

**IRELAND'S
YEARBOOK OF
EDUCATION** **2018**
2019

Editor **Brian Mooney**

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

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FOREWORD



Joe McHugh
Minister for Education
and Skills

Tugtar aitheantas forleathan do ról an oideachais i dtaca le torthaí agus deiseanna saoil ár ndaoine óga in earnálacha an oideachais agus na hoiliúna a fheabhsú.

Táim muiníneach go mbeidh tionchar dearfach ag an réimse tionscnamh atá á bhfeidhmiú faoi láthair sa Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna ar chaighdeáin an teagaisc agus na foghlama i ngach earnáil oideachais.

Leanfaidh an Roinn de bheith ag obair i gcomhar leis na gníomhaireachtaí ábhartha chun athrú a chur i bhfeidhm agus chun feabhas a chothú i suíomhanna oideachais atá ag éirí níos éagsúla.

It is more than 20 years since I moved from teaching to a different career. Despite that passage of time, I am conscious of the pressure on principals and teachers and I'm keenly interested in the wellbeing of learners, teachers and leaders; teacher supply and the Irish Language.

I want to thank Richard Bruton for his work and acknowledge the Department for the impressive inroads made in creating the best education system in Europe.

I look forward to building on these successes. I will work collaboratively with Ministers Mary Mitchell O'Connor and John Halligan in their roles in Further and Higher Education and Training and Apprenticeships.

I'm very much looking forward to progressing the range of apprenticeships and traineeships on offer, as well as advancing the third-level sector through the Technological University model.

I am delighted to have received so many messages of support from across the sector following my appointment. Thank you.

I am taking stock of where we are with the Action Plan for Education. In spring 2019 I will set out goals for the Department and the sector and I will combine that with a new Statement of Strategy 2019-2021.

This will allow me to take a comprehensive look at where we are, assess the pace and scale of change and measure how the Action Plan is delivering.

It is a listening exercise too – so the ideas and input of all education partners is needed and wanted.

Central to the education of our children, young people and lifelong learners should be respect and decency - how we treat and look after one another. The basis of humanity.

I see the education sector as a collective. Our drive and focus should be united, to nurture the next generation.

Is iomaí raite ach is fiú arís é - Ní neart go cur le chéile.

SCHOOL BUILDINGS, PATRONAGE AND THE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Within two days of being formally appointed Minister, safety of school buildings was my entire focus. I want to assure principals, teachers, staff, parents and pupils that any affected building will be thoroughly assessed and improved to ensure they are of the highest standard.

I have been hugely impressed by the diligent and tireless work of the Department to address the problems. This will continue.

As well as addressing these issues, we will continue with the rollout of Project Ireland 2040. Under this Plan, our overall capital budget will rise to €941m in 2019 - an increase of almost €200m compared to 2018. This will enable good progress to be made on the school building programme and modernising higher education infrastructure.

We will continue to be at the forefront of sustainable energy design. We benchmark sustainable school building design.

A multi-annual energy research pilot project in partnership with SEAI is developing and creating opportunities, best practice retrofit options and innovative delivery models for energy upgrades of schools built before 2008.

I'm particularly impressed by this; it is helping to show us the future direction of energy efficiency in schools and it will continue to deliver a programme of retrofits, as NDP funding permits.

The Energy in Education website portal and advice programme also assists schools to reduce energy consumption and empowers schools and pupils to learn the benefits of sustainability. Let's build on that.

All of these developments on the capital side are taking place in conjunction with a 5% increase in school capitation for the 2019/20 school year, representing additional funding of €10 million.

The profile of school patronage needs to change to better reflect the needs of a modern Ireland, in the expectations of parents.

A reconfiguration process is in place to increase diversity of existing primary schools. This is being dealt with across 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs), with initial pilot areas to identify demand for more diversity.

The opening of 42 new schools from 2019 to 2022 will create more opportunities for increasing diversity. A new Online Patronage Process System provides objective information to parents in relevant school planning areas, so that they can make informed choices about patronage and language medium for their child's education.

I also want to see the substantial minority demand for Irish-medium education in some of these planning areas addressed in a meaningful way.

AN GHAEILGE

Tá eolas maith ar mo thuras teanga féin. Ní uirlis chumarsáide amháin í an Ghaeilge. Is tairseach í chuig ár stair, ár n-oidhreacht agus ár gcultúr - Ár nOidhreacht

Tar éis cúpla samhradh a chaitheamh ag athfhoghlaim, agus buíochas nach beag ag dul d'Oideas Gael i nGleann Cholm Cille, smaoiním siar ar mo laethanta scoile féin agus creidim go gcaithfidh an bhéim a bheith ar an teanga labhartha.

D'oibríomar go dlúth le comhghleacaithe i Roinn an Taoisigh agus sa Roinn Cultúir, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta chun an "Straitéis Fiche Bliain don Ghaeilge" agus an "Plean Gníomhaíochta 5 Bliana don Ghaeilge 2018-2022" a chur i bhfeidhm.

Áirítear orthu sin réimse de bhearta oideachais amháil tumoideachas páirteach Gaeilge, cúrsaí tríú leibhéal, oideachas aosach, tacaíochtaí dátheangacha, an Polasaí don Oideachas Gaeltachta 2017-2022 agus bunú Gaelscoileanna.

Laistigh de na ceantair Ghaeltachta, tá an Polasaí don Oideachas Gaeltachta 2017-2022 á chur i bhfeidhm lena áirithiú go mbeidh fáil ar oideachas ar ardchaighdeán trí mheán na Gaeilge chun tacú le húsáid na Gaeilge mar phríomhtheanga sna pobail sin. Chomh maith leis sin, tá an Scéim Aitheantais mar Scoil Ghaeltachta á cur i bhfeidhm againn agus an Grúpa Comhairleach don Pholasaí Gaeltachta chun comhairle a chur ar fáil agus chun cabhrú le feidhmiú polasaí a mhúnlú.

Ní raibh sé mar thosaíocht i gcónaí sa seomra ranga grá don Ghaeilge ar feadh do shaoil a spreagadh. Tá an timthriall sin á bhriseadh againn agus tá an-chreidiúint ag dul do mhúinteoirí as an méid sin a dhéanamh.

Is gá dúinn breis acmhainní a thabhairt do mhúinteoirí chomh maith le treoir chun an teanga a dhéanamh ábhartha, agus go spreagfar daoine óga agus go mbeidh na huirlisí acu chun grá a thabhairt di agus i a úsáid.

Leanfaimid de bheith ag díriú níos mó ar an teanga labhartha. Táim ag iarraidh go mbeadh caighdeán níos fearr i dteagasc na Gaeilge. Tabharfaidh an Roinn tacaíocht dom dó sin agus beidh níos mó agus níos mó béime ar labhairt na Gaeilge sna scoileanna.

CURRICULUM

An issue that I have thought deeply about is the education of history. This is particularly in the context of the centenary of the end of the First World War, the delicate path we walk to mark the foundation of the state and the

role of women in society, and how and why their role was often relegated to benefit a male dominated order.

There is also a huge amount for the next generation to gain from learning the mistakes of our recent past.

We have our own migration story to learn from and the journey from conflict to peace on our island.

We should also use the experience of the last 100 years to explain how we cause and combat climate change, protect our environment and sustain the planet.

History can act as a catalyst for the revival of our language – to show its place in our culture, heritage, ár nOidhreacht.

I also want to see the review of the Primary Curriculum continue apace. It should be benchmarked against best international practice. PE should be a core part of that, with emphasis on the use of An Gaeilge in sport.

Consultations will also take place throughout 2019 on the Senior Cycle.

TEACHER SUPPLY

There's no doubt that the issue of teacher supply has been a most pressing one in recent times.

A team of dedicated officials in my Department is working on initiatives to address the shortages.

It is being tackled on a number of fronts. And we will continue to consult with stakeholders, including unions, to address it.

In autumn 2018 we announced a new Irish-medium course at Marino Institute.

New entrant pay is often cited when retention of our teachers is discussed. What must be remembered is that pay is part of the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020. It covers the entire civil and public service and it remains the best way to make improvements in the terms and conditions of teachers.

The Teaching Council is working on improving guidance for teachers applying for registration and the work on this front will continue. There are many bright and much-needed teachers overseas and a priority of mine is to promote the jobs that we have at home.

NORTH - SOUTH

Coming from a border county I see the ties that bind communities. And connections through education help shatter misconceptions.

Our work has the opportunity to stand out as an ideal model for continuing the rich and valued North-South collaboration.

Significant numbers of students cross the border every day for education and training. This movement is due in no small measure to the EU and the PEACE IV programme. I am particularly delighted that the EU have signalled their intent to continue a similar programme after 2020.

Schools and institutions beyond the immediate border region can also engage in cross-border initiatives through the EU's Erasmus programme and more should be done to encourage it.

A shining example of North-South cooperation that will only deepen in the coming years is Letterkenny IT, University of Ulster and the North West College. Their collaboration is a timely reminder of the common objectives and strengths we share on this island and the advantages to be gained in aligning regional development and educational approaches.

Intense efforts will also continue to ensure that the gains of the last 20 years are not diluted by Brexit.

INCLUSION

Inclusive education is a fundamental principle of our system. All children must have the opportunity to benefit from education in order to help them realise their potential.

DEIS – Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools is our main policy initiative to tackle educational disadvantage. There are now almost 900 schools in the DEIS Programme, with the Government investing over €200m, helping to support 183,000 students in the current school year.

I want to build on the success of DEIS and make sure that we target resources to those who need it most while protecting existing benefits.

Government has invested significantly in Special Education, with more than €1.75 billion being spent in 2018, an increase of 43% since 2011.

We have more than 13,400 Special Education Teaching posts; 15,000 SNAs by the end of 2018; more than 1,470 teachers in 124 special schools; approximately 1,440 special classes in place with 140 new Special Classes opened in September 2018. And Budget 2019 makes provision for an additional 950 SNAs in 2019.

A new model for allocating Special Education Teachers has been introduced for mainstream schools to bring about a fairer system to benefit children most in need of support. I hope to build on this.

The National Council for Special Education's comprehensive review of the Special Needs Assistant Scheme was published in May 2018. It recommends a new model of support based on the principle of access to the right in-school support, at the right time, delivered by the right people.

Government has committed €4.75m in Budget 2019 to support the phased implementation of a new model and planning work to support this is underway.

WELLBEING

In today's fast-paced society, we have to take a holistic approach to the services we provide. Children are at the centre of what we do, and promoting their wellbeing should be a priority. But we must also be mindful of the stresses and strains on principals, teachers and support staff.

We have brought Wellbeing into the new Junior Cycle and rolled out programmes that build teachers' capacity to promote social and emotional competence and resilience.

The Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice will shape what we do over the next few years.

And our work will broaden with cross-Government initiatives such as the National Taskforce on Youth Mental Health.

The pressures on valuable family time are not lost on me either. With the work/life demands on mothers and fathers I am keen to see a growth in homework clubs, in primary schools in particular.

Schools are heated through the day; it could offer more time for learning through sport and games; parents would find it easier to take up employment; and it would help ease some pressures from family life.

Wellbeing can also be further improved by encouraging extra-curricular achievements and we should do more on this front.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

We should be thinking about how we tackle health, fitness and emotional wellbeing as one. Healthy bodies ensure healthy minds.

PE is part of core curriculum in primary level, with one hour a week recommended. It continues at Junior Cycle, where one of the eight key skills requirements is that a student stays well and is healthy and physically active.

PE is also a core part of the Senior Cycle and the recent inclusion of PE as a Leaving Certificate examination subject has unquestionable benefits.

The first Leaving Certificate PE exam will take place in June 2020, with national roll out of both the subject and the Framework from September 2020.

These developments will help to encourage teenagers to enjoy physical activity and it may help to address concerns about the drop off in participation of teenage girls in sport.

I hope to build upon commitments in Project Ireland 2040 to improve sporting and PE facilities and encourage more girls to keep up sports.

CONCLUSION

All of this presents just a flavour of my focus and the range of developments underway across the education and training sector.

It is truly a giant arena and crucial to our success as a nation.

We have a responsibility to deliver excellent services for our young people and to drive our respected education system on.

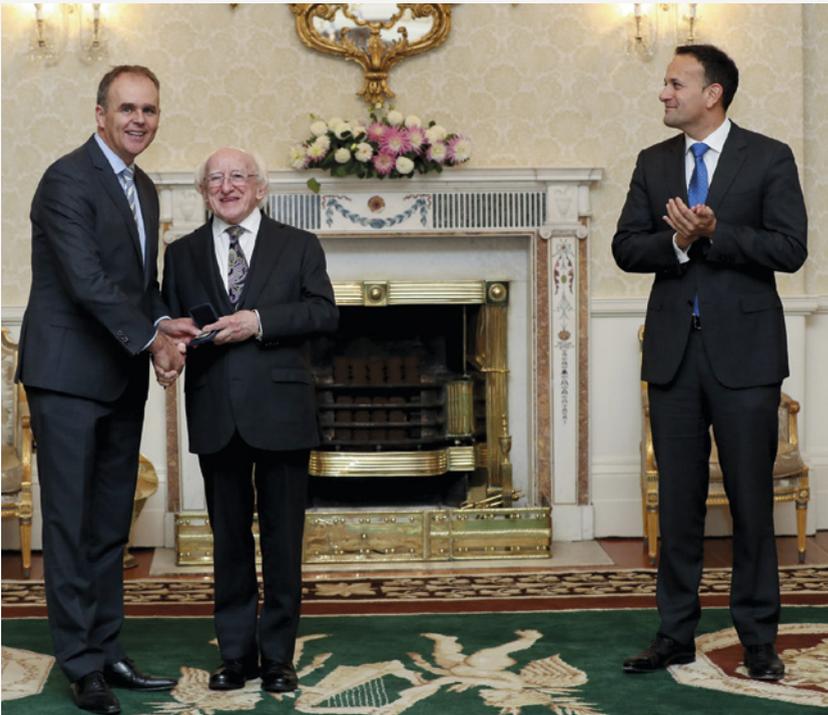
Since being appointed, I have been impressed by the dedication of those involved in the sector.

I am confident that as we take the time to consider our progress to date, we will use our reflections to continue to work collaboratively.

In the spirit of partnership, communication and inclusivity, we can improve outcomes even further and ensure that everyone we serve truly gets the opportunity to fulfil their potential.

I spiorad an chomhair, na cumarsáide agus na hionchuimsitheachta, is féidir linn torthaí a fheabhsú agus a áirithiú go bhfaighidh gach duine ar a ndéanaimid freastal an deis a gcumas iomlán a bhaint amach.

Mar a deirtear, Ar Scáth a chéile a Mhairimid!



On 16 October 2018 Education Minister **Joe McHugh** received his Seal of Office from **President Michael D Higgins** in Áras an Uachtaráin, with **An Taoiseach Leo Varadkar** also present. *Photograph by Maxwell*



Brian Mooney
Editor, Ireland's
Yearbook of Education

EDITORIAL

Relecting on the growth and development of both Irish and international education over the past year, I found the theme of 'respect and decency', as highlighted in Minister Joe Mc Hugh's contribution to this publication, particularly insightful.

"Central to the education of our children, young people and lifelong learners should be respect and decency - how we treat and look after one another. The basis of humanity. I see the education sector as a collective. Our drive and focus should be united, to nurture the next generation."

I consider myself to have been immensely privileged to have spent my working life within the Irish education system. It has exercised a profoundly positive influence in moulding me into the person I have become today.

What drew me to give my working life to teaching has been the respect and decency which imbues every element of the Irish education system, and the people who work in it.

Professor John Coolahan, whose death this year robbed Irish education of a leading light, told us in what he knew to be his last public lecture that "Education has been central to Ireland's transformation over recent decades."

It is the respect and decency which imbues Irish education at every level which has contributed to its transformative effect on our society to which Professor John Coolahan alluded. Our challenge in 2019 and beyond is to continue to embed respect and decency into every aspect of Irish Education, at every level from early childhood to adult education in all its manifestations.

IRELAND'S GREATEST EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT?

Some have questioned why Irish society has not moved more quickly to diversify the patronage of our Catholic primary and second level education system.

Communities up and down the country, when offered the opportunity to move to a more diverse range of patronage options, have not seemed to be highly motivated to seek radical changes. Why is this?

Future generations will ponder how a faith-based Irish education system absorbed the largest influx of children from other cultures, religions, and societies - larger than has ever been experienced by any country in the developed world - and did so in a manner whereby

those children have melted effortlessly into our society, transforming it in the process into a tolerant, outward looking, confident place to grow, work and live.

The answer lies in the Minister's insight as to what lies and must continue to lie at the core of how we are: *"Respectful of every person, irrespective of their religion, ethnicity, intellectual capacity, or aspirations, with decency at the core of how we treat every person we encounter in our daily interactions."*

My favourite educational event each year is the presentation of the JP Mc Manus scholarship awards, in partnership with the Department of Education and Skills, which takes place in November in the University of Limerick. The award winners who receive €6,700 for each year of their undergraduate degree or £5,500 in Northern Ireland, are the 125 highest performing students in their Leaving Cert or A levels, from families throughout Ireland who do not have to pay the Leaving Cert fee or its Northern Ireland equivalent.

These incredibly bright young people, who all attended non-fee-paying schools, are a manifestation of what the Irish education system produces, through its ordinary day-to-day work. They hail from every community on our island, and as they congregate on the stage in the concert hall in UL, following the receipt of their award from Mr McManus, they are a pictorial representation of the emerging Ireland of tomorrow, in all its cultural and ethnic diversity.

The Irish education system has done, and continues to do, an amazing job in helping to bring about the transformation of our society, which contrary to our nearest neighbour, seems to be at peace with itself, facing into the future with confidence.

Yes, we have many challenges which I will now address, but as an educational ecosystem, we have achieved amazing outcomes, not through huge outlay of capital and current investment, but through the respect and decency for our students and for each other which we bring to our daily endeavours.

BRINGING GAEILGE BACK INTO DAILY USE?

Inspired in part by Minister Mc Hugh's achievement in restoring his proficiency in the Irish language, I have returned this autumn to a weekly Gaelige class, to hopefully enable me to converse with ease in my native language. It may be wishful thinking on my part, but I sense a growing appreciation amongst us in Ireland of our language, and the confidence that its use gives us individually and as a society.

In time, the decision of a previous Minister for Education, Mary Hanafin, to increase the percentage mark for the oral component of Gaelige in the Leaving Cert to 40% may be seen as a transformative moment in the state of health of Irish as a spoken language among the general population.

INCREASING THE DIVERSITY OF OUR TEACHING POPULATION

Ironically, the fact that a H4 grade in Irish is now becoming a requirement for entry to primary school teacher training may unintentionally place an

obstacle in the path of a vital change required in the composition of our teaching population.

While Ireland has been transformed before our eyes over the past fifteen years, our primary school teaching population has remained very traditionally white, middle class, and predominantly female.

If we are to make inroads into nurturing a more diverse expression of the composition of Irish society today in our teacher population, we may have to consider whether an entry requirement of a H4 in Irish is essential.

Teachers trained outside of Ireland can commence teaching in the primary school system for a period of three years before they successfully complete a proficiency examination in Irish.

We may need to undertake further research as to why young people from communities not currently represented in our teacher population are not presenting themselves for training, and find ways of creating a pathway into teacher training for them, which does not compromise the requirement that they become competent in the delivery of every aspect of the curriculum prior to commencing their full-time work in the classroom.

A CRISIS IN TEACHER SUPPLY

At second level and to a lesser extent at primary, we are facing an escalating crisis of teacher supply right across the curriculum. With pupil numbers about to increase substantially at second and third level in the coming years, this crisis in supply needs to be addressed far more urgently than it has been to date.

The present structures mandated by the teaching council are not delivering sufficient qualified teachers to our classrooms. The topic is addressed by Tomás Ó Ruairc in his article in this year's edition. But the steps already taken are far too little to provide the numbers of qualified teachers required within the timeframe demanded by the numbers of students who will need schooling and scholastic proficiency in September 2019 and in the following years.

The creation of a range of new teaching-specific undergraduate degree programmes, commencing in September 2019 - although welcome - will not provide teachers for the classroom before 2024, and they are needed now.

Furthermore, as has been happening with Home Economics graduates from St. Angela's in Sligo, there is no guarantee that these teacher graduates will ultimately choose teaching as a career if the economic rewards of employment in the wider economy entice them away from education following graduation.

The two-year Professional Masters in Education may prove to enhance the quality of teaching practice into the future. Its immediate effect, however, has been to discourage graduates in the Arts, Science, Business, Engineering, etc, from committing two years of their lives to unpaid work in schools, while they pay college fees of up to €12,000 and pay for their accommodation and living costs as well. On top of that, these graduates

have no guarantee of a full time contract of employment at the end of their two-year graft.

With multiple other employment opportunities available to graduates of these disciplines, in an economy experiencing effective full employment, the numbers selecting teacher training fall far short of what is needed to meet the future needs of our growing second level student numbers.

WHO CAN AFFORD TO WORK AS TEACHERS IN OUR CITIES?

Bad and all as the teacher supply problem is outside of our major cities, it is at total crisis level in urban Ireland, where the prohibitive cost of accommodation makes it almost impossible for young people to put a roof over their heads on a teacher's salary.

When I started teaching in my alma mater in Oatlands College in 1976, almost none of my teaching colleagues drove to work because they lived locally or arrived on local public transport. Today, forty-two years later, teaching colleagues leave Sligo, Wexford, Athlone and other points across the island, to commute daily to work, leaving home before 6 a.m. and returning after 7 p.m. each day.

This lifestyle is unsustainable and is denuding our city/urban schools of experienced teachers. Radical action on teacher supply is required now to avoid the immediate de-professionalization of teaching in our classrooms.

COMBATING THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON OUR CHILDREN

Simply bemoaning the effects of technological change on our societies will achieve nothing, but seeking solutions to the negative consequences in the lives of children in formation, and on society in general, is an urgent priority.

Banning the use of iPhone in our schools may give us a short-term feeling of doing something positive, but given how technology is becoming embedded in the way that children and adults learn, and is being widely used by teachers in delivering the curriculum, getting rid of iPhones out of schools is very much a stop-gap measure.

The best long-term solution lies with both regulation at an EU level of the technological companies operating within our borders, and in educating ourselves better to live more healthily in a technologically driven world.

Professors Aidan Moran's article within, on how to increase our capacity to "*think critically*", is a very useful reminder that we can and must embed the development of critical thinking skills into all levels of our education system. Given the changing nature of knowledge, the ease with which students have access to information, and the pace of change in the workplace and the world generally, these competences and skills are critical to the preparation of young people for learning and living.

In an era of 'fake news', the critical thinking skills to discern truth within the avalanche of content encountered daily are vital for children and young people.

ONGOING CURRICULUM REFORM

It is often forgotten that the underlying rationale behind the Junior Cycle reforms, outlined in the Framework for Junior Cycle (2015), is the development of *eight key skills* that provide students with learning opportunities that achieve a balance between learning subject knowledge and developing a wide range of skills and thinking abilities, through a focus on active and collaborative learning.

Students are enabled to use and analyse information in new and creative ways, to investigate issues, to explore, to think for themselves, to be creative in solving problems and to apply their learning to new challenges and situations.

2018 has seen the full implementation of these reforms in all second level schools. Many teachers still have deep-seated concerns regarding their own competencies to deliver a competency-based curriculum. The level of in-service support for enabling teachers to effectively deliver the programme is the bare minimum required, and still leaves many teachers feeling uneasy.

CONTINUING A COMPETENCY-BASED CURRICULUM THROUGH TO THE LEAVING CERT?

Teachers' unease is rooted in the realisation that most parents are focused primarily on high status CAO course places, and that teachers will be judged ultimately by their capacity to deliver to this agenda.

Parents have to date supported the State and their children's schools in pushing forward with Junior Cycle reforms. It may become a different matter entirely now that the reform of the Leaving Cert is about to become a live issue. The mechanism that is used to determine access to high status degree programmes -whatever that is - is the sole focus for many students and families. In Ireland today, that mechanism is the Leaving Cert.

In countries such as the USA, which does not provide high status terminal exams, the focus is on SAT preparation, which is underpinned by a multibillion dollar SAT preparation industry.

Are we going to be faced with the choice in the coming years of removing the Leaving Cert as the determining factor in CAO entry, and replacing it with a SAT-like alternative?

I am sure that the grind school industry is drooling at the prospect of the vast sums of money such a decision would generate for them. The Hpat grinds industry income stream would be very small beer indeed, compared to what a SAT-like college entry system would unleash.

FURTHER EDUCATION

With the economy at almost full employment, many Education and Training Boards (ETB's) are struggling to attract students into the Post Leaving Cert programmes (PLC). Previously students would have needed a one-year course to secure employment in the range of industries such as health and beauty, child care, security, hairdressing, etc. Now, however, in a tight

labour market, many employers are prepared to recruit students directly from school and train them themselves.

While many eighteen-year-olds are bypassing the PLC route into employment and securing their first job straight from second level, large numbers of mature and recently retired workers are seeking up-skilling to enable them to remain competitive within their current employment.

In the case of some recently retired citizens, their interest in attending part time FE programmes is to develop new skills to enable them to continue to make a positive contribution to their communities, or simply to acquire skills to lead more productive and healthy lives in their golden years.

Unfortunately, given the current employment contracts of teachers in PLC colleges, and the way in which the sector is regulated by the Department of Education and Skills (DES), these adults - who have no interest in full-time nine-to-five, September-to-May courses - are robbed of the very expertise they seek.

The recent ESRI report on PLC reform recommends revisions on both the teacher contract issue and the nature of what is deemed to be a valid course for funding purposes in the eyes of the DES.

It is my understanding that the Teachers Union of Ireland (TUI) is open to holding discussions on this matter, so long as their members are accommodated in delivering programmes that suit their professional and personal circumstances.

I would encourage the Minister to explore this issue further, as its resolution may facilitate both the ongoing health of the PLC sector and the skills development needs of our adult population.

While the PLC sector struggles to attract those seeking to enter the labour market quickly, the Universities and Institutes of Technology (ITs) are offering significantly more high status courses to QQI levels 5 and 6 graduates of PLC programmes. This move by the Universities and Institutes of Technologies is based on their very positive experience in recent years of the progression of such students through to degree level in their institutions.

As many more PLC graduates are offered highly sought-after CAO course places based on securing distinctions in their course work, questions are being raised as to the consistency and comparability of the assessment structures within the PLC sector.

Padraig Walsh addresses this issue in his article within. Unlike the Leaving Cert, assessment within the PLC sector is carried out by the teaching staff delivering the programme, with external examiners providing a quality control mechanism.

HIGHER EDUCATION

The major development in Higher Education in 2018 has been the eventual passing of the Technological Universities Bill leading to the

establishment of the Technological University of Dublin, which will open its doors on 1 January 2019. This first Technological University in Ireland is an amalgamation of three Institutes of Technology – DIT, Tallaght and Blanchardstown. A number of other clusters of Institutes of Technology continue to seek technological university status.

As I predicted in last year's editorial, the Cassells recommendations on third level funding has been kicked into the long grass. There is no political will to increase registration charges of €3000, which – after Britain's exit from the EU on 29 March 2019 – will be the most expensive in Europe.

It's the Boston or Berlin question again. Are our Irish third level colleges competing for Irish students in the English-speaking Anglo-Saxon world of the British Isles, the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, where student fees are very high? Or are they competing among our twenty-six EU fellow member states where third level education is a State funded entitlement in most cases and over a thousand courses are now offered through English? With several thousand Irish students already studying through English in Continental Universities, this is a very live question.

While the Government ponders a way out of the third level funding dilemma, our universities are recruiting international students from China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, etc, who pay high fees, which helps to balance the books. The international student numbers in our major universities are now in the 15-20 per cent range.

We have not yet got to the point where places on CAO programmes are cut to create more international ones. But, as the population bulge about to pass through our second level schools approaches university entry stage, hard choices will have to be made as to who pays for their third level education. The Universities cannot be expected to forego high-paying international students, and replace them with relatively low income domestic Irish students. The political reality is that it is to the next Government that it will fall to address this problem.

FOURTH LEVEL RESEARCH

The reality of the very close relationship between Irish and UK third level institutions, and their ongoing success in recent years in securing EU funding for a large amount of their shared projects, is a matter of huge concern to the Irish research community, given the ongoing uncertainty regarding the outcome of Brexit.

These research relationships are deeply rooted, and our third level colleges will experience a period of extreme turbulence ahead if ultimately they must seek new partners among our fellow 26 EU member universities, if UK institutions exit the EU funded system.

The coming years may present great challenges to the Irish research community, to which they will undoubtedly rise.

SPECIAL BREXIT EDITORIAL



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For the second year in a row, we have chosen as our Picture of the Year this image of Enda Kenny leaving the meeting of the European Union's Heads of Government on Saturday 29 April 2017. We believe that this was a pivotal moment in Irish history.

As Taoiseach at the time, Enda Kenny had secured agreement that the retention of the totally open border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland would be one of the three issues resolved in the Withdrawal Treaty between Britain and the European Union, prior to entering into discussions on any future trading arrangements between both parties.

In our view, given the extremely close educational relationships that exist between citizens and institutions in the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland, and Great Britain, the retention of totally free movement within the Island of Ireland, without any physical border checks of any nature, was central to fostering the closest possible educational cooperation and interactions at all levels. It was for this reason that we chose Enda Kenny's achievement in securing the agreement on that Saturday night in April 2017 as the outstanding event of 2017.

At the time we were perplexed as to why the profound significance of the agreement secured by Enda Kenny with our 27 EU colleagues seemed not to have registered in any way with those in the UK responsible for negotiating their exit from the European Union.

We realised at the time that, if the precondition to agreeing a withdrawal treaty was that no physical controls would be placed on the movement of people on the Island of Ireland, and if children living for example in Monaghan town could freely choose to attend a school fifteen minutes across the border in Northern Ireland, or in Monaghan town itself, this freedom of movement would have profound implications for the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in fully exiting the European Union. Where else along the borders of the EU can citizens of third countries enter the EU daily for educational purposes?

There has been a widely held misconception, both within Government and among citizens, that because Ireland and the UK have a long-standing arrangement whereby citizens of both jurisdictions can move, work, and study, freely within our islands, that this will continue indefinitely, irrespective of the final shape of the withdrawal treaty. Statements to that effect have been issued by both Ministries of Education, following meetings to discuss the issue.



It is our understanding that officials in the European Commission made it known earlier this year that no such educational arrangement can exist, involving citizens of the Republic of Ireland, that do not apply also to all other EU citizens.

Therefore, an agreement which secured the rights of free educational movement within the island, given the concerns of our Unionist cousins, would also have to apply between the island of Ireland and Great Britain, and - given Brussels' determination that all EU citizens will continue to have equal rights - would also have to apply to all those living within the EU.

The final outcome of the negotiations between the UK and EU, and specifically how they will shape the educational cooperation and extremely close relationships which currently exist between our islands, are at the time of writing as yet totally unclear.

What is clear is that Enda Kenny's success in winning the support of his fellow leaders for his then government's position on free movement without any physical barriers on the Island of Ireland, is one of the pivotal moments in Irish history, with far-reaching effects into 2018 and beyond. We salute him for this achievement, and wish him good health and happiness when he relinquishes political office at the end of the current Dáil term.

