



EDUCATION
MATTERS

Editor **Brian Mooney**

IRELAND'S YEARBOOK OF EDUCATION 2018 2019

Editor **Brian Mooney**

PUBLISHED BY
EDUCATION MATTERS

MANAGING EDITOR
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ISBN: 978-0-9956987-2-7

SPONSORED BY
Dublin City University - Irish Research Council
National University of Ireland - Trinity College Dublin
Maynooth University - University College Dublin - NUI Galway
University of Limerick - QQI - SOLAS

Copy-edited by Stan Carey
www.stancarey.com

Designed by Artvaark Design
www.artvaark-design.ie

Printed in Ireland by
Walsh Colour Print
Castleisland, Co. Kerry

The views expressed in this Yearbook are many, varied and sometimes contradictory.
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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 chaighdeán 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, smaoinim 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 amhail 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 Pholasáí 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 í 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.

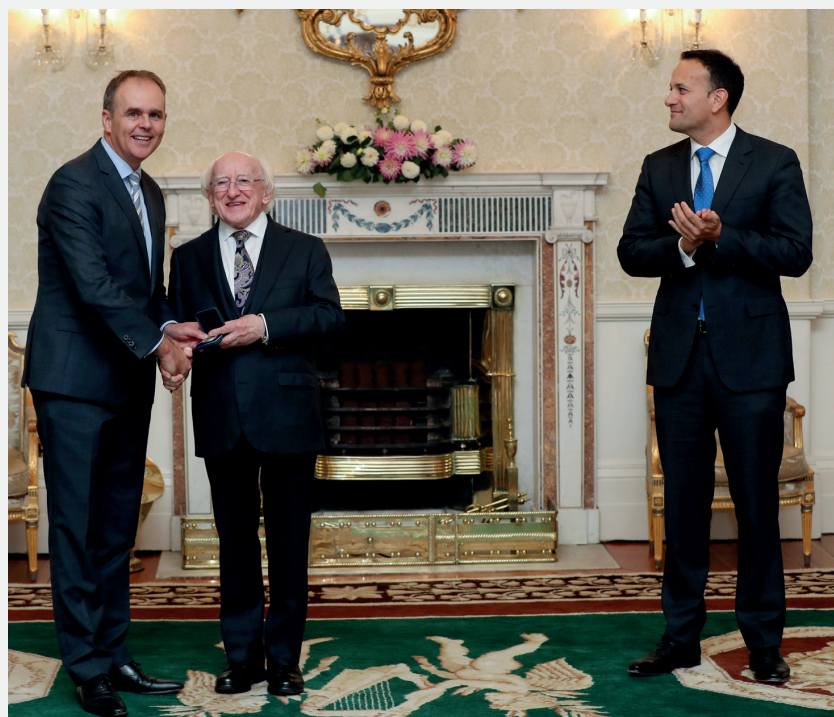
Since being appointed, I have been impressed by the dedication of those involved in the sector.

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 McHugh'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



Brian Mooney

Editor, Ireland's
Yearbook of Education

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.

THEMES



During the Pope's visit to Ireland in August 2018, An Taoiseach Leo Varadkar publicly acknowledged the contribution made by the Catholic Church to the building of Irish society, particularly in establishing schools and hospitals when people were in need and the state did not provide.

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Well-being in education can transform children's lives

Dr Niall Muldoon

Dr Muldoon discusses the many recent initiatives for well-being in education, including the Well-Being programme introduced in September 2017 by the Department of Education & Skills. He underlines the need to provide for the well-being of all members of the education community, including staff well-being, which is an important part of a mentally healthy school.

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A changing and challenging relationship

Dr Gareth Byrne

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What makes us the way we are - and what makes each of us different from everyone else? Drawing from his new book, 'How the Wiring of our Brains Shapes Who We Are', Dr Mitchell looks at the reasons why children are innately different, and their individual natures cannot necessarily be moulded by their parents. Teachers, too, are well aware of differences in the personalities, interests, and aptitudes of their young charges.



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There was no area of education in Ireland to which Professor John Coolahan did not contribute during his long and incredibly fruitful life. Ni bheidh a leithéid ann arís.





Dr Niall Muldoon
Ombudsman for
Children

ENHANCING WELL-BEING ACROSS THE EDUCATION COMMUNITY

Well-being in education can transform children's lives

This article looks to highlight the vital importance, from a children's rights perspective, of actively enabling all members of every school community to improve their well-being. The well-being of school leaders, staff, and students is intertwined with the well-being of parents, members of the board of management, and the local community. Therefore, for a child to fully express their talents and maximise their benefits from education, their well-being and the well-being of all who touch their lives need to be enhanced.

An enormous amount of work is being done to ensure the well-being of our children and young people in the education system and beyond. This is leading to many more schools developing a culture of well-being, which creates a self-sustaining momentum and ensures that all associated with it feel the benefits. This is not only desirable but will also lead to fuller realisation of children's rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

CORE ROLES OF OMBUDSMAN AND HIS OFFICE

The Ombudsman for Children's Office (OCO) is an independent statutory body that was established in 2004 under the Ombudsman for Children Act 2002. As Ombudsman for Children, I am accountable to the Oireachtas for the exercise of my statutory functions. My core roles are to promote the rights and welfare of children up to the age of eighteen, and to deal with complaints made by or for children about administrative actions of public bodies that have, or may have, negatively affected a child.

Our remit is limited to the public sector. Since education is an area of the public sector that most children engage with for an extended time, it is necessarily a consistent focus of the OCO's work across our statutory functions. Our recent work includes providing advice to Government on the Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2016 and the General Scheme of the Education (Parent and Student Charter) Bill 2016. In the area of complaints, education is the largest category we deal with each year, accounting for 45% of all complaints we handled in 2017.

Through our work we understand that schools occupy a vital place in the lives of children, their families, and communities. Indeed, many young people we meet speak highly of their schools and educators. One of the most remarkable encounters from my time in this role was meeting a seven-year-old girl who had written to the OCO seeking help to find her family a house. I invited her and her mother into the office and she told me about the challenges of being homeless and living in unsuitable emergency accommodation. Although this

child had experienced considerable adversity, she was excited when talking about school and the fun she had there. This shows the profound influence schools have on their pupils.

This example reminds us why schools are, and always have been, at the forefront of efforts to promote well-being among children. We are increasingly confronted with evidence which suggests that growing up today is more complex than it has ever been. Many young people have to deal with issues such as bullying (face-to-face and online), sexuality, transition between school levels, breakups, and blended families. Nevertheless, I am confident that schools have the power and skills to help students navigate the challenges of life in the twenty-first century.

THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION'S WELL-BEING AGENDA

As all of those working in the field will know, well-being has emerged as a dominant theme in education discourse in recent years. This is reflected by the fact that Goal 1.1 of the Department of Education's Action Plan for Education (2016–2019) is to improve services and resources to promote well-being in school communities. More recently, on 20 July this year, Minister Richard Bruton launched his Department's Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018–2023, which adopts a holistic approach to well-being. In keeping with the WHO's definition, it comprises many interrelated aspects, including being active, responsible, connected, resilient, appreciated, respected, and aware. The framework sets out to ensure that by 2023 the promotion of well-being will be at the core of the ethos of every school and centre for education and that Ireland will be recognised as a leader in this area. This is an admirable and ambitious target which suggests that there is a genuine commitment to promoting well-being at government level.

The new Wellbeing Programme will see 300 hours of timetabled learning over the three years of the junior cycle.

This is not to say that schools are only now starting to create a culture of well-being. There are innumerable examples of fantastic school cultures where great thought is given to students' well-being. For well-being to be truly embedded, however, there must be equal value put on the well-being of the whole school community, so that all teachers, pupils, parents, and staff can feel that their welfare is a core consideration. To deliver the objectives set out in this new Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework, the Department must give schools all the additional support they need to sustain and build upon the fantastic work already being done.

WELL-BEING IN EARLY YEARS

The continued extension of the Early Childhood Care and Education scheme means that about 117,000 children are currently benefiting from the two free years service (Irish Government, 2018), and this reflects growing awareness of the immediate and long-term benefits that early years education brings to children and their communities (UNICEF, 2001; Rodgers, 2013).

Participating preschools agree to implement the Aistear curriculum framework. Aistear is based on four themes, one of which is 'Well-being' (NCCA, 2004). This theme aims to help children be strong psychologically and socially, be as healthy and fit as they can, be creative and spiritual, and have positive outlooks on learning and on life. Although high-quality

preschool education has been found to enhance the well-being of all children, it has even greater benefits for those from disadvantaged backgrounds (Melhuish, 2014). Thus we welcome this investment as recognition of the importance of strong, positive preventative measures. Speaking before the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Health and Children, Professor Kevin Nugent, director of developmental medicine at Boston Children's Hospital, said, 'Initiating programmes that meet the developmental needs of children from birth to age three years is as much about building a strong foundation for lifelong physical and mental health as it is about enhancing readiness to succeed in school' (Oireachtas, 2015).

In September 2018, I had the pleasure of seeing evidence of the benefits described above in action when I launched the Young Knocknaheeny Area-Based Childhood (ABC) Programme 'Learning Together' report. It was clear to me then that all those involved in the programme (HSE, Tusla, school principals, crèches, NGOs) are doing tremendous work to respectfully support children and parents to get the lives of the children in the area off to the best possible start. We expect that the Government will approve Ireland's first-ever National Early Years Strategy by the end of 2018 (Irish Government, 2018). This is an important opportunity to invest in the well-being of future generations in a similar manner to what I witnessed in Knocknaheeny and the many other ABC Programmes around the country.

Some of the most vibrant wellbeing initiatives have been developed organically by schools.

WELL-BEING IN PRIMARY AND POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS

One of the most positive partnerships I have been involved with in my current role is the Wellbeing for Teachers and Learners (WTL) Group. Created in 2016, it comprises the Ombudsman for Children's Office, the Irish Primary Principals' Network, the Teaching Council, the National Parents Council (Primary), and the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals. The group's objective is to ensure that collective efforts in well-being have a positive impact on the whole school community – teachers, students, parents or guardians, and the wider community. Since its formation there have been significant developments in the area of well-being at both primary and post-primary level.

The Wellbeing Programme, introduced in September 2017 by the Department of Education and Skills (DES), will see 300 hours of timetabled learning over the three years of the junior cycle. From the perspective of the OCO, it is particularly encouraging that the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment's guidelines for this programme are informed by a rights-based approach to well-being:

A rights-based approach to wellbeing is useful as it reminds us that wellbeing matters not simply because it leads to better educational outcomes or can influence young people's outcomes as adults. Wellbeing matters in the here and now. It is important in its own right because all students have a right to feel cared for in school. (NCCA, 2017, p.10)

Some of the most vibrant well-being initiatives have been developed organically by schools. Corpus Christi Primary School in Moyross, County

Limerick, an area with deeply embedded socio-economic problems, including a history of low educational attainment (Limerick Council, 2013), is a standout example. This school has placed student well-being at the heart of its ethos and developed a number of programmes to promote pupils' mental health. Alongside sports programmes, there is a gardening club, after-school woodwork, and a cookery programme. From a therapeutic perspective Corpus Christi also run art, play, music, and equine-assisted therapy sessions to support pupils' emotional development. I have met with students and parents from this school and have seen first-hand how such interventions helped students to make sense of and express their feelings.

Across the three years I have been in office, I have visited many national and post-primary schools like Corpus Christi Primary School, and each one affirms how a well-considered and enthusiastically supported well-being programme can enhance student outcomes, even in the most challenging educational environments. It also confirms how much was being done in the realm of well-being long before it became a formal programme sanctioned by the DES.

WELL-BEING AND SCHOOL STAFF

Former Cork hurler and mental health activist Conor Cusack has told the story of how, as a young student, he worked on weekends and summer holidays in glasshouses. In the ecology of gardening, if he wanted something beautiful to grow, he knew he had to create the conditions that would allow whatever seed was planted to thrive. He was also taught that if it didn't thrive, the first question asked was: What was wrong with the environment and climate, and why had they not encouraged the plant's healthy development? Did it receive enough water and sunlight? Were there issues with the soil? Invariably, the reason was identified. Cusack made the point strongly that the last question to be asked was: Could there be something wrong with the seed? This highlights the importance of well-being as a culture in schools, because that is what every child lives and breathes every day. If the culture is not healthy, how can the child – or other member of the school community – survive and thrive?

When schools support staff well-being, there are positive effects on staff retention, job satisfaction, productivity, and student outcomes.

It is therefore vital that we do not lose sight of the fact that any dynamic well-being initiatives must embrace all members of the school community. To this end, the National Parents Council runs a training course to help parents promote their children's well-being and mental health in conjunction with St Patrick's Mental Health services (NPC, 2018).

Staff well-being is an equally important part of a mentally healthy school. All workplaces can be stressful at times, and schools are no different. It is important that schools recognise this and take action to help staff reduce stress and build better ways of coping. Schools and staff need to work together to create a culture where all members of the school community, including staff (teaching, administrative, and maintenance) feel supported and have the opportunity to flourish.

Ultimately, when schools support staff well-being, there are positive effects on staff retention, job satisfaction, productivity, and student outcomes.

PARTICIPATION AND WELL-BEING

The Ombudsman for Children's Office is guided by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, an international agreement that sets out the rights to which every child aged under eighteen is entitled. By ratifying the UNCRC in 1992, Ireland made a commitment under international law to respect, protect, and fulfil the rights of children set out in the Convention. A core principle in Article 12 is that every child with the capacity to form a view has a right to express their views freely and to have due weight given to their views in all matters affecting them.

Irish research has shown potential benefits for students when their opinions are taken into account. These include significant improvement in the quality of their relationships with teachers and their sense of belonging and connectedness to school. Ultimately, the link between student voice and well-being is substantially supported by evidence (Flynn, 2017).

Flynn has observed: 'Embedding these structures [of listening to students] as habitual practice will ensure a sustainable and credible approach to inter-generational dialogue, and a democratic, shared process in curricular and education reform' (2017, p.7). The Education (Parent and Student Charter) Bill 2016 presents the State with a vital opportunity to legislate for mainstreaming a culture of children and young people's participation in school decision-making, in accordance with Article 12. It is crucial that we make the most of this opportunity so that student engagement becomes a 'habitual practice' and can create that sustainable and credible 'intergenerational dialogue' for our whole school community.

CHALLENGES

Recent years have witnessed a groundswell of support for well-being initiatives across the education sector. But many people remain somewhat sceptical of the agenda and raise legitimate concerns about the feasibility of these initiatives. Paul Downes described the DES's Wellbeing Policy for 2018–2023 as largely a repackaging of policy already in operation, and feared that by not fully resourcing second-level schools, 'this national policy risks being merely a sticking plaster' (Murray, 2018).

Meeting the infrastructural and resource demands imposed by well-being initiatives is another challenge. School leaders are right to question how best-practice approaches involving active learning and project-based methodologies can be implemented in overcrowded classrooms or without appropriate outdoor space. Finally, fears of work overload and staff burnout have been raised, particularly among teaching principals (Oireachtas, 2018). Ultimately, unless such concerns are confronted and addressed, well-being risks being seen as another initiative forced upon schools, and uptake will be affected accordingly.

CONCLUSION

Article 29 of the UNCRC tells us that a child's or young person's education should help their mind, body, and talents be the best they can. It should also build their respect for other people and for the world around them. 'Education' in this context goes far beyond formal schooling to embrace the broad range of life experiences and learning processes that enable children, individually and collectively, to develop fully and to live a well-rounded and

satisfying life in society (UN, 2001). By placing well-being at the heart of our education system, we can vindicate this right.

Young people today live in a world characterised by economic uncertainty, academic pressure, and all-pervasive social media. It is unsurprising that reports show an increase in anxiety and mental health difficulties experienced by schoolchildren (Krause, 2017; O'Brien, 2018). We cannot expect schools to solve our mental health problems. But well-being in schools is a powerful component of wider efforts to promote positive mental health in Irish society.

With that in mind, I will finish with an old Zen proverb that encapsulates the strength that can only come to people – children and adults alike – who feel content and confident with who they are: *Only those who are extremely pliable and soft can be extremely hard and strong.*

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RELIGION AND EDUCATION IN IRELAND

A changing and challenging relationship



Dr Gareth Byrne

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Director, Mater Dei Centre for Catholic Education, DCU Institute of Education

We are living at a key moment in the relations between religion and education in the Republic of Ireland. Read any newspaper, turn on the radio, look at Twitter, and there is bound to be something about religion or education or the interrelationship between them. Many claim that the Irish have a greater interest in religion than most. Clearly, education matters to us too. It is crucial that we get the relationship right for our time and for the future.

THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF IRELAND

There has been great change in Ireland, socially, culturally, and religiously in recent years. Growing diversity has become a reality, in particular through the movement of peoples to Ireland. Economic migrants, refugees from war-torn Syria and elsewhere, and those of means who sense Ireland to be a place of opportunity have come to these shores. The variety of global and social media that we consume every day, and that consume us, can bring us immediately close to the interests and concerns of those on the other side of the world, members of our own families, and people we have never met.

A new openness to secularism has become powerfully influential. The distress caused by sexual abuse scandals in the Catholic Church, and the inability of Church leaders to deal openly with this issue, have contributed to ambivalence towards religious commitment. The removal by referendum in May 2018 of the recognition of the equal right to life of the pregnant woman and the unborn, inserted into the Constitution in 1983, is a sure indicator of change in the air.

The vast majority of people living in Ireland, however, profess to be Christians and continue to identify with the Catholic Church: 3,729,100 or 78.3% of the population in the 2016 census. Members of the Church of Ireland in 2016 numbered 126,400, while 62,200 Orthodox Christians now live in Ireland. The numbers belonging to other religions have grown from small beginnings, with Muslims in 2016 numbering 63,400, and Hindus 14,300. In perhaps the most dramatic revelation, those with no religion have grown to 468,621 or 9.8% of the total population.

THE PLACE OF RELIGION IN EDUCATION IN IRELAND

The general aim of education in Irish schools as set out by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) is a holistic one, seeking to engage with 'all aspects of the individual, including aesthetic, creative, critical, cultural, emotional, intellectual, moral, physical, political, social and spiritual development, for personal and family life, for living in community and for leisure' (NCCA, 1993, p.26).

The Education Act, 1998, confirms that schools recognised by the state should 'promote the moral, spiritual, social, and personal development of students', and do this 'in consultation with their parents, having due regard for the characteristic spirit of the school' (Government of Ireland, 1998, para. 9d). Parents and the school engage together in providing support for young people according to what they hold dear.

Fundamental questions about the meaning and mystery of life are rooted deep in the human condition. Parents generally value the emphasis placed by schools on helping young people come to terms with such questions, whether or not they or their young people have a particular belief system and faith community: 'Although we may think we are too busy to reflect on them, these are questions which, even when ignored, continue to lie deep in the human heart' (Murray, 2017, p.12).

PRIMARY RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION

Following the 1998 Education Act, the new Primary School Curriculum, 1999, featured Religious Education as one of the seven curricular areas mandated for all primary schools. Religious Education at that time came under the remit of Church authorities (Catholic or Protestant) on behalf of the local parish community and its families. Sacramental preparation of Catholic pupils for first Eucharist and Confirmation has thus been facilitated in the Religious Education programme in Catholic schools.

In the Catholic sector, serious questioning is taking place regarding the school-based model of sacramental preparation.

One of the successes in Religious Education in recent years in Catholic schools, still 90 per cent of primary schools in Ireland, has been the ongoing introduction of the new Religious Education programme for Catholic children, *Grow in love*. In the Catholic sector, however, serious questioning is also taking place regarding the school-based model of sacramental preparation. In many cases, neither the parents nor their children participate in their local parish, yet whole class groups of Catholic pupils

are being delivered to a once-off celebration in the parish that should be part of a committed process of initiation into full participation in the life and rites of the Catholic community.

In September 2018, Archbishop Diarmuid Martin, following a recommendation of the Dublin Diocesan Council of Priests, wrote to all parishes in the diocese issuing guidelines for the enrolment of those wishing to participate in sacramental preparation in their parishes. This may be the start of a growing effort to help Catholic parents and families choose to engage more fully in their parish if and when they decide to put their children forward for the sacraments of Christian initiation, with all the rights and responsibilities they confer.

NEW FORMS OF SCHOOL PATRONAGE

The traditional model involving a close relationship between religion and education in primary schools, dependent on management structures closely associated with local parishes of one Christian denomination or another, remains dominant. But it is not the only way to envisage how religion and education can work together into the future. With the development of new

forms of school patronage, particularly Educate Together, a patron body established without any religious affiliation, the relationship cannot be presumed in its traditional manner.

In Educate Together schools, reference is made to an ethical education curriculum and to the patron's half-hour, rather than to Religious Education. Children are introduced to ethical, spiritual, and environmental themes without engaging, at least at school, with a particular faith community. In some cases Catholic parents, together with their local parish, are encouraged to use the school facilities after school hours for sacramental preparation.

A significant multi-belief approach has also been initiated in new Community National Schools, under the patronage of local Education and Training Boards (ETBs), previously Vocational Education Committees (VECs). These schools, acknowledging the religious diversity in their community, have been working on a Religious Education programme seeking to embrace the variety of religions and worldviews of their students and to celebrate difference in the life of the school. This has not been without its complications. Recent doctoral research shows that while management in such schools seek to promote a mutually respectful approach to different religions and belief systems, it can be difficult to create a level playing field that is equal for all (Mullally, 2018).

A number of ongoing discussions are of interest in seeking to define an appropriate relationship in the future between religion and education in Irish primary schools. In 2017 the NCCA reported on its consultation about a possible Education about Religions and Belief (ERB) and Ethics curriculum, an idea first suggested by the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector, 2012. The Forum recommended the divesting of some schools from the Catholic sector to allow for variety of school choice for parents in a local area, and the introduction of ERB and Ethics into all primary schools. It envisaged a smaller number of faith-based schools which would continue with their denominational Religious Education programme, and supplement it with elements of ERB and Ethics not already addressed.

The NCCA report indicates a number of contextual issues which raise questions about what was proposed: the rights of patron bodies as set out in the Education Act, 1998, questions about the impact of the proposal on the ethos of schools still under denominational patronage, the recognition that much of what was being proposed by this new curriculum is happening in schools already, and the repeatedly voiced concern about time pressure and curriculum overload. Doctoral research completed this year, taking the proposed ERB and Ethics curriculum as an example, has highlighted the importance of genuine partnership in curriculum design in Ireland, but indicates the breakdown of trust that can occur between partners, both those recognised in negotiations and those on the margins, when their voices are not being heard (Sullivan, 2018).

A significant multi-belief approach has been initiated in new Community National Schools which are under the patronage of ETBs.

During the past year the NCCA also issued a final report on its consultation on curriculum structure and time in the school week in primary schools. One issue that received particular attention from respondents was the proposal that Religious Education or other patron's programme be designated in so-called 'Flexible Time', a term that was itself questioned. Concerns were expressed that this would lead to downgrading Religious Education in faith-based schools, suggesting that it be considered a discrete subject (as the Forum had done) and thereby undermining the integrity of the characteristic spirit of such schools.

The Education (Admission to Schools) Act, 2018, was also enacted, one of whose effects will be, from September 2019, to prevent schools generally from giving preference at admission to pupils based on their religion – particularly Catholic schools, given the number of such schools, from accepting Catholic pupils first. Preference for members of other faith communities, Protestant, Muslim, or Jewish, for example, will continue to be allowed in their schools in order to maintain the ethos of such minority schools.

SECOND-LEVEL SCHOOLS AND THE NEW RELIGIOUS EDUCATION SPECIFICATION

One way of understanding the second-level schooling system in Ireland is to see it under three headings: voluntary secondary schools, largely Catholic, usually under Trust Boards which continue the work of founding religious congregations and dioceses; ETB schools and community colleges, both formerly managed by VECs; and coeducational community and comprehensive schools, managed on behalf of the state by boards of management with community representatives, often including representatives of religious congregations who had been involved in an amalgamating school, or of the local bishop.

Religious Education is available in Ireland as a state-certified subject, at Junior and Leaving Cert levels, to students of all religions and none.

Religious Education has been available as an optional state-certified subject in Ireland at second level, open to students of all religions and none, since 2000 at Junior Certificate and 2003 at Leaving Certificate level. The development of these NCCA syllabuses, and a curriculum framework for non-exam lessons at senior cycle, has meant that all the textbooks written since have focused on the content material set out in these syllabuses or curriculum framework. Even when the subject is not taken as an exam subject, the syllabuses have generally been followed. At the time of their introduction, the Irish Catholic bishops offered guidelines indicating how this state approach might be employed in Catholic schools and with Catholic students in other schools.

During 2017 and 2018 the NCCA has been leading a review of Religious Education as a state-certified subject for junior cycle, as it has with all junior cycle subjects, in line with the creative teaching and learning approach suggested by the Framework for Junior Cycle 2015. The background paper for Religious Education, reinforcing the value of the subject for all young people, was generally well received. The new specification for Religious Education, due to be implemented in schools in September 2019, addresses

the subject to all students, whatever their religious faith or worldview, seeking to promote mutual understanding.

Research led by this author reveals an appreciation among 13- to 15-year-old students of the learning that comes from Religious Education. The proposal that 'we must respect all religions' was supported by 84% of the 3,000 young people surveyed, with 85% agreeing that studying religion in school helped them towards such mutual understanding (Byrne, Francis, and McKenna, 2018, forthcoming).

Somewhat incongruously, while this review was under way, the then Minister for Education, Richard Bruton TD, chose to issue first one circular letter in this regard, and then a second. Circular Letter 13/2018, published in February 2018, required Community and ETB post-primary schools not only to facilitate the regular opt-out supported by the Constitution when 'religious instruction' in a particular faith tradition is offered by such schools, but to offer another subject alongside it for those opting out.

The Minister not only did not provide any extra resources to schools for this, but contravened, it is said, the need in the Education Act to conduct a consultation with relevant bodies before making such a decision. This circular letter, by referring to both religious instruction and Religious Education without differentiating between them, put in question the Department's own efforts over the years to provide a form of Religious Education at second level for all students, and its importance, as testified to in many other countries since 9/11, for community cohesion and the well-being of society (Cullen, 2018; Religion Teachers' Association of Ireland, 2018).

The second circular letter was issued by the Department of Education and Skills in October 2018, as a result of ongoing requests by those involved in such schools. Circular Letter 62/2018 provides a clarification by the Department that the NCCA Religious Education syllabuses and the new Religious Education specification for junior cycle are intended for students of all faiths and none. The approach indicated for ETB and Community Schools in Circular Letter 13/2018, facilitating the withdrawal of students and provision of other tuition alongside religious instruction, does not, the second letter confirms, apply to NCCA Religious Education. Where religious instruction and worship in accordance with the rites and practices of a particular denomination, however, continue to be offered in ETB and Community Schools, the Department, in Circular Letter 62/2018, indicates a newly required opt-in by parents for their young people.

It will be interesting to see what decisions schools and parents will make in the future. What is important in contemporary society is that all students in all schools be offered a form of Religious Education that gives them the opportunity to reflect on and engage openly from their own perspective with the questions posed for them: 'All schools in Ireland have a duty to young people to help them prepare to live confidently in, and contribute to building up, an Ireland that is not only plural but open and respectful' (Byrne, 2018).

NEW INITIATIVES IN ADULT RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

With all this discussion of religion and education, the question of ongoing lifelong adult religious education and faith development is emerging again as a topic for conversation in some quarters. With the declining numbers of priests and members of religious congregations in the Catholic community, lay people are now taking formal leadership roles as parish pastoral workers and catechists, paralleling the leadership roles lay people have fulfilled in schools over many years.

Share the Good News, the national directory for catechesis of the Catholic Church in Ireland, emphasises the importance of members of the Church engaging in ongoing education and reflection on what their faith means to them, and growing into a deeper sense, too, of Christian community and mission. A postdoctoral research position in adult religious education and faith development, the first of its kind in Ireland, has recently been filled at the Mater Dei Centre for Catholic Education, DCU Institute of Education (see www.dcu.ie/materdei.cce).

POPE FRANCIS IN IRELAND

The visit of Pope Francis to the World Meeting of Families 2018 in Dublin provided a unique opportunity, for Catholics and others, to reflect together on Irish society past and present. The formal intervention of Taoiseach Leo Varadkar was significant for the forthrightness of his condemnation of a culture that allowed clerical abuse to go unchecked. His speech was also noteworthy for the generosity of his acknowledgement of how structures put in place over the years by the Catholic Church contributed to building up Irish society when people were in need and the state did not provide, particularly in establishing schools and hospitals.

We may have reached a tipping point in Ireland in the relationship between religion and education.

Pope Francis's well-known commitment to the airing of diverse points of view on Church issues (Dorr, 2018) was evident as he listened carefully. The silent gatherings at the Garden of

Remembrance and elsewhere spoke volumes to the whole of Irish society too. The visit of Pope Francis, and his humanity, may encourage those who are convinced that dialogue can heal the human heart and human society.

For Pope Francis it is clear that the Church is called constantly to renewal, to begin again in every generation to offer the service it can give: 'God is eternal newness. He impels us constantly to set out anew, to pass beyond what is familiar, to the fringes and beyond' (Pope Francis, 2018, para. 135). Other Church leaders are following his example in suggesting that the Gospel has new things to say to people interested in building up contemporary society, for example by working to end human trafficking and slavery, and by resisting religious extremism (Nichols, 2017). The Fine Gael think-in, immediately after the visit of Pope Francis and ahead of the new Dáil term, addressed church-state relations. This may signal recognition in government quarters of the importance of such dialogue.

CONCLUSION

We may have reached a tipping point in Ireland in the relationship between religion and education. From now on, religion will have a place in people's

lives when and if it is freely chosen, contributes to meaning in their world, and helps them embrace the mystery of life that lies deep in the human heart. Religion will have an important part to play in education in Ireland if it is judged that the religious, spiritual, and moral values being proposed are loving, just, truthful, hope-filled, transformative, and inspiring.

Education in Ireland will continue to promote dialogue with religion not because the Church says so, or because any other religion or worldview seeks recognition, but in so far as religious conviction can be seen to contribute to the newness, generosity, and wholeness with which Irish society hopes to respond imaginatively to the deep-felt needs of all its people, particularly its young people.

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TRANSITIONS IN THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

The Irish school system is not seamless. From the time children enter preschool at the age of three until they complete their formal education, they experience a number of transitions – some more visible and challenging than others. The official designation of the various levels of education – pre-primary, primary, junior cycle second-level, senior cycle second-level, further education, higher education – is not unique to Ireland. A formal classification of levels and sectors (ISCED 0, 1, 2, etc.) has been used by the OECD and the European Commission in recent decades in their publications of international statistics.

STATE-FUNDED NATIONAL SCHOOL SYSTEM

Ireland was one of the first western countries to have a state-funded system of basic education for all: the national school system founded by Lord Stanley in 1831. Higher education in a university setting has existed for many hundreds of years, but until recently it was only for the privileged few – mostly men. A small number of ‘Intermediate Schools’ (between primary and university), to prepare the elite for university, existed from late medieval times, but state aid was not available for such schools to any significant extent until the latter half of the nineteenth century. Not until the mid-twentieth century did ‘free’ second-level education become available for all. From a historical perspective, schooling could not be described as ‘joined up’ until recently.

FOUR CONSECUTIVE SCHOOL SETTINGS

In Ireland today, almost all young people begin their schooling at the age of three in one of the newly funded ECCE centres. After two years there, they graduate to a separate national (primary) school where they spend eight years, then to a second-level school where they spend five or six years, three in junior cycle and then two or three in senior cycle. At the age of eighteen, most young people continue with their education, in either a further or a higher education institution, for another one to six years, sometimes with a transition or transitions during this period. So the average young person is likely to attend at least four different school settings during their formal education. For some, the transition from one level to another is painless – even exciting. But for others it can be challenging and stressful, resulting in a small number of early school leavers.

LACK OF CONTINUITY ACROSS THE LEVELS

Given how the structure of schooling developed, it is not surprising that there was little if any continuity in the past between pupils’ learning experiences at the various levels. The primary school curriculum was initially devised to provide a minimum level of numeracy and literacy for a population whose schooling would end

at twelve or thirteen years of age. The secondary school curriculum was drawn up to prepare the elite for university education – with little or no reference to the primary school curriculum.

Universities have always jealously guarded their autonomy and academic freedom, and their curriculum traditionally reflected the academic interests of their individual professors. In recent decades, efforts have been made in most countries to align the curricula of pre-primary, primary, second-level, and higher education, with compromises from all sectors, and Ireland is no exception to this trend. In its recent documentation, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) has indicated its commitment to ensuring that there will be continuity in young people's learning experience through all levels of their school life.

Another article in this publication addresses the transition into and out of primary school. This article focuses on the transition between junior and senior cycle and between second level and higher education.

Recent reforms of the junior cycle curriculum reflect the approach that has underpinned the primary curriculum since the early 1970s, which emphasises guided discovery and active learning. The junior cycle framework published by the NCCA in 2011 (Innovation and Identity) focused attention on the 'school as the site of innovation, and on teachers and school leaders as the agents of any change process'. What students would learn was described in twenty-four statements of learning and eight key skills, including literacy and numeracy. A revised assessment structure was introduced that would include classroom-based assessment. After some delays, the revised junior cycle curriculum is finally being implemented, and 2018 saw the first cohort of junior cycle students sitting the new Junior Cert exam, which included a limited number of school-based assessments.

Higher order skills are not being assessed because the assessment tools for Leaving Cert are limited for the most part to end-of-cycle written examinations.

The senior cycle curriculum is in the early stages of revision and reform, and until reform is agreed and implemented there will be discontinuity between junior and senior cycle curricula. The Leaving Cert is a high-stakes exam, given that it is the only 'student performance indicator' used for entry to most third-level courses. Consequently, at senior cycle, assessment is the tail that wags the curriculum dog. Regardless of what skills the Leaving Cert syllabi emphasise, such skills are unlikely to be prioritised by teachers or students, unless they are assessed for certification purposes. Therefore the Leaving Cert exam will effectively determine what teachers teach and students learn at senior cycle level for the foreseeable future.

Employers and third-level academics have for many years been critical of the Leaving Cert's overemphasis on lower-order skills such as knowledge and regurgitation of facts, to the detriment of higher-order skills such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. An analysis of current Leaving Cert syllabi, carried out some years ago by this author, indicated that in many subjects, higher-order thinking and the skills of application, analysis, critical engagement, synthesis, and evaluation are indeed emphasised in

the syllabi of most Leaving Cert subjects. But some of these skills are not being assessed, because the assessment tools are for the most part limited to end-of-cycle written examination.

'Predictability in the Irish Leaving Certificate' (2014), a study carried out on behalf of the State Examinations Commission by Baird et al.,¹ recommended that more emphasis be placed on higher-order thinking skills in the examinations, in keeping with international trends in assessment. This point was also made in a recent study by Denise Burns et al. (2018, cited in Donnelly, 2018), which quoted students as confirming that memorisation and rote learning dominated their preparation for the Leaving Cert. One student referred to preparing an 'essay pool' of thirty essays on different topics for the English paper, and a Geography student said they did '100 essays in January and learned them off'.²

Similar findings emerged from an analysis of Leaving Cert Biology papers over a ten-year period from 1999 to 2008 (Cullinane and Liston, 2016).³ Their study concluded that 'the examination predominantly includes questions that do not promote higher levels of thinking' and that 'the majority of the marks were allocated to the lower objectives of [Bloom's] taxonomy, suggesting that students can rely on rote learning to succeed when undertaking the biology examination'.

It has been argued that too many students are attending third-level education in Ireland.

SOLUTIONS TOWARDS ASSESSMENT OF HIGHER-ORDER SKILLS

In the view of this author, actions could be taken to ensure greater congruence between the desired outcomes of the Leaving Cert syllabi and their assessment. The existing exam system could be supplemented with a greater variety of modes and techniques of assessment, to ensure closer alignment between the syllabi and the exams, and to move towards an assessment system that recognises and rewards the skills that have been identified as necessary for lifelong

learning, such as analytic reasoning, critical thinking, generation of fresh ideas, and practical application of theory.

Supplemental modes of assessment could include projects, portfolios, and other assignments completed in supervised but non-exam conditions. Essays and open book questions, answered in supervised classroom conditions and externally marked, could also be considered. Instead of requiring students to sit one written exam at the end of the final year, two or more sittings at different points throughout the two-year senior cycle could be an option. New and different forms of assessment might also reduce the current reliance on pen-and-paper tests and allow greater use of new technologies, which might include online submission of essays (written under supervision) and computer-marked multiple-choice questions.

It has been noted that even though the total number of students taking the Leaving Cert increased this year, the number applying for third-level places fell. While the reasons for this are not yet clear, it may well be that students

are beginning to embrace different pathways to employment other than spending three or four years in the third-level sector.

It has been argued that too many students are attending third-level education in Ireland. Currently, more than 60% of the relevant age cohort make the transition from second level. This is one of the highest rates in the EU. By contrast, Ireland has one of the lowest rates of participation in apprenticeships – less than 2–3% of school leavers in recent years. Only 1% of apprentices are female – since until last year almost all apprenticeships were in male-dominated craft apprenticeships such as construction, electrical, plumbing, and carpentry.

Earlier this year, the Minister for Education and Skills, Richard Bruton, announced that the government is committed to increasing the number of young people entering apprenticeships, and he pledged to more than double enrolments in what he referred to as ‘earn and learn’ opportunities by 2020. He announced twenty-six new apprenticeship programmes, varying from two to four years and culminating in awards from Level 5 to Level 10, in areas such as accounting, financial services, cybersecurity, animation, and systems engineering. €122 million has been allocated this year for apprenticeship programmes.

Given the low number of apprenticeships in Ireland to date, an increase makes sense. But a cynic might ask whether this is a covert way for government to get employers to contribute financially to the education of the future workforce. The cutbacks in government funding for higher education have been a source of considerable concern in recent years, with HEIs pointing out that their enrolments have almost doubled in the past decade while government funding has fallen by almost one-third. The era of ‘doing more with less’ has come to an end, as there is no longer any slack in the higher education system – if there ever was!

A NEW TRANSITION?

And so as we approach the third decade of the twenty-first century, the transition from second to third level and into the labour force is becoming more varied. Transfer is no longer linear. There are many more pathways to employment from second-level education than there were a few decades ago. With the expansion of further education and the growth in apprenticeships, it is likely that the proportion of school leavers entering higher education directly from school will fall and the numbers entering via further education or apprenticeships will grow. In parallel, there is likely to be an increase in lifelong learning opportunities and in the number of mature students re-entering education with a view to re-skilling or expanding the skills and knowledge they acquired earlier in life – a new transition?

NOTES:

1. Baird, J., Hopfenbeck, T.N., Elwood, J., Caro, D., and Ahmed, A. (2014) ‘Predictability in the Irish Leaving Certificate’. OUCEA report 14/1.
2. Donnelly, K. (2018) ‘Leaving Cert “memory test” doesn’t challenge students’. *Irish Independent*, 13 August 2018.
3. Cullinane, A. and Liston, M. (2016) ‘Review of the Leaving Certificate Biology examination papers (1999–2008) using Bloom’s taxonomy: An investigation of the cognitive demands of the examination’, *Irish Educational Studies*, 35(3), September.



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DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES AND STUDENT LEARNING

This year has seen a prominent focus in public discourse on digital technologies and their impact on children's development and wellbeing. The debate has often been narrowly concentrated on whether or not to ban mobile phones and other personal devices (in schools and other settings), but commentators have also argued that giving children and young people the skills to use technology appropriately and safely is what really matters.

What does the evidence tell us about the role and impact of digital technologies in children's lives? In order to fully appreciate the complexity of the issues, we need to look at the place and impact of digital technologies in both the school and the outside-school lives of children and young people. This will help in understanding more clearly whether and why technology shapes children's development and learning.

The paper begins by considering the evidence on the role of technologies in the classroom and how such innovations have the potential to enhance teaching and learning for students. It then examines some of the barriers to the effective use of technology in Irish schools. The discussion concludes with some recent research examining the role of mobile phones in children's academic and socio-emotional development. The evidence shows that the issues are complex, not simply reducible to a debate about the merits of prohibition.

DIGITAL STRATEGY FOR SCHOOLS 2015-2020

In the educational space, the *Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020* signalled a renewed focus on enhancing the role of digital technologies in student learning. This policy was envisaged as 'the first step in an exciting and ambitious programme which will further embed technology and digital learning tools in primary and post-primary schools ... [and] greatly enhance the learning experience and lifelong learning skills of all our students' (DES, 2015). While the policy has been criticised as short on concrete plans (Lewis, 2017), it does represent a policy commitment to enhancing the capacity of schools to truly embed technologies in their classrooms. However, in many ways this policy drive really began with the roll-out of high-speed (100Mbps) broadband to all second-level schools, as part of Ireland's National Digital Strategy (DCENR, 2015). This created an impetus for change, perhaps beyond what was initially anticipated.

SLOW BUT DEFINITE PROGRESS

Research tracking the programme illustrated small but tangible ways in which technology was beginning to embed in classroom

life (McCoy et al., 2016). Indeed the high expectations of teachers and principals in terms of what could be achieved with state-of-the-art broadband infrastructure were at least partly realised (Coyne et al., 2016). Schools that received broadband earlier were more likely to report that it had an impact on teaching and learning. Both principals and teachers saw benefits for student learning, through enhanced student participation and achievement, greater collaboration among students and in the development of higher order thinking skills and transversal skills. The findings showed a shift towards more student-centred technology usage over the course of the 18-month study. Through the qualitative research, teachers highlighted benefits in terms of meeting diverse student needs, allowing greater differentiation and tailoring of approach. Digital technologies and online fora, like blogs, also allowed teachers to create a more independent learning environment:

It's all about giving the independence back to the students, the independent learning, where they're responsible. If they don't make a certain amount of contributions to the blog over the year then you're looking at the assessment ... It's blended learning, its teacher plus tool equals learning (Teacher)

Teachers also spoke of the role of digital technologies and online resources to support and expand social learning. There was little doubt that an appetite was there among school principals and teachers to embrace the potential of digital technologies to enhance teaching and learning (McCoy et al., 2016).

INFRASTRUCTURAL DEFICITS

The investment in broadband infrastructure eliminated one of the biggest barriers constraining the effective integration of digital technologies in school and classroom life, but other infrastructural deficits came to the fore. These include limitations on Wi-Fi and hardware quality and reliability, and insufficient technical support. In many cases schools needed to source funding for pay for the updating and maintenance of hardware (McCoy et al., 2016). In this context, the recent provision of grants to support investment in digital technologies in primary and second-level schools ¹ and to support schools in the rollout of Computer Science ² in the Leaving Certificate are to be welcomed. However, the research has also highlighted constraints in funding and time allocated to the role of ICT co-ordinators. Their role also tends to be largely technical and less about guiding the future direction in digital integration and pedagogical change. Teachers' own skills and confidence in using technology were also central – students were acutely aware, distinguishing between early adopters, 'reluctant' teachers and those who were risk-averse. It is clear that professional development (both initial and continuous) will play a key role in embedding digital technologies within teachers' pedagogical practices, increasing teachers' skills and confidence in using technology and achieving the desired teaching and learning

DES plans to encourage the use of ICT in Continuing Professional Development will need to be realised.

1 <https://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Press-Releases/2018-press-releases/PR2018-05-02.html>

2 <https://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Press-Releases/2018-press-releases/PR18-07-23.html>

outcomes (McCoy et al., 2016). Plans to encourage the use of ICT in CPD design, development and delivery (DES, 2015) will need to be realised.

TECHNOLOGIES CENTRAL IN NEW CURRICULA

Many of the curriculum developments happening, particularly in second-level schools, are strongly focused on embedding digital technologies in the classroom. The new junior cycle will be central in expanding the place and value of digital technologies in teaching and learning, in particular in placing digital technology as central to many of the statements of learning and key skills comprising the programme. The senior cycle review is also worth noting, given that the NCCA is currently 'working with 41 collaborating schools to generate a shared vision for senior cycle and a strong base from which to shape a curriculum that genuinely meets the needs of all learners for years to come', no doubt placing digital technologies at the core. Their approach, drawing on the voices of students and teachers, is valuable, with earlier research highlighting that students provide a unique and valuable insight into the potential for digital technology to enhance their learning (Coyne and McCoy, forthcoming).

The provision of Computer Science as a Leaving Certificate subject represents the latest initiative in the goal of developing 'discrete' digital technology skills and an opportunity to develop critical and strategic learning skills among students (DES, 2015). Students themselves are keenly aware of the importance of digital skills in the workplace, and possess an appetite for formal computer classes throughout their second-level years (McCoy et al., 2016). Thus, it is likely that Computer Science will attract considerable numbers of students once the programme expands beyond the 40 pilot schools, provided curricular content and assessment methodologies are well-designed, and teacher supply constraints are addressed.

New curriculum developments are strongly focused on embedding digital technologies in the classroom.

ONLINE SAFETY

Digital technologies have undoubtedly become an increasing feature of young people's lives, both within and outside of school environments. Most young people today use a multitude of technologies on a daily basis (McCoy et al., 2012). While the evidence highlights the valuable potential of embedding technologies in teaching and learning processes, there is also a need to guard against the dangers of (excessive or inappropriate) technology use, particularly outside of the classroom. The evidence here is scant and somewhat mixed. CyberSafeIreland recently found that 18 per cent of children talk to strangers online every day and one-fifth of 12-year-olds are spending more than four hours a day online. As part of the Broadband Study, focus groups with students in 2nd and 5th year, revealed that students consider 'online' safety to be analogous to 'offline' safety, highlighting how technology has permeated the day-to-day lives of young people (McCoy et al., 2016):

Clicking on one of those things is like getting into the car with somebody you don't know (2nd year student).

It's not really much of a difference, I mean you're not going to walk up to a random person in the street and tell them where you live (5th year student).

Students participating in this study demonstrated an awareness of the risks online, and felt that their schools had offered good guidance through expert speakers, the SPHE programme and peer learning programmes. While these experiences may not represent the experiences of young people across all schools, there was certainly evidence that schools are embracing their role in educating young people for online safety (McCoy et al., 2016; Coyne and McCoy, forthcoming).

MOBILE PHONE TECHNOLOGY

Ongoing research at the ESRI is examining the role of digital technology use in children's socio-emotional and cognitive development, drawing on the Growing Up in Ireland study. The evidence raises concerns: early mobile phone ownership, in particular, has a negative relationship with the academic development of children as they move into adolescence (Dempsey et al., forthcoming). The persistent presence of mobile phone technology allows it to have an unprecedented impact on children's development. It can seamlessly cross home, school and other settings the child occupies, making it difficult for parents and teachers to supervise and monitor usage. The frequency of engagement with mobile phone technology is likely to be much greater than for other forms of technology. International evidence suggests that mobile phone usage may impact on children's development through cognitive overload or the negative effects of multitasking, distraction, an impact on memory and learning patterns, an impact on sleep duration and quality, changes in interpersonal interactions, increased anxiety and mobile phone addiction.

International research suggests that mobile phone usage may impact on children's development through cognitive overload, negative effects of multitasking, increased anxiety...

NEED FOR RESEARCH EVIDENCE TO GUIDE PRACTICE

It is clear that schools have a new and evolving role in digital literacy - giving children the skills to critically assess what they view online and make informed choices. Such education should begin in the pre-school years. In moving towards a consultative approach to decision-making, the Minister for Education and Skills recently issued a circular to all schools asking them to consult with parents and students in making decisions on the use of smart phones and personal devices in school. The intention is to promote a shared approach regarding the appropriate use of digital technologies, with buy in from all on the appropriate use of technology within and outside the classroom. The approach is novel and to be commended, but schools are being asked to make decisions in the absence of evidence to guide their deliberations. The dissemination of research evidence on the role and impact of digital technologies on child development and learning would greatly assist schools in their consultations.

ACTION PLAN FOR ONLINE SAFETY 2018-2019

More broadly, it is encouraging that in July of this year, the Government launched the *Action Plan for Online Safety 2018-2019*. The Plan includes actions to enhance resources to support online safety, equip teachers to embed digital awareness and digital citizenship in their practice and support student participation in safer internet day activities and peer-to-peer initiatives. It is particularly welcome that the implementation of

the Action Plan will include consultation with children and young people, through Hub na nÓg, Young Voices in Decision Making.

TECHNOLOGY FUNDAMENTAL IN TODAY'S WORLD

Technology is a fundamental part of the modern world and today's students will have jobs that rely on technology. Knowing how to use technology appropriately and effectively will be hugely important for children as they move into adolescence and adulthood. But protecting them from the dangers is equally, if not more, important, so balancing these competing needs must be paramount. There is little doubt, the challenge for policy is significant, as acknowledged by the Minister for Education and Skills, Richard Bruton:

New technology is revolutionising our world bringing with it fantastic opportunities but also challenges. We have an important role in equipping our citizens, in particular our children, with skills to negotiate life in a fast changing 21st century and working together raise awareness to the benefits of new technology while safeguarding our children online. (Action Plan for Online Safety 2018-2019).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Much of the research cited was funded from the ESRI Programme of Research in Communications, which is in turn is funded by contributions from Ireland's Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources and the Commission on Communications Regulation (ComReg).

Growing Up in Ireland has been funded by the Government of Ireland through the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) in association with the Central Statistics Office (CSO) and the Department of Social Protection (DSP). These data have been collected in accordance with the Statistics Act, 1993. The DCYA, CSO and DSP take no responsibility for the views expressed in the research. The project has been designed and implemented by the joint ESRI-TCD Growing Up in Ireland Study Team.

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Award-winning NCAD student

Earlier this year, ESB challenged Irish design students to create a bespoke trophy for international start-up competition, Free Electrons 2018. Diarmuid Farrell from Co Laois, third year student at the National College of Art and Design (NCAD), created the winning trophy from one piece of folded sheet metal.

"The trophy is based on the idea of the big energy companies and small start-ups working together and using innovative new technologies to create clean energy. I feel the augmented reality aspect of the trophy reflects that innovation. I feel very privileged to be part of such an inspiring project. It's really amazing to see all of the work that the start-ups are doing in the area of sustainability", Diarmuid said.

The augmented reality (AR) aspect works by using image targets which a phone can read and project its digital elements in real time.

Congratulating Diarmuid, Jerry O'Sullivan, Deputy Chief Executive at ESB, said: "Innovation is at the very heart of what we do at ESB and we strive to explore and invest in creative ideas and people that will, in turn, benefit our customer... we are excited and proud that Diarmuid's inspiring design took centre stage and his obvious talent was showcased.



NCAD student **Diarmuid Farrell** with his award winning design for the Free Electrons programme.



Mary Nihill

National Director,
Centre for School
Leadership

EVERY TEACHER A LEADER

Learning to be a school leader in Ireland

Researchers (Leithwood et al., 2006; Day, 2009),¹ policymakers, and practitioners increasingly recognise the role of leadership at all levels in developing high-performing schools. Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005),² in their study of school leaders and their impact on student achievement, found the average correlation between leadership and student achievement to be 0.25. What this means is that if a school principal were to improve their leadership practices by one standard deviation, then student achievement would increase by ten percentage points.

Unfortunately, the opposite is also true, and the authors warn that if a principal's focus is on the wrong things, student achievement can be negatively impacted. It is therefore important to support teachers in their leadership journey, and to examine what professional learning best equips those aspiring to positions of leadership in schools – as well as those already in leadership positions – to allow them to develop the competencies required to lead schools effectively.

A CONTINUUM OF LEADERSHIP IN IRISH SCHOOLS

There is a growing belief that single-person leadership, such as a principal's, is insufficient to lead learning and teaching in a complex organisation such as a school. Hargreaves and Fink (2006)³ observed that principals' leadership, and the assumption that school leadership is synonymous with the principal, have preoccupied educational leadership literature for too long.

The growing emphasis on distributed leadership and the recent increased allocation of deputy principals to post-primary schools, combined with the publication of circulars⁴ on middle leadership positions for schools, makes this a task of great importance for the Irish school system. The Centre for School Leadership (CSL) has looked at specific leadership areas along the continuum and has identified the following as the leadership positions in schools:

- teacher leaders
- middle leaders
- aspiring senior leaders
- newly appointed senior leaders
- established senior leaders
- system leaders.

It is important that each type of leadership be developed and recognised and that it have its own inherent value in contributing to better learning experiences for students. This identification of leadership 'levels' should not be viewed as a hierarchy with only an upward trajectory as the preferred route to professional achievement.

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FOR SCHOOL LEADERSHIP IN IRELAND

In Ireland, the development of the Quality Framework for Leadership and Management, as part of the 'Looking at Our Schools 2016' study,⁵ has brought a focus to the importance of leadership for good learning outcomes for students and the need to develop leadership qualities and skills from the outset of a career. It has also given the educational system, and leadership development initiatives in particular, a strong and coherent foundation on which professional development can be based.

The formation of the Centre for School Leadership in 2015⁶ was a recognition of the central role of leadership in the task of building schools that promote powerful teaching and learning for all students. The memorandum of understanding between the Department of Education and Skills (DES) and the two professional organisations representing school leaders – the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD) at post-primary level, and the Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN) at primary level – clearly articulates the need to 'lead, support and advise on a strategic framework for a continuum of leadership development for schools'.⁷

The discussion on appropriate professional learning for school leadership is important in the development of the Irish education system for a number of reasons. The increased emphasis on whole-school improvement through school self-evaluation (SSE)⁸ and the task of managing the quality of teaching and learning in the school have become key leadership functions. The recent leadership and management circulars⁹ published by the DES have placed greater emphasis on distributed leadership in schools.

The Irish system needs to develop leadership attributes in all staff.

A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING CONTINUUM FOR SCHOOL LEADERSHIP IN IRELAND

The Irish system needs to develop leadership attributes in all staff, and to systematically identify and support its future senior leaders. The type of extended professionalism advocated by the Teaching Council as part of its Cosán¹⁰ initiative for all teachers will provide a much stronger pool of potential leaders and will greatly assist in this development.

Therefore, any proposed continuum should look directly at how this leadership can be developed. International examples suggest that good education systems identify effective leaders for today and that high-performing systems grow and develop tomorrow's leaders in a planned and progressive way.

A proposed continuum should aim at developing and fostering the qualities and skills which characterise effective leaders. The people recruited into teaching, their experience in their early years as teachers, and the ways we identify and develop talent across their careers will all contribute to extending the size and quality of the leadership pool.

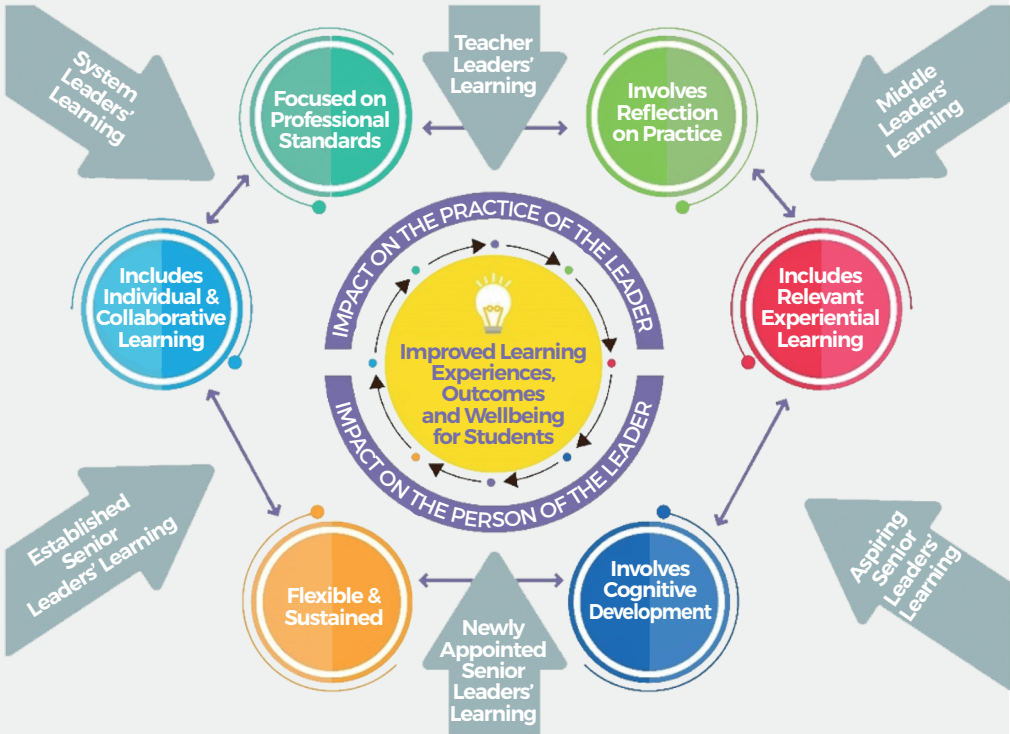
There is therefore a pressing need to bring more coherence and clarity to the provision of a continuum from teacher leadership through middle

leadership to senior leadership – both on the ground at school level, and by providing a coherent but flexible learning pathway.

COMPONENTS OF AN IRISH PROFESSIONAL LEARNING MODEL FOR LEADERSHIP

Research by the Centre for School Leadership (CSL) has identified a number of key interdependent and interconnected processes that support the professional learning of leaders, both those aspiring to leadership roles and those who already occupy leadership positions. Rather than rely on a single type of experience or a collection of disconnected experiences, CSL is proposing that if change and development of leadership practice in schools is to become a reality, professional learning activities need to incorporate some or all of these components as appropriate to the context and objectives of the professional learning activity, which will be quality-assured by CSL.

This model will develop and enhance leadership practice best in primary and post-primary schools. The CSL leadership continuum is therefore aligned with this model of professional learning and highlights the relationship between learning and practice. The diagram below illustrates this model of professional learning, with grey arrows representing the six levels of leadership that exist in schools. It highlights the components of a proposed Irish model of professional learning, as represented by the coloured circles.



Components of an Irish Model of Professional Learning for Leadership

FOCUSED ON PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

The 'Looking at Our School 2016' framework for leadership and management,¹¹ published by the DES Inspectorate, is designed for school leaders to use to enhance the quality of leadership in their schools. This publication provides a common understanding of what constitutes high-quality leadership practices. It is therefore important that those involved in developing professional learning programmes and activities use the standards and statements of practice as a basis for planning such learning. The framework highlights the skills and knowledge that are essential elements of good practice. Focusing on the standards outlined in the framework can also give participants tools for reflection as a support in developing their leadership capacity.

The flexibility built into the statements of practice allows school leaders to reflect on and evaluate their own level of proficiency in their specific context. The framework allows for what is most relevant to the specific purpose of individual teachers and schools. It also offers an excellent tool for those providing professional learning to evaluate the strengths of their current provision, and it can be used to explore opportunities for further development. The framework, if used as a guide to identifying good practice in a school as part of school self-evaluation, can be very powerful in developing good leadership practices at a number of levels in schools.

REFLECTION ON PRACTICE

Reflective practice is the ability to reflect on one's actions to engage in a process of continuous learning. According to one definition, it involves 'paying critical attention to the practical values and theories which inform everyday actions, by examining practice reflectively and reflexively'.¹²

**High-performing systems grow
and develop tomorrow's leaders
in a planned and progressive
way.**

Reflective practice can be an important tool in professional learning settings, where people learn from their own professional experiences rather than from formal learning or knowledge. It is an important way to bring together theory and practice; through reflection a person can see and label forms of thought and theory in the context of their work. A person who reflects throughout their practice is not just looking back on past actions and events but is taking a conscious look at emotions, experiences, actions, and responses, and using that information to add to their knowledge base and reach a higher level of understanding.

A challenging practice for school leaders is to engage in systematic reflection that serves to mitigate time constraints and emotional upheavals of the job and for maximum benefit. Reflection on one's leadership practice should not be seen as a detached or disconnected action but one that is promoted by the culture and structures of the school. Reflection is an inherent component of what it means to be an effective leader. Reflective practice provides a continual means of understanding that translates into renewed action for the individual and the organisation alike. In essence, by engaging in a cycle of questioning, leaders move towards a developmental, non-linear view of leadership that is necessary for a collective sense of direction, purpose, and meaning.

Carroll, Smith, and Whewell (2008)¹³ describe reflection as a process to be engaged in rather than a product that can be acquired by ticking the appropriate box. They suggest that asking questions of those taken-for-granted moments acts as a key to reflective practice; tools that can be used include learning journals, critical incident analysis, coaching, and mentoring. Coaching and mentoring are also highlighted as tools for reflective practice in the Cosán Framework for Teachers' Learning.¹⁴

The emergence of blogging in more recent years is seen as another form of reflection on experience in a technological age. Exploration of models of portfolio-based learning and ICT-based solutions could likewise be helpful tools for reflective practice by both aspiring and established leaders.

RELEVANT EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Experiential learning can be both formal and informal. It involves action as well as reflection. At an informal level, the learner may decide to make a change in order to improve their leadership practice. They then try out the change and observe and evaluate its impact on their practice and on students' learning outcomes. When experiential learning becomes more formal, it is often a structured professional enquiry combined with action research. The evidence-seeking in this formal process is supported by theory generated from reading and discussion.

Reflection is an inherent component of what it means to be an effective leader.

The Australian Charter for Professional Learning of Teachers and School Leaders¹⁵ emphasises that professional learning will be most effective when it is relevant, collaborative, and future-focused, and that it needs to address and adapt to the challenges faced by the practitioner. The learning focuses on the identified needs of students, and encourages teachers and school

leaders to test out approaches that find new solutions to persistent issues by challenging their assumptions about their practice.

The Cosán framework cites action research projects and piloting of new initiatives as examples of learning processes. The CUREE (Centre for the Use of Research Evidence in Education) report 'Understanding What Enables High-Quality Professional Learning'¹⁶ draws on a range of published research addressing the question: What are the characteristics of high-quality professional learning for practitioners in education? This report highlights the role of structured dialogue and group work in providing opportunities to explore beliefs and assumptions, try out new approaches, give and receive feedback, and explore evidence by trying new things.

COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

The renewed focus on the school leader as a leader of learning makes the use of new knowledge and the engagement with new ideas and perspectives an important component of professional learning for leadership. Reading and research provide a different lens through which a leader can view their practice. It is therefore important that strong links be forged between those engaged in leadership research that supports evidence-informed practice and those providing professional learning for school leaders. Carroll, Smith, and Whewell (2008) point out that if reflection on practice is not informed

by new ideas and draws only on experiences, its capacity to inform learning is limited.

The CUREE report highlights the importance of support by specialist expertise as an important part of professional learning for both teachers and school leaders. The importance of practice-based current research on effective leadership is a recurring theme found by CUREE when it examined a range of research on what constitutes good-quality professional learning.

The Cosán framework identifies research as a learning process and expands the definition of research to include:

- participation in a research-meet or other research event
- research carried out as part of an academic programme
- membership of a research engagement group
- action research.

The use of relevant research that challenges existing practice and outlines a path towards improvement in teaching and learning outcomes for students is therefore a core element of a quality professional learning activity for school leaders.

FLEXIBLE AND SUSTAINED OVER TIME

Professional learning should be linked to participants' needs and take into account the culture and context in which the teacher or leader works. So it is important that professional learning take account of variables such as career stage, priorities, motivation, and the professional confidence of the learner.

The use of relevant research that challenges existing practice is a core element of quality professional learning.

The Australian research highlights the availability of flexible and non-linear programmes of activity and support as a characteristic of effective professional learning for school leaders. Programmes with fixed start and end dates and linear timetables are increasingly seen as inappropriate for leaders working in relentlessly pressured environments.

Other research highlights the importance of professional learning being available when needed, and stresses that engagement with learning is greatly improved if it addresses a specific need. Building a national strategy for career-long leadership development has to support the role of the individual practitioner in shaping their professional development. More personalised learning approaches are complex and make specific demands on learners. Forde et al. (2013)¹⁷ state that it is important to balance the system need for leadership capacity with scope for the individual practitioner to shape their own professional learning pathways.

Researchers such as Wasik and Hindman (2011)¹⁸ and Tabernik and Williams (2010)¹⁹ found sustained professional learning to be a key characteristic of effectiveness. Teachers and school leaders who received sustained professional learning over time were more likely to put strategies learned into practice. Many of the learning processes cited in Cosán, such as

working as a cooperating teacher, availing of a secondment, and engaging in an externship, fit into the category of sustained professional learning.

INDIVIDUAL AND COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

Individual learning has benefits and should be part of all professional learning. It allows leaders to develop a personalised pathway to their goals. Cosán acknowledges this, and in relation to teachers' learning argues for a balance between enhancing their own practice as individuals and creating a responsive and dynamic community of practice.

However, reflection and experiential learning, referred to here as components of a model of leadership learning, depend to a large extent on collaboration for sustained impact on practice. Carroll, Smith, and Whewell stress the importance of considering group dynamics and a safe working environment, with explicit discussions of notions of trust, confidentiality, and power that will allow for better outcomes from the collaboration. A genuine, structured, collaborative process that involves leaders working together, identifying starting points, sharing evidence about practice, and trying new approaches can be a powerful component of any leadership professional learning activity.

CONCLUSION

Providing a clear framework for both aspiring and serving school leaders at different levels allows them to plan their own leadership pathway and opportunities. Learning to be a school leader is not about getting to the next level: it is about developing the skills and capacities to maximise potential at whatever level of leadership a person occupies at a particular time, career stage, or context.

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Stamps issued to honour two famous leaders

On 5 April 2018, An Post issued two stamps in recognition of the life and achievements of international statesmen and Nobel peace prize winners, Martin Luther King Jr. and Nelson Mandela.

Martin Luther King, Jr. was an American Baptist minister, activist, humanitarian and leader in the African-American Civil Rights Movement. He led the August 1963 'March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom' where he gave his famous 'I Have a Dream' speech. King, Jr. received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964 for his non-violent campaign against racism. He was assassinated on April 4, 1968.



Martin Luther King, Jr. 1929–1968

Éire W

2018



Nelson Mandela 1918–2013

Éire W

2018

Nelson Mandela, the anti-apartheid revolutionary spent 27 years in jail as a political prisoner. Following his release in 1990, Mandela became the first black President of South Africa in 1994, serving until 1999. He was jointly awarded the 1993 Nobel Peace Prize with Frederik Willem de Klerk in recognition of the peaceful change-over of government and their efforts to end apartheid.

The stamps are available from main post offices, from the stamp counters at Dublin's GPO, or online at www.irishstamps.ie. Both stamps are intended for international mail and will carry a 'W' designation for worldwide posting.



Anne Looney

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EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND POLICY-MAKING IN IRELAND

Beyond serendipity to strategy

Ireland's ambitious *Action Plan for Education 2016–2019* makes several references to research across a number of objectives and targets. Notably, system objective 4, which is focused on building bridges between education and the wider community, includes a high-level goal on research in higher education and the innovation system (DES, 2016, p.13). References in the plan to *educational* research – by this I mean the branch of social sciences research about education – are more granular and action-specific, and most of these are associated with agencies under the aegis of the Department of Education and Skills (DES), rather than with the Department itself.

For example, reference is made to research to support the new Leaving Certificate subject in Computer Science and the development of reporting as part of the work of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) (*ibid.*, p.25). The work of the National Forum on Teaching and Learning to provide an 'evidence base' for higher education pedagogy is mentioned (*ibid.*, p.28) as is the role of the National Council for Special Education in leading research in special education (*ibid.*, p. 30).

The most recent update, *Action Plan for Education 2018*, places more emphasis on research in higher education and refers specifically to post-Brexit scenarios and the need to attract world-leading researchers to Ireland (DES, 2018, p.50). Discussion of educational research is again confined to specific projects: research papers to support junior cycle developments, research to support the implementation of *Síolta*, the quality framework for early years, research to support the Digital Strategy, and research on the impact of the changes to grading in the Leaving Cert. Development of a 'research-based framework' (*ibid.*, p.43) is proposed to support the evaluation of continuing professional development for teachers working on student well-being.

Both the overarching plan and the most recent 2018 update reference a number of educational research activities and projects. At one level, therefore, educational research is part of the national plan, and has a role in making Ireland's the best education and training system in Europe. But the absence of any *strategic* position for educational research, and its assignment to a 'supporting' role for other actions, is striking. And when compared to similar education plans for systems like ours (Scotland and New Zealand, for example), this absence is even more notable.

In New Zealand, the plan for education to 2020 includes the achievement of more evidence-based decision-making by students,

parents, teachers, leaders, providers, and Government, as one of a set of intermediate-level goals (New Zealand Government, 2016, p.9). It goes on to discuss how findings from research, including international research (of particular importance for New Zealand) and system data, should be available at every level of the education system to inform planning and decision-making, from the classroom to the committee table.

The Scottish government launched a strategy for educational research in April 2017, in response to a recommendation by an OECD review of the school system on the need to strengthen evaluation and research, including independent research (OECD, 2015). Across developed education systems, systematic efforts are being made by governments and other stakeholders to improve the links between research and education policy (Brown, 2014).

In Ireland, while there are examples of how research has significantly shaped education policy in recent years, such impact has been more serendipitous than strategic. The serendipitous and the strategic are not mutually exclusive; two examples, discussed later, show that most research impact lies somewhere on a continuum between them.

The next section looks at the complex relationship between research and policy in education from different perspectives and considers the popular concept of 'evidence' in policy talk and policy-making.

THE RESEARCH-POLICY RELATIONSHIP

The relationship between the social sciences and policy-making has not always been cordial. But in the last decade of educational change across the globe, growing attention has been paid to how research is used to inform both policy and practice. This trend has not been confined to education. Health policies have led the way in championing and integrating what have come to be called 'evidence-based' approaches.

These approaches emerged from a convergence of developments. At the start of the millennium, Davies et al. (2000) observed that a well-educated and more informed citizenry with the tools to access and generate data was going to expect more of that data to be referenced in democratic deliberations. At the same time, the research community in the social sciences was growing, and, with the help of new technologies, capable of more sophisticated analyses.

Politically, this was the age of accountability and greater scrutiny of government decision-making, with an impetus towards and expectation of improvements in education outcomes. In the years since Davies and colleagues described the circumstances that gave birth to the turn to evidence, social media and infographics have served to make research evidence far more accessible to wider audiences.

In 2011 the final report of the European Project on Evidence Informed Policy Making in Education in Europe (EIPPEE) noted the complexity of the research-policy relationships. Evidence, the report concludes, is just one imperative in effective policy-making. For this reason the authors of the report prefer the term 'evidence-informed', because claiming that policy is 'evidence-based' obscures the fact that sometimes evidence can have a very

limited role in the policy process (Gough et al., 2011). The authors also note that the breadth of what constitutes evidence is wide and dynamic, ranging from published peer-reviewed research studies, to expert knowledge, surveys of public opinion, evaluations of previous policies, and systematic reviews of research literature.

Just as the developments in social media have changed the way research findings are published and shared, an exponential rise in what has come to be called ‘grey literature’ has reshaped the relationship between research and policy, offering the policy community a new and digestible form of evidence. Although ‘grey literature’ is variously defined, in general it is understood to mean the wide range of reports, working papers, and other publications not produced by commercial or academic institutions, generally accessible and readily shared.

Literature produced by government agencies (e.g. NCCA or HEA in Ireland) or consultants (e.g. McKinsey or PWC) would fall into this category. Because of its accessibility (usually online) and wide dissemination, it can have a significant impact on policy development and the policy-development community – at all levels. As ‘evidence’, the quality of grey literature may vary: some of it amounts to little more than op-ed or polemic. But it can also include systematic reviews of a particular field of study or policy. Infographics are popular in this form of evidence, and these graphic representations are popular with social and mainstream media.

An exponential rise in what has come to be called ‘grey literature’ has reshaped the relationship between research and policy.

CHALLENGES TO THE RESEARCH-POLICY RELATIONSHIP

The term ‘evidence’ is not without contestation. Further, there is not universal support for a closer relationship between research and the evidence from research, and policy-making. Critics of the evidence-informed approach talk of a narrow view of what counts as ‘evidence’, and of the risk that only research that can generate ‘policy-ready findings’ will be funded and commissioned. In education systems that include an evaluation of the research performance of higher education institutions, ‘policy impact’ is increasingly referenced in evaluation frameworks.

For example, the draft general criteria for the 2021 Research Excellence Framework for the UK include a proposal that 25 per cent of the evaluation should be allocated to significance and impact on the economy, culture, and social and public policy. There is concern in the research community that research in social sciences may be whittled into its most impact-ready forms (usually large-scale population studies), leaving little room for smaller, highly contextualised work. This is in marked contrast to trends in the physical and biological sciences, for example, where the pressure is towards more frontier, basic, and blue-skies research which, by its very nature, may never have impact.

Critics of the evidence-based movement in social policy also point to the risk that professional judgement and the wisdom of practice and experience may be displaced over time (Boaz et al., 2008). Critics also fear that research findings can be used ideologically to give legitimacy to political perspectives. Others view this turn to evidence as technocratic

and overly optimistic in the face of complex social problems. Some social scientists question whether we need more evidence, or whether we need to recognise that the solutions to these complex problems are beyond data or evidence, as they might require reconciling radically different values.

Supporters of the movement reject the accusation of over-reliance on certain narrow types of research findings, or excessive concern with ‘what works’. Geoff Whitty (2006), for example, writing about evidence-based policy-making in education, suggested:

Research defined too narrowly would actually be very limited as an evidence base for a teaching profession that is facing the higher challenges of a rapidly changing world where what works today, may not work tomorrow (p.162).

Writing about the teaching profession, he went on to suggest that any research-based profession must engage with research that questions and challenges prevailing assumptions, think differently, and challenge old myths and preconceptions. For Whitty, the research-policy relationship is not linear: it’s not simply a matter of educational researchers generating evidence to use in policies that teachers and others then implement. Rather, research has multiple ‘users’ in the education system and is ‘used’ at lots of different phases of the policy process – which is neither linear nor logical. Brown (2014) makes a similar point, noting that research, even if it gets into the policy process, may not have any influence given the range of forces shaping that process.

SERENDIPITY AND STRATEGY: TWO EXAMPLES FROM IRISH EDUCATION

While the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) led by the OECD may be the most widely discussed research study in the world, and arguably the most influential on education policy, I want to look at two home-grown examples of the research-policy relationship. The first – very close to home – is the study conducted by Geraldine Scanlon and Grainne McKenna from my own institution, Dublin City University’s Institute of Education, on the impact of homelessness on children’s educational achievement and well-being.

Conducted on behalf of the Children’s Rights Alliance and provocatively titled ‘Home Works: A study on the educational needs of children experiencing homelessness’, the research report presented data gathered from children, their families, and their teachers on the experience and impact of homelessness. It foregrounded the voice of the children who participated. Launched on 3 July 2018, the research found that children in emergency accommodation were frequently absent from or late for school, fell asleep in class, and had trouble concentrating. Parents reported concern about the impact of poor diet, and everyone – children and adults – reported the stress and embarrassment caused by homelessness (Scanlon and McKenna, 2018).

Reporting in the *Irish Independent* on the day of the launch, Katherine Donnelly described ‘the grim litany of suffering and loss being faced by

Any research-based profession must engage with research that questions and challenges prevailing assumptions.

children caught up in the current homelessness crisis' (Donnelly, 2018). Both authors gave media interviews on the day, and there was considerable coverage on social media, much of it generated by attendees at the launch. The homelessness crisis has continued, and may even have deepened since, but it is interesting that on the afternoon of 3 July, after the study was launched, the Minister with responsibility for housing announced the building of new family hubs across the country. This may well have been scheduled for that week, but the timing could hardly have been coincidental.

Research that is well presented, communicated effectively, and inserted into the news cycle and the social media cacophony may generate an immediate policy response. While the response in this case did not end child homelessness, the research-policy interaction showed that powerful evidence, even from local and contextual studies, can be difficult to ignore.

The second example is a research study that took place in 2002–2010. Its impact continues to be felt: the changes currently being implemented in junior cycle owe much to this research. Indeed, the impetus for change was, to a large degree, fuelled by the research. The longitudinal study of student experiences of post-primary education, funded by the NCCA, was conducted by Emer Smyth and her team at the Economic and Social Research Institute.

Changes currently being implemented in junior cycle owe much to a research study conducted by Emer Smyth and her team at the ESRI, 2002–2010.

It began with a questionnaire distributed to post-primary principals, generating an unprecedented 78 per cent response rate. A stratified sample of eleven schools was then generated for the longitudinal component of the study, and around 1,000 first-year students began their remarkable journey as research subjects. The first publication, in 2004, was about the effectiveness of transition from primary to post-primary schools (Smyth et al., 2004). It described how first-year class

groups were organised, how first-year students were tested before and on entry into post-primary school, and how 'settling in' happened for students and teachers.

Standardised tests were administered to the participating students, and this data formed a baseline for future years of the study. The scores showed that first-year students were being sorted into ability groups based on very little evidence, and that once placed in these groups, students had little or no mobility for the rest of their school career. The reports that followed, at intervals of about 18 months as the cohort moved through post-primary education, offered not just insights into the experience of schooling from a student perspective, but compelling evidence of the need for change. This was noted by the NCCA in one report that formed the basis for the current reform:

The evidence from that study has served to confirm what many had already believed about the experience of junior cycle education for students – that it has three distinct phases – a first year about settling in, a third year dominated by the examination, and a second year where students either become more, or less connected to school. The research also showed that the quality of engagement – with the

schools, with teachers and with learning – is central to this phase of education. Disengagement with any of these in junior cycle is not a phase, or a glitch, but a process that will deepen in senior cycle and have consequences well beyond schooling. The disengagement is more acutely marked in boys, and in students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds. (NCCA, 2011, p.4)

The commitment to the research project by successive NCCA boards and committees across a ten-year period, and the systematic and consistent use of the research in documents such as the one quoted above, are an example of a strategic research–policy relationship. But it was not without serendipity. Rapid social and economic changes in Irish society also generated pressure for reform. Coming at the same time as the research study gave the findings additional policy power. Similarly, a study that foregrounded student perspectives on their learning, and their reflections on the quality of the school experience at a time of increasing interest in the rights of children and young people, probably got more attention than it might have a decade earlier.

TOWARDS A STRATEGY FOR EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH?

Serendipity may be a constant possibility, but when it comes to connecting educational research and policy, intentional and sustained strategy is a better use of research, and ultimately gives rise to better policies. A measure of the positive response to Scotland's strategy for educational research is that even the researchers like it! Mark Priestley of Stirling University wrote in his popular blog that he was cautiously optimistic about the strategy that saw researchers included as part of the educational community, along with students, families, communities, and policy-makers. The commitment to enhance research infrastructure and encourage independent research to challenge the system was particularly welcome (Priestley, 2017).

Although it is early days for Scotland's strategy, and questions about funding and implementation remain, perhaps Ireland needs to consider something similar? That's a question not just for government but for the educational research community.

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Dr Alison Campbell, Director, Knowledge Transfer Ireland.

New practical guide on the appointment of company directors

A publication aimed at providing guidance to those thinking of taking up positions as company directors and observers in spin-outs and start-ups was launched recently by Knowledge Transfer Ireland (KTI).

"We have developed this simple guide to assist individuals who may be taking on a directorship or observer role, and for any organisation considering appointing one of its staff in these types of positions," said Dr Alison Campbell, Director of KTI.

"We hope that it will be particularly helpful for those involved with spin-out companies from research performing organisations [RPOs].

"Ireland has a very strong spin-out sector, with 113 thriving active spin-out companies in the state last year supporting at least 1600 jobs. In 2017 a further 21 new spin-out companies were formed. Good governance and active support for these spin-outs by founders and RPOs is an important part of their success.

"This guide has been prepared to help those who are looking to engage in the Board of companies understand their statutory and fiduciary duties and the expectations and risks involved."

The KTI Practical Guide: 'The Role of Directors & Observers' is available to download from the KTI website.

WIRED THAT WAY

The origins of our individual natures



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Any parent with more than one child knows that they don't come out of the womb as blank slates. 'They're like chalk and cheese' is a common refrain, emphasising the innate differences between children and how refractory their individual natures are to parental influences. Teachers, too, are well aware of differences in their young charges – in their personalities, their interests, and their aptitudes.

In a new book, titled *Innate: How the Wiring of Our Brains Shapes Who We Are* (Princeton University Press), I trace the origins of these differences to variation in how our brains get wired during development. Much of this variation arises from genetic differences between people, but inherent variability in brain-development processes also makes an important, and often overlooked, contribution.

HUMAN NATURE IS ENCODED IN OUR DNA

If we think about human nature in general – the range of behavioural tendencies and capacities that characterise us as a species – it becomes obvious that it must somehow be encoded in our DNA. The human genome in any newly fertilised egg cells must contain the instructions to build a human being, with a human brain, that endows that being with human traits.

We know quite a bit about how that works – the bit about building a human being, at least. Developmental biologists have worked out many of the principles and processes by which a developing embryo becomes patterned, with a head at one end, a tail at the other, a heart in the middle, and so on, as well as the molecular mechanisms by which cells decide to become muscle cells or skin cells or bone cells.

When it comes to the human brain, this gets much more complex. It is made up of hundreds of distinct regions and subregions, each with scores of specialised types of nerve cells. And those cells have to be arranged and connected with exquisite specificity to carry out the particular computations that underlie our cognitive functions. All of this requires the actions of thousands of different genes, each of which encodes a specific protein, which interacts with other proteins within or between cells to drive all these developmental processes.

The details of that aren't important here. What's important is that variation in the sequence of DNA that comprises all those genes can affect the outcome. The human genome is a string of 3 billion chemical bases or 'letters' of DNA, in a specific sequence. If you

compare humans to chimps, 98.7 per cent of those letters are identical. The 1.3 per cent that are different – about 39 million differences – are responsible for the *differences* between humans and chimps, including in their brains and respective natures.

The same principle applies to differences between individuals in any given species. The genomes of any two humans are 99.9 per cent identical, meaning there are about 3 million differences between them. As with the differences between humans and chimps, many of the differences between humans affect the genes controlling brain development, and will cause differences in the outcome, manifesting as differences in our respective natures.

FAMILY RESEMBLANCES

If genetic differences cause variation in our traits, then people who are more related to each other should be more similar to each other for those traits. This is exactly what we observe. Advances in neuroimaging let us examine in detail the structure and function of the brain, the way different regions are laid out, and how they are interconnected. These analyses reveal a unique ‘neural fingerprint’ that characterises each of our brains. That pattern is much more similar between identical twins, who carry all of the same genetic variants, than between fraternal twins or siblings, who have only 50 per cent of those variants in common. The same effect is seen even across distantly related people in the general population (ruling out concerns that twins are somehow a special case).

Our genes direct the wiring of our brains in ways that affect our psychology, endowing us with innate predispositions and tendencies.

With psychological traits, we see the same pattern. For pretty much any psychological trait that can be measured and thus compared between people – including cognitive traits like intelligence, memory, or quantitative reasoning, or personality traits like extraversion, neuroticism, or conscientiousness – people who are more closely related to each other are more similar for those measures. The same is true for the incidence of psychiatric conditions,

including autism, dyslexia, and ADHD – all highly genetic conditions. By contrast, it is consistently found in twin and adoption studies that growing up in the same family environment shows a surprisingly small, often negligible, effect on our psychological traits.

Our genes thus literally direct the wiring of our brains in ways that affect our psychology, endowing us with innate predispositions and tendencies. But the effects of our genes are not fully deterministic. The genome does not encode a specific outcome of development, only the rules by which the processes are governed. How that programme plays out will vary from run to run. So even identical twins – while much more similar to each other than unrelated people or regular siblings – are not fully identical in their brain structure or psychological make-up. Chance events during development ensure that by the time they are born, they are already unique.

THE INTERPLAY OF NATURE AND NURTURE

Our stories, as individuals, do not start with a blank page. But of course they also do not end with the first page, or the first chapter. Nature and nurture are typically set in opposition to each other, but in reality there is an

intimate interplay between them. Humans, especially young children, are learning machines. Our protracted development and maturation – taking much longer to reach adulthood and independence than other primates – gives us the opportunity to learn from our experiences and adapt our behaviour accordingly. Given that, you might expect that experience would tend to flatten out or override our innate predispositions. In fact, exactly the opposite tends to happen: our experiences more often amplify these innate differences.

There are several important reasons for this. First, our experiences do not just happen to us – they are also influenced by our genetics. In particular, if personality traits are shared between parents and children, this interaction may amplify the traits of the child. For example, if a naturally cautious child also has overprotective parents, this will reinforce the child's initial temperament. A naturally aggressive child who also has aggressive parents will have that pattern of behaviour consolidated.

In addition, young children with different temperaments evoke different responses and reactions from their parents, peers, teachers, and coaches, which can similarly influence their development. A naturally gifted child – academically, musically, athletically – is likely to receive encouragement from parents and teachers in ways that can lead to a virtuous cycle of increased practice, achievement, praise, and motivation.

As we mature, we become more and more active, autonomous agents who increasingly select our own experiences. An outgoing child will choose to socialise more, and develop more expertise in social skills, while a naturally shy child may lag behind in these skills, due to lack of practice. A child with dyslexia, for whom reading is effortful, will naturally tend to read less and fall further and further behind their peers.

Finally, we learn from reward or punishment – from things feeling good or bad. But the neural circuits that mediate signals of reward or punishment, or that control what kinds of things we pay attention to or find salient, also differ between people. This means that even when two people are exposed to what looks objectively like the same environment or circumstances, their subjective experiences may be highly different. And it is the subjective experience that determines whether we learn from something and how it shapes our future behaviour.

Our innate predispositions are thus crucially important in influencing our habits in response to our environments and experiences. We all start out different from each other, and in many ways we become more so over time – more and more crystallised versions of ourselves.

For educators, recognising this diversity is essential. It can, in the first instance, lead to greater acceptance of the range of behaviours, abilities, aptitudes, and interests that individuals will present in a classroom. And it can help identify children who may benefit from intervention to counteract the vicious cycles that can amplify initial difficulties, if left unchecked.



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STRENGTHENING THE QUALITY OF IRISH-MEDIUM EDUCATION IN THE GAELTACHT

From policy formulation to implementation

Out of a population of one million people in the Gaeltacht, just over one in five speak Irish daily (Central Statistics Office, 2017). Despite the decline in the use of Irish in the Gaeltacht, surveys show that people in Ireland value and are positively disposed towards their Irish identity, culture, and language. The significant expansion of Gaelscoileanna and Gaelcholáistí is testament to the deliberate choice made by many parents for their children to access Irish-medium education (Ó Duibhir, 2018, p.16). Learners in these schools are dependent on dispersed networks of Irish speakers to come into contact with Irish (ibid., p.22).

A major challenge is to revive and promote the use of Irish as the daily means of communication among people in Gaeltacht areas in Ireland. The education system plays a crucial role in promoting and advancing Irish, our first official language. A community effort is needed in an area where English is the majority language spoken and where learners often have limited access and exposure to Irish outside of school. While native Irish speakers attending Gaeltacht schools are fluent in Irish, there is concern about their levels of language proficiency (Ó Giollagáin & Charlton, 2015; Nic Fhlannchadha & Hickey, 2016, cited in Ó Duibhir, 2018, p.23).

Addressing the challenge of the survival of the Gaeltacht, the commitment to promoting and reviving the Irish language is evident in the '20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010–2030', which led to publication in 2016 of the 'Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017–2022'. The Policy is the first-ever targeted strategy for Gaeltacht education in the Gaeltacht to address the decline in the use of Irish. Its implementation is part of the Department and Education and Skills' (DES) overall plan to make the Irish education and training system the best in Europe by 2026 (DES, 2017c).

The Policy was informed by a comprehensive review of national and international research and case studies carried out by the Inspectorate on primary and post-primary schools in the Gaeltacht (www.education.ie). The extensive consultation undertaken, which generated over 550 responses from stakeholders and Gaeltacht communities, influenced the measures set out in the Policy.

The Policy has been widely welcomed by Gaeltacht communities and has received much media coverage. It provides a clear roadmap for a long-term strategy for action to extend the use of Irish and strengthen Irish-medium education in the Gaeltacht. Its overarching goal is to ensure the availability of high-quality Irish-medium education in Gaeltacht schools and early-years settings,

and in this way to support the use of Irish as the main language of Gaeltacht communities. Specifically, it aims to:

- support and engage school communities in language planning by contributing to the use and maintenance of Irish in the school and local Gaeltacht community
- use lessons from research and on-the-ground experience to implement positive change and increase the number of schools and early-years settings in the Gaeltacht that operate solely through the medium of Irish
- develop networks and support schools in becoming centres of excellence in delivering high-quality Irish-medium education.

MOVING INTO IMPLEMENTATION

Implementing the Policy is challenging, as there is a need to ensure that policy translates into actions that will impact positively on practice. Careful planning is essential to enable Policy goals to be attained and to overcome any obstacles encountered. Implementation began with the establishment of a dedicated Gaeltacht Education Unit (An tAonad um Oideachas Gaeltachta (AOG)) in the DES to oversee, monitor, and support the phased implementation of the Policy. A budget of €1 million was allocated in 2017, which was more than doubled in 2018. Since its establishment, AOG has used its communication, coordination, and planning processes to inform, consult, gather, and disseminate information to steer the Policy implementation.

A Gaeltacht Education Policy Advisory Committee, comprising representatives from a wide range of stakeholders, was established at an early stage. The committee pre-emptively identifies challenges and opportunities, and members provide helpful advice, perspectives, and feedback to support Policy implementation. Such participation, engagement, and professional dialogue have helped establish trust and inform decision-making. AOG is also supported by a team of Inspectors, and positive links have been fostered with the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, An Chomhairle Oideachais Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG), and other agencies.

Implementation of the Policy began with the establishment of a dedicated Gaeltacht Education Unit - An tAonad um Oideachas Gaeltachta (AOG).

GAELTACHT SCHOOL RECOGNITION SCHEME

A Gaeltacht school has traditionally been defined on the basis of geographical location. The Gaeltacht Act 2012 provides for a redefinition of Gaeltacht areas based instead on Irish-language criteria. Under the Policy, schools located in Gaeltacht language-planning areas are eligible to seek recognition as Gaeltacht schools on the basis of implementing specific language criteria (DES 0033/2017 and 0034/2017) and on condition that they are participating in the language-planning processes under the Gaeltacht Act.

The Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme was launched in April 2017. The Scheme is a key action to support Policy implementation to strengthen the quality of Irish-medium education and Irish-language use in primary and post-primary schools. Its objective is to encourage participating schools to achieve Gaeltacht school status over a five-year period. This will be

achieved by implementing specific language-based criteria and a total-immersion approach using an action-planning development process.

The launch of the Scheme was complemented by a coordinated communications strategy, which included the distribution of a comprehensive information pack to schools and parents on the benefits of immersion education. This pack was developed by the Department's Gaeltacht Education Unit in collaboration with the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, COGG, Gaeloideachas, and Údarás na Gaeltachta. This awareness-raising phase had a substantial impact on influencing school communities to participate in the Scheme. Initial uptake was high, with 106 primary schools (79%) and 28 post-primary schools (97%) opting into the Scheme from the outset. Schools chose whether or not to participate, after consulting with their communities, and this has enabled schools and local communities to take greater ownership of the Scheme.

The package of supports provided by the Department was contingent on the quality of schools' engagement with the action-planning process (DES, 2018a, 2018b). A review of schools' action plans was completed by the Gaeltacht Education Unit in collaboration with the Inspectorate, and feedback was provided to schools on the next steps to ensure continuous development. Following this, targeted supports were provided to schools under the Scheme that included additional allocated teaching hours, continuing professional development (CPD) delivered by COGG, Inspectorate advisory visits, and a grant for Irish-medium resources. Schools in Gaeltacht language-planning areas that currently adopt a partial-immersion or bilingual approach are being facilitated to move, on a phased basis, to a total-immersion approach in Irish, through their action-planning process.

Seminars were provided in all Gaeltacht areas to inform parents of the benefits of full immersion education.

Although initial uptake has been very strong, schools on the fringes of Gaeltacht areas that have not yet opted into the Scheme will be given further opportunities to do so over the five-year timeframe of the Policy.

IMPLEMENTING IMMERSION EDUCATION

Implementing immersion education places a particular emphasis on fostering a teaching and learning environment solely through the medium of Irish. One challenge encountered was the need to highlight the benefits of immersion education, to alleviate parents' concerns that their children's proficiency in English would be affected. Schools and their local communities were given brochures, information packs, posters, and frequently asked questions on immersion education. Seminars were provided by COGG and Gaeloideachas in all Gaeltacht areas to inform parents of the benefits of full immersion education in infant classes in Gaeltacht primary schools. In addition, the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and Údarás na Gaeltachta support community organisations in preparing and implementing language plans in Gaeltacht language-planning areas.

AOG has worked closely with COGG in the publication of customised Draft Guides with indicators of good practice for primary and post-primary schools (DES, 2018c, 2018d). These Guides will support schools in the Gaeltacht in their efforts to meet the language-based criteria for immersion

education in order to gain recognition as an Irish-medium Gaeltacht school. It is envisaged that the Guides will enable schools to explore indicators of good practice for immersion education and to identify improvement targets to support the provision of high-quality Irish-medium education. The guides were informed by research carried out by Mary Immaculate College on behalf of Gaeloideachas, and observations and feedback were provided by the Gaeltacht Education Policy Advisory Committee. The Draft Guidelines will be modified on the basis of schools' experience in using the Guides and the feedback provided by schools and different stakeholders.

ADVISORY VISITS TO SUPPORT SCHOOLS

Inspectorate advisory visits play an important part in helping schools to use self-evaluation purposefully to respond to the needs of first- and second-language learners, encourage innovation, and strengthen immersion education. During these visits, the inspector's role is to provide support, advice, and affirmation, monitor progress, acknowledge good practice, and help schools address the challenges on their journey towards achieving recognition as a Gaeltacht school.

ACTION-PLANNING THROUGH SCHOOL SELF-EVALUATION

Schools participating in the Scheme were required to develop action plans for improvement linked to language-based criteria for review and approval by the Department. This was a deliberate action to emphasise from the outset the need for target-focused planning at whole-school level. The monitoring process was implemented to encourage schools to engage in school self-evaluation involving staff, learners, and parents, to increase the likelihood of positive teaching and learning outcomes in classrooms and schools.

Plans are underway to provide opportunities to link post-primary schools digitally to extend minority subject options for students in the Gaeltacht.

OTHER POLICY ACTIONS UNDERWAY

Plans are under way to implement a small-scale, three-year e-hub Pilot Project under the Policy. Its objective is to provide opportunities to link post-primary schools digitally in order to extend the minority subject options for students in post-primary schools in the Gaeltacht. A small number of e-hub post-primary schools selected for the pilot will access additional support to facilitate their participation in the project. If successful, it will be extended to other interested post-primary schools. This will make available additional subjects in a virtual online learning environment through the medium of Irish.

Forás, an Irish-language development programme, is another pilot initiative under way in the implementation phase. It involves providing additional support to two post-primary schools in the Gaeltacht that meet predetermined criteria. This pilot programme will focus on providing support for the Irish-language acquisition and fluency of learners at junior cycle. The results will be carefully evaluated, and the learning gained will inform future practice in Gaeltacht schools.

Following a competitive tendering process, two new Irish-medium teacher education programmes have been awarded. A part-time M.Ed. in Irish-Medium and Gaeltacht Education for practising primary and post-primary teachers and principals began in Mary Immaculate College in September

2018. A new four-year B.Ed. programme through Irish for primary teachers will begin in Marino Institute of Education in September 2019. Additional staffing has also been provided for the Postgraduate Masters in Education programme delivered through Irish at NUI Galway. It is hoped these developments will strengthen the supply of teachers with a high level of proficiency in Irish, to ensure the survival and future of the language.

CONCLUSION

In monitoring the quality of implementation, the challenge will be to sustain momentum and optimum engagement. There will be a need to analyse evidence to establish how the Policy actions affect the use of Irish in school communities. The intended and unintended impact of the Policy on the quality of teaching and learning in Gaeltacht schools will require consideration. For example, how has the Policy affected practice in classrooms? Has it changed the extent to which Irish is spoken and used? How have contextual and other external factors influenced the level of impact of the Policy's implementation? How will the findings inform future decision-making? Are there economic implications? What benefits accrued from the additional supports provided to schools under the Policy? How have schools with challenging sociolinguistic circumstances stepped up to improve the quality of Irish-medium educational provision for learners? To what extent is it possible for these schools to achieve Gaeltacht school recognition under the terms of the Policy?

Policy implementation is dynamic. It requires a flexible, problem-solving approach rooted in foresight to address inevitable roadblocks and respond to unanticipated issues. Implementation plans may need to be adjusted accordingly. A collaborative, interdepartmental approach with a focus on building capacity is essential to bring about sustainable change in practice. Project planning and attention to detail are critical to ensure that outcomes are achieved to best effect.

An Irish version of this article is available at www.education.ie.

Tá leagan Gaeilge den alt seo ar fáil ag www.education.ie.

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Gaeilge 24 Challenge: Speak only Irish for 24 hours



Colaiste Chraobh Abhann, Wicklow, taking part in the Gaeilge 24 challenge to speak only Irish for 24 hours. Over 34,000 students in 32 counties took part in 2018.



Patrick Sullivan

Director of curriculum and assessment in the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

WHAT MAKES A QUALITY CURRICULUM?

Experiences from the Irish context

There are many who recommend a simple recipe for a quality curriculum: to a large helping of knowledge add a dash of skills and a pinch of learning dispositions, then season with some key competencies. Authors of such recipes often understand curriculum as a prescriptive, step-by-step mode of transmission, believing that teaching involves pouring the contents of the curriculum into passive students, who wait like empty vessels.

This view undermines the teaching profession, yet it is prevalent in public discourse when debate on a bewildering array of problems inevitably arrives at the seemingly simple solution to 'put it on the curriculum' (Looney, 2014). In this view, teachers are technicians, and practice is focused on 'delivering' the curriculum, following its prescribed contents, ticking off lists of objectives, and routinely completing meaningless paperwork. We need to challenge this view of curriculum.

It is timely to consider what makes a quality curriculum in 2018, given Minister Richard Bruton's ambition to have the best education system in Europe by 2026. Work is well under way, with two major projects initiated: redevelopment of the primary school curriculum, and review of senior cycle at post-primary. So as we begin to think again about the experiences we want for our young people at both primary and post-primary levels, this article offers insight into current thinking on these developments, signposting a way forward towards a quality curriculum.

BEYOND PRESCRIPTION

Teaching and learning are not a linear, step-by-step process. Anyone who has spent time working in a classroom understands there is uncertainty, 'unforseeability', convergences, and divergences (Priestley & Biesta, 2013). Those with a prescriptive mindset shift the focus of the question *What knowledge is of most worth?* to the assessment question: *Have pupils learned what others have demanded?*

In the Irish case, the dominant role of assessment as 'the tail that wags the dog' (Dysthe, 2008) has been well documented. While assessment reform at junior cycle is a welcome development, the high-stakes Leaving Certificate still dominates the senior cycle experience; mandatory standardised testing in second, fourth, and sixth classes in primary school is also affecting the experiences of children.

For some time there have been calls for teachers to take back the curriculum for themselves and to teach beyond the test scores (Pinar, 2004). Curriculum is not merely what can be measured, nor is it limited to a table of contents. In its broadest sense it can be understood in three ways: the 'intended curriculum': what is intended to occur; the 'enacted curriculum': what actually happens when the curriculum is enacted; and the 'experienced curriculum': what learners experience, construe, and learn (Billett, 2006). The rest of this article draws attention to some features that indicate a quality curriculum in 2018 as intended, enacted, and experienced.

THE INTENDED CURRICULUM

The intended curriculum is the frameworks, syllabi, subject matter, skills, competencies, and values intended to be taught. In the past, the development of the intended curriculum was described as mysterious, something that happens away from the realities of the classroom (Coolahan, 1981; Mulcahy, 1981). Since the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) was established, efforts have been made to shed light on the process, for example through a partnership approach.

Some have called this approach into question, voicing concerns about the influence of powerful partners in brokering a 'cosy consensus' that lacks real ambition and innovation (Gleeson, 2004; Granville, 2004; Sugrue, 2004). However, recent research unearths a more disruptive and potentially innovative understanding of partnership employed by the NCCA (Sullivan, 2018). The emergence of informal processes of curriculum development have broadened the activities of the NCCA and include working directly with schools and supporting participation from students, teachers, principals, and parents throughout the development of curriculum.

In the Irish case, the dominant role of assessment as 'the tail that wags the dog' has been well documented.

LEARNING FROM SCHOOLS

The question of how best to engage with and learn from the experience of schools is often a conundrum, when developing curriculum is not straightforward. The value of such work is undoubted, but the means by which schools are supported to work with curriculum developers is often contentious. Schools are busy places that focus, rightly, on supporting their students and teachers.

Collaboration takes time and can involve sustained, robust engagement, which can be a big ask of schools. Nonetheless, due to the goodwill and interest of schools, this engagement is an important feature of NCCA's work. Often it involves testing and trialling new specifications; learning from teachers, parents, and students; collecting examples of students' learning; developing support material for teachers; and trying initiatives that share practice among schools.

In 2018, two school forums were established to inform the redevelopment of the primary school curriculum and the review of senior cycle. At senior cycle the schools forum provides opportunity for school-based discussions on developments, which in turn inform national seminars. At primary level the forum takes a community-of-practice approach to generating ideas on the future direction of the curriculum, and is a space to ground research in schools' experience.

Recent developments such as reform of junior cycle and development of the primary language curriculum and primary mathematics curriculum have used networks of schools, ensuring that the developments are grounded in the realities of the classroom. The quality and innovative nature of such developments are testament to the investment of working with schools in a sustained and developmental manner, and can be seen to militate against previous criticism of curriculum development that happens away from the classroom.

Recently, schools have called for greater flexibility with the curriculum they provide. In the past, the volume and prescriptive nature of materials led to a sense of 'curriculum overload', a phenomenon prevalent the world over. Overload squeezes time and space during the school day, leading to 'hurried classrooms' as the teacher attempts 'to cover everything' (Elkind, 2001). This compression is exacerbated by lists of objectives and content that must be ticked off, and by extra paperwork that seems to accompany every new development.

In reviews at primary level, teachers have called for a less crowded curriculum (NCCA, 2005, 2008) and more recently for greater flexibility in how they manage time across the school day, month, and year (NCCA, 2018). These requests ask us to reconsider how best to structure curriculum and how to think more flexibly about the use of time. Time and space are the most important commodities we can give our students. It is time to give the same to our teachers.

The move to a less prescriptive curriculum cannot be made without support for teachers and schools.

Curriculum needs to describe learning in broad terms, and it needs to be lightweight and flexible. It should provide guidance on essential knowledge, disposition, and skills for students, not prescribe thousands of objectives. The recent development of curriculum frameworks such as *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* (2009)

and the *Junior Cycle Framework* (2015) present the parameters in which learning should take place. They do not have detailed lists of objectives but instead enable teachers and schools to exercise professional autonomy and make key decisions on the content and nature of teaching and learning in the classroom. As schools are given more autonomy, opportunities arise for developing a 'local curriculum' tailored to the context and the needs of teachers and students.

The move to a less prescriptive curriculum cannot be made without support for teachers and schools. Teachers often say they learn best from each other. A quality curriculum provides supports that present the experience of teachers engaging with and teaching the intended curriculum. Capturing the experience from classrooms is important, including the successes and challenges of the curriculum in practice.

In recent years the NCCA has developed such material, which includes examples of student learning, and guidance for teachers on the 'how' of the curriculum. Presenting material online enables teachers to access it when they need it, through an interactive medium, while supporting the notion of an evolving curriculum that changes as students, teachers, and schools require it to.

THE ENACTED CURRICULUM

Prof. Andy Hargreaves (2016) says we are in the midst of a seismic shift in education, moving from an age of achievement and effort to one of identity, engagement, and well-being. For Hargreaves, education systems from 2000 to 2015 were wholly concerned with the questions: How are we doing? How do we know? And how do we improve? The answers have resulted in unprecedented and global educational reforms.

Often these reforms are designed to raise national standards and are driven by internationally benchmarked big-data assessments such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). Ireland is no exception, with the implementation of Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011–2020 (DES, 2011), which resulted from the decline in numeracy and literacy scores in Ireland referred to as the Irish ‘PISA shock’ of 2009.

Reforms of this type have had successes. For instance, Ireland’s own interim review indicates significant improvements in English reading and Mathematics (DES, 2017). While progress can be seen, such reforms are essentially narrow in scope and cannot address broader questions posed by wider societal shifts.

Hargreaves contends that Trumpism, Brexit, immigration, social media, and the rise of anxiety in young people indicate a need to address broader questions, including: Who are we? What will become of us? Who decides? To address these questions, we must broaden our approach to educational reform and move away from strategies on individual components of the curriculum, such as literacy and numeracy. Curriculum developments need to support the identity, engagement, and well-being of students by supporting the development of their collective sense of place, their awareness of their impact in the public sphere, their self-awareness, self-confidence, self-esteem, and ultimately their well-being.

Curriculum
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Renewed focus on these aspects of education are evident with the introduction of the *Wellbeing Guidelines* in junior cycle (2017), *Politics and Society* (2016) and *Social, Personal and Health Education* (SPHE) at senior cycle (2011), the themes of ‘Identity and Belonging’ and ‘Wellbeing’ in *Aistear* (2009), the continued work on *Education about Religions and Beliefs* (ERB) and *Ethics* in the primary curriculum, and the beginning of the review of *Relationships and Sexuality Education* (RSE) across sectors. The nature of the learning and development supported by these curriculum developments enable teachers to respond to broader questions on students’ identity, engagement, and well-being.

EMPOWERING TEACHERS

Supporting all students in this way demands a lot from our teachers. It requires them not only to have a broad and deep understanding of what,

how, and who they teach, but also to be compassionate and thoughtful, to inspire student engagement and motivation, to promote tolerance and social cohesion, and to make each student feel valued, respected, and included. By any measure, teaching in this context is a demanding prospect, requiring a great deal of professional empowerment to respond successfully.

The twentieth century saw the empowerment of teachers undermined by the prescriptive nature of curriculum. Recently there has been a move to reclaim the professional imperative that underpins the profession. The establishment of the Teaching Council, a self-regulatory professional body, can be seen to further the professional cause in Ireland. Having the authority to make decisions and the freedom to act in accordance with one's professional knowledge are hallmarks of autonomy in action.

In this context, teachers do not do whatever they think or feel is right in a given situation; rather they do what they know is right based on their understanding of professional practice (Schleicher, 2018). Recent developments in professional guidance, such as the Teaching Council's *Code of Professional Conduct* (2012), the roll-out of *Droichead* for the induction of newly qualified teachers (2013), and the ongoing work in *Cosán*, the national framework for teachers' learning (2016), provide the basis for practice to be grounded in a framework of professional standards: important elements to empower the profession.

Giving teachers time and space to exercise their professional autonomy is key to providing a quality curriculum.

Giving teachers the time and space to exercise their professional autonomy is key to providing a quality curriculum. Reducing the level of prescription in curriculum is an important step in this regard. This work is supported by the use of learning outcomes in curriculum specifications. Learning outcomes give teachers flexibility to select what to teach and the best order in which to teach it, to choose appropriate pedagogical approaches, and to identify the most appropriate assessment methods that match the intended learning. This is an important move towards giving teachers more time and space in the curriculum to exercise their professional judgement.

Innovative approaches that support powerful learning include play, collaborative learning, arts-based learning, project work, inquiry-based methods, experiential learning, narrative-based approaches, and algorithmic thinking (Peterson et al., 2018). Many of these have active learning, student interaction, and sustained engagement as consistent features. Opportunities for learning are restricted if teaching is overly focused on narrow objectives and has limited time for engagement. Learning outcomes enable teachers to provide rich learning experiences that support many forms of engagement, representation, and expression, enabling all students to learn and progress.

THE EXPERIENCED CURRICULUM

The experienced curriculum refers to what students learn and construe as a result of the enacted curriculum. Of course, what teachers teach does not always tally with what students learn. Learning thrives when students experience a curriculum that requires them to interact, to think creatively

and critically, to collaborate and take risks in their learning, to build connections across disciplines of knowledge, to connect learning to local and global communities, to share and reflect, and to feel empowered and take ownership of their learning.

STUDENTS' VOICE AND RELATIONSHIPS

We all feel valued and respected when our views are listened to and inform decisions that affect our lives; students are no different. When teachers listen to what students have to say, it can have a profound impact on teaching and learning in the classroom. When you provide space for students to have their say, it does not always make for comfortable reading. In a survey of 3,200 students by Comhairle na nÓg (2017), less than 50% said they learned best through textbooks, 75% through active learning approaches; 64% wished there was more project work in schools, 78% said exams are the greatest source of stress, and only 30% said teachers make learning interesting and fun.

Such findings call into question teaching that focuses on textbook recital with students sitting passively in rows, and prevalent use of summative rather than formative assessment methods. It also asks questions of our curriculum, the types of learning it describes, how it is organised, and how appropriate forms of assessment are supported.

While student councils are a feature of many Irish schools, we now know that support for students to have their say regularly, in the classroom, has the most impact on engagement and learning. Research from Trinity College Dublin found that enabling student voice encourages engagement in learning, enhances agency and leadership, improves student-teacher relationships, encourages active citizenship, and empowers students to participate in school life (Flynn, 2017). Relationships are pivotal when supporting student voice and require openness from both teacher and student.

Support for students to have their say regularly, in the classroom, has the most impact on engagement and learning.

From a child's first day of school, their gender, class, ethnic background, and educational ability directly affect the relationship they will have with their teacher and subsequent teachers (Smyth, 2018). Given the substantial research on the centrality of teacher-student relationships for engagement, motivation, and well-being, this is a worrying statement. Findings from the study 'The Transition to Primary Education' (Smyth, 2018), supported by the NCCA and drawing on the 'Growing Up in Ireland' dataset, indicate that if you are a boy, have a special education need, or are from a lower socio-economic background or an ethnic minority, your relationship with your teacher will be negatively affected from day one of primary school.

The research requires us to consider the white, middle-class, Irish, female composition of our teaching profession. It asks questions of how we encourage teachers to think deeply on their values and how they perceive their students. Such questions are not easily answered and require both personal and professional development in order to break long-held stereotypes that may act as barriers to forming positive relationships with all students.

TOWARDS A QUALITY CURRICULUM

A quality curriculum moves beyond a prescribed list of content or a recipe for learning. Recent developments support the view that a quality curriculum is developed with schools, learning from their experiences, innovations, successes, and failures. It provides flexibility for localised decision-making within a framework of professional standards, empowering teachers in designing classroom-based curricula that meet the needs of all students. It supports powerful teaching methods by giving teachers time and space in the curriculum to create sustained and immersive educational experiences. Perhaps most importantly, it empowers students by giving them a voice in their learning and by supporting their identity, engagement, and well-being through positive relationships with their teachers.

The key messages of this article are informed by discussions and research on developments in the early childhood, primary, and post-primary sectors. It has focused on some lesser-known processes of curriculum development, such as work with schools, teachers, and students. This work supports the more recognised processes such as the incorporation of national and international research in developments, the deliberative structures through which curriculum is approved, and the wide-ranging, ongoing consultation that takes place.

The hallmarks of this lesser-known work are found across many developments from the NCCA, including Aistear (2009), the Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam Teangana Bunscoile (2015), the Junior Cycle Framework (2015), the Level 1 Learning Programme (2017) and the work on transitions from preschool settings to primary schools (Smyth, 2018). As the NCCA begins to redevelop the entire primary school curriculum and look again at the experience of students at senior cycle in post-primary schools, there are exciting possibilities to support teachers' professional autonomy and create a quality curriculum for all students.

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US students explore educational practice in Ireland

In summer 2018, sixteen students from Indiana University Bloomington School of Education visited Dublin, Galway and Belfast to observe the impact that historical factors can have on classrooms.

The 16 students are members of the Living-Learning Centre at Indiana University, which provides cultural immersion opportunities so student-teachers can gain different perspectives on education early in their college careers.

During their 10 days in Ireland, students visited a variety of primary school classrooms, including parochial schools and Educate Together schools.

Final year student Zach Paul noticed an emphasis on mental well-being in Irish classrooms that he hadn't seen in American classrooms. For example, a few times per day in one school visited by the group, a school-wide bell rings, signaling time for students to close their eyes, take a few deep breaths and collect their thoughts. When they are finished with the exercise, students are given the opportunity to debrief and share what is on their minds. Zach said he hopes to incorporate these types of exercises into his classroom one day.



The Living-Learning Centre at Indiana University, USA, provides cultural immersion opportunities for student-teachers to enable them to gain different perspectives on education early in their college careers. Sixteen student-teachers, members of the Living-Learning Centre, visited schools in Ireland in 2018.

Students also took part in a drama workshop for adults with autism spectrum disorders, which Zach found particularly rewarding. He said it allowed him to put into practice the methods he has learned in his special education courses while gaining experience working with an age group that he hadn't taught before.

Student Brianna Leibel observed a difference in that Irish teachers work to make sure children from nomadic populations stay in school, while their American counterparts build relationships that ensure children experiencing homelessness still receive an education.

Source: Indiana University

THE LEGACY OF PROFESSOR JOHN COOLAHAN



Áine Hyland

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The death of John Coolahan on 3 June 2018 marked the end of an era in Irish education and in the arts in Ireland. John was a well-known figure in Irish education and arts circles for over fifty years. He played a major part in influencing Irish education policy, both as an ‘insider’ and an ‘outsider’, and was actively engaged in various arts initiatives over the decades.

John was born in Tarbert, Co. Kerry, on 9 June 1941. He attended the local national and secondary schools, and in a memoir written shortly before his death, he gave credit to St Ita’s lay Catholic Secondary School in Tarbert and to its founder and principal, Jane Agnes McKenna, for his lifelong interest in literary, cultural, and educational matters. After his graduation as a national school teacher from St Patrick’s College, Drumcondra, in 1961, where he was awarded the Gold Medal for coming first in the graduating class, he taught for four years as a national school teacher while studying in UCD for a BA, MA, and H.Dip. He then became a secondary teacher and read for a PhD and M.Ed. in Trinity College Dublin.

John was appointed lecturer in education in Carysfort College in 1971, where he remained until 1974, playing a key role in drafting the new three-year B.Ed. programme which was first awarded in 1977. The background papers and draft B.Ed. curriculum that are still extant from that period show that he was the key author of the new B.Ed., which was adopted in all of the colleges of education recognised by the National University of Ireland. The documents provide evidence of a programme based on sound philosophical principles that would prepare the national teachers of the future to teach the Department of Education’s 1971 ‘New Curriculum’ – an avant-garde, child-centred curriculum which placed Ireland among the vanguard of educationally progressive European countries at that time.

In 1974 John was appointed college lecturer in UCD, and in 1986 he was appointed statutory lecturer. The following year he was appointed professor of education and head of the Education Department in the National University of Ireland Maynooth (now Maynooth University), a post he held until his retirement in 2004.

His formal academic positions were only one aspect of his enormous and ongoing contribution to education, nationally and internationally. He was exceptionally generous in his willingness to give talks and keynote addresses to a wide variety of groups and associations – from local parent associations, teacher centres, summer schools, and various educational associations to major international conferences and specialised policy audiences. His hundreds of talks

and presentations throughout the decades included keynote addresses to teacher unions, managerial bodies, the Reading Association of Ireland, the National Parents Council, and the Educational Studies Association of Ireland, to name but a few.

At an international level, John spoke at conferences and seminars all over the world, including Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, Belgium, Portugal, the Czech Republic, Chile, Costa Rica, Mexico, and South Africa. Through his work with the OECD and the European Commission, he was a key influencer of educational policy in numerous jurisdictions. He carried out no fewer than ten reviews of national education systems on behalf of the OECD in countries as diverse as the Russian Federation, Chile, and the Dominican Republic. He undertook consultancy work for the World Bank and the Council of Europe, and he served as vice president of the European Commission's Consultative Group on Education.

John willingly accepted onerous and demanding roles on a wide variety of government-appointed groups and committees. Politics played no part in his appointments, in that the various Irish ministers for education who appointed him were from Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, and Labour. In the 1990s, he wrote the background report for an OECD review of Irish education, which focused specifically on teacher education. This report was accepted almost verbatim by the OECD team, to the chagrin of Department of Education officials, who had planned to carry out a cull of university education departments – as they had done with the closure of Carysfort College some years previously.

“The National Education Convention was a landmark event in the shaping of educational policy in modern Ireland.”

In 1990, John was invited to write a Green Paper on Education, which, while not initially accepted by government, was to have a decisive influence on Irish education in subsequent years. His acceptance of an invitation from Minister for Education Niamh Breathnach and Secretary General Don Thornhill in 1993 to chair the National Education Convention was a turning point in the history of Irish education. No longer would bilateral negotiations between Church and State about educational policy be carried out behind closed doors – the National Education Convention was the beginning of a transparent and open approach to educational policymaking to which multiple partners could contribute. To quote John himself: ‘The National Education convention was a landmark event in the shaping of educational policy in modern Ireland, and its impact was to be very far-reaching and long-lasting.’

A year later, he chaired the roundtable meetings on the regionalisation of education, which focused on the potential role and functions of Regional Education Authorities, which the government of the time had planned to set up. In the event, those authorities were never set up, but the discussions that John chaired in 1993 and 1994 ultimately led to the White Paper on Education and the landmark Education Act of 1998: the first comprehensive Irish education act.

In subsequent decades, at the invitation of successive ministers, John contributed to a strategy for lifelong learning, to the drafting of the

Universities Act of 1998, and to the report of the steering committee on the Establishment of a Teaching Council. In 1998 he chaired the National Forum on Early Childhood Education. He is currently best remembered for his chairing of a National Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector which reported in 2011. This report has had a major influence on government policy on the patronage of primary schools, although its recommendations have yet to be fully realised.

Throughout his long career, John wrote five books and more than 120 articles. His magnum opus, *Irish Education: History and Structure*, first published in 1980, was and continues to be a basic textbook for all teacher education students. He was co-editor, with this author and others, of *Towards a Better Future*, a review of the Irish school system published by the National Association of Principals and Deputy-Principals in March 2017, only weeks before he was diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumour – the tumour which took his life a year later. Yet the diagnosis spurred him on to an extraordinary spurt of creative energy during the final months of his life, when he delivered on everything he had committed to – talks, lectures, keynote addresses, and publications – even when prolonged periods of engagement were no longer easy for him and his speech and mobility had begun to deteriorate. But his intellectual and mental capacity were unaffected, and some of his finest writings were completed during this period.

John's generosity was boundless. His chairing of various boards, committees, conventions, and forums was all carried out pro bono, as were his countless talks and keynote addresses. He was incomparably unselfish in his willingness to help and advise his friends, students, and colleagues – nothing was too much for him and no request was ever refused. This author is one of many who owe John an enormous debt for his wise and sagacious advice. He advised and mentored me in the late 1970s as I researched and wrote up my own PhD. He invited me to act as a tutor in Carysfort College when he was a part-time lecturer there. He encouraged me to apply for the professorship in UCC in 1993, and he was invariably supportive and helpful to me throughout my academic career.

Professor John Coolahan's legacy is all-encompassing... there was no area of education in Ireland to which he did not contribute.

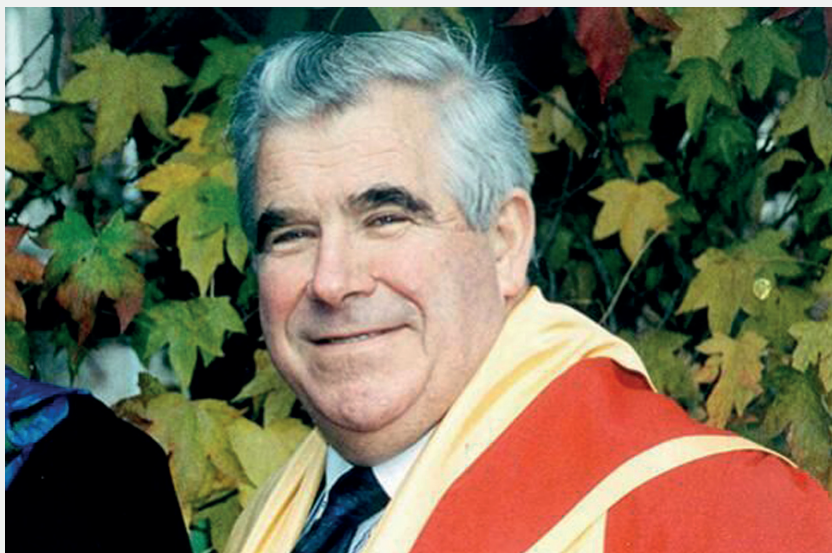
John's legacy is all-encompassing. He was passionately committed to the provision of a world-class teacher education system for primary and post-primary teachers – initial, induction, and in-service. He played a major role in bringing the Teaching Council to fruition in the early 2000s, after decades of vacillation on the part of successive governments. He was instrumental in convincing the Department that teacher education could continue to be provided in all the universities, and he helped ensure that the high calibre of Irish teachers was maintained at a time when teaching became a low-status profession in many other parts of the world.

John contributed generously to north-south education initiatives and was a founder and ongoing member of SCOTENS. He was a pioneer in educational research: he set up the Educational Studies Association of Ireland in the late 1970s and never missed the annual conference, attending

the 2018 conference in UCD only weeks before his death. His report on Early Childhood Education contributed in no small way to the (belated) decision by the State to initially fund one year of preschool education and more recently two years.

In short, there was no area of education in Ireland to which Professor John Coolahan did not contribute during his long and incredibly fruitful life. He will be sorely missed in the world of education and the arts.

Ni bheidh a leithéid ann arís. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam dílis.



John Coolahan was Professor and Head of the Department of Education at Maynooth University for 17 years.

Maynooth University has now established the “John Coolahan Education Scholarship” to recognise John’s long-standing commitment to education.

A quote from John Coolahan on Maynooth University website captures what was at the heart of his many endeavours:

There is a three-letter word which I cherish in the education process, but is rarely expressed, and that is “joy”. I consider that education is a joyous, fulfilling activity, and this dimension of joyous engagement should be more emphasised.

1 EARLY CHILDHOOD



Tara McCallion-Gleeson, 3, investigates a slide under a microscope at the annual Sligo Science Fair held on 10 November 2018 in IT Sligo as part of Science Week Ireland.

EARLY CHILDHOOD CONTENTS

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The early childhood education sector in Ireland has been evolving rapidly over the past five years, with a drive towards greater professionalisation. In looking to the future, it is time to take stock and examine the emergent state of ECEC professionalisation in Ireland and begin to chart the pathway to ensure ECEC realises the potential to deliver best outcomes for children.



KEY MESSAGES ON PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS

Supporting parents as primary educators of their children

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Dr Josephine Bleach

The key message in this article is that Parenting Matters. We must invest in all parents, the primary educators of their children. Legislation, policies, and services must respect parents' right to be included as equal and valued partners in their children's lives, in order that children will be enabled to realise their maximum potential.



TUNING IN TO BABIES

Nurturing relationships in early childhood settings

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Babies' learning and development is a function of their experiences and their relationships with the people they are with, which affects physical and mental health for the rest of their lives. Early childhood educators must have training in the skill of relational pedagogy.



TRANSITIONING FROM PRESCHOOL TO PRIMARY

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Dr Margaret Rogers, Niamh O'Brien

The transition from preschool to primary school is a pivotal experience in a child's and family's life and requires careful thought and planning for every child. This brief case study outlines a successful transition collaboration supported through the AIM programme.



UPDATE FROM EARLY YEARS EDUCATION INSPECTION 2018

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Early Years Education Inspection, introduced in April 2016, evaluates the nature, range, and appropriateness of educational experiences offered to very young children. To date, over 1500 such inspections have been conducted nationally. In this article, Dr Maresa Duignan looks at progress made thus far.



EARLY YEARS INSPECTION

A case of two masters

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Dr Mary Moloney tracks the development of the dual inspection system in the Early Childhood sector (Tusla and DES). Does it work? Accountable to two masters, the Early Childhood sector is concerned with the 'burden of evaluation and monitoring'. To reduce the pressure, Dr Moloney proposes a single unitary inspection of settings, undertaken jointly, using a combined quality and regulatory framework.



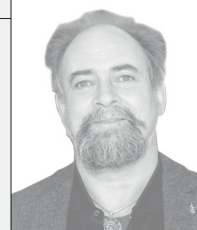
REIMAGINING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE IN IRELAND

A competent system and a public good

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Prof Matthias Urban

The early childhood sector in Ireland has undergone substantial policy changes in recent decades, but major challenges remain unresolved. This article analyses the recently published early years strategy First 5, and argues that radical culture change is necessary and possible to create an early childhood system oriented by values of democracy and diversity and understood as a public good and a public responsibility.



AIM wins Excellence and Innovation Award

The Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) was among the winners of a 2018 Civil Service Excellence and Innovation Award, announced by Minister Paschal Donohoe in a special ceremony in Dublin Castle in November 2018.

The Awards are held annually to recognise the achievements of civil servants and showcase examples of best practice and innovation in Government Departments and Offices.

Speaking at the event, Minister Donohoe congratulated all those who participated:

“These projects highlight the best practice that we see every day in our workplaces. The passion and commitment of staff to deliver on their objectives is a common thread that shines through all of the projects that have been shortlisted.”

The Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) is a model of supports designed to ensure that children with disabilities can access the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE).

Part of the DCYA, AIM's Excellence and Innovation award was for Citizen Impact.



Pictured at the 2018 Civil Service Excellence and Innovation Awards in St. Patrick's Hall, Dublin Castle, 22 November 2018, are: **Paschal Donohoe**, Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure & Reform; **Dr Anne-Marie Brooks**, DCYA; **Mairéad O'Neill**, DCYA; **Martina Morey**, DCYA; **Teresa Griffin**, National Council for Special Education – DES; **Bernie McNally**, DCYA; **Robert Watts**, Sec Gen, Dept of Public Expenditure and Reform; **Katherine Licken**, Sec Gen, Dept of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.



Dr Margaret Rogers

National Manager,
Better Start National
Early Years Quality
Development

ECEC IN IRELAND 2018

Where to from here?

The early childhood education sector in Ireland has been evolving rapidly over the past five years in particular, having come from a relatively marginal level of policy focus and investment, lagging behind the experience in Australia, New Zealand, and many EU countries. In common with many jurisdictions:

ECEC [early childhood education and care] tends to receive less attention than any other level of education and training, despite evidence that investing efficiently in quality early years education is much more effective than intervening later and brings considerable returns throughout the lifecycle, particularly for the disadvantaged. (CEU, 2011)

In terms of advancing professionalism, emerging models of practice and growth of knowledge, skills, and experience, it is in a period of transformative change. State investment, starting from a very low base, has grown substantially. Though at 3% of GDP it still falls far short of the EU average of 7%, early childhood education is nonetheless firmly established as a political, economic, and social priority.¹

Many developments in recent years, whether driven by policy or emerging from practice, have created both opportunities and challenges for ECEC providers and staff. There is a drive towards greater professionalisation at many levels, from practitioner to organisation. Increased emphasis on quality, governance, and accountability across many sectors, both non-profit and commercial, has meant that the early years sector has had to engage with new systems, processes, and responsibilities, such as charity regulation and company law. In children's services, preschool regulations have been updated, and a system of registration² rather than notification is now established. Legislation on child safeguarding³ and Garda vetting⁴ has placed statutory duties on early years providers and staff.

Opportunities and incentives for quality improvement have been provided. The state now offers a bursary for preschool staff working in services who complete degree-level qualifications. Continuing professional development opportunities have greatly increased, with the development of the Leadership for Inclusion course⁵ and a programme of training to support inclusion, with, for the first time, CPD payments provided to employers to release staff to participate.

This article outlines some of the changes and opportunities that have emerged, especially in the past five years, and speculates on the pathway forward for ECEC in Ireland in the years to come.

RECENT CONTEXT 2013–2018

The past five years have been a period of rapid growth, development, and transformative change in ECEC in Ireland. Government investment has increased by 80% (DCYA, 2018); 200,000 children are accessing state-supported early years programmes; new training, mentoring, and professional development programmes are being implemented; and regulation has strengthened. Many of the goals identified by advocacy and policy informing groups, as outlined below, have influenced the developments across the sector.

2013 – RIGHT FROM THE START

Right from the Start (2013) was the final report of an expert advisory group established by the then Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Frances Fitzgerald, to inform the development of an early years strategy. The group compiled its report under ten themes and articulated a vision for the Early Years Strategy.

The National Early Years Strategy will be for all children aged 0–6 years.

1. All children from birth to 6 will flourish and thrive in healthy and supportive families and communities. They will be happy, healthy, secure, and hopeful, and will have a sense of belonging.
2. Young children will grow up in nurturing environments in which the quality of their experiences supports their learning, development, and well-being. This will allow them to make the most of their early childhood and maximise their individual life chances.
3. Society will recognise its responsibility for the health, care, education, and nurturing of all young children. It will value all young children as competent, capable, able doers who have histories and potential and who matter here and now.
4. All Government policies should be informed by the rights of children and be child-proofed for their impact on children aged 0–6.

Early childhood education is firmly established as a political, economic, and social priority.

FIVE PEAKS OVER FIVE YEARS:

- increasing Investment
- extending paid parental leave
- strengthening child and family support
- insisting on good governance, accountability, and quality in all services
 - public funding allocated only to services that achieve quality standards
- enhancing and extending quality early childhood care and education services
 - investing in training, mentoring, and professionalising the early years workforce
 - two full years of ECCE before entering primary school.

Paradoxically, while the group was finalising its report in 2013, an RTE *Prime Time Investigates* programme, 'A Breach of Trust', revealed instances of appallingly poor practice in a number of early years settings, and raised

public concerns about standards of care for children. In response, Minister Fitzgerald announced an action plan to improve standards, known as the Pre-School Quality Agenda, which outlined a number of commitments:

- increase the required qualification standards of childcare staff
- support implementation of *Síolta* and *Aistear*, including examining the establishment of nationwide mentoring supports
- implement new National Preschool Standards
- introduce registration of all childcare providers
- develop a more robust, consistent, and regular inspection system
- publish inspection reports online
- ensure action is taken in response to findings of non-compliance
- increase sanctions for non-compliant childcare providers.

Over the following five years, these commitments have largely been implemented, with significant impact on practice.

Preschool inspection regulations were updated and published in May 2016, coming into effect from 30 June on a phased basis. They now include a requirement for a minimum qualification (QQI level 5) for all staff working in preschool settings, and registration for early years services, to which conditions can be attached where necessary.⁶ The Preschool Inspectorate was restructured nationally and additional staff employed, widening the qualification criteria to include ECEC graduates.

The state now offers a bursary for preschool staff, working in services, who complete degree-level qualifications.

Better Start National Early Years Quality Development was established in 2014 to provide a quality development mentoring and coaching service to early years settings, and to bring an integrated national approach to developing quality in early years education and care. The work of Better Start is underpinned by the *Síolta* Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and by *Aistear*: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework.

The Aistear Síolta Practice Guide (NCCA, 2015), an online resource integrating *Síolta* and *Aistear*, was published in 2015. It provides a rich suite of resources, including podcasts, video, tip sheets, and self-assessment tools, linked to the original frameworks, to support implementation in practice.

Alongside the revised preschool regulations, 2016 also saw the establishment of the Early Years Education Inspectorate (EYEI) in the Department of Education and skills (DES). The EYEI model provides evaluative information, advice, and support on the quality of education provision in an early years setting with reference to:

- the quality of the context to support children's learning and development
- the quality of the processes to support children's learning and development
- the quality of children's learning experiences and achievements
- the quality of management and leadership for learning. (DES, 2018)

The Better Start Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) was also launched in 2016, providing seven levels of progressive universal and targeted supports to ensure that children with a disability can access and meaningfully participate in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) (state-funded preschool) programme.

In 2017, the ECCE programme was expanded to allow up to 62 weeks' participation by children, and further extended in 2018 to provide a full two academic years of state-funded preschool for children in Ireland. As a result, the number of children availing of ECCE increased by 63%, with 120,601 children availing of the programme in the 2016/17 academic year.⁷

In 2018 the **Better Start Early Years Learning and Development Unit** was established to coordinate a programme of training aiming to build the capacity of early years settings to provide high-quality, inclusive programmes to all preschool children. In support of it, a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) fund was announced by Minister Katherine Zappone, providing for eighteen hours of annual paid CPD for early years practitioners attending approved training courses.

2018 also saw the establishment of an Early Childhood Research Centre in Dublin City University Faculty of Education.

In September 2018 a Quality and Regulatory Framework (QRF) for the early years sector was published by Tusla. It sets out Tusla's interpretation of the preschool regulations and defines the parameters against which services are inspected. It promotes the continuous improvement of the quality and safety of services provided to children (Tusla, 2018).

All of these developments are rooted in a commitment to ensure that children are at the centre of policy and practice and derive optimal benefit from public investment in ECEC. However, it must be acknowledged that for those working in ECEC, change has been rapid, pervasive, and complex, but with little evidence of increased professional recognition or enhanced working conditions, a key driver of quality (OECD, 2006).

In this increasingly complex system, an almost existential quest for recognition and parity of equivalent professionals is a persistent theme. This could be characterised as an emerging profession in search of an identity, as it struggles to find its place in the multifaceted system of ECEC in Ireland and the wider professional context of children's services. Key characteristics of a profession include:

- special knowledge and skills in a recognised body of learning derived from research, education, and training at a high level who apply this knowledge and learning in the interest of others
- adhering to a code of ethics and standards of practice regulated by a professional association or council
- a commitment to competence achieved through continuing professional development
- accountability to those they serve and to society.

In 2018, a Continuing Professional Development Fund was announced by Minister Katherine Zappone, providing for 18 hours of annual paid CDP.

Despite the rapid growth and development in ECEC in Ireland, the construction of a profession has yet to emerge, and the quest for identity and consequent recognition continues.

WHAT CONTRIBUTES TO DEVELOPING A PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY?

A shared understanding of professional development supported by adequate initial and continuing professional development contributes to developing a professional identity. (Hayes, 2015, p.27).

A growing body of research evidence points to the impact of the education standard, qualifications, and professional development of those working in ECEC on the beneficial outcomes for children (Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000; OECD, 2006; Urban et al., 2011; European Commission et al., 2014; Slot et al., 2015). It is essential to recognise that professional development is not linear (as with formative training) but a dynamic process of experience and interaction, honing knowledge and skills (Sheridan et al., 2009). The calibre of those professionals influences the process and content or curriculum quality of ECEC provision (Pramling and Pramling Samuelsson, 2011).

Core to professional identity is a need for clarity of role and professional orientation (Hayes, 2015). Ireland currently operates a split system of early childhood education and care for children from birth to six years, with a variety of delivery, mostly (70%) provided through private enterprise for children up to school age. While the intrinsically integrated nature of learning and development for children under six is well understood, policy and the wider education system privilege 'education' as a distinct practice.

Ireland currently operates a split system of early childhood education and care for children 0-6 years.

The public education system is available to children from the age of four years, in state-funded schools, staffed by qualified (NFQ level 8 or 9 degree) primary school teachers. In contrast, just 20% of ECEC staff hold a BA level (NFQ 7,

8, 9)⁸ degree or higher, up from 13.6% in 2013.⁹ Degree-level qualifications for working in the ECCE programme (children aged 3–5) are incentivised through higher capitation, while no such incentive is available for younger children, resulting in a higher proportion of graduates working with the 3+ age group.

PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY - WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The terminology used to describe people working in the non-statutory preschool sector varies hugely. There is a plethora of titles (e.g., early years assistant (ECCE), early years assistant (non-ECCE), room leader (ECCE), centre manager, deputy manager) (Pobal, 2017), none of which indicates an established professional identity.

Again in contrast to primary teachers, social workers, nurses, and other established professions, there is no professional registration body, no requirement for CPD, and until mid-2018 no policy incentive to undertake such training – though most ECEC staff do regular CPD on a voluntary and unpaid basis.

The issue of professional identity and recognition is not confined to ECEC in Ireland. In 2015, Stacey Goffin wrote:

Even though in recent years ECE has experienced significant increases in policy support and funding, the field continues to be characterized by sector fragmentation, reliance on an under-developed workforce and uneven public respect, resulting in a divided field of practice, patchy policy support and capricious public financing. Further exacerbating the field's status is its historic reluctance to step forward and create a desired future for ECE as a field of practice. (Goffin, 2015, p.1)

The EU framework for quality in ECEC aims for a pedagogical workforce of professionals holding a full qualification specialised in early childhood education at bachelor degree level (NFQ 7 or 8): professional pathways that are flexible and commensurate with the professional skills and competencies of its members, but also reflecting their contribution to the public good that is ECEC. This requires a fundamental rethink on how ECEC is structured, funded, governed, and delivered in Ireland, through which children's rights and best interests are promoted.

Employment in ECEC in Ireland and many other countries is currently characterised by low pay, lack of full-time, secure employment, and absence of clear career structures. In recent years, New Zealand has introduced pay parity between kindergarten and primary school teachers, making ECEC teaching a more attractive occupation, leading to lower staff turnover and a higher proportion of qualified staff, trained to implement the national curriculum.

In recent years,
New Zealand has
introduced pay parity
between kindergarten
and primary school
teachers.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

With the publication of a ten-year early years strategy now imminent, it is time to take stock and examine the emergent state of ECEC professionalisation in Ireland. The current profile of provision does not meet the commonly accepted definitions of a profession. Yet the recognition of ECEC as a public good, in terms of its beneficial outcomes for children, is on a par with the education system and necessitates its delivery by a body of professional peers. Currently the model of delivery in Ireland is largely privately owned and commercial, though state funding increasingly underpins its provision.

To achieve progress, the body of ECEC professionals and policy must move in tandem if a competent system (Urban et al., 2011) for ECEC in Ireland is to be realised. This will require substantial growth in graduate-level professionals; a clear framework for CPD; professional recognition reflected in terms, conditions, and career structures to ensure retention of qualified personnel; and the development of a professional affiliation system.

This structure must be underpinned by a commitment to adequate investment in children's early learning experiences, and a quality-assurance process to ensure that the quality of provision results in beneficial outcomes for all children. The forthcoming ten-year early years strategy will hopefully provide a clear strategic policy direction to progress the development of a

professionalised ECEC sector in Ireland, ensuring that all children derive the optimum benefit from participation.

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TERMINOLOGY

In keeping with the definitions in the OECD and the EU Quality Framework, this paper uses the term *ECEC* to refer to childminding, community, and private-setting-based services (full and part-time) and junior primary classes for children from birth to six years – that is, the various out-of-home settings where the early care and education of young children take place.

FOOTNOTES

1. www.startstrong.ie/files/Double_Dividend_Policy_Brief_Web.pdf.
2. Child Care Regulations: The Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016.
3. The Children First Act, 2015 (commenced December 2017).
4. National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012; updated to 20 December 2017.
5. The Leadership for INCLUSION in the Early Years programme, LINC, is a Level 6 Special Purpose Award (Higher Education), designed to support the inclusion of children with additional needs in the early years.
6. Note: this only applies to full, part-time, and sessional services, and exclude childminders.
7. Pobał, Early Years Sector Profile (2017).
8. Pobał, Early Years Sector Profile, 2017.
9. Pobał, Annual Early Years Sector Survey, 2013.

Early Childhood Ireland Conference 2018

The Early Childhood Ireland (ECI) 2018 annual conference took place in April.

Minister Katherine Zappone used the occasion to announce a new Continuing Professional Development (CPD) initiative, which was welcomed by ECI.

The Minister said that an initial €3 million had been secured; Better Start National Early Years Quality Development would be the national lead for the management and oversight of the new CPD initiative; and a pilot initiative would be rolled out in 2018 to Early Years practitioners attending the AIM Hanen Teacher Talk and Lámh training programmes, with a view to expanding to include, for example, First Aid Response training in 2019.



Pictured here are **Teresa Heeney**, CEO, Early Childhood Ireland; Minister for Children and Youth Affairs **Dr Katherine Zappone**; **Jillian van Turnhout**, Chairperson, Early Childhood Ireland.




Dr Josephine Bleach

Director, Early Learning Initiative, National College of Ireland

KEY MESSAGES ON PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS

Supporting parents as primary educators of their children

 On 13 June 2018, the Early Learning Initiative (ELI), National College of Ireland, hosted an early-years conference titled 'The Constitutional Role of Parents as the Primary Educators of their Children'. Research in Ireland and internationally consistently finds that parents have a powerful influence on their children's educational and social development. This is also reflected in the Irish constitution, which recognises the crucial role of the family as the natural and primary educator of the child (1937, Article 42.1), with rights and duties to active participation in the child's education.

EARLY LEARNING CONFERENCE

The aim of the ELI conference was to raise awareness of the vital role that parents play as primary educators of their children and how this contributes to children's development and learning. Throughout the day, there were many interesting presentations and discussions among the diverse audience of early-years educators, family support professionals, researchers, and policymakers. All highlighted the valuable and interesting work being done with parents, of all genders and from all communities, to fully realise their constitutional role as the primary educators of their children.

The morning sessions outlined innovative supports for parents in challenging circumstances, along with the implications of local and national policies for parents. The afternoon sessions focused on the importance of play and the evaluation of parenting support programmes. A common thread running through the presentations was the importance of the home learning environment and the need for more creative, sustainable approaches that maximise dialogue and enhance partnership between parents, children, and professionals.

Attendees greatly appreciated the opportunity to learn more about a wide range of quality-practice-based research projects from across Ireland. As one wrote, 'There is some fantastic research going on in this area! Continuous need for support for development, dissemination and awareness of evidence based practices/supports.' Several themes emerged on the day, most of which centred on rethinking relationships with, supports for, and perceptions of parents, at both national and local level.

PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS AND FAMILIES CRITICAL

Afterwards we were left with as many questions as answers, most of them 'how' rather than 'what' or 'why' questions. This indicates the consensus that partnership with parents and families is critical to the development of children's social, language, and thinking skills from

an early age – but that human diversity, social norms, and organisational complexities may make it difficult for families and services to translate partnership into practice.

Gender equality in parenting was highlighted by Paschal Donohue, Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform, who outlined the need for parents, employers, and society to move from the traditional roles of father as financial provider and of mother as carer and home-maker, to the modern egalitarian parenting model, where both parents are active, equal partners in their children's education and lives. Minister Donohue outlined the challenges parents face in trying to achieve a balance between parenting and work, and called on employers to value and support all their employees in their parenting role.

Pregnancy and the early years of childhood are the most crucial times to ensure that children grow up healthy and happy and have the best possible chance of achieving their potential. Francis Chance, programme manager of the Nurture Programme, Katharine Howard Foundation (KHF), emphasised the importance of empowering parents and ensuring that their perspectives inform family-focused services and support. He summarised the key messages from a KHF report 'Giving Our Children the Best Start in Life: The Voices of Parents', where parents identified how Irish services can be more closely attuned to the supports that parents need and find most helpful. Chance noted that while many parents were doing well and appreciated the support available to them, a significant number were struggling with issues such as isolation, time, and homelessness.

Liz Kerrins, early years manager, Children's Rights Alliance, discussed the Alliance's work in ensuring that children's rights were respected and protected in laws, policies, and services. She mentioned the annual Children's Rights Alliance Report Card, which evaluates the Government's progress on actions for children and identifies serious issues for children. However, as acknowledged in the national policy framework 'Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures' (2014), parents are instrumental in ensuring that their children's rights are both respected and realised. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child places a duty on the State to respect the rights and responsibilities of parents (Article 5) and to support them with their child-rearing responsibilities (Article 18).

"Valuing parents' role means listening to them and consulting them."

ROLE OF STATE

Throughout the day, there was much discussion on the role of the State, with the following question put to the panel from the plenary sessions: How do we ensure a whole-of-government approach to parenting and education that everyone can feed into and support? A key policy recommendation from the delegates was the need for a long-term strategic Government plan for early interventions for children and families, which builds on existing projects that are working well and where parents are included as equal partners in decisions being made about their children. As one participant observed, 'Valuing parents' role means listening to them and consulting them. Long-term multi-party policy and investment are essential.'

There was recognition that all aspects of public policy affect parents. The impact of homelessness and social isolation on parents and families was raised frequently. The need for suitable housing and space to support children's learning and play was highlighted, as was the need for the Government and services to treat people as individuals rather than stereotyping them as 'homeless', 'addicted', and so on. A strengths-based approach was advocated, with the situation being considered the problem, not the individual concerned.

Another question for the panel was: 'What is the consultation process for national strategies, and how do we feed into it?' Parents and children were invisible, it was suggested, unless they were in the National Development Plan (NDP). Consultation for the NDP and the National Children's Strategy should, it was argued, be linked and include a commitment to more long-term, sustained funding for family learning and community parent-support programmes.

Áine Lynch, CEO of the National Parents Council, discussed how the NPC supported and empowered parents to become effective partners in their children's education and feed into national strategies. NPC now had the responsibility for supporting parents whose children attended early years services as well as primary schools. Lynch questioned if parents' councils were the best way to involve parents, particularly as they tended to focus on fundraising rather than policy formation. Parental involvement, she argued, needed to be supported by the attitudes, beliefs, and practices of all members of the education community, with parents acknowledged as full partners in the decisions that affect their children. True partnership was the only way, in her opinion, to deliver better outcomes for children.

Positive, friendly, respectful relationships with staff were regarded as the most important factor in getting parents involved.

Another question that arose was: How do we effectively blend key parenting messages with the practical support that parents with children in early years to post-primary education need to implement those messages? Many presentations highlighted the innovative and effective

ways practitioners around the country were supporting parents through home visits, parenting groups, and services. Many of these programmes provided strategies and supports for parents to enable their children's development through play-based learning activities. There was broad consensus that these programmes were valuable but required large-scale Government commitment and investment to ensure they were available to all parents, both urban and rural, across the country.

Parents' understanding of school-readiness and the value of play for children were discussed, as was their awareness of the importance of developing children's resilience. There was a sense that parents tend to focus on a limited number of early literacy and numeracy skills rather than having a holistic view of the broad range of dispositions and skills a young child will need in school.

One question that challenged everyone was: Is there a way we can support parents in understanding what is actually important for being school-ready, that is, socially and emotionally? Positive, friendly, respectful relationships

and interactions with staff were regarded as the most important factors that influenced parents to get involved with programmes and services. But it was also agreed there was a need to recognise the many constraints that may limit parental involvement and prevent parents from feeling comfortable in a service or school and raising issues they may be concerned about.

PARENTS: EQUAL AND VALUED PARTNERS

ELI would like to acknowledge and thank all those involved on the day. While the debate was lively, there were three clear messages from all contributors: *Parenting matters*. As a nation, we need to invest in and empower all parents as the primary educators of their children. If children are to realise their maximum potential now and in the future, then legislation, policies, and services need to respect parents' rights to be included as equal and valued partners in their children's lives.

Transitions across Early Years Education

The *Transitions across Early Years Education* seminar took place in June 2018. This joint INTO and Early Childhood Ireland seminar was an opportunity to bring together representatives of the primary and pre-school sectors to explore opportunities and challenges in transitions across early years education.

In round table groups, delegates discussed how the current redevelopment of the primary school curriculum could be used as an opportunity to ensure better alignment in the curriculum across pre-school and primary education.



Pictured at the seminar are: (l-r) **Dr Harold Hislop**, Chief Inspector, Department of Education & Skills; **Emer Smyth**, Head of Social Research Division, ESRI; **Teresa Heeney**, CEO, Early Childhood Ireland; **Sheila Nunan**, General Secretary, INTO; **Dr Deirbhile Nic Craith**, Education Officer, INTO; **Joe Killeen**, President INTO.



Dr Geraldine French

Programme Chair and Assistant Professor on the Bachelor of Early Childhood Education degree at the Institute of Education, DCU

TUNING IN TO BABIES

Nurturing relationships in early childhood settings

Babies are born primed to engage with people and to explore the world around them. They are learning and developing from their day of birth in every context in which they find themselves. As babies' participation in out-of-home early childhood education and care (ECEC) settings is rising (OECD, 2012), the quality of this education and care is of the utmost importance. This article explores why we should focus on babies in ECEC settings in Ireland, the unintended consequences of some policy actions, the specialised knowledge and relational skills required for working with babies, and some recommendations for policy and practice.

WHY WE SHOULD FOCUS ON BABIES IN ECEC SETTINGS

We now know that the period from birth to 18 months is when more will be learned than at any other time. Early experiences, including babies' relationships with others, interact with genes to shape the architecture of the human brain and provide the foundation for sound mental health. The postnatal brain doubles its size in the first year and attains 80–90% of its adult size by age three (Nugent, 2015). What babies learn and how they develop in their early months and years is truly extraordinary. In contrast to the vulnerability and dependence of a newborn baby, a typically developing 18-month-old baby may be walking, talking, and feeding independently. Such leaps of learning and development require nurturing and support by committed educators in early childhood settings.

A wide range of argument and evidence from babies' rights, health, infant mental health, and neuroscience points to the importance of nurturing education and care for babies' flourishing (French, 2018). We have 'a good deal of evidence that early childhood interventions, including child care interventions, can make a difference in improving outcomes' for children, including babies, when the intervention and care are of high quality (Waldfoegel, 2002, p.553). There is also evidence, however, that attendance in non-parental care can have negative effects (Melhuish et al., 2015). Despite these inconsistencies, comprehensive reviews of research conclude that training and qualifications affect educators' ability to provide responsive, nurturing, sensitive care and education to enhance babies' development and learning (Melhuish et al., 2015).

POLICY CONTEXT IN RELATION TO BABIES IN IRELAND

Early Childhood Ireland (2018) reports that 3,542 children from birth to one year and 30,060 from 13 months to 36 months attend early childhood settings in Ireland. Since December 2016, all staff working directly with children in such settings must hold a minimum of Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) Level 5 Major Award in Early Childhood Care and Education (or equivalent). If the setting

is providing the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme (for children from two years and eight months), all ECCE room leaders must hold a minimum QQI Level 6 Major Award in Early Childhood Care and Education (or equivalent).

To ensure that qualifications meet requirements, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs has released a list of Early Years Recognised Qualifications, available on its website. A higher capitation fee is payable to ECEC providers where all ECEC leaders in settings hold a bachelor degree in childhood/early education (minimum of Level 7 on the National Framework of Qualifications or equivalent) and have three years of experience working in the sector.

There is an unfortunate consequence of this policy for babies in ECEC settings in Ireland. Currently there is no capitation scheme for babies and consequently no higher capitation incentive for higher qualifications. The literature acknowledges the importance of the quality of nurturance that babies receive, and that the higher the qualification, the better the experience for the child (Melhuish et al., 2015). Because of the current policy and the demands on settings, babies are likely to be left in the care of the least qualified personnel. But given the explosion of learning and development in their earliest months and years, babies should be educated and cared for by the most qualified personnel.

SPECIALISED RELATIONAL PEDAGOGY

Qualifications alone are not sufficient to guarantee the nurturance of babies' learning and development. Dalli (2014) reports on the rise of research evidence in relation to pedagogy with babies in group-based settings, with key findings converging on the notion of a specialised 'relational pedagogy'. A concept called a 'neuro-relational approach' has emerged (Lebedeva, 2018), in recognition that experience, not simple maturation, changes the brain (neuro-) and that all learning happens in the context of relationships (relational). In other words, the brain is an organ that is changed, in interactive and complex ways, by relational experiences with others.

Because of current policy and the demands on settings, babies are likely to be left in the care of the least qualified personnel.

This idea of relational pedagogy speaks to what educators *do* in relationships, environments, and experiences in their daily care of babies (Benson McMullen et al., 2016). Consistent with neurobiological and child development research, Dalli (2014) reveals that relational pedagogy draws on the same concepts for optimal development: very young children need sensitive, responsive caregiving from educators who are affectionate, available, and on the same wavelength as them.

Relational pedagogy involves meeting babies' care needs and emotional demands in a predictable, consistent, calm, and loving manner. Babies need those around them to follow their lead and focus on them as people (not just the task). For example, bodily care routines (feeding and nappy changing) are opportunities for learning and are managed in a calm, unhurried, interactive way, with the baby given time and space to eat at their own pace and to be held and physically moved with respect. Respect is important and is demonstrated in how the baby is talked to about what is happening

and how the baby is offered respectful and gentle touch. The difference between task-based care and a specialised relational pedagogy is outlined in the table below (adapted from Fleer and Linke, 2016, p.9).

TASK-BASED VERSUS SPECIALISED RELATIONAL PEDAGOGY

Task-based care	Specialised relational pedagogy
Related to getting the task done, e.g. quickly change nappy or feed baby	Relating to the whole child, not just the task – seeing opportunities for learning and communication, e.g. narrating the experience for the baby, using the nappy-changing experiences to offer choice – hold the powder or the tissues, playing, singing songs, nursery rhymes, and games.
Adult routine/schedule-based	Infant rhythm and need-based, e.g. the baby is gently placed in their cot when they indicate that they are tired, and are fed when they should be hungry after the last feed.
Do what has to be done	Stop, look, listen, and think about what it means for the baby first, e.g. if the baby has to have a nappy changed, think what it would be like to have an adult (sometimes an unfamiliar person) pick you up and change your clothes, without explanation.
Doing things to the baby, e.g. wiping their face with a cloth after feeding	Doing things with the baby, e.g. offering the baby the cloth to respectfully wipe their own face; if not accepted gently, unhurriedly wipe her face while explaining what is happening.
Focus on the task	Focus on doing things in the relationship with the baby, e.g. talking through everything that is happening, pointing things out to the baby, and seeing the situation from the baby's point of view

While it is accepted that reliable, sustained relationships in the family are important, the need for predictable and stable relationships in ECEC settings is acknowledged less frequently. The negative and disruptive impacts of abrupt changes in personnel for babies, related to high educator turnover, are too often disregarded (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004). The specialised relational pedagogy needed for working with babies can be achieved by developing a quality, key person approach.

The role of the key person involves having particular responsibility for the baby and the relationship with the baby's family. This relationship begins before the baby starts in the setting. The key person engages in every aspect of the baby's day, from the time the baby arrives to the time they go home, with responsive interactions tuning in to the baby's natural rhythms. Key persons work in teams, and ideally stay with the same baby for the first three years of their life, providing continuity of care.

Babies are just starting to make sense of the world. In their early stages in the ECEC setting, it is important that babies be exposed to a limited number of people: 'Being handled by many different people – each with their different way of holding, soothing, talking to and changing the baby' impedes babies'

sense-making (Fleer and Linke, 2016, p.9). One study reported an alarming number of people changing babies' nappies over time (Jackson and Forbes, 2015). This is to be avoided. Only the baby's key person (or a family member) should change the baby's nappy in the setting.

According to the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 'Prolonged separations from familiar caregivers and repeated "detaching" and "re-attaching" to people who matter' are emotionally distressing and can lead to enduring problems (2004, p.3). The authors write that no scientific evidence supports the belief that a baby having to form numerous relationships with educators provides valuable learning opportunities for them.

The argument about whether the key-person approach works or not is over in the UK, to the extent that it is compulsory in the Early Years Foundation Stage (the mandatory curriculum in the UK). That is not the case in Ireland: the key-person approach is recommended in the Aistear Siolta Practice Guide, and excellent resources are provided, but the approach is not mandated here yet.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

It is recommended that there be incentives to increase the qualifications of and attract higher capitation for those working with babies. If I am a baby of six months, surely I have a right to be nurtured and educated by a person with equal qualification as if I am three, six, or seventeen years of age? Those qualifications must include content on relational pedagogy. It is also recommended that a key-person approach be mandated for working with babies in Ireland.

**Greater attention
is required to
strengthening
the resources and
capabilities of those
who nurture babies.**

We now know that the first days of a child's life set in motion a train of events that are the basis of later learning and development. We also know that babies' learning and development is a function of the everyday experiences and people they encounter. Greater attention is required to strengthening the resources and capabilities of those who nurture babies. The skills required to work with babies are not intuitive and require a specialised relational pedagogy.

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First ever early years cross-departmental strategy

On 19 November 2018, the Government unveiled 'First 5', Ireland's first ever cross-Departmental strategy to support babies, young children and their families.

The ambitious ten-year plan will deliver:

- A broader range of options for parents to balance working and caring
- A new model of parenting support
- New developments in child health, including a dedicated child health workforce
- Reform of the Early Learning and Care (ELC) system, including a new funding model
- A package of measures to tackle early childhood poverty.

The Strategy was jointly launched by An Taoiseach Leo Varadkar, Minister for Children and Youth Affairs Dr Katherine Zappone, Minister for Health Simon Harris, and Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills, Mary Mitchell O'Connor.



l-r: Minister for Children and Youth Affairs **Dr Katherine Zappone**, An Taoiseach **Leo Varadkar**, and **Oscar**, aged 5.

TRANSITIONING FROM PRESCHOOL TO PRIMARY

A case study

The transition from preschool to primary school is a pivotal experience in a child's and family's life. It requires careful thought and planning for every child, particularly when a child may need additional supports to enable their inclusion. When transitions work well, they help children to develop confidence and acquire skills to manage future changes in their lives (ABC Start Right Limerick, 2018).

Research has identified the transition to school as a time of potential challenge and stress for children and families. It involves negotiating and adjusting to an array of changes, including the physical environment, learning expectations, rules and routines, social status, and identity (Hirst et al., 2011). It is essential to recognise the complexity of factors that influence each child's learning and transition experiences, and the diversity that exists within and between groups of children, and to understand transition as a process rather than an event (Peters, 2010).

WHAT WORKS IN TRANSITIONS FROM PRESCHOOL TO PRIMARY SCHOOL?

Transitions from preschool to primary school have become a focus of research interest in many countries. In Ireland the National Council for Curriculum Assessment (NCCA) is currently undertaking a project to support transition planning and information-sharing and has completed a pilot demonstration project with preschools and primary schools (NCCA, 2018). Studies in other countries have found that successful transitions depend on the nature of the relationships between all involved. A study in New Zealand found that 'for children, their friendships, peer relationships and the relationship with their teacher appear central. Respectful, reciprocal relationships between the adults involved are also key factors in a successful transition' (Peters, 2010, p.1).

Recent analysis of data from the Growing Up in Ireland study, commissioned by the NCCA, looked at children's experience of starting primary school. It found that parents engage in a range of activities to help prepare children for school, such as talking to them about school, visiting the school, and practising reading, writing, and numbers with children. Teachers were less concerned with pre-academic skills but valued children having life skills such as managing personal care (clothing, toileting, lunch, school bags, etc.); they reported receiving little information on children's individual strengths or challenges (Smyth, 2016).

Overall, the literature points to the benefits of preparing in advance, creating collaborative links and communication between all key



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stakeholders, involving children in developing practical skills, promoting confidence, and introducing them to the new environment through visits, images, stories, and meetings with key people. The Better Start Access and Inclusion Model (AIM), outlined in brief below, supports transition planning and outlines a case study of such planning in practice.

BETTER START ACCESS AND INCLUSION MODEL (AIM)

The Better Start Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) was established to create equality of access and opportunity for children with a disability. A key component of the model is to work collaboratively with parents, preschool providers, and other professionals to enable a child's inclusion and meaningful participation in preschool and to support their timely and successful transition to primary school.

This article, through a case study, outlines the steps taken to ensure a smooth transition from preschool to primary for a five-year-old child with autism. It demonstrates how active collaboration with parents, preschool, school, and health professionals works effectively to prepare and support children for this significant life transition.

CASE STUDY

Profile of child:

Age: 5 years 6 months in June 2018

Gender: female

She attended two years in the same preschool.

Strengths: This child comfortably engages in free play for a large part of the morning session with support from her key worker. Her receptive and expressive skills have developed over the preschool year, and she can communicate functionally with the adults and peers in her preschool environment. She has begun to show an intrinsic interest in tabletop activities without support of an adult.

Interests: She is extremely sociable and enjoys role play in the home corner with small groups of friends. She loves exploring books in the cosy corner and watching the bubbles and fish in the tube lights in the sensory corner with her key worker. She loves running, parachute, and bouncing balls in the playground.

Needs: She is presenting with autism after consultation with a private therapist. She is attending a paediatrician for therapy to address dietary aversions and nutritional deficiencies due to pica. Adult support is needed for toileting, lunch, and snack time.

EYS role:

Initially an early years specialist (EYS) visited the service when the child started in 2016. The EYS made three more visits over the first year of the child's participation, including introducing the Better Start Access and Inclusion Plan to the parent and preschool team. The child's strengths and interests were identified and built on to plan for her meaningful

participation. Strategies advised by her speech and language therapist (SLT) were integrated by the preschool team, with the support of the EYS. The Aistear Síolta Practice Guide (NCCA, 2015) was used to support practice overall in the preschool.

The following year, a different EYS was allocated and began work in the setting. In March 2018, in anticipation of the child moving to primary school in September, the EYS met with the child's key worker and parent to identify goals to support the child's transition. The goals focused broadly on supporting the child's independence, building her confidence in her abilities, and phasing out the level of support provided by her key worker. They included practical life skills such as:

- taking off her coat and putting her lunch bag away without physical prompt
- making independent, confident choices in the preschool environment
- making short visits to the primary school with her key worker and other children who were moving to the same school, to be familiar with the new environment.

Additional resources were created and added to the preschool environment, including photographs of her new teacher and SNA (primary school), a school bag, pencil case, and 'big books' that the child could pack and unpack during conversations about her sister's 'big heavy school bag'. Both the preschool and parents were encouraging more independence at mealtimes and during toileting. Visual prompts were used in the preschool to support choice and engagement during free play.

Collaboration between the preschool and school on joint visits, and information-sharing, were very effective.

The EYS arranged to meet the school SNA and key worker to share information on the child's strengths, abilities, and interests, as well as supports required using resources such as books and planning templates. Advice was received from the child's occupational therapist (OT) and early intervention team (EIT) to support her application for an SNA.

What helped the process to succeed?

- The family's willingness to share information from EIT and other professionals with the school and preschool.
- The preschool team were committed, engaged, and highly professional, benefitting from continuing professional development (CPD).
- Collaboration between the preschool and school on joint visits and information-sharing were very effective, creating a familiar and welcoming environment for the child.
- Support from the EYS to liaise with all parties, support collaboration, and implement small, measurable goals for transition that all key partners could work on together.
- Support and advice from the child's EIT professionals.
- A positive relationship between preschool and primary enabled good communication and cooperation, and strong parental partnership ensured that all concerned had full information on the child's strengths, abilities, and support needs.

Outcome:

The child had developed practical self-help skills to support her independence and had gained confidence due to her enhanced capabilities. She was familiar with the primary environment, teacher, and SNA, and necessary supports were in place to ensure her participation. She was enthusiastic about moving to primary school and joining her two older siblings, along with nineteen of her peers from preschool.

CONCLUSION

Better Start AIM is founded on the principles of inclusion, equity, respectful partnerships, and a strengths-based approach. This short case study outlines how applying these principles in practice in planning and preparing for transition from preschool to primary makes for a smooth and positive transition experience for the child, family, and educators involved.

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UPDATE FROM EARLY YEARS EDUCATION INSPECTION 2018



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This article describes progress to date in establishing early-education inspection by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills (DES) in early years settings that are delivering the free preschool in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme funded through the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA).¹ It describes the trajectory of implementing education inspection and shares brief insights into the early findings of this initiative.

The Inspectorate of the DES works to improve the quality of learning for children and young people in places of learning, including Irish schools, centres for education, and early years settings providing State-funded early childhood care and education for children from 2 years 8 months until they enrol in primary school.² The Inspectorate is also responsible for providing advice to the education system, the Minister, and policymakers.

Early Years Education Inspection (EYEI) is carried out in accordance with section 13(3)(b) of the Education Act 1998 and in line with a Memorandum of Understanding between the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, the Minister for Education and Skills, and the DES Inspectorate. Early years settings delivering the universal free ECCE Programme are obliged, under the terms of their grant agreement, to facilitate inspection by the DES Inspectorate (DCYA, 2018, section 8.1).

EDUCATION INSPECTION IN THE EARLY YEARS SECTOR

The EYEI model was introduced in April 2016. It evaluates the nature, range, and appropriateness of early educational experiences offered to young children. Evaluation is based on a quality framework informed by the principles of Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework,³ Siolta: the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education,⁴ and national and international research on early childhood education and inspection. The EYEI quality framework focuses on the following four areas of practice:

- The quality of the context to support children's learning and development
- The quality of the processes to support children's learning and development
- The quality of children's learning experiences and achievements
- The quality of management and leadership for learning.

These are detailed in the Quality Framework for Early Years Education contained in the *Guide to Early Years Education Inspection* (DES, 2018a).⁵

External inspections facilitate improvement and change in education provision. Inspection reports provide evidence-based judgements about the quality of education provision and affirm the aspects of practice that are working well. The outcomes of inspection also inform the judgements of staff on the strengths and priorities for improvement in the early years setting, complementing internal self-evaluation and review processes. The *actions advised* in inspection reports provide important direction for the early years setting as it seeks to improve the quality of provision and practice. EYEI reports are available on the DES website.⁶

IMPLEMENTATION OF EDUCATION INSPECTION – THE JOURNEY TO DATE

EYEI began formally in April 2016 with a small team of early years and primary inspectors, all of whom are highly qualified early years professionals with a diverse range of professional experience and expertise. The early phase of implementing EYEI allowed the practice of the framework for inspection to be tested in depth in a diverse range of settings nationally. It also allowed the EYEI model to be trialled in multi-room early years settings, and allowed a follow-through inspection model to be implemented.

To date, over 1,500 inspections have been conducted nationally in a wide variety of early years settings. This represents approximately one third of settings delivering the ECCE programme of free preschool education.

Very positive endorsement of the inspection model emerged from the 2017 review.

The DES Inspectorate adheres to a core principle of close collaboration with stakeholders and partners in the education system in developing and operating its inspection programme. This has been extended to the early years sector. An example of this commitment is the publication of a composite report outlining early findings from EYEI at the end of 2017.⁷ The report details a range of feedback, gathered through experience of implementing the EYEIs and wider consultation with all stakeholders in the sector.

Very positive endorsement of the EYEI model emerged from this review. A wide range of stakeholders, including practitioners, parents, and policymakers, reported that Early-Years Education Inspection had worked. Three main points of commendation were reported:

- EYEI highlighted the importance of giving every child enriching, enjoyable early childhood experiences that provide a great start for young children on their education journey.
- EYEI has valued and validated the professionalism and commitment of the early years workforce.
- EYEI has provided robust, authentic information to parents and policymakers about what has been achieved and what still needs to be addressed in delivering high-quality early education.

The report also identifies concerns about the context in which the ECCE programme operates. It highlights the need to build the capacity of the early years sector to meet the high expectations of quality early education detailed in the DES EYEI quality framework. Although the findings of inspection showed huge potential across the sector, much work remains to

be done to realise this potential to provide high-quality early education for all children nationally.

As the focus of EYEI in its first year was on evaluation in small-scale early years settings, a trial of the model in 40 large-scale early years settings was conducted in early 2018. Although most settings operating the ECCE programme are very small (one or two rooms), it was important for the DES Inspectorate to identify challenges that might arise for the EYEI model when applied in a larger setting (five or more ECCE rooms). Following the trial, further consultation took place to identify any amendments to the EYEI model that might be necessary.

In the end, a high degree of satisfaction with the EYEI model prevailed across all stakeholders. No changes were necessary to the content of either the Framework for Inspection or the inspection processes themselves. More details were included in a revised guide to EYEI, to ensure that practitioners and providers of early education were fully clear on the inspection processes. These included guidance on the editing and publication of reports, and additional Signposts for Practice to identify indicators of good practice across the four areas of the EYEI Framework. The revised guide to EYEI was presented to the Minister for Education and Skills and the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs in June 2018 and was signed off as the basis for EYEI from September 2018.

INSIGHTS FROM EDUCATION INSPECTION IN THE EARLY YEARS SECTOR ON CURRICULUM AND PEDAGOGY

Evidence from education inspection in the early years sector indicates a very diverse range of curricular approaches being used to inform the programmes of learning on offer. The most frequently declared approaches are Montessori, High/Scope, Play-based, and Irish-medium (Naíonraí). Many settings declare a hybrid or eclectic approach, selecting from the above and other approaches and philosophies. There is also evidence of commercial curricula being used.

Much work remains to be done to provide high-quality early education for all children nationally.

The EYEI model does not prefer any one curricular approach over another, but it does require that the curricula or programme on offer be informed by Aistear and Siolta. In this regard it is positive to note that the majority of early years settings are aware of these practice frameworks and in most instances reference Aistear in their declared programme of learning.

There is room for improvement. Analysis of the findings in Area 2 of the EYEI Quality Framework, which refers to the 'Quality of processes to support children's learning and development', shows that this is the area of practice most likely to achieve lower ratings on the EYEI quality continuum. Continuing challenges for practitioners include implementation of an emergent curriculum that is informed by the interests and individuality of children; the use of pedagogical strategies that focus on active learning and promote children's agency as partners in their own learning; and planning for progression in learning.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The nature and scope of early education practice illuminated by EYEI to date are diverse, with many challenges both internal to the setting and influenced by external factors such as staff training, funding, and access to support and advice. There are strong examples of innovative and exemplary practice, where expert professional early years practitioners have managed to create rich, inclusive, and engaging learning environments. Continued support and investment in improving quality in practice are certainly warranted. The DES, through the implementation of EYEI, looks forward to documenting and promoting the continuing improvement of early educational practice in the coming years.

FOOTNOTES

1. Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) (2018) Early Childhood Care and Education Programme General Conditions and Grant Funding Agreement 2018/2019.
2. Inspectorate, Department of Education and Skills (2015) *Code of Practice for the Inspectorate*. Dublin: DES.
3. National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2009) *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*. Dublin: NCCA.
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5. Department of Education and Skills (DES) (2018a) *Guide to Early Years Education Inspection*. www.education.ie/en/Publications/Inspection-Reports-Publications/Evaluation-Reports-Guidelines/guide-to-early-years-education-inspections.pdf. www.education.ie/ga/Foilseacháin/Tuairiscí-Cigireachta-Foilseacháin/Tuarascálacha-Treoirlínte-Meastóireachta/treoir-don-chigireacht-oideachas-luathbhlianta.pdf.
6. Department of Education and Skills (DES) (2018b) Early-Years Education-focused Inspection (EYEI). www.education.ie/en/Publications/Inspection-Reports-Publications/Early-Years-Education-Reports/.
7. Department of Education and Skills (2018c) *Insights and Future Developments: A review of early-years education-focused inspection: April 2016 – June 2017*. www.education.ie/en/Publications/Inspection-Reports-Publications/Evaluation-Reports-Guidelines/a-review-of-early-years-education-focused-inspection-april-2016-%E2%80%93-june-2017.pdf.

EARLY YEARS INSPECTION

A case of two masters



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Issues of quality have permeated discourse on Early Childhood Education and Care¹ (ECEC) in Ireland for decades. Aligned to this is the question of governance: Where should responsibility for ECEC lie – with the Department of Education and Skills (DES) or the Department of Health? As with all aspects of ECEC provision, this is a complex question to which there is no easy answer. In some respects, the answer lies in the purpose of ECEC. Is it about children's care, welfare, protection, or early education?

In the absence of national debate about the positioning of ECEC, the age-old care–education divide continues, driven and exacerbated by policy initiatives. As a result, care (associated with children from birth to 2 years 8 months²) is under the aegis of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA), while responsibility for education (associated with children aged 2 years 8 months to school-going age) rests with the DES.

REGULATORY REFORM

The ECEC sector has been governed and regulated since 1996 by the Health Boards/Health Service Executive. However, in 2014, responsibility for inspection transferred to Tusla, the independent statutory regulator of Early Years Services in Ireland, catering for children from birth to six years old, who are not attending primary school (Tusla, 2018, p.xv). Two years later, the Childcare Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016 were published, resulting in wide-ranging reform, including:

- the establishment of a national register of Early Years services
- a requirement for existing services to re-register within a three-year timeframe
- the introduction of a long-awaited minimum qualification requirement at QQI Level 5.³

As Figure 1 shows, regulatory inspection under the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016 focuses on four core areas.

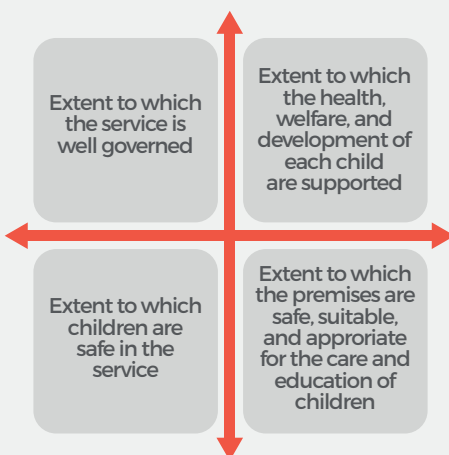


Figure 1: Overview of core areas inspected by Tusla

Tusla (2018, p.vii) notes there is ‘a significant emphasis on the governance of services to ensure that children attending ... are safe, receive appropriate care and have a positive experience where they can develop and learn in a quality service’.

Inspections are underscored by a Quality and Regulatory Framework (QRF). Underpinned by the practice frameworks *Síolta*, *Aistear*, the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM), and others too numerous to mention, the QRF brings together evidence-based national and international best practice in early years services, as well as international ECEC regulatory authorities and the European Commission. It ‘presents the scope of how the Inspectorate will assess services for compliance with the [regulations] which, in turn, will promote the quality and safety of services provided to children’ (Tusla, 2018, p.xvi).

EARLY YEARS EDUCATION INSPECTIONS

Since 2016, and at the request of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and the Minister for Education, the DES Inspectorate has been leading and organising focused inspections on the quality of educational provision in settings participating in the universal ECCE scheme,⁴ thus signifying alignment between this scheme and the education system.



As with Tusla inspections, EYEIs are based on a quality framework informed by the principles of *Aistear* and *Síolta* and by national and international research on ECEC and inspection. Within this framework, provision is categorised under four broad areas – see Figure 2.

Figure 2: Broad areas of the quality framework underpinning EYEIs

The focus on process quality (Figure 2) and ‘inspection for improvement, has the potential to develop the capacity of early years services and educators to use ... *Síolta* and *Aistear* to support self-evaluation and review processes that are integral to quality improvement in practice’ (DES Inspectorate, 2018b, p.9).

WHO INSPECTS?

Historically, the HSE/Tusla inspectorate was composed almost entirely of Public Health Nurses. Following repeated calls to broaden its composition, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Katherine Zappone, announced a broadening of eligibility criteria on 5 September 2018. Individuals with a QQI Level 8 qualification in ECEC can now be considered for inspectorate posts alongside those who hold a professional qualification in social care, social work, teaching, or child psychology. While consideration of ECEC graduates for Tusla inspectorate posts should instil confidence in the sector with regard to salient qualifications, experience, and possible career pathways, it fails to recognise ECEC as a distinct discipline in its own right.

From the outset, the DES recognised the need to include people with ECEC qualifications and experience in the inspection of early years settings. Initially, therefore, they recruited a team of nine early years inspectors with a QQI Level 8 degree in ECEC plus five years' post-qualification experience. This team of qualified, skilled, and experienced ECEC graduates is supplemented by DES primary inspectors with expertise and experience in early years education (DES Inspectorate, 2018a).

DOES DUAL INSPECTION WORK?

The report 'A Review of Early-Years Education-focused Inspection: April 2016 – June 2017' (DES Inspectorate, 2018a) points to a broad welcome from ECEC providers and educators, who appreciate the 48-hour advance notice of an inspection and the co-professional dialogue on which the EYEI is premised. In the words of one educator, 'for the first time our work as Early Years Educators was actually looked at in context by inspectors that were experienced in the field' (DES Inspectorate, 2018a, p.23).

From a DES perspective, the EYEI model has worked. It has:

1. strengthened the commitment to providing every child with positive early childhood experiences that provide a great start for young children on their education journey
2. valued and validated the professionalism and commitment of early childhood educators
3. provided robust, authentic information to parents and policymakers about what has been achieved and what still needs to be addressed in the delivery of high-quality early education (adapted from DES Inspectorate, 2018a, p.7).

Nonetheless, the sector is concerned with the 'burden of evaluation and monitoring' (DES Inspectorate, 2018a, p.23) brought about by dual inspection whereby they are accountable to two masters. One master, Tusla, rightly stresses its statutory function as regulator. It promotes and evaluates the care, safety, and well-being of children from birth to six years attending ECEC settings. The other master, the DES, plays an equally crucial role in 'improving the quality of the learning for children' (Tusla, 2018, p.xxi). Tusla is focused on compliance, while the DES seeks to support self-evaluation.

While each master perceives its respective role as separate from the other, there is little doubt that they share a common interest in ensuring that children are safe, receive appropriate care, and have positive experiences that support and enhance their learning in the daily life of the setting. The current dichotomy in roles, however, speaks directly to the care–education divide.

We know that care and education are inextricably linked. One without the other is not possible. Inspection, whether by the DES or by Tusla, therefore does not happen in a vacuum. Inspectors are not blinkered. Surely a qualified, skilled, and experienced inspector does not evaluate children's learning in isolation, and does not fail to notice unsafe practices, to register poor adult–child interactions or pedagogical strategies, or to become aware of incorrect adult–child ratios or weak governance during inspection. Likewise, evaluation of care practices, for example, must surely

take account of the learning environment, relational pedagogy, parental involvement, and so on.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that educators are burdened by administration, including documentation of children's learning. It has been suggested that in some instances, educators receive conflicting recommendations from the two inspectorates. They do not know what they are meant to record or why. In addition, the DES points to pressure on educators to attend pre- and post-inspection meetings in their own time (DES Inspectorate, 2018a). They are under inordinate pressure, and in their attempts to please two masters, some educators are:

1. undertaking training programmes to ensure they 'pass' inspections
2. maintaining separate lots of documentation to satisfy both the DES and Tusla.

These actions are symptomatic of a malaise in the dual inspection system.

Interestingly, while both the DES and the Tusla inspectorate place young children at the centre of their practices, little attention is given to the impact of dual inspection on children in settings. Here I refer to the presence of two different inspectorates in the children's space, albeit on different days or months. Irrespective of how interactive inspectors are in engaging with children, the presence of multiple adult strangers is almost certainly an intrusion for children and usurps their time in the setting.

With cooperation and goodwill, however, steps can be taken to reduce the pressure on providers and minimise the intrusion on children's time and space. While mindful of the different professional cultures in which each inspectorate operates, it is imperative that they work together to develop a streamlined inspection system. Ideally, what is required is a single unitary inspection where both the DES and Tusla inspectors would undertake joint inspection of settings, using a combined quality and regulatory framework. Not only would this reduce stress and administration for providers and educators, it would consolidate respect for young children in settings and would support inspectors to embrace and model co-professional dialogue both within and outside early years settings.

REFERENCES

- DES Inspectorate (2018a) A Review of Early-Years Education-Focused Inspections, April 2016 – June 2017: Insights and Future Developments. Available at: www.education.ie.
- DES Inspectorate (2018b) A Guide to Early Years Education Inspection. Available at: www.education.ie.
- Tusla (2018) Quality and Regulatory Framework: Full Day Care Service and Part-Time Day Care Service. Dublin: Early Years Inspectorate, Tusla.

FOOTNOTES

1. This is a contested term. This article uses the terms *ECCE* and *Early Years Services*, depending on the source.
2. The age at which children can access the universal ECCE scheme since September 2018.
3. Room leaders working in the universal ECCE scheme are required to hold a QQI Level 6 qualification.
4. Formerly known as the free preschool year, originally introduced in 2010.

REIMAGINING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE IN IRELAND

A competent system and a public good



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The early childhood sector in Ireland has undergone constant and substantial policy changes for almost two decades, from John Coolahan's 1998 'Report on the National Forum for Early Childhood Education', which led to the publication of the white paper 'Ready to Learn' and the National Childcare Strategy, to the publication of the long-awaited *Early Years Strategy* in November 2018.¹

Like in other countries, policy developments in Ireland have responded to, and reflect, wider societal and socioeconomic changes. Ireland has seen two decades of unprecedented efforts to develop, expand, and sustain better quality for children and families in a highly fragmented sector, with many actors following diverse agendas and pursuing often contradictory interests.

Despite these efforts, major challenges remain unresolved in four key areas: governance of the system at all levels, resourcing and funding, fragmentation of services, and over-reliance on a supposed 'market'. Together, these result in a system that is not fit for purpose: it denies children's rights to high-quality early childhood experiences, neglects families' rights to reliable and affordable services, perpetuates unacceptable working conditions for educators, and fails to address the needs of a fast-changing and diverse society. How can these challenges be addressed?

Here I argue that radical culture change is necessary, inevitable, and possible. I offer a preliminary appreciation and analysis of the government's recently published early years strategy *First 5*, and lay out steps towards an early childhood system based on rights, oriented by values of democracy and diversity, and understood as a public good and a public responsibility.

SETTING THE SCENE

I have noted the substantial policy changes in Ireland's early childhood sector this century. As recently as 2004, the OECD found that 'National policy for the early education and care of young children in Ireland is still in its initial stages' (OECD, 2004). The report concluded that much needs to be done:

Significant energies and funding will need to be invested in the field to create a system in tune with the needs of a full employment economy and with new understandings of how young children develop and learn.

The challenges at hand are confirmed by internal experts who took part in the international study 'Strategies for Change' in 2004–05 (Urban, 2006, 2007). For example:

The 'Early Childhood Care and Education' (ECCE) Sector in Ireland is as interesting as it is bewildering in its evolution, structure, diversity, quality, inequality, key players and controlling interests. (Murray, 2006)

In 2015, a European Commission report on Ireland's macroeconomic context painted a picture of major challenges, especially for working parents trying to access childcare services of acceptable quality in the private and voluntary sector:

The scattered provisions for childcare support are complicated and difficult to navigate. The shortcomings of current provisions relate mainly to a combination of low payment rates for childcare providers, limited knowledge of the scheme and practical obstacles to accessing after-school care (geographical or administrative). In an attempt to increase the quality of services, a new National Quality Support Service will commence in 2015 with a limited budget and small staff. No budget was allocated to up-skill childcare staff beyond minimum qualifications. Childcare programmes generally fail to have a significant impact on increasing access to affordable and quality childcare, particularly for low-income families. The recently set up inter-departmental group on childcare might be seen as a platform to develop more comprehensive solutions to this problem. (pp. 60–61)

Ten different government departments share some responsibility for the [early childhood] sector.

PROGRESS IN KEY AREAS – BUT SYSTEMIC CHALLENGES REMAIN

Despite this rather bleak analysis, considerable progress has been made in key areas: the general regulation of the sector (Office of the Minister for Children, 2006), the framing of quality of provision (CECDE, 2006), content (NCCA, 2009), quality assurance (Better Start, DCYA, 2015; Early Years Education Inspectors, DES, 2016) and the development of the workforce as laid out in the call for proposals for this project. However, rapid change does not necessarily result in sustainable transformation (Hayes et al., 2013).

Any strategy to reform the sector can only be meaningful if it takes the entire system into account (European Commission, 2011) and builds on its ability and willingness to transform itself into a competent system (Urban et al., 2012). What are the central challenges for the Irish early childhood system? In a report commissioned by the Department of Education and Skills (Urban et al., 2017), we summarised them under four headings:

Governance: The CoRe project, 'Competence Requirements in Early Childhood Education and Care' (Urban et al., 2011), has shown that competent professional practice can only unfold in an environment where knowledge, practices, and values are coherent across all levels, including governance and administration. It is challenging to see how this can be achieved when 'a myriad of institutions' (Murray, 2017, with reference to Dr Thomas Walsh, NUI Maynooth) – i.e., ten different government departments – share some responsibility for the sector.²

Resourcing: Despite increased government spending, the early childhood sector remains critically under-resourced, and there has been a tendency to prioritise short-term incentives for parents over structural investment in services. This has led to unsustainable working conditions and levels of pay for staff, and to services that are unaffordable for users.

Fragmentation: Despite attempts to develop coherence across service provision for children and families, the sector remains divided between childcare and early education services. These follow different logics and interests, making it difficult to develop individual and collective professional identity and representation across the sector. The most problematic consequence of this is that it has prevented the various interest groups from coming together under a shared vision for all children, families, and professionals.

Marketisation: Reliance on private for-profit providers, especially in the so-called childcare part of the sector, puts significant strain on public finances without delivering quality for all (OECD, 2001, 2006; Lloyd and Penn, 2012). It also maintains a fundamental dilemma for the formation of the roles and identities of service providers, many of them owner-managers of small services (see Start Strong, 2014).

A WELCOME ROADMAP AND SOME CRITICAL QUESTIONS

Each of the systemic challenges above requires attention and concrete action. Moreover, they reinforce each other. Is there hope? I write this at a crucial point in time. Fundamental decisions about the future of the sector can't be postponed much longer. So the long-awaited early years strategy published in November 2018 is very welcome. 'First 5: A whole-of-government strategy for babies, young children and their families' (DCYA, 2018) introduces much-needed clarity to the debate.

Reliance on private for-profit providers... puts considerable strain on public finances without delivering quality for all.

First, it takes a holistic, integrated approach, setting out a vision, a roadmap, specific objectives, and concrete actions under four interconnected areas.³ Second, it includes ongoing, processual evaluation, which may allow for necessary recalibration during implementation. Both are crucial elements of a systemic, emergent, and reflective approach to developing a complex and dynamic system. The strategy includes explicit focus on research and acknowledges the need to invest in research infrastructure and capacity. A first concrete step, announced in the strategy, will be the establishment of an Irish early childhood observatory (First 5 research observatory).

All these are important steps towards a competent system; they deserve our full support and constructive engagement. However, while First 5 points in the right direction, it also gives reason for caution, critical interrogation, and debate.

If the clue is in the name, what does 'First 5' tell us about its positioning of the early childhood sector? The internationally adopted definition of early childhood refers to children from birth to eight years. This means our focus, as a profession and academic discipline, cannot and should not be defined

by the set-up of the settings or institutions in which children may find themselves.

A baby or toddler might be cared for in the home, by immediate or extended family, in a crèche, or by a combination of nurturing, caring, and supporting arrangements, regardless of their country of birth. A five-year-old, however, will be either in an early childhood setting (kindergarten, preschool) or in the compulsory school system, in primary school.

The international definition enables and challenges us to treat primary school as an early childhood institution that requires our attention as much as preschool. As a space for children provided by society, its values and practices must be holistic, nurturing, loving, based on children's rights, and addressed to the whole child in all their diversity. Does the age limitation implied by the name 'First 5' imply a conceptual demarcation between preschool and school, between departmental responsibilities, between present and future models of the workforce (early childhood *practitioners* as opposed to *teachers*)? I don't accept this to be the case, but it deserves our critical engagement.

A second urgent question arises from First 5's change of terminology referring to the sector: after years of slow shift from *childcare* over *early childhood care and education* (ECCE) to *early childhood education and care* (ECEC), the strategy now refers to the *early learning and care* (ELC) sector. ECCE, the umbrella term adopted by many Irish policy documents, led to confusion with the 'free' preschool scheme with the same acronym. ECEC is adopted internationally (e.g., in EU council conclusions and the EU Quality Framework). Does introducing ELC imply deviation from international consensus? Does the new emphasis on *learning* imply distancing from *education*?

A first concrete step, announced in the strategy, will be the establishment of an Irish early childhood observatory.

Thirdly, First 5 rightly identifies the need for a strong and highly qualified early-childhood workforce capable of building the effective system at which the strategy is aiming. The critical question is whether introducing a new defining term for the sector implies yet another attempt to define the collective professional identity from an external position, without debate or meaningful consultation. Is this the best way to build an 'appropriately skilled and sustainable professional workforce that is supported and valued and reflects the diversity of babies, young children and their families' (DCYA, 2018, p.160)? Is an 'appropriately skilled' workforce different from a *professional* one, and if so, what does that imply?

There are good reasons why everyone in the Irish early childhood sector should engage with these questions. They remind us that education and care are political practices stemming from profound political questions, with often conflicting answers from which political and democratic choices must be made:

- What does it mean to be a child, to live and grow up in our society?
- What is the purpose of early childhood services?
- What is the relationship between the private (family) and the public (society)?

- What are fundamental values?
- What do we mean by education? For example, is it learning oriented towards readiness for school and transition to the next phase, or fulfilment of the potential of every child, from birth, to be a whole person with physical, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual capacity? Definitions include what Freire meant by *Educação*: a political, emancipatory practice of liberation and transformation.
- Who has a say in defining, exploring, and answering these questions? Whose voices are heard, and by whom, and whose continue to be silenced?

These questions are preliminary and not exhaustive. Others will add their own. How we engage with the critical questions will ultimately decide whether First 5 will be the success it needs to be. How should we approach and frame our critical engagement? Below are four suggestions.

EARLY CHILDHOOD AS A PUBLIC GOOD AND PUBLIC RESPONSIBILITY

We should engage in a broad public debate about the purpose and values of early childhood services in Ireland. One of my favourite nursery schools from my previous professional life, in Tottenham, asks new parents about their dreams and hopes for their children. All the collected dreams are on display in the hall.

I think we need this exercise as a country: what are our dreams and hopes for young children? Who, and what, do we think early childhood services are for? Who resists change because they benefit from the status quo? What do we want early childhood services to be and achieve in society? Individually and collectively, we must clarify our position and take a stand.

We have a shared public responsibility for the lives of all children from birth... There is no such thing as 'other people's children'.

To start, we should recognise that early childhood services are a common good that benefits all children, families, and society. We have a shared public responsibility for the lives of all children from birth, and for the cohesion of the society we want to live in. There is no such thing as 'other people's children'.

EARLY CHILDHOOD INSTITUTIONS AS PUBLIC, NOT PRIVATE, SERVICES

If the current structure of the sector is not fit for purpose, what are the alternatives? Much evidence shows that a sector that relies on a business model cannot, long-term, deliver the common good (OECD, 2001, 2006; Penn, 2011; Lloyd and Penn, 2012; Urban and Rubiano, 2015). Quality as experienced by children and families tends to be low (or variable at best), access and outcomes unequal, costs high, working conditions unsustainable, governance and regulation onerous. How the government's early years strategy is oriented serves to acknowledge this.

So we need to fundamentally rethink how early-years services are provided in Ireland – and by whom. What would a deprivatised, genuinely public sector look like? Soviet-style *kinderkombinat* institutions in each county? Certainly not. Any appropriate solution would build on the system's strengths: the profound connectedness of services and professionals to the

local community, and their knowledge of the rights, hopes, capabilities, and needs of the community that is often their own. Services would be diverse and decentralised (as now) but publicly resourced and coordinated.

INTEGRATED SERVICES

While grounded in local communities, services must also be highly integrated to cater for the rights of all children, families, and communities. In Ireland we are struggling to overcome the deep conceptual and institutional divide between childcare and early childhood education (Van Laere et al., 2012). Progress has been made. It is now widely accepted that education starts at birth and care does not stop at the primary school gate.

Now we must ensure that this holistic, rights-based approach to caring for and educating all children is reflected at all levels of the system, including governance. If we take our public responsibility for children seriously, we must think about integration on a much broader scale. Health, nutrition, physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being should be included, integral to the services available to all young children and their families.

A STRATEGY FOR THE STRATEGY, BUT FIRST A VISION

The new early years strategy can provide much-needed orientation for the next decade. The time frame is important because it makes it possible to escape the short-termism of electoral cycles and the temptations of quick fixes and election giveaways. This approach brings Ireland in line with an emerging global consensus on the importance of long-term, systemic policies to reform and develop early childhood systems (Powers and Paulsell, 2018; Urban et al., 2018).

The new early years strategy can provide much-needed orientation for the next decade.

What are the implications for Ireland? I want to be radically positive and say it can become the road map for the system change I believe we need: from a fragmented, marketised, dysfunctional system to a fully integrated public service for all children and families, regardless of

their legal status, ethnicity, perceived ability, economic status, or any other artificial distinction. Exclusion is not an option.

I fully support the ambition, laid out in First 5, to develop fully integrated services for children and families in Ireland. We should aim high: five years from now, there will be a fully integrated early childhood development, education and care hub in each county. These will offer some services in-house, and will proactively coordinate many services in the region, in diverse settings: pre- and postnatal care, parental support and advice, infant health care, sessional and drop-in childcare, and early childhood education. They will reach out to all families in the area and work closely with other services and professionals providing child and family support.

The implications are huge. To start with, we must overcome silo mentality and competition. We will need a highly qualified (and sufficiently paid) professional workforce, able to collaborate across professional and disciplinary boundaries. We must recognise that coordination and communication across differences are essential competences, and we must create new support structures and roles to reflect the task. But Ireland does not face these challenges alone. We can learn from other countries.

STRATEGIC ALLIANCES: THE EARLY CHILDHOOD RESEARCH CENTRE AT DCU

The publication of *First 5* coincides with the launch of the new interdisciplinary Early Childhood Research Centre (ECRC) at Dublin City University. In my new role as Desmond Chair of Early Childhood Education, I have the privilege to direct this unique venture. As the sector enters a critical new phase, we aim to support practice and policy through our key activities:

- With a global network of research collaborations, we can connect the local and the global at all levels of the early childhood system: practice, policy, research, theory.
- We will investigate the big picture without losing sight of the child, the family, the educator in that picture.
- We will respond and contribute to the developing Irish ECEC context and work with all stakeholders to provide information and evidence, conduct systemic evaluation, offer constructive critique, and suggest viable alternatives.

I am convinced that our new centre will contribute strongly to building much-needed early childhood research capacity in Ireland, grounded in local and global collaborations. We already provide a world-class environment for international and Irish doctoral and post-doctoral researchers, and for research-based teaching and professional development. We aspire to be a focal point for debate and imagination, towards an early childhood system that provides more equitable outcomes for everyone. Most of all, we see our centre as an open invitation for shared thinking and collegial collaboration.

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FOOTNOTES

1. Policy milestones since 1998 include: National Forum for Early Childhood Education (1998); White Paper Ready to Learn (1999); National Childcare Strategy (1999); National Children's Strategy (2000); Model Framework for Education, Training and Professional Development (2002); Siolta: National Framework for Quality (2004); National Economic and Social Forum Early Childhood Care and Education report (2005); Diversity and Equality and Inclusion Guidelines for Early Childhood Care and Education (2006, revised 2016); and Aistear: Early Childhood Curriculum Framework

(2009). The most recent milestone is the publication of the early years strategy First 5 in November 2018.

2. Departments of: Children and Youth Affairs; Education; Finance; Public Expenditure and Reform; Health; Justice, Equality and Law Reform; Health Service Executive; Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht; the Environment, Community and Local Government; and Social Protection.
3. Strong and supportive families and communities; Optimum physical and mental health; Positive play-based early learning; An effective early childhood system.

Ireland's first Early Childhood Research Centre

On 19 November 2018, Minister for Children and Youth Affairs Katherine Zappone launched Ireland's first ever dedicated research centre for early childhood at the DCU Institute of Education.

The centre will actively promote close collaboration between research, policy and practice in the field, both nationally and internationally, and will build upon the existing expertise of the DCU Institute of Education, which provides teacher education and research for every level of education.

The establishment of the Early Childhood Research Centre follows on from the appointment by DCU of Professor Mathias Urban as the Desmond Chair in Early Childhood Education in September 2017. It was made possible through the generosity of businessman and philanthropist Dermot Desmond.

This is the only early childhood research chair at an Irish university and aims to spearhead research that will have a transformative impact on public policy and practice in this sector.

Speaking at the launch of the Centre, Minister Katherine Zappone said:

"The establishment of the Early Childhood Research Centre and the appointment of a Chair in Early Childhood Education are very welcome developments. Professor Urban is a renowned leader in this field and I commend DCU for making this appointment. I look forward to the valuable work being undertaken here to help further inform policies which will deliver for generations of Irish families to come."

Professor Urban, who will lead the ECRC, is a world thought leader in the field of early childhood research, renowned for his contributions in international early childhood policy and professional practice.

He most recently presented to the 2018 T20 Summit (Think 20 – a network of research institutes and think tanks for the G20 countries) in Buenos Aires, where he highlighted that early childhood education requires a more coordinated approach to governance, resourcing, professional preparation and evaluation.

Access to high quality early childhood development, education and care is recognised as key to achieving the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

The ECRC will continue to lead the early childhood policy brief during Japan's presidency of the 2019 G20 summit.

Speaking at the event, DCU President Brian MacCraith said:

"DCU is committed to engaging in research that will have a transformative impact on lives and societies. We were proud to establish the Desmond Chair in Early Childhood Education... The establishment of the research centre is a reflection of our commitment to the area of early childhood education."



Mathias Urban, Desmond Chair of Early Childhood Education, DCU; **Anne Looney**, Executive Dean, Institute of Education, DCU; **Dermot Desmond**, Philanthropist; **Brian MacCraith**, President, DCU, at the launch of Ireland's first ever Early Childhood Research Centre.

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PRIMARY



Members of Ógras with President Michael D Higgins and his wife Sabina, at BEO - *Gaelach agus Bródúil* - the main event of Bliain na Gaeilge 2018 in Dublin on April 14.

PRIMARY CONTENTS

OVERVIEW OF PRIMARY EDUCATION IN 2018-2019

Empowering school leaders to manage change

Páirc Clerkin & Geraldine D'Arcy

In this overview of 2018, the authors hail as a resounding success the work of the Centre for School Leadership in its development of a model of professional learning for leadership. On the other hand, regarding the deluge of initiatives landing on their desks from the Department, they believe principals must say no unless these initiatives directly support the priorities identified for schools.

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THE CHALLENGING ROLE OF THE IRISH TEACHING PRINCIPAL

How the system can help

Anna Mai Rooney

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SPECIALISING IN PRIMARY PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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DISCOVERING GEMS

Authentic listening to the 'voice' of experience in teaching pupils with autism

Carol-Ann O'Síoráin

The authors imply that we may have more to learn when it comes to teaching and learning in autism classrooms. They question the notion that applying evidence-based scientific programmes for autism-specific intervention is the sole 'best-practice' approach for schools. To support their view, they present a case study of Susan, a teacher who showed exceptional practice. Susan worked and planned from the mainstream curriculum with differentiation and responsive teaching, and presented an interpretation of literacy and being literate as 'identity and connecting'.

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GOING BACK TO SCHOOL FOR 150 YEARS

A time for reflection

Sheila Nunan

Much has changed in the 150 years since the INTO was founded in 1868. But some issues, such as pay equality, teacher supply, and classroom size, remain as pressing as ever. The anniversary offers an opportunity to reflect on progress made and problems still to be solved.

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Páirc Clerkin

CEO, IPPN



Geraldine D'Arcy

Research &
Publications Manager,
IPPN

OVERVIEW OF PRIMARY EDUCATION IN 2018-2019

A challenging year of relentless change

The wide variety of contexts being managed by more than 6,500 school leaders of Irish primary schools means that any attempt at an overview of the sector will likely omit or inadequately represent some crucial aspect for practitioners. Having said that, the past year has been particularly challenging with two key initiatives – revised child protection guidelines, and GDPR – landing in schools with little or no preamble, and certainly little appreciation for the complexities and impact they would bring to bear. Coupled with new inspection models, ongoing review of the curriculum, the Digital Learning Framework, increasing expectations from all stakeholders, and a minister who had an action plan for every aspect of education, it's fair to say that this year has been incredibly intense for all primary school leaders, teachers, and others working in the sector.

Let's look at just a few examples of what has been happening in primary education over the past year or so. Hurricane Ophelia led to much discussion about school closures and mitigating actions with boards of management and parents. The review of the role of SNA highlights both challenges and opportunities to improve the way supports are offered to children with special educational needs in our schools. Investing in primary education – an initiative led by the management bodies of primary schools – brought much-needed focus and attention to the deficits of the capitation and ancillary services grants in primary schools. The minister's pronouncements on ASD classes in schools and the perception that schools weren't willing to provide for them caused a furore. Our esteemed colleague Professor John Coolahan passed away after an illness bravely borne and is much missed.

This year brought two key celebrations: the 150th anniversary of the Irish National Teachers' Organisation and the 40th anniversary of Educate Together. Both organisations can take huge pride in their individual and collective history in advancing primary education in Ireland. School divestment continues to pose significant challenges, not least the very slow pace in divesting of patronage to non- and multi-denominational patrons. The discontinuation of the so-called 'baptism barrier', the consultation on the primary curriculum, and the re-emergence of School Self-Evaluation, a much-valued planning tool, were welcomed in many quarters.

There were some significant challenges and changes in the sector that warrant a little more attention.

TEACHER SUPPLY

There is direct evidence that the availability of substitute teachers at primary level has become increasingly challenging, and is getting

much worse over time. This is confirmed through surveys conducted by IPPN and CPSMA as well as the Teaching Council's report 'Striking the Balance'. The report noted significant issues in primary education, including the fact that only 64% of absences were claimed for by schools. A key conclusion in the report noted 'significant concerns regarding the efficiency and effectiveness of the current substitute teacher system' and that 'there is a risk that this dysfunction can have a negative impact on the quality of pupil learning'. Schools, and particularly principals, are dealing with the shortfall, and with the consequences.

There are many possible explanations for the reduced number of substitute teachers, including population growth, regulation (which can restrict the availability of teachers), economic factors, and improved pupil-teacher ratios. While many schools have had significant difficulty finding available and suitably qualified substitute teachers, Irish-language schools, special schools, island schools, those situated in remote locations, and one-teacher schools have severe difficulty on an ongoing basis.

The DES has taken measures to address issues relating to the shortage of substitute teachers in the short term. However, more needs to be done if schools are to see an improvement in the challenges they face in this regard, particularly in the longer term. This requires collaboration between the DES, the Teaching Council, and the teacher training colleges to ensure an adequate supply of trained teachers in the future. There are a number of potential solutions that would alleviate the shortage of substitute teachers over the next few years, while the crisis is at its worst:

The availability of substitute teachers is getting much worse over time.

- Key to resolving the issue is the creation of supply teacher panels, to ensure that trained subs are available regionally, as this would offer security to new graduates and provide cover for the leadership days of teaching principals. Restoring pay equality for new entrants to the profession would also help retain newly qualified teachers in Ireland.
- The teaching practice element of the fourth year of the Bachelor of Education could be considered as an *internship*. This would allow for greater flexibility in the redeployment of host teachers, including flexibility to cover for their colleagues' absences.
- More flexibility could allow teachers qualified in other jurisdictions, as well as retired teachers, to undertake substitute teaching.
- Clearing redeployment panels earlier.

CHILD PROTECTION GUIDELINES

Legislation enacted in December 2017 mandated schools to get up to speed with complex legal requirements for child protection, Risk Assessment, and the Child Safeguarding Statement by March 2018. Despite the deadline, online and face-to-face training was not available to all schools and mandated persons until after the deadline, which created significant unrest. The legislation and the procedures for child protection are critically important, and they should help safeguard and protect both children and school staff into the future, ensuring that all schools implement best practice in a consistent and transparent way.

GENERAL DATA PROTECTION GUIDELINES

As with all organisations throughout the European Union, schools too have been affected by the new EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). GDPR gives data subjects the right to request from schools whatever data is being stored about them and to withdraw consent to its use, effectively ordering its destruction. According to Article 12, this request must be free of charge, easy to make, and fulfilled within one month. However, a school is entitled to hold lawfully obtained data about pupils in order to carry out its business. Coming so soon after new child protection legislation and guidelines, GDPR has put considerable pressure on schools, as well as those organisations that support them.

SCHOOL ACCOUNTS

2018/2019 will be the first year for annual school accounts to be prepared using the standardised national template, in order to fulfil obligations under Section 18 of the Education Act, 1998. All accounts for this school year must be submitted to the Financial Services Support Unit (FSSU) by the end of February 2020.

The Centre for School Leadership pilot CPD project has been a resounding success.

This will create challenges in those schools whose systems may not readily accommodate the requirements of the template. A key challenge for such schools will be the capacity and skills to take remedial action in a timely manner. It is likely that smaller schools will be disproportionately affected, as they have far less administrative support and also less funding for software and other financial and administrative resources.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT CIRCULAR

Circular 63/2017 – Leadership and Management in Primary Schools, issued in September 2017, is a leap forward for school leadership and management. Two key aspects are the facility to recruit a teacher from outside the existing staff for the role of deputy principal, and a partial restoration of promoted posts and middle-leadership capacity. Seniority is no longer a criterion for promotion to a post of responsibility, and there is flexibility to meet the needs of the school.

While larger schools have not benefited from the restoration of promoted posts, overall it heralds an excellent opportunity to develop a real and genuine distributive leadership in our schools. There is an appreciation of the reasons behind the Department prioritising smaller schools in the restoration of posts, but all schools need to be in a position to develop and grow their leadership and management capacity at a time of relentless change.

CENTRE FOR SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

School leaders rightly expect a coordinated approach to high-quality CPD provision. The Centre for School Leadership, CSL, formed in 2015, has consulted with all stakeholders on the design of a ‘continuum’ of professional learning for school leaders.

The pilot project has been a resounding success. One-to-one and group mentoring, leadership coaching, and the Postgraduate Diploma in School Leadership (PDSL) are going from strength to strength. The centre's current work in the development of an Irish model of professional learning for leadership along the continuum, together with CSL's quality assurance remit, will support the Irish education system to provide professional learning of the highest quality for school leaders. CSL has achieved a huge amount over the past few years. It is time now for CSL to be established on a permanent footing and for future provision to be expanded to include all deputy principals in our primary schools.

We must say no to initiatives unless they directly support the priorities we have identified for our schools.

IMPROVEMENTS IN FUNDING

The past year has seen a number of improvements in the primary sector, which should be acknowledged:

- The pupil-teacher ratio, at 26:1, is now at its lowest-ever level. We need to build on this improvement to bring Ireland into line with the best education systems, if we are to achieve the Minister's stated aim of being the best in Europe by 2025.
- An increase in the number of 'leadership and management days', also known as 'release days', available to the almost 60% of principals who teach full-time – teaching principals – was introduced for the 2018/2019 school year. Teaching principals now have 17–29 non-teaching days per year, depending on the number of mainstream class teachers in their schools. We need to urgently progress to *at least* one day per week for all teaching principals if we are to genuinely facilitate and empower the leadership and management of our smaller schools.
- The Leadership and Management Circular brought much-needed improvement to middle leadership capacity. All schools now need to be enabled to develop their capacity to lead and manage the school, and to provide much-needed support to school leaders.

CALENDAR OF REFORM

Over the past number of years, it has been assumed that school leaders will lead reform and manage the constant stream of change, not to mention heightened expectations. Systems thrive on accountability and measurement, but children thrive on stimulating, teaching, and learning. The needs of children must always win out over those of any system.

A 'calendar of reform' is long overdue, whereby there is genuine thought and collaboration right across the sector in prioritising and resourcing multi-year system change programmes, if for no other reason than to ensure that change is fully embedded and efforts not wasted. All of the education partners and agencies need to engage in open and transparent dialogue about the change agenda. There needs to be an agreed multi-year plan and timescale to manage the pace of change, beginning with clear *priorities across the sector*. For a start, school leaders need time to implement and embed the significant change that is *already* taking place in our schools. We welcome the Department's setting up of the Primary Education Forum, which aims to 'support the planning and sequencing of

change in the primary sector' and seems to be along very similar lines to the ideas outlined above on a calendar of reform.

As school leaders, we also need to consider how we manage the pace of change in our schools, to embrace the autonomy the school leadership role offers, and to ensure that our School Improvement Plan and School Self-Evaluation work are the priorities we live by. This is why 'empowering school leaders to manage change' is so important. Schools, and school leaders, need to insist that the priorities we are focusing on remain the priorities we work to, regardless of what initiatives and programmes are launched, communicated, or promoted by external parties.

We must protect the positive learning environments in our schools by saying no to initiatives unless they *directly* support the priorities we have identified for our schools. Schools have a significant amount of autonomy, and we should exercise it – to control our response to events rather than allowing events to control us.

CONCLUSION

It is clear that something has to change, as school leaders and school staffs are under considerable pressure. There is a danger that the change agenda will undermine the positive learning environments which have been built up over a number of years in our schools. The development of a calendar of reform, proposed here, is crucial if we are to empower school leaders and build capacity and sustainability in the primary sector.



Jim Hayes, IPPN Founding President, is presented with a bronze plaque by IPPN Board member **Íde Ní Dhúbháin**, in recognition of his IPPN presidency and his contribution to primary education and school leadership. The plaque is inscribed with the mission statement of IPPN 'Tacaíocht, Misneach, Spreagadh'.

THE CHALLENGING ROLE OF THE TEACHING PRINCIPAL IN IRELAND

How the system can help



Anna Mai Rooney

Deputy Director
Primary, Centre for
School Leadership

In the ever-changing landscape of modern education, school leaders, now more than ever, require the skills and expertise to manage change, maximise school improvement, and ensure the best possible learning experiences and outcomes for their students. They are responsible for developing the teaching and learning in their school to prepare students adequately for the infinite possibilities facing them in a complex twenty-first-century world.

57% of primary school principals in Ireland are teaching, and therefore have full teaching responsibility for a single class, a mixed class, or groups of children accessing special education teaching. These teaching duties, in addition to the task of leading the school community, have become an almost impossible burden for those who find themselves in this position.

In a recent study of the role, 77% of principals interviewed said they felt that the role of the teaching principal is unsustainable in the long term; interestingly, 72% of teachers said the same. 45% of principals said they would not be in the role in ten years' time, due to increasing workload, burnout, and demands on personal life (Salmon, 2016).¹

Education stakeholders have been listening continuously to the challenges experienced by teaching principals and have made repeated representation to government for increased release time as a priority. Many believe, however, that not enough is being done. Feedback to the Centre for School Leadership (CSL) referred to the 'overwhelming workload' and the 'hugely challenging and very lonely role', which gives an insight into the frustration felt by principals trying to juggle teaching and management duties and to show positive leadership in their school community.

Although teaching principals welcome and appreciate the significant supports in the system from the professional, union, management, and trust bodies, and the support services, alongside the mentoring and coaching supports available from the Department through CSL, there is a need for additional scaffolding to support their role.

SMALL SCHOOLS: THE PROS AND CONS

For many years now, the future of small schools in Ireland has been analysed, and closures, amalgamations, and clustering or federation possibilities have been examined. In the DES report 'Value for Money Review of Small Primary Schools', published in 2013,² the reasons given historically for the number of small primary schools in Ireland included population diversity, geographical factors, and (to a much lesser extent) minority linguistic and denominational groupings. The

main concerns expressed were how important the small school is to its local community, and the distance children would have to travel to get to school.

Internationally, the evidence suggests that small schools do indeed have a real and positive local effect. In Finland, where the number of small schools has decreased significantly since 1992, research into their closures brought the following conclusion:

A safe, small school is fundamental to a pleasant community. The school is more than just a place to educate children; it influences the community's well-being. ... Closing a village school accelerates the withering of life in the surrounding countryside, reduces the 'immigration attraction' of the village, potentially increases emigration, and leads to a downward spiral in which the remaining services in the village are terminated.³

Feedback to the Centre for School Leadership referred to the 'overwhelming workload' and the 'very lonely role' [of the teaching principal].

The current debate in Ireland on the closure of Garda stations and post offices would be significantly heightened by the closure of local schools, leaving no plan for the development and growth of rural Ireland, abandoning it to quiet residential areas with no prospects of employment or population growth. As the DES review points out, however, 'the community role of a school must be viewed in the context that the central role of a school is to provide education to children, and this is the objective against which the effectiveness and efficiency of provision should be assessed'.⁴

The committee in charge of putting the report together then turned towards the performance of small schools, in consultation with the Inspectorate. Their research found that small schools' success in teaching and learning, and outcomes for their students, were on a par with larger schools. It is a widely accepted fact that the education provided by Irish small schools is of the highest standard.

While there is no doubt about the high standards of teaching and learning, there are many questions to be asked about the well-being of the teaching principal who is expected to lead and maintain them. The demands of modern education in relation to compliance, diversity, inclusion, and expectations, alongside the social and economic challenges that exist for families, make the teaching principal's role challenging in the extreme. HayGroup (2003) concludes: 'the significant proportion of small schools within the system places considerable pressures on the ability of teaching principals within these schools to effectively deliver the leadership aspects of their role'.⁵ It raises the question of what can be done to assist them. How can the system better support them?

HOW CAN THE SYSTEM SUPPORT THE TEACHING PRINCIPAL?

According to Salmon (2016), teaching principals said they urgently need extended secretarial support, release time increased to a minimum of one

day a week (supported by clusters of schools joining together for substitute access), and the possible solution of an administrative principal for clusters of small schools.⁶

While the extra secretarial support and one release day per week would certainly improve workload issues, it is interesting that this much-sought-after improvement in conditions is not seen as sufficient to effectively address the demands of the role. Principals taking part in a study by Murdoch and Schiller (2002) reported that even with extra release time, they had to arrange their role so that they no longer had responsibility for a class: ‘Nobody can serve two masters. You can’t work in a classroom for the simple fact that there is too much administration to do.’⁷ In this study, principals in New South Wales in Australia already had full-time secretarial support if they had 50 students or more, and many part-time clerical assistants were working many additional hours voluntarily to support the principal and staff. These assistants felt ‘frustrated that they were not able to offer the degree of support that they felt was needed to enable teaching and learning to be the highest priority’.

FEDERATION OPTIONS

Work by Williams (2008) in the former National Centre for School Leadership (NCSL) in Nottingham brought the many federation options to the fore. She looked at all levels of federations, from the informal to the formal, and their impact on school communities. Informal federations work collaboratively to share best practice, learn from each other, and develop policy together. Formal federations have an administrative head teacher in charge of more than one school. They share governance and appointments and make joint budgetary decisions. Schools which formally become part of a federation usually have a history of collaboration:

A move to federations would ensure that small schools remain a vibrant part of their local community.

With these stable federations, there existed a prior history of collaboration between the schools, a common culture shared by the communities, and the schools are in fairly close proximity to one another.⁸

In the Irish context, a move to federations would ensure that small schools remain a vibrant part of their local community. Federations might begin when a principal teacher retires or seeks to step down. In the latter case, adequate terms and conditions are essential. The school could then be supported to collaborate with another small school locally. No new principal would be recruited, and the principal of a neighbouring school of a similar size and context would be offered the opportunity to become administrative to effectively manage the two schools. Both boards of management would remain until the next changeover of boards, at which point the federation would organise a joint board with representatives from both schools. This may not be necessary, however: some respondents to Williams’ research felt that ‘by having totally separate governing bodies, the school’s individuality and identity remained undiluted and singular’.

The challenges of such an approach include the level of visibility of the principal teacher in the schools, and the skills needed by a principal to approach the role strategically. Positive perception of the federation by the school community is key. Advantages of such an approach include the opportunity to practise shared leadership, with enhanced opportunities for collaboration in teaching and learning, a culture of trust and distributed leadership, and a sustainable way to lead small schools and promote the well-being of the teaching principal.

This proposal may well present challenge for a significant number of leaders in small schools. On the other hand, many will see the potential in it to attain a better work-life balance. There are many considerations in such a proposal that need further scoping. One of these is the professional learning necessary to be principal of a federation of schools. Stakeholders working collaboratively to help the process is key. Autonomy, choice, respect, and absolute support for the schools involved are essential. A pilot project could be a beginning.

FOOTNOTES

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A CALENDAR OF REFORM

Managing the change agenda in primary schools



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For any system to effect meaningful and sustainable change, its key players must have a clear and agreed focus on the purpose of the change, an unambiguous understanding of the desired improvements or outcomes, and above all a commitment to work together at a pace that is sustainable, manageable, and deliverable.

There is no doubt that the past year has been extremely challenging for those working in the education system, particularly at primary school level. The rate and pace of change have been significant, with legislation enacted and system reform introduced. The combined impact has caused deep frustration and increased anxiety among school leaders, who feel that expectation is now superseding feasibility.

This is not a new phenomenon. For many years, school leaders have articulated their concerns and frustration about the change agenda. Let me be clear: school leaders are themselves agents of change. But conflict arises where leaders undergo enforced change, and consequently feel pulled in so many directions that they lose focus on what really matters in their own school context. This results in system overload, where change management is seen as impossible, and innovation and improvement are viewed with suspicion or rejected completely.

SYSTEM OVERLOAD

So what is causing this system overload? And what can be done to manage the change agenda in a more sustainable way, ultimately delivering better outcomes for the pupils in our schools? Is overload a relatively new phenomenon, or have school leaders simply reached breaking point? Has the system become too focused on short-term wins, to the detriment of more sustainable and focused long-term goals? Are we now more reactive than proactive?

The diversity that exists in the primary school system in Ireland means there cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach to reform. It is simply impractical to expect that reform can be centrally designed to suit a small school with a teaching principal, a special school, and a large school with an administrative principal. There are complex resourcing needs unique to so many of our primary schools that need to be considered when introducing reform, and any change agenda must address these needs.

One of the greatest frustrations articulated by primary school leaders is the uncertain and sporadic way that system change is communicated to schools. Publication of the Action Plan for

Education 2016–2019 by Minister Bruton is a very welcome (and long overdue) development, but the lack of clarity on how the plan will be delivered is frustrating.

Contrast this with the current system of school self-evaluation, where our schools identify their priority areas and clearly outline their improvement plans over a defined period based on a detailed analysis of school needs. This process means that schools are clear about the focus of their own change agenda. More importantly, the school improvement plan impacts positively on the learning needs of the pupils in each school.

Unfortunately, we do not have a similarly structured approach to reform at system level, which results in what is seen as an uncoordinated and sometimes ad hoc approach to the change agenda. Simply put, there is no plan, no published calendar, and no timeline for change, either short-term or long-term.

It is important to note that the change agenda at system level often includes departments and agencies other than the DES that influence and control change in our schools. This adds to the frustration of school leaders, who feel there is no control over where the next initiative or legislative change is coming from. When a lot of change is proposed to happen within a short period of time, this puts inevitable strain on an overwhelmed system.

IPPN has continuously highlighted the negative impact of system overload on sustainable educational reform.

And what is the effect of this current approach to system change? First of all, when schools receive notification of a new initiative, curriculum change, or legislative reform, it immediately results in an unwelcome distraction from the valuable school plan already in place. School leaders are unwittingly drawn into the lure of the proposed change, become reactive, and feel they have to divert attention immediately to the ‘new agenda’. Prioritising is disabled and focus is lost. This results in teachers and school leaders feeling undervalued, disempowered, and disconnected.

Primary school leaders often talk about the lack of time factored in to the current change agenda to embed initiatives. Valuable time spent gathering data, developing processes, and planning delivery of school improvement plans requires an embedding phase if we are to critically evaluate the impact of the improvements on pupils’ outcomes. Unfortunately, the current uncertainty about how system change is determined, and the resulting logjam that is system overload, do not provide for time to embed. This is not only counterproductive but also damaging to real progress.

IPPN, the professional body representing primary school leaders in Ireland, has continuously highlighted the negative impact of system overload on school improvement and sustainable educational reform. Its 2014 publication ‘Priorities for Principal Teachers – In Clear Focus’ set out an approach to prioritising workload which was shared with every principal, deputy principal, and board of management at that time. A calendar of reform was first proposed at the IPPN annual conference in January 2015 during the president’s address to over 1,100 school leaders and invited

guests. It was seen as innovative yet challenging to a system that has traditionally been controlled centrally.

CALENDAR OF REFORM

So what does a calendar of reform look like, and who are the key players? A calendar by definition is a timetable fixing the beginning, length, and division of time in a definite order. A calendar of reform in education would determine systemic reform in a structured, planned, and connected way that would return a sense of ownership and trust to the schools that ultimately implement change.

This idea requires commitment to significant dialogue between all education partners and agencies identified as stakeholders in systemic reform, or who currently influence the change agenda in our schools. It requires open and honest appraisal of what will best serve the needs of the Irish school system into the future, and of what is manageable in the current provision of resourcing – human and material – in our schools. Critically, a calendar of reform must complement and respect the current school self-evaluation process and not supersede the autonomy it has brought to determining individual school reform. Reform of the change agenda must never become a power play or a choice between system reform and school improvement planning.

CLEARLY DEFINED OBJECTIVES ARE VITAL

Above all, there has to be a commitment to a change agenda plan that determines future reform with clearly defined objectives. This must include both short- and long-term planning at system level, and any such planning outline must involve extensive collaboration with key stakeholders in order to establish trust. The Action Plan for Education is the obvious platform for this proposed collaboration. By accepting that a new way of mapping reform will maximise opportunities for future generations of Irish pupils, those tasked at school level with implementing and embedding improvements will feel more connected and valued if honest, generous, and meaningful conversations take place. A calendar of reform is the obvious way forward.

Leadership without Borders



Pictured at the Irish Primary Principals Network (IPPN) Conference 2018: **Dr Anne Looney**, Executive Dean, Institute of Education DCU, addressing school leaders on the topic 'Leadership without Borders'.



Seamus Mulconry

General Secretary,
Catholic Primary
Schools Management
Association (CPSMA)

IF WE WANT THE BEST, WE NEED TO INVEST

In theory, primary school education in Ireland is free. Article 42.4 of the Constitution unambiguously states:

The State shall provide for free primary education and shall endeavour to supplement and give reasonable aid to private and corporate educational initiative, and, when the public good requires it, provide other educational facilities or institutions with due regard, however, for the rights of parents, especially in the matter of religious and moral formation.

Free education, however, is a fallacy. In reality, primary school education is far from free.

The Capitation Grant is supposed to cover the day-to-day running costs of schools, including the cost of educational materials. But on average it covers just over half of these running costs. Already hard-pressed parents are contributing a not insignificant €46m a year to keep schools solvent, the lights on, water in the taps, and heating oil in the tank, not to mention educational materials.

While unacceptable, this is unsurprising given that cuts to the Capitation Grant have cost schools approximately €110 million. As the recent Chief Inspector's Report pointed out, expenditure per pupil has fallen by 15% since 2010 and at primary level is now below the OECD and EU average. Ireland now spends less per pupil than the US, UK, Belgium, Sweden, the Netherlands, Austria, Finland, and Norway.

While a recent Grant Thornton report quantified the monetary gap between the theory of free primary school education and the reality of state underfunding, it only scratches the surface of the true cost of underfunding to our primary system, and more importantly to the pupils in our schools.

The true cost of underfunding to schools is not just financial. There is also the significant opportunity cost of principals who should be focused on leading, and boards of management who should be focused on supporting teaching and learning, instead of having to focus on fundraising and financial firefighting.

It is important to note that despite having to cope with a virtual tsunami of social, curriculum, and governance changes combined with funding cuts over the last number of years, Irish primary schools have continued to deliver outstanding results.

Last year a major international study ('Progress in International Reading Literacy Study') found that Irish ten-years-olds were among the best in the world when it came to literacy, outscoring all their peers in the EU and the OECD. Just three countries were ahead of us in the global rankings.

These results demonstrate the extraordinary return on investment generated by Irish primary education. Despite the fact that we spend less per pupil than the US, UK, Belgium, Sweden, the Netherlands, Austria, Finland, and Norway, our pupils outperformed their peers in these countries.

That primary schools do so is a tribute to the quality and commitment of the teachers who teach and the principals who lead teaching and learning in our schools, and the voluntary boards of management who support them in their work.

However, Irish primary education is now operating at or near the pain barrier. Underfunding and initiative overload are putting the system and the professionals who work in it under severe pressure, at a time when social change is making running a school ever more challenging.

As Edmund Burke once observed, 'Economy is a distributive virtue, and consists not in saving but selection.' The challenge for any Minister for Finance, indeed any Minister, is to determine what use of scarce resources will generate the best return.

International study found that Irish ten-year-olds were among the best in the world in literacy.

The business case for investing in primary education is compelling. Schools have proven they can deliver great results with inadequate funding. This leads to the question of what they might achieve with adequate funds which free principals and boards of management to focus on the real work of education rather than fundraising. Failure to invest at a time when school costs (energy, insurance, etc.) are starting to rise will put even more pressure on an already creaking system.

CAPITATION GRANT

For some time, CPSMA had been aware of growing complaints among principals and boards of management that the Capitation Grant was not covering the core costs of running a school. It therefore asked Grant Thornton to analyse the financial accounts of a representative sample (5%) of Catholic primary schools for 2015 and 2016. The key findings from the Grant Thornton Report are:



Capitation vs. General Expenditure

At just under €46k, the average *capitation grant provided is insufficient to cover general expenditure*, which amounts to €91k (approximately 50% coverage). This indicates that other sources of income are being used by schools to supplement general-purpose expenditure. There is a risk that dedicated income, i.e. grants received for specific purposes, may be used by schools to address the shortfall.



Capitation & Ancillary Grants vs General Expenditure

On average, capitation and accessible ancillary services funds combined *provide coverage of approximately 53% of general expenditure*. From this, we can deduce that at minimum 47% or approximately €43k must be covered by other means.



Total Income & Expenditure Growth

On an overall basis, income has declined by 4% and expenditure has declined by 2% between 2015 and 2016, with average school income and expenditure amounting to €166k and €165k respectively.



Capitation Grant Income

Capitation grant income *represents 27% of the total income of schools and 52% of general income*. This indicates a key reliance on capitation as a critical source of income and creates the risk of exposure or financial vulnerability should the capitation grant be further reduced.

Based on the figures contained in the sample accounts, CPSMA asked Grant Thornton to provide an estimate of the total contribution of parents and local communities to local schools. Grant Thornton estimated this at over €46m (€46,572,352).

The level of underfunding of Irish primary schools, compared to our main competitors, was detailed for the first time in a 2017 working paper by the Nevin Economic Research Institute, which found: ‘the Republic spends well below the norm for advanced high-income economies when it comes to education ... the Republic’s relative spend is in the region of 80% to 82% with regard to primary education.’¹

See Eurostat Table at end of article setting out the annual expenditure on educational institutions per pupil/student based on FTE, by education level and programme orientation, 2013.

EXTRA FUNDING PRESSURES

A variety of extra and future funding pressures continue to come on stream for schools. Since 2010, the capitation grant has been cut by 15% but the consumer price index (CPI) has risen by 4.5%, which indicates that the day-to-day running costs for schools have risen over this period.

The nature of education and the level of technology have also changed: schools now have to pay for connectivity and ICT maintenance, for example. Schools now also face increases in insurance and energy costs as inflation returns to the Irish economy.

1. McDonnell, T. and Goldrick-Kelly, P. (2017) ‘Public Spending in the Republic of Ireland: A Descriptive Overview and Growth Implications’. P20. June. Nevin Economic Research Institute (NERI) Working Paper.

In addition, policy changes such as GDPR and the forthcoming Parents and Students Charter will impose costs for the secure retention of data, response to data access requests, and arbitration (which, while very worthwhile, is not inexpensive). Finally, litigation involving school is becoming more common and is adding to the financial burden faced by schools.

Commenting on the 2018 Budget, Minister Paschal Donohoe said that when formulating his budget plan, he was thinking of ‘the boys and girls in our primary schools. I see the atmosphere that they are in. I want them to have the best future possible.’

As the Irish economy is now growing strongly, the Minister for Finance has a real opportunity to turn rhetoric into reality and secure the best possible future for the pupils in our primary schools, through additional investment in primary schools to cover the full core costs of running a school.

Furthermore, the Minor Works Grant must be fixed on the Schools Grant Calendar on a permanent, non-discretionary basis and paid in a timely fashion to give school management the autonomy to plan effectively for the maintenance of school buildings.

When changes to policy are planned by government, it is essential that appropriate resources are provided to ensure that schools can deliver on these mandated policy changes. The era of unfunded mandates must end.

**The era of unfunded mandates
must end.**

If the government wants to have the best educational system in Europe, we as a nation must invest to ensure that school leaders can focus on education rather than the distraction of fundraising to cover the core costs of running schools.

Annual expenditure on educational institutions per pupil/student based on FTE, by education level and programme orientation, 2013, Euros

Primary and lower secondary education (Levels 1 and 2)

Belgium	8,723.70
Germany	7,189.30
Rep. Ireland	7,220.70
France	6,893.70
Netherlands	8,027.70
Austria	10,280.50
Finland	9,266.80
Sweden	10,938.80
UK	9,368.00
Norway	15,680.60
Switzerland	18,566.10
USA	8,515.20
Japan	7,394.70
Average	10,070.43
Average (EU)	8,836.06
Median	8,995.25
Rep. Ireland gap to median	1,774.55
Rep. Ireland (% median)	80.27%

Source: Eurostat (2017c)

Notes: 2013 data unless stated. Countries included are those where data is available and with GDP (PPP) per capita of at least US \$40,000 (2016) and population of at least 1 million. All ISCED 2011 levels excluding early childhood educational attainment.

The unweighted average, the unweighted EU average and the median all exclude the Republic of Ireland.

A negative gap means that the Republic of Ireland out-spends the comparator countries.

10 YEARS OF STATE MULTIDENOMINATIONAL SCHOOLS

Journey of the Community National School model, 2008 to 2018



Seamus Conboy

Primary Support
Officer for
Community National
Schools

Community National Schools (CNSs) are Ireland's only state-owned and state-managed primary schools. They are built on the core values of being multidenominational, equality-based, community-focused, and committed to providing excellence in education. They are under the patronage of local Education and Training Boards (ETBs). There are now fourteen CNSs across the country (see image).

In an education system that is still largely denominational, it is widely accepted that 'the inherited pattern of school patronage no longer satisfies the educational needs and rights of many citizens' (Coolahan et al., 2012, p.33). Only 4 per cent of primary schools in Ireland are 'multidenominational', and 45 per cent of those are in Dublin.

As a potential remedy for this, CNSs are expected to grow significantly across the country over the coming years. This could happen through a combination of establishing new schools and the 'Reconfiguration Process', whereby a school changes its ethos from denominational to multidenominational. The Action Plan for Education 2018 aims to have 400 multidenominational or non-denominational schools in Ireland by 2030 (DES, 2018).



Community National Schools across Ireland

THE JOURNEY FROM 2008 TO 2018

A press release in 2007 announcing the establishment of the CNS model outlined its vision:

The new schools will be open to children of all religions and none. They will be interdenominational in character, aiming for religious education and *faith formation during the school day* for each of the main faith groups represented. A general ethics programme will also be available for children whose parents opt for that and the schools will operate through an ethos of *inclusiveness and respect for all beliefs*, both religious and non-religious (Mary Hanifin, December 2007).

While the CNS model today is still true to being inclusive and having equal respect for all children, it has evolved significantly since this original vision. These developments have come from learning through the experiences at school level. From the outset, the principals, teachers, and managers of the schools were fully committed to creating an inclusive environment for all children. Many undertook postgraduate studies in areas like intercultural education and religious diversity and shared the learning with the other schools at network meetings. The schools quickly began to grow in confidence, and all thrived in the areas that they served.

CHALLENGES

The Community National Schools soon became the schools of choice for parents in the communities where they were located. However, when patronage of the schools officially transferred from the Minister to ETBs in 2016, the model faced a number of challenges. Because the schools were originally established as ‘emergency schools’, there was limited time to tease out the vision for a multid denominational state model of primary education. This meant that the schools responded to the requests and needs of their own communities in the absence of a clearly set out framework.

The Community National schools... all thrived in the areas that they served.

By 2015, the GMGY (Goodness Me, Goodness You) programme had been developed from junior infants to second class only. It was aligned with the original vision that the schools would provide both generic religious education and religious instruction for all within the school day. This meant that the children were all taught the GMGY programme together for most of the year. They then separated into their different religious or belief groups for four weeks a year to learn more about their own beliefs. This was called ‘belief-specific teaching’ (BST). During this time, Catholic children participated in ‘sacramental education’ and were prepared for Communion and Confirmation.

School experiences in this practice varied greatly. In the vast majority of cases, BST was found to be at odds with the overall ethos of the school. Therefore, various practices developed across the model. Over time, some schools moved away from separating children into different belief groups, and moved sacramental preparation to outside the school day. In other schools, the parish required Catholic children to do more than four weeks of BST a year, and Catholic children were withdrawn from GMGY once a week for sacramental education. Although these changes worked for the

individual schools at the time, describing the model as a collective was very difficult. There was a need for clarity and consistency across all of the schools.

OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES

These challenges were all overcome as a result of combining different processes and events:

1. development of the GMGY senior curriculum (third to sixth class)
2. development of a patron's framework
3. research carried out by Trinity College Dublin (TCD)
4. correspondence from the Irish Episcopal Conference.

Development of the senior curriculum began in 2015, with the assistance of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). As a result of in-depth consultation with schools, ETBs, and the DES, BST in its original format was not a feature of the senior curriculum. In 2016, Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) began development of a patron's framework that aimed to clearly articulate the core values of the schools and how they should be lived out.

The same year, TCD did a comprehensive study on the approach to religious education in CNSs. Although it found many positive aspects to the model, it recommended that BST be discontinued and that sacramental education be moved to outside the school day. The Irish Episcopal Conference wrote to ETBI expressing concern about the varying practices in schools for sacramental education. At a think-in organised by ETBI in June 2017, it was decided that BST would be discontinued in all schools and that sacramental preparation should move outside the school day and become the responsibility of the parish.

TCD did a comprehensive study on the approach to religious education in Community National Schools.

COMMUNITY NATIONAL SCHOOLS TODAY

All Community National Schools operate within a clearly set out CNS patron's framework that has been developed based on the core values of

the model. Because the schools are located in very different contexts across the country, they have the freedom to meet the needs of their communities and to develop their own unique identity within the framework's clear parameters.

All CNSs deliver the revised GMGY curriculum, with all children taught together for the entire school year. This revised curriculum (junior infants to sixth class) has four strands: 'My Stories' (identity education), 'We are a Community National School' (values education),



Core values of the CNS model

‘Thinking Time’ (philosophy for and with children) and ‘Beliefs and Religions’ (multidenominational religious education).

The GMGY curriculum aims to enable each child to develop:

- a confident and positive sense of self and group identity, a sense of belonging, and respect for and understanding of others’ identity and belonging
- an understanding of their own and others’ values, and thereby develop as an individual and as a social being and contribute to the good of society
- psychological and emotional wellbeing and a positive outlook through critical, creative, collaborative, and caring thinking and participation in philosophical inquiry, dialogue, and reflection.
- an understanding of the diversity of the beliefs that inform their own and other people’s ways of living, and respect and appreciation for people’s right to express their beliefs.

The new curriculum has been very well received by schools and teachers. Children and parents have also responded very positively to the recent developments.

Many primary schools and communities are more and more aware of the ETB as a possible patron.

Many primary schools and communities are more and more aware of the ETB as a possible patron. As well as the inclusive nature of the schools, they are attracted to the ETB as a patron. As well as educational and governance support from a dedicated director of schools, ETBs provide a number of services to schools, such as human resources, IT, buildings, and financial, that boards

of management normally have responsibility for in all other models.

CONCLUSION

Ten years after their inception, CNSs and ETBs are proud of what they offer the communities they serve. The Irish state should be proud of its own model of primary education. Through the hard work of ETBs, school leaders, teachers, parents, children, and partners in education, the CNSs are now in a position to flourish in the coming years.

Many existing schools are becoming aware of the CNS model and the services available from ETBs. ETBI has developed a pack called ‘Becoming a Community National School: A Step-by-Step Guide’, for existing schools considering becoming a CNS. The full contents of this pack can be accessed on the www.cns.ie website. More information on the GMGY curriculum and its supporting materials are available at www.cns.ie/goodness-me-goodness-you/.

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LOST IN TRANSITION

Building a programme of transition through teachers' learning



Kathryn Corbett
Principal

For most pupils, the move from primary to post-primary is a momentous event in their young lives. Less than eight weeks separate their experience of one system from another, involving changes in educational location, regulations, demands, and expectations. This often coincides with the physical and emotional changes of adolescence, and social adjustment in new and existing friendships (Eccles et al., 1993; Gutman & Midgley, 2000; Hargreaves & Galton, 2002). For many, it is a time of great excitement. For others, it is a life stage, filled with anxiety and uncertainty.

Research in the Irish context, although conducted over a decade ago, concluded that successful transition depended on the school's approach to 'student integration', subject choice, and method of ability grouping (ESRI, 2004, p.237). The study, entitled 'Moving Up: The experiences of first-year students in post-primary education', explored the social and academic factors that help young people settle into post-primary school in Ireland. It concluded that there were variations across schools in the type and range of supports offered to pupils for transition. Post-primary principals said they did not receive enough information on their incoming pupils, and the lowest level of satisfaction related to information on the coverage of the primary curriculum.

In recent years, the Department of Education and Skills (DES) and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) have taken significant steps to address the information gap. To ensure continuity of learning for pupils, and as part of the National Strategy on Literacy and Numeracy, since 1 June 2012 all primary schools are required to send a copy of pupils' end-of-year report (including standardised test scores) upon enrolment to the post-primary school (Circular 0056/2011). Following on from this, the NCCA developed a suite of 'Education Passport' materials, which became mandatory for all schools to use in 2014/2015 (Circular 45/2014). These included:

- The standard *6th Class Report Card* template for completion by schools.
- The *My Profile* sheet for completion by pupils in primary schools before being shared with their parents or guardians.
- The *My Child's Profile* sheet for completion by parents or guardians.

While these steps illustrate the transfer of information between sectors for pupils and parents, the ESRI report also concluded that there was a need to develop more awareness among teachers about the different curricula, and a need for 'greater co-operation between

the primary and post-primary sectors in terms of curriculum development and transfer of good practice in relation to teaching methodologies' (ESRI, 2004, p.245).

TRANSITION PROGRAMME FOR 6TH CLASS PUPILS

Based on the research and Circular requirements outlined above, and combined with the practical experiences of pupils, parents, and teachers, our school aspired to develop a comprehensive transition programme to support our 6th class pupils, inform ourselves as teachers, and build a shared sense of responsibility with our local post-primary school. The process began in November 2016 and has become an important part of both pupil and teacher learning in our school calendar. This article outlines the steps involved in setting up and developing such a programme, and concludes with the benefits experienced by both school communities.

The first meeting involved both school principals and members of the in-school management team to discuss ideas, possible activities, and timelines. There was a sense of nervous excitement that both sectors could collaborate in a way that would benefit not only our pupils but also teachers' learning in both schools. None of the 6th class teachers had attended the local post-primary school as students. So the first obvious step was to organise a visit for them to see these classrooms in action across a range of subjects, to understand the changes our pupils would experience when they completed their primary education.

All primary schools are now required to send a copy of pupils' end-of-year report to the post-primary school, including standardized test scores.

It was on this visit that we looked at the post-primary school through the eyes of our pupils, and imagined how it must feel to experience the sheer size, the movement after each class, the management of lockers, lunch in the canteen, remembering where to sit and what was needed for each of the 19 subjects they would have in First Year. Our empathy for pupils with special educational needs deepened, strengthening our determination to develop the most comprehensive programme possible.

SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS PUPILS

In a more recent report by the ESRI as part of the Growing Up in Ireland series, 'Off to a Good Start? Primary School Experiences and the Transition to Second-Level Education' (2016), research findings indicate that 'young people with special educational needs experienced the greatest transition difficulties and the largest decline in academic self-image between the ages of 9 and 13' (p.7). The study emphasised the crucial role of relationships with teachers in influencing pupils' attitudes to school and school subjects.

Sharing knowledge and experiences between both sectors therefore enables the development of empathic understanding, and subsequently policies and practices to meet the needs of pupils. As a priority, teachers with responsibility for coordinating SEN in both schools have established strong and consistent communication links as part of our transition programme. This involves meetings in term 3 to discuss support provided for pupils,

and strategies that have been effective in supporting their learning in the primary setting.

The next step in our programme was to open our 6th class classrooms to our post-primary colleagues. The focus of their observations included methodologies, assessment and differentiation strategies, seating arrangements, our code of behaviour, and transitions between subjects while remaining in the same room. Our 6th class teachers were initially a little apprehensive. It was a leap into the unknown, and there is vulnerability and courage in opening one's practice to others. Two lessons were observed, one numeracy and one other subject, and with the permission of the class teacher, the post-primary teacher was actively involved with small groups engaged in a task.

STARTING A PROFESSIONAL CONVERSATION

To conclude, the teachers had a lunch meeting, which led to a hugely enriching professional conversation for all teachers who shared their assumptions and experiences. Noteworthy comments referred to the post-primary teachers' preconceptions of primary teaching, the independent learning and articulate pupil discussion they had observed, the movement and pacing of teachers, and how embedded assessment was in teaching and learning in our classrooms. They were simply blown away by the ability and competence of our 6th class pupils. 'Maybe we disempower them when they come to us, because we have such low expectations of what they are able to do' was one thoughtful comment from a post-primary colleague.

Teacher collaboration that focuses on pupil learning is a powerful agent of change.

There was also a tangible sense of pride and affirmation for the teachers in our school in the exchange of feedback and insights on their practice. The meeting concluded with a consensus that there were more similarities than differences between the sectors, and acknowledgement of the value in the opportunity to talk about and share knowledge and experience. This has now become an annual practice in our schools, with different teachers benefiting each time.

THE EMERGENCE OF TRANSITION ACTIVITIES

Various transition activities have grown from these first steps. As part of Active School Week, 6th class Sports Day takes place in our local post-primary school. Within walking distance, and taking advantage of an empty campus in June, our pupils and teachers can use its wide range of equipment and sports facilities. Our pupils also had the opportunity to attend an introductory science lesson, taught by post-primary teachers in their labs, designed and fully equipped with apparatus for which the primary sector has neither the space nor the funding. Both experiences have gently introduced our pupils to the surroundings of a post-primary school, and generated a sense of readiness to move to the next stage of their education. For teachers, these activities again enabled the sharing of knowledge and practice in PE and Science, which were mutually beneficial.

STUDENT COUNCILS INTRODUCED TO EACH OTHER

Both schools have active student councils. In our first year, members of the post-primary student council held a Q&A session with our 6th classes to complement the work of our pupils using a school-developed booklet on transition. Building on the success of this, the following year we introduced the councils to each other, to enable the pupils to discuss the impact of their role in the school and to share ideas and goals. It was a memorable moment when a 3rd class pupil articulately questioned the post-primary council about its biggest achievement as a council to date!

SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION INTO SECOND LEVEL

The benefit is evident in how quickly and confidently our pupils settle into the post-primary setting. We are excited about the programme and intend to build on its successes in the years to come. It is created from a sense of shared responsibility by both schools, combined with trust through building relationships using good communication structures. Regardless of sector, teaching is about good planning, assessment, and differentiation, combined with enthusiasm, creativity, patience, and perseverance.

Teacher collaboration that focuses on pupil learning is a powerful agent of change. Without a focus on this as part of a comprehensive transition programme, I have no doubt that pupil and teacher learning could have been lost in transition.

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PROFESSIONAL COLLABORATION IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN IRELAND

Let's get together to learn together



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Professional collaboration involves colleagues sharing their knowledge and expertise in order to benefit their own professional growth and hence their students' learning experience. Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018, p.4) state that professional collaboration is a descriptive term and that the term collaborative professionalism 'is normative – it is about creating stronger and better professional practice together'. 'Together' is a simple but powerful word, because working together means we all learn in one way or another.

Schools that give teachers opportunities to collaborate are more likely to attract, develop, and retain skilled, effective teachers (Ingersoll and Kralik, 2004, cited in Johnston and Tsai, 2018). According to Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018, p.4), the *professional* aspect of collaboration refers to a teacher's ability to act professionally, exercise judgement, and retain an appropriate professional distance from colleagues and students, thus ensuring personal boundaries are not crossed; the *collaborative* aspect refers to teachers or other colleagues who work, talk, share, and reflect together.

COLLABORATIVE PROFESSIONALISM

A teacher's colleagues and students are their 'most valuable resource', because they 'learn from them and with them' (Delaney, 2017, p.195). Collaborative professionalism allows a collective learning initiative to be created, where dialogue is valued and where students and teachers share ideas and learn from one another in a reflective, open, learning environment. In the words of Sir Ken Robinson, 'collaboration is the stuff of growth'.

PARTNERSHIP FOR 21ST CENTURY (P21)

The Partnership for 21st Century Learning (P21) is a leading advocate in the promotion of learning through collaboration by developing partnerships between education, business, community, and policy leaders 'so that that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills they need to thrive in a world where change is constant and learning never stops'. The P21 framework encourages creativity and innovation among teachers and students alike, driven by an effective school leader. Traditionally, teachers were autonomous in their professionalism, which is a barrier to collaboration. This type of approach can lead teachers to resist becoming part of a community of teachers and learners who share and reflect together (Little, 1990, cited in Johnston and Tsai, 2018; Moller et al., 2013, cited in Johnston and Tsai, 2018).

The Henry Ford Learning Institute believes innovation can take place in an environment where 'time for valuable collaboration is

identified and protected. Despite tightly scheduled days and an array of assignments that compete for attention, school leaders ensure sufficient and regularly scheduled time for educators and students to work together' (Parizek, 2018). This approach to collaboration can be adopted to ensure that learning takes place between teacher and teacher, teacher and student, and student and student, from preschool to third-level.

Schools that give teachers opportunities to collaborate are more likely to attract, develop and retain skilled, effective teachers.

Hargreaves (Education Northwest, 2018) states that while we know how professional collaboration works, there is little evidence to show what types of collaboration work best. Teachers often report a lack of time for collaboration in the school day (Dreyer, 2014). For example, the Rand Report (Johnston and Tsai, 2018) states that only 31% of teachers felt they had enough time to collaborate with other teachers. Research shows that when teachers are given opportunities to collaborate, the benefits are reaped for both teacher and student learning:

- Students achieve more. Teachers improve their expertise and become more motivated to teach effectively and to stay in teaching (Education Northwest, 2018).
- According to Veldsman (2011, cited in Dreyer, 2014), when collaborative approaches were used between mainstream and learning support teachers in an effort to improve literacy skills, teachers became more confident in their ability to collaborate effectively. Improvements were also seen in students' literacy skills and in classroom management.
- Cooperative teaching is a method through which mainstream and special education teachers teach collaboratively in the classroom. Bauwens, Hourcade, and Friend (1989, p.36) define cooperative teaching as:

An educational approach in which general and special educators work in co-active and coordinated fashion to jointly teach heterogeneous groups of students in educationally integrated settings In cooperative teaching both general and special educators are simultaneously present in the general classroom, maintaining joint responsibilities for specified education instruction that is to occur within that setting.

Examples of good practice of cooperative teaching have been produced by SESS and Cork Education Support Centre. They clearly demonstrate the benefits of teachers working together in the classroom to teach all children of different learning abilities.

- Through collaborative professionalism, teachers find themselves in a position where they can receive mentoring from more experienced and more effective teachers, thus improving their own teaching skills and methodologies (Johnston and Tsai, 2018). It allows for new ideas to grow, and for stagnation in creativity, motivation, and implementation of new teaching strategies to cease.

Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018, p.65) discuss the approach to cooperative learning and working in Norway, where one of the four pillars of the curriculum is to 'communicate, collaborate, and participate', while another is to 'inquire and create'. Cooperative learning in Norway embraces the outdoors and the environment, and gives opportunities to teachers to work together and develop professionally, and to students to learn and teach one another.

In summary, a collaborative school community is one where both the teacher voice and student voice influence teaching and learning.

HOW IS PROFESSIONAL COLLABORATION BEING ADDRESSED IN IRISH PRIMARY SCHOOLS?

We have noted the traditional autonomous nature of the teaching profession in Ireland. In recent years, however, Ireland has adopted a much more collaborative approach to teaching and learning in primary schools. In this new direction, collaborative professionalism in schools is seen as a way for teachers to reflect on their teaching and learning, in order to enhance the learning experience and outcomes of the children in their classrooms. Many new initiatives and policies have been implemented to encourage teacher collaboration in primary schools in Ireland, such as School Self-Evaluation Process (2016a), The Digital Learning Framework for Primary Schools (2017), Cosán (2016), and Féilte, the Festival of Education. So how do these initiatives encourage collaborative professionalism?

A collaborative school community is one where both the teacher voice and student voice influence teaching and learning.

SCHOOL SELF-EVALUATION

The School Self-Evaluation Process or SSE (2016–2020) follows on from the SSE process that took place from 2012 to 2016 (DES, 2016a). It allows schools to focus on improving teaching and learning in their school community by using collaborative, reflective practices. According to the DES (2016a, p.10), 'School self-evaluation is a collaborative, inclusive, reflective process of internal school review'. It involves gathering evidence, reflecting on this evidence, and putting an action plan into place to improve children's learning. Throughout the process, the teacher is also learning and improving their professional and collaborative skills.

According to the SSE Guidelines (DES, 2016a, p. 37):

Professional collaborative review of teaching and learning is a practical and powerful method of obtaining direct, first-hand information or evidence about teaching and learning in classrooms and in other learning settings. It gives direct access to what pupils and teachers are doing and can be used to gather information on a wide range of aspects of teaching and learning.

Once a school decides on the area of focus for the SSE, for example the Primary Language Curriculum (DES, 2016c), it must then devise ways to work collaboratively as professionals to gather information. These evaluation approaches ensure that the views of the whole school community are included in the process. Evaluation approaches of teaching and learning include:

- Teacher discussion and reflection
- Teacher self-reflection
- Team teaching and review
- Review of monthly progress reports (*cuntas míosúil*)
- Professional collaborative review of teaching and learning
- Individual and collective review of pupils' work. (DES, 2016a, p.35)

One school that used SSE to improve oral language skills among its pupils was the Harold Primary School in Dublin (Curran, 2014). The school's level of reading was quite high, but children were not bringing these skills into their oral language experiences with themselves and other people. The school devised a collaborative action plan to teach oral language skills in context in all classes, relating it to subjects such as history, art, and maths by including language that the children used in everyday life. The result was overall improvement in the children's ability to use oral language skills to develop their reading and writing skills.

DIGITAL LEARNING FRAMEWORK

“Teachers valued the sharing of new ideas, methodologies and resources, and the support they received from colleagues.”

The Digital Learning Framework for Primary Schools (DES, 2017) contributes to SSE by enhancing teaching and learning through digital technologies in primary schools. It encourages collaborative planning in areas such as literacy, numeracy, and STEM, as it requires a cross-curricular focus (DES, 2017, p.3). It is directly aligned with the domains and standards of the framework Looking at Our School 2016 (DES, 2016b), which complements SSE. The framework focuses on two dimensions of the work in schools: teaching and learning; and leadership and management (DES, 2016b, p.7). The theme of teaching and learning, and achieving these through collaborative professionalism, is common to all of these initiatives and policies.

COSÁN

Cosán is the national framework for teachers' learning in Ireland and the framework through which teachers' lifelong learning and development are recognised. It encourages their continuous professional development, which in turn helps to improve the learning and development of their students (Teaching Council, 2016). Based on feedback from teachers and other stakeholders, it outlines four dimensions of teachers' learning: formal and informal, personal and professional, collaborative and individual, and school-based and external.

Feedback on the collaborative and individual dimension was that ‘teachers valued the sharing of new ideas, methodologies and resources, and the support they received from colleagues’ (Teaching Council, 2016, p.12). The framework acknowledges that by working together as part of a structured planning process, teachers could identify their own professional learning needs. Cosán acknowledges the importance of teachers as autonomous professionals and learners, thus placing value on self-reflection to enhance both teacher and student learning. Collaborative, collective reflection is also an essential part of a teacher's professional growth. SSE and Cosán

place similar value and importance on the effectiveness of collaboration to improve teacher and student learning.

FÉILTE – THE FESTIVAL OF EDUCATION

Féilte (2018) is the Teaching Council's Festival of Education. It celebrates excellence in teaching and allows teachers from all education sectors and from all over Ireland to come together to collaborate and share ideas. Féilte began in 2012 with an audience of 150 and is now one of the largest gatherings of teachers in Ireland.

Much progress has been made in the past quarter-century in developing professional collaboration, and Ireland is part of this progress. However, as Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018, p.138) write, 'it is now time for this to develop into collaborative professionalism, rooted in inquiry, responsive to feedback, and always up for a good argument'.

CONCLUSION

There are many opportunities for collaborative professionalism in a school community. Quality leadership in a school is one essential component: it sets the collaboration wheel rolling by allowing time in a busy schedule for teachers to talk, share ideas, and reflect on teaching and learning in the school. Quality leadership should encourage a school community to get together to learn together. Learning together in a whole school community, for both teacher and student, is at the core of true collaborative professionalism in the classroom.

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Educate Together celebrates 40th anniversary



Pictured at the Educate Together 40th anniversary event are: **Prof Áine Hyland**, one of the founding parents of the Dalkey School Project in Dublin, the first school in the Educate Together tradition. She is pictured here with **David Rankin** (10), **Dylan O'Broin** (11), **Emily Roarty** (5), **Sophie Roarty** (8), **Matt O'Broin** (7) and **Oliver Donohue** (9). Photo: Brendan Lyon/ImageBureau

SPECIALISING IN PRIMARY PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Primary teachers 'fit' to enhance well-being of children

Physical Education (PE) teachers at post-primary level are teaching PE as a recognised Leaving Certificate subject from 2018. This new focus on PE is particularly significant at a time when the Primary Curriculum in Ireland is being redeveloped, with considerable debate likely on policy and current practice for PE in primary schools.

Such interest in PE at both levels prompts us to examine where it all begins for our young people: What are the foundations of a child's PE experience? How can we prepare our teachers to provide quality experiences for children in our PE classes? Arguably, there are actions required to ensure that each child's primary PE journey makes a significant difference to their long-term well-being.

THE FOUNDATIONS OF WELL-BEING IN AND THROUGH PHYSICAL EDUCATION

The challenge to provide a rich foundation in early years and primary PE which embraces the physical, affective, and cognitive development of the child is underpinned by growing concern about the number of children who have poor eating habits, who have reduced play and physical activity opportunities, and who consequently are failing to develop fundamental movement skills. For example, in an Irish context only 19% of 5th and 6th class primary school children met the Department of Health and Children's physical activity recommendations of at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous daily physical activity (MVPA) (Woods et al., 2010).

PE is not the 'silver bullet' that can provide all the opportunities for adopting an active lifestyle, developing children's fundamental movement skills, or tackling childhood obesity. But PE is one of the key players in this complex societal space. It has a crucial role to play especially as *all* children undertake programmes of PE in primary schools. Harris (2018) argues that primary PE is increasingly recognised for the role it can play in setting a foundation for lifelong engagement in physical activity. In a UK context, she argues that PE should be a core subject, because:

it uniquely addresses the physical development aim of the curriculum and it also makes a significant contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of children.
(p.2)

In an Irish context, PE as a core subject merits serious debate as we redevelop the curriculum, with its concern for well-being and the potential to enhance children's physical, affective, and cognitive development and well-being.



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PREPARING TO TEACH QUALITY PRIMARY PHYSICAL EDUCATION

There is ongoing debate about *who* should teach primary PE worldwide (Coulter et al., 2009; Fletcher & Mandigo, 2012), including various views on the need for a ‘specialist’ teacher. In Ireland, the class teacher is responsible for planning and teaching PE programmes. In the Institute of Education, DCU, all PSTs undertake core PE modules that amount to 48 hours of contact time (see Table 1). They also plan PE lessons and teach PE in their school placements. Their study of PE is supported further through foundation disciplines, modules on other curriculum subjects such as SPHE, modules that focus on integration of subjects, and modules that prompt reflection on their professional practice. The core PE modules focus on content related to the strands of the PE Curriculum (Government of Ireland, 1999) but also embrace key concepts such as skill acquisition, promotion of physical activity, exploration of cooperative learning in group work, and assessment in PE.

While we acknowledge that the time allocation for core PE modules is generous, in comparison to other ITE providers across Europe, the depth of exploration of PE content remains a challenge. In recognition of this, the Teaching Council (2013) has welcomed the specialist model and its potential to provide ‘distributed expertise in schools’ (p.10).

Since the inception of the reimagined four-year B.Ed. programme (Waldron et al., 2012) at the Institute of Education, DCU, it is now possible for PSTs to specialise in PE and hence become part of the distributed expertise in schools. This specialisation in PE gives PSTs additional time to focus on PE and deepen their knowledge and understanding. Specialist PSTs are prepared to develop their capacity as leaders and advocates for the subject without deskilling their colleagues who continue to teach PE. We describe below how these specialist PSTs are supported to become leaders.

Physical Education, IoE, DCU - Core and Specialism Modules

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3				Year 4
Core	Core	Specialism	Specialism	Specialism	Specialism	Specialism
Physical Education	Child Development, Health and Wellbeing through PE	Theory, Practice and Fundamental Skill Development	Teaching the PE Curriculum	Curriculum and Inclusion	Outdoor Learning in PE	Subject Leadership in PE
ED1015 2.5 ECTS *	ED 2019 2.5 ECTS *	AP 204 5 ECTS *	AP 205 5 ECTS *	AP 301 5 ECTS *	AP 302 5 ECTS *	AP 401 2.5 ECTS *
European Credit Transfer System (ECTs) are a standard means for comparing volume of learning across Europe						

* Core courses with 2.5 credits are generally allocated 24 hours contact time.

PRE-SERVICE PRIMARY TEACHERS WITH A SPECIALISM IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION

PSTs who opt for the PE specialism spend an additional 120 hours doing specialist study as part of a group of around 25 students (group size is limited by capacity). The group examine their own socialisation related to PE, as recommended by Cosgrave and Murphy (2009). The PSTs engage further in practical activities exploring play, and teaching fundamental movement and sports-specific skills for athletics, gymnastics, and games, for example, thus deepening their content and subject knowledge. They build on their experience of outdoor and adventure activities in various locations indoors and outdoors, such as in local parks.

While aquatics will be taught to children by swimming teachers, the PE specialism prompts PSTs to explore their crucial role in supporting children as they develop proficiency and confidence in the water through play and with a focus on stroke development. Exploring particular curriculum models, such as Teaching Games for Understanding (Bunker and Thorpe, 1982), gives them frameworks for teaching. The principles of movement applied to tasks are further explored during their work in dance and gymnastics.

Student teachers who opt for the PE specialism spend an additional 120 hours doing specialist study.

Use of digital technologies in PE is a valuable aspect of the specialism, as reported by Marron and Coulter (2018). Inclusion of children with special educational needs is another element of the specialist study, and links are made with settings that provide opportunities for children with special needs to experience PE as part of mainstream or special classes. The role of sports and activities that promote physical activity in the school day is explored with particular study of initiatives such as the Active School Flag¹ and the Be Active After School Activity Programme (ASAP).²

As part of their study, the PSTs are prompted to critique ongoing debates in PE and related issues at local, national, and international level. They are encouraged to research aspects of PE and to work collaboratively to present case studies illustrating best practice in: adapting content to local contexts; use of equipment; technology; and working in partnership with coaches and other external providers.

Assessment of the specialism modules encompasses continuous assessment of particular aspects of coursework, including a performance skills assessment where the emphasis is on teaching skills to children rather than on sports-related performance. PSTs reflect using an e-portfolio as a further assessment method. Their PE specialism work starts them on their professional journey to becoming subject leaders. This journey will be supported by the further learning opportunities embraced in the Cosán Framework for Teachers' Learning (Teaching Council, 2016).

PE as a core subject merits serious debate as we redevelop the curriculum.

Throughout the specialism modules, significant time is allocated to giving PSTs opportunities to work with children in PE classes, supported by

peer feedback and teacher educator mentoring. Research tracking the progress of this work is currently underway under the umbrella of Create 21,³ a university initiative to drive research into the continuum of teacher education.

As we now observe a third cohort of PSTs begin their teaching journey, we can be confident that they are well positioned to make significant contributions to leading primary PE as they progress on this journey. While they will continue to teach *all* subjects, their leadership role in PE broadens the reach of their impact as they support others to teach quality PE programmes.

THE PRIMARY PHYSICAL EDUCATION SPECIALIST AND THE WELL-BEING OF THE CHILD: SOME ACTIONS

Providing early opportunities for children to learn in and through PE must be a priority for primary schools. Provision of specialist opportunities for some PSTs, as described above, is a significant step to ensuring that classroom teachers in each primary school are supported by a colleague who can also advocate for PE in contexts where this is necessary. With the redevelopment of the Primary Curriculum, the likelihood of PE becoming embedded in a well-being space, the growing interest in the Active School Flag Award, and the links to well-being in the Aistear and Junior Cycle Frameworks, the time is ripe to highlight the potential contribution of these primary PE specialists.

The onus is on school management to recognise the potential contribution of the primary specialist to supporting PE. On appointment to a school staff, the specialist primary teacher can nurture the teaching of quality PE (McLennan & Thompson, 2015) and drive the provision of quality PE learning experiences. The contribution of PE to the well-being of the child can be significantly enhanced by the primary teacher with deep knowledge of the subject.

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FOOTNOTES

1. <http://activeschoolflag.ie/>
2. <http://www.beactiveasap.ie>
3. <https://www.dcu.ie/create21/About-create21.shtml>

Féilte 2018: Teaching Whole-Heartedly

FÉILTE 2018 took place at Mary Immaculate College Limerick, 5-6 October 2018. This annual Festival of Education, organised by The Teaching Council, celebrates the wonderful work that teachers do, and gives teachers the opportunity to collaborate and share this work with each other and with the wider public.



Pictured here are: **Aoife Hughes**, St. Vincent's Girls NS Dublin 1; **Máire Lineen**, Teaching Council Member; and **Seána Ó Rodaigh**, St Vincent's GNS Dublin 1.



**Dr Carol-Ann
O'Sioráin**

programme co-ordinator of the Postgraduate Diploma in Special Education Needs: Autism; lecturer on inclusion and diversity in St Angela's College, Sligo, NUIG.

**Professor Michael
Shevlin**

School of Education,
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Dr Conor McCuckin

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DISCOVERING GEMS

Authentic listening to the 'voice' of experience in teaching pupils with autism

Empirical research on evidence-based practice provision for people with autism values quantitative methods (Bond & Symes, 2014; Westerveld et al., 2015) over the qualitative methods that relay 'voice' through, for example, teacher interviews. Any attempt to justify educational practice must include the voice and views of *all* experts (Perry, 2009). This article challenges the notion that applying evidence-based scientific programmes for autism-specific intervention is the sole 'best-practice' approach in schools.

Presented as direct support is evidence on literacy teaching and learning, particularly from a 'voice' perspective, regarding the professional and ethical practice of a case study teacher as she 'discovers gems' when teaching pupils with autism. The article reports on findings from a programme of research that explored literacy practices involving pupils with autism (n=35), their parents (n=34) and teachers (n=14), and observations of teaching and learning (189 hours) in seven autism-specific classrooms in mainstream primary education in Ireland.

TEACHING AND LEARNING IN AUTISM CLASSROOMS: MORE TO LEARN?

Across the US and Europe, access to autism diagnostic profiling is now more accessible than ever, with a rise in confirmed diagnoses. The increased identification of children and young people with autism has led to an unprecedented increase in specialist autism classrooms attached to mainstream primary and post-primary schools in Ireland. The Department of Education and Skills (DES, 2018), through its section on teacher education, has invested significantly in special-education initiatives across colleges and universities for ongoing professional development in evidence-based practices.

Over 60% of the provision of special classes in Ireland are designated for pupils with autism (McCoy et al., 2014; Banks et al., 2016; Banks and McCoy, 2017). With such large specific educational provision, it is appropriate to query the efficacy of the teaching and learning experienced. While Daly et al. (2016) provided a comprehensive evaluation of educational provision, with a particular focus on a framework of indicators for good practice in four areas – teaching and learning, inclusive school culture, school management, and staff development – we argue that such an approach should be extended to encompass a more nuanced and personalised 'voice' perspective of the experiences and outcomes from those involved.

NOT EVERYTHING THAT CAN BE MEASURED COUNTS: NOT EVERYTHING THAT COUNTS CAN BE MEASURED?

There is general consensus among educators that many evidence-informed interventions can be used to enhance the educational experiences of children and young people with autism. When explored in a tightly designed review of the literature, however, Parsons et al. (2009) found that (1) the number of robustly designed and evaluated approaches available was rather low, and (2) these were quantitative. Parsons et al. concluded that well-known evidence-based interventions 'may not be as effective as initially thought and there is a need for more explicit research on the appropriateness of these interventions'.

In observing 'best autism practice', Guldberg (2010, p.168) suggests a particular focus on 'direct teaching of communication and language, social understanding and skills, as well as learning with and through peers'. Parsons and Kasari (2013, p.251) report 'growing awareness in the autism field that there remains a substantial gap between research and practice in real-world classrooms'. This supports the position of Lanter et al. (2012), who say there is a deficit of literature on literacy practices in these classrooms.

This presents us with our query: What are the most appropriate models of teaching and learning and inclusive educational practices for pupils with autism that would enable these learners to demonstrate their literacy practices? In seeking to answer this, we present a case study of a teacher who shows exceptional practice through respectful pedagogy.

Tasks set were respectful, authentic, and academically focused. Her planning was organic and she made written changes, as needed, during the lessons.

CASE STUDY: SUSAN

Susan has been teaching for more than 35 years, and for the past 10 years has been a teacher in an autism-specific classroom. She has engaged extensively in professional development across all autism-specific evidence-based programmes and practices. She is the main teacher to a group of six boys aged 6–9 years, all with a diagnosis of autism. Susan demonstrates a wealth of knowledge of the theories of autism and has established a fluid and flexible approach to teaching and learning.

Twenty-seven hours of observations from Susan's classroom showed significant differences from other classrooms in the study. Her classroom was very small and had limited space and facilities; as a result, she constantly changed and adapted the layout by moving furniture. There were no schedules or visual timetables on the walls or desks. She said, 'They are not needed.' She taught time to all the pupils by structuring a lesson on the school day, which was the basis of her maths lessons for the first month of the school year.

Susan constantly referred to the clock and the mental schedule she had established with the pupils, and they all transitioned seamlessly across the school day. There was no room for individual tables and work stations. Susan taught in small groups for the full day. She worked and planned from the mainstream curriculum with differentiation

and responsive teaching. Tasks set were respectful, authentic, and academically focused. Her planning was organic and she made written changes, as needed, during the lessons.

SUSAN IS AUTHENTIC AND CARING. SUSAN PLANS AND ADAPTS. BE LIKE SUSAN.

Susan, in contrast to her teaching peers in the study, presented an interpretation of literacy and being literate as ‘identity and connecting’. She described literacy as:

Stories, their stories ... their response to stories they hear, and if they record their responses in drawings, that’s their literacy as well.

Susan explained how literacy skills can emerge in the autistic learner’s ability to connect with a text, with the self, and with characters or others when she engages artistically by dramatising a story. She conceptualised literacy as ‘their own vocal responses’:

Since doing the Mr Men, one of my most challenging boys has decided he’s Mr Greedy, which means he robs my jellies at every available opportunity – the whole box! He then calls out, ‘Look, Susan, look what Mr Greedy is doing in the corner’, and I’m going ‘Oh!’ ... but that’s his drama ... That’s what literacy is. It’s communicating, it’s books they are surrounded with, it’s do they want to play with ideas they come in contact with.

Susan demonstrated her skills as an inclusive teacher: valuing learning diversity, supporting all learners while holding high expectations, working with others (SNAs), and having a professional attitude. For example, she reported ‘discovering’ a child’s ‘gem’ or motivation-enabled expression, language, and communication, and she said: ‘Sam made most of that display because he was motivated to do it’ (Sam used a diorama to recreate the narrative of *Rosie’s Walk*). Susan said, ‘You need to be flexible, because there’s no point in turning a literacy or writing lesson into total torture.’

Social communication was also observed where the pupils initiated conversations and took on a role of communicative leader. Susan and the SNAs provided jovial moments to engage the pupils in language experiences. Having moments of waiting or quiet also gave pupils open opportunities to begin conversations in a natural, safe manner. An observed pause in the day allowed one pupil to initiate a conversation, asking Susan if they could have a party day and make a cake from his new book, *Gruffalo Crumble and Other Recipes*, which he had brought to school. Literacy flowed:

P(a) (excitedly): ‘Make them Gruffalo cake, make them Gruffalo crumble.’

Susan: ‘How do we make them all brown?’

P(a): ‘Melt chocolate.’

Susan: 'How do we put purple prickles all over its back?'

P(a): 'What about icing?'

Susan (referring to the picture in the cookbook): 'How do we make them like this?'

P(a): 'We could use toothpicks.'

(The whole group begin talking together and at once, arguing about how to make this cake. There are too many dyads happening at once for me to record, so I sit and observe. The volume is high. There is a natural break in the conversation.)

P(e): 'We could put icing in it.'

Susan: 'Okay, we need icing sugar. How are we going to get chocolate all over it?'

P(a): 'Buy chocolate.'

Susan: 'Okay, we need cooking chocolate. What about purple prickles?'

SNA (referring to an earlier suggestion during the argument): 'We could use Smarties. Great idea.'

Susan: 'Okay, I need Smarties. How many packets will I need?'

SNA: 'And something to drink?'

Susan: 'Okay, we need to tell mummies and daddies that we are not going to do any work tomorrow, because it will be a Gruffalo party!'

CONCLUSIONS AND REFLECTIONS FOR PRACTICE

The findings of this study indicate that we need to embrace a broader conceptualisation of literacy practices for children with autism. A fluid, flexible practice is evidenced that suggests caution is needed in the use of programmes that restrict a differentiated, informed pedagogical approach to literacy instruction. Greater inclusive opportunities are needed for children with autism, in order to build literacy practices through playfulness and social experiences. Quality is evidenced in the synthesis of knowledge of theories of autism with theories of effective teaching and learning and high expectations. (Two of Susan's six boys transitioned to mainstream the following year for all academic subjects.)

While Susan's classroom remains in a 'unit' setting, it did not restrict the teaching and learning experienced by the pupils but did restrict their learning with and from non-autistic peers. It is not the establishment of specialised classrooms or physical architecture that guarantees or

safeguards quality and effective participation and learning, but the quality of the pedagogue.

Based on these rich research findings and Susan's practice, we encourage teachers and researchers to continually explore qualitative and 'voice' approaches to understanding the teaching and learning experiences of pupils with autism. Many of us rely on our own readings and standard practices in this increasingly important area of education. O'Síoráin et al. (2018) remind us that leadership in inclusive education is never straightforward – it is always a dilemma of 'doing things right' or 'doing the right things'.

Such work requires continued personal and professional reflection by the educator. What Susan helps us to understand is that we can also have very real dialogue with these pupils, who can co-construct the learning environment. Confidence and competence can be developed – not only in the pupils, but also in the reflective practitioner.

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GOING BACK TO SCHOOL FOR 150 YEARS

A time for reflection



Sheila Nunan

General Secretary of the
Irish National Teachers'
Organisation

This year marks the 150th anniversary of the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO). Anniversaries, like birthdays, retirements, and other milestones, are a prime time for reflection. There have been a lot of changes since 1868, when a couple of dozen men gathered in a Dublin room for what was 'decidedly the largest meeting of teachers ever in Ireland'.¹ From that humble start, INTO membership has grown to over 45,000 teachers across the island of Ireland today.

Since its foundation, INTO has played a central role in raising the status of teaching and influencing policy towards inclusive, child-centred teaching. To those first INTO members, who taught long before electricity became a ubiquitous commodity, the classrooms of today would seem like foreign places. Even visually, today's schools are very different from those of 1868. A teacher of 150 years ago would be amazed by the brightly printed posters and displays on our modern classroom walls. I'm sure they would be entranced at the sight of interactive whiteboards in action and in awe of the fabulous role-play areas that our teachers have created, from post offices to spaceships, in junior classes across the country.

We have moved on in many ways since 1868. We know more about how children learn, and we have adapted our teaching methodologies accordingly. In the mid-nineteenth century, only one in three teachers was trained, and teachers were poorly regarded. Today's primary teachers are a highly skilled, well-trained, and well-respected professional group.

But in some ways the INTO of 2018 echoes the organisation of 1868 much more than it should. That first INTO Congress was dominated by discussions of pay. Over the years, INTO has fought for pay equality. In the past, the equality sought was equalisation of the pay between men and women. It is concerning that, in 2018, equal pay is still a top priority for the organisation – this time based on date of entry to the teaching profession, rather than gender.

We have come a long way since 1868, but INTO remains as relevant now as it was then. There are many improvements to the teaching profession outstanding, not only in pay but also in the areas of class size, supports for school leadership, planning of teacher supply, and school funding.

PAY EQUALITY

At the time of writing, achieving pay equality remains the INTO's top priority. 2011 saw a 10% pay cut implemented for new entrants, which

meant that any teachers graduating from 2011 onwards were financially disadvantaged. Further measures cut the pay of entrants from early 2012.

Significant progress has been made in reversing these impositions, and the work continues. While the economic crisis is now over, it has had a huge impact on teachers' morale and led to difficulties in recruiting and retaining teachers. Pay equality is about attracting and retaining the best into the profession, a benefit for all.

CLASS SIZE

Ireland currently has some of the largest classes in Europe, averaging twenty-five pupils per class – five above the EU average. While class sizes may have varied over the years, our understanding of the factors that affect pupils' learning has increased. We know that children do better in smaller classes, especially children early in the school experience, children with special educational needs, and children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Smaller classes ensure that teachers can give more attention to each child. They notice early if a child is struggling and can make the necessary intervention.

We have come a long way since 1868, but INTO remains as relevant now as it was then. There are many improvements to the teaching profession outstanding...

We know that the primary school teacher is one of the most influential adults in the lives of many children – the person with whom they want to share their news, the person they turn to when they feel sad, the person they seek out when friends fall out. Smaller classes ensure that teachers provide not only better academic support but also social and emotional support, and guidance to the pupils in their care.

If we aspire to have the best education system in Europe, we must make the classroom environment conducive to excellence, starting by reducing the size of our classes. Our teachers are a hardworking, ambitious group of professionals: we must facilitate their best work.

While there were some improvements in the pupil-teacher ratio in Budget 2016 and Budget 2018, there is still a way to go. Worryingly, while small reductions were made in the pupil-teacher ratio in ordinary schools, there was no corresponding reduction in the ratio in our DEIS schools (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools), which work with some of our most vulnerable children so they can have the opportunity they deserve to achieve their educational potential.

SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

The role of principal has changed significantly over the years. Since the 1990s, it has an increased focus on leadership. This shift has brought a dramatic increase in the administrative tasks associated with the role, and the workload of the principal has increased. The principal has responsibility for the day-to-day running of the school, management of staff, implementation of new initiatives and curriculum revisions, and the administrative work that keeps a school functioning, among many other things. Many of our principals do this while teaching a class full-time.

Our teaching principals are over-burdened and over-stretched. The policies that must be written for a small school are no shorter or fewer than those needed in a larger school. Curricular initiatives that must be implemented are the same whether a principal manages a school with 50 pupils or 500. An emergency that requires managerial attention is no less urgent in a school with a teaching principal than in a school with an administrative principal.

We need measures to ensure that our principals have the capacity to run our schools to the best of their ability. At the very least, teaching principals need to have at least one day a week to work on the administrative and non-teaching duties of a being a principal.

IN-SCHOOL MANAGEMENT POSTS

The supports needed for our principals include the need to establish proper in-school management teams, so that the leadership and management of our schools are a shared task. A moratorium on filling posts of responsibility in our schools was introduced in 2009; as a result, over 5,000 of these posts were lost. The cutting of these posts left schools without supports in a range of curricular and other areas, and abolished career progression opportunities for many teachers.

2017 saw the first structured restoration of posts of responsibility to schools since the moratorium was introduced. But a job started is not a job done. Our schools and teachers need full restoration of the posts that were lost. Our school leaders need the additional support, and our teachers need opportunities for career progression.

SCHOOL FUNDING

The introduction of free education in the 1960s opened a host of opportunities for many. But the price of 'free education' continues to climb, and families are increasingly being asked to carry the cost. Primary schools have, for too long, been the poor relation in the education family. For every €8 spent funding our primary schools, €11 is spent at second level and €15 at third level. We expect our schools to run on 92 cent per pupil per day.

**Parents and local communities
are subsidising our primary
schools to the tune of €46
million a year.**

It's simply not enough. We know that our primary principals and teachers are a creative and resourceful group, but they are not magicians. Schools cannot run on creativity and goodwill alone. As it stands, parents and local communities are subsidising our primary schools to the tune of €46 million a year. This money is not being spent on luxuries or sophisticated extras to enhance learning, but on basic necessities and day-to-day running costs to keep our schools open.

TEACHER SUPPLY

When INTO was founded, most national teachers were unqualified. Over the years, INTO has worked for the professionalism of the job and to ensure that our pupils are taught every day by qualified teachers. We know that our schools currently struggle to find qualified teachers to cover for absences. Without qualified substitute teachers to cover sick leave, for example, schools must resort to measures such as hiring unqualified personnel,

splitting classes, moving pupils into other classes (where they are supervised but are not engaged in learning), and deploying special education teachers to teach classes; children with special educational needs then have reduced access to SEN teachers.

Proper supply panels would ensure that schools have a secure supply of substitute teachers.

How do we solve this problem? By establishing proper supply panels. This would ensure that schools have a secure supply of substitute teachers available to cover brief absences, and the teachers on the panel would have security of employment. This year, INTO has been involved in establishing a 'cluster' model where a number of schools with teaching principals may employ one teacher to cover their release days. A similar model could be used to ensure that schools have

access to qualified teachers to cover other absences. With the technology most of us carry around in our pockets every day, such a model has never been more workable.

CONCLUSION

This year marks 150 years since the first meeting of the Irish National Teachers' Organisation, and we have travelled a long and interesting path since then. In the words of historian Niamh Purséil, in her book *Kindling the Flame*, to mark the 150 years of INTO, 'the INTO's greatest success was its survival, and one of its greatest achievement was fostering a sense of solidarity, unity and professionalism among men and women whom the authorities, whether secular or clerical, so keenly wished to keep divided'.

Our values and choices today will affect the teachers who come after us, just as the decisions of those teachers who organised 150 years ago affect our teaching profession today. Let us choose wisely, therefore, and value primary education.

FOOTNOTES

1. *Freeman's Journal*, 6 June 1905.



Top table at the 150th INTO Congress held in Killarney, Co Kerry, in April 2018. Seated from left to right: **Noel Ward**, INTO Deputy General Secretary/General Treasurer, **Joe McKeown**, INTO CEC Representative; **Richard Bruton**, Minister for Education; **Sheila Nunan**, INTO General Secretary and **Joe Killeen**, INTO President 2018/19.

JOHN CURRAN RIP

A Generous Soul, A Visionary



It is with a profound sense of shock, sadness and disbelief that we acknowledge the sudden passing of John Curran, highly esteemed colleague and friend to all in Irish education, in South Africa on 7th November. John is and was a highly esteemed colleague and friend to all in the Irish Primary Principals' Network - IPPN.

The outpouring of condolences, shock and sadness at John's passing indicates the calibre of person he was. Indeed, hundreds of our members shared their feelings on our online Book of Condolences and

many more attended his memorial service in Trinity College, Dublin on 23rd November. The words of John's fellow founding member, and former CEO of IPPN, Seán Cottrell reflect the feelings of us all - 'A good friend, a generous soul, a visionary - gone too soon. May your generous spirit be with us always.' It is impossible to quantify how many people were inspired and impacted by John over the course of his life, but we believe it was many thousands, both in Ireland and in Africa. What an incredible legacy!

A founding member of IPPN, John served on the IPPN Executive Committee (now the Board of Directors) from 2000 to 2007 and was PRO from 2005 to 2009. During his sixteen years as Principal of Good Shepherd NS, Churchtown, Dublin 14 until his early retirement in June 2005, John advocated positively and consistently in relation to principals' workload, boards of management and school funding, as well as supporting his fellow school leaders directly and in the development of services through his role on the Executive Committee. We are all indebted to him for all his work over many years, all completely voluntary. On a personal level, we will greatly miss his wonderful sense of humour, his infectious laugh and his ability to lighten the most serious topic. As our president David Ruddy commented "He was very much loved and very dynamic. He always wanted to give back."

John was so passionate about his recent work in South Africa, as Director of Education for Mellon Educate*, a role he began in October 2016. He was tireless in empowering teachers and principals, as evidenced in his own words last January when he described his role:

“Exciting times helping mentor and support principals and schools in some of the most disadvantaged communities I have seen. Very rewarding to help empower teachers and communities to improve teaching and learning in their schools and overcome significant obstacles. Learning lots and broadening my horizons.”

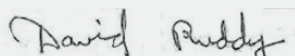
He brought a delegation from South Africa to IPPN Conference last January, as he was keen to showcase Irish school leadership practice to the Minister for Education and the Secretary General for the Ministry for Education in the Western Cape, as well as a number of their colleagues. He was instrumental in bringing Irish teachers and principals to Africa as part of the Teachers’ Blitz projects in 2017 and 2018, to build schools, improve existing school infrastructure, and support school leaders’ professional development.

Nelson Mandela once said “Education is the most powerful weapon we can use to change the world“. John lived and breathed those words. John lived and breathed those words. He has had a profound impact on numerous children in Ireland and in Africa, and on school leaders, colleagues, friends, and above all on his family. May he rest peacefully.

Is briseadh croí do Líonraí Príomhoidí Éireann bás tubaisteach John Curran. Iar-phríomhoide agus iar-chomhghleacaí ag IPPN é John. Fear seimh, uasal a bhí ina chara ag príomhoidí agus ag múinteoirí in Éirinn agus thar lear. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam uasal dílis.



Páirc Clerkin
CEO



David Ruddy
President

PINE FOREST ART CENTRE

Set in the Dublin Mountains amidst beautiful scenery, for 40 years now Pine Forest Art Centre has been providing camps and courses for children and young people which combine creativity with fun.

Summer Courses for 4-16 year olds, Easter Courses,
Schools Activity Days from March to June, Portfolio Preparation Courses,
Halloween Workshops, Birthday Parties,
Christmas Workshops, Parent/Adult and Child Art Activity mornings.



Summer Camps

The Centre runs two-week summer camps during July and August for children aged 5 -12 years and teenagers aged 13-16 years. Activities are many and varied - participants paint, sculpt, sketch, make pottery and clay items, weave, do batik and paper crafts.

Portfolio Preparation

There is also a Portfolio Preparation course during the summer for young people aged 16-19 years. This course is provided with a view to helping young people organise and expand portfolios with Art College and /or Leaving Cert in mind.

Courses during the year

The Centre runs courses during the Halloween, Christmas and Easter Holidays. Birthday Parties and Team building events.

School Groups Activity Days

School Art and Craft activity days are available from March to June.

Parent and Child Art & Craft Days

Held on the last Sunday of each month.

PINE FOREST ART CENTRE

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SECOND LEVEL



Girls from Christ King Secondary School Cork, performing excerpts from 'Bewitched' at the Gala Dinner of the National Association of Principals & Deputy Principals (NAPD) in Galway on 19 October 2018.

SECOND LEVEL CONTENTS

SECOND-LEVEL REVIEW 2018

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Clive Byrne

In his review of 2018, Clive Byrne moves swiftly and succinctly through a broad spectrum of issues including initiative overload, professional development models, middle management, mentoring, coaching, new postgraduate diploma in school leadership, parents' aspirations for their children, and more...



LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT IN POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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John Curtis

A paradigm shift is taking place in how we understand leadership in our schools. Circular Letter 0003/2018 presents new possibilities to schools in equipping a generation of school leaders for the challenges they face.



FLOURISHING LEADER - FLOURISHING SCHOOL

Linking the principal's potential to that of their school

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Dr Michael Redmond

The lives of school principals are profoundly enmeshed with those of their schools, and either one's flourishing is intrinsic to the other's. This article addresses the notion that schools have a personality of their own and explores what voluntary secondary principals say are the key aspects of their inner selves that directly affect their school's potential.



SCHOOL PLACEMENT

A new era for partnership?

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Tomás Ó Ruairc

This article looks at school placement in the context of the changes in Initial Teacher Education over the past six years. How far have school-HEI partnerships come? How could they be further supported? And what can we all do to enhance the experience for student teachers?



JUNIOR CYCLE REFORM

Five years in, where are we now?

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Dr Pádraig Kirk

This article provides an overview of progress in implementing junior cycle reform in schools. It highlights the many changes and innovations we can expect to see and describes how schools, school leaders, and teachers are being supported in the current reform.



SENIOR CYCLE REFORM

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Barry Slattery, John Hammond

Many developments at senior cycle have taken place in recent times, including new subjects, new grading system, syllabus revision, LCA, LCVP, and Transition Year. So it's a good time to review the strengths, weaknesses, and challenges of the new programmes and the senior cycle as a whole.



TRANSITION YEAR – PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE

Learning for the future

216

Dr Gerry Jeffers

What insights for policy and practice can be gleaned from the Transition Year journey from a quirky, marginal anomaly thought up by a strong-willed Minister for Education to an embedded feature in over 90% of second-level schools?



THE FOREIGN LANGUAGES STRATEGY

Learning a foreign language has never been more important

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Breda Naughton

In this article, Breda Naughton addresses the place of foreign languages in primary, post-primary, further, and higher education. She summarises the context in which the Foreign Languages Strategy was developed, outlines existing provision, and highlights recent actions that have resulted from the Strategy.



VIRTUAL DESKTOP INFRASTRUCTURE

A virtual world where the benefits are real

Trevor Collins

Assistant Principal Trevor Collins focuses on the use of Virtual Desktop Infrastructure (VDI) in schools. He describes one school's journey in changing from the traditional ICT model to cloud-based VDI. He discusses, also, an action-based pilot programme going on in the local area.

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THE STORY OF AUNUA ACADEMY

How an Irish non-profit for mental health was born

Karina Murray, Philip Smith

School days and childhood can be severely challenging, and things don't always get easier as one grows older. Irish non-profit Aunua Academy aims to provide free resources on mental health that can inform and support children, young people, and adults throughout the world. This is its story.

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ACHIEVEMENT IN THE JUNIOR CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION

Trends over time in DEIS and non-DEIS schools

Dr Susan Weir, Dr Lauren Kavanagh

The achievement gap between students from disadvantaged backgrounds and their more affluent counterparts is well documented in Ireland and elsewhere. This paper uses Junior Cert exam results to examine trends in achievement in DEIS and non-DEIS schools over a 15-year period and concludes that the achievement gap has narrowed since the introduction of DEIS.

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Clive Byrne,
Director, National
Association of
Principals and Deputy
Principals (NAPD)

SECOND-LEVEL REVIEW 2018

Initiative overload was a key phrase heard frequently in the second-level sector over the year. The Action Plan for Education to make Ireland's education system the best in Europe brought urgency to each initiative. Timelines and deadlines following close on their heels certainly raised the hackles and blood pressure of many school leaders. Each action in the plan is good and beneficial, but following so quickly one on top of the other made colleagues wonder what needed to be dropped in order to embrace the latest circular and when might the necessary resources flow to enable school leaders to keep up.

PAY DIFFERENTIAL BETWEEN TEACHERS

The pay differential between teachers still rankles, and it is increasingly difficult to hear that the €200 million it would cost to restore pay parity cannot be found, when all the economic signs point to an economy that is healthy and robust. The recent budget strategy towards restoration is welcome, but for many it isn't enough. The rate for the job should be similar even allowing for the 26-point salary scale, which limits the possibility of recognising and rewarding exceptional effort by teaching colleagues. Teachers are contributing to the rising economy, and this needs to be recognised by prioritising the financial needs of younger teachers in a meaningful way. The bulge in second level won't be really felt until 2025, but education must be seen as an investment in our future and not solely as a cost in the present.

INCREASED INVESTMENT IN EDUCATION

This year, as the public purse was loosened, we saw increased investment in education, with 1,600 additional teachers and 3,000 special needs assistants appointed to cope with the additional pupil numbers in the system. For every €5 spent by the Department of Education and Skills (DES), 20 per cent or €1 is spent on Special Educational Needs. The management bodies and school leader associations are being briefed by the Inspectorate on new models of inspection coming into force in 2019, to ensure that the investment in resources to promote inclusion as part of SEN is being used as effectively as possible.

TEACHER SHORTAGE

Despite the additional staff appointed, many schools reopened this year without a full complement of teachers. Shortages this year included modern foreign languages, Irish, Maths, and the Science, Technology and Engineering subjects. Anecdotally, a Home Economics teacher is one of the most difficult to employ this year as a result of many graduates abandoning teaching and taking better-paid permanent positions in the food science sector.

QUESTION MARK OVER ATTRACTIVENESS OF TEACHING AS A PROFESSION

The attractiveness of the teaching profession is now being questioned. Lower salaries, fewer permanent positions, and the lure of the Middle East and other countries where Irish teaching graduates seem to be more appreciated are listed as factors contributing to the shortage of teachers. Continuous professional development and in-service needed as a result of reforms to the junior cycle have made the situation worse. Hundreds of teachers at a time are called out of school for training by the Junior Cycle for Teachers team, but there are no substitute teachers available to cover classes, and this can lead to disruption in schools.

CLUSTER MODELS OR BAKER DAYS?

It's an unintended consequence of curriculum reform, and will probably get worse before it gets better as we look to make the senior cycle more suitable for the needs of a significant cohort of students not suited to the type of academic curriculum on offer in the current Leaving Certificate. The recent introduction of Politics and Society, Computer Studies, and Physical Education for the exam is the start of a programme geared to meeting the needs of students, where the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) is revising outdated syllabi, many of which haven't changed in almost forty years. The revision of subjects will benefit our students but will also require professional development programmes for the teachers, which will make the lack of available substitutes more obvious. Cluster models may be the way to go, but it would be great to have Baker Days as they have in England, during which all in-service and training could take place at the same time.

A policy decision
was taken in the
Department that school
leadership needed to
be supported.

POLICY DECISION TO SUPPORT SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

A policy decision was taken in the Department that to cope with the range of initiatives being implemented, school leadership needed to be supported. After many years of lobbying, the decision to appoint 200 additional deputy principals and to partially restore a number of assistant principal posts at levels 1 and 2 will greatly benefit schools and should, in time, benefit the system as a whole. Seniority was the major criterion in the past, but following discussions between the Department, the teacher unions, and the management bodies, suitability to carry out the role is much more to the fore. The clarity in the circulars establishing the new positions is welcome, but school leaders find the appointment process difficult, with disappointment among unsuccessful applicants and an increase of tension and fractiousness among staffs. Hopefully this will soon dissipate.

MENTORING PROGRAMME EXPANDED

The Centre for School Leadership (CSL), a collaboration between the DES, the Irish Primary Principals Network (IPPN), and the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD) to support leadership, continued to make great strides. The mentoring programme for newly appointed principals was expanded this year, and the positive feedback from mentors and mentees is a great reflection on the professionalism of all involved. The decision to expand the programme to accommodate clustered mentoring

for second-year principals is progressive, and the involvement of the expertise of the two professional associations in this aspect of mentoring provides further CPD opportunities for those participating.

COACHING SERVICE ESTABLISHED

The outstanding success of the CSL this year was the establishment of a coaching service to cater for up to 400 school leaders from primary and post-primary sectors. The professional coaches involved are not educationalists, but the feedback from the coaching partnerships is phenomenal. There was a worry at the start that coaching would be seen as a deficit model. This hasn't happened – coaching is for excellence, and the benefits in participant schools will be noteworthy. Hundreds more leaders will benefit from the extension of the coaching supports into the current school year.

POSTGRADUATE DIPLOMA IN SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Having implemented the coaching and mentoring strategies, the last leg of the stool for the CSL was the development of an eighteen-month Postgraduate Diploma in School Leadership (PDSL): a key milestone. The involvement of universities in Limerick, Galway, and Dublin, with additional support from Cork and Waterford Institutes of Technology, ensured that the CSL has created an opportunity for 240 aspiring school leaders to upskill and be accredited as the system seeks to create a pipeline of applicants for school leadership positions into the future. Cohort two is beginning this September as the first cohort completes the programme this term and will graduate in 2019. The CSL was established as a three-year pilot project, but having been subject to a review has been extended for a further two years.

Cohort two [of the Diploma in School Leadership] is beginning in September 2018.

NAPD SYMPOSIUM

What should a well-educated eighteen-year-old look like was a question posed at a recent NAPD symposium as we continue a national debate about how well our education system caters for our students. According to the most recent census, 12% of our population come from a non-Irish background. Ireland educates pupils from 200 countries with multiple languages; 13% of pupils have a disability, and 20% experience deprivation. Our education system should provide happy, fulfilled, and challenged students who can think for themselves. There must be equality of opportunity and also equity in the system, and as educators we must develop students with a lifelong love of learning. As a society we need to recognise the harsh realities our young people will face when they leave school.

PARENTS' ASPIRATIONS FOR THEIR CHILDREN

As part of the symposium, the National Parents' Council (Primary) undertook a questionnaire which was completed by over 3,000 parents. It addressed parents' aspirations for their children. Over 66% said they would like to see changes to the type of senior cycle on offer in our Irish schools. They wanted their children to get good results, but most of all they wanted their children to be happy, to develop good social skills, and to know about the world they live in. When asked what they believed were the qualities needed to be a well-educated eighteen-year-old, parents included independence,

confidence, creativity, ambition, leadership, curiosity, and courage. It was reassuring to note that parents believed their children should be imbued with values of compassion, honesty, justice, empathy, tolerance, and respect for themselves and others. The survey highlighted the skills needed to succeed in the modern world. Among them were strong computer and digital skills, a high level of literacy and numeracy, critical and creative thinking, practical skills, good knowledge about their personal well-being, and good social skills.

CHANGE NEEDED IN THE CLASSROOM

Based on responses by our primary parents, it seems clear that change is needed to what goes on in the classroom. Are we in favour of a broad liberal education model as opposed to a vocational and training approach? For educational leaders, the challenge is to lead strategically, to lead the teaching and learning that transacts in schools, to lead the people in school, and to perform an important leadership role in the wider community. Building a positive school community is at the heart of what the goal should be in promoting a culture of lifelong learning in schools for both teachers and students.

HPV VACCINES

Few were unmoved by the recent revelations in the media concerning the cervical check scandal. Reports from the High Court detailing the personal stories of women affected resonated with the public. These high-profile cases and the tragic outcomes reported went a long way to raising awareness of the need to deliver the HPV vaccine to girls in first year in school. Last year and earlier this year a campaign highlighting potential side effects of the vaccine resulted in a dramatic decline in the numbers inoculated. The HSE launched a national campaign emphasising that there was no evidence that any side effects reported could be linked to the HPV vaccine. They detailed the risks and consequences to girls of contracting cervical cancer if the percentage taking the vaccine in schools was not increased.

Many schools have had to rewrite their data-protection policies.

As a result of the campaign, it seems this is happening, and now there is talk of administering the vaccine to boys as happens in other jurisdictions. The HSE is clear that the most effective way to administer national vaccine campaigns is through the school system. Schools cooperate on the basis that such programmes are for the common good, even though administering the vaccines can be disruptive.

DATA PROTECTION POLICIES

Schools hold a lot of sensitive information, so when news of the GDPR emerged in May it was a slow burner at first. As the date of implementation neared, the GDPR seemed to take on a profile similar to the millennium bug almost two decades ago, when there was a worry that systems would crash as the clocks struck midnight. As we know, they didn't crash, and the world didn't end, and so it is with the GDPR a few months down the line.

Management bodies and law firms held briefings and information sessions. A lot of potential risks were highlighted and Armageddon threatened, but thankfully, where schools have made honest attempts to comply with the regulations, things seem to be working out. What to file, how long to keep

records, issues to do with Section 29 appeals (whether on refusal to enrol or disciplinary matters), access to video recordings, and the need to pixelate faces are coming to the fore as implementation of the regulations beds down. Schools can get good information on the website dataprotectionschools.ie, but many schools have had to rewrite their data-protection policies.

DIGITAL STRATEGY

Schools received additional grant aid as part of the government's Digital Strategy, which was welcome. Funds are made available, but the hoped-for front-loading of resources has not materialised. The use of technology in our schools, whether as part of management information systems or for teaching and learning, must have adequate broadband and technical backup to help schools cope, and this often isn't the case. The strategy has GDPR implications, which may be a chore, but on the other hand the use of ICT to upload Classroom-Based Assessments as part of the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement will be very welcome in recognising areas of learning and other areas of student interest that are proving difficult to record administratively. There is disagreement over who should be responsible for inputting what could be a significant amount of data. Schools await developments.

ISSUES RESULTING FROM SOCIAL MEDIA

One area of significant concern is schools' ability to cope with issues resulting from social media. Bullying, racism, sexting, and videos undermining teachers and students that are posted outside school hours result in schools trying to cope with the consequences on a daily basis. Parents' expectations of what actions are possible for a school are often unrealistic. Schools find it frustrating when parents maintain that their child couldn't possibly be involved in such situations.

Resources on webwise.ie are very useful but underused by parents and students.

Parents are often very conscious of their rights but not so conscious of responsibilities when issues that should be sorted out at home are brought into school. Inevitably, the school can't win. This is a worry, but what is more of a worry is pupil self-esteem, well-being, and resilience, which can be compromised by the abuse of social media. Resources on webwise.ie are very useful but underused by parents and students. This has led to an increase in student self-harm and even more serious consequences.

What areas to cover in a review is a daunting task. Other issues prominent during the year but in no particular order involved:

State exams – how the system will cope in the light of the recent High Court ruling;

Possible revisions to the Leaving Cert;

The potential for conflict as a result of the Admissions bill in reducing the places available for children of past pupils;

The abolition of the Baptism barrier in one sector, but with other schools able to select on denominational grounds;

The moratorium on the appointment of ancillary staff, particularly in the ETB and Community and Comprehensive sector when people retire, which is causing severe disruption in affected schools;

Risk-assessment profiles in the new Child Protection Guidelines;

Expanding the range of subjects in the senior cycle as we seek to embed junior cycle reform;

The high trust model governing the use of professional time granted to teachers, and potential areas of conflict as schools implement CBAs and SLAR meetings;

The annoyance caused by the circular on school uniforms, when schools had so recently undertaken a review;

ALL IN GOOD TIME...

The lack of clarity in the first circular on students who wish to opt out of Religion, and the ability of schools to offer alternative provision. Schools are dynamic institutions. The Action Plan for Education followed by Minister Bruton is being implemented to good effect, with improvements being registered across the board. Recent international studies bear witness to this. When Minister Bruton moved to his new portfolio in October, it is worth noting that his successor, Minister Joe McHugh, in his early pronouncements recognised the fast pace of reform and assured his audience that he was listening and would do his best to ensure that time to embed new initiatives would be provided, as well as the resources necessary to implement them. And so say all of us!



Outgoing NAPD President, **Mary Keane**, passes the chain of office to **Kieran Golden** of Mayfield Community School, Cork, at the end of the annual conference in October 2018.



John Curtis

General Secretary,
Joint Managerial
Body/Association
of Management of
Catholic Secondary
Schools

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT IN POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS

A new paradigm

In 2014 the Joint Managerial Body (JMB) and the Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools (ACCS) presented a document to the Department of Education and Skills (DES) entitled 'A Proposal for Management Structures for Post-Primary Schools'. It marked the culmination of a period of consultation and research by the two second-level school management bodies on how a recalibrated and enhanced model of middle management might be introduced in our schools.

The document's genesis was partly the moratorium on filling vacant middle-management posts that resulted from the economic downturn and obviously had an adverse impact in our schools. But it also reflected the realisation that a new model was needed for how middle management might be constructed and would evolve. It is interesting to look at the main principles of its proposals for new management structures:

- Allow for local-level decision-making on the recruitment and structure of middle-management roles
- Allow for local flexibility in managing the middle-management system
- Enable career development through the use of middle-management structures
- Ensure accountability of middle-management roles through better procedures for reporting, monitoring, and sanction
- Promote mobility in the middle-management structures as a preparation for advancement to senior management roles
- Create opportunities for senior management to prioritise teaching and learning in schools.

The proposals resonated with a realisation at DES level that reform in this area was warranted. In an address towards the end of 2015 to the Annual Conference of European Network for Improving Research and Development in Education Leadership and Management, Chief Inspector Dr Harold Hislop acknowledged: 'We have to face up to the need to create greater and more flexible middle-management capacity in Irish schools, and management bodies have been pressing this case with Department officials and ministers.' At that time, the chill winds of financial rectitude still blew, but dialogue began to occur, various suggestions and embryonic models were floated, and a sense emerged that as funding became available this was an area that could be addressed.

It was a time, too, when there was a thrust towards the curricular reform that culminated in the new junior cycle and, industrial issues

aside, prompted us towards a renewed focus on the teaching and learning and management dynamic in our schools. The work of the Inspectorate was coalescing towards the 'Looking at Our School' document. Published in 2016, it advocated a vision of engagement and management at school level predicated on concepts of fluid and distributed leadership, which focused primarily on optimising teaching and learning processes in the school.

That extra deputy principals were assigned to many schools in 2016/17 copper-fastened the sense that a new way of looking at collaborative leadership in schools had to evolve, and engaged us all in further reflection on what possibilities might emerge in the long-promised restoration of middle-management posts in our schools.

The nature of a collaboration that involves the Department, management bodies, and teacher unions towards producing any circular will inevitably present challenges for all involved. But it was apparent from early on that the final product had the potential to be forward-looking and transformative, and there was significant investment in time and energy from everyone involved.

The cooperation evident among the management bodies in producing the 2014 document was again manifest in discussion with Department officials as precepts took shape and officials crafted a document that would reflect the principles enunciated in 'Looking at Our School'. And so, after due consultation, Circular Letter 0003/2018 on Leadership and Management in Post-Primary Schools emerged.

There was of course frustration in many quarters that a circular due at the start of the 2017/18 academic year did not appear until January for schools in the post-primary sector. This put schools in an unenviable space, trying to concertina the process of reflection and engagement with all relevant school parties that the circular required, trying to make significant progress before the end of the academic year.

It stretched the school management bodies too, in trying to apprise their member schools of all that the circular entailed. In the case of the JMB, we reached approximately 600 people in information sessions scheduled throughout the country, and I would like to compliment my colleagues in the JMB who planned and delivered this training in such a short period of time. The other management bodies, too, engaged in similar preparatory work with their schools.

These frustrations were offset by the realisation that the circular did present new possibilities to schools. Whereas previous circulars in this area tended to use language that placed posts of responsibility solely in the management spectrum, this circular leads on the notion of Leadership and Management, and the change in focus appears in its opening line: 'High-quality leadership is crucial in establishing a shared purpose and vision for a school and to the achievement of high quality educational outcomes for students.'

**Circular 0003/2018
on Leadership and
Management in Post-
Primary Schools
presented new
possibilities.**

The emphasis throughout is on leadership and empowering those taking on these middle leadership and management roles to engage in a coherent way in the running of our schools. The concept of distributed leadership and all this entails is referenced in the need for strategies in a school to evaluate need and direction, and in the key premise is that everything should funnel to improve the learning experience of the student in the school:

Leadership in a school context creates a vision for development leading to improvements in outcomes for learners, and is based on shared values and robust evaluation of evidence of current practice and outcomes. In this way, leadership is distributed throughout the school as a key support for student learning.

The circular also allows that in equipping a new generation of school leaders for the challenges they face in a complex and challenging school and social environment, there should be flexibility in assignment, the capacity to experience different perspectives of what leadership in a school can entail, and a review that can allow reflection and growth in the tenets of leadership.

'Looking at Our School' is the touchstone for a school reflecting on practice and establishing the needs and priorities that will allow it to construct a leadership and management frame to suit its specific needs. It identifies and explores four key leadership and management domains in a school, referenced in the circular, that should be comprehended in any leadership structure: *Leading teaching and learning*, *Managing the organisation*, *Leading school development*, and *Developing leadership capacity*. In determining what best fits the requirements of each school, cognisance can be taken of the school's characteristic spirit, its mission statement, and its particular aims and objectives.

As the fundamental contact point with our pupils, teachers are unquestionably our key leaders.

Any new circular and its implementation will have challenges, and it is unfortunate that in this instance it coincided with a tsunami of other curricular and legislative change that has stretched school leaders' capacity to cover all bases. Furthermore, the number of new posts allocated this year does not match the number lost in the last decade, and in an era of ever-increasing demands on schools this needs to be addressed.

Notwithstanding the challenges, school communities have embraced the opportunity and challenges that the circular entails, and its implications are seen as enhancing efficacy and student experience on the ground. Other challenges will emerge. Issues of distributed leadership and how it can be developed in this sphere perhaps still need exploration and more direction. Hopefully, what is opening up to us now are possibilities in this area and the beginning of a conversation that will improve mission, professionalism, efficacy, and outcome in each school.

Finally, if there is a paradigm shift taking place in how we understand leadership in our schools, the most important aspect is perhaps how we comprehend the role of teachers. As the fundamental contact point with our pupils, and in their engagement with the teaching and learning process, teachers are unquestionably our key leaders. Though its primary focus is

on the middle leadership and management structure, the circular notes: 'Every teacher has a leadership role within the school community and in relation to student learning', and it is important that this be given attention.

What occurs in the other spheres of leadership is to facilitate and augment the teacher's core function. Much of junior cycle reform is predicated on teachers becoming involved in more collaborative activities that should evolve from subject department engagement to such areas as modelling of best practice, team teaching, and peer evaluation, and this presents opportunities for leadership to be nurtured and encouraged. In the context of methodologies, teachers might be given opportunities to lead in illustration and exposition and to evaluate best practice in a manner commensurate with what 'Looking at Our School' promotes.

With further curricular reform envisaged, the concept of teachers as leaders and influencers in collaborative practice will become increasingly important. In his address in 2015, Dr Hislop said:

We must accept, as James Spillane puts it, that 'teaching is socially defined more as a complex social craft' as distinct from 'a well-defined, relatively invariable, technical endeavour'. This means that leadership in schools must support networks and collaboration in the school that promote professional control and collegiality among teachers.

In schools, we are all called to be leaders: perhaps with Circular Letter 0003/2018 it is a case now of progress made, but much more to do



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 next conference will be held in St. Patrick's Campus, DCU, Institute of Education & All Hallows College on 12th - 14th April 2019 - Embracing the Elements of Change!**



For up-to-date information visit:
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Dr Michael Redmond

Director of Research & Development, JMB, and Vice Chairperson, NCCA

FLOURISHING LEADER – FLOURISHING SCHOOL

Linking the principal's potential to that of their school

The 2018 national policy and framework for well-being in schools focuses, of course, on the flourishing of the individual, in particular that of the student and the teacher. The core premise is that 'well-being is present when a person realises their potential' (DES, 2018), which to me aligns with the concept of self-actualisation. But if an individual can self-actualise, might not a school be able to do this too – and how might this relate to the flourishing of the principal?

Though not well developed in the literature, the notion that 'all schools develop a unique personality that is built up as people solve problems, cope with tragedies and celebrate successes' (Schein, 1985) has potential to support a concept based on the idea of self-actualisation. If personal self-actualisation can be defined as 'man's tendency to actualise himself, to become his potentialities ... to express and activate all the capacities of the organism' (Rogers, 1961), then the school, an 'organism' with its own unique personality, may similarly have a capacity for actualisation.

If 'real transformation of schools ... involves a commitment to self-actualisation as a process of moment-by-moment change' (Harris, 2007), there may exist a nested interdependence between the principal's emotional resources supporting their self-actualisation and the creation of the emotional conditions essential for school renewal, leading to realisation of its own unique potentialities (Figure 1).

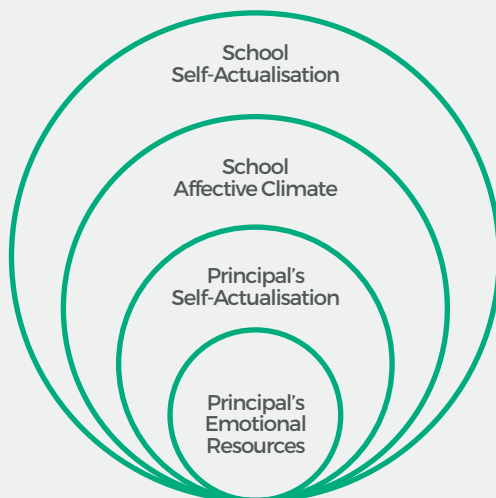


Figure 1: Modelling linkage between emotional resources, conditions, and actualisation

One weakness of this model lies in the application of a human developmental term, *self-actualisation*, to an organisation, the school. I asked some principals in my recent research whether they believed a school can have a personality – not as a strategy to side-step such anthropomorphism but to explore their perspective on this possibility. The feedback was unanimous:

Denis: I think so, Michael ... personality and all that goes with it.

Christine: Yes. And different year-groups have a personality of their own, and different staffs have a personality of their own, and our staff personality is changing big-time.

Martin: I do actually, I do, because I think it's driven by their ethos or what they subscribe to. A school community has a character of its own and has a personality – almost like a temperament of its own.

It's possible that the principals' articulation of school 'personality' was as a result of my prompting, though it has been similarly affirmed by much larger groups of newly appointed principals in the training modules I have led. It is equally possible that the leaders are referring to school climate, which Owens (2004, p.178) relates to such terms as 'atmosphere, personality, tone, or ethos'.

So whether it is a social fiction or is more fundamentally related to climate or culture, it must nonetheless remain valid to speak of a school's 'tendency to actualise [itself], to become [its] potentialities ... to express and activate all the capacities of the [organisation]', to paraphrase Rogers, above.

I have long argued that a school's capacity to reach its potential is rooted in the affective capacities of the principal. My concept of 'affectively attuned change-management' (Redmond, 2016, p.109) draws from the shared stories of over 180 voluntary secondary principals to identify twelve key emotional competencies framed under four domains:

1. personal impetus (values and ethical foundations)
2. personal mobilisation (affective acumen and personal agency)
3. collective impetus (human connection and climate control)
4. collective mobilisation (staff synergy towards reaching potential).

Thus a resonance between the nested model of linked personal and organisational actualisation (Figure 1) with the affective attunement domains becomes evident (Figure 2):

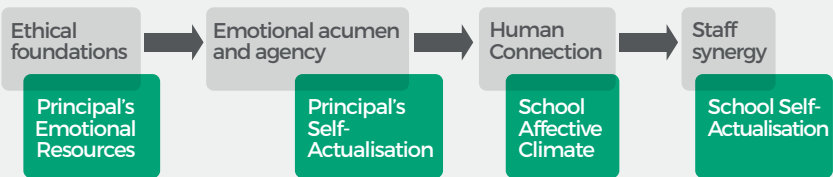


Figure 2: Resonance between affective attunement and self-actualisation models

So which ‘soft’ competencies, precisely, do principals point to in each of these four domains? From over 70,000 words of principals’ narratives, the following affectively rich capacities emerged as vital to the goal of authentic collaboration and school flourishing:

1. Recognising that values and emotionality are intertwined in the person of the principal (Beatty, 2000, p.339) and find expression in:

- an internal moral compass
- ethical decision-making
- purposeful and nuanced exchanging of information
- appropriate conveyance of meaning
- coherence between rhetoric and action
- engendering a shared belief in one’s integrity and actions.

2. Self-actualisation, ‘expressing and activating all one’s capacities’, presents as self-efficacy in which the principal:

- links life experience to the role of head teacher
- protects and renews self with ‘mental strength’
- bounces back from setbacks
- employs structured solution-seeking
- removes rocks from the river – i.e., solves problems effectively
- actively sources practical help or psychological support
- engages in social learning for sustainability
- possesses self-belief.

3. The principal must mobilise their skills in human connection, which directly impact on the school’s affective climate, by demonstrating:

- orientation towards care
- mutualisation of respect
- awareness and meeting of needs
- resolution focus towards micro-political dynamics
- emotional self-protection
- concern for quality of life
- a holistic approach to the condition of self and others
- empowerment of others.

4. Ultimately, the principal leads the staff in bringing the school to ‘expressing and activating all its capacities’ by artful reculturation, employing:

- listening and watching – contextual consciousness
- situationally aware decision-making
- operational consistency
- communicating and modelling expectations
- inculturating professional account
- a distinctive mode of influencing people.

GRAPHICAL REPRESENTATION

In generating a graphical representation of this phenomenon, the principals’ narratives were re-examined for recurring images. Although symbolic language was occasionally coined, such as interviewee Denis’s reference to his office desk as his ‘emotional-labour table – this is where all that stuff

goes on', the most frequently cited scene of significance in the principals' habitus was 'the corridor'. Each of the interviewees and a number of the survey respondents referred to important aspects of their activity being transacted on school corridors:

MR: So a lot of this [emotional labour] work happens at this table.

Denis: ...or around the corridors, Michael, you pick your spot, you pick your moment, you know your people.

Christine: I'd somebody here recently who is a principal, and they said, 'You know the students', and I said, 'Yeah, I'm on the corridors.'

Thus, key elements of each of the four processes foundational to the model can and do occur 'on the corridor', including:

- purposeful and nuanced exchanging of information
- engaging in social learning for sustainability
- orientation towards care
- awareness and meeting of needs
- a holistic approach to the condition of self and others
- listening and watching – contextual consciousness
- situationally aware decision-making
- communicating and modelling expectations.

Two other features of 'the corridor' are also significant in terms of imagery – the purposeful flow of people through space and time, and the rooms off the corridor, where transformational activity can occur. This latter point was brought into sharp focus by Christine, who was taken from the corridor into a room and experienced a turning point herself:

Christine: I was sauntering along the corridor one day and they [two colleagues] said, 'Quick – into our room', and the two of them said, 'Cop on to yourself – you go and apply for that job'. 'I don't want it.' 'We don't care – you go and apply for it. Look at who's applying for it, and how would you feel if they were giving orders to you?' I said, 'It wouldn't bother me', and they set the seeds, and I remember asking my predecessor for an application form, and I ... I got the job.

A graphical representation of what I have called 'Affective Actualisation' is presented in Figure 3 on the next page as meaningful affective activity in the purposeful flow of people along a school corridor, ultimately taking the community towards greater fulfilment of their potential:

The Affective Actualisation concept sets out a chain of association linking integrity and efficacy to connection and, ultimately, reculturation. Its usefulness will hopefully lie in its affirmation of a link between the flourishing of the principal and that of their school, as well as its elucidation of the emotional competencies to which we all need to attend if we are to live and lead more fully.

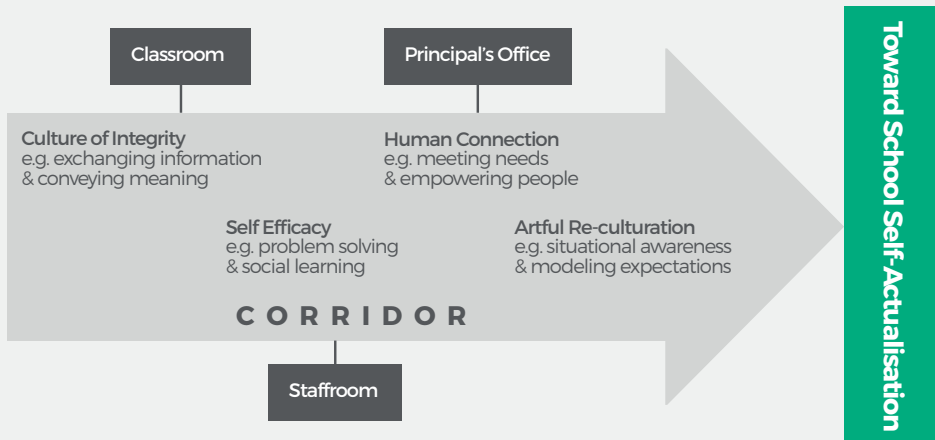


Figure 3: Graphical representation of Affective Actualisation

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ASTI Convention 2018



Kieran Christie, General Secretary ASTI and **Dr Melanie Ní Dhuinn**, Assistant Professor in Teacher Education, TCD. Guest Speaker at ASTI Convention 2018, held in Clayton Hotel, Silver Springs Cork, 3- 5 April 2018.

SCHOOL PLACEMENT

A new era for partnership?



Tomás Ó Ruairc

Director and CEO,
Teaching Council

One of the most visible and palpable aspects of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) for student teachers is school placement. From my own experience, it is certainly the part of the programme that leaves the most indelible of memories – both positive and negative! In a recent survey by the Teaching Council of student teachers, the questions on school placement drew some of the highest levels of engagement.

It is fair to acknowledge that we have made huge progress in ITE in the last six years. As the late Prof. John Coolahan would often point out, these programmes were transformed at a time when we were experiencing the most severe financial crisis in the history of the State. All seventy ITE programmes, covering primary, post-primary, and further education, have been reviewed and accredited by the Teaching Council. All are grounded in clear conceptual frameworks.

From the Council's perspective, two of the most significant structural changes in the programmes have been the increased time for reflective practice, and school placement. The programmes were extended to four years and two years, not to facilitate more of the same, but to give higher education institutions (HEIs) and student teachers space and time to fully integrate their learning into their professional practice. This was all with the ultimate aim of enhancing the quality of teaching and learning experienced by pupils and students.

This period of significant change and innovation in the content of ITE took place at the same time as the infrastructure around ITE provision was being transformed, on foot of the 2012 Sahlberg Report. The overall trend, at least conceptually, has been to bring more cohesion and collaboration to this provision, while ensuring that it is rooted in a university-based, research-informed context.

This policy position of the State is not a universal one in international terms. We must work hard as partners in education to ensure that it remains intact, and that it continues to demonstrate that it can support high-quality teaching, learning, and innovation in our schools. This is in all our interests.

The Department of Education and Skills (DES) has conducted a formal review of the implementation of the Sahlberg Report, and we await its findings with interest. In the interim, it is reasonable to assume that a significant overhaul of the structure for HEI-based provision of ITE has occurred. If this is the case, how stands the structural support and provision for school placement?

SCHOOL PLACEMENT – STRUCTURAL SUPPORT

Our recently published longitudinal research on school placement (Hall et al., 2018) indicates that we have made a lot of progress but that a number of areas need further work. It was conducted over four years, from 2014 to 2018. Eight recommendations arising from the research focus on the need for more schools to support school placement, more support for cooperating teachers, enhanced partnerships between HEIs and schools, including joint research, and the need to see how school placement links with Droichead and Cosán.

These recommendations hint at the complexity of relationships that underpin school placement. Many organisations and stakeholders are involved: school boards of management, principals, cooperating teachers, wider school staff, student teachers, pupils and students, HEIs, placement tutors, Teaching Council, Higher Education Authority (HEA), and the DES. Yet no one organisation or body has full control of all the levers that influence the management of school placement.

The DES has overall policy responsibility for education, including funding and resourcing. The HEA is responsible for the funding of third level. The Teaching Council, as the independent professional regulatory body, sets the standards and professional requirements for school placement in teacher education. The HEIs set the academic standards and are responsible for the operation of school placement as a central element of the programmes of ITE. Schools offer student teachers opportunities for school placement, and individual teachers opt for the role of cooperating teachers.

By supporting student teachers, school principals can help ensure an adequate supply of qualified teachers who will meet their needs.

The intention is that all of these elements should link together so that the experience of school placement is helpful, instructive, and enjoyable for everyone. The need to ensure a coherent, user-friendly system for organising school placement is obvious.

PARTNERSHIP

Given this lattice of overlapping responsibilities, and the historical nature of the school system, the partnership approach which the Council has called for in its school placement guidelines is essential if its full potential as a professional crucible for student teachers is going to be realised. This has been clear to us for some time from the school placement seminars we have hosted for HEIs, school principals, and cooperating teachers.

The messages we have received from schools have been very clear: supporting student teachers on placement is an intergenerational professional responsibility which many principals and cooperating teachers take seriously. Given the high stakes of teaching and learning for pupils and their families, however, the experience of facilitating student teachers to teach in classrooms must be fully and wholly supported. They need to be given full opportunity to grow and develop their professional practice, to reflect on that experience, and to become better teachers as a result.

This should be a win-win-win for all concerned. By supporting student teachers, school principals can help ensure an adequate supply of qualified

teachers who will meet their needs, and especially their students' needs, well into the future. Student teachers will learn how to become better teachers. And HEIs will enhance the quality of graduates whom they help prepare for the teaching profession.

A full and holistic partnership approach to school placement, which fully acknowledges the critical importance of teacher education for all parties, is needed to realise this vision. How can we develop and enhance the current structural supports for school placement to this end?

WHAT CAN WE ALL DO TO ENHANCE SCHOOL PLACEMENT?

The Teaching Council, for its part, is engaged in a comprehensive review of the standards for Initial Teacher Education, including the requirements for school placement. We are aware of the variety of views about the current standards, in particular the ten-week block that students must engage in towards the end of their programme. The rationale for this requirement continues to be valid – supporting student teachers as they approach the point of qualification in ensuring that the transition to full responsibility as qualified teachers is as smooth and effective as possible. As part of its review, the Council will consider the various ways this aim could be fulfilled.

Beyond that, it seems that the administrative and structural supports around school placement will need to be significantly enhanced. Based on feedback from HEIs, schools, and student teachers, all parties are looking for ways to make the organisation of school placement easier. The systems by which this could be achieved exist. It should be eminently possible for us all to work out how the systems could be implemented.

Implementing such systems would go a long way towards supporting the work of principals and cooperating teachers. Their work in supporting, guiding, and advising student teachers is vital. We all need to acknowledge the work they do throughout the year and look at practical ways we could enhance our support for them.

All parties are looking for ways to make the organisation of school placement easier.

Beyond logistics and administration, we are aware of enhanced efforts by some HEIs to strengthen their partnerships with schools in the area of school placement. One of the most innovative approaches is seeking to fully and authentically integrate research into relationships so as to inform and support professional practice in schools. In our most recent seminars on school placement, we facilitated HEIs and their partner schools in showcasing the various ways they are strengthening partnerships. The aim is to share professional learning both between HEIs and schools, and within each respective context.

MEETING THE IDENTIFIED NEEDS OF THE SYSTEM

We have made significant progress in teacher education in the past six years. Much of the structural provision for ITE has been transformed, as have the programmes they offer. We are seeing clear evidence of the positive impact of these changes. If we are to sustain this progress, however, all stakeholders need to enhance the supports for school placement, so that together we can fulfil our responsibilities to student teachers and to the students they will teach.

More fundamentally, the demographic projections from the Central Statistics Office (CSO) indicate that the number of students attending post-primary will increase year on year until they peak in 2025. That is seven more years of growth, which will drive increased demand for teachers in post-primary.

We have a particular window of time now where we can enhance our structural supports for school placement, and ITE more broadly, to ensure that the model of teacher education that we have will provide enough teachers to meet the identified needs of the system. This means the need for more schools and teachers to facilitate school placement. And it means that schools will need more support and guidance to facilitate this engagement.

CONCLUSION

In his book *Learning in Landscapes of Practice*, Prof. Etienne Wenger-Trayner neatly summarises the significant challenges that face students such as student teachers on school placement:

Students engaged in practice-based learning are engaged in courses which seek to integrate learning in academic and workplace contexts. They face the challenge of negotiating multiple boundaries in the course of their studies. They straddle a boundary between the academic and workplace context, but also typically are engaged in transitions across boundaries in the workplace, both between their current and future work roles and between different areas of practice.

Given the pressures that student teachers can face on placement, the seminar hosted by Mary Immaculate College in Thurles last November, led by Dr Finn Ó Murchú, was instructive. Teachers at the seminar were clear in calling for more coherence between the various elements of the system. They identified the need for reciprocal relationships between schools and HEIs. The seminar concluded with a call to further explore the opportunities for HEIs and schools to work together more broadly and deeply.

This will be the litmus test for us all on school placement over the next five years – the depth and breadth of school–HEI partnerships so that everyone involved, especially the student teacher, grows in their professional learning.

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JUNIOR CYCLE REFORM

Five years in, where are we now?



Pádraig Kirk

Director, Junior Cycle
for Teachers (JCT)

Implementation of the new Framework for Junior Cycle (DES, 2015) began in schools in September 2014, with the 2012 iteration of the Framework forming the basis of teacher professional development at that time. The 2014/15 school year also saw the introduction of a new subject specification in English for all first-year post-primary students.

Since then those students have gone on to complete the full three years of their junior cycle, which heralded many firsts: they were the first to experience new classroom-based assessments (CBAs), the first to sit the final state examination in its new format (two hours instead of five for higher-level students), and the first to be awarded the new Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA), a rich picture of student learning which replaced the old Junior Certificate. These students are currently in their senior cycle years; for the students following in their footsteps, junior cycle reform is a reality in more and more subjects.

The reform of junior cycle is now well under way in schools. Subject specifications are replacing old syllabuses. These specifications set out expectations for students and through a series of learning outcomes 'describe the knowledge, understanding, skills and values students should be able to demonstrate after a period of learning' (DES, 2015, p.10). This shift to a learning-outcomes-based specification is perhaps one of the most significant changes at classroom level.

Junior cycle learning outcomes are student-centred and so are written in terms of learners and their development rather than what is to be taught (Biesta and Priestley, 2013). Each subject specification is developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) and undergoes rigorous development, involving extensive consultation. Aligning with the key tenets of junior cycle, each specification is written to include opportunities to develop key skills, including literacy and numeracy, which aim to support students' learning, progress, and achievement.

New subject specifications were introduced for Business Studies and Science in September 2016, which means that by the end of the 2018/19 school year, three subjects will have concluded their first full cycle in schools. September 2017 saw the introduction of subject specifications in Gaeilge, Visual Art, and Modern Foreign Languages (MFL), while September 2018 saw five being introduced: Mathematics, History, Geography, Music, and Home Economics. September 2019 will see the last group of subjects to be introduced, starting again

with first-year students: the four technological subjects, Classics, Religious Education, and Jewish Studies. By 2019 all subjects in their new format will have been phased in, and by 2022 all subjects will have undergone full cycles in the school system.

As well as individual subjects being revised, the curricular programme into which they fit is also changing. Students will now study a maximum of ten subjects for examination purposes, effectively ending situations where it was possible to study fourteen or even more subjects. More and more schools are introducing new short courses, of 100 hours duration across the junior cycle, and this is presenting opportunities for schools to better tailor their junior cycle to meet the needs of their own student cohort.

Innovative and creative courses such as Coding, Digital Media Literacy, Artistic Performance, Chinese Language and Culture, and Philosophy are popping up on junior cycle curricula nationwide, while external bodies such as the Post-Primary Languages Initiative are creating a repository of short courses that schools can introduce if they so wish. Short courses are designed in accordance with nationally established and published criteria by the NCCA, or schools may develop their own.

A new area of learning called well-being is assuming centre stage. This move is aimed at better supporting our students to cope with the normal ‘ups and downs’ of modern living and has at its core six well-being indicators:

A new area of learning called well-being is assuming centre stage.

Connected, Aware, Resilient, Respected, Active, and Responsible. As well as promoting a whole-school culture of well-being, schools are asked to devote 400 hours of tuition time to this area by 2021, equivalent to one-fifth of the entire junior cycle programme.

The timetabled provision of the well-being area of learning comprises PE, SPHE, CSPE (in the form of three short courses which schools can follow if desired), guidance-related learning, and other areas deemed appropriate by schools for their student body. The Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines for schools, published in January 2017 by the NCCA, support schools in developing their well-being programme.

A significant development at junior cycle has been the introduction of Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programmes. These are designed for a small number of students with particular special educational needs. This is the first time that students at these levels have had access to a tailored junior cycle programme, and is a welcome development in creating a more inclusive education system.

Student assessment practices at this level are also changing. Heretofore, student achievement at junior cycle level was measured primarily by how they performed in a final state exam in June. The reformed junior cycle changes all of this. It promotes formative assessment practice in classrooms, providing vital feedback on where the student is in their learning, where they need to go, and most importantly how to get there.

Junior cycle sees the introduction of a dual approach to assessment that supports student learning over the three years of junior cycle, and also

measures achievement at the end of those three years. While final exams still exist, albeit in a changed format, they are now complemented by structured Classroom-Based Assessments (CBAs) and an Assessment Task.

CBAs were developed to help assess skills that cannot be easily assessed in a traditional pen-and-paper exam. Students are required to undertake two CBAs in each subject they study, generally one in second year and one in third year. For short courses, only one CBA is required. Student work on CBAs takes place over a number of weeks (usually three) and is designed to take place as much as possible during class time. While CBAs are facilitated in the classroom by the subject teacher, they are externally devised by the NCCA, in consultation with the State Examinations Commission, who also define the national timetable for CBAs. CBAs are assessed by teachers with clear criteria provided, along with exemplars of student work at different levels to support teacher judgement.

Having assessed student work, teachers have an opportunity to share and discuss samples of work at Subject Learning and Assessment Review (SLAR) meetings. This plays an important role in developing an understanding of standards and expectations, by enabling teachers to reflect on the evidence of students' work and to share the learning and teaching strategies supporting that work. SLAR also fosters 'purposeful peer interaction' (Fullan, 2008, p.46) and enhances student feedback.

Schools are also changing how they report on student progress, both to parents/guardians and to students themselves. Gone are the days of As, Bs, and Cs, etc., which provided limited insight into student progress, and in come new sets of descriptors for final exams and CBAs. For CBAs there are four levels of achievement: *Exceptional*, *Above Expectations*, *In Line with Expectations*, and *Yet to Meet Expectations*. These are informed by rich features of quality which are criteria to help teachers arrive at a best-fit, on-balance judgement about the quality of student work.

Junior Cycle for Teachers is a dedicated support service for schools, including school leaders and teachers.

Indeed, for schools, junior cycle reform has introduced a whole new language of learning, not just in how we report on student progress but right across the curriculum. Five years in, we all continue to engage with and develop a shared understanding of this new language. Significantly, most of this engagement happens collectively in schools, which in turn is helping to further promote an enhanced culture of teacher collaboration.

The changes currently being embedded in schools, like those outlined above, are significant. It was recognised early in the reform that schools would require significant support in implementing these changes effectively. This support came in the form of Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT), a dedicated support service for schools, including school leaders and teachers. JCT is staffed entirely by teachers, who are seconded from their teaching role to design, develop, and facilitate high-quality professional learning experiences for teachers.

JCT has been providing sustained CPD for teachers since 2013/14 across a myriad of areas. We work closely with all interested stakeholders to ensure a smooth roll-out of our services nationally, and in doing so we endeavour to minimise disruption to teaching and learning at school level. Generally, schools close for two days annually to allow teachers to participate in CPD opportunities, while a smaller cohort of teachers will do an additional CPD day. No one ever moves to close schools lightly, but it is recognised that the greater good in the end will be worth the efforts being made now.

Other supports include allocating professional time to all teachers, which resulted in the creation of some 650 new teaching posts in summer 2017. School managers are also given additional resources to help them coordinate and manage changes at school level.

In recent months the NCCA has embarked on a review of senior cycle, and we look forward to what might transpire from this. There is little doubt, however, that the changes currently afoot at junior cycle level will impact across the wider school system and may lay foundations for developments in senior cycle.

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Mike Hughes, author of 'The Magenta Principles.ie', addresses the NAPD conference, October 2018.

National Student Grant Awarding Authority



In 2012, under the Government's Transforming Public Services agenda, a centralised student grant administration function at national level for higher & further education students was created. This replaced the existing student grant process which was administered by 66 individual grant awarding bodies across VECs and local authorities.

Contact us:



support@susi.ie



/susisupport



0761 087 874



@susihelpdesk

The Student Support Act 2011 introduced reforms to the student grant process, including a single consolidated Scheme, and provided for the appointment of a single grants awarding body.

City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDETb) was designated by the Minister for Education and Skills as the single national awarding authority and within that the business unit known as **SUSI** (Student Universal Support Ireland) was created. The rules governing the operation of the grant Scheme are set out in:

- The annual Student Support Regulations which outline approved educational institutions and approved courses.
- The annual Student Grant Scheme which sets out details relating to the Scheme including classes of grant, classes of applicant, eligibility exclusions etc. In addition, the Scheme sets out core eligibility criteria including:
 - Nationality
 - Residency
 - Progression (through education)
 - Means (including 'reckonable income' as set out in the Scheme).



PLC Student



Undergraduate Student



Postgraduate Student



Student Studying Outside the State

CDETb

An Bord Oideachais agus Oiliúnaíochtaí Bhaile Átha Cliath
City of Dublin Education and Training Board



**Rialtas
na hÉireann
Government
of Ireland**

Student grants online

The main objective in centralising grant administration was therefore to bring greater simplicity and efficiency to the grants administration process while ensuring a student centred application.

To this end **SUSI** operates an online application system at www.susi.ie. Applications for new and renewal grant applications for the 2018/2019 academic year opened on the 5th April 2018. The requirement for students to submit supporting documents has been significantly reduced through data sharing agreements with relevant public bodies which further streamlines the process.

A responsive Support Desk is also available to answer any queries that students may have.

www.susi.ie.

SUSI by Numbers

SUSI processed almost 100,000 applications with circa 80,000 students awarded a grant for the 2018/2019 academic year.

Grant types

Eligible students attending further education, **Post Leaving Certificate courses**, receive a maintenance grant, the value of which is determined by the level of reckonable income in the household for the previous year and the distance that the student travels from home to college (more or less than 45km).

Eligible students attending **Higher Education**, as well as receiving the maintenance grant, also have their fees/student contribution covered, whichever applies to the student. The value of the student contribution for the 2018/19 academic year was €3,000.

Eligible students attending approved courses in approved institutions **outside of the Republic of Ireland**, at undergraduate level only, receive a maintenance grant from SUSI.

2017/2018 academic year saw the introduction of a maintenance grant for eligible students at **Postgraduate level** who qualify for the special rate of grant. SUSI also provides funding to eligible students at postgraduate level towards the cost of their fees.

Key Dates

March	Renewal reminder emails sent to renewal applicants
April	SUSI online application system opens
June	Renewal applications priority closing
July	New applications priority closing
August	Leaving Cert results and CAO offers
September	First maintenance payment Higher Education
October	First maintenance payment PLC
November	Online application system closes

SENIOR CYCLE REVIEW

Many developments at senior cycle have taken place in recent years, including the introduction of new subjects such as Politics and Society, Computer Science, and Physical Education. A range of second assessment components have been introduced across many subjects, and the Leaving Certificate grading system has also changed significantly.

But it's fair to say that the last structural changes at senior cycle took place over twenty years ago, when many subject syllabuses were revised and the curriculum was diversified to include the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). At that time, Transition Year also became a recognised part of an optional three-year senior cycle. Much has happened with these programmes in the interim, so it's a good time to review the strengths, weaknesses, and challenges of these programmes and the senior cycle as a whole.

CHANGING CONTEXT

The world and society have always changed, but with technological advancements the pace of change has become more rapid than ever, and schools have been immersed in these changes. The impact of globalisation, secularisation, a changing economy and world of work, and ongoing technological change is profound, even on small countries like Ireland. We have a more diverse society, where concerns about human well-being rise with the quickening pace of change.

Concepts of learning are evolving: there is now a focus on key skills and competencies, problem-solving, learning to learn, and working with knowledge. In turn, the role of teachers and teaching changes too. Teachers are working together, building learning communities, and adopting powerful pedagogies that are collaborative, inquiry-based, and dialogical, adjusting the focus from teaching to the impact of teaching on learning. This is aligned to a changing role for students, who may participate more in their schools on many levels – including, for example, in the review of senior cycle.

These changes have led to many debates about education and have presented schools with many challenges and opportunities. The review of senior cycle education is an opportunity for the influence of all these changes to be considered across this whole stage of education and across all programmes.

There are important local, system-based considerations for this review too. It's starting at a time when many recent developments at junior cycle are still being introduced and embedded in classrooms



Barry Slattery

Director, Curriculum and Assessment, NCCA



John Hammond

Acting Chief Executive, NCCA

– another major change that schools have experienced in recent years, and one that has not been as smooth as everyone would have liked. But we are now regularly reminded by parents, students, and teachers of the need to consider the line of continuity between a reformed junior cycle and a future senior cycle.

SCHOOLS AT THE HUB OF POLICY DEVELOPMENT

It is clear that schools are at the hub of change in our education system, so it makes sense for them to be instrumental in developing the policy advice that will affect schools. The approach to senior cycle review involves schools from the outset. This allows for the realities of school life, culture, and perspectives to inform review from the earliest stage. It enables us to think about the implementation of educational change in the context of schools and daily schooling.

This combined approach, of working directly with schools and with our representative structures in the NCCA, will help to ensure that the advice from the review has stakeholder support and is based in the reality of what schools are doing and can do. Before any advice on senior cycle development is offered, NCCA is working directly with forty-one schools to hear the views of teachers, management, parents, and students, through school-based review. This is central to the overall review.

THE REVIEW PROCESS

The initial phase of the review process, as set out in the figure below, involves two consultation cycles: a school-based review, and a series of national seminars. The first cycle explores the theme ‘The purpose of Senior Cycle: thinking about the future’; the second looks at ‘Pathways and flexibility’. Each begins with a school-based review. This involves discussions with around 2,400 students, and with teachers, school management, and parents in forty-one schools.

Teachers engage in staff discussions facilitated by a link teacher in the school who has direct access to an NCCA mentor.

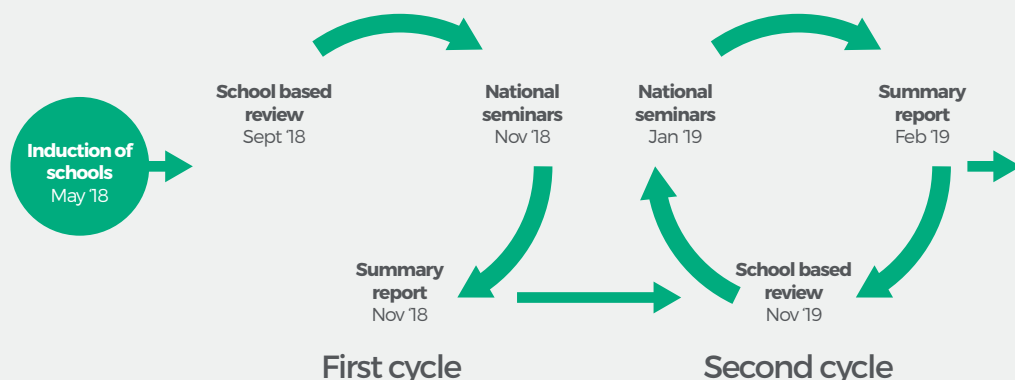
We are providing schools with a range of supports, including mentoring, short research reports on existing programmes, and research from other jurisdictions. The materials used by schools for the review discussions were developed with the ESRI and with feedback from parents, teachers, and students. In each school-based review, teachers engage in staff discussions facilitated by a link teacher in the school who has direct access to an NCCA mentor, and parents participate in focus group meetings hosted by parents in the school. The NPCpp are offering additional support to parents who wish to facilitate focus group sessions with students.

All materials, surveys, and online supports are available to all schools to facilitate optional, wider involvement in the review. Additional schools have availed of this to conduct their own school-based review and are submitting their feedback.

Each school completes a teacher and a parent response to the research questions. The student voice consultations are conducted by NCCA staff. At the end of each school-based review, the reports from parents and teachers, audio recordings, and reports of student focus group meetings are analysed

by the ESRI. The emerging themes are presented at the national seminars, held in Cork, Dublin, Galway, Waterford, Limerick, Athlone, and Sligo. These offer an opportunity for wider stakeholder involvement in the review of senior cycle, and a platform for all stakeholders to hear and discuss the views of fellow stakeholders representing a variety of interests.

The findings of both consultation cycles will be collated in a consultation report in March 2019. The final phase of the review will comprise extensive consultation on the report with all stakeholders, before a final advisory report is discussed by the NCCA Council in June 2019.



Initial phase of review process

THEMES EXPLORED IN EACH CONSULTATION CYCLE

The first cycle focuses on 'The Purpose of Senior Cycle: thinking about the future'. The Action Plan for Education aims to make the country's education and training system the best in Europe by 2026. In this context, what is the purpose of senior cycle, and what is the place of well-being/citizenship education? Considering the tradition of a strong pastoral dimension in post-primary schools, it is not surprising there is consensus among stakeholders for a senior cycle better suited to all students. In this cycle we will begin to identify how senior cycle can become more inclusive – for students with special educational needs, groups at risk of exclusion, and students who have followed Level 2 Learning Programmes at junior cycle and are moving with their peers into senior cycle. A new senior cycle can set a benchmark for including learners who may not have benefitted sufficiently or at all from senior cycle in the past.

It is important to remember throughout these deliberations that our current senior infants will be moving into senior cycle in 2028. What will they need to participate and succeed? This will inform discussions during the second consultation cycle, on 'Pathways and flexibility'. It will explore the structure of senior cycle, the educational programmes involved, the pathways available to all students, and how to organise the curriculum in these pathways. It will reflect on how the current structure of senior cycle reflects the purposes for a new senior cycle that have emerged from the first consultation cycle.

During the second cycle, we will also seek views on whether there are core subjects or learning experiences that are seen as central to senior cycle, and the degree of choice that is or should be given to students in each pathway.

If flexibility, autonomy, and customisation are to become features of a new senior cycle, it will be important to consider the implications this will have for learning, the sites of learning, assessment, reporting, certification, and qualifications.

There is a demand for upper-secondary alternatives to traditional academic pathways.

INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Deliberations on senior cycle review will be informed by research on our current programmes and on the provision of, and developments in, upper secondary education in other jurisdictions. Across the systems examined in a recently commissioned NCCA study,¹ upper secondary education aims to enable all students, regardless of background or need, to achieve their full potential; prepare them for further, lifelong learning and employment; and produce adaptable, future-focused individuals and

responsible, active citizens. Other interesting findings from the study include:

- Upper-secondary education systems appear not to be a one-size-fits-all offer, but rather provide students with a range of options to suit their future destination.
- There is demand for upper-secondary alternatives to traditional academic pathways, and internal assessment arrangements play a heightened role in such vocational/professional and technical education pathways.
- Planning – both at individual student level and in terms of local planning of provision – is increasingly important as jurisdictions offer an increasing variety of pathways.
- Environments outside of school, e.g. alternative/training providers, work-based learning, and community learning make a key contribution to experiential learning in this phase of education.
- Official records of achievement, in addition to exam results and certificates, are a feature of the upper-secondary phase, serving the needs of students and of future employers or educational institutions.
- There is a focus in the upper-secondary ‘offer’ on ensuring students’ physical and mental well-being.

It will be interesting to see if similar findings emerge from the review of senior cycle. From an NCCA point of view, as a representative body, there is much we have learned from the work at junior cycle that can benefit the approach to senior cycle review and can contribute to establishing a shared platform and trust for shaping a curriculum that genuinely meets the needs of all learners at senior cycle for years to come.

1 ‘Overview Report: Upper Secondary Education in Nine Jurisdictions’ can be accessed at: www.ncca.ie/media/3337/scoping-report-online-2.pdf.

TRANSITION YEAR – PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE

Learning for the future



Dr Gerry Jeffers

Researcher and lecturer

In mid-July 2018, as part of a review of career guidance provision in schools, the economic consultants charged by the Minister with the task invited a cross-section of people to a day-long consultative event in Farmleigh in the Phoenix Park, Dublin. This followed an earlier invitation for public submissions. A striking feature of the day was participants' focus on work experience placements at second and third level. Embedded in those conversations seemed to be a strong recognition by educators and other stakeholders that Transition Year (TY) is widely accepted as a vibrant, integral component of the Irish education system.

And yet doubts linger. For the first twenty years of Transition Year there was little evidence the programme would ever move beyond a quirky, marginal anomaly thought up by a strong-willed Minister for Education who didn't consult anyone about his innovation (Jeffers, 2015, p.97). One of Minister Richard Burke's concerns back in 1974 was the large number of early school-leavers. He also saw the secondary school system as conservative and described the Department of Education as 'demoralised'. He disliked the divisions and inequalities in schooling.

'Something subversive was needed,' he told me in a 2001 interview. And so Transition Year was born.

OFF THE TREADMILL

Richard Burke described the kernel of his innovation as follows:

Because of the growing pressures on students for high grades and competitive success, educational systems are becoming, increasingly, academic treadmills. Increasingly, too, because of these pressures, the school is losing contact with life outside, and the student has little or no opportunity 'to stand and stare', to discover the kind of person he (sic) is, the kind of society he will be living in and, in due course, contributing to, its shortcomings and its good points. The suggestion was made that perhaps somewhere in the middle of the course we might stop the treadmill and release the students from the educational pressures for one year so that they could devote time to personal development and community service. (Burke, 1974)

Prescient words from 1974! The minister was also aware, from his experiences as a teacher, of the potential of Transition Year for teacher development. In 2001 he said:

I had a high regard for the teaching profession in the sense that I knew that if circumstances could be such, they would be delighted to be liberated to do that for which their basically idealistic calling had prepared them. So, it [Transition Year] was, in a sense, an emancipation of the teaching profession to educate as distinct from grind.

He was blunt in his view that teachers can also be victims of ‘the system’. He spoke of ‘the unfortunate teaching profession’ being ‘under such pressure to bring the pupils through the treadmill’, adding that ‘with the exception of a very, very few gifted teachers, there was no opportunity for the teaching profession to actually engage in education in the strictest sense of that term’.

PARTICIPATION

Schools were slow to embrace the notion of an interdisciplinary year promoting intellectual, social, and emotional maturation and free from the pressure of public examinations. The Curriculum and Examinations Board in 1986 produced helpful *Guidelines for Schools* (CEB, 1986) but it was not until 1994, when the programme was ‘re-vivified and expanded’ (Coolahan, 2017, p.139), that participation rates increased dramatically.

“Transition Year was, in a sense, an emancipation of the teaching profession to educate as distinct from grind.”

By 2004, an official DES publication stated – some might say overstated – that ‘Transition Year, which has been one of the major innovations in Irish education, is an option which is now firmly embedded in the system’ (DES, 2004, p.13). Participation rates continue to rise. In the school year 2017/18, 92% of schools offered a TY programme, while 72% of students who enrolled in third year the previous year progressed to Transition Year.¹

TENSIONS

An early evaluation (Egan and O’Reilly, 1979) noted numerous tensions in the TY programme and varied views among practitioners. These included tensions between a focus on preparation for the workplace and for the Leaving Cert, between emphasis on practical living and on subjects like philosophy and logic, between what might be called ‘linear’ or ‘core’ subjects such as English, Irish, and Mathematics and ‘new’ subjects: ‘linear subjects were deemed an irritation in many schools and received the minimum possible emphasis,’ the researchers found, and along with Philosophy they were ‘generally seen to be of little importance compared with the other subjects’ (ibid., p.55).

The authors wrote that problems with the conceptualisation of TY were unlikely to derail the project, because:

many of the most enthusiastic and enlightened participants are the same people who have little time for problems of definition. From their point of view the Transition Year, as they are implementing it, is working satisfactorily; and if it does not conform with some blueprint in the Department – well, too bad for the blueprint. (ibid., p.55)

Importantly, Egan and O'Reilly conclude that Transition Year students were more self-aware, more confident in social settings, better informed about the wider world, and surer about career choices.

NEW IMPETUS

Before the national mainstreaming of Transition Year in 1994, new guidelines for schools were published, in a document shorter than its 1986 predecessor. Transition Year was seen more as a whole-school responsibility, with the emphasis on teacher collaboration, teamwork, and staff development. Interdisciplinary or cross-curricular work was more strongly advocated, and any reference to a percentage of the programme being 'academic' was dropped.

At the same time, the new *Guidelines* sought to reassure doubters: 'This is not to say that TY programmes should lack intellectual content; it is essential that they offer a challenge to pupils in all areas of their development' (DE, 1993, p.5). The 1993 *Guidelines* also radically extended the ambition of the programme: 'The aims and philosophy of Transition Year should permeate the entire school' (ibid., p.2). An enormous challenge!

Following the dramatic expansion in the programme in the mid-1990s, the Inspectorate evaluated it in 146 schools. Its report concluded:

The consensus among principals, teachers and pupils is that the Transition Year Programme is a very worthwhile initiative, allowing the school to engage in genuine in-school curriculum development, offering teachers an opportunity to break free of overly compartmentalised subject teaching, and giving students the space and the time to grow in maturity and to develop in self-confidence. (DE, 1996, p.20)

"The Transition Year Programme... gives students the space and time to grow in maturity and to develop in self-confidence."

While praising schools for enthusiasm and innovation, that report also made recommendations. These point back to some issues raised by Egan and O'Reilly in 1979 and will have an uncomfortable familiarity with anyone reading recent DES inspection reports of Transition Year. Those recommendations from 1996 include:

- more attention to interdisciplinary, cross-curricular approaches
- Leaving Cert subject choices to be delayed until the end of TY (some schools were operating what looked very like a 'three-year Leaving Certificate')
- further develop links with the local community
- more compensatory teaching
- more networking between schools for 'improving and revitalising' programmes
- better assessment procedures
- improved evaluation in schools.

VARIATION

A dominant theme in research into Transition Year in 116 schools by Smyth, Byrne, and Hannan (2004) was the variation in practices and perceptions both between and within schools. This diversity persists, one suspects, and

makes generalisations about TY especially problematic. Many people have anecdotal evidence of the programme in School A being 'brilliant' and in neighbouring School B being severely under-realised. Smyth et al. conclude by clarifying the importance of key features for a successful TY, including whole-school commitment, time for coordination and teacher cooperation, diverse content, structured exposure to the world of work, and more innovation particularly in teaching methods, forms of assessment, and ongoing evaluation and redesign.

Subsequent research noted how schools tend to 'domesticate' Transition Year (Jeffers, 2007, p.xxviii). This manifests in how schools adapt the TY guidelines and shape them to fit a school's tradition, values, practices, and context. A shadow side of domestication is that TY's flexibility can be invoked by schools to justify a narrow selectivity that ignores key features of TY: interdisciplinary work, new forms of assessment, and health education, for example, can thus be neglected.

EXPENSE

Another persistent concern in much of the research already cited and in public commentary on TY relates to costs and the socio-economic status of non-participants. 'Transition Year costs can be significant, particularly if a family has more than one child in secondary school,' said Marcella Stakem, social policy officer with the Society of St Vincent de Paul (SVP) to the *Irish*

Times recently (Lally, 2018). Transition Year costs, which can vary from €300 to €900 per pupil, have become a significant source of stress for parents, according to the SVP. The organisation acknowledges that TY has 'lots of social and educational benefits' and called on the DES to put measures in place to enable children in low-income families to participate.

There is strong emphasis on collaborative planning of the Transition Year programme and of committing this to writing.

Other TY-related research, for example Moynihan (2013) on work experience and subject choice and Clerkin (2012, 2018) on psycho-social development, has illuminated important features of Transition Year. These works add

to a growing evidence base showing how young people mature through the TY experience, how their self-awareness and confidence grow, how their aspirations become more focused, how relationships with classmates and teachers deepen, and how the experience enriches school life. It's also worth noting how insights into 'what works' in Transition Year echo key ideas in *Schooling for Change: Re-Inventing Education for Early Adolescents* (Hargreaves et al., 1996 p.80), especially their focus on relevance, imagination, and challenge.

CURRENT CONCERNS

One window on current challenges for Transition Year is opened through the programme evaluations conducted by the DES Inspectorate and available online (DES, 2018). About ten programmes are evaluated each year,² and at the time of writing (mid-September 2018) eight TY programme evaluations have been posted. These reports are nuanced and, while broadly positive, warrant careful reading. Many of the challenges mentioned resonate with previously expressed concerns as well as issues identified by the support services in the mid and late 1990s (TYST, 1998).

Among the recommendations, there is strong emphasis on the importance of collaborative planning of the Transition Year programme and of committing this to writing. Allied to this is the recommendation, stated in one report, that 'all teachers in TY need to incorporate teaching methodologies that promote active engagement and help students to take more responsibility for their own learning'. A strong focus on what's actually happening in classrooms is striking in many recommendations, with calls for more cooperative learning, more differentiation, and more varied content, among other things.

Perhaps in response to the pejorative descriptor of Transition Year as 'a non-exam year' (or the more offensive 'doss year'), the inspectors strongly encourage schools to implement appropriate assessment procedures. In one case there is an explicit proposal to introduce an end-of-year portfolio assessment.

Closely linked to the attention to classroom practice in the reports is a growing recognition of the importance of Transition Year as a place for 'student voice' to find expression. Indeed, this, and an awareness of Transition Year as a time when young people's sense of agency can be deepened, are among the exciting developments in Transition Year thinking.

Tensions between Transition Year and the established Leaving Cert programme also persist in the inspectors' reports. One illustration is a recommendation that 'within the academic modules, teachers should diversify the content and ensure that there is greater distinction between the TY curriculum and the Leaving Certificate curriculum'. The school's response, appended to that evaluation, is frank and robust:

Inspectors strongly encourage schools to implement appropriate assessment procedures.

The Board also acknowledges the recommendation relating to Leaving Certificate content. The line between giving a 'taster' course and looking in slightly more depth at the highly pressurised and stressful Leaving Certificate content is a fine one. The Board acknowledges the excellent work done by its teachers in preparing for achievement in the Leaving Certificate. As Module Descriptors are reviewed, the level of Leaving Certificate content will be closely examined.

While learning beyond the classroom has been one of Transition Year's strengths, schools can, in the opinion of the Inspectorate, overdo it. For example, devoting 20% of the time in Transition Year to work experience placements is regarded as 'excessive'. There are also occasional recommendations that make one wonder about the level of planning some schools put into Transition Year; for example, that a parent-teacher meeting be introduced! Or that admission to TY needs to be included in the school's admission policy, that end-of-year evaluations should be conducted, that a community service component should be introduced, or that there should be planning meetings!

REFRESHING

One of the biggest challenges schools face regarding Transition Year is to keep refreshing it, to avoid it becoming stale, predictable, or boring. The need to keep it vibrant was a strong finding among many interviewed for *Transition Year in Action* (Jeffers, 2015). A changed junior cycle, which resonates with many features of TY (Kelly, 2014) should prompt an imaginative rethink of how TY might best build on the learning experiences of the previous three years. Similarly, the current review of senior cycle is an opportunity to rethink Transition Year (Jeffers, 2018).

The evidence that Transition Year can greatly enhance the lives of students and teachers... is compelling.

The disappointment of Brexit directs us to revisit Transition Year's opportunities for learning about the rest of Europe – its history, geography, cultures, and social and political contexts. The 1993 *Guidelines*, while still clear and coherent, predate the technological explosions of the past two decades, and this is a further reason for a new impetus. New guidelines are needed.

Notwithstanding the claim referred to earlier that Transition Year is 'embedded' in the system, the programme continues to have to fight against being marginalised at many levels, including policy and support (financial, professional development, and moral). Transition Year is often marginalised in educational discourse: for example, it appears incidental in the ambitious *Action Plan for Education 2016–2019*.

The contention that Transition Year is a 'bubble' slightly detached from what is 'really important' has not gone away. Yet despite many challenges, the evidence that Transition Year can greatly enhance the lives of students and teachers, particularly through young people's holistic development, is compelling. The review of senior cycle education is an ideal opportunity to refresh this remarkable educational innovation.

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FOOTNOTES

1. 661 of 714 second-level schools offered a Transition Year in 2017–18, with 44,950 students enrolled in the programme. 62,533 students were in third-year junior cycle the previous year (Annual Statistical Report, DES).
2. These refer to specific evaluations of schools' TY programmes. Aspects of TY also feature in other inspections, notably Whole School Evaluations (WSE), and subject inspections.

Youth Volunteer of the Year



Daniella Timperley of St Louis Grammar School, Ballymena, one of two Pramerica "Spirit of Community" Youth Volunteers of the Year, 2018.



Breda Naughton

Retired Principal
Officer, Department
of Education & Skills

THE FOREIGN LANGUAGES STRATEGY

Learning a foreign language has never been more important

Learning a foreign language is no longer a luxury for some but a necessity for most. It is an international key which, upon turning, will open many doors and opportunities for those that embrace and enjoy the challenge. (Foreign Languages Strategy, p.40)

In December 2017, the Department of Education and Skills (DES) published 'Languages Connect: Ireland's Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017–2026'. It sets out a roadmap to place Ireland among the top ten countries in Europe for teaching and learning foreign languages. The Strategy is accompanied by a five-year Implementation Plan 2017–2022, which contains 100 actions to improve efficiency, diversity, and immersion. A Foreign Languages Advisory Group (FLAG) was established to oversee and advise on its implementation.

The Strategy is a priority in the Department's Action Plan for Education 2016–2019. While providing high-quality language-learning opportunities and promoting competence in both of our official languages, Irish and English, are very important objectives of Government, we must also target the learning of a range of foreign languages in Ireland.

This article addresses the place of foreign languages in primary, post-primary, further, and higher education. It summarises the context in which the Strategy was developed, outlines existing provision, and highlights recent actions that have resulted from the Strategy.

CONTEXT

English may be a lingua franca of international communications, but knowing English is not enough. Competence in a number of languages is a key skill that our citizens should be encouraged to achieve. Our enhanced language diversity, predominantly due to the arrival of immigrants from almost 200 countries since 2000, is a social, cultural, and national resource to be welcomed and nurtured, especially by our education sector.

National, EU, and Council of Europe reports have promoted the need for Ireland to prioritise the learning of foreign languages. Such reports are referenced in the Strategy. With Brexit, the increasing globalisation of the world economy, and the rise of emerging non-English-speaking markets as a major source of growth for the Irish economy, the importance of foreign language skills cannot be overstated.

In August 2014, a consultation was launched to gather the views of stakeholders and inform the development of the Strategy. Almost 80 submissions were received. Two consultation events were organised: one concentrated on the teaching and learning of foreign languages in schools; the other sought input from stakeholders in the Further Education and Training and Higher Education sectors and industry. The Minister for Education and Skills hosted a roundtable event to discuss the findings of the consultation and the proposed strategy.

EXISTING PROVISION

Traditionally, French, German, Spanish, and Italian were available on the Junior Certificate programme. Under the new Framework for Junior Cycle, a new specification for Modern Foreign Languages (French, German, Spanish, and Italian) was introduced in September 2017 with more emphasis on oral language and project work. New 100-hour junior cycle short courses in Chinese, Lithuanian, Japanese, Russian, and Polish are also available.

In addition to the four junior cycle foreign languages, Japanese, Russian, and Arabic are available as curricular subjects for Leaving Certificate. The suite of non-curricular heritage EU languages available for examination in the Leaving Cert is extensive. Students were examined in eighteen non-curricular languages in the 2018 Leaving Cert, with the greatest take-up in Polish, followed by Romanian and Lithuanian.

The opportunities to study foreign languages at junior cycle and Leaving Cert level are therefore significant. But there is scope for greater diversification. This has become apparent over the last decade, as candidates are presenting in a wider range of languages for the Leaving Cert, as the table below shows.

Year	French	German	Spanish	Italian	Japanese	Russian	Arabic	Non-Curricular Languages
2008	27,697	7,472	2,965	257	127	245	119	536
2012	25,977	6,788	4,330	384	240	308	159	1,348
2018	23,710	8,503	7,027	462	296	367	148	1,461

Table: Candidate uptake of foreign languages for Leaving Cert examination

IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGY

The Foreign Languages Advisory Group was established to advise on and drive implementation of the Strategy. Regular reporting on the 100 actions in the Implementation Plan enables the Group to measure and report on progress.

VISION AND GOALS FOR THE STRATEGY

The Strategy's vision is that Ireland's education system will promote a society where the ability to learn and use at least one foreign language is taken for granted, because of its inherent value for individuals, society, and the economy. Four overarching goals have been set out:

1. Improve language proficiency by creating a more engaging learning environment.
2. Diversify and increase the uptake of languages learned and cultivate the languages of the new Irish.

3. Increase awareness of the importance of language learning to encourage the wider use of foreign languages.
4. Enhance employer engagement in the development and use of trade languages.

AUDIT OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES PROVISION

One of the actions in the Strategy was an audit of foreign-language provision in post-primary schools carried out by the Post-Primary Languages Initiative (PPLI). A total of 393 schools, about 55%, completed the survey. The following summarises key findings from the audit:

- Size, type, gender, and geographical location of schools affect the range of languages offered.
- A small percentage of students do not take a foreign language, because they have special educational needs (SEN) or because taking a language was optional.
- Transition Year gives schools an opportunity to offer a wider range of languages, with new languages such as Chinese, Japanese, and Russian being made available.
- 76% of schools would like to offer additional languages, with Spanish and Chinese the two most frequently mentioned, followed by German and Japanese.
- Availability of qualified teachers, timetabling, teacher allocation, and insufficient numbers of interested students are key challenges identified by schools for the expansion of foreign language provision.
 - The reduced numbers of teaching graduates from higher education institutions (HEIs) is affecting schools' ability to introduce additional languages.
 - Dublin is the only county where all the non-curricular Leaving Cert languages along with Arabic and Russian have more than ten Leaving Cert sits. Polish has more than ten sits in nineteen counties.
 - Schools do not always understand that students and parents should be actively encouraged to maintain their heritage languages and be informed of the benefits of maintaining them.
- Despite the perceived low level of demand for support classes for heritage languages, most respondents are at least moderately interested in e-learning or blended learning options for such supports, which would help to address the challenge presented by small groups of interested students in individual schools.

In August 2018, Minister Bruton announced an increase in the provision of Foreign Language Assistants.

RECENT ACTIONS

CURRICULAR DEVELOPMENTS

The new Primary Language Curriculum for senior classes acknowledges linguistic diversity to include English, Irish, and other languages, enabling teachers to draw on and support the linguistic abilities of the children in their classroom. Future development of the primary curriculum will take account of the intercultural/multicultural dimension.

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment is starting work on developing a Leaving Cert Mandarin Chinese specification and Leaving Cert heritage language specifications in Polish, Lithuanian, and Portuguese,

aimed at mother-tongue speakers. These are due for implementation in September 2020.

FOREIGN LANGUAGE ASSISTANTS

The Strategy aims to double the number of Foreign Language Assistants in schools from 110 to 220. In August 2018, Minister Bruton announced an increase in the provision of Foreign Language Assistants from 110 to 140 for French, German, Spanish, and Italian during 2018/19. He also committed to expanding the range of languages to which the scheme will apply. These assistants will help students to:

- understand the spoken language
- speak the foreign language
- read authentic and fictional texts
- understand the way of life and customs of the foreign country.

TEACHER SUPPLY

The Department has established a steering group to look at the issue of teacher supply, including teachers of foreign languages. In March 2018, Minister Bruton announced an expansion of the number of places on post-primary teacher education courses at undergraduate and postgraduate level in priority areas, including foreign languages.

TEACHER UPSKILLING

Additional Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for teachers of foreign languages is being provided by the Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) support service and PPLI. Further CPD will be provided as new languages are introduced.

The Department has established a steering group to look at the issue of teacher supply.

AWARENESS-RAISING CAMPAIGN

A change in mindset is needed around foreign-language learning. Education providers and employers must work together to increase awareness of the importance of gaining proficiency in foreign languages. Parents must realise the importance of this and act as advocates to motivate their children to learn foreign languages.

An awareness-raising campaign, led by PPLI with the support of Government departments, HEA, HEIs, embassies, cultural services, and bodies such as IBEC and Enterprise Ireland, was launched in September 2018 and targets:

- school principals, teachers, and guidance counsellors
- parents and students
- third-level institutions.

A new 'Languages Connect' website brand has been developed to direct this campaign.

POST-PRIMARY LANGUAGES INITIATIVE

In addition to the audit and awareness-raising campaign, PPLI is supporting implementation of the Strategy by:

- Employing additional peripatetic teachers to teach Lithuanian, Polish (from September 2018), and Korean (September 2019). Korean is being introduced as a pilot in a small number of schools for Transition Year from September 2018.
- Facilitating *Communities of Practice* whereby teachers of foreign languages can meet their peers to share ideas and expertise.
- Piloting a variety of options for introducing lesser-taught languages into schools, including shared classes and blended learning.
- Providing a variety of opportunities for teachers who are qualified in a language but not currently teaching it, to upskill in that language and thus enable schools to expand their provision by activating existing but dormant capacity.
- Developing resources to support innovative teaching methodologies.

CONCLUSIONS

The vision and four goals of the Foreign Languages Strategy will become a reality through delivery of the actions outlined in the implementation plan. This Strategy is being implemented alongside other strategies and policies (such as Irish, STEM, Creative Ireland) that seek to give our learners a broad and balanced education. Prioritising the knowledge and skills acquired through the study of foreign languages is a necessary component of our education system if it is to be the best in Europe by 2026, the key target under the Action Plan for Education 2016–19.

Working together, educators at all levels, employers, and parents in particular must heighten awareness of the importance of learning foreign languages. The opportunities that ensue for foreign-language learners, heritage-language speakers, and the economy are significant as we successfully navigate our global environment.

Languages Connect: <https://languagesconnect.ie/>

Information on the Strategy and progress reported by FLAG is available on the DES website: www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Curriculum-and-Syllabus/Foreign-Languages-Strategy/foreign-languages-advisory-group-flag-.html.

FÉILTE: 'Weaving Well-Being - Learning to Flourish'



Mick Rock, Teacher, Pope John Paul the 2nd National School, Dublin; Máire Lineen, Teaching Council Member; and Fiona Forman, Teacher, Pope John Paul the 2nd National School, Dublin.

VIRTUAL DESKTOP INFRASTRUCTURE

A virtual world where the benefits are real



Trevor Collins

Assistant Principal,
Bandon Grammar
School; Business,
Economics and
Computer teacher

Recent ICT initiatives in Irish education have led to changes in teaching and learning, including what is taught, how it is taught, and the infrastructure for teaching and learning. This article focuses on the use of Virtual Desktop Infrastructure (VDI). It describes a journey of a school changing from the traditional ICT model to one of the newest (and hopefully best) systems available in using cloud-based VDI. It also discusses an action-based pilot programme being undertaken in the local area.

The work undertaken has been solidly founded in the best practice of education literature. Those behind the change in infrastructure have won awards at local and national level and have been positively reviewed by business and academic management.

This journey has just started. Bringing about a change in the conservative world of education may prove difficult – but difficult roads often lead to the most wonderful destinations. Virtual Desktop Infrastructure is here to stay, and is becoming standard in business. This article explains how VDI can improve ICT infrastructure in education. The system is virtual, but as we will see, many of the benefits are real.

The concept arose from the benefits that staff in Bandon Grammar School (BGS) saw when using VDI after they upgraded their ICT system around 2012. In conjunction with VMware, a local software company, the school adopted a system that would normally be used in the banking, insurance, and finance sectors.

Since the system is quite new, there is a lack of academic research and literature on cloud-based VDI in both secondary and third-level education. This article may encourage further study in the area.

THE PATHWAY TO CHANGE

Some schools do not have computer rooms and do not provide ICT training to students. Others may have a dedicated computer room with an average of twenty-five devices, each typically comprising a monitor, keyboard, mouse, and terminal. We can assume that devices would have applications for writing documents (e.g., Word), creating presentations (e.g., PowerPoint), and accessing the internet (e.g., Chrome).

Over the years, various State initiatives have attempted to develop ICT in schools. Schools IT 2000 was a key programme with over £40 million in investment. It financed equipment and improved connectivity and teacher training (Mulkeen, 2003). This investment in education continues.

Some schools may have a portable trolley with laptops or handheld devices to do something similar to normal PCs. Costs to maintain and upgrade these devices would be incurred by the school.

Each device is a standalone unit and must be updated individually. Maintaining these systems can be costly and time-consuming, and depends on a member of staff having a certain level of ICT skills. Often this is a teacher with a full timetable and huge and varied demands being made on them.

While various bodies such as the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) (see References) and Financial Support Services Unit (FSSU, 2017) provide guidelines for schools to develop their ICT infrastructure, many schools simply do not have the personnel or time to research, develop, and implement a suitable system. As difficult as it is for a secondary school in Ireland, primary schools face an even tougher task.

GENERATION 1: THE START OF A JOURNEY TO VDI

Bandon Grammar School undertook a major extension in 2011/12, which created an opportunity to redevelop the ICT infrastructure. Before this, the school had one dedicated computer room with twenty-eight PCs. There was also a woodwork room with some PCs. Management's willingness to empower staff with decision-making rights was a key factor. As Ghamrawi (2011) wrote, in an article on improving ICT schools, it fostered 'collegial dialogue, collective problem-solving ... and a strong commitment to continual instructional development and design'.

Our main investment was the purchase of servers that would process all accounts, personas, desktops, data, and applications,

Staff researched ICT systems and joined up with VMware, a firm with specialist software used mainly in financial and technical sectors. Since the school essentially had a 'green-field' site on which to build and test a new ICT infrastructure, VMware used the school as a test case to see VDI operating in an education environment.

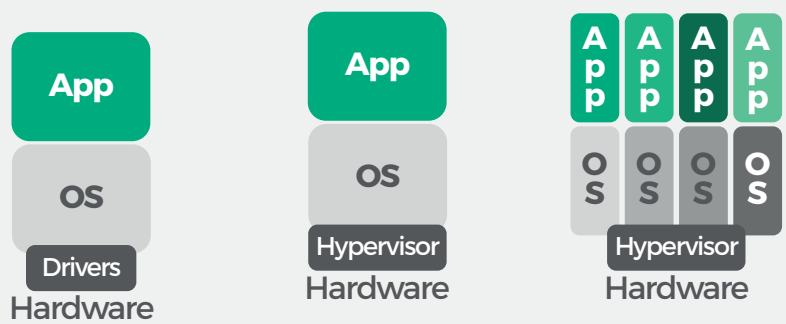
While the Irish Digital Learning Framework (DES, 2017) acknowledges that 'schools are at different stages of the school improvement journey with regards to embedding of the use of digital technologies into teaching and learning' (p.2), we felt from our experience that VDI has many benefits over the traditional ICT model in schools.

Following 'Universal Design for Learning' principles, our design and implementation of this system facilitated 'autonomy and control in order to develop a sense of ownership'. (Valstad, 2010). The team recognised that access to information did not imply access to learning. For students to have the opportunity to reach their potential, a student-friendly, efficient, and durable system was required.

VDI IN OPERATION

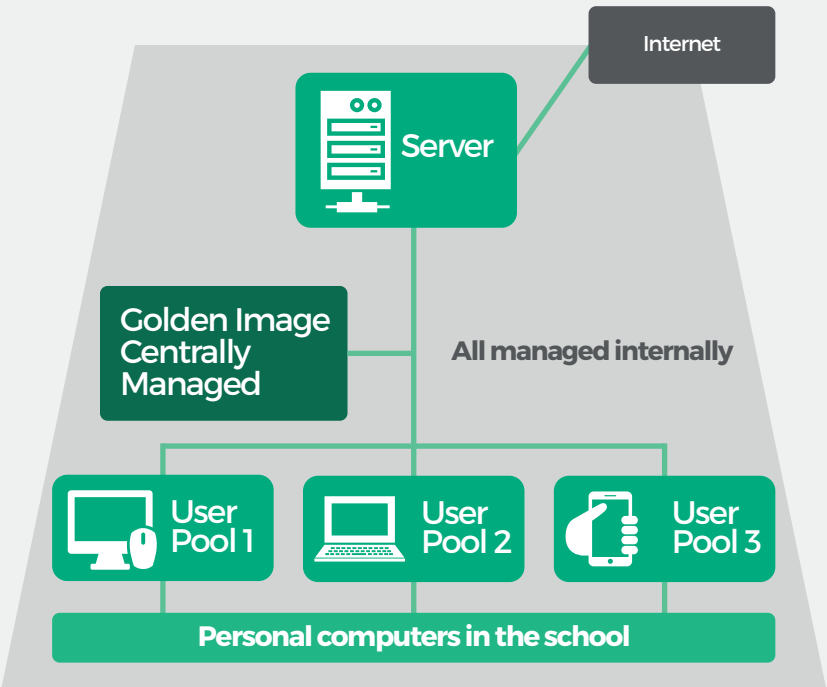
Our main investment was the purchase of servers that would process all accounts, personas, desktops, data, and applications. A special 'master computer' (golden image) is made using software, and it is then copied ('cloned') for each user.

Common with servers, but can be done with desktops too.



Virtualising - abstraction of computing from the underlying hardware/software

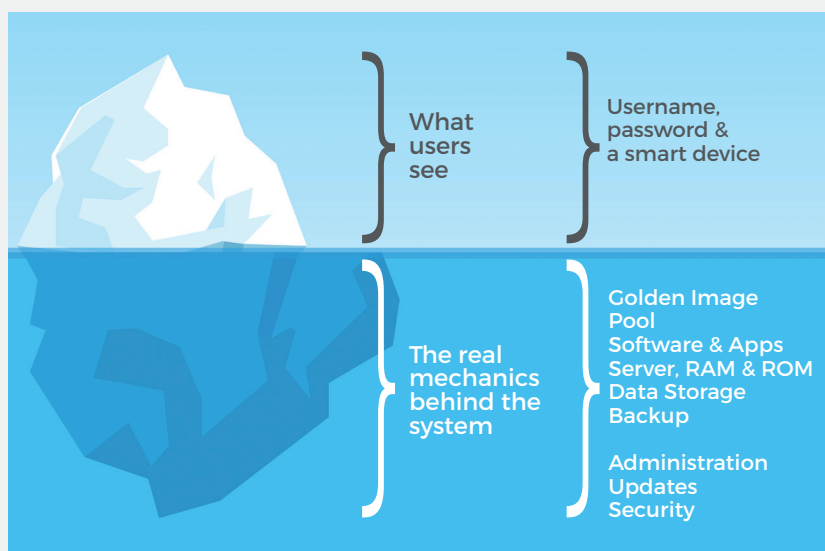
A key point is that instead of using the components of the computer you are sitting at (CPU, ROM, RAM, etc.), all of the processing is done by a more powerful, central server that manages the accounts, apps, software, virus protection, and everything else. The only function of the PC, laptop, tablet, or smartphone is to send the keyboard taps and mouse strokes to the central server. Cheap, second-hand devices can therefore be used instead of expensive, state-of-the-art devices.



Current System in (School VDI)

BENEFITS OF VDI

1. Since the central server does all the processing, you no longer need to spend large sums on new ICT devices. In our case, we collected many second-hand PCs over the years. We now have five dedicated rooms with around 120 PCs, all sourced for free.
2. Different groups of users can be created for different needs (e.g., different software for different years). You can customise the desktops to suit specific needs.
3. You no longer need to spend heavily on updating current devices: maintenance costs are reduced.
4. Students see the exact same desktop on every device.
5. Once the master ('golden image') has been updated, all users get the update the next time they log on: massive savings on time and labour.
6. The devices work consistently and mostly very reliably.
7. Green factor: Devices that otherwise would have been dumped now get a second life (Dasilva et al., 2012).
8. If made available on a national level, every school regardless of location gets access to the same resources.
9. If managed centrally by a state agency such as the DES, the Department can make resources available on every user's desktop. (Equality of access for all, regardless of location, type of school, or background, once a student has access to a device.)



'Front of house' v 'Back of house' infrastructure

FACTORS TO CONSIDER WHEN ADOPTING VDI

1. There are considerable costs in purchasing and setting up a server.
2. Licensing costs need to be factored into budgets.
3. Understanding how the system operates is vital.
4. Be willing to change one's perception of ICT in schools. Decision-makers and stakeholders must become less conservative. VDI changes the focus on expensive, fancy, 'front-of-house' devices to capital infrastructure spending on devices that operate in the background.
5. The school will need a skilled teacher or technician to maintain the servers and accounts if the schools use their own central server. (This has been a major stumbling block with the first generation of VDI in schools, and is now eliminated with cloud-based VDI.)
6. Since the whole system is internet-based, all functionality is lost if the internet is down.
7. Schools need an administrator to help set up accounts and to decide what applications different users have access to. (Less important than #5 above.)

OUR EXPERIENCE

The system was designed and maintained by practising teachers in a school. Problems at ground level were flagged, and appropriate solutions were found: classroom-based solutions for classroom-based problems.

The accounts using the server worked more consistently. With the traditional PC system, a user could change settings (accidentally or deliberately), denying the next user access to applications. Individual accounts stop this from happening. Users can log on to their accounts more consistently, with the same desktop on their screen no matter which of the 120 PCs in the school they use. The applications on the devices worked.

For readers unfamiliar with computer rooms in a school, these may sound like obvious advantages, but in some schools a typical classroom could have up to half of the devices not functioning properly. More devices being able to work for more time is key.

Since updates can now be done centrally, device functionality improved.

With more devices available, teachers started to use more ICT applications with their students than before. More classes were brought to the computer rooms. More assignments were done with ICT. Teachers used the system to allow students to research topics and projects. There was a shift in the teaching pedagogies. Our change in ICT culture replicated many of the advantages described in Lai and Pratt's (2008) investigation on the effects of ICT use in New Zealand secondary schools – for both teaching (p.100) and learning (pp.105–106).

With more devices available, teachers started to use more ICT applications with their students than before.

The infrastructure has proven to be the foundation on which we built our ICT framework. But three applications, which depend on good infrastructure, helped to change the working ethos in the school. The applications are core to administration, teaching, and learning in the school:

1. School portal: The student school-day roll, exam reports, boarder roll, and detention system are now all managed electronically.
2. With Google Apps For Education (GAFE), every student (and family) now has a school email address. (Google Drive has been very beneficial.)
3. Google Classroom has opened up lines of communication between the teacher or coach and the student like never before. Teachers can post notes, resources, attachments, web links, and notices to their students. Sports coaches can put up teams and fixture arrangements. Students can access all of these through their email account or a laptop or PC. Importantly, they can download an app to their smartphone and get notifications via their device: the message comes to them rather than them having to chase the message!

OTHER FACTORS WORTH NOTING

1. Over the last two years, the average student has become much more ICT-savvy. Reluctance to use ICT is reducing (possibly a sign of the times as well as an effect of our infrastructure). This outcome is in line with the long-term objectives of the Digital Learning Framework for Post-Primary Schools.
2. Students are more inclined to use facilities such as Google Drive for group projects.
3. Students doing research for the Young Scientist competition now use online apps such as Google Forms and SurveyMonkey to collect data; this is a shift in learning culture from only four years ago. These apps make it easier and quicker to send and answer questionnaires and to review replies.
4. There has been a big increase in completion rate by Transition Year students who are doing the European Computer Driving License (ECDL), with a remarkable improvement in the average speed of finishing. In the last academic year, we had to create an extra programme for those who completed the ECDL much earlier than expected. To earn a special ICT award, students had to complete five Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), four of which were determined by the school: on social media, HTML programming, social media analytics, and digital leadership. Once the students had completed these four, they could choose a course that interested them.
5. There has been a shift in school culture: ICT is now part of everyday life in the school. Historically, students would be excited going into the computer room, but nowadays it is simply a room where they do things in a different way to a normal classroom.

There has been a big increase in completion rate by Transition Year students who are doing the European Computer Driving License (ECDL).

A BAD PROBLEM EMERGES ... BUT FOR GOOD REASONS

The system is now nearly a victim of its own success. The demands made of it – numbers of devices required, quality of applications used, speed of processing required, and volume of data being transferred – have all increased considerably over the duration of our use of the VDI system.

A KEY ISSUE

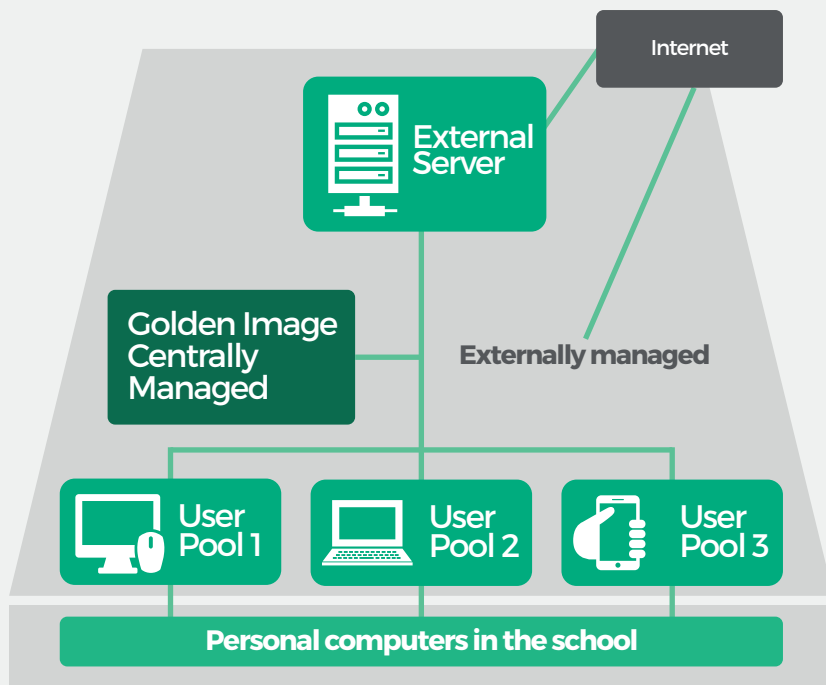
After we gave a presentation at the ICT advisory group of the Joint Managerial Body in summer 2017, an important piece of feedback resonated with us. Our system was over-dependent on key personnel. What would happen if they fell ill, moved away, or retired? Not every school can have personnel with such key skills. While schools may have a designated ICT coordinator, ‘coordinator may mean different things in different schools’, as Mulkeen (2003) wrote.

How can schools adopt a VDI system without the same level of skills or commitment? One solution came through a cloud-based VDI system that was being used in Spain.

GENERATION 2: CLOUD-BASED VDI IN ACTION

With a cloud-based system, much of the software and mechanics remains the same, except that instead of using a server on-site or nearby, all the processing is done by an external server located and managed off-site. This server may be provided by the HEAnet or another service provider. Advantages of cloud-based VDI include:

1. There are huge economies of scale, as a school will only need to pay for the service as they use it. No capital, depreciation, or maintenance costs: just pay-per-use.
2. This second-generation system removes schools’ need to have a skilled teacher or technician available to fix issues with accounts or applications.
3. The school no longer needs to buy a server or pay to maintain and run it.
4. The school no longer has to pay for electricity to run the servers.
5. Labour costs are reduced hugely because fewer staff are needed to maintain the system, and less time is needed to update applications and devices.
6. The applications available can be the same as the first-generation, school-based server system or can be enlarged based on advice from the cloud-based VDI provider.



Cloud-based Virtual Desktop System - Future Model

With this updated model, servers and user profiles and accounts are all managed off-site. While Stoll and Kools (2017) write that ‘the education sector does not have a track record of innovating itself’, the literature suggests that this system empowers schools as learning organisations (SLOs). It is innovative and far-reaching, with the potential to transform education infrastructure. The author feels it can be a catalyst to change the dynamics of education.

THE FUTURE - PILOT PROGRAMME PROPOSAL

A long-term goal is to undertake a large-scale action research project to show cloud-based VDI in action in four local secondary schools. The goal of the pilot programme is to assess the viability of using cloud-based VDI in education in Ireland. This would require a system to manage the ICT education needs of around 1,500 students and 200 teachers. This is a first for Ireland and possibly Europe.

Key factors to consider for investigation include:

1. Cost-benefit analysis of
 - a. Capital infrastructure costs
 - b. Depreciation
 - c. Maintenance costs
 - d. Licensing
2. Impact on learning
3. Impact on teaching

4. Being future-ready
5. Operational functionality of the system.
6. Impact on school structure and life.

We expect the study to last two years and that third-level institutions would be part of the study of the system in action. The final report would be used by education stakeholders to determine future policy-making on using VDI in education in the future.

FUNDING REQUIREMENTS

This proposal is based on all four secondary schools signing up to the project. All students and staff would have online accounts that enable them to access predetermined applications from any device with internet access. The system would also enable users to save their work online, so they could retrieve it from any device at any time.

FUTURE PLANNING

We are working with interested stakeholders to create a business plan. This will be used to lobby for state funding for this two-year project. If successful, we believe the system will stand or fall on its merits. We have been on a journey to develop an efficient, cost-effective, user-friendly system. Perhaps our voyage has only now just begun!

A long-term goal is to undertake a large-scale action research project to show cloud-based VDI in action in four secondary schools.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have been very lucky to be part of a team of dedicated people who have the interests of students at heart. I have been working with my colleague, but more importantly good friend, Darren Platts, who is best described as the brains behind the operation. I owe a huge debt of gratitude to Darren, who simply makes things happen.

Thank you also to Dr Edward Gash, who was key to developing and implementing the VDI system in our school. He continues to go above and beyond the call of duty in helping to develop ICT in education.

Thank you to the management and staff of Bandon Grammar School, who trust us in our efforts and decision-making with ICT in the school.

Finally, a huge thank you to my wife, Caroline, and our two children. Without their support and patience, I would not be able to complete my small role in developing ICT in the school.

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GLOSSARY

Cloud-based: a term that refers to applications, services, or resources made available to users on demand via the internet from a cloud computing provider's servers. Companies typically use cloud-based computing as a way to increase capacity, enhance functionality, or add services on demand without having to commit to potentially expensive infrastructure costs or increase or train existing in-house support staff. (From: www.webopedia.com/TERM/C/cloud_based.html.)

Concurrency: This relates to the level of usage of ICT resources. A school may have three computer labs with twenty-five devices in each. The school may have nine 40-minute classes a day and operate 150 days a year. We assume that classes are timetabled in each room for five periods a day: 3 hours and 20 minutes. You now need to examine the potential hours of use available versus the actual hours used. (As with a typical business, you pay only for what you use and when you use it!)

	Hours per day	Days of use per year	Total no. of hours
Potential	24	365	8,760
Actual	3 hours 20 minutes	150	500

Key value: 500 hours of use versus 8,760 hours of potential use gives a 5.71% level of usage. This example does not factor in half days, exam days, etc. The general average level of use based on major studies is a concurrency rate of just 3%.

Flexilabs: A firm that offers cloud-based VDI.

ICT: Information and Computer Technology

Server: A computer that provides data to other computers. It may serve data to systems on a local area network (LAN) or a wide area network (WAN) over the internet. (From: <https://techterms.com/definition/server>.)

Virtual Desktop Infrastructure: The practice of hosting a desktop operating system within a virtual machine (VM) running on a centralised server. VDI is a variation on the client/server computing model, sometimes referred to as server-based computing. (From: www.gartner.com/it-glossary/virtual-desktop-infrastructure-vdi.) The term was coined by VMware for its VMware server and Virtual Desktop Manager (VDM).

VMware: An IT company that offers a unique program to facilitate virtualisation.

Irish-Language Books for Children of the Irish Diaspora



International students from Italy and St. Andrew's College, Dublin, helped to launch the first series of free Irish-language and culture activity books for children of the Irish diaspora in Iveagh House, as part of Conradh na Gaeilge's Cultúr Club project, on 3 October 2018.

Chabhraigh mic léinn idirnáisiúnta ón Iodáil agus ó Choláiste Naomh Aindrias, Baile Átha Cliath, chun an chéad shraith de leabhráin ghníomhaíochta Ghaeilge agus chultúir do pháistí an diaspóra a sheoladh i dTeach Uíbh Eachach mar chuid den togra Cultúr Club de chuid Chonradh na Gaeilge ar 3 Deireadh Fómhair 2018.



Karina Murray
founder and CEO of
Aunua Academy



Philip Smith
Co-founder of Aunua
Academy

THE STORY OF AUNUA ACADEMY

How an Irish non-profit for mental health was born

My name is Karina Murray: I am the founder and CEO of Aunua Academy, an Irish non-profit and global provider of free, expert education for mental health. But my most important role in life is being a mother, and just like every other parent I have many fears for my children's future. This is what compelled me to take a massive leap of faith. I dedicated the past year of my life and worked relentlessly to build Aunua Academy, as I knew that every child and adult needs to be heard, and I was determined to support them and give them their voice.

But my past is what got me where I am today. Let's start with my school days, which I found challenging. There were no allowances for daydreamers, for the child who got lost in what was happening outside the window, who was held back by an academic environment she felt trapped in. Schools just didn't work like that, and I didn't work the way the schools did.

Things became easier to accept as the years passed, and though I learned a lot more than I had realised, I still carried doubts and insecurities. Acceptance and fitting in were a problem for me, as for so many others – always being the square peg but not knowing how to embrace it. So many children face the longing for a best friend and the dismay and disheartened feeling of going it alone in what feels like isolation. When you are struggling to catch up, this all adds to the challenges faced during school days.

The sad truth is that nothing much has changed in the school environment, and children are expected not only to keep up with their academics but also to deal with the added pressures of today's world. Today, peer pressures come from social media, which can leave children wide open and vulnerable to danger. This is not an environment of comfort and support, and it can impact massively on each person's mental health.

Mental health should be at the core of education, as we can't expect children to know how to feel and react in situations: they need to be taught how to develop their emotional intelligence. The focus on academics needs to shift, or this generation of young people will be facing an even worse fate with a growing epidemic of mental health problems. All children learn differently, and it is crucial that we encourage them and accept them for who they are – not disempower them because they struggle to keep up.

OPPORTUNITIES

For me, life after school became a happy release, growing as a person in new environments, ones that I felt I could control at my own pace and make my own choices. At last I was free: I felt that the chains of being institutionalised had been lifted. I could now use my imagination to create the life I wanted to live, without being told what, where, when, and how to do things. Nothing held me back – this was my time to explore the world and find my space. Having left school a little early, I managed to get into the college I wanted and studied fashion design and art for three years. I explored different jobs over the years, had fun, and travelled; life was good, exciting, and challenging.

Jumping years ahead, I am now in my mid-forties and a mother of two beautiful children. After nine years spent at home raising them, my world changed completely when my son started school and I faced the daunting task of returning to the working world. I wanted to find my place and stay being me. My imagination ran riot again, my gut instinct kicked in, and I gave birth to my new baby, Aunua, which is a play on words for ‘a new you’. It was certainly an opportunity for a new me! In a leap of faith I created this personal-development programme for adults, and in February 2017 we launched successfully with 140 attendees and the Lord Mayor of Dublin, Guss O’Connell.

At the same time, I became a radio presenter and hosted my own weekly Aunua show on Together FM. This was an amazing opportunity for me to interview incredible guests, meet new friends, and build a team for my next venture: Aunua Academy. In September 2017 I trained and qualified as an NLP practitioner. In October I was fortunate to win a scholarship to the Entrepreneurs Institute in Bali and became a founding member of the Genius School, which is one of Roger James Hamilton’s global movements to ‘ignite the genius in every child’.

Aunua Academy is dedicated to providing free resources on mental health that can inform and support children, young people, and adults throughout the world.

DIRECTIONS

My journey began as one of personal development, to find my space, and with Aunua I discovered that my path, passion, and purpose are ultimately to represent children and be their voice. The change of direction from Aunua being a personal-development course for adults to a global online platform for children was inspired by the son of a close friend. At the age of 11 he was bullied and was struggling so much, he wanted to take his own life. I could see the ripple effect of what was happening, and saw his pain and his family’s as they tried to help.

This boy compelled me to drive forward, and I made a promise to his wonderful mother – and to myself – that I would stop at nothing to make changes. Children today face many of the same challenges that I faced in school thirty-five years ago, but we are in a different world today. With each generation comes a sea of new information, new technology, new challenges and changes, and we need to build resources to teach our children how to arm themselves to face these challenges.

To do this, I dedicated the past year to building the best team of professional experts I could find. I spoke to political representatives, health service professionals, and people from all walks of life, working relentlessly to bring Aunua to life. I wasn't sure how best to help children all over Ireland, let alone globally, but I knew we had to make a change. As a mother, I know that the fear we face for our children's future can be crippling, especially with outside influences that too often take hold and destroy young lives. I felt compelled to take action so that every child could have their voice and feel that what's impossible is possible for them.

POSSIBILITIES

I feel blessed to have this opportunity to make a difference, and I know and understand my life's purpose now: to represent children and be their voice. I hadn't envisaged my role as being so public, and at times I have felt completely out of my comfort zone. But I know that if I want to give children their voice, I have to be willing to use mine and speak out.

I've been asked so often about my background, as so many think I have some fancy title, but the truth is that I'm a mother and can understand with compassion what this means and the responsibility it involves. I'm a communicator and networker who brings great people together. I'm just me, someone who leads from the heart, pushes through to make the necessary changes, to be that voice, and yet still I'm that daydreamer who believes that anything is possible when you believe.

AUNUA ACADEMY

Aunua Academy is dedicated to providing free resources on mental health that can inform and support children, young people, and adults throughout the world. Mental-health resources are often expensive, confusing, or not available at all. The world has been crying out for free, accessible, accurate information on mental health: that is the role of the Aunua Academy. We are building a curriculum of content that will show people mental health disorder definitions, symptoms, and support tools. People need to be made aware to recognise their mental health, how to care for it, and how to support themselves and those around them to have a good quality of life regardless of their mental issue.

Aunua Academy is a voice for children and young people who need guidance and a place to call their home when it comes to their mental health needs. We feel this is a global movement that must happen now, and this is the start. Mental health is a battle we all share, regardless of age, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or gender. It is a battle we must fight together and help the world have a better relationship with its mental health.

After piloting Aunua Academy as a secondary-school programme, it became evident that this was urgently needed everywhere. With the support and shared vision of my co-founder and COO, Philip Smith, we built a team of experts and volunteers around the world to bring the Aunua Academy into as many homes and schools as possible. We have worked tirelessly to build the Aunua Academy into what it is today and to make possible everything we aimed for. Now, with many new connections and global partnerships – with social education platform Belouga, the World Health Innovation Summit, – we are closer than ever to making the Aunua Academy the world's home for mental health education. You can visit us at www.aunuaacademy.com.

ACHIEVEMENT IN THE JUNIOR CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION

Trends over time in DEIS and non-DEIS schools

There is a wealth of literature, both Irish and international, that shows a very strong and persistent relationship between poverty and educational outcomes (Weir, 2001; Sofroniou et al., 2004; Reardon, 2011). The DEIS programme was introduced in primary and post-primary schools in Ireland in 2007, and is aimed at providing supports to students who are at risk of educational failure due to their poor socioeconomic backgrounds. The Educational Research Centre (ERC) has been conducting an independent evaluation of the DEIS programme on behalf of the Department of Education and Skills (DES).

The evaluation is attempting to monitor the implementation of DEIS and assess its impact on students, families, schools, and communities at primary and post-primary levels. Many methodological approaches have been used to collect evaluation data (e.g., questionnaire studies, large-scale achievement testing programmes, school visits, interviews, and focus groups), and evaluation reports have been published concerning DEIS primary schools in rural areas (Weir et al., 2009; Weir and McAvinue, 2013), DEIS primary schools in urban areas (Weir and Archer, 2011; Weir and McAvinue, 2012; Weir and Denner, 2013; Weir and Moran, 2014; Kavanagh et al., 2017; Kavanagh and Weir, 2018), and DEIS post-primary schools (Weir et al., 2014; McAvinue and Weir, 2015).

As well as monitoring aspects of the programme's implementation and a variety of other issues, it is important that the evaluation includes the monitoring of student outcomes. At primary level, test data in reading and mathematics collected as part of the evaluation shows that students in urban DEIS primary schools have improved their achievements on each of four rounds of testing between 2007 and 2016, but that their achievements are still well below the national norm (Kavanagh et al., 2017). The monitoring of outcomes for the evaluation at post-primary level has been greatly facilitated by the availability of population-level Junior Certificate Examination (JCE) data provided by the State Examinations Commission (SEC) for all post-primary schools nationally. The aim of the current paper is to use this data to describe the gap in achievement between students in DEIS and non-DEIS schools, and to examine trends over time in their JCE performance.

For the present purpose, student achievement in the JCE is described using an Overall Performance Scale (OPS) score (Kellaghan and Dwan, 1995). The OPS scale involves allocating numerical values to the alphabetical grades awarded to candidates, which, when summed, produces an index of a candidate's general scholastic



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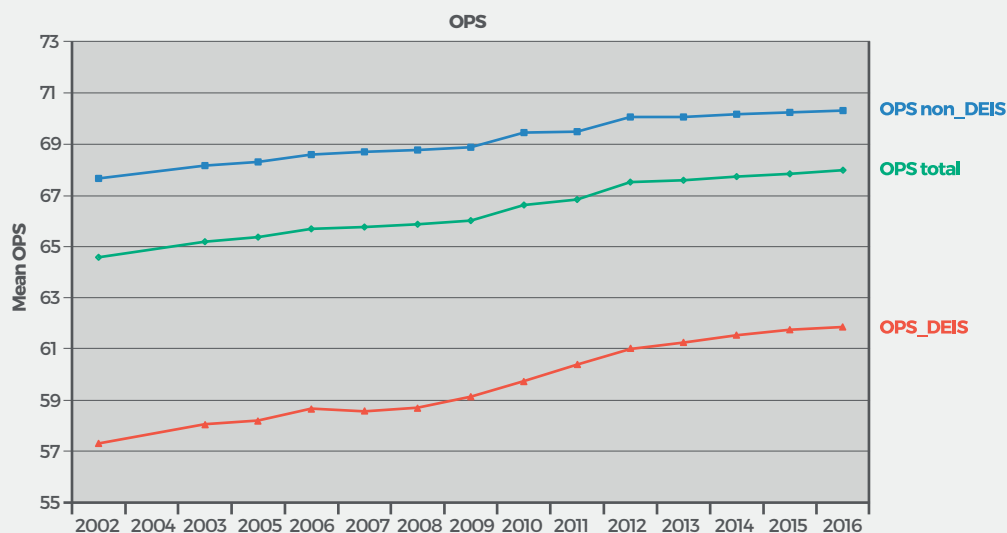
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achievement. The OPS score is based on a student's performance in their best seven subjects, and the level of the paper is taken into account. The maximum possible OPS score is 84 (where a student is awarded seven A-grades on higher-level papers), while the lowest possible OPS score is 0 (where a student fails to achieve at least a grade F on any of their best seven papers). The OPS score is considered a useful broad measure of a candidate's achievements in the JCE.

The graph shows the mean OPS score in the JCE over a fifteen-year period from 2002 to 2016, in DEIS, non-DEIS, and all schools. In 2002, the mean OPS score of all schools was 67.7, rising to 70.3 in 2016. The effect of time on OPS was statistically significant, with an average annual rate of increase of 0.24 OPS points across all schools ($p < 0.001$).¹

There was also a significant gap between non-DEIS and DEIS schools from 2002 to 2016. In 2002, the mean OPS score in DEIS schools was 10.5 points lower than that in non-DEIS schools. By 2016, the most recent year for which data is available, the gap had reduced to 8.4 points. The average annual rate of increase in non-DEIS schools from 2002 to 2016 was 0.19 OPS points, but was significantly higher in DEIS schools, at an average increase of 0.33 points per year ($p < 0.001$).

In 2002, the average OPS in DEIS schools was 57.3 points, approximately equivalent to seven B grades on ordinary-level papers or seven E grades on higher-level papers. In 2016, it was 61.9 points, approximately equivalent to seven A grades on ordinary-level papers or seven D grades on higher-level papers. (In reality, a student achieving an OPS of 57 or 62 will have earned that score from a mixture of grades and levels.) In non-DEIS schools, the average OPS score in both 2002 and 2016 was roughly equivalent to seven C grades on higher-level papers.



1 A multilevel modelling approach was taken to analyse the repeated measures data, with measurement points (Level 1) clustered within schools (Level 2). Data was analysed by fitting a random coefficients model, i.e., a model in which slopes as well as intercepts were allowed to vary across schools. Analyses were carried out using Mplus version 7. Data for 2004 was not available to the authors.

These findings confirm that the achievements of students in DEIS schools have continued to improve since previous analyses by McAvinue and Weir (2015) based on JCE data up to 2014. Their analyses also revealed that the introduction of resources associated with the DEIS programme in 2006/07 may have had an impact on trends for SSP schools: they identified a significant upward change in trend from 2008 onward, around the time the DEIS programme might have been expected to have its first impact.

The correlational nature of the data precludes our drawing conclusions about cause and effect (i.e., that the introduction of resources under the programme caused the improvement). But it is possible to conclude there has been an overall improvement in schools nationally, that the improvement is more marked in DEIS schools than in non-DEIS schools, and that the data suggests the increase is linked to the introduction of the programme.

It is important to continue to monitor educational outcomes in DEIS schools. However, the change to the grading system in Junior Cert English introduced in 2017, to be extended to other subjects in the future, will make it impossible to continue examining trends in achievement as it has been done in the current paper. The two marking schemes have many differences that make them incomparable. For example, there are fewer grades in the new system (6 vs 7), the boundaries for the grades have changed (the old top grade, A, was 85–100%; the new top grade, Distinction, is 90–100%), and the new scheme does not have the option of students taking the subject at foundation level.

A further issue may be even more problematic for comparing JCE data pre- and post-2017. It appears, from preliminary analysis of JCE English grades in 2016 and 2017, that the change to the new scheme has been accompanied by an increase in students achieving higher grades. This is based on the outcome of an exercise carried out at the ERC in which the individual marks allocated in 2016 were converted to the 2017 grading scheme. This revealed that while the distributions for both years were similar at higher level, at ordinary level more students achieved higher grades (i.e., Distinction, Higher merit) in 2017 than in 2016 (Millar, 2018).

Furthermore, if we assume that the 2017 cohort of students taking English at ordinary level contained those who would have opted for foundation level had it been available, that also suggests that the shift to the merit-based system has been accompanied by some grade inflation. Future studies of long-term trends in achievement in the state exams will require exploring ways of equating the old and new grading systems.

Other outcome data at post-primary level in the form of retention levels to Junior and Leaving Cert indicates that attainment rates are improving in all schools, but are increasing at a greater rate in DEIS than in non-DEIS schools (McAvinue and Weir, 2015). The analysis of trends in retention levels using data for the three most recent years is the subject of a forthcoming evaluation report (Weir and Kavanagh, in preparation).

“It is possible to conclude that there has been an overall improvement in schools nationally, and that the improvement is more marked in DEIS schools than in non-DEIS schools.”

“Future examinations of long-term trends in achievement in the state examinations will require exploring ways of equating the old and new grading systems.”

While it remains the case that on all of these outcome measures, students in non-DEIS schools perform better than those in DEIS schools, the data presented in this paper suggests that the gap may be starting to narrow. This is a positive finding for students attending DEIS schools, and for all associated with the programme.

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FURTHER EDUCATION & TRAINING



The number of young people registering for apprenticeships continued to rise in 2018.

FURTHER EDUCATION & TRAINING CONTENTS

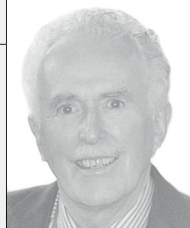
OVERVIEW OF FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING 2018-2019

Key developments and challenges

Dr Bryan Fields

The current FET Strategy is on track to create a first-class integrated FET sector. There have been notable achievements to date, but a number of improvements have been identified, including better governance and oversight of FET. There is a new agreed ambition for FET, and the sector is primed to meet the challenges of 2018-2019.

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TOWARDS AN ETB ECOSYSTEM OF FET PROVISION

From strategy to implementation

Dr Rory O'Sullivan

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Andrew Brownlee

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Dr Bryan Fields
Education and
Training Consultant

OVERVIEW OF FURTHER EDUCATION & TRAINING 2018–2019

Key developments and challenges

Seeing where we have come from is a good vantage point to reflect on progress made and to scan the contours of horizon 2018–2019. Today over two and a quarter million people are at work in Ireland, the highest on record.¹ Current levels of unemployment (5.6 per cent in August 2018) were last seen nearly ten years ago.² The economy is approaching full employment, with growth of just under 5 per cent forecast for this year and just over 4 per cent for 2019.³

In comparison, as the restructuring of the FET sector got under way in earnest in 2014, the country had just exited the EU–IMF bailout. Unemployment was over 10 percent.⁴ The Government's economic strategy for 2014–2016 also looked very ambitious.⁵ It presented a return to full employment by 2020, adding over 100,000 new jobs to the economy.

Education and Training Boards (ETBs) were just over a year in operation. SOLAS was nine months into the process of establishing and structuring itself to lead the sector. A comprehensive review of the apprenticeship system in Ireland had just signposted the renewal and strengthening of existing traditional apprenticeship, and expansion to new sectors. A new Apprenticeship Council was established in November 2014 to drive this.

A new strategic framework for the FET sector also emerged in 2014 when the first-ever Further Education and Training Strategy 2014–2019 was launched. It contained over fifty actions to be implemented by the sector. The first SOLAS Annual FET Services Plan and the first SOLAS Corporate Plan 2014–2016 were then published, both heavily informed by the new Strategy. FET was shaping a new coherence, realising new capabilities, and creating new solutions.

In 2016, the new National Skills Strategy was launched. Among other things, it identified the need to refocus on upskilling those in employment as well as unemployed people. In 2017 an important part of the new national skills architecture emerged, with the establishment of the National Skills Council and nine Regional Skills Fora, with FET representation on both Council and Fora. Later that year, a report by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER)⁶ signalled a further shift in FET investment priorities. It acknowledged that while FET plays an important role supporting some hard-to-reach people and groups to achieve their potential, FET expenditure at this juncture should be based in the first instance 'on the requirements of the labour market'.

The announcement by Government in September 2018 of the first-ever dedicated capital budget for FET, with an allocation of €300m over the next decade, is a welcome development. This is expected to assist with new equipment and facilities and with upgrading, repairing, and renewing existing facilities and equipment.⁷ In summary, the sector has come a long way in a relatively short time, but there is still some way to go.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS TO DATE

Given developments since 2014, a SOLAS-commissioned independent high-level review of progress of the FET Strategy was published in 2018.⁸ It found that the Strategy goals remain relevant and that significant progress had been made since 2014 across all aspects of the Strategy. The many key achievements included the establishment and capacity-building of the FET infrastructure, including SOLAS and the ETBs; ongoing development of new apprenticeships and traineeships; development and roll-out of the 'Professional Development Strategy 2017-2019'; implementation of the 'Literacy and Numeracy Strategy'; progression of a new provider-led quality assurance model; and development of data management systems, including the Programme Learner Support System (PLSS).

TARGETED IMPROVEMENTS SIGNALLED FOR 2018-2019

The FET Strategy update also pinpointed governance/oversight and clarity of FET policy as two core areas needing to be addressed to improve the effectiveness of both the current FET Strategy and its successor. On governance, it recommended increased accountability for delivery of strategic actions by individual organisations, underpinned by explicit commitments in formal partnership agreements.

The review also proposed greater clarity in FET policy, particularly on its expected role and contribution as part of the wider education and training system. It identified a lack of understanding of the benefits of engaging with the sector as one of the biggest barriers to successful implementation of the FET Strategy. The need to establish the value proposition for FET based on evidence is now paramount for 2018-2019.

**The announcement
by Government in
September 2018 of the
first-ever dedicated
capital budget for
FET is a welcome
development.**

FET PROGRAMME EVALUATIONS 2018-2019

One source of this evidence comes from independent evaluations of FET provision. The FET Strategy commits SOLAS to organise and conduct a schedule of evaluations over the lifetime of the Strategy. The SOLAS-commissioned PLC evaluation by ESRI and the SOLAS response to the findings were published in 2018. The ESRI evaluation confirmed the positive role played by PLC provision. The report also highlighted where improvements were needed, including greater responsiveness of job-specific PLC courses to changing labour market conditions. SOLAS and its partners are currently implementing an agreed three-year improvement plan for PLC.

The SOLAS-commissioned evaluation of the National Youthreach Programme is currently being concluded by the ESRI on behalf of SOLAS. It is the first-ever evaluation of the Programme, including Community Training Centres. The findings are expected to generate policy-relevant

knowledge about the effectiveness and relevance of this type of provision in a changing environment, including higher retention rates at second level. The report is due to be submitted to SOLAS in late 2018.

Finally, economic consultants Indecon, on behalf of SOLAS, is evaluating the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme and the Specific Skills Training Programme. Again, SOLAS is looking to the findings to identify the outcomes and outputs of both types of provision and their overall effectiveness and relevance in an evolving education and labour market. The report is due to be submitted to SOLAS in late 2018.

WORK-BASED LEARNING

The most common forms of work-based learning include apprenticeships, traineeships, internships, and on-the-job training. This approach is an attractive option for both jobseekers and employers. The former gain valuable experience and in-demand skills in a real work environment; the latter have a source of skills tailored to company needs or can use the placement to screen for potential employees. An accompanying article in this section discusses developments in the Irish apprenticeship system and the PLC sector.

Work-based learning is also highly valued by existing employees. Given the improving landscape in 2018–2019, the launch of the DES ‘2018–2021

Further Education and Training Policy Framework for Skills Development of People in Employment’ is both welcome and timely. The new policy will enable targeted and systematic FET support, including work-based learning for vulnerable groups in the Irish workforce, particularly those who have lower skills levels. It also prioritises FET support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that need assistance to invest in and develop their workforce.

The need to establish the value proposition for FET, based on evidence, is paramount for 2018-2019.

INTEGRATED GUIDANCE PROVISION

Section 10 of the FET Strategy sets out a vision for an integrated pathway of high-quality, accessible FET guidance in Ireland. It commits to developing and implementing an integrated FET Guidance Strategy, incorporating agreed national referral protocols between Adult Guidance Services, the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP), and other national agencies.

In January 2018 the Minister for Education and Skills launched a review of career guidance in post-primary schools, further education and training centres, and higher education institutions. Its purpose is to ensure that a high-quality, relevant career guidance support service is being provided to all students from post-primary level up to further and higher education. The next phase of work on the integrated FET Guidance Strategy will be informed by the outcomes of this review.

BREXIT AND FET

Brexit is expected to have a material impact on the Irish economy.⁹ It will affect trade, foreign direct investment, and the labour market.¹⁰ SMEs along the border counties may be more badly affected than other businesses.¹¹ This could give rise to location- or sector-specific challenges. Consequently, in

2018/2019, ETBs – especially those in or adjacent to the Border, Midland and Western (BMW) region – are scoping and developing programmes to equip people impacted by Brexit with new or higher-level skills.

Some potential FET-related opportunities may also emerge, including an increase in employer and student demand for new and existing FET provision, including new apprenticeships, most notably those relating to transport and freight forwarding, financial services, and food export. These changes will be reflected in the individual ETB strategic performance agreements for 2018 and 2019.

PLANNING FOR FET STRATEGY 2

The progress review of the FET Strategy flagged critical themes that will feed into the initial development of FET Strategy 2 during 2019. These include a focus on lifelong learning and workforce upskilling, reflecting the changing needs of the economy. Other prerequisites will involve:

- establishing a clearer learning pathway with better guidance, information and support for FET learners;
- a more accessible system for those in employment;
- clearer transition and progression routes into and from FET.

With the development of FET Strategy 2, demands on FET will be amplified not only by Brexit but by longer-term trends such as technological change, globalisation, and an ageing population. Two other trends are also of concern. The hollowing out of the middle skill base in favour of higher and lower-level occupations is significant in Ireland. There has been a 15 per cent swing from middle to high-skilled occupations in Ireland in the last twenty years.¹² There are also persistent low levels of literacy and numeracy skills in a significant cohort (one in five) of the workforce.¹³

There has been a 15 per cent swing from middle to higher-skilled occupations in Ireland in the last twenty years.

STRATEGIC PLANNING PILOTS

Key to developing the strategic performance agreements introduced in 2018 was the SOLAS/ETB strategic planning pilot initiative. The pilot encompassed three ETBs: Cork, Laois/Offaly, and Donegal. It aimed to inform the development of an appropriate strategic planning framework for FET in Ireland, to inform the outcomes-based target-setting approach of SOLAS, and to develop appropriate counterfactual impact evaluation tools for FET.

The pilot also showed it was possible to track thousands of learners at different points in time after course completion. This provided evidence that key full-time FET provision is broadly effective in terms of progression outcomes to employment and to further or higher education.

NEW AMBITION FOR FET

The second SOLAS Corporate Plan 2017–2019 was designed to contribute to broader government efforts to underpin and sustain economic growth and social inclusion. It also incorporates a new ambition for FET expressed as a set of annual aggregate sectoral targets and a set of SOLAS-specific deliverables to be achieved in 2018–2020.¹⁴ The sector targets include a

combined 50,000 new apprenticeship and traineeship registrations by 2020. SOLAS deliverables include a new SOLAS unit established in 2018 to ensure an effective bridging mechanism between social-inclusion policy and its implementation. A funding model to support FET innovation and continual improvement is another important SOLAS deliverable.

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9. Central Bank of Ireland (2017) *Brexit Task Force Update*. December 2017.
10. Ibid.
11. ISME (2017) *Brexit Survey Results 2017*.
12. OECD (2017) *Employment Outlook*, p.86.
13. OECD (2017) *Skills Outlook*, Figure 1.7.
14. For a detailed discussion of this topic, see the article by Andrew Brownlee, executive director of SOLAS, in the present *Yearbook*.



Forty- one different apprenticeships are currently available in Ireland and more are planned.

TOWARDS AN ETB ECOSYSTEM OF FET PROVISION

From strategy to implementation



Dr Rory O'Sullivan

Principal of Killester College of Further Education, and Chair of the FET Committee.

Since 2010, Further Education and Training (FET) in Ireland has undergone enormous change. The first four years of this period focused on putting the building blocks in place to develop a new sector of the Irish education system. A single Skills Division was created for the first time in the renamed Department of Education and Skills (DES) when it assumed policy responsibility for training. The amalgamation of the VECs and the disbandment of FÁS led to establishment of the Education and Training Boards (ETBs). A new national agency to coordinate policy and funding for the FET sector, SOLAS, was also established. The employment services function of FÁS was transferred to the Department of Social Protection, from which the INTREO service emerged. A single national agency for qualifications and quality assurance, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), was established in 2012.

By the end of October 2013, when SOLAS opened its doors, the institutional triangle of FET – SOLAS, the ETBs, and QQI – was in place. In May 2014, the first ever national FET Strategy was launched, in which was presented ‘a roadmap and implementation plan to realise the vision of a world-class integrated system of further education and training in Ireland’ (SOLAS, 2014, p.3). The last four years focused on evaluation and implementation. However, ‘what matters most to macro policy outcomes is local capacity’ (Clarke, 2014, p.200).

During the developmental period of 2010 to 2014, the Minister for Education of the day described the FET sector as having been treated as the ‘black sheep’ (Quinn, 2012), ‘backwater’ (Quinn, 2013), and ‘Cinderella’ of the education system (Quinn, 2014). The legacy of neglect of the vocational sector (Walsh, 2011) in general and the FET sector in particular has resulted in a situation where ‘FET in Ireland has suffered from a persistent capacity deficit’ (O’Sullivan, 2018, p.332). To move from such under-resourcing to become a world-class FET system (SOLAS, 2014), or indeed to be part of the best education and training system in Europe by 2026 (DES, 2016), a conscious effort is required on the part of government to commit the necessary investments, both financial and structural.

This article, while acknowledging their wider remit, including primary and post-primary education, focuses on FET provision in ETBs. It highlights some of the key demands being placed on ETBs and makes the case for significant investment and reforms in ETBs.

CONVERGENCE OF FET AND HIGHER EDUCATION

The establishment of the ETBs resulted in the amalgamation of the suite of programmes previously provided separately by FÁS and the VECs. Currently, SOLAS funds twenty-six different FET programmes. A clear opportunity for rationalisation of the programmes is yet to be realised. The 2017–2018 period witnessed a crystallisation of the policy goals and objectives to be placed on the FET provision in ETBs. A number of strategy statements emerged from SOLAS during this period:

- Strategy for Technology-Enhanced Learning in Further Education and Training 2016–2019
- Further Education and Training Professional Development Strategy 2017–2019
- Supporting Working Lives and Enterprise Growth in Ireland – 2018–2021 further education and training policy framework for skills development of people in employment.

The Evaluation of the Post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) programme (McGuinness et al., 2018), by far the largest of the programmes, was published in January. It highlighted the increasing difficulties with the location of the PLC programme in a post-primary model. The SOLAS response to the evaluation made forty-five recommendations (SOLAS, 2017a). A PLC Programme Improvement Advisory Committee was established to examine the implementation of these recommendations, and its work is ongoing.

Currently, SOLAS funds twenty-six different FET programmes, [of which] the PLC programme is by far the largest.

In April–May 2018, SOLAS engaged in strategic dialogue meetings with the ETBs. This followed a process whereby SOLAS agreed its Corporate Plan for 2017–2019 with the DES. The plan specified national targets to be met by the FET sector over the three-year period (SOLAS, 2017b):

- Target 1 – Skills for the Economy: 10% more learners securing employment after undertaking a relevant FET course
- Target 2 – Progression: 10% more learners progressing to other FET courses or higher education from relevant courses
- Target 3 – Transversal Skills: 10% increase in the rate of certification on courses primarily focused on social-mobility skills development that is transversal in nature
- Target 4 – Lifelong Learning: 10% increase of adult learners taking part in lifelong learning delivered through FET
- Target 5 – Certification and Qualifications: From 2018, for three years, an average of 10,000 more learners each year are to achieve qualifications related to business sectors where employment growth and skills needs have been identified
- Target 6 – Apprenticeships and Traineeships: 30,500 new apprentice and trainee registrations from 2017–2019.

The Strategic Performance Agreement signed between SOLAS and each ETB stipulates the ETB's contribution to achieving the overall national targets by the end of the three-year period.

QQI similarly engaged with ETBs in a series of Initial Quality Dialogue Meetings (IQDMs) in late 2017. In the previous 12 to 18 months, the governance of the Quality Assurance System (QAS) in each ETB migrated from the legacy situation under FETAC, which in many cases consisted of central QA policies with local procedures in each centre, to a consolidated ETB-wide QAS. These IQDMs focused on a dialogue about the work achieved to date and the plan for improvements. This places a greater emphasis on the corporate responsibility at ETB level for the governance of Quality Assurance.

It is interesting to note that the Strategic Performance Agreement Model being implemented by SOLAS is based on a similar model used between the Higher Education Authority and the third-level institutions. Similarly, the Quality Assurance Review Model to be rolled out by QQI in relation to the ETBs is based on the model used for Institutes of Technology (QQI, 2018). With the creation of a single division in the DES for higher and further education and training policy in 2017, the trajectory of convergence between FET and higher education is gathering pace. Despite these trends, however, colleges of further education, both within and outside of the ETBs, are still post-primary schools, as pointed out in the PLC Evaluation Report.

Walsh (2018), discussing the QAS framework with ETBs, highlighted the need for administrative changes in the ETBs to support the new governance requirements. Given the increasingly similar demand being placed on FET and higher education institutions, he observes:

The HEA performance framework report in 2014 indicates that 53% of staff in the university sector are classed as administrative, this falls to 31% in the Institutes of Technology sector. It is considerably lower again in the ETB sector, yet the development, compliance and reporting responsibilities of the ETBs are now commensurate with those for higher education. ... This shouldn't have to mean greater diversion of teachers from frontline teaching, as the current burden of administrative work is already doing this, but a move towards a more balanced mix of administrative and teaching staff across the sector. (p.3)

A persistent feature of FET provision is its fragmented nature.

Building capacity in the ETB for QA governance will be especially relevant when the issue of delegated authority to make awards at ETB level reaches the top of the agenda. However, higher education institutions tend to be geographically clustered on a small number of sites. By contrast, FET provision in the ETBs is more geographically dispersed. Any increase in the non-teaching staffing capacity of ETBs would therefore require a different approach to that of higher education.

THE ETB ECOSYSTEM

A persistent feature of FET provision is its fragmented nature. Siloed programmes result in islands of activity that operate in isolation from, as well as alongside, other programmes. This has also led to a programme-specific approach in the policy discourse on FET. Similarly, the resourcing model for FET continues to be programme-specific.

Rather than continuing to examine FET provision on a programme basis, it may be more productive to focus on the infrastructure for FET provision. In each ETB is a network of geographically dispersed sites already engaged in FET provision. If the focus of strategic development was on the development of this infrastructure, the capacity of each ETB would increase to a point where the success of macro FET policy is more assured. The establishment of the ETBs resulted in an organisation which consists of various types of FET centres – colleges of further education, training centres, Youthreach centres, VTOS centres, adult education, and so on. Currently, the staffing model focuses on the centre, but given the new demands being placed on ETB FET provision, perhaps a more flexible approach is needed.

FET programmes are essentially a set of rules that govern their approval, funding, and staffing, aimed at addressing a particular policy objective. These rules and objectives can change in response to the changing policy landscape. The PLC programme, for example, was assigned an activation objective at the beginning of the recession that it never had in the past (Sweeney, 2013). The difficulty in this case was that the policy objectives of the programme changed but the provision infrastructure did not.

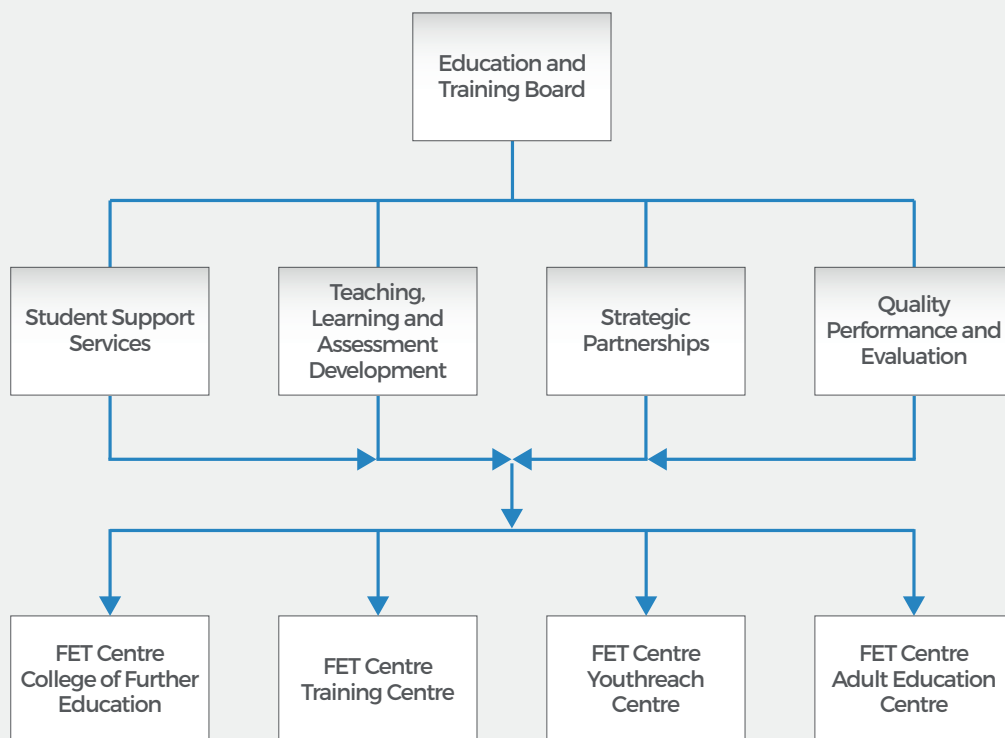
Colleges of Further Education are still post-primary schools, as pointed out in the PLC Evaluation Report.

This situation highlights a key issue to be addressed for FET provision in the future. By continuing to focus the policy discourse and the funding model on a programme, the dysfunctional relationship with the FET provision infrastructure will increase. Increasing ETBs' capacity for the immediate and future demands of FET provision will require that a flexible infrastructure be developed which can accommodate the provision of a range of FET programmes. Given the constantly changing nature of the FET policy context, this ETB infrastructure would need to be flexible enough to respond to this. In other words,

the ETB could be viewed as a FET provision ecosystem. Investing in this ecosystem will build local capacity, increasing the likelihood of success for macro-policy outcomes.

ETB FET ECOSYSTEM

The diagram below outlines a possible model for an ETB FET ecosystem. It proposes a layer of support units between the ETB head office and the FET centres. Non-teaching staff supports would not be concentrated solely in the FET centres. There could be a blend of staff in the various support units, and a coordination/liaison-type role in the centres. Equally, as an ecosystem, this ETB FET provision infrastructure could adapt to the needs of the changing policy landscape. For example, when unemployment is high, the ecosystem could be recalibrated to respond appropriately. In times of economic growth, it could be recalibrated towards increased provision for people in employment. Based on economies of scale, this model could apply collaboratively to a number of adjacent ETBs.



The ETB FET Ecosystem

The Student Supports Services Unit could include a coordination role for career guidance and learning supports, including psychological services. The Teaching, Learning and Assessment Development Unit would coordinate the development of the Technology-Enhanced Learning (TEL) Strategy as well as teaching, learning, and assessment methodologies. The Strategic Partnerships Unit would include employer and enterprise engagement, stakeholder engagement, and education partners in Erasmus+ projects, for example. The Quality Performance and Evaluation Unit would coordinate the QAS for the ETB. This would include quality improvement plans, quality monitoring, and institutional reviews. This unit will be vital to achieving delegated authority status from QQI to make awards.

While this article has focused on FET provision in ETBs, the ecosystem model for ETB provision could also provide much-needed supports to non-FET provision in the ETB. Indeed, the option for non-ETB FET provision to ‘purchase’ supports from such a system may be open to consideration.

CONCLUSION

ETB system capacity will be the key determinant in the likelihood of success of macro-policy outcomes for FET. The legacy of underinvestment for many years, coupled with increasing demand on the FET system, have brought this issue into specific relief. The ambition to have a world-class FET system and the best education and training system in Europe by 2026 – just eight years from now – puts an onus on government to make a substantial investment in the ETB FET ecosystem.

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Open Day at Whitehall College of Further Education, Whitehall, Dublin.



Students from Whitehall College of Further Education, Dublin, shared their skills and experiences with visitors at the College Open Day. Pictured here are Nursing Studies students (l-r): **Bursa Aktar**, **Tshepo Tingwane** and **Yasmin Dolan**.

Conor McCabe Photography

EARN AND LEARN

An overview of apprenticeship development



Martin McVicar
Managing Director,
Combilift

Forty-one different apprenticeship programmes are currently available in Ireland, and more are planned. This expansion is aligned with government policy, with the aim of developing over seventy apprenticeships across a range of industries by 2020. The National Skills Strategy 2025 has set a target of 50,000 apprenticeship and traineeship places to be provided over 2016–2020.

Apprenticeships are available in Insurance Practice, Logistics, Biopharma, Industrial Electrical Engineering, Polymer Processing Technology, Manufacturing Technology, Manufacturing Engineer, Accounting Technician, Auctioneering, Commis Chef, International Financial Services, Network Engineer, Software Developer, and OEM Engineering.

As managing director of Combilift, I chaired the industry-led Consortium Steering Group (CSG) that developed the OEM (Original Equipment Manufacturers) apprenticeship. Recruitment will begin in 2019. This article outlines the rationale for the development of apprenticeships and encourages career guidance professionals and parents to consider the apprenticeship route in the same light as going to university.

THE OEM APPRENTICESHIP STORY

In 2015, Combilift turned the sod on a new, 46,500m², €50 million global headquarters and manufacturing facility. At the same time, Cavan and Monaghan Education and Training Board (CMETB) was completing the development of a new education campus in Monaghan town. Recognising that the new Combilift factory and a growing order book would increase the need for skilled employees, I approached Martin O'Brien, then CMETB chief executive, to see if the ETB could help. Both he and his successor, John Kearney, were very supportive.

The practical response was swift and resulted in the development of the Engineering Traineeship, a year-long course aimed at preparing learners for work in the sector. This was delivered in conjunction with the ETB at Monaghan Institute. The traineeship combines theory and practical industry experience to give a solid understand of engineering practice.

Combilift helped to design the curriculum, which focuses on engineering, electronics, and hydraulics. Combilift supports the delivery of the Traineeship, with two members of staff seconded to teach on the course. Trainees also receive practical placement

and a bursary from Combilift for the duration. Trainees complete 12 weeks in industry working with Combilift, and study for 24 weeks at Monaghan Institute. Work placement is spread across the year in blocks of 2–3 weeks, after which trainees receive a QQI level 5 award on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

Most graduates have gone on to be offered full-time employment with Combilift, and many progress in their careers at the company.

INDUSTRY GROWTH

In 2015–2017 Combilift was not the only company facing a demand for skilled employees. There are 12,790 manufacturing enterprises dispersed around Ireland, many in the OEM sector. Most are small, with 83 per cent employing up to 10 people (micro firms) and 95 per cent up to 50 people.

OEM companies manufacture across a wide spectrum of equipment. Many are market leaders in their field, and range in size from SMEs and family-run businesses to larger companies such as Combilift, Dairymaster, Dennison Trailers, and Dromone Engineering. They provide innovative and practical solutions to a range of customer needs. Their products contain complex electrical, battery, electro-mechanical, hydraulic, pneumatic, and electronic technology.

Combilift supports the delivery of the Engineering Traineeship, with two members of staff seconded to teach on the course.

Manufacturing firms play a critical role in the Irish economy as drivers of exports, as employers, as a source of revenue, and as drivers of growth. GDP from manufacturing in Ireland increased from €26,206 million in Q3 2017 to €28,551 million in Q4 2017. GDP from manufacturing in Ireland averaged €11,514.41 million from 1995–2017, peaking at €28,551 million in Q4 2017 from a low of €4,601 million in Q3 1995.

Manufacturing also has significant spin-off effects, such as indirect employment supported in other sectors (e.g. services and logistics). Manufacturing firms source approximately €14 billion of materials and services from Irish-based suppliers. The sector grew at a record pace in December 2017, as business conditions improved.

The Investec Purchasing Managers' Index, which measures the health of the industry, rose from 58.1 in November 2017 to 59.1 in December, the strongest reading in the history of the series. This was driven by stronger new-order growth and the fastest rise in employment in the sector since the survey began in 1998. The rate of growth in new orders was the fastest since June 1998, as client demand improved and new export orders increased sharply. This led to a steep increase in output, with production rising for an eighteenth consecutive month.

APPROACHES TO SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

The steep rise in output brought with it a growing demand for skilled employees. This was identified in the Forfás report 'Future Skills Requirements of the Manufacturing Sector to 2020', which addressed the emerging demands for skills in the sector in Ireland. Specific skills needs were also identified by the Mid-Tier Engineering Group.

The Government's 'Action Plan for Jobs 2012' highlighted the need for a focus on manufacturing that led to the Forfás report. This study has been developed in tandem with the wider government strategy for manufacturing, 'Making It in Ireland: Manufacturing 2020'. The 'Future Skills' report highlighted concerns among engineering firms about the shortage of a qualified, skilled workforce, capable of working with machinery that combines mechanical, electrical, electronic, and IT/software technologies.

In the manufacturing and engineering sectors, there has been considerable interest in Combilift's approach to meeting its skills needs and developing its relationship with the ETB. The apprenticeship approach to training was of particular interest, since many companies were familiar with existing craft apprenticeships.

The Apprenticeship Review defines an apprenticeship as 'a programme of structured education and training which formally combines and alternates learning in the workplace with learning in an education or training centre'. This combination of on-the-job and off-the-job employer-led training was deemed the most suitable response to the complex needs of the OEM sector. There was considerable support among companies for developing a recognised apprenticeship award on the NFQ.

CONSORTIUM STEERING GROUP

In 2015 a group of OEM companies formed a Consortium Steering Group (CSG) to respond to the Apprenticeship Council's call for proposals. It reviewed the apprenticeships on offer and concluded that they did not meet all of the OEM sector's skills requirements. The companies felt that a new programme should be designed to meet those needs.

A decision was taken to submit a proposal for a Level 6 Apprenticeship in Original Equipment Manufacturing (OEM) in conjunction with Cavan and Monaghan Education and Training Board (CMETB) and Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board (LCETB).

The role of an OEM technician was recognised by SOLAS as a 'green-field' one. The consortium and its education partners worked on developing a three-year programme leading to a Level 6 Advanced Certificate in OEM. In October 2018 the OEM apprenticeship programme was approved, and the first recruitment will begin in 2019.

DIVERSE SKILLS TRAINING

The OEM technician will be trained in diverse engineering skills to assemble a range of components, involving different processes, in order to manufacture and support original equipment. They will acquire general practice skills across a range of processes, to put together a disparate range of components to manufacture a product.

This type of apprenticeship has not existed before. It is aimed at secondary-school leavers who have completed their Leaving Certificate, or mature applicants who wish to pursue a career in this area. The overarching aim is to give apprentices the underpinning academic knowledge and

In 2015, a group of Original Equipment Manufacturing (OEM) companies formed a Consortium Steering Group to respond to the Apprenticeship Council's call for proposals.

practical experience needed to enhance their employment and educational opportunities, in companies specific to the OEM sector.

The combination of academic and work-based training ensures that all apprentices will graduate with an enriched experience of the traditional classroom blocks of study which can be directly applied to the workplace. This applied feature provides a unique experience, ensuring sustainability and applicability responsive to the OEM industry.

Apprentices will be employed by approved companies operating in the OEM space. On-the-job learning will take place in that company, and the learner will also attend off-the-job education and training on a block release basis at the dedicated premises of the coordinating education provider.

While common engineering skills will be developed over the programme, the OEM engineering technician, uniquely, will cultivate the skills necessary to assemble, install, test, commission, and electronically control engine-driven (diesel and gas) and battery-powered systems. The technician will have the skills to analyse electrical wiring, hydraulic, pneumatic, and robotic systems to identify specific faults encountered in OEM products.

They will gain the expertise to support customers on the use and maintenance of the products they manufacture. They will learn how to interpret technical and calibration data and use torqueing testing instruments for effective product assembly, fault diagnosis, and rectification. They will also be responsible for installing and calibrating sensors and for transmitting and controlling devices.

The role of an Original Equipment Manufacturing (OEM) technician was recognised by SOLAS as a 'green-field' one.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT

The apprenticeship programme has been developed to give a consistent number of apprentices to be hired, retained, and developed for this dynamic industry. Delivering committed, adaptable, and ambitious people into the OEM sector year on year, this apprenticeship will be a key contributor to strategic recruitment and planning of many indigenous and international organisations in Ireland.

The 'Future Skills' report says there is a clear consensus among stakeholders that the manufacturing industry suffers from negative perceptions among the Irish population, and that this dissuades suitable people from seeking a career in it. The industry faces a talent shortfall, as young people completing their second-level education are often encouraged to prioritise university and college courses.

Whilst there are programmes to promote STEM subjects and careers, such as Discover Science and Engineering, Smart Futures, and STEPS, the firms that were consulted argue that there is now an urgent need to highlight and educate in manufacturing in Ireland. There is a particular need to promote advances in the industry and the excellent career opportunities available.

The current approach to second-level education does not suit everyone. High-achieving students and those who struggle academically often say they would prefer a more practical approach to learning. Learning by doing

is a valued method, one that every young child can relate to. So why are we not encouraging our children to consider a practical, hands-on approach to their choice of training after the Leaving Cert?

The move towards continuous, practical assessment, with the reform of junior cycle, will intensify the demand for active, hands-on learning. The experiential approach in an apprenticeship programme allows for reflection on tasks undertaken, and is facilitated by employers through on-the-job placement.

WORK-BASED LEARNING

Employers contribute uniquely to the design and delivery of apprenticeship programmes. An apprenticeship is a work-based learning programme, designed by employers in association with education and training providers. A study by the KOF Swiss Economic Institute concludes that the main features of vocational educational training in top-performing countries include the fact that employers are involved in setting qualification standards.¹

In Irish apprenticeships, experienced industry professionals have the opportunity to pass on their skills. In universities such experts are highly sought after: they are invited to give guest lectures and encouraged to take students on work placement. In an apprenticeship, they design and deliver the course content and act as mentors to apprentices.

The expectation from employers, students, and indeed parents is that participants are work-ready on graduation. There has been an increase in the number of degree courses that combine substantial work-based learning (either through placement or project work) with academic education. This approach has attracted more applicants looking ahead to life after graduation.

Educational programmes that include work-based learning allow a smoother transition from school to employment. Evidence shows that career prospects are better for students with work experience, particularly experience gained through apprenticeships.

**An apprenticeship
is a work-based
learning programme,
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education and training
providers.**

STRUCTURED CAREER PATHS

Apprenticeships provide a mix of job-specific and transversal skills that are difficult to acquire in classroom-only environments. Industry and other stakeholders have expressed a clear need for more structured career paths in manufacturing – to make career opportunities in the sector more visible and attractive, and to improve human resources and training practices.

A more clearly structured career path in the form of an apprenticeship recognises both formal and on-the-job training. It will provide recognised progression pathways linked to the NFQ. The OEM apprenticeship

1 KOF Swiss Economic Institute (2016) 'Feasibility Study for a Curriculum Comparison in Vocational Education and Training: Intermediary Report II: Education-Employment Linkage Index (draft)'. Available at: <http://e-collection.library.ethz.ch/eserv/eth:49542/eth-49542-01.pdf>.

programme seeks to open up such pathways in order to give good career choices for the graduate.

The value of completing an apprenticeship is clear: the apprentice gains a qualification, develops transferable skills, and has opportunities for career progression. Successful apprentices have higher earning power and acquire higher-level degrees. By offering apprenticeships, employers attract the interest of potential employees, thus future-proofing for skills and competitiveness.

APPRENTICESHIPS AS A FIRST CHOICE

Even with growing interest in apprenticeship-style training, there is a need to review the perception of apprenticeships. In Ireland, apprenticeships and traineeships are acknowledged as another option outside the CAO system for students. That in itself perpetuates the perception that non-CAO options are often a fall-back, primarily for those who don't get the points for an university or college course. It is time we divested ourselves of the idea that apprenticeships are only for students who do not achieve high grades, and that it is not good for a secondary school to report a lower-than-average transition of its students to university.

A view of apprenticeships as 'second best' to academic education is not uncommon to Ireland. Such career options have struggled to achieve what researchers call parity of esteem with academic education.² Bias against apprenticeships and traineeships as a first option is evident in the fact that we do not refer to apprenticeships as part of the higher education system, even though many apprenticeships are at Level 6–9 on the NFQ.

Career advice and decisions driven by school league tables are not serving our children or country well.

Career advice and decisions driven by school league tables are not serving our children or country well. There is a personal, financial, and social cost to making the wrong decision, and a financial implication to non-progression: 14 per cent of students who entered higher education institutions in 2014 did not progress to year 2.³ The cost of a year's study mounts up, with registration fees, course fees, and living costs. The cost to the taxpayer must also

be considered. It is even more expensive if the student does not get a job on completion.

The typical student most likely to progress to second year is a female student of education or healthcare in a university or college, with relatively high Leaving Cert points. The student most likely not to progress is a male student with relatively low Leaving Cert points, studying a Level 6 or 7 course at an Institute of Technology in computer science, construction, or engineering. Yet there is a suite of apprenticeships available in areas such as engineering and IT, to complement the traditional craft apprenticeships, which may be of more benefit to this category of student.

2 See for example Hansen, K. and Vignoles, A. (2005) 'The United Kingdom education system in a comparative context: What's the good of education?', pp. 13–35.

3 <http://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2018/09/HEA-Progression-Higher-Ed-201415-201516.pdf>.

In May 2018, Combilift partnered with the Institute of Guidance Counsellors (IGC) and hosted a Continuous Professional Development (CPD) day for career guidance counsellors on site at the new Combilift global headquarters and manufacturing facility. It was held during the official opening of our €50 million facility in Monaghan. Guidance counsellors met with our employees and heard about the traineeship and apprenticeship programmes and the different career-development pathways in the company. Their engagement and response were excellent. This model needs to be replicated across the country, where career professionals engage with local industry to identify options and pathways for their students.

The pressure to go to college, to get a degree and a good job, is not always beneficial to school leavers. We must avoid an approach where apprenticeships, traineeships, and other vocational options are seen as being only for those who do not get the points for other options. We must not overlook the value of apprenticeships as a good first choice for many. Otherwise, we are doing a disservice to students and employers alike.

About Combilift:

Combilift is the largest global manufacturer of multi-directional forklifts and an acknowledged leader in long load handling solutions. More than 40,000 units have been sold in over 85 countries since Combilift was established in 1998. The driving force behind Combilift's operations is a desire to deliver innovation in the material-handling arena.

Combilift continually invests 7% of all revenue in research and development as part of its relentless quest to find safer, more productive, and more cost-effective ways to lift challenging loads in challenging environments. The company's commitment to new product development has seen it continue to blaze a trail through the lifting and handling industry worldwide, cementing the company's reputation as a global leader.

Combilift employs more than 600 people at its purpose-built €50 million global headquarters and manufacturing facility in Monaghan. The new purpose-built 46,500m² facility was officially opened by An Taoiseach Leo Varadkar TD in 2018.



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SHAPING FUTURE FET VIA STRATEGIC PERFORMANCE AGREEMENTS

Multi-annual strategies, outcomes, and impacts



Andrew Brownlee

Executive Director,
Strategy and
Knowledge, SOLAS

The establishment of an outcomes-focused multi-annual approach to planning is a pivotal moment in the continued development of a strategic and integrated further education and training (FET) system.

The journey began in 2013 with the formation of SOLAS and Education and Training Boards (ETBs), which brought the FET sectors together for the first time under a devolved delivery model. There followed a natural establishment phase to ensure that structures, roles, and responsibilities in the organisations were aligned with the policy, economic, and social objectives that the FET system was designed to serve.

The challenges in this regard should not be underestimated. Any merger is complex and requires careful planning and management, and this was certainly the case with such large and multifaceted VECs coming together, in most cases to form larger ETBs with no sense of shared regional identity or infrastructure. It was also true of SOLAS itself, where the role of FÁS in centrally controlling and operating a national training system evolved into one of setting the overall direction for an integrated FET system, steering and supporting its change and development, funding its devolved operations, and ensuring accountability for this investment.

The incorporation of SOLAS as a much smaller organisation to deliver on this remit required a change in culture, strategy, and systems. Indeed, it is to the credit of SOLAS and the ETBs that there was a seamless transition to the new approach to provision, with no impact on learners, who continued to avail of high-quality, accessible learning regardless of location across the country.

Although such challenges were acknowledged, the scale of ambition for the new system of FET was clear from the outset. The first five-year strategy, published in May 2014, set out the direction in which it needed to develop and committed to a system of outcomes-based planning and funding to underpin it. It was recognised that to facilitate this move to an outcomes focus, new systems and capability had to be built.

The first step was to develop the Funding Allocation Request and Reporting (FARR) system, a bottom-up approach to planning that required ETBs to set out the activities they would deliver across the range of FET programmes in each calendar year. This played a major role in developing a holistic understanding of provision across each

region, and of the diversity and contribution of each ETB in meeting the unique needs of its learners, communities, and industries.

The establishment of a robust annual planning system was accompanied by the incremental development of learner data infrastructure via the programme learner support service (PLSS). This brought together a learner and programme database with a national course calendar to provide a platform to begin to track, analyse, and challenge the outcomes arising from FET.

Given this platform, the potential was recognised for a more strategic and multi-annual approach to planning and funding FET. This is particularly critical for FET, where real thought and planning must go into how provision needs to evolve to keep pace with the rapidly changing social, economic, and technological context. We are perhaps in an unparalleled period of industrial transformation, with changes every day in the world of work, how people learn and develop, how communities survive and prosper, and how enterprises do business. A multi-annual strategy, fuelled by a strong evidence base, disruptive thinking, and local context and connectivity, is essential to ensure that ETBs can respond flexibly to emerging regional needs and deliver clear outcomes in return.

We are in an unparalleled period of industrial transformation, with changes every day in the world of work.

To begin such a process, a pilot initiative was established between SOLAS and three ETBs (Cork, Donegal, Laois/Offaly) which looked at how strategic priorities could be set and targets pursued over a three-year period. Following its success, a framework was agreed with ETBs for a new strategic dialogue to inform the development of

multi-annual strategic performance agreements with SOLAS. The launch of the SOLAS Corporate Plan in 2017, with a series of core national FET sector targets agreed with the Minister for Education and Skills across a three-year period, provided further clarity on what was expected from SOLAS and the ETBs.

The development of strategic performance agreements between SOLAS and each of the sixteen ETBs for 2018–2020 involved an intensive eight-month process launched in February 2018. A notable aspect of this process was the appointment of an independent expert panel, bringing together expertise in education and training provision in both a national and an international context, and in other relevant areas such as active inclusion, EU learning programmes, and public sector reform, to provide constructive

THE PERFORMANCE AGREEMENT

- introduction
- regional characteristics
- ETB FET resources & infrastructure
- strategic priorities and key commitments
- role in delivering relevant policies and strategies
- risks, opportunities and challenges
- summary of actions/initiatives to progress FET strategy goals
- summary of ETB contribution to 6 national FET sector targets
- agreement and monitoring arrangements

challenge and objective input. SOLAS issued templates and guidance to help gather relevant information and set out programme development plans. Development workshops were held with groups of ETBs to discuss the evolving context and support strategic and transformative thinking in setting out a direction for the next three years.

Perhaps the most pivotal component was strategic dialogue, with structured meetings hosted by the ETB to discuss plans across FET. These dialogue meetings provided the bedrock from which focused strategic agreements could be developed, harnessing policy, strategies, targets, labour market insight, and continuing programme evaluation and improvement to set out a clear direction for ETB development from which annual plans can then flow and be linked to resource allocations.

More than this, the agreements give a flavour of what's unique about the particular region that an ETB serves, and of the good practice that is in place or is planned to respond effectively to these unique characteristics. The high-level structure of the agreements is shown in the box. Along with the agreements, each ETB was required to submit target templates showing detailed plans for delivering on each target, together with the rationale for any programme change in each case.

While the individual agreements stand alone in setting out the strategic direction of each ETB, their collective value is also striking. They demonstrate how clear plans are in place to deliver on the FET sector targets agreed with the Minister for Education and Skills by 2020, including:

The strategic performance agreements show the real transformation that is taking place across the FET system.

- Enabling jobs for the economy: over 20% more learners securing employment from provision which primarily serves the labour market than was the case in 2017.
- Supporting progression to other learning opportunities: over 25% more learners progressing to other further or higher education courses from provision primarily focused on this purpose than was the case in 2017. The critical role which PLC provision plays in facilitating progression to higher education will also be enhanced.
- Transversal skills development for active inclusion: certification on courses primarily focused on transversal skills development growing by 20%.
- Lifelong learning and workforce upskilling: a 10% increase in adults starting a suite of lifelong learning-relevant programmes over 2017-2020.
- Focusing on Ireland's critical skills needs: a rebalancing of existing provision from non-prioritised towards key skills areas, and an enhanced focus on ensuring that activity in these skills areas is fully accredited, and that expansion of FET provision is concentrated as far as possible in these areas, delivering an annual average increase of 10,000 key qualifications.
- Embracing new models of apprenticeship and traineeship: with new programme development in emerging skills areas and a shift in other skills-specific programme provision to fit the traineeship model, stimulating 13,900 new traineeship registrations from 2018-2020.

The expansion of apprenticeships, in terms of demand for established programmes and development of post-2016 initiative, will also continue across the FET system.

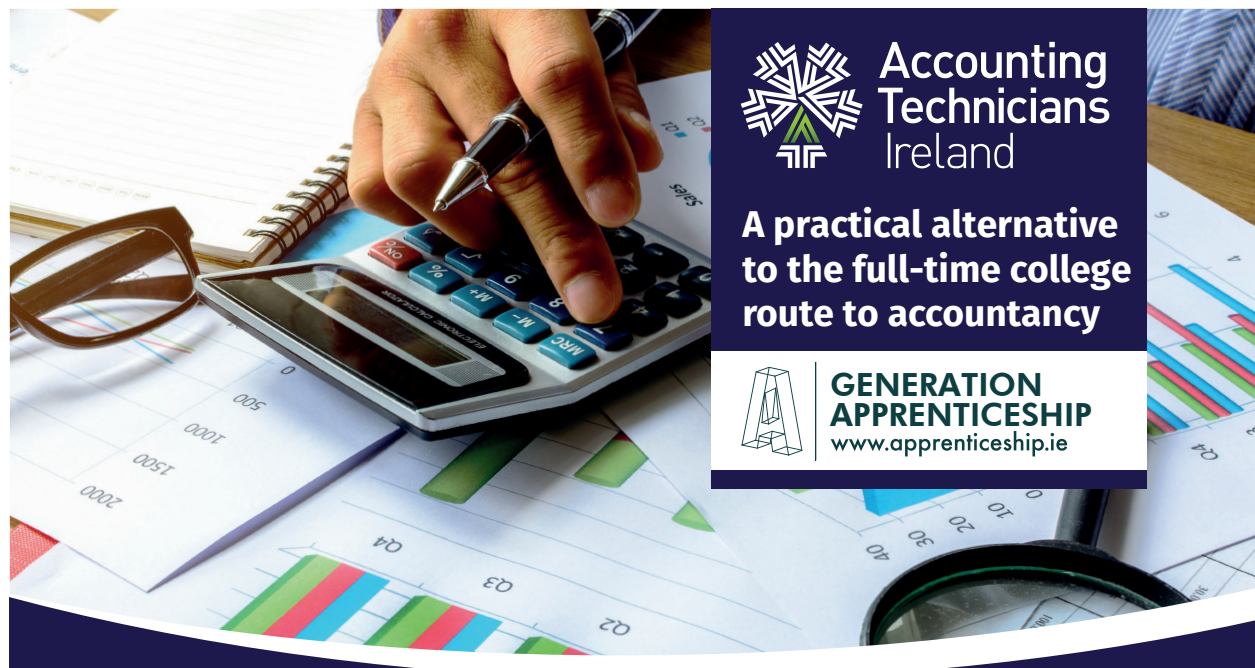
There are of course risks and issues that need to be addressed in order to facilitate the reform and development set out in the agreements. Further enhancement of management structures and resources, capital funding to ensure modern and relevant facilities, addressing inconsistencies across programmes in staffing and learner support, and a more coordinated and streamlined approach to quality assurance and programme validation will all be critical enablers to drive the system forward.

Nonetheless, after a period of development and establishment, the strategic performance agreements show the real transformation that is taking place across the FET system. The increased formalisation and accreditation of learning, a focus on transparent and more consistent progression routes, a rebalancing of provision towards key skills areas and workforce needs, and the expansion of lifelong learning provision are facilitating a clearer learner pathway into, within, and from FET.

Further evidence of performance and impact will emerge from PLSS development, the data partnership between SOLAS and the CSO (allowing learner impacts to be tracked and validated), programme evaluations, and thematic research. This will reinforce and enhance the strategic performance agreement, but at its first attempt it has already set out a clear direction for FET and made clear the sector's ability to deliver on critical targets for employment, progression, transversal skills, lifelong learning, and meeting key skills needs.



Martin McVicar, Managing Director of Combilift, driving the elevation of manufacturing apprenticeships to a much higher level.



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Dr Padraig Walsh
Chief Executive, QQI

QUALITY IN FURTHER EDUCATION

Towards more consistency and comparability

Although Irish further education (FE) awards at levels 5–6 of the National Framework of Qualifications are aimed at providing workplace opportunities, holders of major awards increasingly use their qualifications to access opportunities in higher education.

Higher education institutions need to have confidence that applicants presenting with Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) awards from different providers, or from colleges within the same provider, have achieved similar levels of knowledge, skill, and competence that will allow them to succeed on their higher education programme. For this to happen, there must be comparability and robustness in the quality assurance system in place for the QQI Award, as there is for the better-understood Leaving Certificate qualification certified by the State Examinations Commission.

PROVIDER-LED QUALITY ASSURANCE IN FURTHER EDUCATION

How is quality assured in the Irish FE system, so that it is comparable to the purely external mechanisms of the state-certified examinations? In FE, responsibility for quality assurance is shared between the provider and QQI. Each provider is required to have a verification and authentication process in place to ensure that assessment is fair, consistent, and valid.

Internal verification is where a provider's assessment policies and procedures are internally verified by the provider itself. This takes place on a sampling basis, with one or more internal verifiers assigned.

External authentication provides independent, authoritative confirmation of fair and consistent assessment of learners in accordance with national standards. It is done by assigning an independent external authenticator.

Each provider or centre must also establish a *Results Approval Process* whose purpose is to ensure that results are fully quality-assured and signed off by the provider before submission to QQI. This must include consideration of the internal verifier and external authenticator reports.

THE RE-ENGAGEMENT PROCESS FOR ETBS WITH QQI, 2017–18

In 2016, QQI issued Quality Assurance Guidelines for education and training generally,¹ and separate guidelines for universities, institutes of technology, education and training boards (ETBs),² and

private or independent providers. The next step for all providers with a prior relationship with QQI's antecedent bodies was to agree quality assurance procedures with QQI, taking the above guidelines into account.

For the ETB sector, this process, termed re-engagement by QQI, began in 2017. It involved working with the newly appointed Directors of Further Education and Training in the sixteen ETBS and with Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI). Each ETB was required to develop an Executive Self-Evaluation Report (ESER) that described its corporate oversight and management of the quality assurance procedures across its many colleges and centres.

In November–December 2017, QQI held a series of dialogue meetings by visiting all sixteen ETBs and met with senior management and staff. This paved the way for QQI to approve the quality assurance procedures of all the ETBs between April and June 2018.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN ETB QUALITY ASSURANCE

QQI, as a product of amalgamation itself, recognises the challenge of integrating the quality systems of the former vocational education committees and FÁS training centres into a single quality assurance system.

City of Dublin ETB (CDETb), the largest ETB, has around 3,500 staff providing courses for almost 23,000 full-time and 30,000 part-time learners each year in Dublin. CDETb currently operates sixteen colleges of further education, two training centres, an adult education service that operates in five areas across the city, ten Youthreach centres, and education and training facilities in seven prisons.

**In Further Education,
responsibility for quality
assurance is shared
between the provider
and QQI.**

The challenge for CDETb was to move from twenty-two separate legacy quality-assurance agreements in 2014 down to four in 2018, covering FE colleges, Youthreach, and adult and prison education and training. The aim for CDETb is to move even more towards a unified total quality assurance management framework.³

ACCESSING HIGHER EDUCATION WITH QQI FE AWARDS

Of the 23,733 major award level 5 certificates issued by QQI in 2017,⁴ over 70% (16,102) were made in the ETB sector. Holders of these awards make up the majority of non-mature entrants to the country's higher education institutions outside of the Leaving Cert cohort. In recent years there has been a significant increase in the number of learners accessing higher education on the basis of their QQI FET award, usually a level 5 PLC programme from a further education college.

These entrants are facilitated through what is known as the Round 0 offering of the Central Applications Office (CAO). This is where many higher education courses now have an entry route for applicants presenting QQI FET awards, where quotas are set aside for these applicants on certain programmes. Offers are made each year in advance of the main Round 1 offers to applicants presenting with Leaving Cert qualifications.

Applicants are offered the quota of places for QQI FET applicants. Places are limited and are allocated based solely on the applicants' score. Where students have the same score, places are allocated by the CAO based on random selection. Many courses also have an entry route for applicants presenting QQI FET awards which do not have a specific quota. These courses offer places in Round 1 at the same time that applicants presenting with Leaving Cert qualifications are considered.

In 2018, QQI provided the results and scores to CAO for the roughly 15,000 applicants who said they wished to use a QQI award to access a college place. In 2017, 5,343 applicants received offers based on their QQI score alone – up 7.7% on 2016. In University College Dublin in 2018, for example, over 180 places were reserved for QQI FET applicants across seventeen different entry programmes.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN QQI MONITORING

As a complement to the internal verification and external authentication elements of assessment moderation described above, QQI data monitoring also has a role to play. Most QQI monitoring is routine and desk-based, although there are provisions for direct interventions in the case of complaints or concerns identified through the QQI policy on monitoring.⁵

In UCD, in 2018, over 180 places were reserved for QQI FET applicants across seventeen different entry programmes.

QQI FET awards at levels 4–6 are graded pass, merit, and distinction. QQI sends annual grading reports to all its FET providers (currently numbering about 450). Reports are sent more frequently to the ETBs, given the number of centres and learners. The information is sent with directions that it is to be used for both review of internal consistency in grading and for benchmarking against national comparators. The information includes the following:

- Grade distribution by component within the provider: two separate reports allowing comparison across all components in a year and by individual components across years. If it is a multi-centre provider such as an ETB, this also allows comparisons between different centres and centre types, e.g., FE colleges versus training centres.
- National benchmarks per component assessment by the provider, i.e., the total number assessed nationally in the year, aggregated across all providers, and the distribution of grades therein, i.e., what proportion achieved distinctions, merits, passes, etc.

QQI also gives each ETB a breakdown of all FET components assessed in a year, showing grade distributions and standard deviations when aggregated across all providers. These are very useful in identifying which fields of learning and forms of assessment show the greatest variability in grading. It was evident during the dialogue meetings between QQI and the ETBs in 2017 that this data was being carefully considered by the ETBs as part of their internal quality assurance systems.

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW

After QQI approval of the QA procedures for the ETBs in April and June 2018, the next step is an external review of the effectiveness of quality assurance procedures in the sixteen ETBs. This will follow the well-established

practice of a self-evaluation report (this time at the wider ETB level, rather than just the executive), a visit by the expert panel, and a public report with commendations and recommendations for improvement. The intention is to conduct an omnibus review of all sixteen ETBs in 2020. This will be an opportunity to see the progress being made towards an integrated quality system in each ETB.

QUALITY ENHANCEMENT

QQI also has a role in supporting providers in enhancing quality. In November 2018, QQI is organising separate consultation events on assessment in further and higher education, in the context of QQI's green paper on assessment issued earlier in the year.⁶ The further education event is being hosted jointly by QQI and ETBI.

FOOTNOTES

1. Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines developed by QQI for use by all providers (2016). www.qqi.ie/Downloads/Core%20Statutory%20Quality%20Assurance%20Guidelines.pdf.
2. Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines developed by QQI for Education and Training Boards (2017). www.qqi.ie/Publications/Publications/Sector%20specific%20QA%20Guidelines%20for%20ETBs.pdf.
3. City of Dublin Education and Training Board: Quality Assurance. <http://cityofdublin.etb.ie/quality-assurance/>.
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5. QQI Policy on Monitoring (2014). www.qqi.ie/Publications/Publications/QQI%20Policy%20on%20Monitoring%202014.pdf.
6. QQI Green Paper on Assessment of Learners and Learning (2018). www.qqi.ie/Downloads/Green%20Paper%20Assessment%20of%20Learners%20and%20Learning%20March%202018.pdf.



Minister for Higher Education **Mary Mitchell-O'Connor** greets **Beatrice Dooley**, President of the Institute of Guidance Counsellors (IGC), at the IGC Annual Conference held in The Helix, DCU Campus in October 2018.



Beatrice Dooley
President of the
Institute of Guidance
Counsellors

STRATEGIC CPD PLANS FOR THE INSTITUTE OF GUIDANCE COUNSELLORS

2001 was the best year of my life. It was the year I met my husband – on my birthday. I also qualified with a Postgraduate Diploma in Human Resources Management. From Armstrong's *Handbook of Human Resource Management Practice* (1999), I learnt that development is the 'growth or realization of a person's ability and potential through the provision of learning and educational experiences', and that 'the human resources plan flows from the strategic plan and contributes to it by spelling out how much more can be achieved by investing in people' (p.480).

Armstrong taught me that a human resources development strategy should be designed to benefit *all* stakeholders. In the world of guidance counselling, this means employers, jobseekers, clients, students, educational partners, and labour market stakeholders. As the Institute of Guidance Counsellors (IGC) has charitable status, it is appropriate that any investment in our human resources should benefit the wider community.

IGC PLANS FOR CPD

In the IGC, plans are under way to roll out two types of recommended Continuous Professional Development (CPD) nationwide, to equip our members to meet current challenges in their workplaces. The aim is that all guidance counsellors, regardless of working context or location, will have a uniform, cutting-edge CPD experience.

The IGC is a professional association 1,335 members strong, made up of qualified professionals working in a broad variety of settings which include second-level schools, further education and training (FET), higher education, adult education, youth services, the prison service, probation services, and private practice. Any CPD we plan must address our holistic role and furnish us with new and relevant learning about personal, educational, or vocational guidance.

1. VOCATIONAL OR LABOUR-MARKET-FOCUSED CPD

The first type of CPD relates to opportunities in current labour market initiatives, such as new and existing apprenticeships, traineeships, and up-to-date labour market information (LMI) on current and projected labour market shortages, such as in STEM and ICT. We plan to bring the main employers, FET and apprenticeship course providers, to guidance counsellors at branch level to deliver information on how to identify suitable candidates, where they can find a mentor, training course, and career progression routes out of these. SOLAS will provide the holy grail of LMI.

In May 2018, we organised a pilot of this CPD which was hosted by Combilift in Monaghan town. James Eustace (ETBI) gave a comprehensive overview of current apprenticeship opportunities in Ireland. Our members travelled from Donegal, Clare, Cork, and Dublin to attend – a testament to the fact that we are starving for reliable and up-to-date LMI.

The IGC is indebted to our colleagues in the Joint Managerial Body (JMB), the Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools (ACCS), and Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) for communicating their full support of this CPD to school managers, and for encouraging school principals to release their guidance counsellors for it. Without their support, guidance counsellors could not have attended.

Why should guidance counsellors be informed about apprenticeships and traineeships?

- As outlined in key national policies, such as the National Skills Strategy 2025 and the FET Strategy 2014–2019, the Government aims to significantly grow ‘work-based learning’ through the development of apprenticeships and traineeship routes.
- The target set by the Government is 50,000 apprenticeship and traineeship places to be provided over 2016–2020.
- The apprenticeships system includes awards from levels 5–10, and traineeship programmes offer awards at levels 4 and 5 on the National Framework of Qualifications.
- The national apprenticeship system is being expanded into new industry sectors, with recent examples of new apprenticeships in aviation engineering, IT, design, and the culinary arts.
- At the time of writing, there are 36 apprenticeships and 31 traineeship programmes available and many more being developed.

For students who are predominantly kinaesthetic learners, the traditional learning experience can be soul-destroying.

For students who are predominantly kinaesthetic learners, the traditional learning experience that still dominates second-level education can be soul-destroying. These students typically excel in hands-on, practical learning situations. If they become switched off at school and have no one to join the dots for them at the right time, they are in danger of dropping out.

As the direct link between employers and potential employees, guidance counsellors play a pivotal role in guiding students and jobseekers of all ages into appropriate courses and careers to match their unique skills, aptitudes, interests, and personalities. Empowering the guidance profession to deliver a first-class service will accelerate Ireland’s economic recovery by ensuring the optimum fit between potential employees and labour market requirements. The IGC are now asking the labour market stakeholders to communicate the labour market needs and information to us.

2. ENHANCED COUNSELLING CPD

The second type of CPD is tailored to address skills needed to ‘hold’ students experiencing mental health difficulties who have been referred out but are on waiting lists and at risk. We also need upskilling on boundary

management, cyberbullying, and what to do when referral breaks down or gets stuck in a time loop. We need CPD on handling situations when caregivers do not follow our recommendations to take their child to the GP urgently, or when the child cannot tell the GP what their problems are and end up back with their guidance counsellor.

Guidance counsellors are key front-line personnel who identify and address the mental health issues of our next generation across all education sectors nationwide every day. Due to resource constraints and a lack of joined-up thinking in our health services, guidance counsellors are often left to 'hold' individuals in a counselling space until our referrals are actually followed up on by the appropriate mental health services. This can continue for months and in severe cases up to a year.

The IGC wants to be proactive, but this requires resources, especially access to a network of external professionals for referral, with parental consent, to appropriate services. We worry when we read news stories about referral agencies. We wonder about the fate of the 'at-risk' students and adult learners we refer out.

Guidance counsellors identify and address the mental health issues of our next generation.

Ireland has the fourth-highest rate of suicide among teens across thirty-seven OECD and EU countries (UNICEF, 2017). The IGC believes that each life we save is priceless – and make no mistake, we are saving lives. But we need referral systems that work, in addition to timely supports for guidance counsellors who are left to deal with tragedies alone. We engage in mental health triaging in schools and adult education services throughout the country, but we are not being adequately resourced or supported. The current and next generation of learners in this country deserve better. Guidance counsellors and their management deserve better.

Meanwhile, the IGC continues to consult with our members on what type of counselling CPD they need to support their practice. Armstrong (1999) writes that the aim of a training needs analysis is to define 'the difference between what is happening and what should be happening' (p.514). He advises against falling into the 'deficiency model' approach which focuses on what is lacking, and favours a positive approach concerned with 'identifying and satisfying learning and development needs ... increasing all-round competence' (ibid.). Our CPD plans are not about being reactive: they are about being proactive and planning for the future.

THE VALUE OF CULTIVATING A LEARNING ORGANISATION

Mullins (1999) describes a learning organisation as 'an organisation which facilitates the learning of all of its members and continuously transforms itself' (p.351). If the IGC is to survive and evolve, geography should not be an impediment to offering high-quality CPD to our members in all sixteen branches, which students and adult clients will benefit from.

Vision can be defined as 'a mental image of a possible and desirable future state of the organisation' (Lynch, 2000, p.443). My vision for the IGC is a professional body where all practitioners, regardless of their working context or geographical location, have equal access to high-quality CPD that

will empower them in their role, where all our labour market stakeholders recognise that we are the umbilical cord between the jobseeker and industry. As the professionals who interface with jobseekers across the lifespan, we are a valuable resource, and it makes economic sense to supply us with cutting-edge LMI and forecasts of labour market shortages.

If you have visited our head office, you will know it is in a basement. Glancing out the window, you see the feet of people walking by. Next time you look out our basement window, look beyond the legs and observe the stars: *Ex umbris et imaginibus in veritatem* (John Henry Newman, in Lynch, 2000).

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Pictured at the Annual Conference of the Institute of Guidance Counsellors (IGC) in the Helix, DCU Campus, in October 2018, l-r: **Beatrice Dooley**, President IGC, **Mary Mitchell O'Connor**, Minister for Higher Education, and **Professor Brian Mac Craith**, President of DCU.



Niamh O'Reilly
CEO, AONTAS, the
National Adult
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HALF A CENTURY OF LIFELONG LEARNING ADVOCACY

AONTAS at 50: past, present, and future

AONTAS is the national membership organisation that promotes and advocates for adult learning. In 2019 it celebrates its fiftieth birthday. This article offers a preview of a larger piece of work cataloguing the historic role of AONTAS in the dramatic and ever-evolving field of adult, community, and further education and training, abbreviated here as ACFET.

In 2019 *The Adult Learner* journal will provide a comprehensive record of AONTAS's role in ACFET. The present article offers a snapshot of how AONTAS has been setting the agenda for advancing educational equality over the last half-century, and notes some key challenges for the future. First it summarises AONTAS's achievements in making an impact on the lives of all adult learners, through:

- (a) building and developing the advocacy organisation
- (b) influencing the policy process
- (c) advocating for marginalised groups.

Second, it lists AONTAS's immediate priorities for ACFET, concentrating on where AONTAS is influencing the decision-making, implementation, and evaluation of public policy most affecting adult learners. Finally, the article looks forward to Ireland becoming a global leader in ACFET and looks at how Ireland can reach its fullest potential as a model society for lifelong learning.

THE ROOTS OF POSITIVE CHANGE

When Fr Liam Carey returned from Columbia University in 1967, having researched how adult educators cooperated in England, Wales, Scotland, Canada, and the US, he established a national adult education association in Ireland. Over the following two years, three formative events changed the face of learner advocacy:

- In 1968, Carey worked with prominent adult educators to organise an international conference on the theme 'Adult Education in a Changing Irish Society', with speakers from the US, UK, European Bureau of Adult Education, and Irish Management Institute.
- A committee was formed, consisting of the Department of Education, University College Cork, rural organisations, Forás Éireann, the Vocational Education Colleges, and the Dublin Institute of Adult Education. It was tasked with setting up a national adult education association, the first of its kind on this island.

- A report was prepared, and a proposal was approved to establish AONTAS at its first annual conference in 1969 (Carey, 1979).

1. BUILDING AND DEVELOPING AN EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY ORGANISATION

From the outset, AONTAS understood that its role in developing adult education meant creating a space for, and giving voice to, adult learners – especially those most marginalised by systemic barriers to accessing education and those whom the education system excluded and failed.

The organisation's origins and current activities can be defined by how it seeks to achieve its aims by drawing on domestic and international expertise, producing robust research to inform and reform policy, nurturing nationwide relationships and building international networks, communicating policies to AONTAS members and policy-makers, and appointing highly qualified CEOs who were also leading adult educators.

During its first ten years, three more pivotal events shaped AONTAS:

In 1970, AONTAS affiliated with the European Bureau of Adult Education, thus embracing best international practice, broadening domestic horizons, and influencing Irish and European ACFET policy. International engagement by AONTAS has contributed enormously to the development of ACFET in Ireland, evidenced by AONTAS becoming the national coordinating body for the European Agenda for Adult Learning (EAAL). As coordinator for Ireland, AONTAS contributes to increasing participation in adult learning across the EU, enhancing policies and supports for adult learners, and gathering and disseminating best practices to benefit learners in Ireland and farther afield.

In 1970, AONTAS affiliated with the European Bureau of Adult Education, thus embracing best international practice.

The decision of P.J. Carroll Ltd in 1974 to provide £75,000 funding to AONTAS over a five-year period – to employ a full-time secretariat, undertake a research project, and sponsor an international conference – strengthened AONTAS's advocacy capacity, reinforced its research and international engagement strategies, and moved it from an organisation run by highly dedicated volunteers to one managed by extremely committed professionals. The research project on women's participation in adult education was to have a profound effect on the focus of AONTAS and its advocacy role.

The third crucial moment, in 1977, was the decision to tackle the literacy problem in Ireland by establishing the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA). To support it, AONTAS developed a draft five-year programme and provided £5,000 seed funding (O Murchu, 1984). The establishment of NALA was a key development in Irish ACFET (Murtagh, 2014).

After a decade of intense research in the 1980s, and critical engagement with high-profile government reports on adult education (in 1973 and 1984), AONTAS launched its manifesto for ACFET: 'For Adults Only: A case for adult education in Ireland' (Bassett et al., 1989). It drew together all available research to articulate AONTAS policy on its structures, service provision, funding, tutors and teaching, the facilities and resources of the

time, priority areas for advocacy, access, and the development of adult education. This comprehensive, ambitious, and progressive blueprint gives the organisation its roadmap and compass to this day.

In articulating, analysing, critiquing, and further developing ACFET policy, 'For Adults Only' is buttressed by *The Adult Learner*. Established in 1985 by the Adult Education Organisers' Association (AEOA), the journal continues to be a vital catalyst for policy development and advocacy work. With solid foundations laid down by the good work of the AEOA, AONTAS took over responsibility for publishing *The Adult Learner*.

With full-time staff and international recognition gained for its significant contribution to knowledge in the area, not only is the journal's future secure, but it is set to continue as a shining example of how to provide a forum for critical reflection on teaching and learning practices, and how to address educational disadvantage, social exclusion, inequality, and workplace learning.

The first twenty-five years created a clear path for building organisational capacity to deliver the highest standard of advocacy, and for earning the esteem of members, partners, stakeholders, and decision-makers. These are no small feats in a historically fragmented educational ecosystem hampered by a longstanding lack of coherent government policy. The quarter-century saw a phenomenal pace of change in ACFET in Ireland, with AONTAS playing a pivotal role.

In 1977, the decision [was taken] to tackle the literacy problem in Ireland by establishing NALA.

2. INFLUENCING THE POLICY PROCESS

From its foundation, AONTAS was influencing ACFET policy. At its inaugural conference in 1969, the Minister for Education announced the establishment of a commission on adult education. Members included Fr Liam Carey, the chairman of AONTAS, and two other founding members. The commission recommended that AONTAS be recognised as the National Advisory Body on Adult Education (Hyland and Milne, 1992).

One of its most effective interventions happened in 1997, when AONTAS and NALA joined forces to argue for a White Paper and a Minister with specific responsibility for adult education during that year's general election. As a measure of the campaign's success, Willie O'Dea was appointed as the first Minister for Adult Education in 1997. This was followed by the publication of a Green Paper in 1998 and a White Paper in 2000.

Another important strategy to bring about positive change has been AONTAS's active engagement with the Department of Education (DES), helped by having a high-ranking Department official on the committee which originally established the organisation (Carey, 1979). Working tirelessly to build and sustain this relationship, AONTAS maintains close, constructive communication with the DES to develop and implement evidence-based policies.

3. ADVOCATING FOR MARGINALISED GROUPS

Learners are central to the work of AONTAS and we are committed to supporting the capacity of learners to influence policy and practice in adult and community education. (AONTAS, 2013, p.15)

From its very foundation, AONTAS championed the inclusion of women in ACFET as part of a broader movement for women's rights. The first phase in the 1980s involved supporting, encouraging, and coordinating the establishment of community-based women's groups. EU funding was secured in 1992 for the *New Opportunities for Women* project. Further funding led to the Women's Education Networks' Development project to provide management training and capacity-building for women's groups. In the early 2000s, the Strategies to Advance Networks Collective Empowerment (STANCE) programme, co-funded by the DES and the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, further developed the sector's capacity, especially for women to empower themselves through education.

To consolidate women's education development, the Women's Community Education Quality Assurance Framework project 2003–2005 was established. AONTAS published the Women's Education Quality Assurance Framework in 2005 to help women's groups ensure quality and have a resource which:

- frames the social analysis and distinctive practice of women's community education
- builds a shared language for women's community education
- quality-assures the practice of women's community education (AONTAS, 2005).

From its foundation,
AONTAS championed
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in adult, community,
and further education.

The expertise developed in community education through its women's projects and research gave AONTAS a powerful voice to influence policy in the Green Paper (DES, 1998) and White Paper (DES, 2000). Consequently, in 2003, the Department announced that AONTAS would be commissioned to deliver the Training and Support Programme for Community Education Facilitators.

Support for community education continued to strengthen in the twenty-first century, when the 'Citizen Learner Conference Report' (AONTAS, 2005) was published. In 2007 the establishment of the Community Education Network (CEN) gave a voice to the community and voluntary sector and to individual adult learners. This initiative has had significant benefits in influencing implementation of the recent fundamental changes in ACFET, and in enhancing the authenticity of the advocacy activities and the credibility of its work to reform flawed policies and propose progressive new ones.

CEN, comprising 130+ community education organisations, is closely supported by AONTAS to continue achieving sector-wide recognition for having a positive impact on the lives of learners, to raise the profile of community education, and to lobby decision-makers for sufficient resourcing. CEN is the only national network dedicated to independent

voluntary community education groups committed to bringing about positive social change by empowering all adult learners.

In its recent submissions to SOLAS and in meetings with the SOLAS executive, AONTAS highlighted that community education was not given appropriate attention in initial SOLAS policy proposals. AONTAS ultimately succeeded in having community education explicitly recognised in the Further Education and Training Strategy 2014–2018 (SOLAS, 2014).

CURRENT ADVOCACY FOCUS

AONTAS has undergone substantial changes in recent times, with a new CEO in 2016, an extensive organisational review, and a two-year growth plan. The AONTAS president led an extensive board review to place AONTAS in the best possible position to modernise and meet current best practice standards in corporate governance. A new AONTAS Constitution – the most extensive governance review of the organisation since its establishment in 1969 – was another milestone.

As an all-island non-governmental advocacy organisation, AONTAS responds to the deep and varied needs of its 450 members. It lobbies for positive change in adult and community education through learner-centred consultation, advocacy, and communications. By keeping learners at the heart of its work, AONTAS ensures it is rooted in the current context for learners, has insight into the complexity of policy implementation at individual level, and makes authentic and meaningful representation. Meeting the needs of adult learners has always been a key advocacy focus for AONTAS. To ensure their voices are heard, an Adult Learner's Forum was set up in 2010.

Meeting the needs of adult learners has always been a key advocacy focus for AONTAS.

KEEPING AN OUTWARD FOCUS

Adult learning advocacy is an international movement made up of committed social-justice advocates. AONTAS has established itself firmly in this global collective that strives for more equitable provision of education. By broadening its focus in this way, it has become an increasingly important constituent of NGOs engaged in EU and cross-border initiatives.

This work brings benefits closer to home. For example, working in close mutual support with adult learning organisations across the UK, AONTAS co-hosted the first 'five nations' event with colleagues in Northern Ireland, held in Belfast and entitled 'Borders, Boundaries and Bridges'. This brought adult learning advocates together from Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and England.

At EU level, AONTAS is a partner or lead in all three key action funding programmes of ERASMUS+. AONTAS:

- is a National Coordinator of the European Agenda for Adult Learning (EAAL) and engages with the European Commission
- contributes to EPALE
- is a board member of the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) for EU policy influence

- continually strengthens its expansive network across adult learning NGOs and education ministries across Europe.

Broader engagement has given our members the opportunity to engage in continuous professional development across Europe and raised the profile of the Irish lifelong learning system, particularly in learner voice and community education.

AONTAS's work also includes building the research basis for adult learning through *The Adult Learner*, promoting adult learning through the Adult Learners' Festivals, building the capacity of community education through CEN, directing the public to learning opportunities through the OneStepUp information and referral service, and leading the National FET Learner Forum. These activities empower learners and mandate AONTAS to represent members at national and EU level.

Before 1969, and throughout AONTAS's evolution, the main factor underlying the historical and persistent need for advocacy work in this area is the endemic inequality of access to and outcomes of educational opportunities for adult learners. To gain any ground for the most disadvantaged people in the population, AONTAS and its membership have always believed it is essential to lobby for sustainable, equal participation in learner-centred, quality, accredited and non-accredited lifelong learning.

Currently, the lifelong learning participation rate is 8.9 per cent (Eurostat, 2018). While this represents progress, it is worth noting how the recently published Adult Education Survey (AES) by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) shows there are continuing and changing forms of educational inequality. Stark inequalities still exist in lifelong learning participation among 25–64-year-olds.

Stark inequalities still exist in lifelong learning participation among 25–64 year olds,

Factors influencing the likelihood of participating in education include age, gender, level of education, region (geographically, and urban/rural), and level of deprivation. If you leave school early, you are seven times less likely to participate in formal, accredited education (2%) than if you have a degree (14%). Simply put, those who can access and benefit well from the education system continue to participate more in lifelong learning.

FET policy is focusing on those who are in employment through the new policy framework 'Supporting Working Lives and Enterprise Growth in Ireland: 2018–2021 further education and training policy framework for skills development of people in employment', officially launched by Minister Richard Bruton on 11 September 2018. With lifelong learning becoming the new norm for employees, it is important that all have the opportunity to participate to improve their prospects.

The AES states that unemployed people were over three times more likely to participate in formal education than employed people (28.2% versus 7.6%), possibly due to labour market activation policies. Additionally, employed people were much more likely to have participated in non-formal education than unemployed people (59.3% versus 38.3%). More employed

people participated in lifelong learning than unemployed people (62.6% versus 52.9%).

But what does this tell us about employee access to education? We know you cannot view people in employment as a homogenous group, a clear example being the 2017 OECD report stating there are major differences in access:

- i. Non-standard workers (those in precarious conditions with little or no job security, part-time, temporary and self-employed people) are more likely to be women, receive less training and employment stability.
- ii. In Ireland, every tenth employee is an involuntary part-time worker.
- iii. Full-time temporary workers are 20% less likely, and part-time workers 40% less likely, than standard workers to receive training and skills development, which leads to further wage inequality.
- iv. Immigrants and workers low in skills receive less education and training from employers.
- v. Generally in OECD countries, employers spend twice as much on employees with tertiary education as opposed to those lower in skills.

BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION IN ADULT LEARNING

The AES highlighted cost, family responsibilities, and health as significant barriers. For example, 21 per cent of people whose highest level of education was primary cited their health as the reason they could not participate in education; 15 per cent of those with a lower-secondary qualification cited the same. Only 4 per cent of those with third-level qualifications cited health.

Rates of depression in Ireland are more than 10 percentage points lower for those with third level education.

While we cannot determine the health issues involved, we do know from OECD data (2017) that rates of depression in Ireland are more than 10 percentage points lower for those with third-level education than for those with below second level. Clearly, education policy change alone cannot overcome every barrier. Of course, educational

inequality cannot be understood or addressed in isolation from wider societal inequality.

INTEGRATING BROADER SUPPORTS

The ability to engage in lifelong learning, with ACFET especially, must be viewed in the context of a person's life situation. Supports for health issues, access to affordable quality accommodation, and alleviation of poverty all contribute to the likelihood of participating in lifelong learning. Similar to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, until the most immediate rudimentary barriers come down, educational inequality will persist. Integrated, whole-system approaches with wrap-around supports are needed to bridge gaps in engaging and retaining educationally disadvantaged learners.

Community education has traditionally offered an alternative, arguably more fit-for-purpose, set of supports. For example, counselling services, mentoring, and childcare are not only more person- and learner-centred, they represent straightforward features of best practice on what works well in allowing education to become an empowering force in learners'

lives, with positive effects on their families and communities, yielding deep socioeconomic and health dividends for all society.

With this knowledge, we can infer with a high level of confidence from the AES data (CSO, 2018) that the following recommendations will greatly increase the quantity and improve the quality of lifelong learning participation rates in Ireland, with lessons for other jurisdictions:

- **No financial cost** – Keep FET accessible by ensuring there is no cost for participation.
- **Support diversity of education provision** available, non-formal and formal offerings, particularly through part-time provision, so adults can manage other responsibilities (family/caring).
- **Widen access to accredited provision** for adults in a range of education contexts to address the low formal education participation rate.
- **Community education** – support local learning opportunities to address the regional disparities in lifelong learning participation.

As we move towards fifty years of AONTAS, unfortunately these issues are not new; nor are they exclusive to Ireland. A review of all thirty-five years of *The Adult Learner* highlights recurrent themes: the need to cover costs (no fees for learners, to revive the mantra of ‘no crèche, no course’); to provide adequate childcare; and to offer a holistic range of supports for learners.

What we have learned over the fifty years of AONTAS is that we have the answers to such questions through the wealth of knowledge from our members and adult learners. Diversity of adult learning provision is vital: part-time, flexible, accredited and non-accredited courses; clear progression paths; recognition of prior learning (RPL); learner supports (including financial) in formal and non-formal (i.e., community education) contexts; effective learning methodologies; and integrating learner voice across provision.

Recurrent themes: the need to cover costs; to provide adequate childcare; and to offer a holistic range of supports for learners.

A VISION OF ADULT LEARNING AT FIFTY

We have learned that community education is precious: it must never be taken for granted or allowed to stagnate. AONTAS, with its organisational culture rooted in the tradition of adult and community education, adhering to transformative values, and advocating for adult learning, has always been responsive to change. It adopts new methods of provision and proactively maintains its relevance for those it serves.

AONTAS has worked continuously to meet the needs of the most educationally disadvantaged; it has empowered communities, particularly women; and it has contributed to cross-generational educational equality as a home-grown, community-centred model of holistic education provision, in many ways making Ireland the envy of Europe. For an equitable vision for adult learning, it is time we gave community education the recognition, resources, and respect it deserves.

In 2019, AONTAS will adopt its new Strategic Plan, which encompasses extensive consultations, providing a roadmap for driving educational equality for all adults. Not only does Ireland have the capacity to become a

global leader in ACFET: it must. Reaching its full potential as a model lifelong learning society is no longer an option or aspiration; it needs to happen or we risk succumbing to negative outcomes that have occurred elsewhere, with deeply disturbing political, economic, and cultural consequences. Two of the main questions facing ACFET are:

- How will AONTAS build on its legacy of empowering those most excluded from the benefits of education?
- How will AONTAS vigilantly maintain its pole position in the broader sphere of influence, to ensure that its values and vision remain at the heart of driving progress in educational equality?

In a time of unprecedented uncertainty and inequality, we know that AONTAS's past record, present position, and new strategic plan place adult and community education on course to be at the heart of improving the health of Irish democracy and civil society in the twenty-first century.

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BRINGING OPPORTUNITIES TO THE LOW-SKILLED

The hidden people of our education and training system



Inez Bailey

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Against the backdrop of Ireland's much-vaunted international reputation for having the best-educated workforce, it comes as a shock to many that nearly half a million people in the current labour force have lower secondary as their highest level of educational attainment. In this article I will try to answer the following questions: Who are these 'hidden' people, and how have they been supported by our education and training system to raise their educational profile? Is the EU's Upskilling Pathways an opportunity Ireland cannot afford to miss?

Compared to many of our European neighbours, Ireland was late to introduce free second-level, in 1967. From this time, our education system began a significant transformation leading to mass participation in secondary education. Over time, this led to greater participation in third-level education (Coolahan, 1981). With the abolition of university fees in 1997, the course was set to continue increasing participation in higher education. This focus on increasing participation in the formal education system has continued apace.

Also in 1997, the current Minister for Education and Skills, Richard Bruton, as Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, presided over the White Paper on Human Resource Development (DETE, 1997) which recognised the extent of the low level of educational attainment among the workforce and the critical need for upskilling and lifelong learning. A decade of policy wrangling between the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE) and Department of Education and Science (DES) did not yield a significant measure to address the extent of upskilling required. While lifelong learning was adopted as a guiding principle of education policy, strategy, and implementation, to realise this slippery concept proved too great a challenge.

A further effort came in the first National Skills Strategy (Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, 2007), which set targets for raising educational attainment levels for the workforce to be achieved by 2020. This report called for Government to help those without a Level 4 or 5 qualification on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) to achieve this level of education through full- or part-time study without incurring costs and with a level of subsistence provided by the State.

Despite this ambitious plan being punctuated by the financial crash, all targets were either achieved or on course to be achieved by 2020 except for the one concerned with raising the level of educational attainment of those with lower secondary education. Consequently,

the target was rolled over into the current National Skills Strategy (DES, 2016) without a published analysis of why previous efforts had failed.

Drawing from the Labour Force Survey in quarter 3 2017 (Skills and Labour Market Research Unit, 2018), there are over 445,000 people aged 25–64 with at most lower-secondary education or Level 3 on the NFQ. The largest numbers are aged 45 and over. Most work as farmers and construction workers, with others in retail, food and beverage, and health care sectors. Most worryingly in terms of upskilling, this group of people have significantly lower levels of participation in lifelong learning than their counterparts with higher levels of educational attainment.

SOLAS, the Further Education and Training Authority, recently launched a new policy framework for skills development for people in employment which places an emphasis on those whose skill level is below Level 5 on the NFQ, with a target to reach 40,000 people described as vulnerable by 2021. ‘Supporting Working Lives and Enterprise Growth in Ireland’ (SOLAS, 2018a) was accompanied by a press release with the following comment from Minister Bruton:

To address the basic skills issue, the EU has outlined a three-step approach called Upskilling Pathways.

Ireland is currently behind in this area. This represents a major challenge for both enterprise and the education and training sector to develop and nurture the talent that is already in the workplace, both to drive enterprise success and to facilitate the personal career path of the individual. Both business and the education sector need to substantially step up their efforts to meet the very ambitious target we have set – at least 15 per cent of adults participating in lifelong learning by 2020. We will need a substantial increase in activity and novel, inventive programmes to deliver on this target. We are looking for measurable actions, which we will include and report on each year as part of our annual Action Plan for Education, which sets out our strategy to make Ireland’s education and training service the best in Europe by 2026.

UPSKILLING PATHWAYS – AN OPPORTUNITY FOR MUCH-NEEDED INNOVATION?

Chiming with Minister Bruton’s call to action, A New Skills Agenda for Europe (European Commission, 2016) similarly sets out the importance of skills for human capital, employability, and competitiveness, and guides member states to strengthen the quality and relevance of skills development. Chief among the actions required is the urgent need to raise the basic skills of the quarter of Europeans who struggle with literacy, numeracy, and digital skills. In Ireland, one in six Irish adults has low literacy and one in four has low numeracy (OECD, 2012).

To address the basic skills issue, the EU has outlined a three-step approach called Upskilling Pathways. The first step is to ensure that citizens have easy access to assess their skills. They should then be able to take up a flexible learning opportunity to meet their needs. The third step is to ensure that people are able to validate their skills level through certification.

Upskilling Pathways directs our focus onto the citizen who may need to upskill, and invites countries to examine how well they meet the three-step

standard through their existing education and training infrastructure. While most countries have given their initial responses to the EU, there is a common belief that all countries will have a gap between what is provided and the citizen facing the three-step standard of Upskilling Pathways.

In Ireland, like many other countries, assessment is usually embedded in education and training programmes, accessed after the person has decided to join a course. Upskilling Pathways compels us to think about how to make assessment available to the public before joining a course. Adult information and guidance services also play a role here, but again these services are often too predicated on the person already being with an education and training provider.

Innovation and technology will be increasingly deployed to offer solutions to this issue. The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) currently offers a basic skills-checker tool as part of the eLearning platform www.writeon.ie, which aims to help people with literacy and numeracy concerns clarify their skills level. Further research is required to ascertain how much this tool helps orient people on a learning path.

The extent to which learning opportunities are offered in flexible formats is another debatable element. Most further education and training provision takes place face to face, in classrooms, and during the week. But there is growing awareness and adoption of blended learning solutions, most notably writeon.ie, which is being used by Education and Training Boards for those wishing to upskill and gain certification at Levels 2 and 3 on the NFQ.

There is growing awareness and adoption of blended learning solutions, most notably writeon.ie

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), which speaks to the third step of Upskilling Pathways, is much written about as a way to encourage more people into lifelong learning. But it remains largely a policy artefact awaiting realisation as a commonly understood process by which people can validate what they already know and receive the appropriate qualification. Among the obstructions is the cost of providing such a service to the public. Again, technology can play a role here and in the area of upskilling; where the volume of learning is low, so are the associated costs. NALA has been providing RPL through writeon.ie for nearly a decade and has shown how it can meet the mantra of access and progression for adult learners.

Upskilling Pathways offers Ireland a new perspective from which to further develop and increase the support to people who wish to develop their basic skills. All the education partners are willing, but without increased investment, our efforts could fall short again.

ARE WE NOW READY TO SEE AND RESPOND TO THE HIDDEN PEOPLE OF OUR EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEM?

The existence, extent, and problem of people with low levels of educational attainment in the workforce have been recognised in policy terms for well over two decades. Despite targets being set, efforts to address the issue have consistently fallen short. Why this is the case remains largely a matter of conjecture.

With a new policy and strategy comes the hope that this failed trajectory will finally be broken, and that the people who have benefited least from our education and training system to date will get to share in the spoils that the rest of us know lifelong learning can bring.

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Dr Padraig Walsh, CEO, QQI; **Mary Mitchell O'Connor**, Minister of State for Higher Education; and **Billy Bennett**, VP for Academic Affairs and Registrar of Letterkenny Institute of Technology.

Conference on Best Practice

Quality and Qualifications Ireland, the state agency responsible for the promotion of quality in education and training in Ireland, recently hosted a conference on Best Practice in Student-Centred Approaches in Education and Training in Dublin Castle. The event was co-hosted by the Union of Students Ireland, the Higher Education Authority, the Irish Universities Association, the Technological Higher Education Association and the Irish Survey of Student Engagement.

Delegates heard from national and international experts on how to implement student-centred approaches with real impact in higher and further education and training. The event also showcased good practice in student-centred initiatives, demonstrating the impact on the quality of teaching and learning.

THE YOUTHREACH STORY:

Shining a Light on a lesser known narrative



Louise Cole

Bray & North
Wicklow Youthreach
Coordinator, KWETB
and National
Association of
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Coordinators
Communications
Officer

It has been a year for review and reflection in the Youthreach community. 2018 saw the completion of a systematic evaluation of the Youthreach programme carried out by SOLAS through the ESRI as part of the programme evaluation commitments made in the FET Strategy 2014–19.

Preparing for the evaluation, there was a clear realisation that it was a unique opportunity to embrace the spotlight, and there was a hunger among Youthreach coordinators nationally to use the period of review to reflect on – and, most importantly, highlight to a wider audience – the work that is happening in our centres nationwide.

SO WHAT IS THE YOUTHREACH STORY?

Very often there is genuine misunderstanding of the Youthreach programme and of its place in, and contribution to, the Irish education system. Youthreach is a programme that caters for young people for whom mainstream education has not been successful, and for whom the supported and needs-based model that underpins the programme is much more suitable. It operates in 110 centres in twenty-five counties, managed locally by the sixteen ETBs.

Youthreach provides an invaluable educational opportunity to young people aged 16–20 who want a programme that gives them the chance to gain qualifications, develop their social and personal skills, and ultimately move on to further education, training, or employment. It is designed to meet the needs of a diverse range of learners in an ever-changing societal and educational landscape, by providing a safe space where they can identify and develop their strengths, address areas for improvement, and ultimately be the best version of themselves that they can be.

‘Youthreach is a good chance to get a practical education. Not all people can fit in a mainstream school – this is where they fit in now,’ said Shane, a learner in Wicklow Town Youthreach.

REACHING MILESTONES

The past year has provided Youthreach with platforms through which we have been able to share the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of learners like Shane. Not only was Youthreach undergoing evaluation and review, it was also celebrating key milestones.

The first of these came at the start of the academic year, with the celebration of sixty years of ESF funding in the EU, the bedrock of the Youthreach programme funding history. As one of the largest

ESF-funded programmes, Youthreach was given the wonderful opportunity to play a major part in the celebrations.

Youthreach input at this conference was all about the learner. Kirsty, a past learner from Clara Youthreach, County Offaly, gave an impassioned speech on her experience of Youthreach and how the centre's supportive and nurturing environment brought her from a difficult time in her life to a place where she is experiencing both happiness and success in her career. This was followed by the unveiling of *Youthreach: The National Picture*, a video developed for launch at the conference capturing the learner voice from all over the country.

THE LEARNER VOICE

Youthreach: The National Picture serves as an introduction to the programme in a very powerful way. Through the voice of learners, we can hear what Youthreach means to them and how it is empowering young people to achieve both academically and personally in their lives. This is supported by input from coordinators on the NAYC executive,¹ who provide context and structure to the overall video, ensuring that it will become a useful and informative promotional tool for use into the future.

Youthreach is a programme that caters for young people for whom mainstream education has not been successful.

Filming the video was a wonderful opportunity to involve many centres and learners in a combined effort to promote the Youthreach programme. The video team visited four centres around the country: Ballymun in Dublin, Sligo Youthreach, Galway City Youthreach, and The Glen Youthreach in Cork. The idea was to make the video truly national and to include as many ETBs as possible. Each host centre opened its doors to learners from centres in their region to come and take part. The finished video provides valuable insight into the workings of the Youthreach programme nationally and truly captures the learner voice.

SUPPORTING THE LEARNER JOURNEY

There is little point in sharing the voice of the Youthreach learner with the wider public if we don't take the time to listen to it ourselves. One of the underlying and most valued strengths of the Youthreach programme is the relationships developed between learners and staff. It is through these relationships that centres can best identify the challenges the learners face and the barriers that may exist to their succeeding at this stage of their educational and personal journey.

The 2018 annual NAYC Conference was themed 'Positive Pathways', to allow space for coordinators to explore how we can support this journey. There was a focus on mental health and on the challenges that exist not just for our learners but for the future of the programme and for meeting learners' needs. As Dr Mary Gordon identified in her 2017 NEPS research report:²

If approached in a crosscutting way, the Youthreach programme can be seen as a form of vocational education provision and as a resource for the building of resilience and as a location for the provision of guidance and support services to a particularly vulnerable group of young people.

The conference also included a facilitated reflection and consultation session with NAYC members on the Youthreach quality assurance tool, the Quality Framework. Since its establishment in November 2000, there has been continued emphasis on examining and improving implementation of the Quality Framework, with particular focus since 2014 on developing and adapting it further.

The primary purpose of the Framework is to help staff to examine centre practice, identify strengths and challenges, and implement actions to improve the service they provide, thus ensuring the continued enhanced provision of a programme that supports that all-important learner journey.

FROM RELECTION TO PRAXIS

Youthreach concluded 2018 with a celebration of all that we are and hope to become, as we move from a period of evaluation and reflection to one of action and change for the better. Not only did the year close with publication of the programme evaluation and associated recommendations, but it also saw a first-of-its-kind Youthreach event that celebrated the thirty-year anniversary.

YR FEST brought every centre in the country together for a celebration of learning, diversity, and opportunity. Held in the impressive National Sports Campus, learners from over 100 centres had the opportunity to engage with everything from sporting activities to workshops, learner performances and centre showcases. This was enhanced by a large exhibition area that brought together groups and organisations focused on progression into further education, training, and employment, and on health and well-being.

**Youthreach is one of
the most important
developments in Irish
education over the last
30 years
- Dr Dermot Stokes.**

2018 has been a year for positively exploiting every possible platform to communicate a single-minded and important ideal, an ideal that we plan to continue driving and supporting, an ideal that simply states: #WeAreYouthreach.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

In recognition of our thirty-year anniversary, it seems fitting to leave the closing words of this article to Dr Dermot Stokes, adjunct professor to DCU's Further Education and Training Research Centre (FETRC) in the Institute of Education, and the Founding Youthreach National Coordinator:

Youthreach is one of the most important developments in Irish education over the last 30 years, and its flexible, needs-based and learner-centred approach is widely recognised across Europe as a model provision for early school leavers. Along the way, we contributed handsomely to the growth of FET and the development of a new qualifications framework that records progress at the learner's pace and allows for both vertical and transversal progression. And we put centre planning and quality at the heart of teaching and learning in our centres. Most importantly, we worked with several hundred thousand young people. Of course we didn't succeed with everyone, but we always gave as best we could, given the situations that presented,

building the centres into learning and nurturing spaces in which participants could move from dependence to independence. But nothing stays the same. When we started out 30 years ago a mobile phone was the size of a peat briquette and only marginally more communicative! As the world around us changes, we change too. But, though the mission evolves, the essence remains now as it ever was, to put the young learner at the heart of the work.

Youthreach is co-funded by the Irish Government, the European Social Fund, and the Youth Employment Initiative as part of the ESF Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning 2014–2020.

FOOTNOTES

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YR FEST: First-of-its-kind Youthreach Event



YR FEST brought together 100 centres from around the country in October 2018 for a celebration of learning, diversity, and opportunity. Learners engaged with sporting activities, workshops, performances and centre showcases. A large exhibition area facilitated groups and organisations focused on progression into further education, training, and employment.

LEARNER VOICE

What it means for further education and training



Leah Dowdall
AONTAS Learner
Advocacy Officer

While learner voice has had a long history in broader adult education theory and practice, the 2014–2019 Further Education and Training (FET) Strategy for the first time incorporated learner voice as a component of a wider FET framework.¹ The change came after learners were invited to participate in the FET Strategy consultation.

This inclusion of learners was described as ‘one of the most informative parts of the consultation’, fuelling a desire to expand and embed learner voice practices into wider FET culture.² It was a novel concept and validated the Strategy’s aim to achieve a world-class FET system in Ireland. The Irish FET sector was promising to use learner voice to achieve something bold and innovative; the challenge now was to discover what this objective would look like.

LEARNER VOICE IN PRACTICE

When the FET Strategy was developed, learner voice had been gaining traction in Ireland and abroad. In 2003, Scotland launched SPARQS (Student Partnership in Quality Scotland), an agency dedicated to promoting student partnership models. SPARQS soon led the way in creating a Student Engagement Strategy, which outlined key practices and policies to foster meaningful student engagement across the third-level sector.³

The same year in the US, another NGO, SoundOut, launched a pilot project aimed at promoting student engagement in Washington public schools. By 2007, the US Department of Education was recommending SoundOut’s framework as a tool to promote a safe and supportive learning environment.⁴ In 2006, the UK’s Futurelab developed a handbook on learner voice designed for both second- and third-level institutions, outlining methods that could be used to promote a culture of learner voice in schools.⁵

These developments quickly reached Irish educational circles. In 2008, the School of Education at Trinity College began exploring the concept of learner voice.⁶ Trinity educational researcher Paula Flynn piloted a research project on learner voice in the Irish post-primary sector that captured the benefits of student engagement.⁷ While Irish universities had separately explored student engagement strategies, in 2014 educators moved towards a national strategy. A working group chaired by Professor Tom Collins developed a learner engagement guide that included principles for embedding the practice into the Irish university sector.⁸

In 2013, when the FET Strategy was being developed, there were numerous learner voice strategies and principles from which to draw

guidance. The only obstacle was that many were designed for the primary, secondary, or university sector. FET presented unique challenges, many of which meant that learner voice engagement needed to be multifaceted and comprehensive to ensure it was being implemented in an inclusive and meaningful way.

TESTING THE WATERS: ADVANCING LEARNER VOICE IN FET

After the FET Strategy was launched, important initiatives began to take place at local and national level. Nominations for learner representatives were sought on Education and Training Boards (ETBs), FET programmes began appointing learner representatives, and Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) took a leadership role in creating a template of learner charters to be launched at ETBs across the country.

In addition to these developments, SOLAS asked AONTAS, the National Adult Learning Organisation, to deliver the first National FET Learner Forum. What started in 2016 as an annual national meeting of learners from across the FET sector has evolved into a series of regional fora held over the course of the year, with plans to reach all sixteen ETBs in 2019.

In its three-year existence, the Forum has reached 676 learners, and with regional fora becoming the core base of the national project, the number is projected to rise to 1,000 learners in 2019 alone. The expansion means that new and often unrepresented voices are now being heard. Of the 190 learners who have so far responded to questionnaires at the 2018 National Forum, 35 per cent said they had not been asked to share their voices before on their FET course.

The expansion [of the National FET Learner Forum] means that new and unrepresented voices are now being heard.

These advances have already had a tangible impact. Learners have praised the new processes in place, describing being heard and listened to as important features of the new culture in FET. The recommendations raised by participants, which are shared annually through

a national advisory report and learner report, can be seen representing the learner perspective in the FET midterm progress review.⁹

CHALLENGES TO MAINTAINING THE INTEGRITY OF LEARNER VOICE IN FET

One of the greatest challenges posed by the FET sector is its diversity. FET encompasses learners aged sixteen and up, each seeking educational opportunities for a wide variety of reasons: employment, upskilling, lifelong learning. There are also educational structures supported by SOLAS and ETBs to deliver FET courses to adult learners, including training centres, post-Leaving Certificate colleges, and community centres. This broad range of learners and structures means that learner voice strategies and processes – that use representational models often employed in the primary, secondary, and higher education sector – will simply not yield the same results when applied unilaterally to FET.

It is important to acknowledge this, because FET reaches some of the most vulnerable learners in the country, those who are not represented in traditional consultative bodies. There is a danger, if inclusivity and diverse representation are not the driving factors pushing learner voice forward,

that these voices will remain unengaged and ignored. Learner voice in FET, if implemented meaningfully, could provide an opportunity to bring these voices into policy. Such engagement would have an impact far beyond that of even the FET sector.

It is not an easy task. There are challenges to providing a safe and secure atmosphere in which these voices can be shared. Power structures, even implicitly created, can pose a barrier. As Robinson and Taylor have shown, learners enter the conversation at a different place from other stakeholders.¹⁰ To ensure equity in this conversation, traditional power structures have to be disrupted and learners have to feel comfortable sharing their opinions without judgement.

By allowing AONTAS, an NGO outside of the FET sector, to do this, SOLAS and ETBI built a structure that creates this climate. AONTAS, under the guidance of the Academic Expert Group advising the project, has made significant efforts to ensure this environment is continuously improving.

There is also the question of purpose: What will learner voice give us? In 2014, when the Economic and Social Research Institute completed a comprehensive study of FET, it cited a concerning 'lack of reliable data in the field'.¹¹ In an effort to rectify this, SOLAS committed to evidence-based research as a core aim.

This outlook shaped the way the FET Strategy was approached. However, focusing exclusively on the delivery of results can diminish the importance of learner engagement in building a FET community based on respect and democracy. As both Michael Fielding and Jean Ruddock have pointed out, the focus on using learner voice only for evidence-gathering over the promotion of learner well-being and active citizenship can threaten the integrity of learner voice strategies.¹² Jane Seale even argued there is a danger that policy agendas could hijack learner voice agendas.¹³

Traditional power structures have to be disrupted and learners have to feel comfortable sharing their opinions without judgement.

Results from the FET Learner Forum reaffirm the important function of learner voice engagement, beyond the aim of information-gathering. Learners said the most enjoyable part of learner voice events is 'being able to see so many people involved in adult education', 'speaking with people from the older generation', and 'listening to other people and knowing that they are going through what you are'.¹⁴ At the heart of these comments is an acknowledgement that these conversations have even greater value than the measurable data they yield. They are, in and of themselves, meaningful avenues of promoting a FET culture.

PLOTTING A PATH FORWARD

Given the significant challenges posed by the vast FET landscape, SOLAS and ETBs should be commended for their work so far. They have laid the groundwork for a culture shift in FET. And while we should celebrate the progress made, it is important to acknowledge the work to be done. To embed learner voice into FET, learners must continue to be empowered to feel they can share their voice in a way they feel comfortable with, and they must be resourced adequately to participate actively in this process.

A FET framework on learner voice should be developed. A commitment must be maintained to reach the most vulnerable learners in the FET system. This will require expanding processes like the Forum and other learner consultative events to ensure learner voice is as diverse and representative as possible.

One of the great challenges moving forward is to find a way to communicate that learner voice is more than just a tokenistic gesture, but rather a genuine commitment to learner engagement in policy development and evaluation. This requires expanding learner voice platforms, building mechanisms that communicate to learners the work being done to address their concerns, and consistently celebrating learner voice throughout FET.

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Animation

Applied Entrepreneurship

Applied Psychology

Art

Arts Management

Creative Computing

Creative Media Technologies

Creative Music Production

Design for Stage + Screen
[Production Design / Costume Design /
Character MakeUp Design]

English, Media + Cultural Studies

Entrepreneurship + Management

Film + Television Production

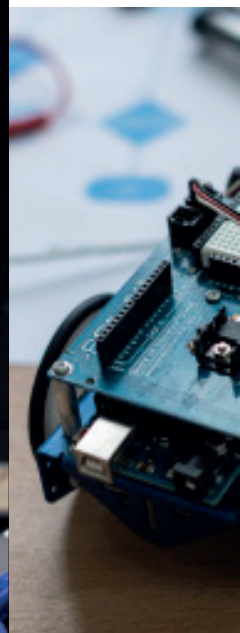
New Media Studies

Photography

3D Design, Modelmaking +
Digital Art

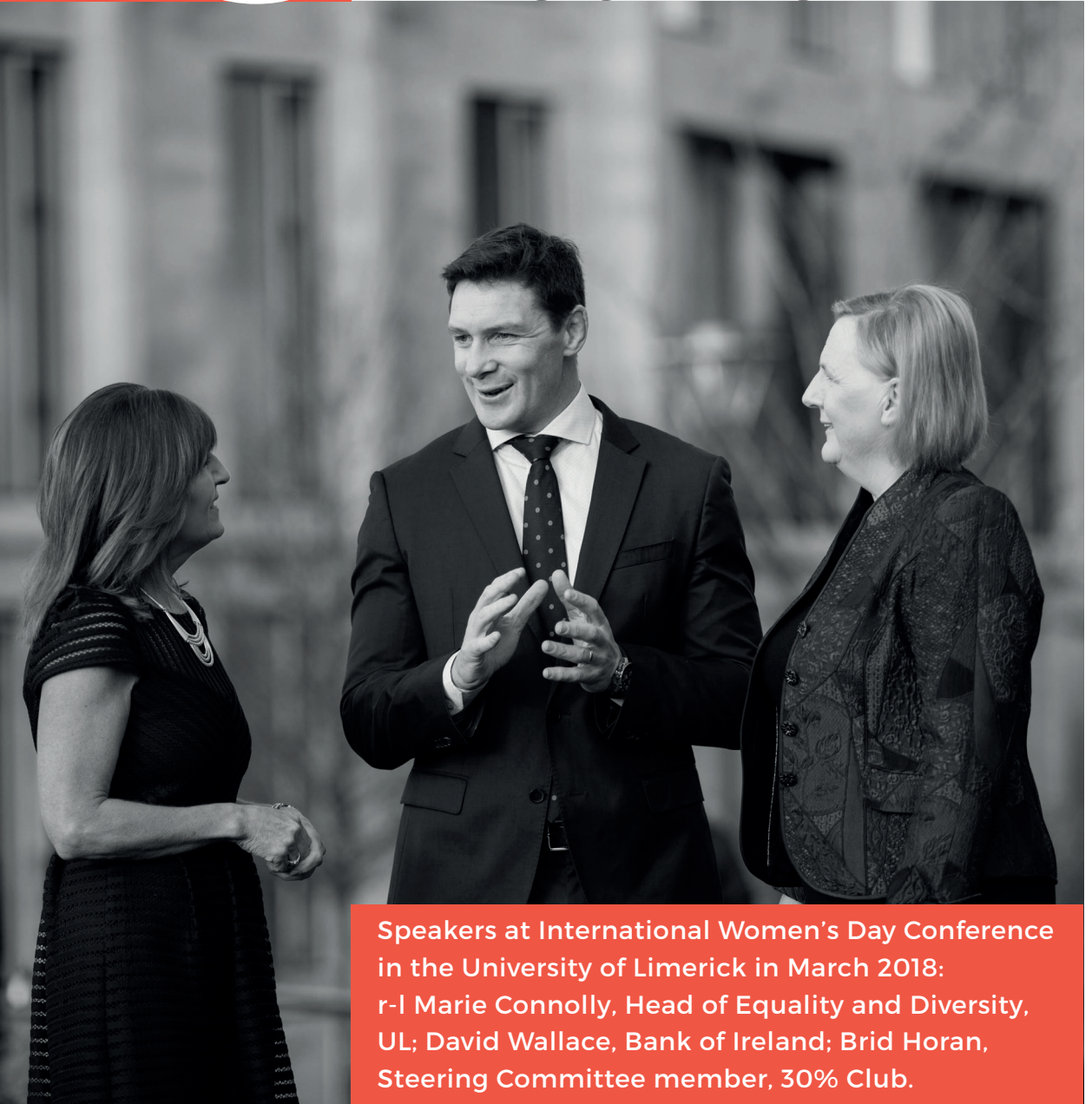
Visual Communication Design

Innovative Creative + Entrepreneurial



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HIGHER EDUCATION



Speakers at International Women's Day Conference in the University of Limerick in March 2018: r-l Marie Connolly, Head of Equality and Diversity, UL; David Wallace, Bank of Ireland; Brid Horan, Steering Committee member, 30% Club.

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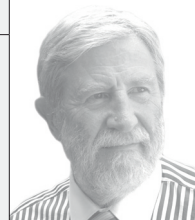
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THINKING FOR YOURSELF AT UNIVERSITY

What it means and how to do it

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Aidan Moran

Every day, we face a variety of complex questions. So how do we approach them critically? This article shows, step by step, what it means to think for oneself and avoid coming to false conclusions.



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Language learning in higher education

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Michael Brophy

Languages Connect, the new government strategy for language learning in Irish education, calls for 'a significant change of mindset'. Welcoming the strategy, Professor Brophy considers the type of change envisaged and examines how it relates to the work and values of modern languages disciplines in today's third-level landscape.



TURN TO TEACHING

Diversifying Initial Teacher Education

335

Dr Katriona O'Sullivan, Dr Gareth Burns

There have been consistent calls to diversify the teaching population in Ireland. In 2017 Maynooth University launched the Turn To Teaching project, which aims to support 100 students from marginalised backgrounds to move into ITE. It will offer pathways for students from the Traveller community, migrants, mature students, and students from DEIS schools. This article reviews the programme background, content, and potential.



REVIEWING PEER PLACEMENT IN INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION

Cleamhnas, pre-nuptial agreements, and the seven-year itch

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Dr Triona Stokes, Dr Ruth Forrest

As part of the critical evaluation of preparation for peer placement, this paper explores interconnections between personal and professional aspects of emerging teacher identity. The structures for establishing peered pairings for school placement are compared to a cleamhnas (arranged marriage), combined with associated 'SP prenuptial agreement'.



APPRENTICESHIP IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Insurance Practitioner, a modern apprenticeship for a diverse industry

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Dr Michael Barrett

This article examines the evolution of the modern-day apprenticeship and charts the creation of the Insurance Practitioner apprenticeship, Ireland's first level 8 apprenticeship.



MAKING LINKS

Career Development and Employability in Higher Education

Dr David Foster

UCD has placed students' career development and employability at the forefront of its student experience. Taking a shared-responsibility approach, a wide-ranging consultation took place and provided data upon which a new institutional strategy on career development and employability was based. This article draws attention to how the strategy is being brought to life.

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COMPUTATIONAL FLUENCY FOR OUR FUTURE

Steps being taken at Schools of Education

Dr Cornelia Connolly

Computing and computational thinking have dramatically changed how we learn and live, and computational fluency is a universally applicable skill set. Towards this end, the School of Education at NUI Galway will host workshops in which participants will develop an understanding of the design of innovative mathematical concepts using coding interfaces, then render their models physically in the university MakerSpace, a unique facility for engaged teaching and learning.

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UCD STUDENT ADVISERS

A unique model of student support

Professor Jason Last

UCD student advisers offer an approachable, confidential, and empathetic support to students. A unique, centrally managed and distributed professional model has evolved, such that best practice is shared but adviser contributions are honed to the needs of specific sections of the UCD community.

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NUI GALWAY APPOINTS NEW ADJUNCT PROFESSOR OF JOURNALISM

Renowned RTÉ journalist and broadcaster **Sean O'Rourke** has been appointed as an **Adjunct Professor of Journalism** at NUI Galway.

Mr O'Rourke, who presents the 'Today with Sean O'Rourke' show on **RTÉ Radio One**, will take up his new role in January 2019. The role is honorary and Mr O'Rourke will continue to work in his current capacity with the State broadcaster, RTÉ.

Speaking of his new appointment, Sean O'Rourke said:

I'm greatly honoured by this appointment, having worked as a student journalist in NUI Galway long before the university began to offer courses in journalism. So much has changed since then in the way journalism is practiced and received, but at its core it is still about two things: asking questions and telling stories. I look forward to working with today's students, learning from them, and sharing ideas about how to serve the public."

NUI Galway opened a new digital newsroom and completed a new dedicated radio broadcast facility in 2018. A new BA in Journalism, and Ireland's first MA in Sport Journalism and Communication, will be launched in 2019. New television facilities are also planned for 2019.





Professor Mark Rogers

Registrar and Deputy President, University College Dublin

OVERVIEW OF HIGHER EDUCATION

I am fairly certain that the Education Matters Yearbook is read mainly by educators and education policymakers. As a sector, we span early childhood, primary, secondary, further education and training, higher education, and across to research. We have the privilege and the responsibility of guiding our children to become the next generation of society, and of developing the lifelong aspirations of more and more adult learners.

Around 104,000 people work in the education sector in Ireland. We are in the sector predominantly because we believe in the value of education and are passionate about our chosen subjects. So in writing the introduction to this section of the Yearbook, I could stop here – because *education does matter*.

REFORM AND RENEWAL ARE IMPORTANT

Before I became deputy president and registrar of University College Dublin, I was dean of science, with responsibility for the largest undergraduate science programme in the country, educating about 2,000 undergraduate students.

A decade ago, when I had the role of dean, science (and STEM in general) was globally perceived as a turn-off. With the possible exception of medicine, the ‘smart’ drive was towards the commercial professions. The global economy was booming. Interest in and applications to science were falling. This was not a UCD phenomenon. Indeed, it was not even an Irish issue. It was a global trend. Universities, Institutes of Technology, and employers were all bemoaning the dearth of students, and consequently graduates, coming through science, computing, and technology.

Before we could go out and promote the opportunities open to our graduates, we had to look at why students had opted out of science studies.

At the same time, UCD was conducting a major university-wide curriculum review. This led to a reforming of our degrees into a modular teaching and learning system that concentrated on learning outcomes rather than proscribed inputs. UCD Horizons, for those of us who remember its introduction, was a massive change in mindset that required our faculty to reassess how they teach, how they assess their students, and how they measure their impact – bringing research into the class environment in a structured way.

In science, we embraced the value of choice and flexibility but guided our students along pathways so that we could nurture and encourage them as well as teach technical skills and expertise. We

quickly saw a positive response, as more and more students chose science, computing, and other STEM degrees on their CAO top preferences. Consequently, the CAO points required to study science have increased by 200 in the past decade. The outcome is that many of our students choose to take science at university because it is such an interesting and mind-expanding topic. Of course, we know that employers are pleased and that they would encourage us to increase places in STEM degrees, but the real winner is society: many graduates take their science degrees into other realms and bring their learning, training, and interests into wider society.

The effort and achievement we have made at third level have spread into secondary and primary education. Not only are young pupils 'talking science', but we have specifically targeted and tackled teacher training in maths and other sciences.

LEARNING FROM ONE AREA HAS APPLICATION IN ANOTHER

With this experience, I find myself most interested in the Government's Languages Connect strategy, which takes a whole-system approach to achieving a high level of multi-language competence nationally.

The primary elements of the Government's ambition are to increase uptake in eight key languages from their present Leaving Certificate exam levels; to introduce a curricular specification for new learners of Mandarin Chinese for Leaving Cert and curricular specifications for heritage speakers for Polish, Lithuanian, and Portuguese; to increase the number of post-primary schools offering two or more foreign languages and increase the number of students sitting two languages for state exams; and to increase the proportion of the higher education cohort studying a foreign language as part of their course, in any capacity, to 20%.

**I recognise the
importance of
multilingualism for our
children.**

Although sadly a monoglot myself, I recognise the importance of multilingualism for our children. We may make a virtue of soon being the only major English-speaking nation in the EU, apart from Malta, but our partners in the Netherlands, Scandinavia, Germany, France, and further east all have high levels of English language competence that reduce our linguistic trading advantage.

Currently at UCD we send 17% of our undergraduates overseas as part of their studies, but we take in twice as many Erasmus and international exchange students. As a small open economy, Ireland has, since the late 1950s, recognised the importance of international trade. It is, of course, two-way. We send our graduates out to conquer international markets, and multinational corporations come to Ireland to tap into our hard-working labour force, our can-do attitude, and our strong foreign direct investment strategy.

As Ireland has become a much more diverse society, it should be easier for us to encourage and facilitate broader language learning.

WHAT DO DIVERSITY AND SOCIAL MIX REALLY LOOK LIKE?

Multilingualism feeds into the widening participation agenda too. Although children from non-Irish or dual-citizenship families tend to have good or

very good English language skills,¹ statistics from the 2016 census show a higher proportion distributed among socio-economic groups D, E, F, and G, compared with Irish families.²

One of the key system objectives set out in the Higher Education System Performance Framework 2018–2020 is to improve the equality of opportunity through education and training and to recruit a student body that reflects the diversity and social mix of Ireland's population. Any educational strategy that encourages and rewards multilingualism therefore has the potential to directly benefit these students.

The higher education sector has introduced various measures and supports to enable socio-economically disadvantaged students to participate in and succeed at third level. The national HEAR access route has streamlined these measures, and although, along with many of my fellow registrars, I am proud of the service we already provide, I am committed to creating a university that truly reflects the diversity of society in Ireland, a university where neither socio-economic circumstance nor disability affects your chance of access to higher education.

The resources we provide enable both disadvantaged students and those with disability to succeed in their study. Alongside the increase in international student numbers, these students reflect a very welcome growing diversity and social mix on our campuses.

I am committed to creating a university that truly reflects the diversity of society in Ireland.

BANG FOR THE BUCK

Supporting such initiatives and State objectives requires funding. The arguments put forward by the higher education sector are as well rehearsed as those of the early education, primary, secondary, and further training sectors. We also compete with 'big spending' health, housing, transport infrastructure, and social protection departments for central government funding.

This year's budget estimate for the Department of Education and Skills is €10.8bn, up 7% on the previous year. Preschool, primary, and secondary education account for €7.4bn, up 5%; higher education comes in at €1.6bn, up 1%. The two areas with larger percentage increases are skills development, at €436m (up 16%) – funded in part by the National Training Fund levy on employers – and capital services, at €852m (up 23%), of which €150m has been allocated for capital investment in higher education, further education and training, and research.

The higher education sector points to its relatively poor public funding position in international terms, and we argue that our output – in terms of the quality and number of graduates we educate – has a direct impact on Ireland's economic prosperity.

The seven universities, through the Irish Universities Association (IUA), have committed to a charter to grow and develop the Irish university education system for this and future generations of students. This charter – Ireland's

1 www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cp7md/p7md/p7se/.

2 www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cp7md/p7md/p7sea/.

Future Talent – commits to transform capability and performance across a range of key criteria to deliver a sustainable system for Ireland's foreseeable needs.

And so I come full circle to the reason that education matters at each stage. Our Government rightly recognises the importance of apprentice and skills training, of expanding and building new schools for a growing population of primary and secondary pupils, of increasing the number of teachers and special needs assistants. Equally, State investment in higher education brings societal benefits in terms of widening participation, cultural enrichment through creativity and innovation, and economic prosperity through productive output. It really is time for Government to show its commitment to these objectives through genuine support and adequate financial funding.

Trinity is first in Europe for producing entrepreneurs

Graduates from Trinity College Dublin have founded more venture-backed companies than graduates from any other European university over the last 12 years, according to PitchBook*.

In September 2018, for the third year in a row, Trinity was ranked first in Europe by the private equity and venture-focused research firm, PitchBook. It is the only European university within the top 50.

"Our graduates have raised \$2.372 billion in funding across 201 companies in the last decade," said Chief Innovation and Enterprise Officer at Trinity, Dr Diarmuid O'Brien.

"This is a testament to the fantastic students coming through Trinity, the competitiveness of the Dublin innovation eco-system, and the role that Trinity plays for Ireland in enabling our best entrepreneurship talent"

*Universities Report: <https://pitchbook.com/news/reports/2017-universities-report>





Juliette Hussey

Vice-President for
Global Relations,
Trinity College Dublin



**Patrick
Prendergast**

President and
Provost, Trinity
College Dublin

TO BE A GLOBAL UNIVERSITY

Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin, has a global footprint that has waxed and waned over the 427 years of its existence.

Founded as the English monarchy was extending its dominance in Ireland, Trinity was the first university established in a colony. The initial impulse was to create new commercial activity around the medieval city of Dublin. Later, the importance of training young men for the professions, particularly as clergy for the Church of Ireland, became the focus; later again, in the 1800s, education for the British colonial service became the dominant theme. In this period the outlook was not national but global, with this sense continuing until recent times, with alumni from the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s being spread throughout the world.

A period of rapid expansion in the 1980s and 1990s brought Trinity into alignment with the needs of a growing State and a concomitant reconsideration of what it meant to be 'global'. This commitment is articulated in the Strategic Plan (2014–2019):

Geographical diversity in our student community is critical in developing an educational milieu which fosters cross-cultural understanding and prepares all students for a life of global citizenship. It allows for a coming-together of different educational, cultural and personal perspectives. It is also a key factor in introducing students to a global dialogue on their areas of academic study, and in building a global Trinity community by creating lifelong, personal, academic, and professional relationships across the world.¹

We continue to extend our global reach through our education, research, and innovation activities. Evidence of our success is our diverse staff and student body: 40% of academic staff are from outside Ireland, and 26% of students hail from more than 100 countries worldwide. Trinity has research collaborations across all continents, student exchange agreements with leading universities globally, a growing number of academic partnerships leading to joint programmes of study, and alumni worldwide.²

EDUCATION

The number of students studying in Trinity from outside of Europe has increased significantly over the last five years, from 1,552 in the 2011/12 academic year to 2,874 in 2017/18. Students from outside the EU are now approximately 16% of the total student body.

This growth is due to the sustained engagement by the Global Relations Team and academics from all parts of the university. The US open days continue to an important part of the annual schedule, and in addition to representation from academic departments and student services, Trinity alumni have played an important role in advising potential students and their parents on the value of a Trinity education.

Traditionally, direct recruitment focused on the US, Canada, Asia, and the Middle East, in schools where students completed secondary school examinations that led to direct entry to Trinity. To increase the diversity of the student body and attract students from other areas, it was decided in 2015 to launch a Foundation Programme, which is delivered in our associated college Marino Institute of Education.

In the Foundation Programme, students from countries whose final secondary exam is not sufficient for admission can take a foundation year, and if successful they are admitted to Trinity in a course of their choice. This has been very successful, and currently the programme has students from Bahrain, Bulgaria, China, Egypt, Hong Kong, Kuwait, Oman, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Tanzania, Turkey, and Ukraine, sponsored by their national government scholarship bodies.

Research output is the major determinant of a university's reputation.

RESEARCH

Research output is the major determinant of a university's reputation. Since what is taught to students is the product of research, education and research are intimately linked. In the best universities, they merge into a common activity for students and staff together. Resources to conduct research must be sought globally, as well as nationally. Trinity draws significant funding for research from the EU, with contracts worth €89.4m for 149 projects under Horizon 2020 to date.

Research publications are one measure of the output of research, and an analysis of published research papers shows that co-authors of Trinity researchers include more than 130 countries.

United Kingdom	697	Switzerland	115	Norway	55
United States	465	China	104	Poland	51
Germany	322	Belgium	95	India	44
France	212	Denmark	91	Finland	43
Italy	191	Austria	66	Czech Republic	40
Australia	181	Portugal	63	Israel	34
Netherlands	172	Greece	61	South Africa	34
Spain	171	Brazil	60	South Korea	29
Canada	161	Russia	59	Turkey	28
Sweden	131	Japan	57	Singapore	27

Top 30 countries for joint publications in calendar year 2017, indicating the very diverse geography of collaborative research activities. Total

number of countries for joint publication was 130 with 4,429 publications. Source of the data is Scopus.

THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE IN A GLOBAL UNIVERSITY

A Trinity education aims to develop global awareness. Studying with students from all around the world promotes a global way of thinking and prepares graduates for their lives ahead. In addition to a diverse classroom, a global university will also give students an opportunity to study outside of Ireland as part of their degree programme. An expected component of a degree in a leading university is the opportunity to take a semester or year abroad in another leading university. Many students also participate in elective clinical or research placements.

Studying with students from all around the world promotes a global way of thinking and prepares graduates for their lives ahead.

Around 30% of undergraduates currently engage in some form of international experience, and the aim is to increase this to 50% over the next five years. Implementing the Trinity Education Project will help students on almost all programmes to take up such opportunities. Since 2016, Trinity is part of the Centre for Advanced Studies Abroad (CASA),³ a non-profit consortium of nine leading research universities in the US, including Harvard, Brown, and Columbia. It was established to facilitate student mobility internationally, through study centres around the world.

Being a global university also means having partnerships for joint programme delivery.

- i. The first such partnership for Trinity was with Singapore Institute of Technology, which involves Transnational Education. Commencing in 2012 with the delivery of programmes in Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy, it extended to Diagnostic Radiography and Radiation Therapy in 2014. In 2016 a joint degree in Physiotherapy was launched. To date, there are over 700 graduates from these programmes.
- ii. A relationship with Thapar University in India was signed in 2015. In addition to forty students per year entering year 3 of Engineering and Computer Science, the relationship is built around capacity-building in research-led teaching.
- iii. Significant partnerships with universities in China have arisen from intense research collaborations and sustained engagement over the last five years. These include the University of Science and Technology Beijing (UTSB) in Physics, and Beijing Foreign Studies University (BFSU) in Humanities and Social Sciences.
- iv. The most significant and wide-reaching university partnership to date has resulted in a dual degree with Columbia University in New York at undergraduate level. Collaboration between Trinity's Faculty of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences and Columbia's School of General Studies has led to dual degrees in English, History, European Studies, and Middle Eastern Languages and Culture. It is intended to widen such offerings to other programmes.

ALUMNI RELATIONS

Trinity has 130,000 alumni in 130 countries worldwide. Alumni in countries abroad provide practical assistance to the university by supporting student

recruitment locally, acting as mentors for Trinity students when they take up student exchanges, providing internship opportunities in companies abroad, and funding travel bursaries to enable exchanges to take place. Alumni are a tremendous source of support for the global university concept, extending the university community into every corner of the globe.

CONCLUSION

What does it mean to be a global university? The simplest answer: It is one that does the things mentioned above: one that is home to students and staff from all corners of the world, and one that has academic partnerships, dual and joint degrees, and opportunities for student and staff exchanges with leading universities around the world.

Paradoxically, we can do all these activities and yet become less open as a society. It is what our alumni do that matters in the long run – and this means our alumni living in Ireland as well as those living abroad. Their receptiveness to new ideas – to global ideas and global relationships – and how they influence their fellow citizens through participation in social and political institutions, are the best measures of having been part of a global university.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Trinity College Dublin, Strategic Plan, November 2014: www.tara.tcd.ie/handle/2262/71761 (accessed 11 November 2018).
- 2 Provost's Annual Review 2016–2017: www.tara.tcd.ie/handle/2262/82059 (accessed 11 November 2018).
- 3 See the Consortium for Academic Study Abroad website at: <https://casa.education/> (accessed 11 November 2018).

Sally McHugh, doctoral candidate in the School of Education at the National University of Ireland, Galway, received a Fulbright-Creative Ireland Museum Fellowship 2018–2019 at the American Ambassador's Residence, Dublin in June 2018. Sally will carry out a place-based learning project at the Exploratorium Museum in San Francisco for 3 months in early 2019. The research will feed into Sally's PhD which explores children's creative engagement with local cultural heritage using constructionist technologies.



Sally McHugh is presented with her award by **Dr Sarah Ingle**, chairperson of the Fulbright Commission Board.



Dr Joseph Ryan

CEO, Technological
Higher Education
Association

THE ADVENT OF TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITIES

Maintaining a diverse, cohesive sector that makes a distinctive contribution to Irish higher education

A signal day in the life of the technological sector was marked in summer 2018 by the announcement by an Taoiseach Leo Varadkar and three members of his cabinet that the first technological university (TU) – comprising Dublin Institute of Technology, Institute of Technology Tallaght, and Institute of Technology Blanchardstown – was to be designated following an evaluation and recommendation by an international panel.

That decision to approve Technological University Dublin marks a very significant enhancement of the higher education landscape but also poses challenges for it. The development in the capital is being followed by work on forming three further technological universities: in the south-east, in Munster, and in Connacht/Ulster. These necessarily involve the merger of institutions, and the result will be a more diversified sector with greater scope and opportunity for learners.

These developments have long been in gestation, dating back to the January 2011 publication of the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030. This also reflects the challenges that such major change poses. What emerged from that strategy was an elective facility whereby institutions could seek TU status, but only when they satisfied published criteria. There was no compunction to undertake such a road, but should one have that ambition it required a merger with at least one other like-minded and, given the attendant practicalities, contiguous institution. It did not allow for merger with traditional universities; the sense was that the country wished to maintain a diversified character for the provision as it applies in higher education.

Naturally the opportunity sparked considerable debate. It elicited reasonable arguments that questioned the wisdom of such a path; counterpoints were equally reasonable, not least those centred on sustainability and the future competitiveness of our institutions internationally. Advocates foregrounded the need for Ireland to build the capacity to compete in Europe or globally, and the corollary that this would require institutions of greater scale and scope.

Against this was the fear that institutions already well connected in their regions and with a role essential to those regions' social cohesion and economic well-being could find their focus diluted by an attempt to serve a much larger area. Students cited the intimate and supportive character of the institutes familiar to them, and highlighted the fear that larger entities might entail some loss of student supports and quality of the student experience.

Communicating the possibilities to committed staff across busy institutions was itself challenging, and any resulting vacuum was likely to incubate fears that change would realise less than what might be lost. Considerable discussion has taken place in the intervening years. Winning the battle on sentiment, and painting the potential of a more diversified sector, with greater capacity, were key to attaining the political support necessary to see the enabling statute enacted in early 2018. The support of staff and their representatives helped progress the policy: change of this magnitude is contingent on inclusive ownership.

The years since publication of the strategy have seen efforts crystallise into four consortia focused on attaining TU status. The successful application of TU Dublin has been the pioneer, and it is followed by the prospect of applications from the Technological University of the South East (TUSEI), comprising the institutes in Carlow and Waterford, and the Munster Technological University (MTU), comprising Cork Institute of Technology and the Institute of Technology Tralee. Work is also progressing on the Connacht–Ulster Alliance (CUA), which, like the Dublin model, currently comprises three members: the institutions in Galway/Mayo, Sligo, and Letterkenny.

A key and challenging question is whether the sector can maintain a common centre if certain members remain institutes of technology (IoTs) while others are designated TUs. There are distinctions between size and standards, and between standards and public perception. All of our institutions are striving to meet the quality metrics published as prerequisites for consideration as a TU. Attaining those metrics does not of itself mean that the best interests of the locale or the strategy of the institution must be to merge with another; governing bodies have much to consider in arriving at such a determination.

**All of our institutions
are striving to
meet the quality
metrics published
as prerequisites for
consideration as a TU.**

But it is likely that the simplified external perception will equate size with standards. A larger institution will, at least at national level, trump a smaller one in public perception unless there is a conscious and dedicated focus on foregrounding the quality and character of the smaller entity's contribution and programmes. There are also institutions with singular character in the scope of their provision, for example the creative arts offerings in the Institute of Art, Design and Technology in Dun Laoghaire.

Other independent institutes have fashioned their offerings over decades to support the enterprise of their immediate region. In some cases, the prospect of uniting with another institution whose mission has developed differently may not win the support of local stakeholders and communities. Because application for consideration as a TU was always an elective decision for each autonomous governing body, it is legitimate for an institution to decide it can best deliver on its mission and responsibilities by remaining independent.

For institutions that have embraced the opportunity provided by the Technological Universities Act 2018, the path is onerous – not least in melding the aspirations and cultures of separate organisations, each with pride in its existing legacies and current contribution.

We are fortunate in this country to have a fine traditional university system. But it is not homogeneous: there are distinctions between the members at least as great as those between the traditional universities and the technological sector. This should be regarded as a strength. Having such diversity in a small country means that learners of all ages and aptitudes can find the ideal learning path and environment in which to pursue their ambition, and this need not entail disproportionate geographical disruption.

We are likely, at very least, to experience a transitional period when the technological sector comprises TUs along with independent IoTs. As a society we need to embrace this as offering the fullest range of possibility, one sensitive to learners' different needs, but which also sponsors institutions connected to the needs of their region. There is a challenge to educate public perception to maximise the benefits from the diversity we have carefully crafted. And this will take time.

We have the local lesson from the history of the National Institutes of Higher Education and their transition to university status, and the time this took under a judicious management. A similar dynamic can be anticipated for the technological sector. There may never be a time when we reach a steady state, and indeed it can be argued that a dynamic environment is perhaps always necessary in higher education.

There is a challenge to educate public perception to maximise the benefits from the diversity we have carefully crafted.

Attention has been given to clarifying and promoting the role of professional higher education in the diversified higher education systems across Europe. This comprises links to other educational sectors and includes flexible arrangements for realising lifelong learning and fostering permeability between vocational education and training and higher education. The European model of University of Applied Sciences as a unique expression of professional

higher education is characterised by a wide range of learning and teaching activities, with a very practical focus and always informed by applied research. They are also notable for their engagement with enterprise and their role in regional development.

What is often lost sight of is the role of regional institutions in supporting social cohesion. Social fabric and economic sustainability are greatly enhanced if an area has support from a higher education institution. It is worth looking back on the past half-century to consider how the IoTs have contributed regionally and nationally to our country's economic well-being. What began modestly has grown exponentially, and the innovation and adaptability characteristic of the sector are now focused on providing relevant programmes, research, and flexible learning for a digital society.

Through all of this, our community has remained focused on individual learners' development. This is affecting delivery norms and pedagogical approaches, and calls to mind the annual fiscal statement of 2019 which shows that even more innovation and flexibility are demanded of institutions to make Ireland still more competitive.

There are challenges for the technological sector that go beyond the form of the institutions themselves. For example, recent trends in the CAO

processes suggest that the popular perception of level 6 and 7 programmes is a factor in the worrying decline in demand. This runs contrary to the demands for enterprise, which continually voices demand for a labour resource with specific technical aptitudes.

The same may be said of the branding of apprenticeships. The innovative dual-learning approach inherent in a new generation of apprenticeship programmes that span the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) has not been distinguished from the traditional apprenticeship model. Again, this points to a fissure between perception and reality; in respect of the diminishing interest in levels 6 and 7 it could also undermine the integrity of the NFQ. Ireland is not alone: professional higher education across Europe is now focusing on recognising short-cycle higher education as a qualification level in higher education, with much greater attention to integrating short-cycle programmes in the system, including recognition of achievements and the necessary supporting quality-assurance provisions.

The recent increases in the National Training Levy have widened the fiscal space for education and training but mean that enterprise reasonably seeks a greater say in the outcomes. The conversation between the technological sector and enterprise representatives will be especially important in this regard, as academia needs to better understand the longer-term needs of enterprise.

Inevitably, funding remains of the heart of this enterprise. Government has yet to make a determination from the fine expert review of the future funding for higher education chaired by Peter Cassels, which identified a need for significant additional investment. Our ambition as a sovereign nation is contingent on such investment. That this decision comes when we have had a minority government means that a determination was always going to be a challenging call, especially if it entailed an increase in the contribution from the learner.

**Creating institutions
of scale and scope to
compete internationally
is not a recipe for saving
money.**

Making technological universities cannot be done on the cheap. Scale can bring savings in certain areas, but creating institutions of scale and scope to compete internationally is not a recipe for saving money. That a small, open economy recovering from deep recession is not best placed to fund such ambitions fully and immediately is a realistic position appreciated by all reasonable commentators. But equally, if we embark on this path, we need as a society to fund it at least to the extent that the TUs created can, during their initial years, grow with a capacity that can uphold our international reputation.

The developments in Ireland are not unique: they echo similar changes in other jurisdictions. In Flanders, some twenty-eight institutions have now been realigned to create thirteen larger entities. The technological sector regards this as a time of great opportunity. It is a time when we can reinforce our connection to the regions and to enterprise, and – given the scale of the emerging technological universities – when we can grow and enhance our focused research capacity for the betterment of the communities we serve.



Professor Diarmuid Hegarty

President, Griffith College

THE PROPOSED NATIONAL LEARNER PROTECTION SCHEME

A new education bill before the Oireachtas (The Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) (Amendment) Bill 2018) proposes, among other things, a national scheme of protection for learners in the event of a course discontinuing midstream due to financial insolvency or other reasons.

This article describes different forms of learner protection arrangements. It details those currently in place in Ireland in member colleges of the Higher Education Colleges Association (HECA), the provisions of the new bill, and the arrangements currently in place in Australia. It recommends further consultation with learners and providers to ensure that the wider merits of the existing HECA system are not lost in the transition to the proposed system.

DIFFERENT FORMS OF LEARNER PROTECTION ARRANGEMENTS

Current learner protection arrangements are prescribed in the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012. Section 65(1) requires the provider of a programme of education and training of three months or longer to have one of two types of learner protection in place for students who have paid fees where a programme does not run or discontinues.

The preferred type of protection is ‘academic bonding’, whereby the learner gets the opportunity to complete their chosen programme of study. This involves an arrangement between the provider of the programme (‘the Protected College’) and at least two other providers (‘the Protecting Colleges’).

In practice, two different cases are envisaged here. In the first case, students may transfer to a similar programme of the Protecting College. This is called Similar Programme Enrolment. A slightly different case of academic bonding is Accredited Programme Completion, where the Protecting College does not already provide a similar programme but undertakes to complete the existing programme of the Protected College in cooperation with QQI. In this case, learners are entitled to a refund of fees as an alternative.

The second type of learner protection arrangement permitted is ‘financial bonding’. It involves a refund of fees (monies most recently paid) to the students or to persons who paid on their behalf. This commitment is usually backed by an insurance policy or a parent-company guarantee.

Current legislation confines the obligation to provide learner protection to non-public-sector institutions. This ignores the

historical reality of college failure or course discontinuance in the public sector; for example, a supervisory management programme left unfinished by Plassey Management Technology Ltd (owned jointly by University of Limerick and Shannon Development), a computing course stopped mid-stream by the Institute of Technology Tallaght, and incomplete programmes offered in Celtic Studies and Haute Cuisine.

THE ARRANGEMENTS IN PLACE IN HECA COLLEGES

All HECA colleges provide learner protection in compliance with the 2012 Act. Some HECA colleges operate refund arrangements backed by an insurance policy or by a parent-company guarantee. Most members provide academic bonding through the HECA Protection for Enrolled Learners Scheme (HECA PEL), which can be summarised as follows.

Each participating member of HECA PEL has set up a trust fund governed by a trust deed. They pay 2% per annum of fee income from QQI-validated courses into their respective trust until that college's trust fund reaches a value of 30% of annual fees. The 2% and 30% are subject to regular review and can be varied by a 75% majority with approval of the PEL Oversight Committee.

An auditor's certificate by the following 31 March is required to support the adequacy of each college's annual contribution. The trust funds of all HECA PEL members are pooled and managed as a single fund by one fund manager, appointed by trustees approved by the HECA PEL board, retaining part in cash to cover operating costs, which are apportioned among the trust funds in proportion to commencement year value.

If a Protected College ceased to provide an accredited programme, the funds in its own trust would be applied to cover the academic bonding or refund costs. Its learners would contribute any outstanding fees for the year of discontinuance. If there were insufficient funds in the college's trust to cover these costs, the Protecting Colleges' trust funds would be used at the same rate to cover the remainder. If there were insufficient funds in both trusts, the remaining HECA PEL members' trust funds would cover the remainder at the same rate.

To protect other colleges against excessive academic bonding costs, each Protecting College providing academic bonding must first submit a detailed breakdown of the proposed costs to the PEL Oversight Committee. Where no breakdown is provided, or where the committee considers the proposed costs excessive, it can seek competitive quotes from other colleges.

The contractual arrangements setting out the relationship between the funds of Protected Colleges and Protecting Colleges are in a learner protection framework agreement. Each college agrees that, if a trigger event occurs, the Protected College shall grant to the Protecting Colleges access to the premises and records and all reasonable assistance to enable academic bonding in accordance with an action plan. A trigger event includes withdrawal of validation or of accreditation, insolvency, winding-up, or course discontinuance for any other reason. The Protected and

The preferred type of protection is 'academic bonding', whereby the learner gets the opportunity to complete their chosen programme of study.

Protecting Colleges must agree an action plan and keep it up to date, to detail how best to provide for academic bonding.

The action plan provides for copies of the records to be placed with an independent custodian and updated at least every two months. The custodian has irrevocable instructions to release the records to the Protecting College(s) if a trigger event occurs, but only for the purposes of the HECA PEL scheme. The action plan will also indicate which Protecting College will provide the academic bonding. In the event of uncertainty, the Protecting Colleges will agree within seven days which programmes are to be delivered by which Protecting College.

The collaborative agreement reached by the HECA colleges has worked well. The scheme is transparent and works in the interests of learners. Through the providers' commitment to compliance and their shared funding of their collective responsibility, they have established a reserve fund of €1.5m to date. Most importantly, unlike insurance-based costs, this fund continues to grow and remains available to support learners. Decisions about its allocation also remain under the control of the Protecting and Protected Colleges involved.

All HECA colleges provide learner protection in compliance with the 2012 Act.

While any college may withdraw from the scheme with one year's notice, this is without prejudice to existing, ongoing protection commitments at termination.

COMPARING THE BILL WITH ARRANGEMENTS IN AUSTRALIA

The new bill provides for obligated providers to pay an annual charge into a national Learner Protection Fund. From the Fund will be paid the cost of programme completion, and transfer to similar programmes – or, if these two are impracticable, the refund of fees to the learner and the administration costs of learner protection.

Obligated providers must inform QQI of any course discontinuance within two working days, and QQI must make all reasonable efforts to secure programme completion for affected learners. The Minister for Education and Skills will make contributions into and receive repayments from the Fund as it accumulates.

Public sector bodies, including some bodies such as the Royal Irish Academy of Music in receipt of public funds, will be completely exempt from the annual charge.

The Australian Scheme on which the proposed Learner Protection Fund is supposedly based requires all higher education institutions recruiting international students, whether private or public, to contribute. This is presumably on the basis that all such institutions benefit from international student recruitment and must contribute equally to their protection. The effect of confining the contributions to private sector institutions will be to increase very significantly the contribution per student, imposing a further burden on their international students.

The new bill also provides that fees received more than forty days in advance of a programme are to be placed into an escrow account and retained there until the course begins.

CONCLUSION

Extending the protection given to learners is to be welcomed. In a national scheme, there is a strong case for such protection to be given to learners in all institutions, both public and private. It is fully understood and accepted that this shared commitment and responsibility requires a financial contribution from providers.

The HECA PEL scheme has shown that provider institutions can provide academic and financial protection for learners and can establish related funds that do not lead to permanent insurance-based annual commitments and increased tuition costs for learners. Much of this effectiveness arises from the providers' shared responsibility and privilege from their dual roles as both protected and protecting institutions.

It is important that the proposed national scheme is informed and managed by the providers of the intended protected learners. A scheme based on ongoing insurance premiums determined by non-participating provider institutions is unlikely to serve learners well.

UL leads in Gender Equality

UL has long been a leader in Gender Equality across Irish higher education institutions with the highest percentage of female professors of any HEI at 33% and as one of the two first institutions in Ireland to be granted Athena Swan Bronze award in 2015 for advancing gender equality.

Since then five individual UL departments have also been awarded Athena Swan awards including the Department of Biological Science, Department of Mathematics and Statistics, PESS - Department of Physical Education and Sports Science; Physics Department and the School of Education (first School of Education to receive the award).

The senior Leadership at UL represents significant gender equality with eight out of twelve female members of the Executive Committee, a female Chancellor and two female Vice Presidents. 50% of UL's Faculty Deans are women, 41% of Heads of Department are women and 53% of UL's Assistant Deans are women.

In addition, 60% of UL's Governing Authority sub committees are chaired by women.

UL President Dr Des Fitzgerald appointed a Special Advisor on Gender and Equality in 2017.



Dr Desmond Fitzgerald, President of University of Limerick (UL).



Aidan Moran

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THINKING FOR YOURSELF AT UNIVERSITY

What it means and how to do it

Many people would sooner die than think. In fact, they do.

—Bertrand Russell, philosopher and Nobel laureate

In August 2017, a group of distinguished professors from Harvard, Princeton, and Yale wrote an open letter to students who were about to begin university life. It contained a simple yet inspirational message: ‘Think for yourself!’ But what does this really mean? What is ‘thinking’ anyway? And how can we master the skill of *critical thinking*?

WHAT DOES ‘THINKING FOR YOURSELF’ MEAN?

For psychologists, ‘thinking for yourself’ has two components: an attitude and an ability. On the one hand it requires a sceptical *attitude* or an eagerness to question ideas, especially those that seem sacrosanct or inviolable. The Greek word *skeptomai* means ‘I consider thoughtfully’, so scepticism is rooted in active reflection. On the other hand, thinking for yourself involves the *skill* of critical evaluation or the ability to form independent conclusions based on a rational evaluation of available evidence. But what exactly is ‘thinking’?

Thinking is best understood as a mental (‘cognitive’) process by which we use our knowledge and imagination to go beyond what is immediately obvious in order to see how things could be different. For example, look around the room you’re in. The fact that you can see furniture beside you doesn’t really qualify as thinking – it’s just perceptual awareness.

But imagine what the room would look like if you rearranged the furniture. This activity involves a cognitive leap beyond the obvious – a mental step that constitutes ‘thinking’. Thinking is a process that enables us to *transform* a situation mentally. It happens whenever we use what we know or can imagine to explore something in our head.

WHAT IS CRITICAL THINKING?

Every day, we face a variety of complex and controversial questions. For example, do people have the right to choose to end their lives? What is the optimal age of digital consent? Unfortunately, because weighing up the evidence on these questions takes considerable mental effort, we take the easy way out by relying on shortcuts like intuition (‘gut feelings’) or accepting other people’s views mindlessly and uncritically.

But thinking for oneself involves *critical thinking*. This is a form of intelligent criticism that helps people to reach independent and justifiable conclusions about their experiences. What makes critical thinking especially valuable is that it is based on *active reflection* – working things out for oneself – rather than passive reproduction of other people's ideas. So how can you improve your ability to think critically? The secret lies in systematic questioning.

IMPROVING YOUR ABILITY TO THINK CRITICALLY: BECOMING SYSTEMATICALLY INQUISITIVE

Perhaps the best way to improve your ability to think critically is to ask a series of questions about things that you hear or read. Here are some useful questions to ask.

1. *What exactly is the claim or conclusion that I am asked to believe?*

The first step in critical thinking is to identify the claim or conclusion that you are asked to believe. This task is quite easy for written material, because authors often tell you explicitly what their 'take home' message is in the subtitle, preface, or conclusion. For example, Ericsson and Paul's (2017) book *Peak: How All of Us Can Achieve Extraordinary Things* condenses its main message in the subtitle.

2. *Who or what is the source of this claim or conclusion?*

The next step is to establish the *credibility* of the source. Not all sources of information are equally trustworthy or impartial. So be cautious about accepting the claims of people who lack verifiable expertise in the topic they're talking or writing about. Also, be sceptical of people (such as social media 'influencers') who may endorse something purely for financial gain.

3. *What evidence is used to support the claim?*

The third step in critical thinking involves looking for relevant and valid evidence. Evidence based on intuition ('I have a gut feeling that ...'), appeals to authority ('according to Professor X ...'), and anecdotes ('someone I know told me that ...') are highly selective, biased, and untrustworthy.

If you read about a spectacular plane crash, for example, you might overestimate the danger of flying. In fact, travelling by car (which you probably do every day) is about 100 times more dangerous than travelling by plane. In general, evidence based on systematic research is reliable, because it is based on data collected using objective and repeatable procedures.

4. *How valid is the evidence cited? Identifying weaknesses in people's arguments*

The fourth step in critical thinking involves evaluating evidence systematically. To help you with this task, here are some useful questions.

(a) Is the claim based on accurate information?

Thinking for yourself involves the skill of critical evaluation, or the ability to form independent conclusions, based on a rational evaluation of available evidence.

A claim may be based on inaccurate information. Consider the widespread belief that spinach is unusually rich in iron. This belief is mistaken: research suggests there is more iron in eggs, liver, brown sugar, or pulses than in spinach.

(b) Is the reasoning valid?

Imagine you are a scientist who has received criticism for your theory that extrasensory perception (ESP) exists. In a public debate, you make the following argument: Pasteur's idea that diseases were transmitted by microscopic germs was dismissed as false during his lifetime but has since been accepted as true. Since your theory has also been ridiculed by the scientific community, then it must in fact be true. Is this argument valid? Of course not, but it could convince some people that your ideas are correct.

(c) Are the assumptions valid?

A weakness of many arguments concerns shaky foundations or questionable assumptions. This problem is especially likely when figurative language is used. For example, the traditional metaphor of seeing our long-term memory as a container is flawed, because a container can be filled beyond its capacity and can overflow. Although this model seems intuitively plausible, research shows that there is no known capacity limit to our long-term memory. Put simply, the more we know, the more we can remember!

What makes critical thinking especially valuable is that it is based on active reflection – working things out for oneself – rather than passive reproduction of other people's ideas.

(d) Does the argument 'beg the question' or assume its own answer?

A fourth flaw in an argument arises when it 'begs the question' or takes its own conclusion for granted. Consider the proposition that 'telepathy exists because I have had a number of experiences in my life I would describe as telepathic'. This begs the question, because its conclusion ('telepathy exists') is based on evidence that requires you to already accept that the claim is true.

Here's another example of this fallacy. Imagine hearing a teacher addressing a parents' meeting with the words: 'As a mother myself, I know a lot about child development.' Where is the evidence that being a mother equips one with a lot of knowledge about child development?

Interestingly, a controversial claim about motherhood caused a political furore in the UK in 2016 during a contest for leadership of the Conservative party. Candidate Andrea Leadsom had to apologise to her rival, Theresa May, for a comment in which she implied that being a mother gave her 'a real stake in the future of our country' – unlike May, who does not have children. A popular and damaging inference from Leadsom's remark was that May and other childless people don't care what happens to the UK. The claim that being a parent is a qualifying characteristic for running a country is clearly nonsensical. Leadsom resigned from the leadership race after her ill-judged remark.

5. Are there alternative explanations for the evidence provided? If so, how plausible are they?

What you see depends on the view from where you are standing. In other words, there are always alternative ways to interpret something. Indeed, the possibility of identifying rival explanations for an agreed set of circumstances is the cornerstone of our legal system. If a defence counsel can prove there is at least a 'reasonable doubt' about their client's involvement in a crime, then the case against this person may be dismissed. By implication, if you can establish an interpretation of the evidence that is at least as plausible as that favoured by the theorist, then you have shown a capacity to think for yourself.

6. Check your assumptions before drawing conclusions

The final step in learning to think critically is to make sure you check your assumptions before drawing any conclusions. This reminds me of the ABC abbreviation beloved of crime scene investigators: assume nothing, believe nobody, and check everything. This is a good example of critical thinking in action.

JP McManus All Ireland Scholarships Awards 2018



Pictured at the JP McManus All Ireland Scholarship Awards 2018 at the University of Limerick are (l-r): **Gerry Boland**, Trustee; **Brian Mooney**, **Mary Mitchell O'Connor**, Minister for Higher Education; **JP McManus**, Sponsor; **Roger Downer**, Trustee; **John Kiely**, Manager, Limerick Senior Hurling Team (all Ireland 2018 champions)



Michael Brophy

Professor of French and Francophone Studies, University College Dublin

TAKING THE FOREIGNNESS OUT OF MODERN LANGUAGES

Language learning in higher education

In November 2017 I had the pleasure, with HE Patricia O'Brien, Ambassador of Ireland to France, of addressing some 140 attendees who had gathered in the Irish Embassy in Paris for the launch of the UCD Alumni Chapter in France. However enthusiastic the turnout, this was but a modest representation of the estimated 1,500 alumni living in that country. Many had studied French or another language as part of their primary degree; others had not. While most had roots in Ireland, some hailed from far beyond its borders. The business executive, architect, engineer, translator, public administrator: each had their own story to tell, all of them carving out home in another language and culture that had given them new personal and professional opportunities.

It is clear, where language learning is concerned, that the paths travelled are multiform, flexible, and open-ended: from the executive just off a TGV from Geneva who recalled her determination to stick with French after a trying first year of Arts studies, to the BComm International alumnus who spoke of the lasting impact on him of Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir*.

With the heightened linguistic awareness it brings, and the critical and creative thinking it nurtures, language acquisition is also, by its nature and as exemplified by this gathering, always potentially life-changing. Strengthening human reserves of adaptability and resilience, it supports an outward-looking mentality hemmed in by neither borders nor divisions, always ready to embrace difference and to further personal growth through dialogue with others.

Some days after this event, Minister Bruton launched *Languages Connect: Ireland's Strategy for Foreign Languages in Irish Education 2017–2026* [see Breda Naughton's article in the present *Yearbook*, Second-Level section]. The Strategy seeks to address Ireland's low levels of language competency, mainly by increasing uptake of languages across the education and training sector, extending the range of languages on offer, encouraging greater student mobility, ensuring the provision of qualified teachers of languages, and raising employer engagement.

The Strategy is to be commended for its scope and ambition, notwithstanding the limited focus on preschool and primary levels. One of its real strengths is that it draws on the public consultation that preceded it and is shaped by the views of stakeholders across sectors. Indeed, in its ability to gather and stimulate dialogue among a range of interested institutions and bodies, the process bears witness to a unity of purpose that must prevail if the Strategy itself is

to gain societal traction and tackle effectively the nation's languages deficit over its achievement timeline of ten years.

While the Strategy fittingly puts considerable emphasis on the need to raise awareness of the importance of language learning, and advocates for 'a significant change of mindset', its insistent use of the epithet 'foreign' to qualify 'languages' runs counter to the very change it seeks to effect. 'Foreign' derives from another language, as is so often the case in a lexis of any 'native' tongue: in this instance, the Latin adverb *foras* or *foris*, meaning 'outside', based on the noun *fores*, meaning 'door'. By placing languages on the outside, beyond our own door as it were, 'foreign' inadvertently underscores how far removed we are from 'languages connect'. The word enforces a demarcation at odds with the 'changing, multicultural and multilingual Ireland' that the Strategy depicts, a country where the 'native' language of a growing portion of its citizens is no longer English or Irish.

Recognising the 'inherent value' of learning and using a language other than the mother tongue, and promoting a society where such ability 'is taken for granted', the Strategy surely aspires to remove or reverse the damaging disjunction its own use of the epithet perpetuates: the strange is to be converted into the familiar, what was previously regarded by many as extraneous or peripheral is to be fostered from within and to become an indispensable feature of the culture. Without such shifts, global citizenship will remain a woolly aspiration, and the benefits of plurilingualism will continue to elude us.

We are currently witnessing, in the form of the Brexit crisis, just where perceptions of foreignness and extraneousness can lead. Those perceptions have had considerable impact on the state of modern languages disciplines in Britain over the past decades. As Michael Kelly notes, the appetite for language degrees in the UK can be correlated over the years to the level of public enthusiasm for the European project. Dwindling student enrolments, closure of language departments, and a marked decrease in the number of universities offering language degrees all reflect a recent history of disengagement with languages and ensuing disciplinary decline – and this in spite of repeated calls by influential bodies to prioritise language learning in the educational system.

The 'vicious circle of monolingualism' identified by the British Academy continues to impede economic development and competitiveness. The British Council's warning that the UK's limited language capability must be remedied for it to become a truly global nation is to be measured simultaneously against its observation of 'the vulnerability of language provision in many schools and universities'.

Ireland has not suffered from such a collapse. While one of the principal aims of the Strategy is to increase from 4% to 20% the proportion of students studying a modern language at third level as part of their degree, Higher Education Authority statistics reveal that, in recent years, there has been no serious deterioration of the established base of students engaged in language learning. The main challenge has come from elsewhere: like other higher education disciplines, modern languages have had to absorb

Its [Strategy for Foreign Languages] insistent use of the epithet 'foreign' to qualify 'languages' runs counter to the very change it seeks to effect.

cuts to government funding of the sector, and to weather downward trends in resource provision that place forward planning on a precarious basis from year to year.

In its review of the allocation model for funding higher education institutions, the expert panel notes ‘anecdotal evidence from institutions of reduced laboratory exposure or levels of practice-based teaching due to staffing pressures which clearly impact upon the learning experience’. As a previous head of a university school of modern languages with responsibility for budgetary management, I, no doubt along with many others, can weigh in on this ‘anecdotal evidence’.

It is clear that strategic government focus on language and intercultural competence outcomes in higher education must be accompanied by countering certain misconceptions that prevent modern languages disciplines from becoming embedded in Irish society as non-foreign fields of knowledge and learning – or, to use the French classification, as *langues vivantes*, living, evolving entities whose mastery is bound up with life itself.

‘Languages Connect’ presents an exciting opportunity... to build language competence that will allow more of our graduates to break down boundaries and flourish in the wider world...

Language learning is a laboratory subject. It is resource-intensive. It requires small-group teaching. The ‘content’ modules that explore the literatures and cultures of the target language extend and deepen this learning as they advance linguistic immersion, enhancing cultural understanding and negotiation of cultural difference through complex encounters with language in different periods, settings, and formats.

The fiscal crisis may have generated efficiencies in education, but beyond anecdote it may be appropriate for the government to evaluate the continuing discrepancy between resource allocation and strategic goals in order to ensure effective implementation of policy. Otherwise, with staff reductions, fewer teaching contact hours, erosion of small-group teaching, shrinking curricular breadth, and the continued pressure to do more with less, modern languages as research-led disciplines will not thrive as catalysts of much-needed change in a country that still struggles to meet the growing need to communicate with the rest of the world in languages other than English.

Languages Connect presents an exciting opportunity, from within our own evolving culture, to build language competence that will allow more of our graduates to break down boundaries and flourish in the wider world as fully participative citizens. Although the Strategy does not discount lower levels of proficiency, it wisely prioritises among graduates the ‘Independent User’ standard as defined by the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). Furthermore, its emphasis on quality of language teaching at all levels, and on alignment of courses with CEFR outcomes, should obviate the risk of ill-conceived training packages that promise far more than they can ever hope to deliver.

Curiously, at the time of submitting this piece, the body set up to oversee and monitor implementation of the strategy, the Foreign Languages Advisory

Group (FLAG), has no representative from a third-level modern languages department or school – despite its commitment to ‘bring together key stakeholders to provide advice from a range of perspectives’. We still wait to connect. We are more than ready to come in.

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University of Limerick Campus Safety Campaign

A campus safety information campaign was launched this year by the University of Limerick in conjunction with An Garda Síochána and UL Student Life.

The *Campus Watch Booklet** is part of ongoing collaborations to raise awareness and provide information on campus safety to students.

The booklet, which is available to read on the UL website, has been published in five languages and is designed to allow quick reference to important student topics. Physical copies can be obtained from An Garda Síochána.



Sgt Kevin Balfe, Community Policing; **Sgt Ber Leetch**, Crime Prevention Officer; **Insp Ollie Kennedy**, Community Policing with UL; international students **Emmad Hydari** - Iran; **Disha Upendra Mandalia** - India; **Sabine Charles** - France.

* <https://www.garda.ie/en/crime-prevention/garda-campus-watch-2018-english.pdf>



Dr Katriona O'Sullivan
Maynooth University



Dr Gareth Burns
Maynooth University

TURN TO TEACHING

Diversifying Initial Teacher Education

In 2017 Maynooth University launched the Turn To Teaching project, a unique three-year programme that aims to support 100 students from marginalised backgrounds to move into Initial Teacher Education (ITE). The programme, funded by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and Maynooth University, aims to address the academic, social, and personal challenges faced by under-represented groups in the teaching profession. It will offer meaningful pathways into ITE for students from the Traveller community, migrants, mature students, and students from schools listed under the Department of Education's Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme.

BACKGROUND

ITE in Ireland has changed significantly in the last ten years. In 2012, an international review panel chaired by Professor Sahlberg emphasised the importance of developing 'innovative strategies so that Ireland can provide a teacher education regime that is comparable with the world's best' (Sahlberg, 2012, p.9). This resulted in ITE providers becoming university-based, and led and underpinned by research.

Further to this, in 2013 the Irish Research Council funded the Diversity in Initial Teacher Education (DITE) longitudinal research project. It recognised that despite growing diversity in Irish society, the teaching population has remained homogeneous. DITE recognised that collecting comprehensive data on those applying to and entering ITE would be crucial in informing ITE policy and practice.

IRELAND TRENDS

The DITE programme of research has revealed significant commonalities among pre-service teachers in Ireland: they tend to be overwhelmingly white, female, settled, Catholic, and middle-class (Keane and Heinz, 2016), and their exposure to diversity is very limited (Leavy, 2005). They are less likely to be mature students (Keane and Heinz, 2015), and the numbers of students with a disability remains low in all higher education (HE) courses compared with the general population.

Even schemes that aim to support diversity in HE, such as the Disability Access Route to Education (DARE) and Higher Education Access Route (HEAR), have had limited success in 'hard-to-reach' degree courses like ITE. Byrne et al. (2013) found that while greater numbers of HEAR- and DARE-eligible applicants were accessing professional courses in 2010–2012, education courses (ITE) were the exception.

The issue of diversity is most obvious in primary ITE courses, where students are more likely to be socially advantaged, less likely to have attended a DEIS school, and less likely to be in receipt of a higher education grant or to have entered through an alternative route (Darmody and Smyth, 2016).

BARRIERS TO ITE

Under-representation can be explained by myriad individual, economic, institutional, and cultural factors. Discourse that emphasises individual barriers explains differential rates of participation on the basis of attitudinal factors, implying that non-participation is due to lack of expectation or 'low aspirations' (Bruce and Bridgeland, 2014).

Others say academic achievement is the main barrier to HE participation (Jones and Thomas, 2003), with large disparities between the educational attainment of socioeconomically disadvantaged students and their more affluent counterparts (McKnight, 2015). In Ireland the high points entry requirement for primary ITE programmes, and the Irish language requirements, are considered significant academic barriers (Keane and Heinz, 2015).

More complex explanations use cultural reproduction to explain inequalities in student mobility (Donnelly and Evans, 2016). According to this paradigm, each class has a different habitus that determines the possession of core values, practices, and beliefs that are played out in behaviour and actions. Students do not always have the 'navigational capital' to support progression to ITE, as they lack experience of the 'norms' associated with HE and ITE. These norms can include knowledge about courses on offer in different institutions, grade requirements for specific courses, and familiarity with the institutions and professions themselves. Often these factors intersect, resulting in a lack of aspiration and reduced academic performance (Reay, 2005; Reay et al., 2008; Reay et al., 2009), leading to reduced likelihood that students will progress to ITE.

Pre-service teachers in Ireland tend to be overwhelmingly white, female, settled, Catholic and middle-class.

Turn To Teaching

Turn To Teaching comprises three educational interventions designed to address these barriers to ITE and support the participation of the most marginalised to become teachers:

1. A one-year pre-university foundation course, 'Think about Teaching', which will prepare twenty-five students annually who have experienced deep educational inequality for entry to ITE degrees.
2. 'Rising Teachers, Rising Leaders' aims to (i) build the capacity of twenty teachers to understand their role in creating a school culture that supports students from diverse backgrounds to aspire to a career in teaching; and (ii) equip forty students in DEIS schools and communities that are under-represented in teaching, with the skills needed to access ITE directly.

3. ‘Tar linn ag Teagasc’ gives all participants access to a tailored Irish-language competency-based module, to help them reach the required entry standard for ITE and to encourage participants to become future teachers of Irish.

Think about Teaching

Foundation courses are a way of supporting targeted groups to transition into university. They are intended for those without the formal entry qualifications for their chosen degree and are designed to prepare students for degree-level study (O’Sullivan et al., 2018). In Ireland they have traditionally been delivered in university, and they generally target under-represented student groups. For the socioeconomically disadvantaged learner or mature learner, the supports offered are generally designed to develop their social and cultural capital alongside academic skills and subject-specific content.

The courses recognise the complex challenges facing such groups in HE, supporting peer relationships, academic growth, and confidence, preventing students from feeling under-qualified compared to their peers,

The [Think about Teaching] course structure and ethos recognise that the Irish education system unfairly favours students from affluent backgrounds.

and aiming to give them access to bridging capital that supports transitions and retention in HE (O’Sullivan et al., 2018). A review of these programmes in Ireland showed their effectiveness in supporting students to progress into HE (Murphy, 2009). Evidence from Trinity College Dublin found that retention and graduation statistics were in line with those of direct-entry students (Share, 2013), even in courses considered elite or hard to access, such as medicine and law.

The Maynooth University ‘Think about Teaching’ ITE foundation course is the first of its kind in Ireland. It offers students from under-represented groups the opportunity to prepare academically, culturally, and socially for primary and secondary teaching degrees in the university. Accredited at level 6, and externally evaluated, the course aims to supplement students’ prior learning by preparing them to undertake a degree in HE.

The course structure and ethos recognise that the Irish education system at present unfairly favours students from affluent backgrounds, and that Leaving Cert points are correlated with the level of cultural and academic capital in a student’s home and schooling (Byrne and McCoy, 2013). Thus students who are marginalised, lack access to extracurricular supports, or attend DEIS schools may not perform well in the Leaving Cert, despite having the potential to be excellent teachers.

Based on this ethos, the ‘Think about Teaching’ ITE foundation course gives students meaningful opportunities to develop the skills necessary to:

- successfully study in university
- feel like they belong in university
- succeed as a primary or secondary school teacher.

'Rising Teachers, Rising Leaders' is a school outreach programme that supports the teaching aspirations and the social and academic development of forty senior-cycle students (Rising Teachers) from DEIS post-primary schools. It also provides twenty teachers (Rising Leaders) from under-represented groups in teaching with a suite of funded university accreditation or CPD options to help develop their leadership capacity and career progression. Developing culturally responsive mentoring and teaching skills will be prioritised.

The student and teacher participants will embark together on a two-year leadership journey. Core elements will be jointly delivered to allow the Rising Teachers to meet and be mentored by the Rising Leaders. In partnership, the Rising Teachers and Rising Leaders will be given an opportunity to create a powerful national campaign about the need for diversity in teaching.

**In partnership, the
Rising Teachers and
Rising Leaders will...
create a powerful
national campaign
about the need for
diversity in teaching.**

CONCLUSION

In line with international concerns (Keane and Heinz, 2016), and a strong evidence base that highlights the benefits and desirability of a more diverse and representative teaching force (Santoro, 2009; Villegas and Irvine, 2010; Keane and Heinz, 2015), there have been consistent calls to diversify the teaching population in Ireland (Conway et al., 2009; Teaching Council, 2011). The policy response has included HEA funding of initiatives that support access to ITE for specific groups.

It is critical to evaluate the influence of Maynooth University's Turn to Teaching project, and the various programmes outlined here, on student participants' capacity to progress to and succeed in ITE, as currently the evidence on which policy can draw is limited. By strengthening the evidence base and supporting these students to see themselves as the teachers of tomorrow, it is envisaged that Turn to Teaching will contribute to national and international policy discourse on equity of access to ITE, and to the objectives, curriculum, and structure of ITE.

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REVIEWING PEER PLACEMENT IN INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION

Cleamhnas, pre-nuptial agreements, and the seven-year itch

A peer school placement experience, part of the revised Bachelor of Education programme at Maynooth University, was reviewed seven years after being introduced. In conjunction with Teaching Council policy (2011), this study represents a year-long reflective process, culminating in the design of a 2018 strategic plan for development of the peer-placement aspect of the related university module.

As part of the critical evaluation of preparation for peer placement, this paper explores interconnections between personal and professional aspects of emerging teacher identity. The structures for establishing peer pairings for school placement (SP) are compared to a *cleamhnas* (arranged marriage), combined with associated 'SP prenuptial agreement'. To present an evidence-based approach, literature from national and international sources is consulted, providing a lens through which to view merits and challenges of the approach.

REVIEW OF PERTINENT LITERATURE

Studies by international researchers on peer placement (Bullough et al., 2002, 2003; Smith, 2002; Baker and Milner 2006; Nokes et al., 2008; Gardiner and Robinson, 2009, 2010; Goodnough et al., 2009) have suggested that pairing two student teachers with a cooperating teacher provides a more supportive and collaborative context in which to learn than the traditional single-placement model. The collaborative aspect of peer placement is consistently noted in literature as enhancing the quality of the learning.

However, research on this suggests that productive collaboration can be challenging to attain, that tensions between collaborators are inevitable (John-Steiner, 2000; Achinstein, 2002; Grossman, Wineberg, and Woolworth, 2001), and that typically, student teachers' prior experiences do not necessarily prepare them to be effective collaborators (Putnam and Borko, 2000; Glazer and Hannafin, 2006).

Based on this research, collaborators may need sufficient time to collaborate, a commitment to sustaining their joint work, and a willingness and ability to analyse, evaluate, and deliberate on complex events and ideas (Wenger, 1998; John-Steiner, 2000). Student teachers, asked to name the sources of tension, identified a lack of time to collaborate, and a lack of shared norms for communication, such as how to agree, disagree, and provide feedback (Wenger, 1998; John-Steiner, 2000; Grossman et al., 2001). Studies consistently conclude that in peer placements, student



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teachers plan more innovative and dynamic lessons and ease the challenge of lesson implementation by assisting or redirecting pupils and managing materials.

Researchers also speculate that the multiple perspectives that peers bring forth can help to design more creative lessons (Bullough et al., 2002, 2003; Baker and Milner, 2006; Nokes et al., 2008; Gardiner and Robinson, 2009, 2010; Goodnough et al., 2009). The fact that a peer can assist with the teaching and learning makes student teachers more confident in attempting complex, student-centred instruction (Bullough et al., 2002, 2003; Smith, 2002; Baker and Milner, 2006; Nokes et al., 2008; Gardiner and Robinson, 2009, 2010; Goodnough et al., 2009).

“... Pairing two student teachers with a cooperating teacher provides a more supportive and collaborative context in which to learn.”

Interestingly, research indicates that due to the equal status of both of the student teachers, as opposed to the perceived imbalance of power between one student teacher and the cooperating teacher, the feedback tends to be more thorough, frequent, and open-ended (Smith, 2002; Gardiner and Robinson, 2009). These researchers conclude that peer collaboration provides more opportunities to reflect on and analyse experiences and to determine ways to improve teaching.

While the evidence is overwhelmingly positive on the benefits of peer placement and teaching for student teachers, some drawbacks are identified:

- Peer placements do not reflect the ‘real world’ of teaching – a world of autonomy and isolation (Gardiner and Robinson, 2010).
- There is often excessive competition between peers (Smith, 2002; Goodnough et al., 2009).
- Student teachers do not have a framework for how to interact, and end up stepping on each other’s toes during instruction (Smith, 2002).
- Pairing sometimes fails as a result of a wide gap in abilities, expectations, and approaches, which results in peers maintaining a joint placement but working individually (Gardiner and Robinson, 2010).

Each of these perceived challenges is addressed arising from feedback from associated stakeholders from 2011–2018, which inform the ensuing 2018 strategic plan.

THE PROCESS: MATCHMAKING OR *CLEAMHNAS*

To actualise the process of peer teaching on school placement, the head of education in the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education at Maynooth University works with a school placement committee member to ‘match’ the students for placement based on their geographical location and a list of five people with whom they would like to be paired.

There are multiple permutations in the allocation of partners, for which an algorithm has yet to be created. But the essential criteria are: (1) geographical location, (2) whether the student has already done a placement in the school being assigned (or in a school of comparable ethos and structure), and (3) both students having nominated one another. The

head of education also ensures an optimal match in suitability on personal and professional grounds. That they can assess this suitability is significant, as this is increasingly challenging in terms of knowledge and management in universities or colleges with a large student population.

The Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education, through the module *Personal and Professional Skills for Teaching and Learning* (PPSTL) 2, introduces students to working teaching partnerships and co-teaching (Walther-Thomas et al., 2000; Friend and Cook, 2014). Student teachers are introduced to different models of co-teaching as they establish a partnership and prepare to work closely with their appointed partner.

The philosophy and practice of critical friendship are presented, with a view to preparing student teachers for peer teaching. The concept of critical friendship is introduced, and the work of Schuck and Russell (2005) has proven very useful in this regard. A critical friend is likened to a 'sounding board', asking challenging questions, supporting 'the reframing of events', and joining in 'the professional learning experience' (ibid., p.3).

In addition to the critical friendship and its associated bounties for student teachers, merits for teacher educators in adopting the critical friendship approach are enumerated, along with the potentially rich learning to be gained by higher education institutions about their student teachers' learning and development. A rationale for peer teaching is elicited first from student teachers on their early stage of development as pedagogues.

Students instantly recognise the potential learning from observing others' practices in the classroom, particularly their behaviour management styles and practices. This reflects one of six key classroom teaching qualities, referred to as 'managerial competence' by Kyriacou (1997, p.78), as managerial responsibilities are assumed incrementally in and outside of the classroom.

In addition to concerns about the organisation of the classroom and its learners, students are generally still grappling with the mechanics of teaching at this stage. For example, they are typically still learning how to introduce new learning content in an active, engaging, and age-appropriate way, and are eager to see how others do this. Lesson pacing and the timing of lesson stages can be demanding for the novice teacher. The beginning, ending, and pacing of lessons have been identified under the six qualities grouped as 'performance' by the Stanford Teacher Competence Appraisal Guide (Stones and Morris, 1972).

At this embryonic stage of lesson planning, the development of learning content is introduced. Its thorough exploration can be a challenge for student teachers. After the role of assistant to a classroom teacher for a term, they have led the teaching of just two to three lessons per curricular subject area and facilitated play centres for three weeks in their first year of the programme. In terms of planning preparation, in their first school placement of second year, students attempt fortnightly scheme planning

The philosophy and practice of critical friendship are presented, with a view to preparing student teachers for peer teaching.

in their pairs for the first time. This tends to be very much favoured by the student group and makes welcome the timing of the peer-teaching experience in Maynooth University's Bachelor of Education programme.

As part of their preparation to peer-teach, a seminar, as part of B.Ed. module PPSTL2, facilitates the introduction and completion of the Peer-Teaching School Placement Agreement (dubbed by students as the SP pre-nup!). Student teachers work through a shared contractual agreement, whereby they deliberate and try to reach consensus on their own approaches to teaching matters, from behaviour-management strategies to planning practicalities such as photocopying duties.

The form was designed by the authors of this paper to ensure that a discussion would be tabled between the partners weeks before the placement, so that potential difficulties could be pre-empted. It was also created in response to literature, which asserted that many challenges on peer placement are due to insufficient awareness about how to collaborate, give feedback in a positive way, plan in a collegiate way, and divide the work equally. These questions are posed with the aim of prompting thoughtful consideration and negotiation among pairs, and of providing a

...many challenges on peer placement are due to insufficient awareness about how to collaborate, give feedback in a positive way, plan in a collegiate way, and divide the work equally.

positive learning experience – primarily for the children in the classroom but also for the student teachers and the cooperating teacher and principal of the host school.

Students take an hour, initially, working with their partners discussing issues, including:

Where and when are they going to do their planning each day after lessons? What time will they 'call it a day', in terms of finishing co-planning? By what mode do they each prefer to be contacted (phone, text, e-mail, Facebook, WhatsApp, etc.)? How will they ensure consistency in their approaches to classroom management? What tolerance of noise do each of

them have? What is an acceptable level of tidiness/untidiness in the classroom? Who will be in charge of displays of work? Who will do the photocopying? Will they both do equal amounts? What will the person do while the other person is teaching the lesson? What type of feedback will they give to one another and how should it be given? (Forrest and Stokes, Peer-Teaching School Placement Agreement, 2011)

Only two lessons are co-taught each day, with the other lessons shared equally. The partners come to agree on many of these issues, and they each sign the contract, acknowledging the discussions and agreements reached. The form is completed outside of the seminar session, after consideration and negotiation. While this is naturally only notional, according to student feedback it appears to consolidate the visions and plans that both partners have for the professional relationship, though like any evolving relationship, it may require some renegotiation as the placement unfolds.

After school placement, the students discuss the merits and challenges of the process. This is recorded in summary form by the course facilitators, who are the authors of this article. The process and administration of the SP prenuptial agreement (Forrest and Stokes, 2011) are explored, and

this ongoing evaluation has led to a synthesis of seven years of reflective feedback from stakeholders. Reflective practices conducted by the module leaders since 2011 inform the conclusions and recommendations below.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following conclusions and recommendations are drawn from the past seven years of practice and informed by the literature outlined. They mainly concern matters of reflecting and disseminating practice and its implications for policy.

Language in co-teaching and team-teaching must be critically examined with reference to the Irish Teaching Council Guidelines on School Placement (Teaching Council, 2013, p.6), to contextualise the theory and practice of peer teaching. In the glossary, *team-teaching* refers specifically to 'teachers teaching the same learners at the same time, and working together to plan, conduct and evaluate the learning activities'.

We suggest that peer teaching is a unique form of co-teaching, in that equity is implied by the fact that the student teaching pair represents the same stage on the continuum of teaching and learning. To enhance understanding of the continuum of teacher education, the nature of peer teaching might be delineated by future policy documentation using such initiatives as the one documented here, as an evidence-based approach to interpreting and enacting policy.

Some students could present at Féilte (The Festival of Education in Learning and Teaching Excellence) on their experience of the paired school placement, to inform future research and policy on Initial Teacher Education. This would also allow the views of the key stakeholders – the student teachers themselves – to be illuminated.

An alternate recommendation is that students be given further opportunities to engage in peer teaching in preparation for engagement in Droichead: The Integrated Professional Induction Framework, so that the merits of paired critical reflection-on-practice become further embedded in everyday practice. An additional benefit of this approach is that the cooperating teachers and student teachers understand the context in which teaching and learning take place and that this is observed over an extended period. This, ideally, presents a realistic view of the ongoing teaching and learning that are occurring in the school environment, as opposed to obtaining a 'snapshot' of practice, which, before the introduction of Droichead, was the method of investigation, inspection, and evaluation of early-career teachers.

Through Cosán: Framework for Teachers' Learning (Teaching Council, 2016), there are opportunities to examine peer teaching with respect to 'practice and collaboration' as an identified teacher learning process, as well as under the mentoring/coaching strand of reflective practice. These may provide meaningful opportunities for sharing knowledge, expertise, and experience, in order to realise co-planning and reflective practice as the norm among professionals along all stages of the professional development continuum.

A recommendation is that students be given opportunities to engage in peer teaching in preparation for engagement in Droichead.

ADDITIONS TO THE STRATEGIC PLAN

In terms of the Strategic Plan for 2018–2021 and beyond, the following elements have been added as objectives for the PPSTL2 university module:

- The drawbacks identified in the bullet points above will be presented to the School Placement Committee of the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education, in order to address issues at policy and procedural level.
- More emphasis will be placed on professionalism in communication, in particular to any use of social media in relation to school placement. Appropriate observation of posting protocols will be explored and agreed as part of the revised peer-placement contract between partners and their teaching and learning environments.
- The newly introduced GDPR requirements in May 2018 on data protection and storage will be emphasised in peer-placement preparation in conjunction with Maynooth University and departmental protocol.
- Fourth-year B.Ed. students will be encouraged to research peer teaching as a potential focus of their Self-Study Action-Research dissertations, as key stakeholders of peer teaching, with a view to informing not only university practice but also, potentially, Teaching Council policy.
- Shared components of students' e-portfolios will be explored as a vehicle for meaningful and appropriate sharing of resources, evaluations, and examples of learning outcomes. This will be aligned with the growing international emphasis on the desirability and necessity for forums in which professional development is presented as evidence and for recruitment and promotion, where appropriate.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The merits of the peer-placement programme and its associated challenges and limitations have been presented. The strategic plan 2018–2021, arising from the review of literature and feedback from students and stakeholders in Initial Teacher Education, has been revised, so that best practice as determined nationally and internationally can be incorporated and embedded. The use of such an evidence-based approach, it is hoped, will inform the future direction and nature of the ongoing development of teachers, particularly those in the early stages of their teaching careers.

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Insurance Practitioner, a modern apprenticeship for a diverse industry

An apprenticeship is a programme of structured education and training which formally combines and alternates learning in the workplace with learning in an educational setting. This is an important definition, as it differentiates an apprenticeship from other work-based programmes such as internships and work placement.

The apprenticeship system in Ireland is governed by the 1967 Industrial Training Act, and all statutory apprenticeships are recognised by this Act. When a new apprenticeship is created, it is protected under the Act by means of a statutory instrument which outlines the specific occupations for which the apprenticeship prepares the apprentice. All Irish statutory apprenticeships are on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) as major awards at level 5 and upwards.

Before the review of apprenticeships in 2013, there were 27 apprenticeship programmes in a variety of occupations; these were traditional craft apprenticeships lasting four years. In recent years there were typically around 3,500 new registrations annually, and these were heavily male-dominated, despite bursaries to encourage female registrations.

CONCEPT AND DESIGN – THE EVOLUTION OF A MODERN-DAY APPRENTICESHIP

In 2013 a major review of apprenticeship provision was carried out. It made several key recommendations, including better collaboration between enterprises and education and training providers, the creation of rewarding careers, and provision of job-ready graduates for a large segment of the population.

Following the review there was a call for new apprenticeship proposals, with the condition that they had to be at least two years long and on the NFQ at level 5 or higher. While these new apprenticeships conformed with the legislation, there are some key differences from the statutory (trade) apprenticeships:

- SOLAS no longer paid the training allowance; rather, the funds were used to support the development of new apprenticeship programmes.
- At least 50 per cent of the learning would be work-based.
- The new occupational profiles would be confirmed by statutory instrument, and the 1967 industrial training act would apply to these new apprenticeships.

THE INSURANCE PRACTITIONER PROGRAMME – A MODERN APPRENTICESHIP FOR A DIVERSE INDUSTRY

The Insurance Practitioner apprenticeship programme is industry-led. The initial proposal was submitted to the apprenticeship council by Zurich Insurance, and while the apprenticeship council endorsed the concept of the Insurance Practitioner apprenticeship, it recommended that there be broader industry representation and that the apprenticeship be available to a broad range of employers. The Insurance Institute of Ireland (III) developed the programme proposal on behalf of the industry, developing the learner specifications and setting up the initial consortium steering group (CSG).

The III approached Institute of Technology Sligo (ITS) to help design, validate, and deliver the programme to the occupational profile specified by the industry CSG. The CSG appointed ITS as the coordinating provider, with the brief to develop a national programme using distance learning technologies. The strong industry representation was key to successful implementation, with the focus on a programme which met the needs of the insurance industry: preparing future leaders in the industry.

Also key was the involvement of SOLAS, the Higher Education Authority (HEA), Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), and the Technological Higher Education Association (THEA), who advised in the start-up phase. The programme includes embedded insurance qualifications, leading to professional designations required to show competence in a regulated industry. As the apprentice grows in their role and achieves industry designation, they perform higher-order tasks. On completion, they must demonstrate competence in one of three areas of the insurance industry: direct client advice, underwriting, or claims handling.

The students are employed by insurance companies and undergo online and blended learning from their home base.

The brief to deliver a national programme was achieved at launch in September 2016, with the launch of a three-year BA (honours) in Insurance Practice, with sixty-seven apprentices employed by almost forty employers, and an apprentice in every Education and Training Board (ETB) area. The students are employed by insurance companies across Ireland and undergo online and blended learning from their home base, with mentoring from senior executives. They achieve a consistent delivery and assessment, supported by ITS, who also oversee the quality assurance of the programme, and by the III, with regular face-to-face days when the apprentices can meet with their lecture team.

The intake of new apprentices is divided almost equally between CAO students, career changers, and graduates, all of whom were employed on three-year apprenticeship training contracts. The CSG provides strategic direction to the programme and ensures that it is sustainable in the long term by forecasting demand for the programme, making recommendations to expand it, and making other strategic decisions on its operation – in a similar way to SOLAS for traditional apprenticeships.

In September 2018, the third intake of recruits was enrolled, with an average annual intake of seventy-five apprentices over the three years. In 2017 the CSG proposed the expansion to include companies who provided

life insurance. The Life Insurance Association (LIA) is now a delivery partner and plays an active role on the CSG.

A further example of programme expansion considered by the CSG is the expansion of the apprenticeship to higher levels (9 and 10 of the NFQ). The CSG made an unsuccessful bid for a level 9 apprenticeship in the summer 2017 call for new proposals. While the rationale for not approving a progression route for the graduates of the BA (honours) programme remains unclear, the CSG remains committed to exploring further apprenticeship proposals and developing progression and entry pathways for the graduates of the level 8 programme.

PROGRAMME DELIVERY

The CSG, guiding ITS and IIL, designed the programme within the framework constraints for new apprenticeship proposals, exploiting the changes to the funding regime. For example, the Insurance Practitioner apprenticeship operates a day-release alternance model, which means the apprentices take their ITS classes on day release rather than the block approach adapted by traditional employers. This was designed to compensate for removal of the training allowance from the apprentice, and delivers a more cost-efficient delivery for both employer and apprentice. The use of online technologies allows a truly national programme of scale to be developed, with large global players and small brokers among the employers providing apprenticeship opportunities.

The use of online technologies allows a truly national programme of scale to be developed.

The involvement of the IIL and LIA as industry representatives has a number of advantages. As educational organisations, they understand the challenges of delivering and validating a work-based programme, and they were key in activating the industry to recruit apprentices. The IIL apprenticeship portal www.earnandlearn.ie has become a key tool in developing an accessible talent pool for the industry and in making this talent available to employers.

LESSONS LEARNT AND RECOMMENDATIONS – OVERCOMING OBSTACLES AND WHERE NEXT

With the recruitment of the third intake in September 2018, and looking forward to the first graduates in October 2019, the partners reflect on a programme that has achieved a truly national spread, with apprentices in a large variety of companies – from household names in national and global companies to local brokers in towns and cities around Ireland.

The strengths of the industry partnership and the guidance of the CSG have ensured a sustainable apprenticeship delivery model, which provides capacity for development in the regions, and have substantially increased the national uptake by female participants in apprenticeship programmes, representing over 40 per cent of each intake.

The development of the Insurance Practitioner apprenticeship provides the blueprint for a sustainable apprenticeship with national reach and industry engagement. This development was challenging, as there are many bodies and instruments involved:

- QQI, with the welcome development of Topic-Specific Quality Assurance (QA) Guidelines and Topic-Specific Statutory QA Guidelines developed by QQI for providers of statutory apprenticeship programmes, which provided a roadmap and framework for development.
- SOLAS, who assisted with the statutory instruments, marketing and coordinating the authorised officer networks.
- HEA, who fund the programme with the support of SOLAS.
- Authorised officer network in the ETBs who support the apprentices and companies on the ground.
- The development by SOLAS of tools to help plan and roll out an apprenticeship programme is welcome. The apprenticeship council strategically manage the statutory apprenticeship programmes.

Nationally there apprenticeships available in new and exciting areas, such as finance, ICT, engineering, hospitality, and logistics. In December 2017 a further twenty-six new apprenticeships from level 5 to 10 on the NFQ were approved for development by the apprenticeship council, and the number of new apprenticeships registered in 2020 is planned to more than double, to 9,000.

Several papers were accepted at the International Network on Innovative Apprenticeship (INAP) conference in October 2017, where the Insurance Practitioner apprenticeship attracted much interest. It was unique and relevant worldwide in a couple of respects. The apprenticeship was delivered in the workplace by a higher education institute. In countries such as Germany and Switzerland, with established apprenticeship provision, education was provided at sub-degree level in training colleges, and students who progressed to degree-level studies did so when they had completed their apprenticeship and entered traditional universities.

The statutory basis of the apprenticeship, and the protection provided to it by SOLAS by the authorised officer network, also received positive comment. Many countries did not have such a statutory basis for their apprenticeship provision. The concept of delivering the off-the-job training by distance in the workplace was also unique.

Rebecca receives UCD Academic Achievement Scholarship

Rebecca Carter's appeal of her Leaving Cert results and her subsequent successful High Court action in September 2018 inadvertently led to the total reorganisation of the State Examinations Commissions appeals process.

In conversation with Brian Mooney, Rebecca indicated that she is totally enjoying Veterinary Medicine in UCD, and engaging fully in college life. However, she continues to be surprised and disconcerted to find that everyone she meets knows her name and her story... the price of courage!





Dr David Foster

Director of Career Development and Skills, and Director, Career Development Centre, University College Dublin

MAKING LINKS

Career Development and Employability in Higher Education

This article outlines how University College Dublin is engaging students in their career development and employability during their time at UCD. It describes the political, strategic, and policy landscape that is shaping and influencing this work, and it highlights the connectivity between the university, students, employers, faculty, and professional support areas. The career development and employability landscape is multifaceted and developing quickly at UCD. Making what is offered relevant has been achieved through cooperation and consultation across levels and functions within the university, and this is seen as essential for success to continue.

POLICY AND STRATEGIC CONTEXT

Govender and Taylor (2015) pointed to an employability agenda that has emerged in recent years in higher education systems around the world. This agenda is said to be led most often by policymakers, but resonates with various stakeholder groups such as higher education providers, parents, students, and graduates.

In the Irish context, discourse and policy on the nature of higher education and the hard and soft skills needed for an effective and vibrant economy are evident in the country's strategic framework. The National Skills Strategy 2025, the Action Plan for Education 2018, the Action Plan for Jobs 2018, and the National Strategy for Higher Education 2030 provide a robust framework in which higher education providers may address employability initiatives in education and learning. This is important, as graduate recruiters generally seek educated talent that is flexible and adaptable – not someone who has been trained to a certain skill set, job function, or role.

At UCD, the international discourse on students' career development and employability is reflected in a broad range of strategic and policy positions that give students' the educational, personal, and professional development they require to contribute meaningfully to the economy and society. UCD educates future national and international leaders by providing an educational and student experience that addresses academic, personal, professional, and career development. It equips students for success beyond the university experience, irrespective of discipline.

The UCD Strategy 2020, objective 2, says the university will 'provide an educational experience that defines international best practice'. The UCD Education Strategy 2015–2020, priority 2, says UCD will 'provide students with opportunities to develop interpersonal, intercultural and life skills within and outside of the classroom'.

Both strategies have been helpful in framing dialogue on the role of a university in education and in helping students to acquire, practice, and enhance skills. To explore students' career development and employability further, in 2018 a working group of senior academic and professional staff was formed to undertake significant consultation with stakeholders (faculty, professional and administrative staff, students, and employers). It took a triangulated approach to data collection:

- Questionnaires were issued to all UCD students and faculty.
- Focus groups were held with professional and support units across UCD.
- Focus groups were held with employers.
- Based on data analysis, the working group developed an Institutional Strategy on Career Development and Employability that has five core priorities:
 - Incorporate career development and employability-related activities in discipline-appropriate ways within programmes.
 - Enhance and develop employability attributes in our students and graduates.
 - Establish and maintain excellent working relationships with our key stakeholders.
 - Provide opportunities for students who want to develop their creativity, innovation, enterprise, and entrepreneurial interests.
 - Communicate our strategy to prospective students and key stakeholders.

Adding a strategy specifically for students' career development and employability provides a focus on the development and expression of career identity and employability skills. This is central to UCD's educational mission. It complements and personalises the national framework on graduate skills, employability, and career development. This new strategy was welcomed at UCD, where there is a genuine focus on the student experience.

**QS has ranked UCD
at number one in
Ireland for graduate
employability in 2018
and 2019.**

UCD's focus on students' career development and employability is also evidenced on the international stage. UCD is a research-intensive university with global reach and is ranked by QS University World Rankings in the top 1% of universities worldwide. This showcases the calibre of the faculty and their research outputs, and the quality of teaching, learning, facilities, and the student experience.

Further, QS has ranked UCD at number one in Ireland for graduate employability in 2018 and 2019. The QS Graduate Employability league table ranks UCD at 74th in the world. No other Irish university, north or south, is ranked by QS in the world's top 100 universities for graduate employability. In developing this ranking, QS seeks data on four core questions:

- How well reputed are the institutions among employers?
- Are the institutions nurturing high-achievers?
- How connected are institutions to employers?
- How attractive are an institution's recent graduates to employers?

UCD thus continues to evidence, on the world stage, a strong commitment

to the educational and student experience delivered by academic and professional experts across a student's lifespan at UCD. It has a track record of excellence in student recruitment, engagement, and progression across the broadest possible curriculum, offering students choice in breadth and depth of academic experience.

Commitment to challenging and developing students starts early, and many academic programmes encourage students to do modules outside of their core discipline. This exposes them to different styles of thinking, learning, studying, and communicating. These experiences build qualities and skills needed by the economy, including flexibility, adaptability, and critical thinking, which are central to future career success and to enriching campus and student life. This promotes diversity and mutual learning. There is clear recognition at UCD of the critical role played by universities in the personal and professional development of students alongside intellectual challenge and academic enrichment.

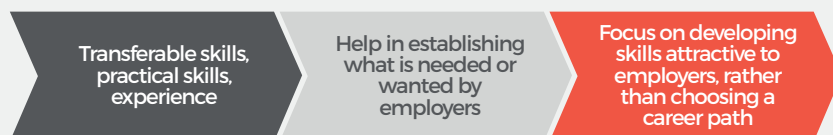
MAKING LINKS: INTERNSHIPS AND UCD

The importance of internships cannot be overstated, from both the educational and career-development perspectives. A decade ago, Knouse and Fontenot (2008), commenting on the situation in the USA, found that employment opportunities evolved directly from the internship experience and that students' employability more broadly was enhanced by the experience of being in the workplace. A National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) survey of internships and cooperative education in the USA (2016) reported in similar vein, finding that job opportunities evolved from internships and that employers saw internships as a primary talent pipeline with an explicit organisational goal to convert as many interns as possible into full-time employees.

The importance of internships cannot be overstated, from both the educational and career-development perspectives.

The situation in Ireland replicates this. Gradireland's 'Graduate Salary and Graduate Recruitment Trends Survey 2018' reported 80% of employers in Ireland offering internships, with 54% recruiting up to 50% of their graduate intake from their interns. This is becoming more commonplace across businesses and sectors of the economy.

In a survey of 1,639 UCD students, carried out during development of the institutional strategy on career development and employability, preparing for the future and developing the skills that employers want feature high among students' expectations of the educational experience. The main themes from the expectations identified by students are as follows:



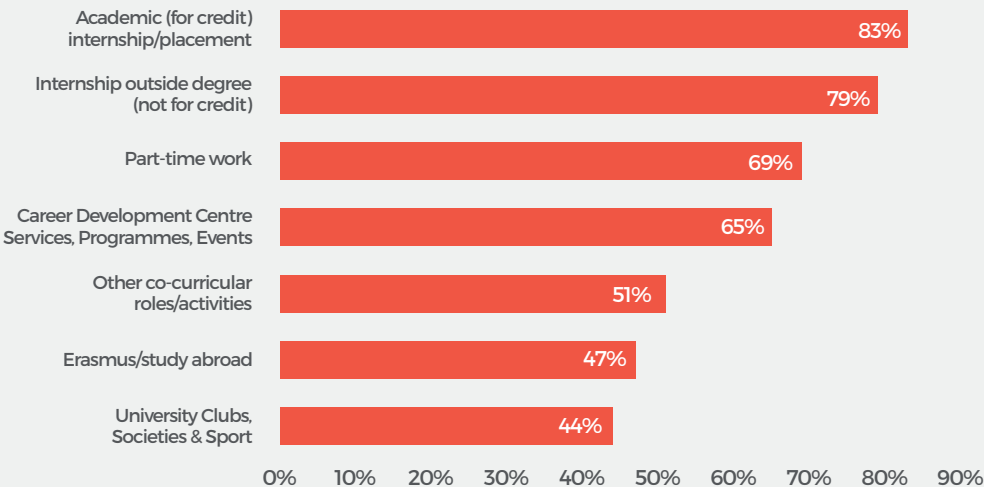
Students' comments show a stated need for workplace exposure and skills enhancement:

Getting real-life experience in the working world during the college education programme and workshops to gain real-life skills and techniques before leaving college.

Gaining the skills and knowledge that will be useful in industry. Having practical skills to deal with real-life employment.

Connecting with the workplace is clearly important to students, and internships are an increasingly popular and effective way to achieve this. The chart below, of what contributed most to employability, illustrates just how important internships are to students (n = 1,639) (Clarke, 2018, p.28):

Q. How important do you feel each of the following elements is in preparing you for employment? (1 = very important, 5 = not at all important)



Scores 1 & 2 (Very important & important)

Other aspects of the student experience also featured highly, including the role of the Career Development Centre and co-curricular activities.

From the student perspective, internships – whether for credit or not – appear critical to their thinking on career development and employability. With UCD's growing offering in this space, students' expectations and needs are increasingly being supported by the faculty and professional staff. A wide variety of programmes in UCD now offer internships at undergraduate and graduate levels.

Operating a hub-and-spoke model, internships are managed locally by college- or school-based internship managers, who engage industry and students, facilitate the recruitment of students to a range of internships across disciplines, and administer preparation, placement, and progress through the internship. Career and skills consultants from the Career Development Centre are often engaged to help students prepare for

internships, and to reflect on their experience upon return to UCD, integrating new skills, thoughts, and abilities into their career plans.

Internship managers have a reporting line to the university internships manager located at the Career Development Centre – a staff-facing role, working primarily with internship managers on dissemination of best practice, for example, and with academic staff seeking to develop and introduce internships to ensure a consistent approach across UCD in systems, processes, and best practice.

As academic internships grow at UCD and employers become more diverse in recruiting across disciplines, one of the challenges the university faces is how best to minimise the number of touch points employers have when recruiting across disciplines.

MAKING LINKS: COLLEGES, SCHOOLS, AND SUPPORTS

The breadth of UCD's strategic landscape is perhaps indicative of a pan-institutional commitment to students' career development and employability being shared across UCD faculty, professional staff, and those offering opportunities for students to engage in volunteering, clubs, societies, sports, international experiences, and work-related activities.

The Career Development Centre has been expanded and now has eight professional career development practitioners.

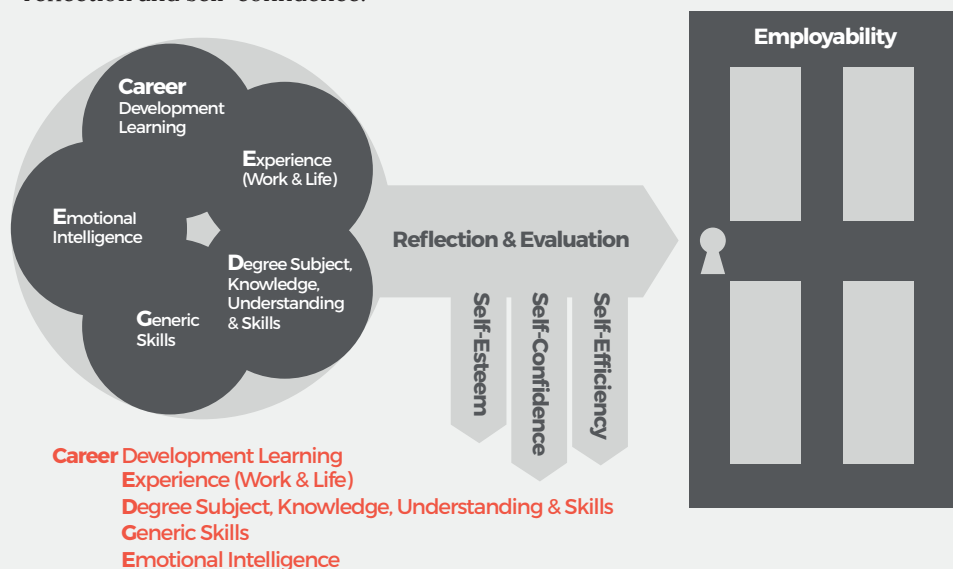
The university is also developing a life-span approach to students' career development and employability, evidenced by recent changes in resourcing such support. The Career Development Centre has been expanded and now has eight professional career development practitioners: six college-facing career and skills consultants, and two specialist posts for graduate research students and postdoctoral researchers.

Student engagement can now be planned and delivered from the first year of an undergraduate programme through to the final year of a PhD or beyond into engagement with early-stage researchers. Development of the team and inclusion of two specialist positions supporting early-stage researchers exemplify UCD's global position as a research-intensive university, contributing to objective 7 of the UCD Strategy 2015–2020, which is to 'develop and strengthen our university community'.

Adding value to the student experience is central to the mission of the Career Development Centre, which plays a key and clearly defined role in supporting the university in the career development and employability of students and early-stage researchers. The Centre seeks to offer a range of initiatives, including credit-bearing modules and not-for-credit programmes of personal and professional development, industry immersion events (such as week-long interactive study visits), and bespoke provision at school and college level.

The Centre is cognisant of current and emerging research in its areas of professional practice. It considered various models of career development and employability before situating its work in CareerEDGE, a theoretical, peer-reviewed model of employability. Adopting the CareerEDGE: Key to Employability model (see image, from Dacre-Pool and Sewell, 2007,

p.281) has provided an evidence base for situating work undertaken in the wider personal and professional development arena and not only in supporting students' job search and transition into work or graduate study. CareerEDGE has helped link career and professional development to academic disciplines, to the broader context of student learning from work and life, and in developing higher-order critical thinking skills such as reflection and self-confidence.



A metaphorical model of employability

Partnering with faculty in colleges and schools has developed organically to meet the needs of students, faculty, and staff. Introduction of career liaison academics roles in the College of Science, some schools in the College of Engineering and Architecture, and at the UCD Sutherland School of Law has been a catalyst for programmes in career development and employability. Career liaison academics may act as a conduit between the Centre and the School. They can review the work of the Career Development Centre through the lens of the School and identify specific student needs. A plan can then be developed to meet these needs and actively encourage students to engage.

This approach has had success. For example, during the 2017/18 academic year, career and skills consultants delivered 158 career development workshops and interventions across UCD colleges, attended by 6,026 students. Of these 158 bespoke interventions, 86 workshops attended by 3,529 students were delivered in the College of Science and the College of Engineering and Architecture, where career liaison academics exist. The career liaison academic network has helped bring key messages to students and staff and to build bespoke, informed interventions.

In addition to college- and school-based interventions, during 2017/18 career and skills consultants delivered 2,792 one-to-one career consultations. In the Career Development Centre's experience, embedding programmes into the curriculum in the form of group work tends to generate demand from students for more one-to-one consultations. Combining interactive

group work with one-to-one consultations has been effective in engaging students in career and professional development.

Career and skills consultants also delivered credit-bearing modules and part-modules:

Full modules:

- Career Development in Psychology
- Career Development for Arts and Humanities (new 2018/19)
- Prepare for your Future Career (Science).

Part-modules:

- Legal and Professional Skills (Law)
- Creativity in Design (Engineering)
- Innovative Leadership (Engineering)
- Human Learning (Education, new 2018/19)
- Internships: Work Experience and Career Development (Education)
- Professional Career Development (Science: Biotechnology)
- Professional Career Development (Science: Biological Systems & Regulatory Affairs and Toxicology)
- Economic Sociology (Economics)
- Entrepreneurship and Plant Biology (Science)
- Social Work Theories and Methods (Social Sciences)
- Internships in Social Sciences (new 2018/19).

During 2017/18 career and skills consultants delivered 2,792 one-to-one career consultations.

MAKING LINKS: THE CO-CURRICULUM

The Education Strategy 2015–2020: Our Students' Education and Experience refers to giving students opportunities to develop through co-curricular activities. UCD has over 100 clubs, societies, and sports to choose from. It encourages contribution to the community through volunteering locally, nationally, and internationally, and participation in Erasmus and Study Abroad semesters and year-long placements. Students are involved in many other activities, such as being a campus ambassador, peer

mentor, or access leader. All are important in the student life cycle, and all give students excellent developmental opportunities.

The Education Strategy helped frame work that was undertaken in 2016/17 to develop non-credit-bearing awards of the university to recognise the development of students' skills, attitudes, competencies, and qualities through engagement in co-curricular activities. Two awards were introduced and are currently being piloted. They are administered and managed by the Career Development Centre on behalf of the university, and they allow students to submit the learning and development from co-curricular engagement for an award of the university. The awards are:

- Embark: developed as an engagement award targeted at first-year students to help them adjust to university life, get involved, and start their own personal and professional journey.

- Advantage: a more significant award requiring students to engage across a broader range of activity, with more significant reflection required by the student.

Both awards focus on themes central to the UCD Strategy 2015–2020: they enhance the educational experience, strengthen our university community, and help attract and retain an excellent and diverse cohort of students. The awards may be achieved through evidence of engagement and assessment of a reflective account that must demonstrate:

- personal and professional development
- engagement with UCD and the wider community
- cultural engagement
- health and well-being.

The awards proved popular with students in the first year of the pilot and are anticipated to grow further in the 2018/19 academic year.

In addition to Embark and Advantage, UCD Career Development Centre and UCD Alumni Relations continue to enhance a Career Development Mentoring Programme, linking students from the College of Arts and Humanities and the College of Social Sciences and Law with alumni from their discipline and related areas. Learning outcomes focus on developing occupational awareness and labour market intelligence through networking and mentorship, developing employability skills, and enabling students who may be undecided about their career to imagine themselves in a graduate career linked to their discipline. The most recent programme of alumni mentoring concluded with a completion rate more than double that of the previous year.

Engaging students in project planning, delivery, and evaluation provides an important learning opportunity.

A leading success factor at UCD in the area of career development and employability has been the ability to leverage expertise available across UCD: career development and employability are seen as a shared responsibility. Supporting students in their own development and also the faculty and staff is important. Staff–student projects that enhance the UCD environment and community or contribute to the wider community may receive set-up funding under the Supporting Partnership and Recognizing Change (SPARC) programme. Engaging students in project planning, delivery, and evaluation provides an important learning opportunity. Since projects are organised in the context of social entrepreneurship, they have contributed significantly to students, staff, and communities.

Other co-curricular programmes include career development study visits that immerse students in the workplace for a period, and undertaking business games and case studies to help apply academic learning to the workplace, make connections, and secure internship and graduate jobs. Co-curricular engagement goes right across the university, giving students opportunities to follow their interests, hobbies, dreams, and aspirations. Students may use this to show the significant career development outcomes from all disciplines – not just those with an explicit link to the workplace.

MAKING LINKS: CAREER COACHING, CAREER DEVELOPMENT, AND EMPLOYABILITY

This article illustrates initiatives and benefits from embedding career development and employability in the curriculum. This can be either for credit or not; what is important is the recognition of a co-curricular track to the curriculum that sits in parallel to the academic experience. Embedding career development and employability in the student experience does not reduce demand for centralised career supports such as career advisory consultations – indeed, it has increased such demand. Many students still want to talk through what their experiences in the classroom or co-curricular engagement meant for them and their future.

As an approach to students' career development, embedding it in the educational experience is therefore a strategic decision to maximise the student experience, and not a resource-saving exercise. While a member of staff may work with more students in a one-hour class than they could on a one-to-one basis in the same time, the process of engaging students in personal and professional development leads to further exploration and service demand.

There is little doubt that delivering career development and employability through partnership with the curriculum works better than stand-alone offerings. Embedding increases student engagement and faculty buy-in to the importance of career development and employability. It allows employers to be more meaningfully engaged in student development. It leads career interventions to be better tailored to module and programme outcomes – and better connected to students, who now expect a more personalised experience than previous generations did. At UCD, the growth of curricular and co-curricular engagement is set to increase and to have a positive impact on the student experience right across the curriculum.

We know now that a qualification in itself is unlikely to lead to personal and professional success.

MAKING LINKS: STUDENTS AND ENTERPRISE

UCD is well connected to professional bodies and employers locally, nationally, and internationally. In particular, engagement with employers is designed to have an impact on knowledge and learning, student development and progression, and the significant contribution made by UCD to local, national, and international communities. At a university the size of UCD, there are many ways that the university, faculty, and staff engage with employers as the educational experience is developed and delivered. Broadly, however, engagement falls under three headings:

- research and development
- talent development
- corporate social responsibility.

We have noted the importance of internships (talent development) to career development, curriculum enhancement, and meeting the economic needs of employers. Many opportunities are created for industry and enterprise to meet future employees. There is still however a demand from employers and students for large-scale, recruitment-targeted events, and the Career Development Centre is actively involved in delivering these.

In 2017/18, for example, the Centre delivered four large recruitment fairs covering business, finance, management, law, science, engineering, technology, and internships. The fairs were attended by 192 national and international graduate recruiters and 4,438 UCD students. A further 89 employer-led presentations and workshops were delivered on campus between September 2017 and April 2018, attended by 1,693 students.

Students' journey through higher education rightly has acquisition of knowledge and qualifications at its core. But we know now that a qualification in itself is unlikely to lead to personal and professional success. Unpacking the wider higher education experience, bringing it to students' attention, and engaging them actively in education and studentship are what works well in preparing global leaders. This is not only about helping students achieve job success or secure a place on a graduate programme. It is not only about meeting employers' talent needs. What we want to achieve is the flourishing of graduates who will lead the sociopolitical and economic global climate.

Automation and artificial intelligence mean that some jobs will reduce or disappear altogether while others, not yet created, will emerge. To prepare students for an uncertain and continuously changing career landscape, institutional approaches to their career development and employability should avoid any temptation or pressure to train students for work but should take every opportunity to educate students to adapt, manage, and influence the world of work as it unfolds throughout their lives.

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COMPUTATIONAL FLUENCY FOR OUR FUTURE

Steps being taken at Schools of Education

An important factor of globalisation has been computerisation and related technological developments. Just as the printing press enabled the spread of reading and writing, so computing and computers help to spread computational thinking (Wing, 2006). The educational benefit of being able to think computationally is unquestionable: the use of abstraction, for example, to enhance and reinforce other intellectual skills, and which can be transferred to any knowledge domain. Science, society, and the economy will benefit from the discoveries and innovations produced by a workforce trained to think computationally.

Computational thinking, or computational fluency as it is sometimes referred to, is a universally applicable attitude and skill set that every citizen should be eager to learn and ready to use. Computational thinking is a fundamental skill for everyone to acquire: as Wing (2014) wrote, 'to reading, writing, and arithmetic, we should add computational thinking to everyone's analytical ability'. Further, it is expected that many more disciplines – such as biology, finance, and education – will make scholarly advances through the use of computing (Yadav et al., 2017).

As educators in Ireland, it is therefore important to consider that in trying to secure meaningful employment in the twenty-first-century workplace, much will depend on how effective people prove to be in working with and understanding intelligent machines. Computational fluency is the underlying problem-solving process that drives Computer Science and connects it to every other domain.

Computer Science is the discipline that makes the use of computers possible, thus driving innovation in nearly every sector and industry. It is the study of computers and algorithmic processes, including principles, design, applications (both hardware and software), and their impact on society. By introducing Computer Science at senior cycle at post primary level, the Department of Education and Skills is addressing a contemporary educational necessity, helping to ensure that learners develop new ways of thinking, creating, and problem-solving. The twenty-first-century competencies are not just of value to our future workforce: they are also necessary for the changing nature of work, study, and society.

The launch of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) Computer Science specification at the beginning of 2018 was a landmark development in Irish education, the first time that Computer Science will be an examinable subject at upper-second level in post-primary schools. Along with the two highly innovative

junior cycle short courses (100 hours each) in Coding and Digital Media Literacy, which were introduced as part of the systemic reform of junior cycle in Irish schools, the introduction of Computer Science at senior cycle is visionary. The Computer Science senior cycle specification is currently being piloted in a select number of schools nationally, and the first cohort of students will sit the Computer Science Leaving Certificate exam in June 2020.

Many higher education institutions (HEIs) are developing initial teacher education (ITE) programmes for the new subject, among them NUI Galway. NUI Galway has a BA Education (Computer Science and Mathematical Studies) programme starting in September 2019 to recognise and harness the close conceptual relationship between Computer Science and Mathematics. This four-year concurrent ITE programme will prepare for the future need for highly educated and suitably qualified Computer Science teachers, who can only be enhanced in their capacity to teach Computer Science by having Mathematics in its broadest sense as their second subject.

The programme design builds on the successful Google-funded project at the School of Education, 'C24M2: Creative Coding for Maths Makers'. That project and series of workshops facilitated and promoted the integration of mathematics and computer science. Through engagement in the workshops, participants (both pre-service teachers and schoolchildren) developed an understanding of the design of innovative mathematical concepts using coding interfaces, then rendered their virtual models physically in the university MakerSpace.

The MakerSpace in the James Hardiman Library at NUI Galway is the only facility of its kind in an Irish university. Purposefully designed to facilitate engaged teaching and learning, the MakerSpace fosters a culture of creativity and innovation and gives students access to knowledge and technologies – such as 3D printing, which can otherwise be prohibitively expensive. Such exposure and experience are of immense value to pre-service teachers replicating innovation in STEM and industry.

From the first computer program developed by Ada Lovelace in the 1840s to the innovative ideas uncovered by Seymour Papert (Papert, 1980), computing and computational thinking have dramatically shifted our learning and way of life. The creativity and problem-solving incorporated in the senior cycle Computer Science specification should be recognised not only as the necessary skills for employment, but also as highlighting the relationship that computational fluency has with creativity, design, and development, which are of immense importance to twenty-first-century competencies across all domains.

In trying to secure meaningful employment in the twenty-first century workplace, much will depend on how effective people prove to be in working with and understanding intelligent machines.

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NUI GALWAY HOSTS INTERNATIONAL ISDDE CONFERENCE

The 2018 International Society for Design and Development in Education (ISDDE) conference was hosted by NUI Galway School of Education. This was the first time the conference was held in Ireland.

ISDDE was formed in 2005 with the goal of improving educational design around the world. Educational design is a general term used to cover both curriculum design and learning design processes.

The theme of the 2018 conference was 'Culture and Educational Design', reflecting the importance of the broader social, cultural and physical environs in the participatory and principled design of educational innovations and technologies.

Organised and chaired by Dr Tony Hall, Dr Cornelia Connolly, Dr Éilis Flanagan and Jim Lenaghan of NUI Galway School of Education, the four-day conference hosted delegates from across the globe, including the US, Australia and Europe.



Chairs of ISSDE Conference 2018, hosted by the School of Education, NUI Galway: **Dr Tony Hall, Dr Cornelia Connolly, Dr Éilis Flanagan-Monahan, Mr Jim Lenaghan.**

During the conference, two NUI Galway staff members were elected Fellows of the Society: Dr Éilis Flanagan and Dr Cornelia Connolly. NUI Galway staff member Dr Tony Hall has been a Fellow of ISDDE since 2016.

UCD STUDENT ADVISERS

A Unique Model of Student Support



Professor Jason Last,

UCD Dean of Students

**Dr Niamh Nestor,
Catriona Keane,
Jacqueline Levine,
Aisling O'Grady,
Kathleen Kiely,
Colum Cronin,**

UCD Student Advisers
Communications
Working Group

The mission statement of the UCD Strategy 2015–2020 describes the provision of a 'supportive community in which every member of the University is enabled to achieve their full potential' (UCD, 2015). Our strategy places the student at the core of our university, and points to the holistic education our students receive, 'instilling in them a desire to learn and create, to question and reason, to innovate and to contribute to society at all levels' (UCD, 2015b).

As our students progress through their programmes and research, we acknowledge they will face significant challenges, and some may need support. We recognise that across the higher education sector, nationally and internationally, stressors are rising and supports need to flex, grow, and adapt (Grant-Vallone et al., 2004; Robotham and Julian, 2006; Robotham, 2008). At the same time, student numbers are growing (HEA, 2018) and educational experiences are progressively digital, with many interactions occurring not between individuals but through an electronic interface (Concannon et al., 2005; Hiltz and Turoff, 2005; Jones and Shao, 2011; HEA, 2012; O'Donnell and Sharp, 2012).

These factors can make for a depersonalised experience. At UCD, we are meeting students' support needs through our academic community, programme administrators, maths and writing support centres, Access and Lifelong Learning team, careers centre, registry teams, health and counselling teams, chaplains, collaboration with the Students' Union, and a university-wide peer mentoring programme. We have also developed a team of student advisers located individually alongside programme areas but who also work together, joining with the university's many other supports. Here we describe the development of this unique model.

Individual level	Programme level	University level
<p>Any issues from practical to the more serious and confidential in nature:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Advice and support - Social, emotional, personal and/or financial - Listening, referral, advocacy - Advisers attached to each programme 	<p>Facilitating a positive learning environment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Peer Mentoring - Staff/Student Liaison Committees - Advise on student support strategy - Co-manage complex cases - Representation at programme and exam boards 	<p>Promoting student engagement, retention & student experience:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Representation on Committees - Student Financial Aid - Orientation - Consultation on Policy development



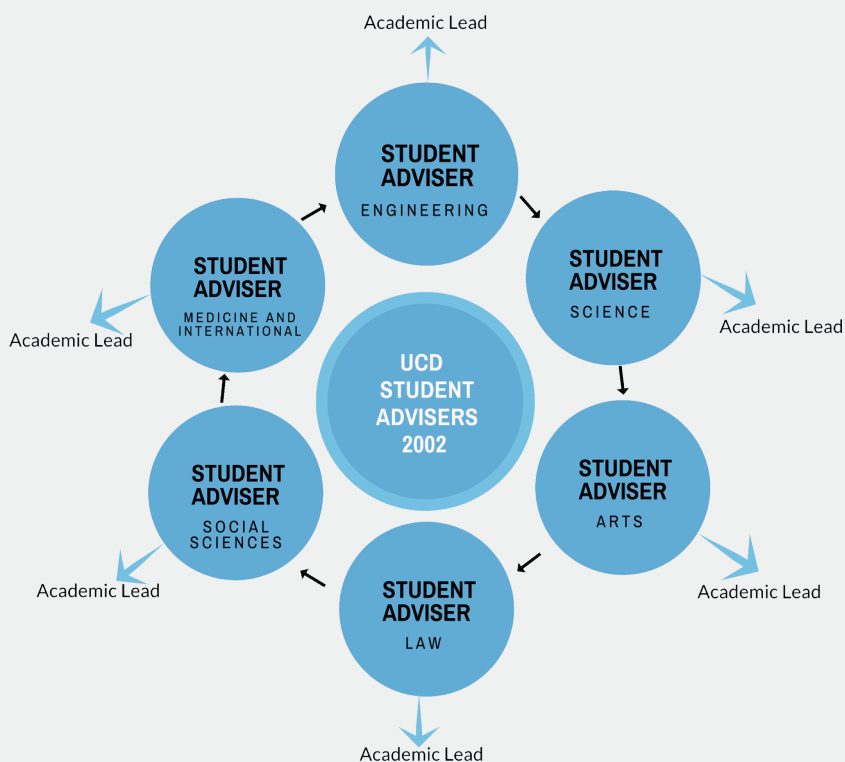
CONTEXT AND HISTORY OF THE UCD STUDENT ADVISORY SERVICE

The role of student adviser was established in 2001 by the then registrar, Dr Caroline Hussey, who had identified a gap in the student support structure at UCD. Whereas students who had academic concerns could speak to their lecturers, and those with personal or health concerns could speak to a health professional, there was little opportunity for students to speak to someone in their own programme about how their studies were being affected by other aspects of their lives.

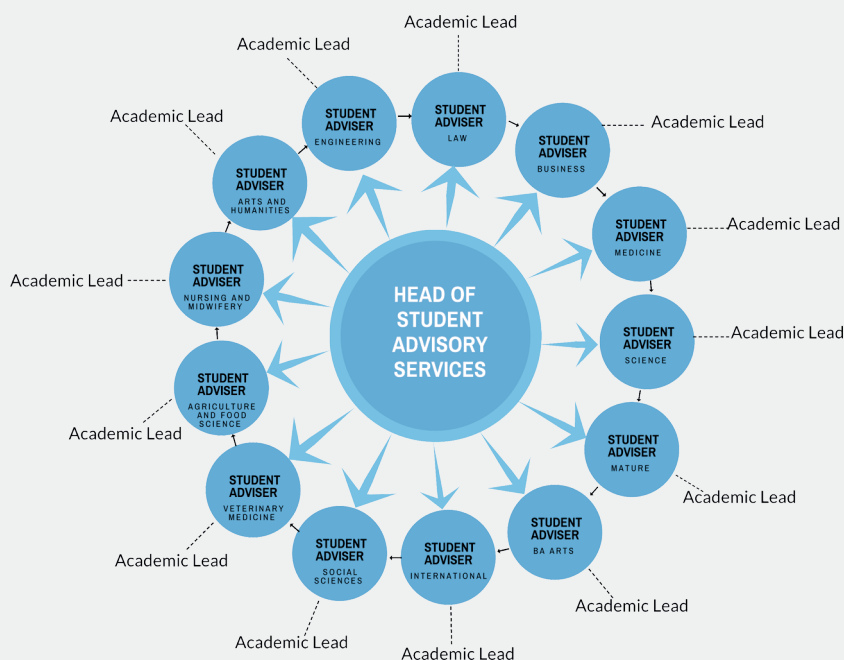
The principle underpinning the creation of the UCD Student Advisory Service was the belief that our students needed to be supported as people.

The principle underpinning the creation of the UCD Student Advisory Service ('the Service') was the belief that our students needed to be supported as people, and that this could be achieved most effectively at a local level, where programme-based knowledge could be combined with personal support in a way that ensured every student was given the best opportunity to succeed.

Student advisers became embedded in the wider support structures of the university and began to work closely with these to provide cohesive and seamless support for all students. This innovative approach meant that students now had someone who could not only give them a space to articulate their concerns but could also work with faculty and staff to ensure their issues were given appropriate practical consideration at programme level. Students easily identified their student adviser as part



of their programme but also knew their conversations were confidential, absolutely insulated from their academic record.



UCD student advisory service model

A CENTRALISED AND DISTRIBUTED MODEL

The Service has grown over the past sixteen years, from an initial group of six to a team of fourteen. In 2016, it was restructured from a decentralised to a hub-and-spoke model. There are now eleven programme-based student advisers, two student advisers who support specific cohorts (international students and mature students), and a manager. This model allows the service to benefit from key aspects of centralisation, such as cohesiveness of strategy and provision of training, while maintaining individuation in delivery. In this way, student advisers provide strategic input to student support and its evolution in UCD while simultaneously remaining embedded in programmes, ensuring targeted support for students' specific needs.

In the 2017/18 academic year, the student advisers recorded contacts with over 12,000 students, in contexts defined by the students themselves.

VALUES

The key values of the Service are integrity, fairness, and commitment, underpinned by respect. Student advisers have a significant and positive impact on students' educational experience and are often the first port of call when students need support, leadership, knowledge, and direction to help them complete their programme successfully and enjoyably.

Student advisers support students in identifying and achieving their academic goals by empowering them to manage the various life challenges they may encounter. They promote the integration of students into the

UCD community by identifying and addressing their personal and social development needs. Offering one-to-one support and acting as the interface to other UCD support services are key to the role.

Student advisers work closely with administrative and academic staff in programmes and across the university to ensure that students are supported in a way that minimises the impact of their circumstances on their academic performance. They foster a sense of belonging in the UCD community, encouraging student engagement and connection with their programme and with the UCD community.

IMPACT

In the 2017/18 academic year, the student advisers recorded contacts with over 12,000 students, in contexts defined by the students themselves. This is a unique and vital aspect of the Service: students drive the queries, set the context, and interact with this support in ways that meet their individual needs.



UCD registrar **Professor Mark Rogers**, with the 2017/18 recipients of a University Teaching and Learning Award, including **Dr Niamh Nestor**, student adviser in the UCD School of Veterinary Medicine, who won an award for Outstanding Contribution to Student Learning.

Student advisers use their unique insight to help formulate UCD policies and procedures, such as the UCD Extenuating Circumstances Policy, Mental Health Policy, Fitness to Continue in Study Policy, and Fitness to Practise Policy. They advise academic programme boards on issues affecting progression and retention in individual student cases. They have a key role in supporting and advocating for students during disciplinary or other UCD processes. They are regularly nominated by students for UCD Teaching and

Learning Awards, and in 2017/18 a member of the team received one for Outstanding Contribution to Student Learning.

KEY FUNCTIONS OF THE STUDENT ADVISERS

Support

A core function of the Service is to provide individual support to students. Student advisers help students navigate challenges, from day-to-day issues to more complex and serious concerns, including failed modules, academic non-progression, stress and well-being, bereavement, illness, financial distress, and family breakdown. They create a safe space for students to articulate and explore their concerns and begin to address them. Student advisers' in-depth knowledge of UCD policies and procedures enables them to respond to students' needs in the context presented.

A core function of the Service is to provide individual support to students.

Students can self-refer to a student adviser or be referred through a recommendation from staff. Student advisers work on the principle of accessibility and have an open-door policy, making themselves available to students who drop by or make an appointment.

Orientation

Managing the transition to higher-level education is a key determinant in the successful academic and social integration of students, and an important factor in student persistence (Tinto, 1975, 1993, 1998, 2002; Astin, 1993; Tinto et al., 2001; Tinto and Engstrom, 2003; Wilcox et al., 2006; National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, 2015). Student advisers play a vital role in organising and delivering orientation to first-year students, and they help manage, organise, deliver, and support orientation in each UCD undergraduate programme. They also work closely with the central orientation team to ensure that related activities run smoothly.



New UCD students enjoy some downtime with their peer mentors during orientation

Peer mentoring

UCD student advisers help to manage and run the UCD Peer Mentoring Programme, which was initiated by three student advisers in 2006/07. The pilot programme, with 25 peer mentors and 250 mentees, was coordinated and managed by student advisers, and peer mentors were drawn from a pool of more senior students who each mentored a group of incoming first years. After a very positive evaluation, the programme was rolled out to all incoming undergraduates, each of whom is allocated a peer mentor from their academic programme.

The main aim of UCD Peer Mentoring Programme is to support new students' successful transition to university life.

The main aim of the programme is to support new students' successful transition to university life. It has been refined since its inception and now has a well-developed philosophy consistent with best practice. Peer mentors share their experiences, insights, and challenges of being a student and also offer guidance, practical support, advice, and referral information about UCD support services.

Tinto (2002) notes that the more involved a student is in the academic and social aspects of their university experience, the more likely they are to graduate; succinctly put, 'involvement matters' (Tinto, 2002, p.3). The peer mentors support this by fostering a sense of belonging and community for the new students, helping strong friendships to develop, and supporting the new students as they transition to life at UCD. Through this informal network, routine problems experienced by first-year undergraduate students are identified and addressed in a timely manner.



UCD peer mentors during their training course before they meet their mentees during orientation

Student advisers and financial support

Financial difficulties can affect student persistence and general well-being (HEA, 2016). At UCD, students have access to financial supports, and student advisers can help students apply for these funds by helping them to prepare the paperwork and to write personal statements, and by writing letters of advocacy.

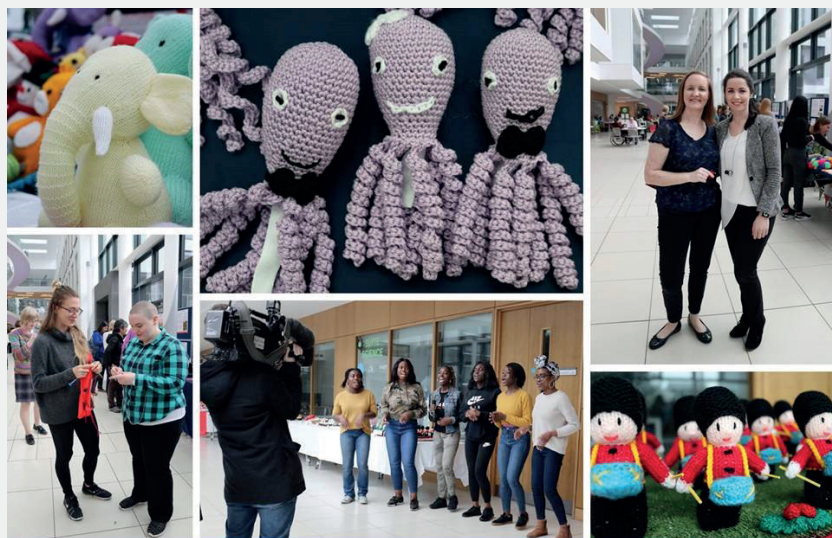
Student advisers' close involvement allows for other issues to be explored that may be affecting the student. Often, a student will present with financial issues but disclose related concerns affecting their lives and studies. This process guarantees a continuum of support across financial and personal issues.

Community engagement

The student advisers are involved in the more celebratory aspects of student life, such as student orientation and induction, awards, peer mentoring, conferring, and career advancement. The UCD Education Strategy 2015–2020: Our Students' Education and Experience (UCD, 2015a) underlines the importance of students becoming members of societies and clubs and engaging in socially integrative activities. This is important to the student experience in terms of successful transition to university life, the formation of friendships, and ultimately student retention.

Student advisers have been involved in initiatives aimed at fostering community engagement and a sense of belonging; for example, the building and developing of UCD Purl Jam, a craft/creative community established by two student advisers in September 2017. It brings staff and students together and produces multiple hand-crafted items for donation to charity. Other key projects include collaboration with the HSE to bring their #LittleThings mental health campaign to UCD, a monthly PhD meet-up, and a walk-and-talk initiative to encourage staff and students to connect with and benefit from nature. These activities encourage staff–student interaction and enhance outreach with the broader community.

**Student advisers
have been involved
in initiatives aimed at
fostering community
engagement and a
sense of belonging.**



UCD Purl Jam Craft and Design Exhibition flyer

STUDENT ADVISERS AS A PROFESSIONAL GROUP

Continuing Professional Development

Since the Service has become a hub-and-spoke model, a framework of professional development has been identified. All UCD student advisers receive training in applied suicide-intervention skills, child protection, and solution-focused brief therapy as part of their continuing professional development. They have also received training from the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre to guide students to the appropriate services after a sexual assault.

Student advisers are given the opportunity to avail of external supervision on a monthly basis. This is supportive in terms of discussing student cases, deepening understanding of students' needs, and determining how best to respond. Supervision is also part of self-care for student advisers as a preventative measure against burnout.

A monthly 'Lunch and Learn' event brings the student advisers together to share and discuss relevant information, best practice, and research.



International NACADA Conference at UCD, 2018. From left: **Professor Jason Last**, Dean of Students, UCD; **Dr Debbie Mercer**, Dean of the College of Education, Kansas State University; **Professor Andrew Deeks**, President, UCD; **Dr Colleen Doyle**, Student Adviser, UCD; **Amy Sannes**, NACADA; and **Dr Charlie Nutt**, Executive Director, NACADA.

Communications

A student adviser communications working group acts to ensure that key messages about the Service are delivered to students at appropriate times, using social media, instant chat through the student adviser website, traditional media (including UCD student newspapers), health and well-being campaigns, and exam-support campaigns. The use and repetition across all communications of a clear, concise message – 'Remember that your Student Adviser

is available for advice and support' – means that students know who they can turn to.

Research

Research is an ongoing and important aspect of the role. The student adviser research working group has three main functions: to evaluate the work of the Service, to conduct research in student support, and to regularly host 'Lunch and Learn' events to share best practice within the team.

An important part of the advisers' work is to evaluate their practice for its impact on students, and how this practice can be improved. They engage in ongoing research and disseminate the findings to the wider national and international student-support community through attendance

and participation at conferences, including Student Affairs Ireland (SAI; formally the Confederation of Student Services in Ireland (CSSI)), European First Year Experience (EFYE), Association of Managers of Student Services in Higher Education (AMOSSHE), and the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA).

This year, over 300 delegates from around the world attended the NACADA International Conference hosted in UCD by UCD student advisers. NACADA is a global community for academic advising based at Kansas State University. Topics covered included student academic support, student retention, supporting under-represented students in higher education, using peer supports, and first-year student seminars.

Finally, a monthly 'Lunch and Learn' event brings the student advisers together to share and discuss relevant information, best practice, and research.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF THE UCD STUDENT ADVISORY SERVICE

The central and unique importance of the Service has long been recognised by UCD students, faculty, and staff. UCD president Professor Andrew Deeks and UCD registrar Professor Mark Rogers have committed to continued growth of the Service over the next three years, in parallel with increased investment in the UCD counselling service. This will help ensure the Service remains relevant and flexible in the face of students' changing and complex needs, increasing student numbers, the growing diversity of the student body, and the continued societal challenges that face the student community at UCD.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks for their contribution to Dr Colleen Blaney Doyle, Nadia Clarkin, and Kieran Moloney. Our thanks also go to Carl Lusby, Ronan Murphy, Naoimh O'Regan, Anna Scully, and Catherine Tormey.

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RESEARCH



Dr Paola Rivetti (DCU), Irish Research Council
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ENGAGED RESEARCH

From the margins to the mainstream

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Kate Morris, Sarah Bowman

Engaged research involves collaborative, community engagement with those most affected by the research. Capacity for engaged research is being strengthened by Campus Engage, a national initiative based in the Irish Universities Association. It has established high-level recommendations for higher education institutions, policy-makers, and research funding organisations to promote excellence in engaged research.



TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITIES AND THE RESEARCH ECOSYSTEM

Supporting research, innovation, and engagement in Ireland's new universities

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Jennifer Brennan

Ireland's first technological university will be established in early 2019. These new universities are poised to embark on the challenge of growing, broadening, and deepening their research, development, innovation, and engagement activities. But how will the national research and innovation ecosystem evolve to support them?



GENDER MATTERS

Creating our future

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Caitriona Creely

The challenges of achieving gender equality in research and higher education are now in sharp focus. Research funders in Ireland are committed to a long-term, sustained effort to achieve this objective, and are effecting change. Much more remains to be done to create future equality.



NURTURING OUR KNOWLEDGE BASE FOR FUTURE INNOVATION

Informed curiosity and the pursuit of new ideas

Felicity Kelliher

This paper debates our capacity as educators to help students hone their knowledge to develop original and sometimes controversial ideas in pursuit of innovation. It chronicles the journey from curiosity to the search for data, leading to clarity and meaning on the road to innovation.

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THE NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR DOCTORAL EDUCATION

Anchor and launch pad for graduate education

Máire Leane

To operate as a living document, the National Framework for Doctoral Education must remain agile and effective. If informed by a robust evidence base and guided by ongoing engagement with key stakeholders, it can constructively address tensions created by policy and funding trajectories and the increased framing of doctoral education as a key interface between the academy and the marketplace.

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Peter Brown
Director, Irish
Research Council

OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH IN 2018

I am delighted to introduce the research chapter for Education Matters' Yearbook of Education this year. 2018 has been a year of continuing change and evolution in Irish research and innovation, and this chapter will tease out some of the issues that are a particular focus for the research community and policymakers.

FROM FRONTIER RESEARCH TO INNOVATION

A milestone in the research funding landscape occurred this year with the allocation of the first tranche of awards under the Irish Research Council Laureate programme for frontier basic research. A key strategic action under Innovation 2020, and funded by the Department of Education and Skills, the programme was established in recognition of the scarcity of opportunities to secure individual awards for frontier research across all disciplines.

Thirty-six 'Starting' and 'Consolidator' awards were made across Life Sciences, Physical Sciences and Engineering, and Social Sciences and Humanities, representing an investment of just under €18m. The adjudication of the expert panels that a further thirty-one proposals were entirely worthy of funding indicates the wealth of research talent in the Irish system, and emphasises the need for the Laureate awards to be embedded in the research funding landscape for the long term.

The Council is currently evaluating proposals for the 'Advanced' grant strand of the Laureate awards, and the result of this competition will be announced in early 2019. At a meeting of research agencies in Dublin in November 2018 with Jean-Eric Paquet, director-general for research and innovation in the European Commission, it was very encouraging to hear him describe the Laureate awards as a 'remarkable programme' and one that he hopes is replicated throughout Europe.

It is something of a cliché, but critical nonetheless, that the innovations of tomorrow depend on the basic research of today. This is a theme taken up by Council member Dr Felicity Kelleher of Waterford Institute of Technology in this section of the Yearbook. Without a vibrant ecosystem for frontier basic research, including individual awards across all career stages and disciplines, we will shrink the base on which innovation, and Ireland's ambition to be an innovation leader, depends.

Investing in frontier basic research also builds strong foundations for world-class international collaborations and funding success in prestigious awards such as the European Research Council's.

Perhaps most importantly of all, a vibrant environment for frontier basic research cultivates the knowledge, expertise, and skills that will be critical to addressing the daunting global challenges of climate action, sustainability, food production, and ageing, among others.

ENGAGING WITH THE CHALLENGES OF TODAY AND TOMORROW

The research and innovation system clearly has a massive role to play in meeting national and societal challenges. The Council is building strong links between the research community and policymakers on the forefront of decision-making in these areas. Ireland 2040, the country's blueprint for development for the next twenty years, sets out ten national strategic outcomes (NSOs) on which achievement of the overarching goals of Ireland 2040 will depend. Globally, achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) grows in urgency, while Europe is developing a framework of challenge themes and missions that will underpin Horizon Europe (FP9).

From a Council perspective, the need for excellent researchers to work with policymakers and practitioners to address challenges is more important than ever, and we must think in these terms in how we approach the development of early-career researchers also. The Council was delighted this year to launch COALESCE, Collaborative Alliances for Societal Challenges, bringing together previous schemes into a new framework that has Ireland 2040 NSOs and the UN SDGs at its core.

We are particularly delighted to have formed an exciting partnership with Irish Aid, who will fund research projects addressing their remit over the coming years, through COALESCE. Engaged research, in which academic and non-academic stakeholders learn from each other and work effectively together, is key to impact. Kate Morris and Sarah Bowman of Campus Engage contribute to this theme later in the chapter.

The Council has published a statement on STEAM research and how it will support this area over the coming years.

INTERDISCIPLINARITY

Successfully meeting national and global challenges will require an increasing emphasis on interdisciplinarity. The Irish Research Council, funding as it does across all disciplines, is uniquely well placed to encourage this form of collaboration. We have taken steps this year to enhance opportunities for diverse disciplines to come together and co-create new ideas and project proposals.

The Council's popular New Foundations programme has a STEAM science communication strand. The Council has published a statement on STEAM research and how it will support this area over the coming years. Finally, the Council has issued a Call (Creative Connections) inviting consortia of institutions to make proposals for interdisciplinary workshops. Successful proposals will drive new momentum in interdisciplinary co-creation, regionally and nationally, and will build on the first Creative Connections call in 2016.

OF PARTICULAR NOTE IN 2018

There were many developments of note during a busy year for research and innovation. Mary Mitchell O' Connor TD, the Minister of State for

Higher Education, was at the forefront of two in particular. First was the announcement of Ireland's first technological university (TU), after TU legislation was passed. TU Dublin will be launched next year, and with the consolidation of institutes, more TUs will follow. Developing research and innovation intensity will be at the heart of the TU sector; Dr Jennifer Brennan, director of research and innovation in the Technological Higher Education Association, addresses this challenge in her article.

A second key event this year was the publication of the report of the Taskforce on Gender Equality in Higher Education. Research funders have a strong role to play in supporting gender equality, and the taskforce report and recommendations were jointly welcomed by the Council, Science Foundation Ireland (SFI), and the Health Research Board (HRB). How research funders promote gender equality is discussed in this chapter by Dr Caitriona Creely of the HRB.

Another significant development this year was the triggering of 'Plan S' by a group of national and European research funders, in furtherance of open access to research. Signatories include SFI and UK Research and Innovation. The plan has sharpened focus on how Europe ensures that publicly funded research is openly accessible, supporting the optimal circulation of research results and knowledge. The Council strongly supports the objectives of Plan S and is currently reviewing its implications for all disciplines. The Council is also actively contributing to the work of the National Open Research Forum (NORF).

Research funders have a strong role to play in supporting gender equality.

R&I CHALLENGES LOOKING FORWARD

The remaining articles in this chapter address themes of enormous strategic importance for Irish research and innovation moving forward: the impact agenda, research infrastructures, and doctoral education. Excellent contributions have been made on these topics in the research chapter of the Yearbook this year.

Evaluating research impact is the topic of discussion of Dr Eavan O'Brien, assistant director (impact and partnerships) in the Irish Research Council. She contextualises research impact, explores impact classifications, and considers some challenges ahead. Undoubtedly, research impact is a matter of increasing importance both in Ireland and internationally. From a Council perspective, reflecting the broad range of impacts arising from our funded research is a priority. This includes recognising that tangible, game-changing impacts often arise along a continuum that starts with basic research.

Dr Sinead Riordan and Dr Jennifer Kenneally of the Royal Irish Academy discuss research infrastructure in Ireland and bring the fruits of the Academy's recent work in this area to bear. Future development and replenishment of research infrastructures will need to balance different considerations. These include supporting all disciplines to future-proof the broad research base, ensuring both early impact and sustainability for the long term, and achieving a balance between particular strategic infrastructures and more general underpinning infrastructure.

Finally, Dr Máire Leane of UCC discusses how the challenges for doctoral training can be explored and managed through the National Framework for Doctoral Education. As the national funder of individual postgraduate scholarships for excellent research across all disciplines, the Council is heavily invested in the development of early career researchers for both academic and non-academic careers. In her analysis, Maire notes that the establishment of the National Advisory Forum for the National Framework, jointly chaired by the HEA and QQI, provides a mechanism to guide the further development of doctoral education and training in an inclusive manner.

In conclusion, it has been a year of continuing development in Irish research and innovation, and the topics in this chapter draw out several of the salient issues. I am delighted to introduce this chapter and wish to sincerely thank each of the authors for their excellent contributions. The Irish Research Council is very pleased to be associated with the Education Matters Yearbook again this year and looks forward to many more editions in the future.

World's Most Highly Cited Researchers

Clarivate Analytics has ranked five academics at NUI Galway in the top 1% of the world's most highly cited researchers: Prof Henry Curran, Prof Colin O'Dowd, Prof Donal O'Regan, Prof William Wijns, and Dr Derek Morris.

The *Clarivate Analytics* list of Highly Cited Researchers for 2018 identifies scientists and social scientists who have demonstrated significant influence through publication of multiple highly cited papers during the last decade. Researchers are selected for their exceptional performance in one or more of 21 fields (those used in Essential Science Indicators (ESI)) or across several fields.

The 2018 Highly Cited Researchers list can be viewed at www.clarivate.com



I-r: Professor Donal O'Regan, Professor Colin O'Dowd, Professor Henry Curran and Dr Derek Morris from NUI Galway. front: Professor William Wijns

Photo: Aengus McMahon



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EVALUATING RESEARCH IMPACT

Context, classification, challenges

Evaluation of research impact is increasingly important, both in Ireland and internationally. This was clearly stated by Carlos Moedas, European Commissioner for Research, Science and Innovation, in a speech in October 2016:

I hope that in the next Framework Programme we can have a more sophisticated approach to this issue of impact. [...] We have an obligation and an incentive to be much better at understanding and communicating the impact of what we do. Not only to ministers of finance, but to the general public!

In the UK, the increasing importance of impact can be clearly demonstrated: the Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2014 assigned the societal impact component a 20 per cent weighting; this increased to 25 per cent for REF 2021. There are myriad reasons to evaluate research impact. Paraphrasing Penfield et al. (2014, p. 22), the impact agenda matters because:

- It enables research-performing organisations and research funders to monitor and to manage the effects of their work.
- It acts as an important public accountability mechanism, which is vital where publicly funded research is concerned.
- It forms an important evidence-based case to government for sustained or enhanced research support and for optimal funding instruments.
- It enhances general understanding regarding the varied means and pathways through which the effects and benefits of research are realised and maximised.

This brief article will set impact in the current research context and consider it in light of the shift towards mission-oriented research. It will then discuss classification and evaluation systems, noting some challenges that face the impact agenda.

CONTEXTUALISING IMPACT

One of the effects of adopting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development on 25 September 2015, at the UN Summit on Sustainable Development, has been to underscore the global impact of research. As noted by the UNESCO Science Report, 'there can be no sustainable development without science' (2015, p.9); thus, research will play a key role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals of Agenda 2030. Further highlighting the link between research and the achievement of global goals, Horizon Europe will include a number of missions that specifically target global challenges. Logically, as Arnold and Giarracca (2012) note, mission-oriented research tends to be evaluated in terms of its impacts.

The proliferation of mission-oriented research shows the interrelationship between basic and applied research. Researcher-initiated, curiosity-driven research is often described with terms such as ‘fundamental’, ‘frontier’, or ‘basic’. While it is not directly or immediately oriented towards practical applications, these may result indirectly from the discovery of new knowledge and fresh approaches. This constitutes a long-term economic investment, with basic research as the prerequisite for any scientific breakthrough (UNESCO, 2015, pp.9–10).

This bolsters the argument that basic and applied research are two sides of the same coin: interconnected and interdependent. Of course, this is not a new argument. As the International Council for Science position statement noted in 2004:

Major innovation is rarely possible without prior generation of new knowledge founded on basic research. Adequate public investment in basic science education and research is a critical factor underpinning socioeconomic development. [...] Support for basic science is not something that can be postponed or diminished when times are hard in the misplaced hope that applied research alone will provide a better return. Basic and applied science are a continuum. They are interdependent.

Rather than an unhelpful dichotomy between basic and applied research, this presents us with timely, stimulating opportunities for complementarity and synergies.

It has been debated whether basic or applied research offers more impact. Evidence suggests that both have impact, but on different timescales (Arnold and Giarracca, 2012). It can take longer for the impacts of basic research to become visible, and this can pose challenges for demonstrating impact to policy-makers, who naturally prefer to see results more swiftly.

Of course, the idea of a linear relationship from basic research to impact has long been discredited (Martin and Tang, 2006). The road from an idea to societal benefits often involves participants going back and forth with ideas, temporary results, experiments, half-products, and formal and informal collaboration (LERU, 2017). Nonetheless, basic research is a vital step on the winding pathway to achieving global missions, sustainable development, and long-term impact.

CLASSIFYING IMPACT

At this juncture, it is worth considering: What is meant by impact? Definitions abound. This one is proposed by the Science and Innovation group of the Small Advanced Economies Initiative (2015, p.5):

The direct and indirect ‘influence’ of research or its ‘effect on’ an individual, a community, or society as a whole, including benefits to our economic, social, human and natural capital.

Basic research is a vital step on the winding pathway to achieving global missions, sustainable developments, and long-term impact.

The UK REF has defined impact as ‘an effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia’. Research Councils UK categorise it as academic or economic and societal, defining each as follows:

Academic impact: The demonstrable contribution that excellent research makes to academic advances, across and within disciplines, including significant advances in understanding, methods, theory and application.

Economic and societal impact: The demonstrable contribution that excellent research makes to society and the economy.

This definition of economic and societal impact specifically encompasses the diverse ways that research-related knowledge and skills benefit people, organisations, and nations by fostering global economic performance (specifically the UK’s economic competitiveness), increasing the effectiveness of public services and policy, and enhancing quality of life, health, and creative output.

When defining impact we must consider the national policy context. In Ireland, the vision of Innovation 2020 centres on ‘excellent research in strategically important areas that has relevance and impact for the economy and society’ (DBEI, 2015, p.7) – again emphasising economic and societal benefits. The refresh of *Research Priority Areas 2018 to 2023* clearly states two over-arching goals of public investment in research, needed for successful prioritisation but not necessarily drawing from the prioritised programme areas: Research for Policy, and Research for Knowledge (DBEI, 2018, p.5). So it is recognised that support for these is essential to meet the vision of Innovation 2020. In discussion of research impact, the academic impact of excellent research and the policy-related impact of a research-informed evidence base must not be overlooked.

Impact is the direct or indirect influence of research on an individual, a community, or society as a whole, including benefits to our economic, social, human and natural capital.

A number of more micro-level impact classification systems are in use. Taking the European Science Foundation (ESF), Science Foundation Ireland (SFI), and the Independent Research Fund Denmark as a sample group, the table

below shows the range of impacts that these research organisations have chosen to highlight. The Independent Research Fund Denmark adopts a novel approach in its 2018–2020 strategy, conveying research impact in the form of the stakeholder groups whom its research benefits. Logically, the chosen system will be affected by the mission and mandate of the research-performing organisation or funding agency. For an agency such as the Irish Research Council (IRC), which funds excellent researchers across all disciplines, or for a research-intensive Irish university, a broad spectrum of impacts should be considered.

European Science Foundation <i>Types of impact (x9)</i>	Science Foundation Ireland <i>Types of impact (x8)</i>	Independent Research Fund Denmark <i>Impact on (x5)</i>
Scientific		
Economic	Economic & Commercial	Business
Social	Societal	
Political	Impacts on public policy	Public sector
		Legislation & regulation
Health	Health & wellbeing	
Environmental	Environmental	
Training	Impacts on human capacity	Educational system
Cultural		Cultural development
Technological		
	International engagement	
	Impact on professional services	

Importantly, all three organisations in this sample highlight the educational, skills-related, or training impacts of research. Impacts in this category include the benefit to society through its graduates, who have benefited from cutting-edge, research-informed teaching. In Ireland, this is clearly in keeping with the planned outcomes of the *National Framework for Doctoral Education*.

CHALLENGES OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT

As noted by the ESF (2012), there is increasing pressure to demonstrate impact, particularly in relation to basic research. This poses a challenge to research-performing organisations and research funders. Clearly, impact matters and is broadly defined. So how do we measure it?

When interpreting and communicating research activity, it is important to consider the associated terminology of outputs, outcomes, impacts, and their interrelationships (Jones and Cleere, 2014). Outputs are the products of research, for example peer-reviewed publications and patents. Outputs can become outcomes, which are ‘the results or consequences of the research activities and outputs on academia, society or the economy: examples are trained postgraduate staff, licence income from patents, follow-on grant income’ (ibid., p.24). Time is a significant factor in understanding impact, as it is the long-term contribution of research to the economy, society, and other areas highlighted by the foregoing classifications. As the ESF observes (2012, p.6), the dividing line between outputs, outcomes, and impacts is not always clear-cut.

As a step along the path to impact, output and outcome measures are regularly assessed by research-performing organisations or funding agencies, with bibliometric tools offering particularly popular measures. Output and outcome metrics are included in the 2017 annual reports of Ireland’s funding agencies (SFI, IRC, and the Health Research Board), with

There is increasing pressure to demonstrate impact, particularly in relation to basic research.

the chosen indicators being determined by the remit and mission of each agency.

Knowledge Transfer Ireland's Annual Knowledge Transfer Survey collects valuable quantitative data on the commercialisation of research. A joined-up approach is taken in the UK, where a number of research funders, including all seven Research Councils, use Researchfish. This online platform is used by researchers to log the outputs, outcomes, and impacts of their research, enabling funders to track the effects of their investment.

Research metrics continue to grow in importance globally. But it is risky to rely on quantitative measures; there is a tendency to count what can be easily measured, rather than measuring what is of real value. Concerns about coverage are often raised, as bibliometric data inadequately captures outputs from humanities and social sciences. Metrics need to consider the full range of disciplines and of researcher career paths.

The responsible use of metrics has been raised through several recent channels: the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) in 2012, the Leiden Manifesto for Research Metrics (2015), and *The Metric Tide* (2015). These concerns are being taken seriously: all seven of the UK's Research Councils signed DORA in February 2018. So assessment of impact should not focus solely on readily quantifiable metrics. This is in keeping with the first principle of the Leiden Manifesto: quantitative evaluation should support qualitative, expert assessment (Hicks and Wouters, 2015).

There is a tendency to count what can be easily measured, rather than measuring what is of real value.

Martin and Tang (2006) outline various econometric studies to measure the economic impact of publicly funded research and development. Such studies generally involve statistical analysis of large datasets. As the authors make clear, there are significant empirical difficulties in measuring scientific knowledge and its contribution to technical change and to economic or social welfare. In particular, there are problems in representing the precise extent to which the results from research contribute to an innovation.

In Ireland, recent studies that have focused on the economic impact of research investment include 'Economic and Enterprise Impacts from Public Investment in R&D in Ireland' (DBEI, 2016) and 'Ten Years On: Confirming Impacts from Research Investment' (PA Consulting, 2011). Both take care to emphasise their detailed quantitative focus on a particular set of impacts. While economic effects are clearly a valid area of investigation, concerns have been raised about limiting consideration of impact to economic benefit (LERU, 2017).

Case studies can be used to show research impact, and are currently employed to varying degrees by Irish research funders. The UK has made particular advances in this area. As part of the 2014 REF exercise, UK higher education institutions submitted almost 7,000 impact case studies using a standard template. All are publicly available online: a valuable source of information on the impact of UK research. A project to develop a similar tool in Ireland would be of significant benefit, articulating the benefits of

academic study and strengthening the case for continued, or increased, public spending on research.

Of course, no method is perfect. It is difficult to generalise beyond the case studies provided, and they cannot offer an exhaustive sense of the multiple links between research and its application (Martin and Tang, 2006, p.6). Somewhat akin to case studies is the occasionally suggested idea that researchers write short 'bio-sketches' to summarise their most important research contributions and activities (Curry, 2018).

A further impact-assessment method is expert review. Since 2016, the European Research Council has adopted an approach along these lines, seeking to build a portfolio of evidence in favour of expenditure on basic research. The ERC's third annual assessment report was published in 2018, involving peer-review of a representative sample of ERC-funded completed projects by independent experts following established guidelines. Reviewers address questions on the academic, societal, economic, and policy-making impact of the projects, and are invited to give an overall grade for projects, with 'scientific breakthrough' as the highest point in the scale.

Clearly, this is a resource-intensive exercise, perhaps prohibitively so for most research funders. The most recent qualitative evaluation indicates that seventy-six panel members and sixty-five remote reviewers participated. The exercise resulted in a consolidated report for 223 projects, consisting of an overall assessment and responses to multiple-choice questions. It was found that almost half of the projects have already had impact on the economy, society, and policy-making, with around three-quarters foreseen to have such impact in the medium or long term (ERC, 2018).

It was found that almost half of the [223] projects [evaluated] have already had impact on the economy, society, and policy-making.

CONCLUSIONS

It is clear that research impact matters more and more, both in Ireland and internationally. Impact is equally relevant to basic and applied research, particularly in global missions. A broad-ranging definition or classification system of research impact appears optimal, with an implicit or explicit focus on the beneficiaries of research. Various impact-assessment methods are available to research-performing organisations and research funders. While those we have looked at are not an exhaustive list, and fresh approaches may be developed, case studies combined with carefully selected metrics may offer optimal assessment results.

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First Irish Recipient of International Early Career Award

Hannah Durand, a doctoral researcher in the School of Psychology at NUI Galway, has received an Early Career Award from the International Society of Behavioural Medicine (ISBM). Ten outstanding early career researchers in the field of behavioural medicine were honoured at the award ceremony which took place in November 2018 in Santiago, Chile.

Dr John Bogue, Head of Psychology at NUI Galway, said: "The School of Psychology at NUI Galway has recently been ranked in the top 1% of psychology departments in the world. This award confirms that our standards of education and research are at the very top in international standings. We are very proud of Hannah's remarkable achievement."

Hannah's research was funded by the Health Research Board Patient-Oriented Research Award and supported by the Primary Care Clinical Trials Network Ireland.

RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURES AND RESEARCH EXCELLENCE

Building on strong foundations, preparing for the future

Ireland's excellence in research and innovation brings major public, social, economic, and cultural benefits. This excellence assumes a high-performing research system supported by the best researchers across a broad research base and by appropriate research infrastructures (RI). It is RI that this article considers, providing a snapshot of current provision and future needs based on a Royal Irish Academy (RIA) survey and stakeholder workshop with researchers from the sciences, humanities, and social sciences, research funders, and policy stakeholders.

Recognising the considerable investment in specific research areas in line with research prioritisation, the RIA sought not so much to consider the needs of specific disciplines but to identify areas of concern and opportunities to enhance RI across the wider research base. Striking commonalities emerged across disciplines in the need for platform-enabling technologies, sustainable mechanisms to ensure maximum value from public investment in RI, and the national strategic framework for RI development and investment.

WHAT ARE RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURES?

Research infrastructures are facilities, resources, and services used by the research community to conduct research and promote innovation. They come in many forms and sizes, from large facilities and specialist equipment to e-infrastructure networks, libraries, and collections (Royal Society, 2018, p.6). RIs are highly dynamic and continually evolving to support new lines of enquiry or to build on advances in technology and techniques.

CURRENT CONTEXT

Significant public investment in RIs is a relatively new phenomenon for Ireland's higher education (HE) and research system. Prior to 1998, the HE system struggled to obtain enough domestic funding to support investment in HE buildings, research centres, equipment, programmes, and training. The roll-out of the Programme for Research in Third-Level Institutions (PRTLTI) transformed the research infrastructures and innovation ambitions of Ireland's HEIs and government.

The government's Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation 2006–2013, the 2007 road map for national research infrastructures, Innovation 2020, and the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 built on this momentum. They brought enhanced focus on internationalisation and linked domestic funding with emerging EU



Sinead Riordan
Royal Irish Academy



Jennifer Kenneally
Royal Irish Academy

RI policy and initiatives such as the European Strategy Forum for Research Infrastructures (ESFRI)¹ and ERANETS.

Ireland's policy-makers worked hard to protect the level of state investment in public R&D during the post-2008 global economic recession. Research prioritisation linked continued state investment in R&D and RIs with the prioritised national objectives of securing Ireland's competitiveness and developing high-value jobs. After completion of Cycle 5 of the PRTL, responsibility for the next wave transferred from the Department of Education and Skills (DES) to the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (DBEI).

The further development of RIs is a key commitment in Innovation 2020: Action 3.16 charges the DBEI with leading the development of a successor to PRTL to support RI development across the research base. While this is in development, state RI investment continues to be concentrated in strategic research priority areas and actioned through DBEI agencies, particularly Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) and Enterprise Ireland. To a lesser extent, the Irish Research Council (IRC), Health Research Board, Enterprise Ireland, Teagasc, Marine Institute, and other government departments also offer sector-specific schemes to support RI.

Key sources of public funding for research infrastructures in Ireland

- National budget through HEA core grant to higher education institutions (HEIs) for foundation investment in research infrastructures
- European Fund for Strategic Investments
- Research funding agencies with grants to support RI related to their remit
- State agencies with grants to support RI specific to their remit.
- Horizon 2020, which supports research projects associated with RI.

Source: Inroad Ireland: Research Infrastructure Factsheet.

The transition to open science, and the need for national alignment with EU policy to compete for Horizon Europe opportunities, are influential drivers in the future development of Ireland's research infrastructure. The refreshed ESFRI Roadmap 2018 specifically identifies the transition to open science and religious studies as areas of high potential for new RI.

RESEARCH STAKEHOLDERS' VIEWS

In early 2018, the RIA survey 'Examining the Adequacy and Requirements of Research Infrastructures in Ireland' explored researchers' satisfaction with current RIs as well as future opportunities and needs in terms of provision, access, and maintenance. It invited respondents to suggest investment

1 The ESFRI Roadmap is the mechanism used for a cohesive approach to developing major RIs in Europe, identifying new RIs of pan-European interest that match the long-term needs of European research communities, covering all scientific areas.

priorities to guide future allocations of public research infrastructural funding.

The survey results, and the discussions of the June 2018 RIA stakeholder workshop, establish a clearer picture of research-infrastructure-related successes and challenges.

- 90% of respondents in the sciences, and 85% of arts, humanities, and social sciences (AHSS) respondents to the Royal Irish Academy's RI needs survey believed there are gaps in the availability of research infrastructures for their discipline.
- 35% of respondents in sciences and 39% in AHSS said they are not generally able to access the research infrastructural resources they require.
- 77% in sciences and 72% in AHSS believe that current RIs in Ireland are not adequately funded and maintained.

WHAT'S WORKING WELL

Several programmes that fund and support research infrastructure development and capacity-building in the HE sector attracted considerable praise. There was notable support for Enterprise Ireland's Technology Gateway Programme by researchers in the Institute of Technology (IoT) sector. In the absence of PRTL, it was identified as a key support for IoT research, particularly with their regional small and medium enterprise (SME) base. IoTs' increasing participation in research consortia, such as SFI centres, was welcomed as one way to offset the scale challenges experienced by IoTs in competing for substantial RI investment in the short to medium term.

The RIA survey 'Examining the Adequacy and Requirements of Research Infrastructures in Ireland' explored researchers' satisfaction with current RIs.

Previous funding allocated by the IRC was highly valued by disciplines whose research falls outside of research prioritisation, as were sector-specific RI schemes and strategies such as those developed by the Marine Institute and Health Research Board. These schemes were considered to offer a credible and highly targeted way to respond to the RI needs of specific research communities and to support the wider research base.

The positive legacy of PRTL was repeatedly cited. Participants noted the benefits for a range of RI, from training of research personnel to physical and virtual infrastructures.

A move towards a national subscription model for academic publishing, as proposed by the National Forum on Open Data, could deliver significant system-wide benefits.

CHALLENGES

Clear differences emerge in the RI needs of universities and IoTs. Concern was expressed about the level of funding available to support streams of research activity that are aligned with regional industry strengths or

the needs of national SMEs. Recurring concerns included the relatively low budget of much-valued schemes such as the Technology Gateway Programme, the ineligibility of research equipment costs, and the large number of IoTs (fourteen in total) competing for the scheme. Scale and research capacity were repeatedly identified by IoT respondents as hindering their ability to compete for larger RI budgets through, for example, SFI programmes.

The rewards arising from the substantial baseline investment in RIs through PRTL were praised, but many cautioned that the research and innovation spin-offs were nearing the end of their time span, with significant investment needed to support the future pipeline of research, innovation, and commercialisation, particularly for the IoT sector and AHSS disciplines. The question arose as to how the next iteration of this research can best be supported.

High-performance computing capacity, data storage and processing, and the need for platform-enabling technologies emerge as near-universal priorities for future RI investment. There is concern that Ireland has not fully grasped what is needed for progression in terms of capacity, budgets, and renewal timelines to future-proof investment in such resources.²

Clear differences emerge in the Research Infrastructure needs of universities and institutes of technology.

The challenges faced by non-commercial research data centres in the Irish HE system, in adapting to the needs of long-term open data, emerged as a strong theme. Issues highlighted include the need for high-speed data encryption and storage, robust data governance, and security systems. The workshop identified the importance of suitable expertise to inform HEI involvement in increasingly complex legal and governance structures for large-scale international RIs, and to ensure compliance with the open data agenda. The complexities of the open data agenda also invited much comment.

In the chatter around large-scale, international, multi-partner research infrastructures, it is easy to lose sight of smaller but equally valuable types of investment. Respondents clearly wished to see more availability of smaller RI funding schemes. From the relatively small equipment grant that buys a gauge to measure changes in ocean temperature, to the digitisation of an archive, respondents noted that these investments enable excellent, impactful research and should be supported. Researchers across disciplines repeatedly called for more small-scale funding to support the renewal or maintenance of existing, often costly, equipment. The spirit of the nursery rhyme ‘for want of a nail, the shoe was lost’ was frequently invoked to illustrate the detrimental effect of failing to plan for such costs at the starting point of investment.

Workshop participants identified several Irish research projects that are on track to benefit from participation in a specified European Research Infrastructure Consortium (ERIC). Each project has already secured the funding and resources required, and needs similar approval at national level

² One respondent noted that Imperial College London has greater high-performance computing (HPC) capacity than that available to Ireland’s HE system.

for participation. This approval presently lacks a standardised process, leaving several national projects stuck at the gates, unable to participate in international collaborations despite having the necessary national expertise and resources. A cross-departmental protocol to assess Irish applications for an ERIC would be extremely useful for researchers and government departments.

MOVING FORWARD

Ten years on from the first national roadmap for RIs, the preparatory discussion for Horizon Europe, implementation of Innovation 2020, funding allocations in Budget 2018, and the National Development Plan 2018–2027 offer a substantial rationale to consider what is working well and what could enhance Ireland's RIs and support excellence in research and innovation.

HEIs, as the primary research performers, must continue to work closely with the research community and state funders to better understand the RI needs, funding, and collaborative opportunities available at domestic and European level.

Restructuring the next cycle of PRTL to include support for new proposals and existing investments across the research base on an open, competitive basis was widely agreed as crucial to future rounds of infrastructure development. Balance and scale were recurring themes: for example, how best to balance the scale and type of investment needed across discipline types and research-performer sizes.

This was neatly illustrated by an observation from an IoT participant at the RIA workshop: The €20 million top-up budget estimated by one university as necessary to bring its RIs in line with international standards was close to the level of investment made to date by the Technology Gateway programme to support regional industry IoT R&D and innovation collaborations.

Developing a whole-of-system RI strategy that speaks to the wider research base offers a way to knit together the current variety of schemes, and thereby better equip the research community to plan for long-term excellence and sustainability. Given the speed of technological advances and requirements, such a strategy should be revisited regularly to ensure its continued relevance – and to give the wider research base, policy-makers, and funders a continued opportunity to engage on the shared ambition of research excellence.

Such a strategy could speak to issues such as approval mechanisms for joining ERICs. The current HEA commitment to update the Large Infrastructure Equipment Research database to catalogue equipment and databases and other eligible resources would similarly inform discussion and decision-making on a national level, and facilitate better access to and use of this equipment by researchers.

Supporting a high-performing research system that incorporates all disciplines is a complex endeavour. Support must be provided for staff, maintenance, collections, library facilities, and those new pieces of advanced technology that lead to the types of headline breakthroughs to

In designing an effective research system, we must be practical as well as aspirational.

which all researchers aspire. In designing an effective research system, we must be practical as well as aspirational, and we must take a coherent national approach to large-scale data management – which needs tackling before it affects Ireland's success rates in Horizon Europe.

For Ireland, as for many of its EU counterparts, involving the wide body of R&D stakeholders in a continuing dialogue on future waves of RI investment will help to achieve that delicate balance between supporting emerging areas of potential excellence, existing strengths, funding for development and long-term sustainability, investment at national level, and funding for international collaborations.

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John Halligan TD, Minister of State for Training, Skills, Innovation, Research and Development; and **Sharon Bolanta**, Irish Research Council Postgraduate scholar, launching the Irish Research Council's International Engagement Strategy.

ENGAGED RESEARCH

From the margins to the mainstream

Irish universities are committed to academic excellence that benefits Ireland, the EU, and the international community. At the heart of our institutional guiding documents is the acknowledgement that engagement with society is interwoven into the fabric of college life. Our strategic plans point to academic excellence, transformative student experiences, impactful research, and engagement with society. The question is: How does an institution move from aspirational engagement to demonstrated societal impact?

Civic and civil society engagement is integral to the higher education policy landscape. Ireland's 'National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030' refers to civic and community engagement as one of the three core roles of higher education. The Higher Education Authority's (HEA) 'System Performance Framework, 2018–2020' includes civic and community engagement in two of its six key objectives:

- Objective 2: Creating rich opportunities for national and international engagement which enhances the learning environment and delivers a strong bridge to enterprise and the wider community.
- Objective 3: Excellent research, development and innovation that has relevance, growing engagement with external partners and impact for the economy and society and strengthens our standing to become an Innovation Leader in Europe.

The detailed metrics which form the basis of higher education institutional *system performance compacts* with the HEA now refer specifically to engaged research activity.

At both national and international levels, the emergence of research programmes focused on public/patient involvement, innovation missions, and industrial competitiveness is shaping a more inclusive research landscape. Under Horizon Europe, the Commission aims to launch missions with bold, ambitious goals and strong, European, added value to tackle issues that affect our daily lives. Examples include the fight against cancer, cleaner transport, gender equality, peace-building, and plastic-free waterways. These missions will be co-designed with citizens, research-relevant stakeholders, the European Parliament, and member states.

More than ever, funding applications require researchers to make explicit the connections between their research and its capacity to generate or improve products, processes, and services, to address societal challenges, and to demonstrate impact on issues of public



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concern. It is in this changing and challenging context that collaboration between researchers and public research stakeholders – including civic and civil society organisations, state and semi-state agencies, industry partners, professionals, and members of the public – has begun to move from the margins to the mainstream of research design and execution. This change is also reflected in increasing application and demand for new pedagogies and research methods, promoting interactions between students at all levels and the organisations they may one day work in.

Based in the Irish Universities Association, Campus Engage is a national initiative that supports the implementation of civic and community engagement and informs policies across the Irish higher education system. Through its steering committee and associated working groups, Campus Engage is dedicated to providing resources and training on civic and community engagement across teaching, learning, and research.

Funded by the Irish Research Council, the Campus Engage National Working Group for Engaged Research consulted across Ireland and the EU for one year, including a series of workshops with more than 320 participants. Based on this widespread consultation, Campus Engage established a nationally agreed definition of *engaged research*, along with a methods register and principles of good practice.

Engaged research describes a wide range of rigorous research approaches and methodologies that share a common interest in collaborative engagement with the community and aim to improve, understand or investigate an issue of public interest or concern, including societal challenges. Engaged research is advanced *with* community partners rather than *for* them.

A great deal of engaged research literature refers to community engagement. *Community* refers to a range of public research stakeholders, including public or professional service and product users, policy makers, civil and civic society organisations, members of the public and other relevant stakeholders.

An evidence review of international literature informed the development of the *Engaged Research Framework* and the *Engaged Research Impact Framework*. These frameworks provides how-to guidance for researchers on engaging with partners across the research life cycle, encouraging high-quality and impactful research, efficient collaboration, knowledge exchange, and reflective questions aimed at clarifying roles and responsibilities.

This Campus Engage initiative builds capacity for engaged research by providing real opportunities for those most affected by the research topic to become involved in setting research priorities, informing research questions, building and using research instruments, collecting and analysing data, and communicating findings through networks. There is a shift of focus from activities of education, popularisation, and dissemination, to dialogue, co-created and co-produced research, knowledge exchange, and deepening public involvement through peer researcher opportunities.

ENGAGED RESEARCH FRAMEWORK



Figure 1: The Engaged Research Framework presents opportunities for engagement across the research lifecycle

While every research project is unique, the **Engaged Research Framework** encourages researchers to consider opportunities for engagement and involvement that exist at each stage of the research life cycle.

At its foundation, engaged research is simply relationship-building over time, and this is where Irish universities can struggle: our engagement is often interpreted as self-serving rather than mutually beneficial.

Engaged research requires strong project management and communications skills, but it also requires unique skill sets, especially in leadership, facilitation, and occasionally conflict-resolution. It requires courage, resourcefulness, and thoughtfulness and results in highly skilled graduates. Investment in engaged research ultimately helps researchers at all levels to find and then develop a community that honours both the professional and lived experiences – and it is at this frontier that exciting and impactful research can happen.

While there are outstanding national exemplars of engaged research, we also continue to advance tokenistic box-ticking approaches, which fail to meet the core principles of sincere engagement. If we are to be genuine in our approaches to engaged research, we must ask the following questions:

- Have we engaged those most affected by the research to clarify whether research is needed? If not, how is this approach reflective of best practices in scientific enquiry?
- Does the proposed research tap the expertise and tacit knowledge of both researchers and research stakeholders? If not, how is this the best use of public monies?
- Does the research design ensure that teammates are clear about the extent of their collaboration, their roles and responsibilities, what they can expect to gain from the research, and what they will be expected to contribute? If not, how is this ethical?
- Is the allocation of funds appropriate for the roles and responsibilities assigned to each teammate? If not, how is the research environment we're creating fair and sustainable?
- Are supports and training required to encourage and support meaningful involvement?
- Are planned research outputs usable by partners and collaborators, and are they recognised or acknowledged?

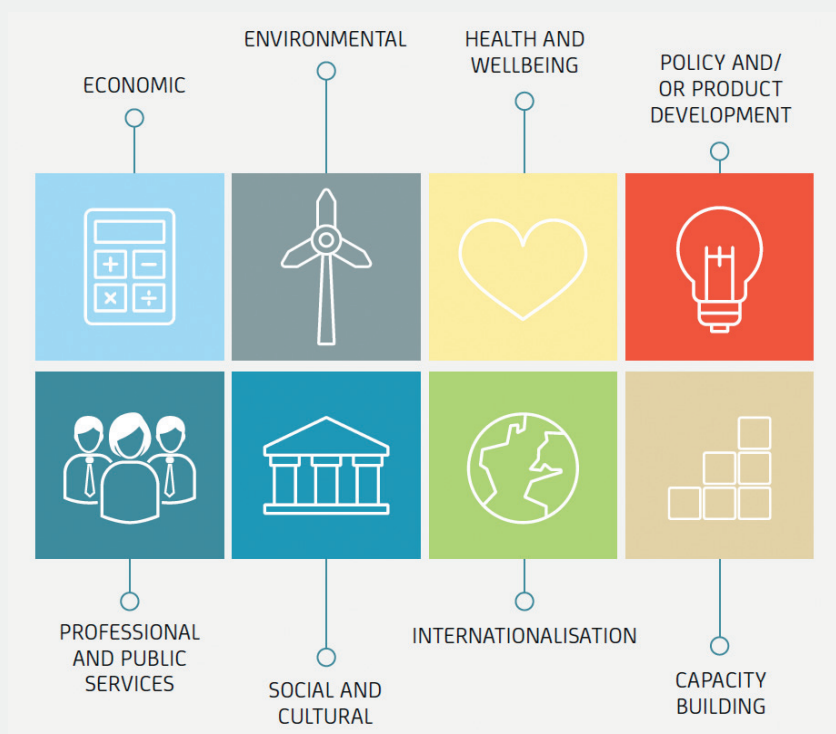


Figure 2: The Campus Engage Engaged Research Impact Framework

At a sectoral level, and in a country the size of Ireland, there is a real risk of both peer-researcher and participant fatigue unless we advance more thoughtful approaches that honour the commitment of time that engaged research requires. In many ways, a conversation about engaged research is a conversation about power. A focus on engaged research requires that we ask and try to answer some fairly significant questions: Who is involved in the decisions about which knowledge is created? How is knowledge created? How it is used? And how it is shared?

At the institutional level, we need systems in place to advance relationship-building in the absence of third-party funding, and we need to do a better job of translating knowledge for positive effect and longer-term impacts. This requires an engagement strategy for every research office. In too many cases, we have no understanding of the history of engagement. Those in civic and civil society organisations can be inundated with requests that do not align with their remit. This shows a lack of care on our part, but it also shows that in institutions, we're unclear about who is doing what, because we are not memorialising efforts or recognising our collaborators in publications, case studies, profiles, awards, plans, reporting structures, and other activities. This is not only irresponsible but incongruous with the goals of higher education.

At its foundation, engaged research is simply relationship-building over time, and this is where Irish universities can struggle: our engagement is often interpreted as self-serving rather than mutually beneficial.

To right these wrongs, Campus Engage has established high-level recommendations for higher education institutions, policy-making bodies, and research funding organisations to promote excellence in engaged research and to make Ireland the benchmark, go-to country for collaborative enquiry. Informed by researchers and community partners in Ireland and abroad, the following opportunities aim to advance a vibrant and responsive research sector with the capacity to deliver impact and innovation for the benefit of all.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

- Provide training, in partnership with public or professional service and product users, policy-makers, civil and civic society organisations, and members of the public, on good practice for engaged research.
- Assign dedicated staff to support institution-community partnerships on all aspects of engaged research.
- Put in place simplified payment/reimbursement systems and processes that facilitate partnering and accommodate non-university staff.
- Develop local communication and information systems which link all departments, disciplines, and colleges to capture past and ongoing engaged research projects to promote mutual learning and to avoid duplication.
- Provide networking opportunities for public or professional service and product users, policy-makers, civil and civic society organisations, members of the public, and higher education staff interested in working together.
- Provide institutional reward and recognition for engaged research, and reflect this in academic workloads and promotions procedures.
- Embed a commitment to engaged research in research and innovation, teaching and learning, strategic plans, undergraduate curricula, and postgraduate and doctoral training.
- Accommodate flexible scheduling and timetabling of workloads to facilitate engaged research activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY-MAKERS

- Publish a national strategy for engaged research in Ireland to position Ireland as a European and international leader in this area.

- Assign leadership to strategically implement engaged research policies, with responsibility for advancing the enabling infrastructure to promote engaged research at a national level.
- Adopt a nationally agreed definition of engaged research.
- Promote nationally agreed guidelines for best practice in engaged research.
- Create nationally agreed metrics that characterise engaged research practice with societal impact.
- Resource a national hub to inform, fund, and offer capacity-building to support societal innovation through engaged research.
- Develop a national 'clearing house of expertise' for engaged research that could contribute to the development of engaged research networks in Ireland and attract international researchers to Ireland.
- Create an inter-institutional/organisational national database of engaged researcher case studies and researcher/support staff profiles.
- Create a national engaged research 'methods toolbox' as a resource for transdisciplinary and inter-institutional collaborations.
- Publish a data management protocol for engaged research.
- Publish an intellectual property protocol for societal innovation.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESEARCH FUNDING ORGANISATIONS:

- Align funding calls to societal needs articulated by public or professional service and product users, policy-makers, civil and civic society organisations, members of the public, and researchers.
- Allow longer project timelines for engaged research projects.
- Include funding for pre-proposal design and consultation and post-project impact assessment.
- Earmark funding for existing programme or service evaluation research.
- Offer societal innovation vouchers for engaged research.
- Fund project management for larger-scale engaged research projects.
- Fund support staff to sustain engagement between partners between and during funded research projects.
- Fund national inter-institutional collaborations to provide leverage for smaller-scale projects to develop into impactful larger-scale projects that address issues of public concern across Ireland.

When we undertake engaged research, it enriches and broadens academic thinking, refining ideas and ensuring their relevance. It reduces duplication of efforts and improves the timeliness of discoveries, often propelling research and research teams further along the pathway to impact. Engaged research favours excellence through collaborative rather than competitive approaches across departments, institutions, and sectors, emphasising the flow of ideas across society rather than just within disciplinary groups. Frankly, we need more of this.

TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITIES AND THE RESEARCH ECOSYSTEM

Supporting research, innovation, and engagement in Ireland's new universities



Jennifer Brennan

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Since the Technological Universities (TU) Act was signed into law in April 2018, the most common question people ask me at work is: What does this mean for research and innovation in the sector? The legislation sets out clear expectations for substantial growth in research, development, innovation, and engagement (RDIE) in these new universities. Put simply, it means more: more postgraduate research students, more research-active academic staff, more research outcomes that support and engage industry and the community, and above all, more impact, particularly in the regions where these new universities will be located.

The technological higher education sector currently consists of fourteen institutes of technology (IoTs). Over the next three to five years, the sector will transform to encompass four technological universities (in the south-east, south-west, north-west, and Dublin) and four IoTs. Ireland's first technological university (TU) will be established in January 2019: the Technological University Dublin, formed by merging the IoTs in Blanchardstown, Dublin, and Tallaght. This transformation, supported by the legislation that underpins it, will scale, broaden, and deepen the RDIE work already ongoing in the sector.

The expansion of RDIE activities began around the turn of the millennium, catalysed by successive cycles of investment through the Programme for Research in Third-Level Institutions. This expansion has been accelerated in institutes preparing for TU applications, but it is occurring across the entire sector due to recognition of the central role of integrated teaching and research in the life of a higher education institution. In the ten years up to 2014, research expenditure in the sector tripled. Enrolments on postgraduate research degree programmes have grown by 40% since 2012, at a time when national enrolment figures were declining.

Another sign of growth is the increasing participation of the institutes in national research and innovation centres. Currently, they are partnering in ten of the seventeen Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) Centres and nine of the fourteen Technology Centres supported by Enterprise Ireland and the IDA. These partnerships take advantage of the institutes' expertise in areas such as ICT, photonics, pharmaceuticals, renewable energy, and materials. In particular, the institutes have a strong role in the two new manufacturing centres being funded by SFI: Confirm and I-Form. Researchers from the IoTs in Athlone, Cork, Limerick, Sligo, and Waterford will join with university and industry partners to develop the latest technologies in smart and advanced manufacturing.

But what characterises the type of RDIE activities that are performed in the technological higher education sector? What will they look like in the new technological universities? For me, the phrases that best illustrate the type of activities are 'mission-oriented' and 'close to the user'. RDIE activities are always performed with the end user in mind, and are often performed with those end users. The best-known example of this focus is the important work the sector does to support enterprise development.

Each institute hosts an innovation hub, where budding entrepreneurs can take part in the New Frontiers entrepreneur development programme. The hubs provide incubation space for spin-out and spin-in companies, which can benefit from enterprise development supports, including tailored advice on applying for research and innovation funding. These companies can also benefit from the research and innovation expertise of the Technology Gateways, a network of fifteen centres of R&D excellence hosted by the institutes in partnership with Enterprise Ireland.

When companies are looking for solutions to research and innovation problems, the Technology Gateway network is well placed to deliver successful outcomes for them. It is an entry point into the RDIE expertise of the institutes. The network covers a very broad range of industry-relevant research areas and is designed so that expertise from different Gateways can be pulled together to deliver on projects for industry clients. Projects can be small or large and can involve collaborative research work between the company and the institute, or consultancy work by the institute for the company. The Gateways completed €26 million worth of projects in 2013–2017, with industry providing around 50% of the funding.

The Finn Lough bubble domes are a unique accommodation experience, featuring 180-degree transparent walls so travellers can immerse themselves in nature and can sleep in comfort under the stars.

One interesting example of a Technology Gateway project is the technology that the Wireless Sensor Applied Research (WiSAR) Gateway based at Letterkenny Institute of Technology developed for the Finn Lough Bubble Domes based in Donegal near the Fermanagh Lakelands. The bubble domes are a unique accommodation experience, featuring 180-degree transparent walls so travellers can immerse themselves in nature and can sleep in comfort

under the stars. But the domes are prone to deflation, which affects their transparency and the occupants' experience. WiSAR developed and retrofitted a unique sensor system based on Internet of Things technology, which identifies when the air pressure has dropped below a critical level and instructs the air pump to refill the dome.

Another essential aspect of the RDIE work of the sector is to support local communities. This 'engaged research' involves staff, and students at all stages of their education. Many undergraduate programmes involve a structured research project with a community partner. These projects deliver for the community partner but also support the student's educational needs. At the larger end of the scale, there are many collaborative research projects with civic or community partners. For example, researchers from Dublin Institute of Technology are collaborating with the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice on a project whose outcomes will support young adults in

prison and upon release. These projects, whether student-led or staff-led, often lead to significant social innovations.

The supports offered by institutes to business also extend to social enterprises, which are developing new ideas, services, and models to better address social issues. One is MyAccessHub, a company founded by Institute of Technology Tralee graduates Gearoid Kearney and Miriam O'Sullivan. MyAccessHub uses technology to help businesses reduce or eliminate barriers that typically prevent neurodiverse people from being successful employees or satisfied customers. Its founders participated in the New Frontiers entrepreneur development programme at IT Tralee and identified it as a key milestone. They continue to work with IT Tralee to develop new technology to enhance their business offering.

Working with international partners is a central aspect of RDIE in the technological higher education sector. The institutes have a strong track record of securing European funding to support these partnerships, with over 25 per cent of annual research expenditure being supported by EU funds. The IoTs in Cork and Waterford are ranked among the top ten Irish higher-education performers in Horizon 2020, the EU framework programme for research and innovation. Institutes are particularly active in securing funding from INTERREG, which supports European regional cooperation.

For example, Dundalk Institute of Technology is leading on a €7.7 million INTERREG project designed to better understand and alleviate the impact of lung disease. The project links Dundalk's Smooth Muscle Research Centre with researchers from Queen's University Belfast and the University of Western Scotland. Further afield, institute researchers are building partnerships with Brazilian universities. This includes the Horizon 2020 EUBrasilCloudForum project, where researchers from the TSSG research institute in Waterford Institute of Technology are partnering with EU and Brazilian universities to formulate a common strategy and approach to cloud computing in the EU and Brazil.

Working with international partners is a central aspect of research, development, innovation, and engagement (RDIE) in the technological higher education sector.

These examples give a flavour of the kind of RDIE activities that the sector is currently engaged in. So much more could be showcased, including substantial work in design and the creative industries at locations such as the design core research centre in IT Carlow, the Crawford College of Art and Design in Cork IT, and Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology. The common thread is the 'mission-oriented', 'close to the user' nature of the work. With a strong focus on problem-solving and social and technological development and innovation, the RDIE undertaken in the sector is intended to advance human knowledge, address societal challenges, and make a real impact on people's lives.

The challenge for this revitalised technological higher education sector is to find a way to continue to grow, broaden, and deepen the range of RDIE activities that they perform, so they can transform into the truly research-informed institutions described in the TU legislation. Enabling this growth will require government to provide dedicated funding for RDIE activities

via the recurrent grant. It will require changes to the workload model for academic staff, allowing them time to begin or engage further in RDIE. Working conditions for research staff will need to be improved, providing a clear pathway for the most talented to progress in the institution and offering tailored training so that researchers can move into the wider labour market. National research funders must remove the barriers that, though often inadvertently, prevent the sector's researchers from applying to their funding calls.

All stakeholders in the national research and innovation ecosystem will have to recognise the strong contribution the sector can make to that system, and examine how the talents of the sector's researchers can be better supported so the work they do can be harnessed for the benefit of Ireland's economy and society. The sector is well aware of the internal reforms required, and the Technological Higher Education Association will support them with those changes. We will also work on their behalf to ensure that external stakeholders make the required changes to enable the sector.

The advent of technological universities can only result in a substantial increase in the technological higher education sector's contribution to national research and innovation efforts. Ireland's stated ambition to become a global innovation leader will only be achieved if all parts of the innovation ecosystem are enabled. Through its past and present achievements, the technological higher education sector has consistently shown that it can deliver on research and innovation outcomes that have a real impact on business and the wider community. If properly supported to make a larger contribution, I have no doubt that these new universities will rise to the challenge.

Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies (DIAS) launched its new four-year strategy on 20 November 2018.



Pictured at the launch l-r: **Professor Ruairí Ó hUiginn**, Director, School of Celtic Studies, **Professor Werner Nahm**, Director, School of Theoretical Physics, **Dr Eucharía Meehan**, CEO and Registrar, Dublin Institute of Advanced Studies, **Professor Chris Bean**, Head of Geophysics, **Professor Peter Gallagher**, Head of Astronomy and Astrophysics. Pic: Marc O'Sullivan

GENDER MATTERS

Creating our future



Caitriona Creely

Programme Manager,
Investigator-Initiated
Research and
Innovation, Health
Research Board.
Leads Gender
Implementation Plan.

I recently attended a conference celebrating the 75th anniversary of Erwin Schrödinger's 'What is Life' lectures. The physics Nobel-prize winner lived in Dublin for many years, and, while director of the School of Theoretical Physics in the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, gave lectures which greatly influenced the development of molecular biology.¹ Having begun my research career in physics, with many lectures held in the eponymous theatre in Trinity, I was curious to see what the contributions would be. The conference did not disappoint; there was plenty to engage the mind and imagination, and inspiring lectures over the two days.

At the opening session, co-organiser Luke O'Neill of Trinity College Dublin recalled TCD's celebration of the 50th anniversary of the same lectures, held in 1993. He highlighted that out of twelve speakers, not one was female, a situation which would be unthinkable today! In the intervening years, acceptance of the need for women to be visible and actively participating, especially in STEMM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, and Medicine), has increased hugely.

Prof. O'Neill wanted to acknowledge in particular the work of his colleague and co-organiser Dr Tomás Ryan in aiming for at least 40 per cent female speakers, which was evident from the line-up. I was heartened that the attending secondary school students witnessed the passion and intellect displayed by male and female, senior and more junior contributors, and the emphasis on how collaboration between countries and disciplines has been key to driving developments in biology in the last 75 years.

Over the two-day conference, I had the pleasure of hearing five Nobel laureates speak, one of whom was a woman: the incredibly impressive Ada Yonath. After the announcement of the 2017 Nobel prizes, with nine laureates – all men – across physics, chemistry, and physiology of medicine, the vice chair of the board of directors of the Nobel Foundation, Göran Hansson, spoke directly on the issue of the dearth of female winners.² He emphasised that all winners are drawn from a pool of nominees, so the Foundation is dependent on receiving nominations of women for the prize.

The selection process takes almost a year, and nomination to the science prizes is by invitation only. The names of nominees and other information about the nominations cannot be revealed until 50 years later. Hansson said that starting in 2018, the Nobel committee would encourage the nomination of women scientists and consider ethnic and geographic diversity. If such an intervention has an effect, it will be on the pool of candidates. It remains to be seen how this will

affect the number of female laureates, and how long it will take for changes to be evident.

GENDER EQUALITY TASKFORCE

In August 2018, TCD hosted the tenth European Conference on Gender Equality in Higher Education. Established in 1998, the conference provides an international forum to discuss and exchange information and experiences on the challenges related to gender in academia and to promoting gender equality. The theme this year was 'Gender in academia and research: Countering persistent and emerging challenges to equality'. It was the first time the conference was held in Ireland.

Minister of State for Higher Education, Mary Mitchell O'Connor, opened proceedings. She said, 'The hosting of this conference places an international focus on what we in Ireland are doing in our higher education sector to effect meaningful and sustainable change in achieving gender equality.' The Minister noted that 'improvements in recent years have been marginal, and there still exists a significant lack of representation of women on key decision-making bodies in the institutions and at senior levels of academic staff'.³ This is borne out by the latest gender-disaggregated figures on the staffing of Irish higher education institutions (HEIs) in universities, colleges, and institutes of technology (IoTs), published by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) during the summer.⁴

At the time of writing, all seven Irish universities now hold Athena Swan Bronze status, and several IoTs and colleges are applying.

Minister O'Connor launched a Gender Equality Taskforce on 6 November 2017⁵ to drive and accelerate implementation of the recommendations in the HEA National Review of Gender Equality in Irish Higher Education Institutions, published in June 2016.⁶ The report from the task force is expected in autumn 2018. The Health Research Board (HRB) fed into the task force at various points, including giving an update on our practices as part of the fact-finding phase in December 2017.

I participated in the gender task force stakeholder event in January, where attendees were asked their views on recommendations from the HEA expert group report: how they could best be implemented and strengthened. This included discussions on gender-specific targets and quotas, mentoring and promotion, recruitment, caring and return-to-work policies, and equality and diversity training. The workshop was mainly for HEIs, and attendees heard first-hand the diversity of activities at institution level aimed at promoting gender equality, including many examples of good practice.

The event included a detailed discussion on the Athena Swan charter, which was established 'to encourage and recognise commitment to advancing the careers of women in science, technology, engineering, maths and medicine (STEMM) ... in higher education and research'.⁷ The charter was launched in Ireland in 2015, supported by the HEA.

As research funders, HRB, SFI (Science Foundation Ireland), and IRC (Irish Research Council) agreed a common approach on Athena Swan status in 2016, setting deadlines for HEIs to acquire award status in order to be eligible to receive awards. Many attendees at the stakeholder workshop had

been deeply engaged in the application process for Athena Swan awards. Feedback from attendees was that the lengthy process of applying for Athena Swan status was viewed as painful but positive, and that having the wealth of data collected through application provides a powerful tool to convince senior decision-makers where a specific problem does exist.

At the time of writing, all seven Irish universities now hold Athena Swan Bronze status, and several IoTs and colleges are applying. Maynooth University was awarded under the expanded charter – that is, including arts, humanities, social sciences, business, and law (AHSSBL), covering professional and support roles, and including experiences of trans staff and students.

Irish HEIs currently may apply under the original process, focusing on women in STEMM in academia (known as the ‘pre-May 2015’ process in the UK), but by November 2020 all applicants from Ireland must use the expanded process. The Irish funders will keep the timing and requirements for Athena Swan status under review, in particular due to differences in when institutions were awarded, and whether the award was made under the original charter of STEMM only, or under the expanded charter.

MOVING THE DIAL: FUNDER PRACTICES

At the Conference on Gender Equality in Higher Education, I participated in a panel discussion on Gender in Research Funding, with colleagues from the IRC, SFI, and the Swedish Research Council (SRC). Chaired by Dr Anne Pépin, senior policy officer in the Gender Sector in the European Commission Directorate for Research and Innovation, we presented examples of successful practice at each funder, highlighted current European collaborative networks and communities of practice to address gender equality, and explored challenges to gender equality from the perspective of funders.

IRC director Peter Brown noted that their intervention of gender-blinding of applications for early-career awards undergoing international peer review has had a positive impact on success rates for women. Marion Boland, head of research policy in SFI, highlighted their Starting Investigator Research Grant, where the number of applications from male candidates nominated by the research body was capped at six out of a possible twelve. She noted that applicants are reviewed for excellence and impact regardless of gender, and that the success rates were on a par.

The Swedish Research Council was represented by its senior advisor, Carl Jacobsson. The SRC supports basic research in all disciplines and has a role in research policy, analysis, and communication. It uses peer review groups to assess over 6,000 research applications annually. The SRC incorporates gender-equality observers at selected peer review groups, and their reports are used to train its peer reviewers, decision-makers, and staff. This intervention has improved the review process and led to more equal success rates for female and male applicants in recent years.

IRC director Peter Brown noted that their intervention of gender-blinding of applications for early-career awards undergoing international peer review has had a positive impact on success rates for women.

A number of European Commission-funded projects were discussed at the session. SFI will be a seed partner for Ireland and UK region in the ACT project,⁸ funded under Horizon 2020, whose partners will set up and coordinate a community of practice among research funders across Europe. Marion Boland will lead that engagement in the coming months. Anne Pépin was looking forward to a new project on gender gaps and biases in the allocation of grants, funded under the 2018 Science with and for Society programme, which should kick off by the end of 2018. This will generate better understanding of remaining institutional barriers contributing to gender gaps in research funding, and of the policy changes required to remove such barriers.

Since publication of the Health Research Board gender policy in June 2016, HRB has reported to the board annually on gender statistics of awards made, and panel composition, which we then publish on our website. HRB aims to promote gender equality as it relates to decision-making in allocating research funding, and to ensure our processes align with international best practice.

Unlike some funders in STEMM, HRB schemes typically attract more female applicants, roughly 60%. Our data shows that success rates for male and female applicants are about equal. HRB does not use standing panels to make funding recommendations to our board. Instead, we convene separate review panels, constituted according to the expertise needed to review applications to a specific scheme, or to conduct interim review of certain awards.⁹ Our gender policy sets a target of 40% of the underrepresented gender (male or female) in our panels, which we are achieving overall. We also aim over the course of a year to have balanced representation in the chairs for our review panels; this is more difficult, as each panel has a single chair, but we monitor it to achieve balance.

In January 2018, HRB had an internal workshop focusing on how we assess research grant applications, in particular how we develop and use assessment criteria.

SPOTLIGHT ON ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

In 2016–17 HRB undertook an external review of our call processes and documentation, and incorporated a live review of some HRB panels: an observer attended review proceedings and reported back to us. While they did not uncover specific gender bias, they did note areas that could be strengthened in the review process. One is assessment criteria: their length, amount, and level of ambiguity.

The report submitted to HRB, and published on our website, noted that experienced reviewers interviewed reported that ‘HRB criteria “feel” familiar’, which carries the risk that reviewers may base their ratings not on the HRB criteria but on those of another funder more familiar to them.¹⁰ Also highlighted was that an assessment criterion that is long, with multiple components, ‘can be interpreted in different ways by different reviewers, with the salient points for them typically being the ones that are remembered and considered’.

As a result, in January 2018 we had an internal workshop, facilitated by the same provider, focusing on how we assess research grant applications,

in particular how we develop and use assessment criteria. Behaviourally anchored rating scales (BARS) use behavioural examples of performance at different points on a scale.¹¹ Commonly used as a tool to improve objectivity when rating candidates for jobs, the approach uses indicators of competence, matched to statements which describe ineffective, effective, or highly effective indicators. It involves much preparatory work developing and refining criteria, which are simplified and distilled to reduce ambiguity. Rather than using a numerical score, for each criterion the reviewers select the narrative which best describes that aspect of the application. The BARS approach has to be carried through in all documentation and guidance for reviewers, and then on the day of the panel meetings when recommendations for awards are made.

The BARS approach works best in our processes for schemes where there are fewer applicants, and this year it has been used in a number of schemes. If a full BARS treatment cannot be undertaken, for example in higher-volume schemes such as our Investigator-Led Projects, we focus on two areas: refining the assessment criteria, and developing a narrative descriptor for scores. This approach has been used in schemes this year: it helps reduce the incidence of panel members interpreting scores differently, and has garnered positive feedback from panel members. I highlighted this work during the Gender in Research Funding panel discussion as an example of good practice.

Thinking about how we develop assessment criteria and challenging beliefs about the level of objectivity we achieve has been a very positive exercise. Improving decision-making by increasing objectivity of HRB assessment criteria is a work in progress, and must of course be tailored to the aims and objectives of each scheme.

One near-term goal for HEI awardees of Athena Swan will be renewal of their bronze status.

MOVING FORWARD

I've touched on some work this year on the gender equality agenda in research and higher education, detailed a piece of work undertaken by Health Research Board to improve our review processes, and mentioned other funder practices that are making a positive difference.

I was struck by a comment from one attendee at the gender equality task force workshop: that applying for Athena Swan status shone a light on the inequalities that exist across our higher education system. How to tackle these inequalities is something to which we can make a positive contribution at different levels: as institutions, funders, employers, colleagues.

One near-term goal for HEI awardees of Athena Swan will be renewal of their bronze status. Funders will work closely together to ensure continued momentum towards achieving this certification. We are also working with SFI, IRC, and HEA on implementing our respective gender strategies, to identify specific areas for common approaches and to share learnings from our agencies on interventions aimed at gender equality.

Data presented by HRB head of pre-award Anne Cody to the Athena Swan committee in June 2018 showed that success rates were higher for men applying for larger HRB research grants (over €500,000) from 2016 to mid-2018, and that many more men hold these larger grants. HRB will consider

the issue of larger awards, in line with our gender policy, to ensure women are not at a disadvantage in securing senior-level or strategic awards, and that the systems we use to review these applications in particular will support fair decision-making.

In conclusion, imagine attending the 100th anniversary of the Schrödinger talks, in 2043. Will the attending students and viewers of the event worldwide see an equal number of male and female Nobel laureates on the stage? Will the audience smile to think that targets such as aiming for 40% female speakers were once necessary? Hopefully that will be the case. Right now there is much work to be done to create that future.

FOOTNOTES

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Pictured at the launch of the Celtic Studies Summer School, run by the School of Celtic Studies at Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies (DIAS) were (l-r): **Professor Liam Breatnach**, Director of the School of Celtic Studies, DIAS; **Mary Mitchell-O'Connor**, Minister for Higher Education; **Prof Vincent Cunnane**, Chairman of Council of DIAS.

NURTURING OUR KNOWLEDGE BASE FOR FUTURE INNOVATION

Informed curiosity and the pursuit of new ideas



Felicity Kelliher

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Senior Lecturer
Management, WIT;
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of Management

In the last few years, educators have become increasingly concerned about the devaluation of knowledge in an age when fact no longer trumps opinion. This has led the leaders of the Knowledge Quarter in London to ask:

What does it mean to be an 'expert' when the sheer scale of information available in this connected world has made us all curators of a vast bank of almost endless data, providing the answers to even the most obscure queries with nothing more than a tap and a swipe? How can the knowledge economy respond when facts are conflated with quick-fire internet memes, when slick presentation is more highly valued than genuine content, when the very notion of authentic truth has been devalued by the rolling news cycle and the dismissive cynicism of pseudoscience and special interest 'facts'? What, in short, is the future of Knowledge the concept, Knowledge the ideal, and Knowledge the quantifiable resource?

Knowledge Quarter Conference, 2018

Knowledge Quarter appear to lament universally available data and the democratisation of information, which they suggest leads to knowledge degradation. I disagree with this position. A revered knowledge base in the form of expertise may act as a barrier to data interrogation or to the acquisition of new information, while its outright dismissal can lead to the inevitable repeat of past mistakes. In contrast, embracing open online data access allows the human race to expand its search for meaning by releasing us from the assumptions that come from 'knowing' without question.

Nor is the World Wide Web the death knell of expertise. Online data may provide a basis for information, and information may be a catalyst to knowing, but its conversion requires understanding derived from experience, association, education, and the use of prior knowledge. Taking this perspective, data alone does not equate to answers. Rather, open online access to data helps inform us and, in doing so, gives us the power to search for new meaning in pursuit of knowledge and ultimately expertise.

CURIOSITY AND THE PURSUIT OF NEW INFORMATION

As educators, we have a critical role to play in nurturing a knowledge-supporting culture that balances past insight and unforeseen opportunity. When seeking opportunity, I believe the golden thread that links knowledge to innovation is informed curiosity in pursuit of novel ideas. Curiosity is an important first step in innovation. So how

do we instil perpetual curiosity, a thirst for knowledge, and a willingness to take risks – among ourselves and our students – in the search for innovation?

Let's think about this chronologically. It was once assumed the world was flat. This was widely accepted by ancient cultures, and some believed it as late as the seventeenth century – despite Pythagoras raising the idea of a domed earth in the sixth century bc and Aristotle providing empirical evidence of a spherical world c.330 bc. Interestingly, the twenty-first century has seen a significant rise in the number of 'flat earth' societies and believers, who use social media to engage with like minds.

If you did not know this story before, did you believe me? Or did you reach for the nearest internet-enabled device to verify it? You may have found both science and pseudoscience in your search, which would have given you comfort that the world is round or indeed is flat, depending on your view.

Regardless of the search outcome, the electronic platform you used gave you access to an immense databank, which you channelled into information propelled by your own curiosity. Those of you older than forty-five reached adulthood before this gateway existed. Those of you older than thirty-five remember dial-up lines where access could be restricted by the bandwidth available and the timing of your search based on the number of simultaneous users. Those of you in rural Ireland face similar problems today, regardless of your age, and we'll come back to that barrier later.

Curiosity is the important first step in innovation.

So, access to data and its conversion to information have been widely democratised; you no longer have to take my word for it. The result can help dismantle information asymmetry: your information likely equates to my own, based on your search and analysis of data on this topic. This removes an unhelpful power dynamic. I cease being teacher and become peer, where we can debate the flat/round earth in pursuit of an optimum explanation, with insight from both perspectives.

This conversation may draw us into the nuances of individual and collective human behaviour, or into a current popular concern that social media is corralling humans to interact only with those who reinforce their perspective. What's the true gain of this part of the journey? It gets us thinking.

FROM THOUGHT TO MEANING

Notice I haven't referred to what exists online as knowledge, merely data which is now easily accessible, at least by the relatively affluent who live in urban first-world democracies. While the Web can offer a myriad of facts and opinions, it is we who must decipher meaning from what we find. This is an important differentiation: it places the capacity to know with the individual, not the machine. As educators, our theoretical or practical understanding of a subject can help our students decipher meaning, while skills acquired through experience, discovery, learning, or education help both educator and student to conceptualise or create new knowledge.

Creating new knowledge involves complex cognitive processes underpinned by perception, communication, and reasoning. It also requires a willingness to take risks. Would you have the courage to challenge societal belief about the earth's shape, as Pythagoras and Aristotle did? I'm not sure I would. The penalty for challenging the status quo could be execution, as in Socrates' case for 'corrupting the youth of Athens'. Socrates pursued a logical trajectory to create new knowledge, when logic was not the norm. He challenged popular belief that physical beauty was the ultimate human skill, professing that intellectual capacity was the greater gift.

A truth-seeker, Socrates neither lectured on nor professed about what he knew, believing himself ignorant. He spoke in a dialectic way, asking questions of all city inhabitants equally – an uncommon practice at a time when it was assumed that the only worthy opinions were those of the wealthy or well positioned. Stimulating public debate with his probing approach, he compelled the audience to think through a problem to a logical and sometimes obvious conclusion. This was considered dangerous by powerful people and ultimately led to Socrates' death.

Let us step into the inquisitor's shoes for a moment. You may believe the world is spherical, but imagine if it were widely assumed flat by fellow educators on a global scale. What things have you taken for granted that are affected by this flipped perspective? Our cognition may be more socially bound than we think, embedded in what is acceptable based on language, culture, and traditions.

Socrates' stance of ignorance freed him to find new meaning through open dialogue. In doing so, he encouraged others to do the same. Being aware of our cognitive processes in this way helps to open our minds to seek the unknown or challenge the falsely believed. If a spherical world is far-fetched, it may be necessary to release perspectives we hold close, in an intellectual spring-clean, to facilitate a more open mind. By considering our biases and those of our peers when searching for answers, we may find more potential to conceive of the impossible, and pass that capability on to our students.

While the Web can offer a myriad of facts and opinions, it is we who must decipher meaning from what we find.

COMMUNICATING WITH THOSE BEYOND OUR COMFORT ZONE

Having built a rationale for a spherical-world movement, who would you solicit to spread this new knowledge? Humans primarily engage with people to whom we have strong ties. Outside of family, we choose others based on common ground: likeminded fellow travellers. We've been affiliating this way since long before the information age, but let us assume we would establish an online group, much like the flat-world societies mentioned earlier. Would you be willing to communicate this newfound insight beyond the group, regardless of response?

It is at this point that open communication occurs, when we step beyond our peers and engage the wider human landscape. We must accept that many people may distrust our perspective or dismiss it as illogical, irrational, or irrelevant, forcing most of us back to the safety of our inner circle. Yet it is those who stake their reputation and status within and beyond their

professional and personal communities that help propel new ideas into the general populace.

PROPELLING THE QUEST FOR FUTURE INNOVATION THROUGH THE SEARCH FOR NEW KNOWLEDGE

We've discussed the journey from curiosity to the search for unbridled data, which is then filtered to provide information to be debated and reasoned in pursuit of meaning, so we can embed it as knowledge in ourselves and others. We considered our capacity as educators to take risks when communicating new and sometimes controversial ideas to our students and the public. In doing so, educators seek to retain, hone, and build our curiosity and risk-taking prowess so that the authenticity of advice feeds our students' knowledge generation and innovation.

Those who debate about the near future believe that the maturing knowledge economy presents challenges and opportunities for our perception, use, and management of knowledge. Consider the earlier quote from the Knowledge Quarter through a research lens. We face data sets so large and unwieldy that they defy analysis using our customary tools and methods. Quantum computing will soon move from research labs into the real world, while eScience, an emerging approach of scientific experimentation with data generated from other experiments, is challenging and expanding our definitions of empirical research. Artificial intelligence and R&D management are emerging as new sectors, eradicating the need for expert advice in a number of fields.

Creative thinking, idea generation, and subsequent innovation are the domain and responsibility of us all.

While Knowledge Quarter appear to lament the democratisation of data and information, I believe there are opportunities for the future of knowledge by embracing this potential. Remember, it is we who decipher meaning from what we find in data trawls, so there is value in nurturing our unique human knowledge base for innovation. Innovation cannot be the responsibility only of commercial entities if it is to perpetuate human development, nor should it be limited to educators, scientists, or any other interest group. Creative thinking, idea generation, and subsequent innovation are the domain and responsibility of us all. I am consciously widening the

field of innovation beyond commercialisation, as this may curtail creative imagination and more elusive creative inspiration – necessary baselines to help develop the breadth and depth of ideas for future innovation to occur.

GENERATING NEW IDEAS IN OUR EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

My proposed definition of innovation is simply the implementation of new ideas. Why is this important? Because what is ahead is not fully explained by what came before, and the challenges of the future are not the challenges of the past. Socrates believed ideas to be paramount, superseding senses. His approach and ultimate fate remind us that creative thinking is not synonymous with safe thinking, yet we often forget to encourage students to take risks when seeking new ideas.

Engaging students in curiosity-led enquiry, where no one has the answers, can alleviate the temptation to remain in safe waters and ideally lead to

collective exploration from which new ideas can be generated. Of course, this is only the first step. We want students to be not just creative but motivated to seek interesting solutions once the idea has emerged. Innovation education is helping us bridge the natural human need for certainty and the pursuit of the unknown among our students and ourselves, as we encourage each other to take educated risks to pursue and implement new ideas.

How might this work in practice? Ideation is one way that educators can help students to inform curiosity, generate ideas, and become accustomed to taking informed risks. This process, suitable for groups of all ages, requires students to reveal ideas in front of peers and tutors – an act of courage in itself. Our goal as educators is to promote divergent thinking, building students' ability to think about different ideas simultaneously, all connected to a topic or problem. We avoid the pursuit of logic or solutions in this phase, ensuring that absurdity has its rightful place in order to free the mind and reveal new links between abstract concepts.

Once this stage is exhausted, over as many iterations as are necessary to expose all new ideas, our goal shifts to promoting convergent thinking to help students individually or collectively evaluate the ideas produced in the earlier cycles of ideation. This stage is supported by analytical thinking, embracing informed curiosity and with a slow, deliberate interaction with data, information, and prior knowledge to select the optimum idea to implement.

Students are then exposed to rigorous critique from peers and tutors, offering them an opportunity to test their professional resilience in a safe environment. They are encouraged to defend their idea and justify a decision to either implement it as intended or change it based on this critique. Social networks can propel this beyond the classroom, offering an optimised individual-group interplay. By embedding criteria of societal contribution, one can further encourage citizenship behaviour among the students.

This process [ideation], suitable for groups of all ages, requires students to reveal ideas in front of peers and tutors – an act of courage in itself.

This approach gives us scope for trial and error to learn from experience. It promotes an organic innovation culture among school leavers and graduates that can potentially permeate Irish society and change global dynamics in the future. With the advent of open innovation, the internet offers a virtual place for innovators to collaborate in new and interesting ways by providing a backdrop for divergent, convergent, and analytical thinking. It opens the door to mutual inspiration, a rare and valuable entity that propels innovation within and beyond the knowledge economy – but only if our citizens have access to the online resource that can inform their curiosity.

Online access for all citizens, regardless of location, should be a given in a first-world country. The stalled roll-out of broadband in Ireland is a significant risk for the country's intellectual future. How are we to be curators of a vast bank of almost endless data if we don't have access? More importantly, how are we to move beyond the role of curator without access to the information that can generate new insight and meaning? It is

this curtailed access that poses the greater risk to our knowledge base for future innovation.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

With sincere thanks to Dr Margaret Tynan, Lecturer in Enterprise, for her invaluable advice.

Inaugural UK-Ireland Research Funders' Forum

On 20 November 2018, representatives from the Irish Research Council (IRC), Science Foundation Ireland (SFI), the Health Research Board (HRB), and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), met in Dublin for the inaugural UK-Ireland Research Funders' Forum.



(L-R) **Michael Ryan**, Head of International, Science Foundation Ireland; **Peter Brown**, Director of the Irish Research Council; **Professor Jane Ohlmeyer**, Chair of the Irish Research Council; **Robin Barnett**, British Ambassador to Ireland; and **Professor Andrew Thompson**, Executive Chair, Arts Humanities Research Council, UK

THE NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR DOCTORAL EDUCATION

Anchor and launch pad for graduate education



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The National Framework for Doctoral Education (2015), the related Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) Statutory Quality Assessment Guidelines for Research Degrees (2017), and the forthcoming Code of Practice for Research Degrees provide an integrated infrastructure for delineating the field of graduate education in Ireland, and for promoting quality within it. Taken as a whole, they have the potential to support cohesion in graduate education as both process and product, while also providing a catalyst for initiatives to share best practice and consultation about future developments in graduate education.

To realise this potential, it is vital that the National Framework for Doctoral Education operates as a living document, evolving and adapting in dynamic ways, informed by a robust evidence base and guided by ongoing engagement with key stakeholders. This gives rise to two key challenges, which provide the focus of this article.

The first is the need to collect data that can inform ongoing review of the implementation and impact of the Framework principles, including consideration of the experiences of students, supervisors, and other stakeholders. The second challenge is to ensure the Framework remains agile and effective in the context of the many tensions created by policy and funding trajectories and the increased framing of doctoral education as a key interface between the academy and the marketplace.

THE EVOLVING GRADUATE EDUCATION LANDSCAPE

Informed by the EUA Salzburg Principles for Doctoral Training (2005, 2010), the National Framework for Doctoral Education (2015) articulates a shared vision¹ of doctoral research as ‘deep engagement ... at the frontier of knowledge’ (HEA, 2015). It also highlights the need for transferable skills that encourage more application and dissemination of knowledge, fuel innovation, and support career diversification outside the academy.

As a touchstone document that promotes coherence, cooperation, and commitment to quality, the Framework is increasingly important in the context of growing complexity and diversity in the delivery

1 The Framework is endorsed by key stakeholders in the higher education and research sectors in Ireland, including the Higher Education Authority, Quality and Qualifications Ireland, the Irish Universities Association, the Technological Higher Education Association Ireland, the Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, the Irish Research Council, Science Foundation Ireland, the Royal Irish Academy, the Health Research Board, Enterprise Ireland, and Teagasc.

of graduate education. The emergence of new Technological Universities, funding programmes such as the SFI Centres for Research Training, and increasing internationalisation in PhD supervision and student mobility are indicative of this evolving landscape. The emergence of a stronger student voice in the graduate education sector is another energising development.

The Postgraduate Student Strategy (2018), recently launched by the Union of Students in Ireland, recognises the limited representation given to graduate students at institutional level. While acknowledging the challenges of engaging such a diverse group, it commits to increased advocacy to enhance the graduate student experience. This is an important initiative, as anecdotal and empirical evidence flag the isolation and anxiety experienced by some graduate students and their dissatisfaction with elements of their study environment.

The 2017 UK Postgraduate Researcher Experience Survey (PRES), for example, found the lowest satisfaction rates with research culture and many variations in quality of research culture between disciplines (Slight, 2017, p.4). The Irish Survey of Student Engagement 2018, which for the first time included students pursuing graduate research degrees, will bring important insights into the experiences of our graduate students. Finally, graduate education and supervision, which have been somewhat overlooked in institutional strategies on teaching and learning, have received much-needed attention with the launch of the NAIRTL Digital Badge in Supervision (2017).

The Postgraduate Student Strategy (2018), recently launched by USI, recognises the limited representation given to graduate students at institutional level.

Against the background of these changes, the launch in 2018 of a National Advisory Forum for Ireland's Framework for Doctoral Education is a key strategic move that will enable the Framework to evolve and adapt in dynamic ways, guided by collaborative and creative dialogue between key stakeholders. The Forum, co-chaired by the Higher Education Authority and QQI, has representation from student organisations, higher education institutions, research-performing organisations, funding bodies, and relevant Government departments and will invite employers and international experts for consultation.

Core functions of the Forum include sharing information and best practice at national level, monitoring international developments, and working collaboratively to shape policy and practice in doctoral education in Ireland. If the Forum delivers on these objectives, and facilitates an ongoing, critical, reflective, and data-driven review of the principles underpinning the Framework for Doctoral Education, it will breathe life into the Framework and render it a living document that anchors doctoral education while also serving as a launch pad for its further development.

DEVELOPING A DYNAMIC EVIDENCE AND PRACTICE BASE FOR GRADUATE EDUCATION

The National Framework for Doctoral Education has prompted institutional initiatives on the structures, policies, procedures, and practices that underpin graduate education. The extent to which such initiatives are embedded in everyday practices is unclear, as is the extent to which there are variations in practices within and between institutions. The impact of

such measures on student and faculty experiences of graduate training and supervision is also unknown.

This lack of an evidence base to inform the ongoing development of the Framework is a challenge that needs action. Vital data is unavailable on completion rates and times, trends in selection of training modules, rates of mobility, numbers of joint and dual awards, variants in doctoral types, and so on. Identifying agreed metrics and methods for collecting such data would support an evidence-based feedback loop, allow for shared learning, and inform review of the Framework principles.

It is imperative, however, that data collection is not limited to narrowly defined indicators of effectiveness and efficiency, or interpreted in ways that fail to capture differences between institutions, disciplines, and programmes. Data capture must also have a clear focus on the quality of the research produced and the quality of the student experience.

The knowledge gap on pedagogies in graduate education, including supervision and examination practices, must also be addressed. Supervisors need encouragement and support to reflectively explore and make public their work in graduate level teaching and assessment (Boud and Lee, 2005). If the scholarship of supervision is not developed, identification and refinement of quality criteria for supervision and graduate education cannot progress. Incentives to promote uptake of training, to support supervisors' continued development as reflective practitioners, and to facilitate peer-to-peer learning must be integrated into institutional teaching and learning agendas – and indeed into workload calculation and promotional schemes. Inter-institutional sharing and capture of graduate teaching experiences would provide critical mass for developing communities of best practice and provide a dynamic resource for the continued enhancement of the Framework document.

The knowledge gap on pedagogies in graduate education, including supervision and examination practices, must be addressed.

RESPONDING TO POLICY DRIVERS AND EMERGING FORMATS OF DOCTORAL RESEARCH

European and national research policy increasingly constructs knowledge production as a stimulant of economic growth, innovation, and entrepreneurship, and calls for greater application and commercialisation of research output (see Horizon 2020, Innovation 2020). This push towards applied knowledge, greater industry-university partnerships, and employability of doctoral graduates outside the academy continues unabated at both EU (Cuthbert and Molla, 2014) and national level.

Take for example the newly launched Eurodoc report 'Identifying Transferrable Skills and Competences to Enhance Early-Career Researchers' Employability and Competitiveness' (2018) and the current Horizon 2020 funding call on 'Research innovation needs and skills training in PhD programmes' (SwafS-08-2019), focused on closing the skills gap between research employment in academia and beyond. The new SFI funding for Centres for Research Training is a key example at national level, prioritising research in specified areas and industry engagement.

Potential challenges for graduate education created by this approach include contraction of the graduate research horizon, prioritisation of research with utilitarian relevance (as defined by short-term market needs), and more limited support for basic and blue skies research that is curiosity-driven. The implications for graduate education of this push towards industry-aligned programmes and training are usefully captured in De Boer et al.'s (2002) concept of 'unbundling' the PhD.

Unbundling refers to incitements to reconfigure or repackage PhDs to meet changing policy and funding drivers. The National Doctoral Framework itself embodies an element of unbundling, advocating the mix of knowledge and professional skills that constitute the structured PhD model. Other unbundled PhD formats include professional doctorates that combine coursework and thesis, and thematic-cohort-based programmes with elements of industry-based placement and training.

While it is undoubtedly possible to reconcile calls for applied, industry, or professionally informed research with a commitment to producing original knowledge, vigilance is required. Another core challenge for the Framework will be to balance calls for new-format PhDs with existing conceptions of what constitutes a PhD. New-format PhDs must be carefully scrutinised to ensure that the integrity of the award is not devalued by a proliferation of programme varieties. And we must not avoid the thorny question of whether we need qualifications outside of the PhD to address increasing diversity of knowledge needs and career aspirations.

European and national research policy increasingly constructs knowledge production as a stimulant of economic growth, innovation, and entrepreneurship.

Finally, we must consider the different value systems and experiences to which students may be exposed in programmes with increasing levels of industry collaboration. Research findings on these issues are mixed (Thune, 2009), suggesting a need for comprehensive monitoring of research training provided outside the academy. The Framework provides a context for addressing these inevitable challenges, which will continue to emerge in a policy context that is increasingly market-facing.

CONCLUSION

The National Framework for Doctoral Education, as a multi-stakeholder document, anchors a shared commitment to the cohesion and quality of the graduate research experience and the integrity of the PhD as an award. It serves as a launch pad for future innovation and evolution in the field. For it to continue as a living document, the principles underpinning it must be subject to ongoing and rigorous review, informed by a robust evidence base and systematic interrogation of the extent to which the integrity of doctoral research as deep engagement with a question at the frontier of knowledge is being upheld.

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President Higgins honours recipients of Future Research Leaders Award

On 25 January 2018, the five recipients of the SFI President of Ireland Future Research Leaders Award were honoured by President Michael D Higgins at a special ceremony in Áras an Uachtaráin in Dublin.

The five awards, representing a €7 million investment, will also support the additional recruitment of 15 research positions. Research supported by the awards will examine novel drug targeting for the treatment of multiple sclerosis and obesity-related diseases, regenerative medicine, immunology, tissue engineering, protein engineering, and memory storage in amnesia.

President Higgins, a passionate political voice, poet and academic, has been a long-standing advocate of inclusive citizenship and creativity, highlighting not only the positive contribution of science to society, but also the links between the creativity of artists and the innovation of scientists.

Equally, the President has stressed the importance of placing scientific research in a clear social, cultural and ethical context, saying that the benefits of scientific advances should be spread as widely as possible.

The awardees of the SFI President of Ireland Future Research Leaders Award are:

Dr Tomás Ryan, who was recruited from Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) to Trinity College Dublin (TCD);

Dr Lydia Lynch, also based in TCD and recruited from Harvard University, USA;

Dr Claire McCoy, recruited to the Royal College of Surgeons (RCSI) from the Hudson Institute of Medical Research, Melbourne, Australia);

Prof John Laffey, recruited to the National University of Ireland Galway (NUI Galway) from St Michael's Hospital, Toronto, Canada

Dr Christina Kiel, recruited to University College Dublin (UCD) from the Centre de Regulació Genòmica (CRG), Barcelona.

Congratulating the awardees, Prof Mark Ferguson, Director General of Science Foundation Ireland and Chief Scientific Adviser to the Government of Ireland, said:

"The President of Ireland Future Research Leaders Award is designed to attract to Ireland outstanding new and emerging research talent."

"In supporting these talented and innovative individuals, we are delighted to recognise early career researchers who have already displayed exceptional leadership potential at the frontiers of knowledge."

"The development of leadership skills in these researchers early in their careers is vital to ensure research and innovation in Ireland continues to progress."



Pictured left to right: Prof John Laffey, Dr Claire McCoy, Prof Mark Ferguson, President Michael D. Higgins, Dr Christina Kiel, Dr Tomás Ryan and Dr Lydia Lynch. Picture by Jason Clarke.

Institute of Art, Design and Technology (IADT)

New Digital Media Building

Minister Mary Mitchell O'Connor and Dr Annie Doona, President IADT, at the announcement of funding for a new Digital Media Building at the Institute of Art, Design and Technology (IADT), Dun Laoghaire, Co Dublin. This building will support the growth of courses in the digital industries and will generate graduates for the emerging design and technology industries.



Women in Film

Second level students attending the Young Women in Film Masterclass at the National Film School at the Institute of Art, Design and Technology (IADT), Dun Laoghaire, Co Dublin.



Film Masterclass

Second level students attending the Young Women in Film Masterclass at the National Film School at the Institute of Art, Design and Technology (IADT), Dun Laoghaire, Co Dublin.





Launch of Early Childhood Research Centre at DCU



IRISH RESEARCH COUNCIL
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