4</sup> UCD student accommodation developed a system to prioritise and reserve accessible accommodation for students with particular requirements. In 2014, IT Services examined the accessibility of technical infrastructure, assistive technology supports required by staff, and campus navigation systems.

## 1.3. Academic integration

UCD is moving from parallel structures and processes to one where all programme-related matters are integrated with its academic governance structures. The university is implementing practical mainstreaming actions to ensure that the needs of students from under-represented groups are integrated in academic planning and delivery. For example, UCD established clear participation targets for under-represented student cohorts: these are now integrated with enrolment planning. Measurable indicators of success have been set: 33 per cent of undergraduates are to be drawn from these cohorts by 2020. UCD recorded 29 per cent in 2017.

The university has increased the number of undergraduate entry routes. Alongside CAO, seven pathways are offered:

- » **HEAR** (Higher Education Access Route), for school leavers who show evidence of socio-economic disadvantage.
- » **DARE** (Disability Access Route to HE), for school leavers who show evidence of disability.
- » **University Access Programme**, for applicants aged 22 who do not meet existing entry requirements. It provides the foundation skills to undertake a degree, and progression is guaranteed upon successful completion.
- » **Mature Years**, for those aged 23+ who wish to enter a full-time undergraduate degree programme for the first time (i.e., no previous Level 8 qualification).
- » **QQI-FET** award holders for entrants holding appropriate award at Level 5/6.
- » **Open Learning**, for all applicants who wish to study at undergraduate level on a flexible, part-time basis and can opt for a certificate, diploma qualification, or audit mode.
- » **Lifelong Learning** is offered to all applicants and provides a way to engage and experience a range of academic topics without a focus on assessment.

Part-time undergraduate students are ineligible for SUSI.

UCD established a curriculum review process to make the taught programme portfolio more coherent. Teams leading this review were trained on inclusion: embedding the principles of universal design, producing accessible blackboard materials, and developing inclusive assessment strategies. UCD Teaching & Learning has embedded universal design principles in the UCD Professional Certificate in University Teaching, which is available to academic staff and frequently undertaken by new staff. UCD Access & Lifelong Learning has published the *Universal Design for Curriculum Design: Case Studies from University College Dublin* (Padden, O'Connor, & Barrett, 2017).<sup>5</sup>

Historically, the University Access Programme was the sole responsibility of ALL, but here too the university is progressing the inclusion agenda. The University Access course for Science, Engineering & Agriculture is now mainstreamed, and forms part of the programmes offered by the College of Science. Discussions are in progress to mainstream the University Access course for Arts, Social Science and Law.

Access to part-time education has been traditionally associated with UCD Adult Education. This provision has been innovatively reimaged as UCD Open Learning, opening hundreds of undergraduate modules to those who wish to study part-time. UCD Open Learning is mainstreamed and offered by 25 Academic Schools. Provision of student-related access support remains the primary responsibility of UCD ALL.

The university has developed other part-time courses to meet particular needs, including in Business, Arts, Social Sciences, and Public Health, without state financial support and despite the inadequacy of national policy on state support for part-time provision<sup>6</sup>. The HEA consistently includes flexible learning as an equity issue (HEA, 2004, 2010, 2015a), yet part-time undergraduate students are ineligible for SUSI.<sup>7</sup> Currently 17 per cent of undergraduates in higher education and 8 per cent of university undergraduates are enrolled part-time (HEA, 2015c, 2015b).

All academic programmes have a dedicated student adviser.

#### 1.4. Student supports

All academic programmes have a dedicated student adviser who helps students find pathways to address personal, social, and emotional issues, and advises on UCD policies, procedures, and services. Many specialist supports are also offered. The Library Services provide access to print and electronic resources, and study support. Support is also offered by the Mathematics Support Centre, overseen by UCD School of Mathematics & Statistics, and the Academic Writing Centre, co-ordinated by the UCD School of English Drama and Film.

Dedicated student supports are also offered to particular students groups, including international students. The ALL Centre provides under-represented students with a wide range of access-related interventions, designed to help them become independent learners and engage with university life. These include information and guidance, financial supports, personal and social supports, individual needs assessment, specialist orientation, academic skills and learning support, disability and assistive technology supports, digital tools for learning, and occupational therapy.

To ensure seamless service delivery, an inclusive environment must integrate supports, and the challenge is to develop models of best practice that offer what is necessary for post-entry access supports, ensuring complementarity and alignment with mainstream services.

## 2. Learning thus far

UCD is moving access from the margins to the mainstream by developing a universally designed and inclusive approach. By using evidence and data, this national policy objective is being addressed systematically and sensibly. But it is a complex and challenging task that requires institutional and individual change (May & Bridger, 2010). This affects all facets of university life, and, when fully achieved, has the power to transform the university (Thomas, 2011a).

HEIs are slowly becoming inclusive, though progress remains patchy.

Mainstreaming access in HE has been a policy objective for some time (HEA, 2004, 2008, 2015a). HEIs are slowly becoming inclusive, though progress remains patchy. Kelly (2017) found early signs of mainstreaming and embedding equality of access, but also an absence of institution-wide policies and practices. Developing inclusive institutions depends on multiple factors – chiefly the priority given to this objective by the institution, allied to the support of senior leaders. Shared understanding is necessary for developing ownership and buy-in. The benefits for all students must be articulated. Sharing examples of inclusive practice is crucial, as is building and maintaining momentum. Processes and structures must be fit for purpose. Mainstreaming actions are warranted across key institutional dimensions. The Inclusive Design Framework proposed by Kelly (2017) offers a useful starting point and highlights four such dimensions: institutional vision and priority; organisational arrangements; teaching, learning, and assessment; and research and data collection.

From a policy perspective, moving access from the margins to the mainstream is but one issue, one challenge, and one priority on the HE landscape. It needs to be facilitated and promoted sector-wide. Pockets of inclusive institutional practice require nurturing and embedding throughout higher education. This strategic approach would enable tangible progress towards the national objective ‘to integrate the principle of equity of access more fully into the everyday life of the HEIs so that it permeates all faculties and departments, and is not marginalised as the responsibility of the designated access office’ (HEA, 2015a, p. 25).

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## FOOTNOTES

1. <http://hea.ie/policy/national-access-plan/>.
2. The WP Committee receives expertise, advice, and operational support from UCD's ALL team.
3. Access Leaders are students affiliated with the ALL Centre. They are invited to apply for the position of access leader, which offers the opportunity to engage in work with ALL. Leaders receive training and contribute to activities such as orientation, shadowing days, events, and campus tours. Three Student Access Leaders are nominated to the WP committee by the Access Leaders Group.
4. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=jOXzwqCxBlM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jOXzwqCxBlM).
5. [www.ucd.ie/all/supports/informationforstaff/stafftraininganduniversaldesign/](http://www.ucd.ie/all/supports/informationforstaff/stafftraininganduniversaldesign/).
6. UCD receives some Springboard funding for graduate level courses only. This is a state-sponsored labour market activation measure, which funds unemployed people to take up targeted part-time HE (HEA, 2012).
7. Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI): <https://susi.ie/>.

## Three new University Presidents



Professor Patrick O'Shea

Professor Patrick O'Shea became the 15th President of University College Cork on 1st February 2017. A UCC Physics graduate and former Vice President and Chief Research Officer at the University of Maryland in the US, his particular area of expertise is in electromagnetic.

"My physics degree from UCC laid the foundations for a successful academic career in the US culminating in my current leadership role at the University of Maryland. I am delighted to return to lead my alma mater, a university of ancient heritage and modern focus."



Dr Desmond Joseph Fitzgerald

Dr Desmond Joseph Fitzgerald became President of the University of Limerick in May 2017. A graduate of UCD Medical School, he spent time abroad as Director of Coronary Care and on the faculty in the Department of Clinical Pharmacology, Vanderbilt.

Back in Ireland, he is currently a Governor of the Mater Misericordiae University Hospital, Deputy Chairperson of the National Institute of Health Research TCC, and a member of the Scientific Advisory Board of the Institute of Translational Medicine and Therapeutics. He is an Adjunct Chair in Medicine and Pharmacology at the University of Pennsylvania and a member of the Association of American Physicians.



Professor Ciarán Ó hÓgartaigh

Professor Ciarán Ó hÓgartaigh is to succeed Dr Jim Browne as President of NUI Galway and will take up his new role in January 2018. He comes to NUI Galway from UCD College of Business where he has been Principal and Dean since 2011.

A first-class-honours and first-in-class graduate of NUI Galway, he said he was honoured to be appointed President of his alma mater and is looking forward "to coming home to the 'town and gown' which shaped me".

# Widening Participation

## Further Education Progression



**Jennifer Murphy**

Admissions Officer, University College Cork

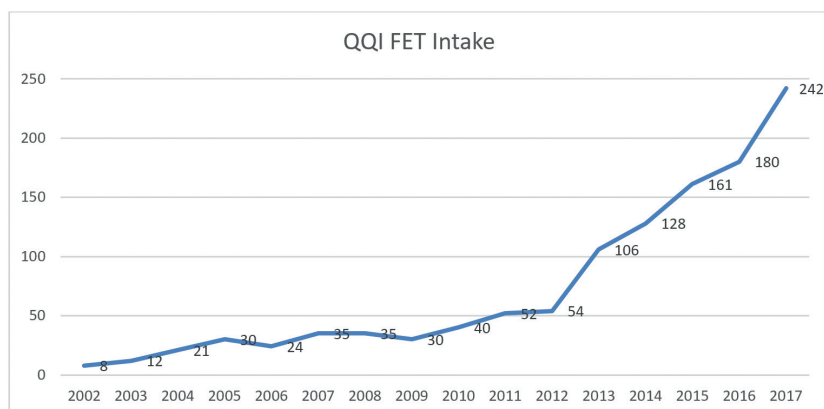
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**T**his paper describes the evolution of an entry route to University College Cork (UCC), established to attract students who hold further education qualifications. The journey began in the early 2000's and has resulted in widened participation of students who might not otherwise have considered pursuing a university degree.

Traditionally, progression of students in Further Education and Training (FET) Colleges to higher education has been relatively low. In an effort to address this, the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-2019 set a target to increase to 10%, by 2019, the ratio of those who gain entry to higher education based on a FET qualification. This measure was intended to counter the concentration of access to higher education at the point of completion of second level education, and the overall objective was to broaden the opportunities for entry to higher education.

The first admissions of students to degree programmes at UCC on the basis of FET qualifications occurred in 2002. Since then, this entry route – now called the QQI FET (Qualifications and Quality Authority of Ireland Further Education and Training) route – has been on an upward trajectory (Figure 1). In 2017, UCC admitted 242 new entrants on the basis of their FET qualifications, which is almost 7% of all new entrants. The number of degree programmes that can now be accessed on the basis of holding a recognised FET qualification, at level 5 or 6 on the National Qualifications Framework, has grown to 41. The students admitted through this entry route in 2017 hail from almost 50 Further Education Colleges, and they hold one of the 80 QQI FET awards now recognised for entry to university.

The evolution of the QQI FET entry route has been an important feature in UCC's widening participation agenda, and it is a success story that continues to develop. In sharing our story, we hope that other HEIs will be inspired to evolve their own widening participation routes so that FET students nationwide are uninhibited in aspiring to higher education goals.



**Figure 1. Intake of students to UCC via the QQI FET entry route**

The tremendous organisational and structural changes in the FET sector in recent decades have had the unintended consequence of adding to the complexity of developing the FET entry route to higher education. Understanding these changes provides an important context to UCC's journey.

The FET landscape was simpler back in 1991, when the National Council for Vocational Awards (NCVA) was established as an executive agency of the Department of Education and Science. Its role was to set, monitor and certify national standards for vocational education and training programmes provided within the FET sector. The NCVA became extinct with the establishment of the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) in 2001, under the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999. Following a similar fate to the NCVA, FETAC was subsequently dissolved, and its functions passed to Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) in 2012.

Throughout the complex structural changes to the FET sector in recent years, UCC has continued to work in close collaboration with the FET colleges in developing the separate entry route for holders of FET qualifications at levels 5 and 6 on the National Qualifications Framework. The journey to establishing this new entry route was inspired in October 2000 at a meeting of the Committee of University Registrars where development of the link between NCVA level 2/FETAC Certificates and NUI degree courses was discussed. Subsequent to this meeting, in an effort to progress some FET links, UCC engaged in discussions with the FE Colleges in Cork.

In 2001 links were developed between two FETAC (NCVA Level 2) awards and UCC degree programmes: the Childcare (DCHSC) award was linked to UCC's BA Early Childhood Studies course, and the Business Studies (BBSXX and BBSAX) award was linked to UCC's Law degree. The entry route was established separate from the school-leaver route, so that eligible applicants would not compete for places on the Leaving Certificate points scheme. UCC launched a booklet, *Linking You to a Brighter Future*, which outlined the application requirements for candidates. An important feature of this entry route was that applicants with the relevant FETAC qualifications did not have to meet any other

matriculation requirements. A quota of places was allocated and eligible applicants competed for them on the basis of their FET award.

The FET Colleges welcomed the UCC initiative and acknowledged the breadth and depth of work that had been undertaken by the university in order to put these links in place. Over the course of the next decade, an increasing number of linked awards were recognised by the university and the number of degree programmes open to FET students continued to grow. One of the challenges in the FET sector was the system of alignment and recognition of old and new NCVA and FETAC awards, and over time the entry route became quite complex to administer.

Unintended  
layers of  
complexity crept  
in.

Unintended layers of complexity crept in as UCC expanded its recognition of QQI FET awards and the number of degree programmes for which they would be recognised. The complexity arose partly due to the process which had evolved for recognition of FET awards by the university. The request to recognise an award would, more often than not, come to UCC's Admissions Office from an FET student who wanted to gain entry to a particular university course. Following a request of this kind, the Admissions Office would examine the curriculum of the FET award. If sufficient alignment to the UCC degree was evident, the Admissions Office would liaise with the relevant UCC programme coordinator, who would subsequently need to go through the university programme approval processes to have the award recognised for matriculation purposes. Typically, the programme would set out special matriculation requirements where students would need to achieve a certain number of distinctions, and in many cases the specific distinctions that would need to be achieved. For instance, in order to compete for a place in the BA Early Years and Childhood Studies degree, three possible entry routes were documented (Table 1).

**Table 1. Entry routes to CK111 Early Years and Childhood Studies in 2015**

Old Code	New Code	Course Title	Distinctions must include the following modules:
DCHSC	5M2009	Early Childhood Care and Education	D20159/ 5N1765 Caring for Children (0-6 years) D20005/ 5N1764 Child Development D20007/ 5N1773 Early Childhood Education and Play D20153/ 5N1770 Early Care and Education Practice
DSACX		School Age Childcare	L22679 Child and Adolescent Development L22680 Health Awareness L21824 Integrating Children with Additional Needs N22682 School Age Children L22681 Relationships and Collaborations
DCXXX	6M2007	Early Childhood Care and Education	6N1942 Child Development 6N1945 Childhood Social Legal and Health Studies 6N1944 Early Childhood Curriculum 6N1949 Personal and Professional Development 6N1974 Equity and Diversity in Childcare



Applicants with the relevant FETAC qualifications did not have to meet any other matriculation requirements.

By 2015, 38 UCC programmes were included in the FET entry route and the university was recognising 66 QQI FET awards. This expansion resulted in a matrix of 1,300 possible entry permutations. The inherent layers of complexity, which included awards and module requirements, rendered the FET entry route increasingly confusing for applicants and FET Colleges to navigate and almost unmanageable for the Admissions Office from an administration perspective.

When the QQI began the process of re-validating and consolidating its FET awards, UCC saw the opportunity to reform the procedure for recognition of individual QQI FET awards. A proposal was made by the Admissions Office to the UCC's Academic Council to consolidate and simplify the entry routes. A common entry route was agreed for six of UCC's Science degrees, for instance, whereas previously each of these six degrees had set out its own separate matriculation requirements. The simplification process resulted in the recognition of an additional 25 FET awards.

Matriculation requirements were simplified to clearly set out the essential modules required to allow entry into specific degree programmes. Where appropriate, the requirement for distinctions in specified modules was removed altogether. Furthermore, many UCC degrees moved away from recognising a specified list of FET awards, to recognising the entire list of awards that are recognised for entry to any UCC degree programme. Streamlining the process for recognising new FET awards, and simplifying the articulation of matriculation requirements for clusters of UCC degrees, resulted in an entry route that was more accessible to applicants and more easily administered by the Admissions Office.

The new Quercus Talented Student Scholarship Programme at UCC gives QQI FET applicants the opportunity to apply for this prestigious award valued at up to €10,000 per annum.

While the QQI FET entry route has made some progress in levelling the playing field for accessing degree programmes of study, QQI FET applicants do not have the same access to entrance scholarships that are awarded on the basis of Leaving Certificate points. However, with the advent of the new Quercus Talented Student Scholarship Programme at UCC in 2014, QQI FET applicants were afforded the opportunity to apply for this prestigious scholarship, which is valued at up to €10,000 per annum. We already have one student who was admitted on the basis of his QQI FET award and successfully competed for the Quercus Sports Scholarship. His story may well serve as an inspiration to future QQI FET applicants.

Cathal O'Hanlon is now in the second year of a BA Arts degree. A native of Cobh, Cathal applied to UCC after successfully completing the Heritage & Culture QQI/Fetac Level 6 course in Coláiste Stiofán Naofa in Cork. Cathal left school after his Junior Cert having been offered a two-year contract with Charlton Athletic FC in England. He applied for and was awarded the Quercus Sports' Scholarship due to his impressive achievements as a soccer goalkeeper. He had guarded the net on the Republic of Ireland International U15's, U16's and U19's soccer squad. Cathal is progressing well in his degree studies and currently plays on the UCC senior soccer team. In 2017, with the help of Cathal's goalkeeping abilities, UCC became the first College soccer team to win both the Collingwood Cup and the Munster Senior League in the same season. On Sunday 12th of November 2017, Cathal received an international cap from FAI CEO John Delaney at a ceremony in the Aviva Stadium. Cathal's story is an inspiring example of successful progression from further to higher education.



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Richard Bruton Minister for Education and Skills, Professor Jane Ohlmeyer Chair of the Irish Research Council, Dr Eucharía Meehan former Director of the Irish Research Council, and John Halligan Minister of State for Training, Skills, Innovation and Research and Development.

# RESEARCH



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# Overview of a Year in Research

## A Turning Point for Pure Basic and Frontier Research



**Dr Eucharia Meehan**

MRIA, CEO and Registrar, Dublin Institute of Advanced Studies

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**I**n this piece, Dr Eucharia Meehan spotlights reasons to remember 2017 in relation to Research, including Ireland's re-commitment to supporting pure basic and frontier research, its investment in an Irish node of the global radio telescope LOFAR, and the announcement in Budget 2018 that Ireland will join the European Space Observatory in 2018.

2017 will be remembered by many in the research system as the year Ireland re-committed to supporting (albeit on a modest level) pure basic and frontier research. In late 2016, in Budget 2017, an acknowledgement had emerged of the imbalance in the system, between the competitive funding available for fundamental, longer-term research and for nearer-term, more predictable impact research. But it was only in April 2017 that the research community really believed a turning point had been reached. The launch of the Irish Research Council Laureate (frontier research) Awards for both the early and mid-career stages indicated that a real change was under way.

The programme, which is modelled on the prestigious European Research Council (ERC) awards, will uniquely reward ambitious (higher-risk) ideas and excellent individuals. It will be a key cultivating mechanism and stepping stone to the ERC programmes for the Irish research community. Not only this, but the government then announced in October (Budget 2018) that funding would be provided under the Laureate programme for later-stage career researchers (Advanced awards). This ensures a full suite of opportunities for researchers across all disciplines and all career stages. It comes not a moment too soon given that there was only one ERC Advanced Award in Ireland in 2017, received by Professor Tom Ray, an astrophysicist from the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies (DIAS).

The second reason 2017 is a seminal year for pure basic and frontier research is rooted in the decisions to invest in global research infrastructures. This type of investment is critical for Ireland taking its place in the world research and science ecosystem. I will first mention, in particular, the investment made in an Irish node of a global radio telescope called LOFAR, the node being called I-LOFAR. The government, research institutions (including DIAS), private entities, and individuals all came together to make this a reality. The radio telescope will be based, very appropriately, at Birr Castle, which has a long association with Irish astronomy and research. A further instance of such forward-looking investment was the subsequent

A movement grew in 2017 to acknowledge the benefits of supporting societally orientated research.

announcement in Budget 2018 that Ireland will join the European Space Observatory (ESO) in 2018. Again this investment will reap benefits not only for the research system but for public and private entities alike.

Through these decisions Ireland is, at a strategic level, taking small steps to play its role in global research and ‘big science’. Whilst the government and its agencies made decisions to support these infrastructure initiatives, congratulations must be extended to those members of the research community for their persistence and advocacy, which will bring Irish research to a better place.

### **Research landscape evolution – national and European**

Alongside these international developments, the national research landscape continued to evolve in line with national policy as set down in Innovation 2020. In September the forthcoming establishment of four new centres focused on national economic research priority areas was announced. These are co-funded by Science Foundation Ireland (SFI), the private sector, and the host higher education institutions (HEIs), and represent an investment of €72m. Centres in Smart Manufacturing, Bioeconomy, Neurotherapeutics, and 3D Manufacturing have been announced, bringing to 18 the number of centres being established by SFI and the HEIs. Four more centres are to be selected for establishment when funds become available.

In parallel with these developments, a movement grew in 2017 to acknowledge the benefits of supporting societally orientated research. Whilst initially driven by the adoption of a Societal Challenge approach by Horizon 2020, there is now more appreciation of the need for research to address national, European, and global issues – even in the absence of a technological or economic imperative.

At a national level, the publication early in 2017 of the ‘Engaged Research’ policy and practical guide by Campus Engage and the Irish Research Council (IRC) set the scene. Further initiatives by both the IRC and the Health Research Board (HRB) to engage societal stakeholders have ensured this agenda has developed some green shoots. Examples include the support of research to contribute to attaining the Sustainable Development Goals, partnering with NGOs and inter-government entities to enable this, and supporting medical patient engagement with research. There is increasing interest among NGOs and government departments in this approach. It is hoped that a Research Prioritisation ‘refresh’, while focused on economic impact, will take cognisance of the need for this broader approach, not least in view of the growing global focus on research which would contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals.

The latter also has been advised as a focus point by an Expert Group set up by the European Commission to advise on the next Framework Programme, FP9. Professor Mark Ferguson, chief science adviser to the Irish government and director general of SFI, was a member of this advisory group; their report, referred to as the Lamy Report, is available online at: [https://ec.europa.eu/research/evaluations/pdf/archive/other\\_reports\\_studies\\_and\\_documents/hlg\\_2017\\_report.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/research/evaluations/pdf/archive/other_reports_studies_and_documents/hlg_2017_report.pdf). Ireland recently made its preliminary submission on FP9.



Other areas of focus in 2017 included the advancement of gender equality in research.

The big unknown in developing FP9 is the UK's relationship with it. It is widely acknowledged in the research community that the UK is a significant contributor to the European Research Area. In 2017, policy makers and research institutions considered the impact of Brexit on national and European research. In the higher education and research domain, the Department of Education and Skills, Higher Education Authority (HEA), IRC, and SFI have all advised and are developing approaches to mitigate negative consequences of Brexit for the Irish higher education and research system. You can read more on this elsewhere in this publication. It is hoped that matters will be much clearer by the time we publish the Education Matters Yearbook 2018.

On a more positive note, Ireland's drawdown from Horizon 2020 reached €475m, and there was a very welcome acknowledgement of the efforts of the research system to engage with H2020 through a mid-term EU H2020 Champions awards ceremony in the summer.

### High-level policy developments

Earlier in the year, a 'refresh' of the Research Prioritisation Report (2012) was initiated by the Department of Business, Enterprise, and Innovation, to conclude by early 2018. The output from this is highly anticipated by the research performing system.

Other areas of focus in 2017 included the advancement of gender equality in research. The HRB, IRC, and SFI's announcement in December 2016 that they would all require institutions applying to them to have a Bronze Athena Swan award by the end of 2019 really is focusing minds. The HEA published the first progress report a year after the Report of the Expert Group: HEA National Review of Gender Equality in Irish Higher Education Institutions (June 2016). The new data shows there were only small improvements (1–2%) in addressing the under-representation of women at senior levels and on the governance and management of institutions between 2015 and 2016.

Accommodation for students, academic staff, and international researchers is now a very real problem.

Regrettably, the critical matter of funding for the higher education system also remains a challenge and is not yet fully resolved. There was a very welcome modest increase in overall funding for the system and a proposal to increase the employer contribution to the National Training Fund in Budget 2018. Not unconnected with this is the fact that the positioning of Ireland's HE institutions in the much-derided institutional rankings remained much the same. But going back to the thorny question of a broader, more sustainable approach to funding the system, this will hopefully emerge in 2018.

Challenges at national level are also impacting on the higher education and research system. Accommodation for students, academic staff, and international researchers is now a very real problem. I say this totally aware of the more chronic problem that accommodation and housing are for many people in Irish society. But in looking back on the year in research, the consequence of this broader national issue for research and academia cannot go unmentioned.

For the first time in the country's history, a Minister of State for Higher Education was appointed.

## Change at the helm

2017 was also a major year of changes in the leadership of Irish higher education and research. For the first time in the country's history, a Minister of State for Higher Education was appointed after the early summer election. Minister Mary Mitchell O'Connor, who had experience in the Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation portfolio in the previous administration, became the first Minister for Higher Education at a key juncture for the system. Minister John Halligan was reappointed to the Skills, Research, and Innovation portfolio and continued to champion the importance of research funding. There were also changes at the helm of key agencies. Dr Graham Love took over stewardship of the HEA. Peter Brown was appointed director of the Irish Research Council and it would be remiss of me not to say Happy 15th Birthday to the IRC. An event marking the anniversary was held in December.

## Evolving issues for 2018 and beyond

Finally, the big policy issue that arose this year in different guises, and which will continue to absorb much time and focus in the coming years, was how researchers and systems enable access to knowledge created through public research investment. In the European context, this manifests itself in the debates on open access, open data, and open science policies. In open access, tensions have increased between the main publishing houses and the broader community, but in particular funding agencies.

Internationally in recent months there have been interesting salvos from entities such as the Gates Foundation pushing for more open access to research and data. ResearchGate, an open access portal, appears to be running afoul of publishing houses over what is available through it. Access to data will be an especially important area in the next decade, and you can read more about this elsewhere in this publication.

Access to data will be an especially important area in the next decade.

At a more local and granular level, the HEA is reviewing how institutions deal with intellectual property and any benefit from it. On a positive note, statistics from Knowledge Transfer Ireland indicate a trend of growing performance in the transfer of knowledge by the higher education and research performing system here in Ireland.

In conclusion to this piece, it is clear that openness on various levels will continue to be a key driver of policy. In a broader context, when one considers the challenges to the validity of research and science, the matter is not trivial. In an unprecedented move, researchers all over the world took to the streets in May to 'March for Science'. The IRC asked us in 2016 and 2017 to 'Love Irish Research', and we need to continue to do so, but we also need to 'Believe in Science' as requested by SFI in recent months. Engagement by research performers, researchers, and funders with the broad public, and defence of good research and science, are now more critical than ever.

# Not Merely an Economy

## Research Funding and Irish Higher Education



**Pól Ó Dochartaigh**

MRIA, Registrar and Deputy President of NUI Galway

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**P**rofessor O'Doherty warns of the danger of focusing too narrowly on applied research, and collaboration with industry, to the detriment of research in the humanities and social sciences. The latter promotes a better understanding of society, enabling us to face the challenge of change and benefit from the advantages that will undoubtedly come with it.

In 2010, when I was at Ulster University, I asked the vice president for research for £10,000 to employ a post-doctoral researcher for a few months. My research background was in German-Jewish literature and history, but for a few years I had been picking up references to Jews in Irish literature, of which I had always been an avid reader but never a scholar. I thought there might be more but needed someone with expertise in the field.

The researcher I was able to employ, Barry Montgomery, found so much material that it became clear there was a full-scale research project to be conducted on this. His preliminary findings instantly debunked the myth, put to me by various people, that the topic consisted of 'Bloom, Bloom, and Bloom', with maybe David Marcus thrown in by the more well-informed. I co-opted a professor of Irish literature at Ulster, Elmer Kennedy-Andrews, as my co-investigator and applied to the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) for a £408,000 grant, and we were successful. The project ran for three years, and our team has discovered hundreds of references to Jews in Irish literature, including in obscure Gaelic manuscripts.

Now ongoing as a collaboration between Ulster University and NUI Galway, the project will lead to a significant volume on the subject, the first of its kind, now in preparation. We created an exhibition telling the story, in twelve panels, which has been in seven locations in both parts of Ireland and in three locations in the USA (New York, California, and Washington, DC). In 2018 it will travel to Britain and Canada. We are illuminating a little-known aspect of Irish literature and what it says about Irish identity in the context of ethnic and cultural diversity.

Different venues for the exhibition have yielded their own surprises. Colleagues in Dublin unearthed little-known documentation in the Royal Irish Academy (RIA) archives. In Waterford, courtesy of archivist Kieran Cronin, the exhibition featured newly uncovered material on Waterford's little-known Jewish community, small but thriving in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In

All of this richness has reached a wider audience and provoked discussion on the nature of Irish identity.

We have had almost ten years of this narrow focus.

Belfast we exhibited various artefacts, including the keys to the old Great Victoria Street synagogue. In Galway, courtesy of archivists Kieran Hoare and Barry Houlihan, we displayed rare materials relating to Jewish theatre groups and plays with Jewish themes put on in Belfast and Dublin in the twentieth century.

All of this richness has reached a wider audience, and provoked discussion on the nature of Irish identity and whether it was ever really the monolith some think it was, even in the first decades after Partition. This is important research in the context of social changes taking place in Ireland today, but it was made possible courtesy of a UK grant. If we had been dependent on the current research funding environment in the Republic, this material would have remained buried.

Of course, everyone understands that after 2008 there was a need to batten down the hatches, as the property bubble burst and unemployment soared. No one could blame any government that put a large degree of emphasis on applied research. Some of the industries that are key to Ireland's economic recovery enjoy the fruits of research that is conducted in our universities, and our graduates and others find work in those industries. Medical technologies constitute one branch of industry that has become extremely important to Ireland's economic well-being (and, in health terms, not just Ireland's), and it would be a fool who decried the successful partnerships created in this field on the back of Irish and international industriousness, intelligence, and originality. Science Foundation Ireland (SFI), Enterprise Ireland, and other investors have also been vital not only in attracting non-Irish talent to Ireland but also in bringing back talented Irish people who would otherwise remain overseas, to our detriment.

But we have had almost ten years of this narrow focus, and a new approach is needed. Quite apart from the fear that the current strategy has sometimes seemed too narrow even in STEM terms (it has been argued that income and industrial collaboration sometimes appear to be more important metrics than hitting the research highs in terms of peer-reviewed research, which would enhance reputations and enable more prestigious international collaborations), it will cost Ireland in the long term both financially and socially if it is continued.

If we look at the German research ecosystem, we see significant funding for research in universities and research institutes across all disciplines and including both fundamental and applied research. The Helmholtz Association 'pursues the long-term research goals of state and society to maintain and improve the livelihoods of the population, in six key areas: Energy, Earth and Environment, Health, Aeronautics, Space and Transport, Key Technologies'. It has an annual budget of €4 billion, 70 per cent of it from state funds, while the individual centres are responsible for raising the other 30 per cent through projects. The Fraunhofer Society, which sponsors 69 Fraunhofer Institutes in Germany as well as global collaborations, is dedicated to applied research and industrial collaborations and enjoyed an annual budget in 2016 of €2.1 billion, of which 70 per cent came from industrial and state contracts.

But Germany also has the Max Planck Society, which currently sponsors 83 Max Planck Institutes and facilities to ‘conduct basic research in the service of the general public in the natural sciences, life sciences, social sciences and the humanities’. Staff in the Institutes publish 15,000 internationally peer-reviewed articles a year, the Society enjoys an annual budget of €1.8 billion largely from public finances, and 18 Nobel Prize winners have come from its ranks since it was founded in 1948. Some of this pure research will provide the ideas, called ‘intellectual property’ these days, on which applied research will build. In addition, the German Research Society (DFG) has an annual budget of €3 billion to distribute across the full range of disciplines, largely via the universities.

Or take the UK system. For years they have had a national Research Excellence Framework (REF, until 2008 the RAE) and seven research councils, which are used to disburse significant amounts of research funding. In the REF, submissions are graded not only by the excellence of publications (originality, significance, and rigour) but also by the research environment of the discipline in its institution, and by the impact of the research, crucially judged as ‘an effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia’. £1.6 billion annually in Quality Research funding is disbursed under this performance measurement across the entire range of disciplines from History, Law and Languages to Medicine, Engineering and Maths.

18 Nobel Prize winners have come from its ranks since it [Max Planck Society] was founded in 1948.

But there is an additional competitive environment. The research councils, among them the Medical Research Council (MRC), the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC), and the AHRC, award billions each year based on competitive research application calls. Of course, it is no surprise that the lion’s share of this goes to the STEM disciplines, nor would anyone seriously expect otherwise. The MRC alone had an annual budget of £755m in 2016–17. Yet within that framework the UK government also found an annual budget of £105m for the Arts and Humanities. That is not huge, but it is enough to create a competitive environment in which the Arts and Humanities can contribute research to promote a better understanding of our society, and they are not exempted from the discourse of ‘impact’. In 2018 the research councils will be merged into a new structure, UK Research and Innovation, which will aim to ‘make it easier to fund cross-disciplinary studies and create an integrated research and innovation system’. It will have an annual budget of £6 billion. Crucially, like the DFG, its remit will cover the full range of disciplines and types of research.

Contrast their holistic approach to research funding coverage with the Irish situation. In 2016 the Irish Research Council (IRC) had an annual budget of almost €35m, of which just over €31m came from government, but two-thirds of this is used for postgraduate and postdoctoral bursaries across all disciplines (just over half go to humanities and social sciences), and half of the remainder is for collaboration with industry. Beyond that, basic research and the arts and humanities have to find private sponsors or look outside the country.

Health and wealth, though crucial to our well-being, are not the sum total of human existence.

Current public funding for research is simply unambitious and far too narrowly focussed.

Science Foundation Ireland is devoted entirely to applied research and collaboration with industry, and had an annual budget in 2016 of €195m. The Health Research Board (HRB) distributed an additional €43 million for health projects. Between them, SFI and the HRB perform an important function that is analogous in many ways to the STEM research councils in the UK and Fraunhofer and Helmholtz in Germany, and investment in this kind of research, some of which additionally comes from Enterprise Ireland and industry itself, is an essential part of any contemporary national research ecosystem. It has certainly boosted the Irish economy, amongst other things in the area of medical technologies, where we are now among the world leaders. That is to be welcomed.

Yet there is another critical aspect to our narrow approach. The funding that the research environments in other countries provide creates a pipeline in which early-career researchers can secure small grants that enable them to build a track record that makes them attractive to international collaborators and competitive for larger European grants. Ireland has set itself ambitious targets for drawing down European funding, yet we tie our own hands in narrowly defining and funding the areas in which we will promote or own talent. Admittedly (and somewhat disgracefully), EU funding initiatives have increasingly been going the same narrowly industrial route, but they are not exclusively so, and they have the potential, ironically, to make much of the humanities and social science research currently being undertaken more applied. Yet we don't invest in developing this.

Part of that may be because the research funding culture in this country is as yet immature. As late as the 1990s it was virtually non-existent, even though we had many researchers of international repute in our institutions. The creation of the IRCHSS and IRCSET in the early 2000s was a welcome development, and the IRC has continued their traditions. And the crash of 2008 has played a wider role, for there is a bigger issue around the chronic underfunding of third-level education in Ireland, whether teaching or research. All in all, there are many reasons that can be given for focussing on applied research and industrial collaboration.

But health and wealth, though crucial to our well-being, are not the sum total of human existence, and nor should they be the sum total of our curiosity as driven by research in universities. Our much smaller country can never hope to unlock the levels of funding outlined in Britain and Germany above, but in two-thirds of the areas described we don't even try. To take just one example: An equivalent budget per head of population to the £105m that the AHRC enjoys would be around €10m in Ireland, but this modest sum could unlock significant creative energy in the Arts and Humanities in Irish universities and build the track records that would later unlock international funding. Daniel Carey, director of the Moore Institute at NUI Galway and vice president of the RIA, puts it thus:

Experience has taught us that a failure to invest in infrastructure leads to serious problems down the road. The same applies to neglected investment in the humanities. We have performed at the highest level in this domain, but our capacity to do so will not survive unless we treat it as a priority to be supported by funding.



As our society changes, investment in the humanities and social sciences will enable us both to respond to any threats that might come from change and to benefit from the advantages that will also undoubtedly come from change. In a rapidly evolving Irish society, current public funding for research is simply unambitious and far too narrowly focussed.

*Professor Pól Ó Dochartaigh, MRIA, is Registrar and Deputy President of NUI Galway and a former President of the Association for German Studies in Great Britain and Ireland.*



Pictured on 15 October 2017 as a new partnership was announced between Irish Research Council and Arts Council to encourage collaboration between research and arts communities (L-R): Peter Brown, Director of the Irish Research Council; Orlaith McBride, Director of the Arts Council; Sheila Pratschke, Chair of the Arts Council; Professor Jane Ohlmeyer, Chair of the Irish Research Council.

# Open Access to Publications and to Data from Publicly Funded Research

Ireland and the World



**Alan Smeaton**

Professor of Computing and Founding  
Director of the Insight Centre for Data  
Analytics at Dublin City University

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**O**pen Access is a movement within scholarly research across all disciplines whereby the outputs, including publications and data, are made freely available to everyone without restriction. In the case of Open Access to data, it also covers data from public bodies like local governments. In Ireland we are slowly making progress with open access to publications and poor progress to research data while our Open Access to data from public bodies is progressing well.

Open access is a term normally reserved for describing how the outputs of research – covering publications and data – can be made openly accessible without restriction, to anybody. Traditionally, research outputs have typically been disseminated by publishing books or journal papers using the support and services of (academic) publishers, which have grown into huge businesses on the back of that. Conference or workshop presentations are also published, again by traditional publishers, and around this has grown the business model by which publishers operate: selling journal subscriptions and books to libraries, and charging a lot for doing so.

Open access is a noble aspiration which goes against this well-established model and has been enabled by the emergence of the internet and digital technologies, especially over the last couple of decades. Open access ensures that anyone, anywhere, at any time, can access research papers, book chapters, workshop papers, and even data used in experiments or analyses, and they can reuse this data or these publications without restriction.

In Ireland, almost all our higher education institutions (HEIs) have created online digital repositories or libraries for the research outputs of our scholars and scientists where their work has been funded by the taxpayer. These repositories are managed by our HEI libraries and have thereby created a new role and responsibility for the libraries. As a platform for disseminating research and scholarly outputs, institutional repositories are a safe bet in that they are funded and operate reliably; materials deposited in them are manually selected and curated by our librarians to ensure they do not break copyright or other restrictions when they are made available under open access. And because they are online digital repositories, the content is easily accessible.

The functionality offered by each HEI repository is basically the same. They accept ‘deposits’ from scholars and scientists, usually PDF files of papers, book chapters, or research theses. These are

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In Ireland, almost all our Higher Education Institutions have created online digital repositories or libraries for the research outputs of our scholars and scientists where their work has been funded by the taxpayer.

manually checked by the library's curator for copyright conformance, then published in the online repository and thus made accessible. The underlying software systems are all interoperable and most are open source, so it doesn't matter if an institution uses DSpace, Greenstone, or EPrints (all of which are freely available), because these systems 'talk' to each other and allow content to be moved from one system to another.

As an example of an institution's repository, Dublin City University's 'DORAS' currently has more than 7,000 items of content, each in PDF, broken into the following categories:

- » Research article or paper (1,567)
- » Book (18)
- » Book section such as a chapter (214)
- » Conference or workshop paper (2,462)
- » Monograph (80)
- » Research thesis (2,571)
- » Working paper (128).

The research thesis category is an interesting one. It is there because DCU has, for many years, insisted that research theses from graduating students be made available on DORAS. Of the 2,571 theses, 1,830 are PhD theses, some going back to 1985, while the rest are at master's degree level.

One of the advantages of open source software is that statistics on access are automatically generated and can be made available to researchers for things like project reviews or funding applications. In the case of DORAS, for the calendar year 2016 alone, there were over 924,000 downloads of the PDFs of these 7,000 publications, which is part of a year-on-year increase in access.

Open access through deposit in institutional repositories is called 'green open access'. It is not the only avenue for open access publication. Many traditional publishers now offer an open access model where the author pays, usually a four-figure sum, to have their article hosted, disseminated, and promoted using the weight and impact of the publisher; this is called 'gold open access'. While it is valid as a form of open access dissemination, the 'author pays' part dissuades or prevents many researchers and scholars from using it.

Institutional open access repositories are not the only such repositories available: many open access hosting services have sprung up recently, such as ResearchGate and Academia.edu. These do not charge authors for publishing, and they offer great support for networking on their websites.

So why do scholars and researchers publish under open access? The trend is driven by several reasons. Increasing access to publications means they will be downloaded more and read by more people, which means they will then be cited more by other scholars and researchers; this is borne out repeatedly by organisations from the Wellcome Trust to the journal Nature. One study found that articles published in Nature Communications are viewed three times more than non-open-access content.

Open access leads to more rapid dissemination, wider collaboration and more interdisciplinary follow-on work.

Open access also leads to more rapid dissemination, so the scientific and scholarly processes move faster and the wheels turn more quickly when newly published material reaches its target audience. It also leads to wider collaboration and more interdisciplinary follow-on work. A personal anecdote will illustrate this.

One of my PhD students published his thesis on DORAS, and part of his work developed an algorithm for detecting periodicity in lifelogs or digital records of everyday activities. The thesis was found and read by a colleague, whom I'd never met, who works in chronobiology at the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI). She introduced us to her former colleagues at Glasgow University who are performing a chronobiological analysis of accelerometer data from 100,000 people in the UK. Our team in DCU has now been brought into that work in Glasgow, and we have applied our periodicity-detection algorithm to their dataset. This is leading to further publications, all because the PhD thesis is available under open access in DCU.

Another reason open access is increasingly popular is that it is seen as a deliverable from publicly funded research. Many research funding bodies now mandate that research output from projects they fund be made available under open access. Projects funded under the EU's Horizon 2020 programme must make their outputs openly available, though it does not count ResearchGate or Academic.edu as open access publishing. Irish research funding agencies, including the Irish Research Council (IRC) and Science Foundation Ireland (SFI), also oblige their funded researchers to publish outputs under open access. While SFI does not specify which repository should be used, the IRC is more direct, stating that it 'should ideally be a local institutional repository to which the appropriate rights must be granted to replicate to other repositories'.

Content [of institutional repositories] is regularly crawled by web spiders and indexed by search services, including Google Scholar.

At a recent launch of newly funded research, one of our funding agencies pointed to the fact that approximately 40 per cent of publications from its funding were available under open access – a good number but not good enough yet. The Insight Centre at DCU has 436 research publications from the last four years available as open access, representing over 90 per cent of our research outputs in that period. Among the missing ones, some are embargoed until after their date of publication or because they are regarded as being in press. There is no reason we can't aim for 100 per cent of outputs available under open access.

One of the reasons why institutional repositories lead to increased visibility of research is that their content is regularly crawled by web spiders and indexed by search services, including Google Scholar. This is done precisely because their content is trusted, curated, and will not cause problems with copyright. The repositories also structure their metadata in a way that is easy for web spiders to assimilate. All of this helps to square the circle, because content from these repositories is then more easily found by people searching the internet.

However, all is not perfect in the world of open access publication. There are dangers from what are known as 'predatory publishers'. These are businesses which have emerged recently with a pay-to-publish business



model for scholarly publication but whose quality of publication is very poor, with low editorial standards, sloppy presentation, and even in some cases fake editors and fake editorial boards. As with everything on the internet, authors and readers have to be careful about the websites they trust. There are literally hundreds of these open access predatory publishers, cashing in on the huge push among researchers and scholars to publish their output.

So far in this article I have discussed open access to publications but not to data. The push for open access to data comes from the requirement to make new research outputs easily replicable by others, to verify and check research results, and to extend and build on that research. Some academic publishers now require that any data used in experiments in research papers must be made available under open access. This is helping to change people's approach to open access.

Almost 5,500 datasets are now available from public bodies on Ireland's Open Data Portal... this is a fabulous resource.

Open access to data can refer to any kind of data, from scientific experiments to surveys to data from public bodies, including governments. In March 2014, Ireland hosted the third plenary meeting of the Research Data Alliance (RDA), a global body whose remit is to develop and promote the standards to allow research data and public data to be easily shared and exchanged, and to make such data easily discoverable. More than 500 delegates from across the world gathered in Croke Park to present findings and to discuss and advance this agenda.

In Ireland, Open Data Fingal was the first local government portal created to publish open data (which is the term used to describe open access to data from public sources). That led to the establishment of Dublinked, which published public data about the city of Dublin, which in turn led to the establishment of a national open data portal, [data.gov.ie](http://data.gov.ie).

Following the RDA meeting in 2014, and recognising the increasing importance of open data, in 2015 the government announced the formation of an Open Data Governance Board, chaired by Emer Coleman. In summer 2017 it published Ireland's Open Data Strategy 2017–2022, developed in conjunction with the Open Data Unit in the Department of Public Expenditure & Reform. The strategy involved a wide range of stakeholder consultation, including public consultation. It identifies seven strategic themes, including broadening the range of public bodies publishing open data; improving the quality, quantity, and range of datasets; continued encouragement of the use of open data; evaluating the impacts, benefits, and risks of the initiative; and more. It also has an implementation plan with aggressive timescales.

Almost 5,500 datasets are now available from public bodies on Ireland's Open Data Portal, and this is constantly increasing. Like open access to our research publications, this is a fabulous resource. One may not think of many use cases for data on sightings of hares in Ireland in 2006–2007, as published by the National Biodiversity Data Centre, or for data on life expectancy in Ireland by age and gender in 1994, 2004, and 2014, as published by Eurostat, but it is when datasets are combined and cross-correlated that their value increases.

So as we watch open access to research outputs develop and grow in importance, and we see the increasing availability of open data, what should we look out for? Mostly it's about two things. Firstly, we should encourage those who have not yet embraced open access to publications, research data, and public data, to do so for their own and everyone else's benefit. This includes encouraging our research funding agencies to more strictly enforce the open access principles in their policies. Eventually this will reach a tipping point where open access becomes the norm because people can see its benefits. We're not quite there yet. The second thing we should watch for is the opportunities that open access offers to everyone – not just researchers and journalists but all citizens. Open access is about everyone's access to data and content from public bodies, whether research funding bodies or local authorities, and that is something we should all have an interest in.



### **New Director of Irish Research Council**

Peter Brown has been appointed Director of the Irish Research Council. From 2015 to 2017, he was Deputy Director of the Council, and Senior Manager with the Higher Education Authority from 2003 to 2014. Previously, he held roles with Dublin Institute of Technology and in the private sector.

Since May 2017, following the departure of former Council Director Dr Eucharua Meehan, Mr Brown has been Interim Director.

Brown's priority in his role as Director will be "to consolidate the Council's unique role within the Irish research eco-system".

*"By investing in exceptional individuals working at the cutting edge of new knowledge, we future-proof Irish research and its place in a globally-connected world," he said.*

*"I am looking forward to leading the Council on this agenda over the coming years, working closely with Council members, a very committed staff team, the Higher Education Authority and Department of Education and Skills and the wider set of research stakeholders."*



# Opening Ireland's Research System

## An Agenda for all Levels



**Patricia Clark**

Co-Chair, National Open Research Forum;  
Programme Manager Policy and EU funding,  
Health Research Board; National Delegate for  
Health, Horizon2020

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**I**reland must open its heart and its mind in the drive to make research more transparent, collaborative and efficient, Dr Patricia Clark writes. The change to open science is seen as inevitable, welcomed by many and already practiced by some. The challenges and rewards are high.

### The change to 'open'

There is a fundamental shift across Europe towards making research more transparent, collaborative, and efficient. This is reflected in the move to 'open science' promoted by the EU Commission<sup>1</sup> and other leading research funders.

Open science covers many aspects of opening up research to allow others to participate at all stages, and to benefit from it as freely as possible once it has been completed. The emphasis is most often on providing access to published findings and data, but it also includes such features as post-publication peer review, open source software, and citizen science, where the wider public engage directly in research to enhance and openly demonstrate its societal impact.

The change to 'open' in our digital era is evidenced by new forms of collaboration, more co-authored articles, new online publication formats, the wide range of online research tools, the emergence of new open access journals, and the calls for new measurements of impact.

While change is seen as inevitable, welcomed by many, and already practised by some, the speed and complexity of this change is daunting. Barriers are deeply rooted in the practices and culture of research, and there are many unanswered questions. Success requires complex research policies underpinned by funding, but ultimately it depends on the researchers themselves implementing change. Cultural change on such a large scale demands a whole-systems approach that engages all levels. So what path are we travelling? And how are we doing?

### Fast policy agenda

Policy-makers have strongly embraced open science in shaping their vision and strategic recommendations. The early focus has been on open access to publication and on open data. Leading by example, the European Commission made open access to publications an obligation for its EU-funded Horizon 2020 grantees. In 2017 its open research data pilot was extended to cover all thematic areas. Its vision is that public research grants should come with the condition of

developing a data management plan, should include such plans in the project's costs, and, ideally, should respect the FAIR principles: Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Researchable.<sup>2</sup>

EU policy is developing along a number of lines:

The European Commission made open access to publications an obligation for its EU-funded Horizon 2020 grantees.

1. Developing research infrastructures for open science to improve data hosting, access, and governance, with the development of a common framework for research data and the creation of a European Open Science Cloud (EOSC).
2. Creating incentives for open sciences and removing barriers to open sciences (e.g. in researchers' careers) as well as mainstreaming and further promoting open access policies on research data and research publications.
3. Embedding open science in society as a socio-economic driver (where open science makes science more responsible to societal and economic expectations).

The European Commission's high-level expert group, the Open Science Policy Platform (OSPP 2016–2018)<sup>3</sup>, is currently advising on implementation across eight action areas: FAIR open data, the EOSC, altmetrics, new business models for scholarly communication, rewards, research integrity, open science skills, and citizen science. This work is continuing rapidly. Reports on EOSC governance and open access publishing in Europe have been adopted. Three further reports – on altmetrics, skills, and research careers – are in the pipeline.

Further plans are being prepared. Demonstrators on the EOSC pilot have been selected, and an EOSC roadmap is being prepared. The Commission is aiming at 100 per cent compliance with the requirements for open access to publications. It is considering launching its own EU open publishing platform. A full open science monitoring service is expected in early 2018. A formal EU Communication on open science is also scheduled for 2018.

A National Open Research Forum has been established to deliver an Irish agenda.

In parallel there are legislative changes afoot with implications for open science, most notably the national implementation of the General Data Protection Regulation due by May 2018, and a new Copyright Directive with implications for Text and Data Mining practices.

### What are we doing?

Irish experts are engaged in many international discussions, helping to shape the agenda and bringing this perspective back home. For example, Irish players are included in both the open science policy platform and three of its working groups.

There is a steady stream of visitors to Ireland for discussions. These include Professor Barend Mons, then chair of the high-level expert group of the EOSC initiative, the Dutch Go FAIR implementation team, the Research Data Alliance Dublin, the UK Digital Curation Centre, and the CESSDA (Consortium of European Social Science Data Archives) ERIC, among others.

In May 2016  
the EU  
Competitiveness  
Council  
Conclusions  
called for full  
open access  
to scientific  
publications in  
Europe by 2020.

A National Open Research Forum (NORF) has been established to deliver an Irish agenda. It is co-chaired by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and the Health Research Board (HRB), with secretariat from the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (DBEI). It has encompassed and broadened the membership of a previous National Open Access committee, combining the expertise of representatives from policy, research funding, research performing, library sector, and other key stakeholders in the research system across Ireland. Working groups are addressing key areas of open access publications, open research data, infrastructure, and human resources that are needed to deliver for Ireland. The Forum directly supports the implementation of Recommendation 4.7 of Innovation 2020 national research strategy: to ‘support national and European open access policies and principles’.<sup>4</sup>

### How are we doing?

Looking briefly at the open publication and open data areas in the Irish system, there has been a long and strong movement towards open access for research publications. Ireland’s transition to open access is viewed as iterative and substantive, with government bodies and funding agencies adopting open access policies over several years.<sup>5</sup> These policies have been developed through consensus-building among stakeholders and culminated in the ‘National Principles for Open Access Policy Statement’, which outlines a framework for open access in Ireland.

But there is a gap. We need to strengthen our implementation and to measure our national performance – or someone else will measure it for us. In May 2016 the EU Competitiveness Council Conclusions called for full open access to scientific publications in Europe by 2020. We have a lot of work to do to reach this goal.

Discussions on open data are more complicated. The development of national principles for research data are in train, to be accompanied by a common data management/stewardship plan (DMP) and implementation. Key barriers to be considered include deficiencies in skills and training, infrastructural needs, ethical and legal issues, funding, evaluation, and rewarding open practices.

Why would researchers invest time and effort in practising open data when career performance is still judged almost purely by the number of publications in high-impact journals? We need to change this traditional approach and reward data management and publishing datasets for others to use. We also need to look at the crossover with other agendas, such as how open science can underpin or enhance the national policy on research integrity.

For the HRB and its funded researchers, our new HRB Open Research platform will bring all these strands together – open access publication, open data, open peer review, funding, recognition, and rewards – into a single approach so we can learn and shape our open science policies and practices. It will be an interesting journey.

## Getting personal

Ireland has a responsive research system with a track record of competing successfully in Europe. To maintain and develop our success, we need to change the way we research, to take advantage of the opportunities and address the barriers to open science. Open science must not become an idea we all agree upon but urge others to take the first step forward. This is personal.

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### FOOTNOTES

4. The EU Commission has defined this more open scientific process as follows: 'Open Science represents a new approach to the scientific process based on cooperative work and new ways of diffusing knowledge by using digital technologies and new collaborative tools. The idea captures a systemic change to the way science and research have been carried out for the last fifty years: shifting from the standard practices of publishing research results in scientific publications towards sharing and using all available knowledge at an earlier stage in the research process.' (Open Innovation, Open Science, Open to the World – a Vision for Europe, European Commission, 2016.)
5. Wilkinson, M.D. et al. (2016). The FAIR Guiding Principles for scientific data management and stewardship. *Sci. Data*, 3:160018. doi: 10.1038/sdata.2016.18
6. Details on the Open Science Policy Platform, including detail of members, plans, minutes of meetings, working groups, and reports, are available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/research/openscience/>.
7. Interdepartmental Committee on Science, Technology and Innovation (Dec. 2015). Innovation 2020 Excellence Talent Impact. Ireland's strategy for research, development, science and technology. Available at: <https://dbi.gov.ie/en/Publications/Publication-files/Innovation-2020.pdf>.
8. Dempster, S. (Dec. 2014). Open Knowledge. PASTEUR4OA Case Study. Ireland: The Transition to Open Access. Available at: [www.pasteur4oa.eu](http://www.pasteur4oa.eu).

### Andrew Grene scholarships

The recipients of the 2016 and 2017 Andrew Grene Postgraduate Scholarships in Conflict Resolution were celebrated at an award ceremony in the headquarters of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade on 21 June 2017. Andrew Grene (1965–2010) was a dual Irish-American citizen who worked with the United Nations. He was the sole Irish citizen lost in the Haiti earthquake of 2010. Pictured here are (l-r): Andrea Salvi and Chiara Mizzoni.



# University Research Centres and the Innovation Ecosystem

Interplay between research and education



**Ned Costello**

Chief Executive of the Irish Universities Association, previously head of national research policy at the Department of Enterprise and Employment.

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**N**ed Costello writes here in a personal capacity about Research, Research Centres and the overall research ecosystem.

The decision by Mostek and Fujitsu to explore the establishment of a chip fabrication facility in Ireland in the late 1970s was possibly the seminal event in the genesis of university-based research centres. The Mostek facility never proceeded, but it highlighted the need to have a research infrastructure to enhance Ireland's attractiveness to foreign direct investment (FDI) in what we now call the ICT (Information and Communications Technology) sector.

On foot of this, the entrepreneurially pioneering work of Professor Gerry Wrixon at UCC led to the establishment of the National Microelectronics Research Centre (NMRC) in the old Lee Maltings beside the River Lee. The NMRC quickly established itself as a competitive player in European research, its early years being synchronous with the then EEC's first flagship collaborative research programme, Esprit, the forerunner of the Framework Programmes for Research and the current Horizon 2020.

Supported by European structural funds, Ireland then developed its first Programmes in Advanced Technology (PATs), predominantly centred on a distributed system of university-based collaborative research centres. In the decade or so when the PATs existed, there was a constant debate about how close to the market they should be positioned. I will return to this later.

The NMRC continued to thrive but faced a significant decision in the mid-1990s when there was a debate about whether the centre should move off-campus or remain linked to the university in its next phase of growth. Ultimately, because of the synergies between the university and the NMRC, the government decided that the centre should remain closely linked to the university, while according it some strategic autonomy. Administrative efficiency partly supported the decision, but the key rationale was the central importance of the links between the centre and the college in the interplay between research and education. This dynamic was (and is) vital in keeping staff at the forefront of research and returning that



Because of the synergies between the university [UCC] and the NMRC, the government decided that the centre should remain closely linked to the university, while according it some strategic autonomy.

There is a large pachyderm in the room: funding.

knowledge to the education of graduate and undergraduate students; it continues to thrive at the NMRCs successor, the Tyndall National Institute.

In terms of policy implications, the emphasis on advanced research and publications is significant, as it drives the constant renewal of staff learning. This is further supported by the symbiotic relationship that PhD students and postdoctoral researchers have with principal investigators. By contrast, one of the factors which led to the demise of Ireland's small number of stand-alone research centres (such as the Institute for Industrial Research and Standards (IIRS)) was the stagnation that can result from an ageing staff who do not benefit from a higher education research environment.

The IIRS experience, and that of the PATs, also illuminated the tensions in the market orientation of research centres. The PATs were to a fair extent 'sold' to a political and administrative system which was then highly sceptical of research, on the basis that investment in them would yield quick returns in the form of income from industry. The fact that their funding came from the Structural Funds Operational Programmes for Industry supported this orientation.

Ultimately this approach failed, since it progressively moved the centres away from research and towards consultancy. Without a strong pipeline of research, the foundations of the market-oriented work were weakened over time. The shift towards a highly applied or consultancy focus also meant the centres were failing to address a market failure in doing work which the private sector finds uneconomic or too risky to undertake.

The policy learning from this experience resulted in the next major phase of investment in science, technology, and innovation (STI) from the mid-1990s onwards. This placed a strong emphasis on internationally excellent scientific research, human capital, and a balance between concentration in centres and more individual awards. This was reflected in policy in the Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation 2007–2013, which also emphasised the importance of more coherence in the broad swathe of publicly funded research and the co-evolution of research in the public system and industry. The strategy envisioned a more complex ecosystem, ranging from non-oriented research to collaborative centres such as the SFI CSETS (which, while based in universities and engaging in oriented basic research, would have an industrial collaboration agenda), and centres driven directly by industry-defined research agendas – the EI technology centres.

Political and economic change (the great crisis) over the past decade shifted the dial again. SFI's legislative remit was extended to applied research, and a much more tightly defined approach to research prioritisation was introduced. Interestingly, the latter applied only to public funds and not to the disposition of state subventions to industrial research, including the burgeoning tax credit. As such, the policy approach that was pursued marked a move away from the co-evolutionary paradigm espoused by the SSTI. In recent years, there has been continuing pressure towards agglomeration in the system through research centres, and pressure to see those centres focus more on higher technology-readiness levels (TRLs).



Some would argue that these movements threaten to destabilise the ecosystem by creating excessive homogenisation. There is a danger that the system will, in the mode of the classic strategic management dilemma, get stuck in the middle: close enough neither to the marketplace to satisfy industry demands, nor to the frontiers of knowledge to generate the research outcomes which grow the next generation of educators, researchers, and entrepreneurs. These risks are magnified by a weakening of system steering mechanisms and, particularly, the abolition of the Advisory Science Council. This mechanism was hardly perfect and would need significant rejuvenation in the form of a science and innovation body of actors from the public and enterprise systems. Such a body would have a purview of the entire ecosystem, without executive responsibility for any individual part. It could play a useful role in advising government on overall strategy.

A Science and Innovation Advisory Council could play an important role in assessing performance and balance of the overall ecosystem.

A Science and Innovation Advisory Council could play an important role in assessing performance and balance of the overall ecosystem. It could look at emerging bibliometric data which contains some warning signs that concentration in the system is impacting negatively on our overall scientific performance. It would also be the ideal place to look at the full spectrum of investment in public research and avoid excessive concentration on the major research funders when assessing the overall disposition of government spend on research. And it would be the ideal forum to assess and debate the findings of the current Technology Futures exercise. This exercise is not simply a rehash of the prioritisation process; it has the potential to significantly shape our research and industrial policy priorities and, as such, has enormous significance. It may well lay the foundations for a more sophisticated challenge-based approach to research and innovation: a pull approach which would balance the current emphasis on top-down push in the system.

Finally, there is the rather large pachyderm in the room: funding. Underinvestment in the system is a destabilising force. It encourages homogenisation in policy, programmes, and structures simply because there are not enough funds to address differentiated needs and priorities adequately. It also encourages defensiveness among budget holders and beggar-my-neighbour approaches where the only way to secure additional funding is by reducing a competitor's resources. The absence of an external advisory body does not help in this regard either.

To sum up: The next phase of our innovation ecosystem should be characterised by greater differentiation and better balance in instruments and structures; greater openness and debate in policy- and strategy-making; and enhanced performance and competitiveness of both, across the HE system and industry, which contributes to short- and long-term competitiveness, along with an appropriate level of resourcing. Notwithstanding Ireland's relatively short history of investment in research, we have much to learn from the peregrinations in policy and structural approaches over the past three and a half decades. We should use that learning judiciously as we move forward.

## The Research Expertise Exchange (REX)

The Research Expertise Exchange (REX) is an online community to support teachers across all sectors in Irish education to connect and collaborate with other teacher researchers, educational experts and professional researchers.

Educational research in Ireland has entered an exciting new period of development with the publication in 2017 of the Teaching Council's Research Support Framework, which will support teacher-led research in Ireland at a national level.

You can join the growing community of active educational and teacher researchers on REX by signing up for free at: <http://www.researchexpertiseexchange.com/>

Pictured below are members of the REX Project Development Team:



(L-R): Dr Jennifer McMahon University of Limerick; Des Carswell, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick; Dr Tony Hall & Dr Kevin Davison, NUI Galway; Marie Ryan & Dr Marek McGann (Coordinator), Mary Immaculate College, Limerick

# PINE FOREST ART CENTRE

*Set in the Dublin Mountains amidst beautiful scenery, for 40 years now Pine Forest Art Centre has been providing camps and courses for children and young people which combine creativity with fun.*

**Summer Courses for 4-16 year olds,  
Schools Activity Days from March to June,  
Halloween Workshops,  
Christmas Workshops,**

**Easter Courses,  
Portfolio Preparation Courses,  
Birthday Parties,  
Parent/Adult and Child Art Activity mornings.**



## **Summer Camps**

The Centre runs two-week summer camps during July and August for children aged 5 -12 years and teenagers aged 13-16 years. Activities are many and varied - participants paint, sculpt, sketch, make pottery and clay items, weave, do batik and paper crafts.

## **Portfolio Preparation**

There is also a Portfolio Preparation course during the summer for young people aged 16-19 years. This course is provided with a view to helping young people organise and expand portfolios with Art College and /or Leaving Cert in mind.

## **Courses during the year**

The Centre runs courses during the Halloween, Christmas and Easter Holidays. Birthday Parties and Team building events.

## **School Groups Activity Days**

School Art and Craft activity days are available from March to June.

## **Parent and Child Art & Craft Days**

Held on the last Sunday of each month.

## **PINE FOREST ART CENTRE**

Glencullen, Kilternan,  
Dublin 18

Phone 01 2941220

Fax 01 2941221

[info@pineforestartcentre.com](mailto:info@pineforestartcentre.com)

[www.pineforestartcentre.com](http://www.pineforestartcentre.com)



## Image of the Year

The then Taoiseach Mr. Enda Kenny leaving the European Union's Heads of Government meeting in Brussels on Saturday 29 April 2017, having just secured approval that the question of Ireland and its border with Northern Ireland would be one of three issues to be resolved before the 27 EU members would enter into trade negotiations with the UK.

Photo provided to Education Matters by the RTÉ News Room.

