Young singers from Coláiste Pobail Osraí entertain delegates at the NAPD Conference Gala Dinner in Killarney, October 2017.

SECOND LEVEL Contents

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

In 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

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.

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.

In the ETB sector, the TUI was able to reach an accommodation that allowed participation in training for the new junior cycle developments.

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

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.

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.

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.

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

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

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.

> 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.

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.

> 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.

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

In 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.

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.

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.

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.

> The new Junior Cycle is now the biggest cloud hanging over not just my teaching career, but the future of education in Ireland.

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 Hanevy and Alan Wall

Leadership in Our Schools

The emergence of a new realm of possibilities

John Curtis
General Secretary, Joint Managerial Body

John 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.

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.

It will allow us to progressively move away from more hierarchical modes that over-rely on the ability and acumen of the principal.

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.

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'[1]

Michael Redmond   **Belinda Moller**

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). 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.

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[1] emphasised the need for 'career-long, safe and affectively articulate peer-delivered dialogic support', a model supported by Spindler and Biott[2]:

> 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[3] 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.

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,

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evidence-based policy framework driving educational reforms[4] have all conspired to produce a perfect storm of unremitting change impacting on the psychological and emotional health of school communities.[5] 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.[6] 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.[7]' 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.[8]

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

The head teacher's role has been reconstituted as supporter, reinforcer, and facilitator of school-wide change efforts.

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.[9]

Bion's group analytic/group relations concept of container–contained[10] is most applicable[11] 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. Rüth[12] 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.[13] This gives participants 'the ability to think their own thoughts, and not to think what has been projected on to them'.[14] 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'[15], 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.[16] 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.'

FOOTNOTES

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Delegates from Bray Branch at ASTI Convention 2017 (L to R): Michael Browne, Michael Berigen-Welkier, Melissa Ní Ghreanna.

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

Clive 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 that 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,

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. 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

Beth 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:
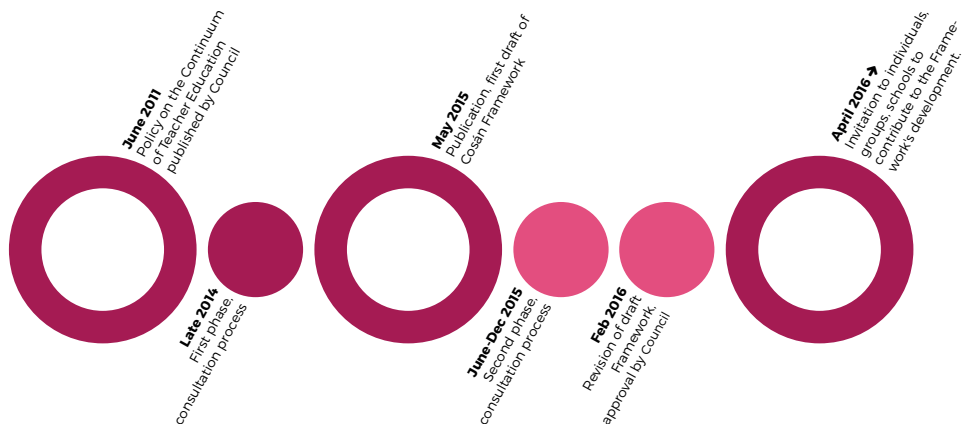
1. quality teaching and learning for their students and themselves, and
2. continued professional growth for enhanced professional practice, to support that quality teaching and learning in a sustainable way.

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:

June 2011
Policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education published by Council

Late 2014
First phase, consultation process

May 2015
Publication, first draft of Cosán Framework

June-Dec 2015
Second phase, consultation process

Feb 2016
Revision of draft Framework, approval by Council

April 2016 ➔
Invitation to individuals, groups, schools to contribute to the Framework's development.

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:

> I believe that teachers must decide for themselves what it is they need to learn and why.

» 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.

> The Teaching Council continues to welcome expressions of interest from teachers, groups, or schools that wish to participate in the development of Cosán.

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; 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

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Julie 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,

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

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The 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

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.

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

Many teachers view pastoral care and student well-being as an important element of their professional role.

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 andapproximately 84,000 grants were awarded, representing student grant funding of €365m.

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18 (Est)
Grant Applications	69700	92200	103800	108200	105300	103200
Grant Awards	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)
Cost per Application	€115	€117	€89	€81	€78	€78
Cost per Grant Award	€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 Agreementimplemented between the Department of Education and Skills and the CDETB, SUSI has met and exceeded its key annualperformance 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 **new** applications completed	**55**% by 31 Oct **75**% by 30 Nov **85**% by 31 Dec	55% 77% 88%	56% 75% 87%	58% 76% 86%	81% 90% 97%	**55**% by 30 Sep **65**% by 31 Oct **85**% by 30 Nov **90**% by 31 Dec	69% 84% - -
% of **renewal** applications completed	**95**% by 31 Oct *(30 Nov)*	94% *(97%)*	92% *(95%)*	95%	96%	-	96%
Grant Payments:							
% of total anticipated **new** awards paid	**40**% by 31 Oct **65**% by 30 Nov **85**% by 31 Dec	44% 71% 84%	43% 69% 85%	53% 70% 85%	77% 88% 94%	**30**% by 30 Sep **55**% by 31 Oct **75**% by 30 Nov **90**% by 31 Dec	42% 73% - -
% of total anticipated **renewal** awards paid	**80**% by 31 Oct **95**% by 30 Nov *(31 Dec)*	92% 98%	86% 94% *(98%)*	95% 96%	96% 98% *(100%)*	**90**% by 31 Oct **95**% by 30 Nov	95% -

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
Student Interactions per Application	8	6	5	4	4

For further information on SUSI, please visit its website www.susi.ie

The Politics and Society syllabus post-Brexit

Learning social sciences in an age of upheavals

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The 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'.[1] 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.'[2]

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

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). **3**

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],**4** 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

> 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.**4**

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

After a year of upheavals, it is not shocking to ask if it [Politics and Society syllabus] is already out of date.

Politics and Society was seen from the beginning as a concept-based curriculum.

» 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. [5]

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. [6]

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

to only 10 per cent of referrals to top news sites.[6] In 2016, 62 per cent of US adults said they get some of their news from social media,[6] 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).

> This storm of fake news is intrinsically linked to the rise of social media as a news source.

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 [7] and an estimated 4.2 billion Google searches every day in 2016. [8]

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.[9] 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.' [10]

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

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.[11]

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.[12] 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.

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) 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.

The ISTA Annual Conference for 2018 will take place in Athlone IT over the weekend of March 23rd-25th.

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Playing Catch-up or Overspending?
Managing the Cost of Special Education

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Hugely 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.

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.

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).

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).

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

> One of the most notable financial changes has been the increased cost of pay for resource teachers.

> In Ireland, how decisions are made around investment in special education is unclear.

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.

Using evidence for effective resource allocation

There is little evidence of the educational impact of increases in spending.

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.
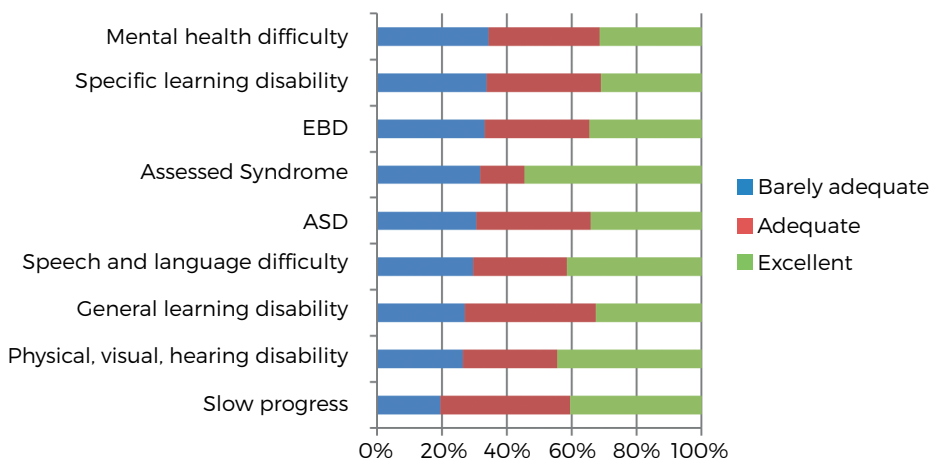
Figure 1: Special education resources available to students at 13
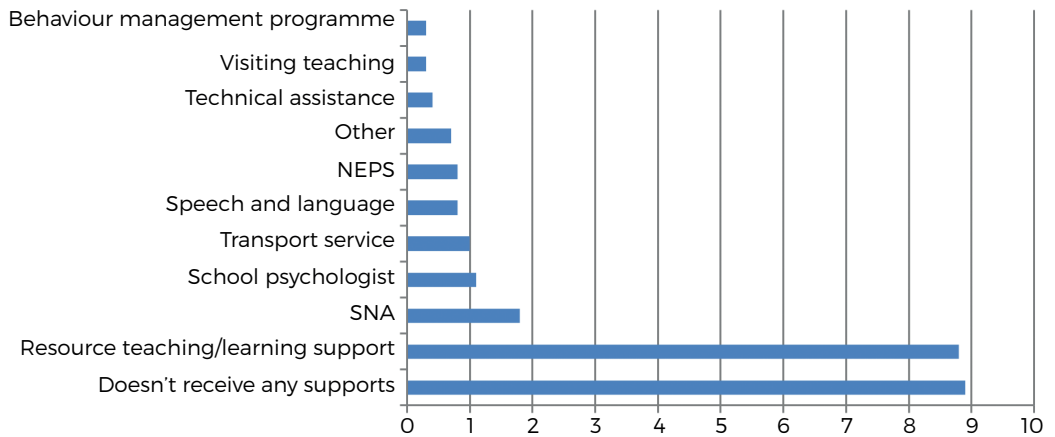
Source: Growing Up in Ireland, 13-year-olds

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

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).

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.

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Ireland in context of large-scale immigration
How do immigrant-origin children fare?

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An 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.[1] 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).[2] These young people represent multiple countries, nationalities,

linguistic groups, and religions, and have diverse needs in terms of educational and social supports.

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.

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)

Legend: Primary/lower sec. ■ Upper sec. ■ Post-sec. ■ Degree ■ Post-grad
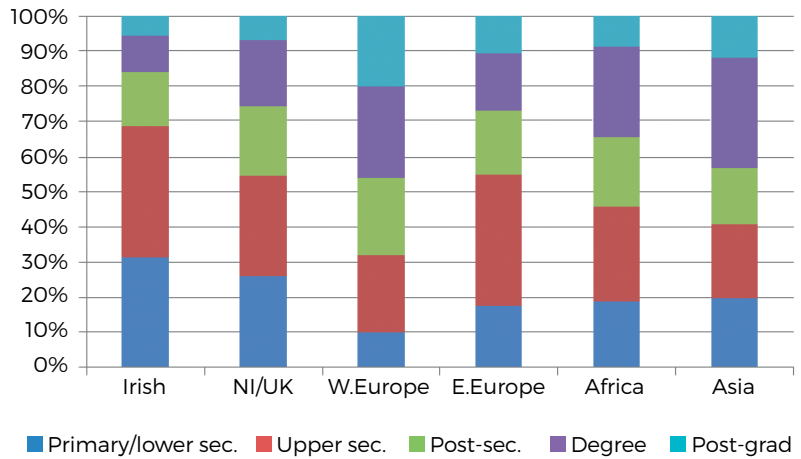
Source: Darmody et al., 2016

Figure 2: Educational expectations of immigrant parents v. Irish (age nine, GUI)

Legend: Junior Cert or lower ■ Leaving Cert/Post-sec. ■ Degree or higher
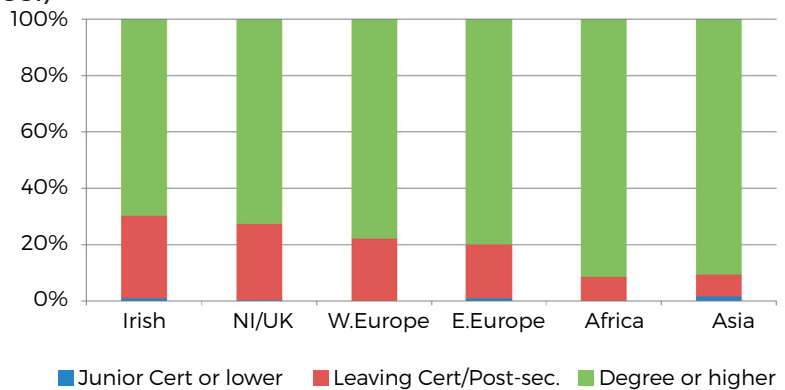
Source: Darmody et al., 2016

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 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.

> Language barriers make it difficult for parents to get involved in school activities.

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).

> Because of the small number of non-Catholic primary schools, many multi-denominational and minority faith schools are oversubscribed.

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

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.

Immigrant-origin children are more likely to report having either one or no friends.

Figure 3: Friendship groups at nine years of age
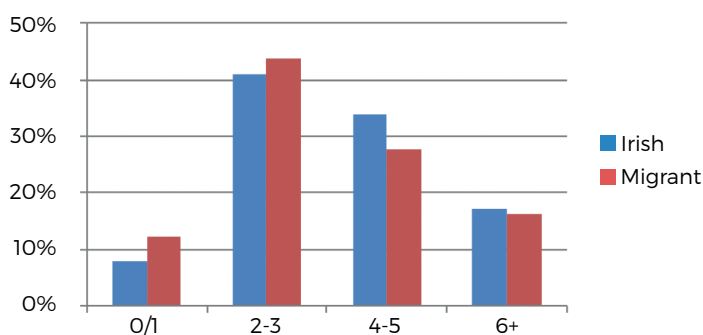
Source: Darmody and Smyth, forthcoming in 2017

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

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.

> Migrant children can often find themselves as an 'out group'.

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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

In 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

recognised for his extraordinary Erasmus+ story and for inspiring others with his experience and achievements.

> The traineeship not only improved her language skills but gave her confidence to live and work internationally.

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.

> Erasmus+ continues to change and innovate in response to the needs of communities.

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

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

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.

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.

Experience

For many expats, the financial aspect of teaching abroad is a deciding factor.

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

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

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.