

**EDUCATION MATTERS** | YEARBOOK 2016–2017  
SHAPING IRELAND'S EDUCATION LANDSCAPE

edited by Brian Mooney

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Education Matters

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

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## Introduction

I am delighted to present to you the 2016–17 edition of *Education Matters Yearbook*.

As this is the hundredth anniversary of the Easter Rising, we have invited the leading expert on Pearse's educational writings, Dr John Coolahan, to write about Pearse's place in Irish education. And as it is also the fiftieth anniversary of the announcement of free second level education, a number of other authors reference the consequences for Ireland of this initiative by Donagh O'Malley in 1966.

I am deeply appreciative of the generosity of the many experts in their fields who have authored the wide range of articles within the 2016–17 edition. Having worked closely over the past year with all of them, I am totally confident that you will encounter many interesting and stimulating new ideas within these pages which will shape your own thinking concerning the major challenges facing Irish education into the future and possible solutions to them.

May I thank all those whose generosity has made the production of this yearbook possible, particularly Phyllis Mitchell, the founder and driving force behind *Education Matters*. Her intimate knowledge of every facet of the Irish education landscape, plus her energy and enthusiasm for the task of bringing this publication to fruition, have impressed me hugely.

May I also thank all the members of the editorial board of *Education Matters* who gave so generously of their time during the year. In particular, may I thank those board members who took on the onerous task of approaching prospective writers in their own sectors of education, and managing the very difficult task of ensuring that all our authors delivered their articles on time.

Without our supporters DCU, Irish Research Council, NUI, Maynooth University, NUI Galway, UL, QQI, SOLAS, NCI, SFI, Leargas, Edco and CIF, we would not be in a position to produce and distribute this comprehensive overview of Irish education to you our readers. May I thank all of you collectively, and particularly our chief sponsors Dr Brian Mc Craith, President of DCU, and the Irish Research Council, whose Director Dr Eucharía Meehan is a member of our editorial board.

May I also thank you our readers for your loyalty to *Education Matters* and invite you to contribute to the ongoing debate on issues pertinent to Irish education on our website [www.educationmatters.ie](http://www.educationmatters.ie).

I am sure you will agree with me that this year's edition of *Education Matters Yearbook* is of the highest possible standard. May I thank our graphic designer, Jeroen Bos of Artvaark Design, and the staff at Walsh Colour Print for the quality of their work.

Finally, may I express my appreciation to Teresa, my beloved wife and partner, for her forbearance while I undertook the role of Editor of *Education Matters Yearbook* over the past two years.

## Editorial



By Brian Mooney  
Editor

The greatest inhibitor to developing a world-class education system in Ireland, one that meets the learning needs of all our people, is for those in positions of power or influence to hold fast to their opinions and beliefs about what constitutes good-quality education, based often on their own life experience of education in all its manifestations.

In considering the wide range of issues we wished to address in the 2016 edition of *Education Matters Yearbook*, the editorial board sought to bring together authors who would challenge every preconception held by those who control and shape educational delivery at every level, and thus how those who access education, at any time in their life, experience it.

Over the past six months, as those who kindly agreed to share their wisdom with us submitted their articles, I have found my own preconceptions of what constitutes quality in education being challenged, reshaped, and reformed, to the point where I can no longer be certain of anything I formerly believed to be true in the field of education.

It is only in such circumstances that both I as editor, and you as a reader of this publication, can begin to reimagine how we can work together every day to deliver experiences of education for all citizens that are transformational in their lives.

A hundred years ago this year, a group of men and women led by Padraig Pearse, made up mainly of poets, artists and teachers, dreamed the impossible dream, without a fraction of the resources required to achieve their objectives. Through the Easter Rising they challenged all Irish men and women to imagine a different Ireland from the one they lived in. In doing so, they transformed our perception of ourselves and sowed the seeds of the birth of our nation.

Dr John Coolahan, Emeritus Professor of Education at Maynooth University, in his keynote article on Pearse the educator, brings to life Pearse's idealistic endeavours to create the ultimate educational experience for children in St. Enda's. As a business venture it was completely impractical and was doomed to fail as a model of a functioning school for the masses. Pearse may have failed as the founder of a school and leader of a doomed rebellion, and yet, to quote Dr Coolahan:

*'During his short lifetime Pearse made significant contributions to public awareness of issues facing the education system, through advocacy he influenced several significant education policy changes and through his educational practice he imaged forth what an Irish culturally focussed school could be.'*

Dreaming the impossible in education, where resources were not there to make it a reality, did not stop with Pearse. On September 10th 1966, at a meeting of the National Union of Journalists in Dún Laoghaire, Donogh O'Malley, then Minister for Education, caused consternation in government when he announced his free education scheme without having brought

the matter to Cabinet. The enthusiasm of the public response made it impossible for the government to reverse the decision. In his speech he described the fact that 30 per cent of children left education after primary school as ‘a dark stain on the national conscience’. He spoke of how people with such a poor level of education were ‘condemned – the great majority through no fault of their own – to be part-educated unskilled labour, always the weaker who go to the wall or unemployment or emigration’. Through his decision O’Malley created the Ireland in which we now live.

Today, fifty years later, in every sector of Irish education we are challenged in the same way that Pearse and O’Malley were. Based on the facts, we could resign ourselves to accepting that our educational world cannot be as we would wish or imagine it to be. In every sector of our education system, be it pre-school, higher education, or somewhere in between, we are all massively constrained by shortage of resources – financial, infrastructural and personnel. In finding innovative and creative ways to overcome these challenges, who will emerge as the Pearse or O’Malley of our own generation?

In the foreseeable future there cannot and will not be the massive increase in funding required to correct all the ills of the Irish education system, no matter how successfully Minister Bruton delivers on the commitment in his article in this year’s Education Matters Yearbook ‘to convince people around the cabinet table and in the wider community that investment in education is the best route to fulfilling our ambitions as a nation’. We must all emulate Pearse in dreaming the impossible dream and working to the best of our ability in our own roles in the education system to achieve it.

In reflecting on this question of impossible dreams, I am reminded of a comment made to me in UL last November by J.P. Mc Manus after this year’s scholarship awards, which he funds, to the highest-achieving students from all 32 counties who do not have to pay the Leaving Cert fee, based on family income. To paraphrase him from memory, ‘lack of financial resources never stopped a good idea coming to fruition’. His fellow Limerick man Donogh O’Malley proved this in 1966.

As evidence to support his thesis, over the past nine years I have followed with great interest and respect the work of Dr Josephine Bleach in her Early Learning Initiative (ELI) with families of young children in north inner-city Dublin. Long before the Taoiseach Enda Kenny put together a taskforce in recent months after a spate of murders in the area, Josephine Bleach has been working tirelessly to address the chronic educational needs of this community with scant resources. As she outlines in her article inside:

*‘The number of participants in ELI’s programmes has grown from 448 (ELI 2008) to 8,484 (ELI 2016). The initial programmes, which focused on parental involvement and literacy, have been refined and extended through annual action research cycles to include Home Visiting, Restorative Practice, Educational Guidance and Numeracy Programmes. Having started with 15 families in the Docklands, the Parent Child Home Programme (PCHP) has now spread to other communities in Dublin, Galway and Limerick with 143 families taking part in 2015–16. The number of professionals involved in ELI*

*has increased from 119 to 837. Teachers and ECCE practitioners have been joined by afterschool services, public health nurses, social workers, librarians, youth workers, corporate volunteers among others.’*

There are tens of thousands of teachers, administrators, and decision makers at every level of the Irish education system who can be inspired by the work of Josephine Bleach and all of the other innovative thinkers living and breathing education throughout the country.

Transformative educational ideas, which permeate every article in this year’s edition of Education Matters and formed the basis of our decision to publish them, do have the power to reshape all our futures, particularly those of our children.

In conclusion, if I were to choose five issues from the many highlighted in this year’s edition which require openness to new thinking among those with the power to bring about necessary change, or to block it through belief in maintaining the status quo, they would be:

- » The rights of appropriately qualified early-childhood educators to a proper salary scale, commensurate with teachers who educate their students at primary level.
- » A willingness in communities throughout the country to countenance the divestment of enough schools to allow all parents to educate their children according to their ethos and values.
- » An openness among second-level teachers to consider methods of assessing students in their care that support the acquisition of skills necessary for young people to deal effectively with the challenges of adulthood.
- » A willingness among those who have traditionally delivered vocational training in Ireland to help the emergence of new models of apprenticeship, catering for an ever-expanding range of skills across all sectors of employment.
- » Courage among our political leaders to grasp the nettle of third-level funding. It must, in my view, include a student contribution from families with the resources to afford it. It must also have an income-contingent funding element which enables colleges to receive enough income per student to compete at the highest international level, in terms of the quality of its educational programmes and the research undertaken at fourth level, to generate the new knowledge on which our future economic and societal health depends. The third and final element of such a funding model should include a tax-efficient contribution from employers and industries, who benefit from the dynamism and creativity of graduates.

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THEMES

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## First Action Plan for Education

Making Irish education and training the best in Europe



**By Minister Richard Bruton**  
Minister for Education & Skills

**M**inister Bruton commits to a bigger high-impact budget in 2017 leading to additional posts in schools, funding for curricular and junior cycle reform, more deputy principals, restored middle management, more guidance counsellors, and more investment in third level.

### Introduction

The basic aim of this Government is to sustain our economic progress and use it to build a fair and compassionate society. No area is more important to this vision than education. Education is unique in this respect, in that it is key to delivering on both aspects of the Government's aims. Education is the best means of delivering a fairer society, breaking down cycles of disadvantage and ensuring that all our people participate in that progress and fulfil their potential. Education is also key to delivering the talent that will drive sustainable progress in enterprise, in public service, and in the wider community.

I launched the first Action Plan for Education with the Taoiseach and Minister of State Halligan in September. The central vision contained in the Plan is to make the Irish education and training the best in Europe over the next decade. The plan contains hundreds of actions to be implemented with particular focus on disadvantage, skills, and continuous improvement within the education service. The plan has five high level goals:

- » Improve the learning experience and the success of learners
- » Improve the progress of learners at risk of educational disadvantage or learners with special educational needs
- » Help those delivering education services to continuously improve
- » Build stronger bridges between education and communities
- » Improve national planning and support services

I will publish the Action Plan for Education 2017 early next year. Quarterly reporting and ongoing consultation with stakeholders will be the hallmarks of our entire approach.

My aim is to convince people around the cabinet table and in the wider community that investment in education is the best route to fulfilling our ambitions as a nation.

## Budget 2017

Budget 2017 represents the start of a major programme of reinvestment in education after many tough years, and the first phase of implementation of the Action Plan for Education.

The Education budget will increase by €458 million (5.1%) in 2017. This brings the Department's budget to its third highest level in history. The total education budget for 2017 will increase to €9.53 billion in 2017, in excess of 16 per cent of total spending.

The 2017 education budget will have a big impact. It will lead to 2,500 additional posts in schools. We will underpin ongoing reforms by providing funding for curricular and junior cycle reform. Strong leadership in schools is a vital ingredient to achieving excellence and innovation in schools. That is why we will be increasing the number of Deputy Principals in larger second level schools and restoring middle management positions. An additional €2 million will be allocated to strengthen guidance counselling provision. This will facilitate the equivalent of 100 additional guidance posts by September 2017.

## Teacher education and support services

Success in education is built on the quality of leadership, the ingenuity in teaching, the support in the community for learning. The Action Plan for Education aims to harness those human resources. To be the best we need to ensure that leadership, management, quality frameworks, teaching methods, and initial and continuing training are all operating to the highest standards. We need to promote innovation and excellence, recognise high achievement and seek to mainstream successful approaches.

A number of Department funded support services currently offer professional learning opportunities to teachers and school leaders in a range of pedagogical, curricular and educational areas. The recently established Centre for School Leadership has a particular focus on the professional development needs of our current and aspiring school leaders. We will continue to explore options for enhanced provision of continuing professional development for teachers and the creation of a centre of excellence to promote and support in-school improvement.

In Budget 2017 we announced a new package to support school leadership, including additional deputy principal posts for larger second level schools and middle management posts for primary and post-primary schools. The commencement of restoration of middle management posts as part of an agreed distributed leadership model means that we will now be able to lift the rigidity of the longstanding moratorium on these posts at primary and post-primary levels. This recognises the key role school leadership has in promoting a school environment which is welcoming, inclusive, accountable and focused on high quality teaching and learning.

## Fitness to Teach

In July of this year I commenced the Fitness to Teach provisions of the Teaching Council Acts. This means that for the first time any person, including a member of the public, an employer or a teacher will be able to make a complaint to the Teaching Council about a registered teacher.

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**We will explore options for the creation of a centre of excellence to promote and support in-school improvement.**

**For the first time any person, including a member of the public, an employer or a teacher, will be able to make a complaint to the Teaching Council about a registered teacher.**

Complaints will be possible under a number of headings, including professional misconduct or poor professional performance.

We are fortunate in Ireland to have such a dedicated and committed teaching profession. However to build on the high professional standards that exist it is important that we seek ways in which to continually improve. Part of being a member of any modern profession is that the public can be assured that when high professional standards are not upheld, it is possible for a citizen to seek redress by bringing a complaint forward and seeing it dealt with in a proper way. The introduction of Fitness to Teach is one way we can do this, and it will help make the teaching profession more open and more accountable. It will support high professional standards amongst teachers in the interests of children and parents, and will enhance the reputation and status of the teaching profession.

## Coding

For the generation of children recently born and starting to enter primary school, creative thinking and problem-solving skills will be absolutely key to how they develop and achieve their potential. In particular, their ability to think critically and develop solutions in the digital world will be vital for their prospects in life. I am determined that we should continually improve the education system in this area.

That is why I have asked the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment to consider approaches to introducing the teaching of coding in primary schools. I wrote to the Council to ask it to consider coding as part of a review of the primary school curriculum which is currently underway. This will ensure that every child has an opportunity to develop the computational, and flexible and creative thinking skills that are the basis of computer science and coding. I am acutely conscious that we need to give all children the best start in a world where such skills will be key to participation and success.

The success of the CoderDojo project is a fantastic example of the benefits of teaching coding to young children. Hugely popular with children, it teaches creative problem solving skills in a manner that engages and excites them. I believe that we must learn from successful programmes like this to improve the experience and outcomes of the education system for our children.

## New Action Plan for Educational Inclusion

I have pledged to make tackling educational disadvantage a major theme of my Ministry. By getting our system of supports for schools in disadvantaged areas right, we can have huge impact on the life prospects of children – increasing their chances of learning well in school, of going on to higher education, of entering and remaining in the workforce, and of avoiding the many problems that too often impact on families in these areas.

The Programme for Government commits to publishing a new Action Plan for Educational Inclusion for schools within 12 months. I will beat this target and publish a plan before the end of this year.



It is envisaged that the new Action Plan will include the following key elements:

- » A new process for the assessment of schools to support students at greatest risk of educational disadvantage;
- » An updated School Support Programme which will draw on international best practice for using the education system to increase opportunities and outcomes for children from disadvantaged areas;
- » A series of pilot schemes aimed at introducing measures which have been shown to work well in improving results for disadvantaged students.

Among the areas being examined as part of the review process are:

- » Supporting school leadership. We are lucky in Ireland to have exceptionally strong school principals in disadvantaged schools – even small improvements in supports for and retention and performance of school leaders in these schools can have a dramatic impact on outcomes
- » Networks and clusters for DEIS teachers and schools – including greater supported self-evaluation. Stronger networks of peer groups for teachers can help develop new practice and improve learning outcomes
- » Teaching methodologies. There is evidence that, for example, changing the way literacy is taught to children who struggle can achieve major improvements in results
- » Improving the integration of schools and other State supports within communities to achieve more effective service delivery and learn more about what works best.

Equally important, we must develop robust pathways for young people who have started at a disadvantage so that they can progress their skills and secure good careers through higher education and apprenticeships.

Implementation of actions arising from the new Action Plan for Educational Inclusion will begin in the 2017/2018 school year and will be a continuing theme in our wider Action Plan for Education

### School Admissions

I have recently published the School Admissions Bill to make it easier for parents to enrol their children in a school that meets their needs. It will:

- » Ensure that where a school is not oversubscribed (80% of schools) it must admit all students applying
- » Ban waiting lists, thus ending the discrimination against parents who move in to a new area
- » Ban fees relating to admissions
- » Require all schools to publish in their admissions policies, details of the arrangements for pupils who do not wish to participate in religious instruction in accordance with their parent's wishes

**I have recently published the School Admissions Bill to make it easier for parents to enrol their children in a school that meets their needs.**

**I have asked the NCCA to consider approaches to introducing the teaching of coding in primary schools.**

**I will publish a new Action Plan for Educational Inclusion for schools before the end of this year.**

**Earlier this year I published the Cassells report and that report is currently with the Oireachtas Committee.**

- » Require all schools to consult with and inform parents where changes are being made to admissions policies
- » Explicitly ban discrimination in school admissions
- » Provide for a situation where a child (with special needs or otherwise) cannot find a school place, and allow the National Council for Special Education or Tusla to designate a school place for the child

Following consultation with members of the Oireachtas, I intend to introduce a number of committee stage amendments including an amendment to place a limitation on the proportion of places reserved for the children of past pupils where a school is oversubscribed. At the moment, there is no such limitation placed on schools.

I hope this important piece of legislation can be enacted by the Oireachtas as soon as possible. Our intention is to make sure that its provisions come into force ahead of the 2017/2018 school year.

I am also committed to increasing choice and diversity within the education system. The best and quickest way of providing diversity and choice for parents is by providing additional multid denominational schools for parents, and I have committed to trebling the rate of delivery of these schools to reach 400 multi denomination and non-denominational schools by 2030.

### Addressing the Skills Gaps

The labour market is constantly evolving and the specific occupations, skills and qualifications that are required change over time. The increasingly interdisciplinary nature of the world of work is also resulting in overlaps in the skills required across different sectors and occupations.

Planning for an unpredictable future is a complicated and uncertain business. To remain competitive in an increasingly interconnected world, the workforce has to be equipped with the skills for the jobs of tomorrow. While we cannot predict what changes technology may bring to the workplace of tomorrow, nor what specific skills will be needed, we can ensure that people are equipped with the basic skills and competences needed to play an active role in society, and that we have a system in place to ascertain the skills needs of the economy as they arise.

### Third Level Sector

Higher education is a central part of our plan as a Government to support a strong economy and a fair society.

We are providing an initial investment of €36.5million in the sector next year and €160million over the next three years. This is the first significant investment in the sector in 9 years – a period in which State investment in higher education fell by 33% (€463million), during a time of growing demographics. This will allow us for the first time to keep pace with demographic increases and also introduce targeted initiatives in priority areas, in particular disadvantage, skills, research and flexible learning, with thousands of students benefiting under each heading.

To build on this initial investment, we will immediately start work on a new mechanism aimed at allowing us to put in place a comprehensive multi-year spending plan for the sector. I will work with Minister Donohoe to put in place a sustainable and predictable multi-annual funding model for Higher and Further Education from 2018 in which all beneficiaries of the third level sector can play a role. I intend to bring proposals to Government in the middle of next year on this.

To examine the proposals that can add to these two elements and put in place a sustainable system of funding that can deliver a world-class third level system for the medium and long term, earlier this year I published the Cassells report and, as committed to in the Programme for Government, that report is currently with the Oireachtas Committee. This is an area where broad political consensus is needed on the future direction, and I will be working to build that consensus.

### Apprenticeship and Traineeship

One of the greatest causalities of the recession were apprenticeships and traineeships. Enrolment in their career pathway collapsed and fell by over 80%. This closed down an important pathway which is a characteristic element in many of the most successful education systems. We need to rebuild these options into a new robust pathway which will become an attractive and respected option for at least 20% of our school leavers. This would see the present 25 apprenticeships expand to over 100, covering all major economic sectors, and annual enrolments growing from under 4,000 to over 13,000. This will require us to forge a new partnership with employers, both in the public and private sectors.

### New Skills Architecture

Under the National Skills Strategy we will develop a new National Skills Council. The Council will drive implementation, oversee research and provide advice on the prioritisation of identified skills needs and how to secure the delivery of identified needs. Information will be provided to the Council from many different sources, including the Regional Skills Fora, which form a key part of this new Skills Architecture.

Nine Regional Skills Fora have been established, providing a single point of contact in each region to help employers connect with the range of services and supports available across the education and training system. The innovative structure of the fora sees the work plan within each region being driven by key stakeholders in the region including employers, enterprises and education and training providers, ensuring that the responses developed are tailored to the unique identified skills needs.

A dedicated team of nine Regional Skills Forum Managers have been appointed to be the key contact points and lead the work of the Forum in each Region ([www.regionalskills.ie](http://www.regionalskills.ie)).

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**W**e will develop a new National Skills Council which will drive implementation, oversee research, provide advice on prioritisation of identified skills needs...

## Pádraig Pearse the Educationalist

Context and continuing relevance of Pearse's thought and practice for education in Ireland today



**By Prof John Coolahan**  
Emeritus Professor of Education at  
Maynooth University

**I**n this immensely rich exposé of Pearse's engagement with education and with Irish language and culture, Prof John Coolahan portrays the young man's passionate commitment to his ideals; his intensity of thought, action and advocacy in support of his convictions and his energetic vision for education and for national identity. The author also discusses the continuing relevance of Pearse's thinking and practice for education today.

During this year's impressive Easter Rising Centenary commemoration, it is understandable that attention focussed on the physical force nationalist dimension of Pádraig Pearse's life. However, from the time of his youth up to three years before he died, it was education and cultural renewal that dominated his work. As Joe Lee remarked in his biographical note, "Education remained his [Pearse's] abiding passion".<sup>1</sup> He only became active in the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) from May 1914, having joined a short time previously. Even as late as April 1913, Pearse stated: "Take up the Irish problem at any point you may and you will inevitably find yourself, in the end, back at the education question."<sup>2</sup>

Before contextualising and examining his ideas on education, it may be helpful to provide a summary of his own education and his engagement with the practice of education as well as with the debates on education and cultural revival.

### Pearse's own education

Benefiting from an educationally favourable home environment, he attended a private school from 1886 to 1891, rather than a national school. From 1891 to 1896 he attended the Christian Brothers Secondary School in Westland Row. While he was very successful in the then four competitive examinations set by the Commissioners for Intermediate Education, he also became an enthusiastic pupil of Irish, influenced by Brother Maunsell from County Kerry. He left school in 1896 at the age of sixteen and joined the Gaelic League, which had been founded in 1893. In 1898, he took the Matriculation Exam of the Royal University and proceeded to the award of B.A. and B.L. degrees by 1901. His BA subjects were Irish, English and French.

### The practice of education

The extent of Pearse's engagement with the practice of teaching is sometimes under-estimated. Between 1896 and 1898 he was employed by the Christian Brothers as a tutor teacher in the CBS. As well as attending lectures in UCD from 1898, he also gave part-time lectures there on Irish from 1899 to 1902. In 1904-05, he taught Irish in Alexandra College Dublin.

From 1906, he gave more formal lectures in Irish in UCD, paralleling Eoin Mac Neill's lectures on Irish history there. He also taught in the Gaelic League's Leinster College. In 1908, he founded and was Headmaster in St Enda's school in Ranelagh, and in 1910 founded St Ita's girls' school, where he also gave sessions. There is a favourable report on his teaching in St. Enda's by a senior inspector JJ O'Neill, who later became first Secretary of the Department of Education under the name Seosamh O'Neill. From 1912, Pearse continued as Headmaster in St. Enda's as it transferred to the Hermitage in Rathfarnham. Thus, it can be noted that Pearse had quite a deal of first-hand experience of teaching and lecturing.

### Irish language and culture

Parallel to this, during these years, was his very close engagement with the cultural revival movement, particularly in its focus on the revival of the Irish language. From 1898, he was an active member of Coiste Gnótha of the Gaelic League. In 1899, he represented the League at the Welsh Eisteddfod, during which he visited schools to observe bilingual teaching. In 1900, he became Secretary of the League's Publication Committee. In 1902, he visited Glasgow and set up links with the language revival movement in Scotland. From 1903 to 1908 he was Editor of *Claidheamh Solais*. He proved to be a very strong editor and wrote a very extensive and influential range of articles. In 1905, he went on a visit to Belgian schools an event which had a major influence on him. Arising from this, he wrote extensive articles on bilingual teaching and prepared and published lesson plans on Direct Method Teaching. He also taught in other Gaelic League Colleges and he was sought after as a speaker at Gaelic League Branch meetings. The Gaelic League Branches had mushroomed to over 500 by 1905, one of the major adult education movements in Irish education. In 1907, he built his cottage in Rosmuc in the heart of the Connemara Gaeltacht, to which he brought some students to experience the richness of the folk and linguistic life of the area.

### Writings on education

As further evidence of his close engagement with educational issues, there are his specific writings on education. A large number of his articles in *An Claidheamh Solais* are focussed on the educational debates of the day. His extensive Prospectus for St. Enda's reflects his vision for the type of exemplar school he hoped for Ireland. His newsletter, *An Macaomh*, is a valuable on-going reflection on the activities of the school and of the educational context of the time from 1909 to 1913.

Pearse had been in favour of Home Rule until the British reneged on it, under pressure from Unionists in Northern Ireland. Between 1912 and 1914, he issued a number of articles on *Education under Home Rule*. He also wrote a series of letters to the press on *Education in the Gaeltacht*. Probably the publication for which Pearse is best known is *The Murder Machine*, published in 1912 and re-published in January 2016.

This summary of Pearse's active engagement on educational and language issues is evidence of how serious Pearse was in seeking reform for these interests. As a committee member, editor, investigator, pamphleteer, public speaker, lecturer and teacher, Pearse was untiring in his efforts both in bringing about change in the character of Irish education and in

**F**rom the time of his youth up to three years before he died, it was education and cultural renewal that dominated Pearse's work.

**I**would make the teachers, both primary and secondary, a national service guaranteeing an adequate salary, adequate security of tenure, adequate promotion and adequate pension...'

**A** people... has nothing dearer than the language of its fathers. Its whole spiritual wealth of tradition, history, religion and all the fullness of its life, and all its heart and soul lives in it." Herder

**A** people without a language is only half a nation. A nation should ever guard its language more than its territories... 'tis a surer barrier, and more frontier than fortress or river." Thomas Davis

promoting the language revival and cultural renewal movement. As he walked to his execution at dawn on 3 May 1916, at the early age of 36, he could have looked back at a lifetime of significant endeavour to promote the education and language system which he considered integral to a distinct Irish nationhood.

### Advocate for Reform

When evaluating Pearse's educational ideas it is desirable to try and relate to the mind-set of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, rather than viewing them from a contemporary perspective. All three forms of the Irish school system – national, secondary and technical – emerged during the time that Ireland formed part of the British Empire. To some extent, the school system was designed as a political socialisation process which prohibited or under-emphasised the Irish language, history and culture/heritage. This gave rise to the cultural revival movement of that period. Many of the revivalists considered that the Irish language and distinctive culture was in great decline and perhaps on the road to extinction. In 1892, Douglas Hyde gave expression to the mood in his address, *The Necessity for De-Anglicising Ireland*. He and Eoin MacNeill were key founders of the Gaelic League in 1893.

In the early nineteenth century, cultural nationalist theorists such as Fichte, Herder and Von Humboldt had identified language as the key criterion for nationhood. The possession of a distinct language gave a moral right to independent statehood. Fichte for instance wrote: "Wherever a separate language is found there a separate nation exists which has the right to take independent charge of its own affairs."<sup>3</sup> Likewise Herder stated: "Herder stated, "A people ... has nothing dearer than the language of its fathers. Its whole spiritual wealth of tradition, history, religion and all the fullness of its life, and all its heart and soul lives in it."<sup>4</sup> He went on to write, "If language is the organ of our social forces, the medium of our innermost education, then we cannot be educated otherwise than in the language of our people and of our country."<sup>5</sup>

In the mid-nineteenth century the Young Ireland Movement very much embraced such sentiments and through the organ of "The Nation", and a host of new publications, highlighted the importance of the Irish language and provided a strongly nationalist interpretation of Irish history. Thomas Davis wrote: "A people without a language is only half a nation. A nation should ever guard its language more than its territories... 'tis a surer barrier, and more frontier than fortress or river."<sup>6</sup> The motto of the Gaelic League, "Tír gan Teanga, Tír gan anam" was taken from the Young Irishmen.

At the turn of the 20th century, Pearse was one of those who were very influenced by such views and adopted a strong revivalist stance towards the Irish language. Pearse remarked, "Were the Irish language to disappear, then the people which we should have in Ireland, whatever else they might be, would not be the Irish nation."<sup>7</sup> Many of his sayings echo the cultural nationalist theorists as when he wrote, "Language and literature must always remain the most important channels for national self expression... In it Ireland's temperament is expressed, its point of

view is Ireland's. Moreover, it imposes the Irish point of view and Irish modes of thought on these who use it.”<sup>8</sup>

It is against such a framework of reference and conviction, in a political context in which the Gaelic culture was considered to be gravely imperilled, that one needs to understand the intensity of Pearse's drive for language and cultural renewal. He saw the education system as a crucial agency in this life or death struggle. Pearse's priority, for most of his life, was to secure reforms in the education system through which he and future generations of Irish people could turn the tide of Anglicisation and, as he saw it, re-establish links with the older Gaelic culture before the conquest.

As it happens, the decade 1898 to 1908 was an era of major effort at educational reform in Ireland, even though one would not think it from Pearse's writings. However, he took a very active role in advocating and influencing many of the reform initiatives. He was an untiring advocate of reform, particularly elements relating to his areas of concern – the Irish language and education. Through a vast range of articles in *An Claidheamh Solais*, through a range of pamphlets and by many public speeches, he fought for change. He criticised the system for being anti-national, for its rigidity and for its alleged lack of freedom for teachers, reserving his most harsh criticism for secondary education, carrying scars from his own experience of its four-tier competitive exam system. There is a difference in tone in his critique in the pre-1912 period, which is more focussed and constructive, whereas his later reflections on education are more sweeping, rhetorical and less based on evidence.

Pearse was a committed advocate of the value of bilingualism in education. He partnered Archbishop Walsh in a pamphlet on Bilingual Education, published by the Gaelic League in 1900. His sustained advocacy of the cause was a factor in the Commissioners of National Education authorising and supporting Bilingualism in 1904. It was also agreed to allow Irish as an ordinary school subject and as an “Extra Subject” for fees, as well as in the bilingual format. In 1904, following representations, a corps of Irish language inspectors were appointed. Due to further advocacy by Pearse and others, in 1907 organisers for Irish instruction were recognised. There had been an impressive increase in the provision of Gaelic League Colleges and, in 1906 following advocacy, they were granted state aid. What was striking about Pearse's engagement was that he acknowledged when progress was made, and pointed out that all the fault could not be levelled at the Education Commissioners. In January 1908, he acknowledged, “*Irish can be taught under the existing code, and well taught, to every child in Ireland. If it is not taught in a given school the blame is with the teacher and the manager – one or both. On that point let there be no doubt.*”<sup>9</sup> (original underlining). Also, to Pearse's satisfaction, Irish history became an approved subject in the primary curriculum in 1908.

Indicative of Pearse's concern with educational administration was his support, in contrast to most of his colleagues, for the Devolution Bill of 1907. The key advantage of the Bill, in Pearse's eyes, was that it would place education policy under Irish control. In support of the Bill he stated, “That Bill if placed on the Statute Book, will call into being an Irish Council... which will have virtual control of Irish education... we shall be

Unlike the prevailing tradition in other schools of the time, Pearse eschewed corporal punishment.

Pearse was a committed advocate of the value of bilingualism in education.

He [Pearse] called for “Freedom for each school to shape its own programme in conformity with the circumstances of the school as to place, size, personnel, and so on.

on the eve of the greatest and most beneficent revolution in the modern history of Ireland. The schools will be ours.”<sup>13</sup>

Pearse was one of many who pushed for a solution to the contemporary university question. Again, his response to Augustine Birrell's 1908 University Bill was gracious – “This really seems to be an honest Englishman's honest attempt to settle the Irish university question, in the best interests of Ireland as he sees them.”<sup>11</sup> However, he took a leading role in the advocacy of Irish as a compulsory matriculation subject for the new National University, achieving success in 1913.

### Practice

As well as his sustained comment and advocacy on educational issues, Pearse also wanted to demonstrate by practical action how a school oriented to Irish culture could operate. With this in mind in 1908, he took the significant initiative of founding a lay secondary school, St. Enda's, in Cullenswood House in Ranelagh. In 1910, he added St. Ita's as a school for girls. Then, in 1912, he rented the Hermitage, a magnificent site in the hills above Rathfarnham, as a home and boarding establishment for St. Enda's. Pearse wanted St. Enda's to be an exemplar school, in strong contrast to the boarding schools of the day, which he viewed as being modelled on English patterns.

The school was animated by a patriotic ethos. It implemented a comprehensive style curriculum with four modern languages as well as Latin, Mathematics, Science, History, Geography, Nature Study, Drawing, Manual Instruction, Physical Education, Vocal and Instrumental Music. The extracurricular programme was remarkably rich – sport featured prominently, particularly Gaelic hurling and football. Pearse established a school museum, particularly rich in natural exhibits. There was a school library with 2,000 books. Drama and pageants featured prominently, not alone in the grounds but, on occasion, in venues such as the Abbey Theatre and Croke Park. School debating was encouraged. The Hermitage included an impressive school garden in which students worked. A very enriching dimension of school life were visits and contributions from some of the writers and artistic luminaries of the day such as Eoin MacNeill, WB Yeats, Standish O'Grady, Sarah Purser, Douglas Hyde, AE, Padraic Colum.

In cultivating a Gaelic spirit in the school, Pearse drew on his romantic view of ancient Irish history and projected characters such as Cuchulainn, of pagan Ireland, and St. Colmcille, of early Christian Ireland, as role models. Unlike the prevailing tradition in other schools of the time, Pearse eschewed corporal punishment. He established a students' council and laid great stress on an honour code for students. In the style of pedagogy, Pearse put into practice his child-centred educational philosophy. He very much favoured the Direct Method of language teaching and he was skilled in the use of what was known as the magic lantern for projecting visual aids material. While Pearse was an enthusiastic, gifted educator who attracted a staff that shared his ideals, he was not a good financial manager. In 1914 he undertook a fund-raising tour in America, and in the period prior to his execution he was at pains to make ends meet for St. Enda's.



### Enduring Relevance of Pearse's Ideas

Viewed from the perspective of schooling in Ireland in 2016, there is much of relevance in Pearse's educational writings and practice, and one considers that there is much in contemporary school provision and practice with which he would be happy. Obviously, the cause he fought for – that Ireland would have control of its own education policy – has come to pass. The Irish language, Irish history, Irish culture and games now have a core role in the school system.

Pearse, in line with the cultural nationalist agenda, was committed to restoring “the national factor” as a central focus of the curriculum. He wrote: “The school system which neglects it, commits, even from the purely pedagogic point of view, a primary blunder. It neglects one of the most powerful of educational resources.”<sup>12</sup> The comprehensive type curriculum in contemporary Irish schools is reflective of Pearse's practice and perspective – “In a true education system religion, patriotism, literature, art and science would be brought in such a way into the lives of boys and girls as to affect their character and conduct.”<sup>13</sup>

The child-centred approach, which now permeates the early childhood and primary curricula, and to some extent the junior cycle, is very much in line with his aspirations. Pearse repeatedly stressed that the nurturing of the child's nature was the central concern in education – “The main object in education is to help the child to be his own true self.”<sup>14</sup> The aim is “to foster the elements of character native to the soul, to help bring these to their full perfection, rather than to implement exotic excellences.”<sup>15</sup> He expresses the process as follows, “It comes to this, then, that the education of a child is greatly a matter, in the first place, of congenial environment and, next to this, of a wise and loving watchfulness whose chief appeal will be the finest instincts of the child itself.”<sup>16</sup> Part of this congenial environment would be the absence of corporal punishment, which has been outlawed in Irish schools since 1982.

A further core dimension of Pearse's educational thought, which has continuing relevance, is his exalted view of the teacher's role. In contradistinction to his view of the contemporary situation of Irish teachers, he stated, “I would make the teachers, both primary and secondary, a national service, guaranteeing an adequate salary, adequate security of tenure, adequate promotion, and adequate pension ...”<sup>17</sup> Ireland, in 2016, is blessed to have a very high calibre teaching force, very well educated, and which under the Teaching Council is now undergoing a major era of reform and development. Interestingly, in the light of recent developments, Pearse urged that the teacher training colleges “would work in close touch with the universities.”<sup>18</sup> Pearse placed a high value on teachers' inspiration and enthusiasm – “What the teacher should bring to his pupil is not a set of readymade opinions, or a stock of cut-and-dry information, but an inspiration and an example... so infectious an enthusiasm as shall kindle new enthusiasm.”<sup>19</sup>

Pearse viewed the educational system of his day as very much a “top down”, rigid and highly regulated system. Against that framework, he repeatedly called for greater freedom for schools and teachers. He called for “Freedom for each school to shape its own programme in conformity

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Contemporary Irish educational policy has been encouraging schools and staffs to work collaboratively and to put their own stamp on their school communities.

Well-trained and well-paid teachers, well-equipped and beautiful schools, and a fund at the disposal of each school to award prizes on its own, tests based on its own programme.”  
*Pádraig Pearse*

with the circumstances of the school as to place, size, personnel, and so on; freedom again for the individual teacher to impart something of his own personality to his work, to bring his own peculiar gifts to the service of his pupils...”<sup>20</sup> He would also extend this idea of freedom to the pupils, in the form of pupil councils.

Contemporary Irish educational policy, through curricular policies, school planning processes and school self-evaluation processes has been encouraging schools and staffs to work collaboratively and to put their own stamp on their school communities. At primary and junior cycle levels, teachers are encouraged to adapt the general curricula and to design new elements such as “Short Courses” in junior cycle for their pupils.

A major bugbear of Pearse concerning the secondary school system of his day was the highly competitive externally set and corrected examination system. He himself suffered from the four-tier process of his school days, which continued in a three-tier format of Junior, Middle and Senior Grades up to political independence. It was to this system that he mainly applied the impactful epithet “the murder machine.” He regarded the exam system as fostering major defects in the teaching-learning process. Contemporary Ireland's two-tier, set and externally corrected public examination system continues to cause controversy. Despite attempts to reform it over four decades, the progress towards its reform has been slow.

In Pearse's day, the education system was run by three separate agencies, which operated independently of each other. Not surprisingly, Pearse advocated that they be brought together under one Minister and operate in a co-operative way working from a single building. In his view, the task of such a Minister would be demanding – “In a literal sense the work of the first Minister of Education in a free Ireland will be a work of creation; for out of chaos he will have to evolve order and into a dead mass he will have to breathe the breath of life.”<sup>21</sup> In 1924, the various branches were, indeed, brought under the Minister for Education as the Education Department. Nowadays, the various branches work more cohesively than in the earlier decades. Pondering on “when we are free,” Pearse projected his attractive image of the future, “Well-trained and well-paid teachers, well-equipped and beautiful schools, and a fund at the disposal of each school to award prizes on its own, tests based on its own programme.”<sup>22</sup>

### Conclusion

In conclusion, it is clear that Pearse was very actively involved in the language and education question in the early twentieth century. It was an era of great political, cultural, social and economic debate and action. During his short lifetime Pearse made significant contributions to public awareness of issues facing the education system, through advocacy he influenced several significant education policy changes and through his educational practice he imaged forth what an Irish culturally focussed school could be. Pearse informed himself on new thinking on educational thought and practice.<sup>23</sup> He visited schools in three other countries where language and culture issues had some parallels to Ireland. In his educational writings he set forth a range of educational perspectives many of which are of enduring relevance for contemporary schooling.



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## International STEM Education Conferences

CASTeL Researchers will host three conferences on STEM education in 2017

### 1st-5th February 2017

Venue: Croke Park  
www.cerme10.org

### 3rd -7th July 2017

Venue: Dublin City University  
www.girep2017.org

### 21st-25th August 2017

Venue: Dublin City University  
www.esera2017.org



It is estimated that, jointly, these major international conferences will attract in excess of 2,300 researchers.

## DCU Institute of Education

The first Faculty of Education in an Irish University



**By Prof Brian MacCraith**  
President, Dublin City University

**P**rof Brian MacCraith describes the 4-year process of Incorporation that led to the integration in October 2016 of the incorporating institutions inside DCU and the formation of the DCU Institute of Education.

### Introduction

October 1st, 2016 heralded a new era for education in Ireland with the completion of the incorporation of St Patrick's College Drumcondra (SPD), Mater Dei Institute of Education (MDI), and the Church of Ireland College of Education (CICE) into Dublin City University (DCU). This development is significant for many reasons, but most of all because it has resulted in the establishment of the first Faculty of Education in an Irish university – the DCU Institute of Education. The incorporation process has also resulted in an expanded and enhanced Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences that is now DCU's largest faculty.

Building on the strengths and complementary expertise of the four institutions that have come together, the DCU Institute of Education has a number of distinctive features:

- » It is home to the largest concentration of education expertise on the island of Ireland.
- » It will provide both Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for teachers and educators across the full education continuum from Early Childhood through Primary and Secondary to Third and Fourth Level.
- » Teachers will be educated in a research-intensive environment.

This last bullet point is highly significant. The Institute will carry out pioneering research and policy development in priority areas for 21st Century education, including Assessment, Digital Learning, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics) Education, Early Childhood Education, Further Education and Training, Special Needs and Inclusive Education, and Education for Sustainable Development (and that is just a shortlist!). The consequence of such a research-rich environment is that both student teachers and practising teachers will benefit from knowledge at the cutting edge of their discipline and bring that with them to their respective schools.

Overall, the Institute is driven by an ambitious vision not only to have a major impact on the quality of Irish education at all levels but also to be recognised internationally as a centre of scholarship and thought leadership in education.

### Origin of the Incorporation Process

Although the origin of the formal Incorporation process dates back to 2012, DCU had linkage agreements and degree awarding status for St Patrick's Drumcondra (SPD) and Mater Dei Institute of Education (MDI) for many years prior to that. Strong relationships had developed between the institutions and informal discussions in 2011 included speculation on the transformative impact of a 'coming together' to establish a 'critical mass of education expertise'. On April 26, 2012 the Chief Executive of the HEA, Tom Boland, wrote to all Higher Education Institutions involved in Teacher Education requesting a submission from them 'with regards to their perceived future role in teacher education'. DCU, SPD and MDI submitted a combined response, reflecting a joint vision and a commitment to a shared future. The excerpt below of our joint submission to the HEA (on May 30, 2012) captures elements of the shared vision motivating the three institutions.

*"Dublin City University, St Patrick's College Drumcondra and Mater Dei Institute of Education have initiated a formal process aimed at establishing*

1. *a new Institute of Education, and*
2. *an enhanced capacity and consolidation in Humanities and Social Sciences.*

*"It is envisaged that this process, while respecting the identity of the individual institutions, will lead to the creation of a single University entity.*

*"This new world-class, research-intensive Institute will focus on:*

- » *Strengthening research-driven teacher education through developing strategic programmes of research in teacher education and in education more broadly, supporting synergies across all sectors and levels of education and targeting priority areas in Irish education;*
- » *Developing cross-sectoral collaboration and integration across programmes in initial teacher education, thereby promoting shared learning for student teachers along the full education continuum (early childhood, primary, second-level and further education) and reducing unnecessary overlap;*
- » *Bringing together an extensive suite of programmes in continuing professional development for primary and second-level teachers and facilitating the development of cross-sectoral professional development in areas of national priority such as STEM Education, Literacy, Assessment, Digital Learning and Special and Inclusive Education;*
- » *Consolidating expertise in areas such as educational disadvantage, special and inclusive education, intercultural education and other equality-related areas, thereby promoting access and inclusion, widening participation and ensuring equal status and outcomes for diverse groups;*

*"The establishment of this Institute of Education will change the landscape of Irish teacher education. It will ensure the provision of research-led programmes of teacher education, the development of teachers skilled in the constructive*

**T**his development is significant... because it has resulted in the establishment of the first Faculty of Education in an Irish university.

**T**he successful, on-time achievement of this goal entailed a major change management process, unprecedented in Irish Higher Education.

**T**his historical initiative will provide a unique opportunity to prepare excellent teachers for all the children in our society.

**T**he new Institute brings together students of education across all sectors from early childhood, to primary, post-primary and further education and training.

*application of research in their work, the continuing development of the evidence base for teaching practice and the generation of key solutions to the current problems being experienced by Irish students at the crucial transition points between primary and secondary education and between secondary and third level / further education."*

In parallel with this submission, and following a request from the Minister for Education and Skills, the HEA established an International Review Panel to advise on the structure of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) provision in Ireland. The members of the Panel were: Professor Pasi Sahlberg, Director General of CIMO (in the Ministry of Education) in Helsinki, Finland, who chaired the Panel, Professor Pamela Munn, Professor Emeritus at the University of Edinburgh, and Professor John Furlong, former Director of the Oxford University Department of Education. The primary motivation for this review derived primarily from a Ministerial request to the HEA to "envison innovative strategies so that Ireland can provide a teacher education regime that is comparable with the world's best". The International Review Panel was also requested to consider the structure of ITE provision in Ireland and to identify possible new structures based on a reconfiguration of existing programmes in order to strengthen the quality of teacher education.

The Panel published its report in July 2012. The conclusions reached by the panel strongly endorsed the university-based, research-informed, full-continuum model proposed by DCU, SPD and MDI:

*".... the Review Panel recommends that **teacher education should be facilitated in a university setting** with systematic links to clinical practice in field schools which provide where possible for **the full range of sectoral teacher education, spanning early childhood to adult education**. This would facilitate greater synergies between the different levels of education. It would also provide **a critical mass for improving capacity for high quality research**, the integration of students and staff across a number of disciplines and the promotion of balanced international mobility of students and staff."*

As requested, the International Review Panel also made specific recommendations regarding the "Restructuring of Initial Teacher Education". Building on the Panel members' experience from other education systems, the Panel indicated that it is difficult to have the desired key characteristics outlined above 'unless the size of teacher education institution is sufficiently large and thereby has a 'critical mass' and competitiveness for good teaching, research and international cooperation. All of these characteristics are also essential for the overall quality of teacher education.' The Review Panel recommended that teacher education in Ireland should be restructured according to specific configurations that were outlined in the report, including the combination of DCU, SPD and MDI. With respect to CICE, the Panel agreed that CICE would be suitably positioned in any one of three configurations (including the DCU-SPD-MDI grouping) and indicated that "its participation would strengthen the chosen configuration." Following discussions with the DCU-SPD-MDI grouping, CICE chose to join that configuration and embrace the overall vision of forming an Institute of Education.

In this manner, a 4-year process of Incorporation began and, with significant support from the DES and HEA along the way, culminated on Oct 1, 2016 in the integration of the incorporating institutions inside DCU and the formation of the new education Faculty, the DCU Institute of Education, along with the major enhancement of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. The successful, on-time achievement of this goal entailed a major change management process, unprecedented in Irish Higher Education, and involved major commitments and engagement of staff at all levels across the four institutions. Given the complexity of the process, it was necessary to engage specialist external services to assist in its coordination.

### Denominational Matters

Upon completion of the incorporation process, three denominational institutions became fully integrated in DCU. The Universities' Act defines all seven Irish Universities as 'secular' and, in this context, DCU is, and will continue to be, a nondenominational, secular institution. The university has, however, a strong commitment to pluralism, social inclusion and diversity at its core. From the outset of the process, DCU made it clear that it would respect and value the identity and ethos of the three incorporating institutions. The new Institute of Education will provide a place of mutual respect for the formation of teachers for denominational (Roman Catholic; Church of Ireland/Reformed Christian traditions), non-denominational and multi-denominational schools. In this way, the establishment of the Institute will enable the education of excellent teachers for all dimensions of a 21st century pluralist society.

DCU's approach is based on providing institutionalized diversity. For the first time in an Irish context, the University is providing a framework to bring together institutions representing the Roman Catholic tradition and the Reformed Christian traditions. This provides an opportunity for all involved to celebrate the different strands in Irish society (history, traditions, identities, beliefs and values) in a critically-reflective, academic space. Such a development responds to the emerging needs of a pluralist Ireland and is built upon the values of mutual respect and inclusiveness.

In order to ensure that the distinctive identity and values of teacher education in both the Roman Catholic and Church of Ireland/Reformed Christian traditions are maintained on an ongoing basis, two Centres for Denominational Education have been established within the Institute (the Mater Dei Centre for Catholic Education and the Church of Ireland Centre). The core curriculum for teacher preparation is denominationally neutral and common to all but, as required, allows for the delivery of modules to prepare teachers appropriately for employment in denominational schools. Overall, this historical initiative will provide a unique opportunity to prepare excellent teachers for all the children in our society in a manner that builds on the richness of diversity in an environment that fosters mutual respect.

### DCU Institute of Education: Structure and Function

From its formal establishment on October 1st, 2016, the Institute has a significant scale, with a staff of more than 125 full-time academics and a student body in excess of 4,000, all in one location at the DCU St. Patrick's

**T**he Institute has a staff of more than 125 full-time academics and a student body in excess of 4000, all in one location at the DCU St Patrick's Campus.

**T**he Institute will carry out pioneering research and policy development in areas including:

Assessment,  
Digital Learning,  
STEM Education,  
Early Childhood Education,  
Further Education and Training,  
Special Needs and Inclusive Education,  
Education for Sustainable Development...

Campus (the post-incorporation title of the campus formerly known as St. Patrick's College).

The new Institute brings together students of education across all sectors from early childhood, to primary, post-primary and further education and training. As well as providing a broad range of undergraduate programmes in education, the Institute offers a rich menu of taught and research-based post-graduate programmes, at doctoral, masters, diploma and certificate levels. In particular, there is a strong commitment to the provision of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programmes, and, aligned with expected policy changes regarding CPD for practicing teachers, it is expected that this dimension of activity will increase in scale over the coming years. The broad spectrum of programmes delivered at the Institute will provide students and teachers with the knowledge, understanding and skills needed to excel in a variety of educational contexts such as preschools, primary and post-primary schools, vocational, adult and community settings.

The Institute structure comprises six constituent Schools:

**School of STEM Education**, Innovation and Global Studies: contributes to a diverse range of taught and research programmes with expertise in areas such as Digital Learning, Science and Mathematics Education, Education for Sustainability, and Global Citizenship Education.

**School of Language, Literacy and Early Childhood Education**: comprises academic staff with a significant range of expertise in relation to theory, practice, research and policy in the fields of language (Irish & English), literacy and early childhood education.

**School of Inclusive and Special Education**: is the first such school in an Irish university. It draws upon the rich traditions and expertise of St Patrick's College and the Church of Ireland College of Education in the areas of inclusive education and special education. The school is committed to supporting the rights of all children and young people to an appropriate education.

**School of Arts Education and Movement**: brings together expertise in teaching and research across the spectrum of arts education practices involving drama education, music education, visual arts education and physical education, as well as themes in creativity and imagination in education.

**School of Policy and Practice**: engages with contemporary practice and policy across primary, post-primary and further education and training.

**School of Human Development**: the school is concerned primarily with the study of Human Development, what it means to be 'fully human' and with the fundamental relationship between education and human development.

As a centre of scholarship and thought leadership in teacher education and in education more generally, the Institute hosts an impressive range of research centres in key areas of education. These include:

- » The Centre for Advancement of Science Teaching and Learning (CASTeL)
- » The Centre for Assessment Research, Policy and Practice in Education (CARPE)
- » The Anti-Bullying Centre (ABC)
- » The National Institute for Digital Learning (NIDL)
- » The Centre for Evaluation, Quality & Inspection (EQI)
- » The Centre for Human Rights and Citizenship Education
- » The Centre for Research Across Teacher Education (CREATE21)
- » The Educational Disadvantage Centre
- » The International Centre for Innovation and Workplace Learning (ICIWL)
- » The Further Education and Training Research Centre (FETRC)
- » Irish Centre for Religious Education (ICRE)

In addition, the United Nations University (UNU) acknowledged the Regional Centre of Expertise in Education for Sustainable Development for the greater Dublin area ('RCE Dublin in ESD') in March 2013. RCE Dublin is coordinated by DCU and will implement six projects in the greater Dublin area from 2014–2018.

All of the research centres listed above play a key role not only in creating knowledge for specialists and broader society, but also in ensuring that teachers educated in the Institute are exposed on an ongoing basis to the most up-to date knowledge in their field.

In terms of the vision of the institute to be ranked among the world leaders in education scholarship, world class research leadership is critical. DCU has already appointed Ireland's first Chair in Digital Learning (Prof Mark Brown) who heads up the National Institute for Digital Learning (NIDL). Earlier this year, the US Company Prometric (with an Irish base in Dundalk) provided funding to establish Ireland's first Chair in Assessment (Prof Michael O'Leary). At the time of writing, private funding has been provided to establish the Desmond Chair in Early Childhood Education together with an associated research centre. It is expected that other such critical developments will be announced in the coming year.

### Conclusion

The establishment of the first Faculty of Education in an Irish university represents a major milestone for Education in Ireland. By virtue of its vision, its scale, its spectrum of expertise, and its ambition, this Institute has the potential to transform the face of Irish education for many decades ahead!

All of the [eleven] research centres play a key role... in ensuring that teachers educated in the Institute are exposed to the most up-to date knowledge in their field.

## Minister for Education and Skills launches STEM report

High quality STEM is pivotal



By Brian Mooney  
Editor

The imperative to achieve delivery of high quality STEM education is

identified as a dominant theme of the STEM report, which was officially launched in November 2016. Editor Brian Mooney details here some of the wide range of actions towards this end outlined in the report.

In the 2015 edition of *Education Matters Yearbook*, Education Matters published the main findings of the STEM Education Review Group which was led by Prof Brian MacCraith and included experts in STEM education as well as industry figures from world-leading companies including Intel and IBM. Following lengthy consideration by the current Minister for Education and Skills Richard Bruton, the report was formally launched on 24th November 2016.

The report outlines the extent of the economic and job opportunities for Ireland that are dependent on high quality STEM education, and also describes how a step-change is needed in the provision of that education if we are to compete on an international level. It also sets out how, for social policy and community reasons, it is important to have scientifically literate citizens in a modern democracy.

It maps 47 actions to be taken in order to deliver on these ambitions. In response to the publication of the report, the Minister has identified 21 of these actions for initial priority implementation. These include:

- » Deliver teaching of all STEM subjects by qualified STEM teachers. Currently there are challenges in the sciences – including an imbalance between the number of teachers with biology, chemistry and physics qualifications – which we (the Government) are committing to address.
- » Introduce computer science, including coding, as a Leaving Certificate subject.
- » Review minimum entry requirements into the BEd programme for Primary Teachers
- » Deliver improvements in continuing professional development for teaching of STEM, including a coherent Policy Framework in the area.
- » Develop a comprehensive suite of STEM Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programmes, upskilling programmes in the sciences, and Technology-Enhanced Learning CPD Programmes for Primary and Post-primary teachers.



- » Include more inquiry-based learning as part of the curriculum in STEM subjects.
- » Develop a means of recognising participation in extra-curricular STEM events and activities (e.g. Coder Dojo, BTYSE etc.) as part of STEM curriculum and assessment.
- » Improve teaching methodologies in STEM subjects, including better curricular materials, a central cloud-based repository for digital learning and STEM teaching resources.
- » Support online communities of learning and practice.
- » Market STEM qualifications better, including highlighting career possibilities for students and parents. The report finds that there is a gap in awareness of the importance of these subjects.
- » Address gender imbalances in specific STEM disciplines.
- » Produce an integrated National STEM Education Strategy (STEM Education Policy Statement).
- » Review minimum entry requirements into the B.Ed programme for Primary Teachers.

The 26 remaining actions will be considered further as the STEM Education Policy Statement – which will be published in the first half of 2017 – is prepared.

Earlier this year, the Minister asked the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment to consider approaches to introducing the teaching of coding in primary schools. The Minister wrote to the Council to ask it to consider coding as part of a review of the primary school curriculum which is currently underway. The Council is considering this matter in the context of reviewing the primary mathematics curriculum. This will ensure that every child has an opportunity to develop the computational, flexible and creative thinking skills that are the basis of computer science and coding.

The STEM report will now be furnished to the Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills and the committee may wish to consider the report.

Speaking at the launch of the report, the Chairperson of the STEM Education Report Group Professor Brian MacCraith said:

“The overall levels of performance and engagement in STEM subjects are not good enough if we aim to provide the best for our nation’s children, and if we wish to sustain our economic ambitions for the future. A step-change in STEM performance and outcomes is required throughout the educational system if we are to move our STEM education performance up to the highest levels.

“The focus of our report has been to identify pathways to achieving that step-change so that, through implementation of our recommendations, the quality of STEM Education in Ireland will be enhanced considerably and sustainably. I am delighted that Minister Bruton has commented so positively on the report and that there is an immediate commitment to implementing many of the recommendations.”

The Report of the STEM Education Review Group is available at [www.education.ie/en/Publications/Education-Reports/STEM-Education-in-the-Irish-School-System.pdf](http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Education-Reports/STEM-Education-in-the-Irish-School-System.pdf)

**A** step-change is needed in the provision of STEM education

**I**ntroduce computer science, including coding, as a Leaving Certificate subject [recommended priority action].

**T**he Minister has asked the NCCA to consider approaches to introducing the teaching of coding in primary schools.

## A Vision for the Irish Language

### Transforming the teaching of Irish and other languages



By Julian de Spáinn  
Ard-Rúnaí/General Secretary,  
Conradh na Gaeilge

**J**ulian de Spáinn gives us several good reasons to be confident that the Irish language is thriving both at home and abroad. He is anxious however about the survival of the Gaeltacht, that vital area where Irish has been the spoken language of the community for thousands of years. He also presents a well-thought-out solution to problems sometimes associated with learning Irish within our education system.

The Irish language today is in a good place. Almost 2 million people on this island have some level of Irish. Another 2 million people have downloaded and are using Duolingo’s Irish language learning app, launched in 2014. You can Google, Gmail, Facebook, Tweet, Instagram and Snapchat, all as *Gaeilge*. Music videos in Irish, produced by TG Lurgan, have had well over 10 million views. International interest in Irish – always stronger than we understand at home – is growing, with many universities around the world teaching Irish, from Poland to Canada and from Australia to Texas. And, in case you hadn’t heard, Ed Sheeran recently recorded one of the biggest songs in the world, *Thinking Out Loud*, in Irish!

There is no doubt that we have a huge opportunity to increase the use of Irish amongst those mentioned above – those who have shown an interest in the language, those who have the language, those who are learning the language, and others who are at the start of their learning experience.

#### Need to ensure the survival of *An Gaeltacht*

While focusing on increasing the numbers of new speakers, and inspiring those who can speak Irish to speak it more often, we must act to ensure the survival of the Gaeltacht. The Gaeltacht is a vital area in which Irish continues to be the spoken language of the community, as it has been for thousands of years. State intervention and support are needed to preserve and protect our most precious cultural resource, but any action being taken in Gaeltacht communities must be adequately funded in order to guarantee success. Languages initiatives undertaken in Gaeltacht areas without long term planning and provision of resources are a recipe for cynicism and defeatism. Proper planning, community involvement, and full investment in agreed strategies can, however – and will – create thriving, vibrant Gaeltacht communities, from which we will all benefit.

#### Solution to problems with learning Irish in schools

I present here a logical, straightforward, and economically sound solution to the majority of the problems sometimes associated with the learning



of Irish in our education system, based on both best practice and on international expertise. Most of the suggestions could also be used to help us build an education system that excels in language learning in general. We could successfully ensure that the vast majority of school children are not only bilingual in Irish and English, but also have a good command of a third language by the time they leave school.

The benefits of bilingualism are many and well-recognised throughout Europe, with the possible exceptions of the UK and Ireland. More media coverage could help to raise this awareness in Ireland. Here are just five of the benefits:

1. Improved cognitive skills, problem solving, etc. – these, in turn, obviously help with employability, job progression, and life in general
2. Improved listening skills and a heightened ability to monitor the environment
3. Improved aptitude for third/ subsequent language acquisition
4. Improved job opportunities – careers for those with a good command of the Irish language include positions in law, media, medicine, business, translation, education, and many other areas
5. Improved protection against dementia and Alzheimer's in later years.

So how do we teach Irish better, ensure that our school children are bilingual at least in Irish and in English, and reap the huge benefits of bilingualism and further language learning?

### Immersion Education

The answer I am putting forward is immersion education, immersion education, immersion education. This is the tried, tested, and successful method for learning languages throughout the world. I mention it thrice to emphasise that it is my belief that the **most important** method of changing language learning in this state should be by immersion education.

Ireland's greatest educator, Pádraig Mac Piarais, went to Belgium in 1906 to learn about immersion education and, on his return, he introduced it in his school, St. Enda's. For him, and for many others active in education at the start of the 20th century, it was clear that the best way to learn a language was to be immersed in it. Now, one hundred years later, it is time to allow the immersion method to reach its full potential in our schools.

We already have full immersion in Ireland in Gaeltacht and Irish-medium schools, with all subjects being taught through Irish and school activities through Irish. It is recognised that pupils in these schools become proficient in Irish and in English with relative ease. This is recognised by parents who continue to seek Irish-medium education for their children. There are now over 300 Irish-medium schools on the island of Ireland and 70 post-primary schools or units.

### Partial immersion

But what about the majority of schools that function through the medium of English? I believe that we should introduce partial immersion, i.e. teaching a number of subjects through Irish and increasing the use of Irish

**E**d Sheeran recently recorded one of the biggest songs in the world, *Thinking Out Loud*, in Irish.

**S**tate intervention and support are needed to preserve and protect our most precious cultural resource [*An Gaeltacht*].

**Y**ou can Google, Gmail, Facebook, Tweet, Instagram and Snapchat, all as *Gaeilge*.

**M**any universities around the world are teaching Irish, from Poland to Canada and from Australia to Texas.

in school activities, and gradually extend this system to all schools. Partial immersion is a proven successful method of teaching Irish in Ireland. The rapid improvements produced by Irish language summer colleges in the *Gaeltacht* show what is possible. Every summer young people attend three week courses and return home with the ability to speak Irish fluently and confidently. Imagine what could be done over 16 years if partial immersion were employed from the two years of free pre-schooling to sixth year in secondary schools. Below is a holistic approach that I am proposing to the Department of Education and Skills to support the introduction of immersion education into all our schools on a phased basis:

### Primary and Early Years education

The early years can be the most important for language learning and so I recommend the following two proposals:

- » Firstly, partial immersion should start from the two free years of pre-school provided by the state. Young children's minds soak up new words in both their native language and in another language they frequently hear. Partial immersion could be introduced gradually by primary schools and providers of early education by choosing subjects such as art, drama, physical education, or other subjects, and teaching these through the medium of Irish. These subjects would also encourage the children to perceive Irish as a fun means of communication, and not as a difficult school subject.
- » Secondly, I would suggest that this introduction to partial immersion should be accompanied by a language plan for the school. This plan would identify and provide opportunities to use Irish outside of the classroom situation to reinforce and give more context to the subjects being taught through Irish.

### Post-primary education

If we introduce partial immersion to primary and early years education, then we can expect that by the time the children reach second level, they should be able to communicate comfortably through Irish. To cater for their increased ability and knowledge of the language, I recommend the following two proposals:

- » Firstly, the syllabus that all students study to Leaving Certificate should be based on the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001)*. This means that the students would learn language skills with clear communicative objectives, starting with an increased emphasis on oral and aural skills and progressing to more advanced written skills as the student progresses through the framework. This system would ensure that all students would learn – and be tested – at the level of their own personal ability in the future, instead of following the rigid system in place at the moment. A language awareness course should also be incorporated for all students to increase their awareness of the importance of language learning. This is not currently fostered enough in our schools, or indeed in Ireland generally.
- » Since the revision of the LC marking scheme giving 40% to the oral component of the exam, many people feel there has been a dumbing

down of the standard of Irish necessary to attain a high grade, as very little literature is studied and the written component of the exam is not challenging. This is especially true for native Irish speakers and students with a high standard of Irish in *Gaelcholáistí* or other schools. For those students who have a high ability in Irish already, the change has been the equivalent of giving 50% of the marks in English to an English oral exam and taking most of the literature off the curriculum. These competent Irish speakers need to be catered for and challenged adequately at Leaving Certificate level. This could easily be done by having an optional additional Irish subject for Leaving Certificate with an emphasis on literature, similar to additional subjects such as applied physics. Alternatively there could be a third level in addition to the ordinary and honours levels – let's call it the *Sárleibhéal* – which would have bonus CAO points for those who choose it, similar to the current system for higher level maths. As the new Junior Cycle specifications include two different specifications for Irish – one for Irish-medium schools and one for English-medium schools – the time is right to follow this with the recommendation above.

### Third level education

Initial teacher education at third level should adapt to facilitate this new approach of partial immersion in our schools. This should be done in two ways:

- » Firstly, and at no additional cost, students starting their initial teacher education courses should spend the first two weeks of their course immersed in the language in the Gaeltacht. As part of the course they will spend two weeks in their first year in the Gaeltacht anyway, but this is usually done at Easter or during the following summer. I believe strongly that if the students met each other for the first time through Irish, and spent a period of time getting to know each other whilst using Irish as the medium of communication, they would be encouraged to continue to use Irish when they return to their colleges of education (having been acquainted through the medium of English initially, it is unusual for someone to change their medium of communication to Irish at a later stage). Being immersed and using more Irish right from the start of their course would be a huge advantage for the students developing their Irish language fluency. I also believe that the period spent in the *Gaeltacht* by the students is an essential part of their course and therefore should be funded by the Government.
- » Secondly, the colleges of education should teach all their students how to teach other subjects through Irish, such as art, drama, or physical education. This would ensure that more and more teachers in our schools will be able to use the partial immersion method on a gradual basis. This would give our children the opportunity to become bilingual at least in Irish and in English by the end of their time in school, while also affording them a greater ability to learn another language.

**S**o how do we teach Irish better?

**M**any people feel there has been a dumbing down of the standard of Irish necessary to attain a high grade.

**L**anguages initiatives undertaken in *Gaeltacht* areas without long term planning and provision of resources are a recipe for cynicism and defeatism.

**D**éanaimis iarracht níos mó ar son na Gaeilge." President Michael D Higgins

### Across all levels

The case I am making requires all levels in the educational system to be addressed in a holistic way. They depend on one another. The change wouldn't happen overnight but gradually over a twenty year period. If the Department followed this new approach, I believe that the teaching of Irish and other languages would be transformed and that huge benefits would be reaped, first and foremost by the children, but also by society as a whole.

Let's stop questioning the status of Irish at Leaving Certificate, and rather see learning Irish as part of a core education that also gives our students the key to learning other languages and accessing all the benefits that accrue to multi-lingual speakers.

As President Michael D Higgins says: "*Déanaimis iarracht níos mó ar son na Gaeilge.*" I couldn't agree more.



At the Conradh na Gaeilge 2016 Ard-Fheis in Dublin Castle: above, Uachtarán na hÉireann, Micheál D Ó hUiginn addressing the gathering; below, Uachtarán na hÉireann, Micheál D Ó hUiginn speaking with members of SEO LINN.

## History and Identity in the Irish primary school classroom in 2016

Why and how we teach history in primary schools: is the subject's potential contribution to citizenship education being fully realised?

Multiculturalism, interculturalism and migration experiences in classrooms are being explored and debated by many educationalists and from a wide variety of perspectives (e.g. Igoa 1995, Dolan 2014). In last year's edition of *Education Matters Yearbook*, Dr Fionnuala Waldron of DCU wrote: "The centenary offers us a once-in-a-generation opportunity to think about why and how we teach history in primary schools and whether its potential contribution to citizenship education is being fully realised" (Waldron 2015). The focus of her article was on the Centenary Programme for Education but her comments are also germane to a wider consideration of the Irish primary school history curriculum as a whole.



**By Dr Catherine Swift**  
Lecturer at Mary Immaculate College  
Limerick

### Concept of ethnic identity

Examining the primary school history curriculum from the perspective of an Irish medievalist, it quickly becomes apparent that the concept of ethnic identity is key to a number of its provisions. Within the strand entitled 'Early people and ancient societies', for example, the individual units include nine named 'peoples' in addition to Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, Celts and Vikings. (The introductory webpage on the NCCA Curriculum Online website identifies this strand as 'Early people and ancient stories' but the subsequent webpages concur with the printed editions in using the word 'societies'.)

While unlikely to have been controversial when originally formatted, the question which arises now from a twenty-first century perspective is how to define the groups identified as a "people" in a way that is meaningful for students: are they to be seen as communities linked by language, by material or other culture, or by a shared genetic inheritance? Pupils in the classroom are expected to become familiar with the following aspects (among others) of such peoples: origins, homelands, homes of people, food and cooking clothes, cultural or artistic achievements, myths and stories and faith and beliefs.

Again, it is thought-provoking to try and pin down in a clear pedagogic framework how these "peoples"

**D**r Swift discusses the tension between Irish identity/culture and multiculturalism in the history curriculum in primary schools and poses important questions about how we define 'Irishness'.

**B**ritish archaeologists have been arguing since the early 1990s that there is no evidence for a Celtic invasion of these islands and indeed there is no evidence for a Celtic 'people' at all.

**I**f we continue to stress our ancient heritage as a key component in our communal identity, how does that impact on a child whose parents may have settled in Ireland in recent years?

mesh and overlap with modern nation states. The problems involved can be invoked by the simple exercise of asking a student to define the characteristics of the American or Australian "peoples". In the curriculum, these are linked solely to population groups in situ when white migrants arrived such as Native Americans or Maori but most children would probably be accustomed, from their prior experience, to considering the term American or Australian to also include people descended from nineteenth or twentieth-century migrants and energetic adventurers from around the globe. Trying to limit one's teaching of American or Australian culture solely to what might be called First Nation populations seems hardly acceptable and indeed counter-productive.

Similarly, for the earlier 'peoples', professional medievalists are increasingly accustomed to considering groups such as "Vikings" or "Romans" as the product of amalgamations of different communities, encompassing much local variation but to date this discourse has largely remained within professional journals and monographs and has not made an impact on primary school textbooks which still tend to refer to these various 'peoples' as being distinguished by a single uniform style of housing, belief system, origin and homeland.

### The Celts

For the founding fathers of the Irish state in 1916 and their predecessors who helped to form their cultural awareness, the original "people" who populated this island were the Celts. Writers such as PJ Joyce, Professor at the Marlborough Street Training College from 1874 and author of one of the major monographs on the subject, wrote:

"The ancient Irish were a branch of the continental Celts: and they brought with them the language, mythology and customs of their original home, all of which, however, became modified in the course of ages after the separation. But the main characteristics were maintained, and a comparison of the native accounts of the ancient Irish people with the classical writers' descriptions of the Continental Celts shows close resemblances in many important particulars" (1913, 24).

This formulation continues to be influential. Reading the Teachers Guidelines provided for Celts, for example, one finds:

"it is an important principle of the curriculum that, at each level, children should experience material from a range of historical periods and in local, national and international contexts. It should also be remembered that the strands are not completely separate sections... work on the Celts might include material from local, national and international contexts and from the strands *Local studies and Life, society, work and culture in the past*" (p.16).

Or again

"The coming of the Normans and the plantations of the 16th and 17th centuries introduced new settlers to the country just as the earlier Celtic, Viking and other migrations had done" (p.22).



However the teaching of such topics at third level is far more controversial today. British archaeologists, in particular, have been arguing since the early 1990s that there is no evidence for a Celtic invasion of these islands and indeed there is no evidence for a Celtic ‘people’ at all. At least one influential writer to this effect published his views as a direct response to the creation of the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly in 1998 (James 1999) and the influence of modern politics in developing this approach has been debated (Megaw & Megaw 1996) but it is proving increasingly influential in Irish archaeological circles and wider afield. For example, Fintan O’Toole’s conversion to this Celto-sceptic vision is visible not only in his own writings for the *Irish Times* but in the almost complete omission of Celts and Iron Age materials from the online teaching resources developed by the extremely successful collaboration between himself, the National Museum and the Royal Irish Academy which produced *A History of Ireland in 100 objects* (2013).

Such cultural developments create a disconnect with nineteenth and twentieth-century authors for whom a Celtic ‘people’ was the key influence in creating Irishness. To quote Joyce again:

“The institutions, arts and customs of ancient Ireland, with few exceptions, grew up from within, almost wholly unaffected by external influence... The first foreigners to appear as invaders were the Danes who began their raids about the beginning of the ninth century. Though they harassed the country for about two centuries, and established themselves in many parts of it, especially on the coasts, they never brought it under subjection: and they effected no changes of any consequence in the customs or modes of life of the people. Next came the Anglo-Normans... but though this was a much more serious invasion than that of the Danes, and though these newcomers continued to make settlements in various parts of the country, the Irish people still adhered everywhere to their native customs” (1913, 1).

Again, given the stress laid on the Irish language as a key determinant of Irish identity by Ministers for Education after 1916 (McManus 2014), Joyce’s views have continued to be influential and the notion of Celts, Celtic art and Celtic customs as the formative factor in early Irish society continues to be widely taught.

### How can we define ‘Irish’?

For teachers working in multicultural classrooms in 2016, however, any formulation of an Irish identity which is inherently dependent on ancient roots poses a number of questions. What messages are we giving children through our teaching of the Celts? Can we, against the backdrop of British Celto-scepticism, continue to refer to an early populating of this island simply as an example of successful and very early migration? If we continue to stress our ancient heritage as a key component in our communal identity, how does that impact on a child whose parents may have settled in Ireland in recent years? Are we implicitly creating the impression that while newcomers may be welcome, they can never be “Irish” in the same way as, say, a child who uses an Irish language surname, even when that surname might be Mac Gearailt or Ó hUiginn, denoting a Norman or Viking heritage?

**I**t seems clear that we will continue to feel the need for something which marks us out as a single identifiable community, united by a shared citizenship and tradition.

**H**ow should we as educationalists help to create a shared “Irish” identity as well as an historical narrative of our past that includes us all?

**A**s a nation we need to rediscover our love for our native culture. *From the proclamation of St Joseph’s School, Drumcollogher, Co. Limerick.*

Such names, after all, have as much to do with family history post the Famine as they do with perceived ethnic origins. My own grandfather, as a Waterford man seeking a job in the new state’s civil service in the 1920s, adopted the mediievally attested Mayo surname of Ó Udaigh as a translation for what he perceived as a rather too Anglo-Saxon Swift although this can be seen as a negation, not just of our own family background, but of Waterford’s important history as a Viking city and international port. So how should we now interpret the traditional elements which go to make up our sense of shared Irish nationality and which are embodied in our current history curriculum as we look forward to the next century of our state’s evolution? How much should we simply discard as the unnecessary remnants of an older nineteenth- or twentieth-century nationalism and irrelevant to our contemporary society?

### Need for a national identity

And yet, in a world marked by globalisation and an increasing dependence on digital resources which often stem from the wider Anglophone world rather than from within this island, it seems clear that we will continue to feel the need for something which marks us out as a single identifiable community, united by a shared citizenship and tradition. When reading the various Proclamations written by Irish pupils over the last year, it was striking how often the phrases Irish history and Irish heritage appear and how enthusiastically such references are phrased. The proclamation of St Joseph’s school, Drumcollogher, Co. Limerick for example reads:

“As a nation we need to rediscover our love for our native culture. We thank the past generations who have preserved our language, music, dance, sports, stories, traditions and heritage. We declare our resolve to keep our unique Irish culture alive and thriving for future generations to enjoy. Through our many great sporting and cultural organisations we can foster a love and appreciation of our culture and traditions and share them with the global community.”

### ‘Irish’ and inclusive

The challenge which our children have posed us is how should we as educationalists help to create such a shared “Irish” identity as well as a historical narrative of our past that includes us all.

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## Religious Education in Ireland

### An erratic and unpredictable transition?

*I listen to my daughter's description of her RE classes and it all seems so vague and 'wishy-washy', there is no intellectual weight, and I say, 'this can only serve as an inoculation against religion rather than education towards any genuine religious understanding'. (Parent)*

To take this anecdote as illustrative of common parental reaction to Religious Education (RE) in Ireland today would be a woeful caricature. There are very many gifted, creative and committed teachers involved in RE, delivering well-thought-out and innovative programmes. Nonetheless, there is unease out there too among parents, in the staff room, perhaps among the students. The above anecdote may serve to flag the need for a vigorous debate about RE among the various parties concerned.

*RE in Ireland is in a process of erratic and unpredictable transition.*

This is the view expressed in a recent article that set out to look at Religious Education in Ireland at a systemic level<sup>1</sup>. 'Erratic' and 'unpredictable' are pretty challenging qualifiers. The author earmarks the key driver as *"the demands of an increasingly multi- and non-religious civil society"*. And indeed there can hardly be a teacher in the country who does not bear witness to the demands of the new plurality in the classroom in terms of ethnic, religious and cultural identities. Time and effort have been devoted to finding appropriate strategies.

Looked at from this point of view under the cosh of this 'key driver', it might be suggested that the desirable outcome is multicultural education and this especially in areas like RE. RE then would be a study of Christianity alongside a study of Islam, alongside a study of Buddhism, perhaps alongside studies of other religions, and alongside a systemic study of the human search for meaning. The curriculum set for examination purposes would precisely reflect these studies.

However, such an outcome would be miles away from what was sometimes called 'education in religion'



**By Dr Cornelius J Casey**

Associate Director of the Loyola Institute at Trinity College Dublin

**D**r Casey writes of unease and the need for new strategies for Religious Education in Ireland. He wonders if the approach being taken now is the best one. Multiculturalism is indeed a key driver but must *all* the experience of previous generations be disregarded? Are we neglecting to pay attention to the intrinsic value of Religious Education? And can there be an understanding of different religions unless this is generated by practitioners of a religion?

**T**here is an unease out there among parents, in the staff room, perhaps among the students...

**P**retty well all the experience of previous generations, seemingly, must be disregarded as no longer fit for purpose.

in previous generations in Ireland or perhaps anywhere in Europe. So, pretty well all the experience of previous generations, seemingly, must be disregarded as no longer fit for purpose. There are questions to be raised, debate to be had, about such an outcome. Should all of what previously constituted RE be jettisoned in the face of the demands of an increasingly multi- and non-religious civil society?

Moreover, it should not be simply assumed that the demands of civil society are today fixed, stable, clear and themselves beyond debate. On the contrary, debate simmers in many countries in Europe and beyond. The events of 9/11 (New York 2001), 15 November (Paris 2015), Bastille Day (Nice 2015) stalk the sensibility of civil society and haunt the considerations of how multicultural living is best conceived and fostered. Nor can it be taken for granted that multi-cultural education is easily achieved. A recent respondent in Britain offered the comment: *"The kids who throw stones at me or spit at me in the street have been through a multicultural education and probably their parents have – you could say the educational system failed them"*.<sup>2</sup> There is much to discuss, much to debate.

Undoubtedly new strategies are necessary, but which are the best ones? And must all the older strategies be simply banished from the field of publicly funded religious education?

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment has developed a new Religious Education syllabus from 2000. It is offered for examination at both Junior and Leaving Certificate levels. The aims at both Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate levels have strongly instrumental rationale for religious education, that is religious education is important for the formation of good citizens and for community cohesion: *"The emphasis in the syllabus on the value of religious belief and on diversity and mutual respect is of particular relevance for national and global citizenship"*.<sup>3</sup>

### Intrinsic value of Religious Education is a vital part of the discussion

Instrumental reasons for study of a subject contrast with intrinsic reasons for such study. In other words the study of this subject is a good in itself. Both kinds of rationale are relevant, but balance is important. Who would propose that the dominant reason for studying music is its contribution to good citizenship? It is only to be expected that public funded education would stress the instrumental reasoning; indeed religious education cannot be isolated from the wider trends in society. But at the same time, is it not important, even vital, that the intrinsic value of this education be acknowledged and nurtured, even in the interests of civil society itself, and thereby wise public funding? Could it not be argued that, if the intrinsic interest was more to the fore in the aims to which the syllabus for religious education is committed, important changes in course curriculum would ensue, and possibly for the better?

### Academic methodologies

The development of new academic methodologies for the study of religions is another important driver in the transitions visited on RE. This new academic approach is rather a bundle of methodologies drawn from the humanities and social sciences and bringing a global awareness to studies



of religion.<sup>4</sup> Academic methodologies are prone to claims of monopoly or even superiority. Some practitioners of the new methodology were slow in this regard. The new methodologies, they claimed, were the only truly academic methods for the study of religion. Theology, in particular, they asserted simply could not claim to make the academic standards of the modern academy. Wasn't it all faith based, they said. It is therefore disqualified, being incapable of critical open-minded research. War ensued. "Not critical!" said the theologians – "watch us".

If we do place the word 'faith' into the mix, then we will immediately ask 'what do you mean by 'faith', using all the critical apparatus of question down the centuries and on to our own today. Furthermore, the theologians said, if there is to be an understanding of other religions doesn't that entail a confluence of understanding generated precisely by practitioners of the religion. How can that be achieved unless you speak from within at least one such horizon? And so on.

Worse perhaps than the war was the confusion. People tried to marry the two streams of insight too easily. This hostile era is, perhaps, now fading. If so, there are better prospects for a fruitful transition in the RE domain because there are better prospects for genuine interdisciplinary contribution. Here, too, fruitful debate may be in the offing.

Finally, another anecdote:

*A parent reported how delighted she was when her son came home and told her they had read some pages of St Augustine (the Confessions). Really gripped and interested, he seemed.*

Anecdotes don't make a case. Everyone will have their own favourite. Nonetheless, an anecdote can often kick off a debate when debate is needed. The kind of unease and disquiet that seems to be out there in classrooms and in staff-rooms and amongst other crucial stakeholders, along with the sense that Religious Education in Ireland is in a process of erratic transition, would seem to indicate that debate is urgent and pressing.

## FOOTNOTES

1. Áine Hyland and Brian Bocking, *Religion, Education, and religious Education in Irish Schools*, Teaching Theology & Religion, Volume 18, Issue 3, July 2015, pp 252-261.
2. In Gareth Byrne and Patricia Kieran, *Toward Mutual Ground*, Columba Press, 2013, p. 100.
3. Religious Education Syllabus, (ordinary and Higher levels), p. 3
4. Robert Jackson, *Toward Mutual Ground*, p.46.

Who would propose that the dominant reason for studying music is its contribution to good citizenship? ...

Undoubtedly new strategies are necessary, but which are the best ones?

## Education and Training Boards

### A Vehicle for Transforming Irish Education and Training



By Pat O'Mahony,  
Research Officer, ETBI

21st-century Ireland found itself with a fragmented, small-scale, voluntarily managed and denominational school system and a training system operating independently of education. Pat O'Mahony outlines how ETBs can address, and are addressing, this legacy.

### Historical Context

Article 42.4 of our Constitution<sup>1</sup> requires the State to provide for primary education rather than to provide education. This and the other provisions in Article 42 merely accommodate constitutionally what had already become a reality.

The intention of the 1831 'Stanley' letter<sup>2</sup> from the Chief Secretary for Ireland to the Duke of Leinster, which established the legal basis for the Irish national school system, was to facilitate the establishment of primary schools that would accommodate Catholics and Protestants under one roof while meeting their religious education needs separately during the school week. After 1831, however, the denominations increasingly applied separately for control of schools,<sup>3</sup> and by 2010 99% of primary schools were denominationally controlled.

Though Article 42 refers specifically to primary education, it set the tone for how second-level education developed – with the exception of what was provided through the Vocational Education Committees (VECs), now Education and Training Boards (ETBs), following the enactment of the Vocational Education Act in 1930 and the establishment of Community and Comprehensive schools from the mid-1960s.

Fragmented, small-scale, voluntarily managed system

The legacy of these developments left Ireland with a school system the OECD<sup>4</sup> described in 2008 as 'fragmented, small-scale, and voluntarily managed' – a system very different to that in most OECD countries. Total responsibility for school governance (other than

- 1 <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/cons/en/html>
- 2 <https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Boards-of-Management/Stanley-letter-1831-Boards-Of-Management.pdf>
- 3 <https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Boards-of-Management/Stanley-letter-1831-Boards-Of-Management.pdf>
- 4 OECD Public Management Reviews: *Ireland: Towards an Integrated Public Service* <http://www.oecd.org/ireland/oecdpublicmanagemntreviews-irelandtowardsanintegratedpublicservice.htm>

in the ETB sector) is delegated to voluntary boards of management, with local government playing a relatively minor role in school planning and governance.

The OECD report recommended that Ireland explore the option of ‘delegating some decision making so that it is adapted to local needs, but regroup some implementation, e.g. using larger Vocational Education Committees (VECs) as centres of excellence in order to benefit from economies of scale and to regroup competencies’.

Over the years the Department of Education and Skills (DES) and some local authorities have collaborated in identifying sites for schools. The DES, through its Forward Planning section, now uses its analyses of demographic and enrolment trends to anticipate future demand for primary and post-primary school places and new school locations. Nevertheless, there seems a strong case for giving ETBs a significant role in planning for and effecting the establishment of new schools and upgrading existing ones. They have the local knowledge, skills and experience to ensure, on behalf of the State, that the current and future school needs of local communities are met in a timely and cost-effective manner. The Education and Training Boards Act 2013<sup>5</sup> provides for ETBs undertaking such a role – see below.

With some 3,300 primary and 730 post-primary schools,<sup>6</sup> Ireland has many small schools. One parish of some 900 people has five primary schools, requiring 40 volunteers to populate its boards of management. Obtaining 40 volunteers with appropriate skills is, to say the least, challenging.

### Demographic Transformation

Until the 21st century, Irish society was relatively homogeneous: Irish, white, English-speaking. And while religious observance had declined, most parents were content to have their children participate fully in the religious education programmes of what was essentially a Catholic school system. Today, Ireland is home to people with different belief systems, languages, cultures and histories. Many schools have high proportions of students whose backgrounds are not ‘traditionally Irish’. A primarily Catholic school system cannot meet these families’ school needs. Nor is it likely – despite such schools’ best efforts to be welcoming and inclusive – to find favour with families who, though of Irish Catholic background, have rejected traditional notions of religion and are increasingly demanding schools not run by churches and not insisting that students take denominational religious education.

The challenge is to find a cost-effective way to meet young people’s educational needs, irrespective of their beliefs, that will allow all young people in a community to attend the same local school. The Community National School (CNS) seems to provide a way of achieving this goal – see below.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2013/act/11/enacted/en/html>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/ireland/49624509.pdf>

**E** TBs’ support role frees principals to lead the school community in the core business of the school.

**M** any schools have high proportions of students whose backgrounds are not ‘traditionally Irish’.

**T** he whole area of industrial relations in schools is a nightmare.

**T** hose who govern and manage schools... face unending legislation, initiatives, circulars, guidelines and procedures...

### School governance and school management becoming more complex

When the writer was appointed principal of a second-level VEC school in 1989, school governance was relatively straightforward, supported in various ways by the VEC’s professional support staff. The writer then became principal of a voluntary secondary school where no such supports were available, and the job was much more challenging. One might feel that a VEC/ETB principal would find their capacity for initiative in leading the school to meet the needs of its students constrained by being ‘answerable’ to the VEC/ETB, but that was not the case. Being an ETB principal essentially means that the ETB’s support role frees the principal to lead the school community in the core business of the school – teaching, learning and student welfare. It also means the principal can work collaboratively with other principals in his or her ETB, easing the sense of isolation that can sometimes overwhelm a school principal.

Twenty-five years on, the task of those who govern and manage schools is much more complex. They face unending legislation, initiatives, circulars, and guidelines and procedures covering a vast array of matters: self-evaluation, anti-bullying, child protection, the Junior Cycle Framework, new models for placing student teachers, new approaches to induction and probation of newly qualified teachers, the literacy and numeracy strategy, mental health promotion and suicide prevention, establishing and sustaining student support teams, data protection, technology-enhanced learning, addressing teacher underperformance, health and safety, Croke Park hours, new rostering and tracking process for managing supervision and substitution, and so on. Complex statutory procedures governing school enrolment are on the way, and the whole area of industrial relations in schools is a nightmare. Voluntary boards of management have responsibility for ensuring that most of this continuous change is implemented, sustained and monitored, without the kind of supports available to ETB schools. Is this a realistic proposition?

This writer worked for many years in NSW (Australia), where schools, whether Catholic or State, had the support of their respective regional offices along the lines of what the ETB schools have currently. Again, these schools did not feel constrained in their capacity for innovation by the fact that they were part of what might be termed a scheme as distinct from standalone entities.

### Education and Training Boards Act 2013

The Education and Training Boards (ETB) Act 2013<sup>7</sup> restructured the further education and training (FET) landscape, streamlining the previous 33 VECs into 16 ETBs and giving the ETBs responsibility for the former FÁS training function. These reforms have already brought much local and regional coherence to FET and, when fully bedded in, Ireland will have a coherent, cost-effective, best-in-class FET system delivering education and training at levels 1 to 6 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), capable of driving economic growth, social inclusion, social mobility, employment and productivity.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2013/act/11/enacted/en/html>

Before the 2013 Act, further education was delivered by the VECs, and training was provided by the Training and Employment Authority (FÁS), which the enactment of the Further Education and Training Act 2013<sup>8</sup> dissolved. The situation with FET provision before 2013, despite excellent work by the VECs and FÁS, was unsatisfactory in several respects. In particular, provision was fragmented, there was some duplication, and progression routes for learners were difficult to identify. While much remains to be done to rectify this fully, an appropriate structure is now in place and the SOLAS Further Education and Training Strategy (2014–2019) provides a clear roadmap for delivering on the vision inherent in the legislative reforms of 2013.

### ETBs and Youth Work

Section 10 of the ETB Act of 2013 builds on the role for VECs established by the Youth Work Act of 2001<sup>9</sup> and says it shall be the function of an ETB to:

- » ‘support the provision, co-ordination, administration and assessment of youth work services in its functional area and provide such information as may be requested by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs in relation to such support, and
- » assess whether the manner in which it performs its functions is economical, efficient and effective’.

Giving ETBs responsibility for coordinating, supporting and assessing youth service provision locally not only facilitates coherence in youth service provision but also allows such work to be integrated into the education and training system, maximising synergies between the two systems.

### Community National Schools (CNS)

In 2008, in response to increasing secularisation and the influx of new culturally and religiously diverse migrants, Co Dublin VEC, now Dublin and Dún Laoghaire ETB, opened the first CNS schools on a pilot basis in Phibblestown and Porterstown. Significantly, the first CNS school was opened at Porterstown as an ‘emergency school’ because the local schools were full and many children were left without a school. Interestingly, those without a school place were those towards the end of enrolment queues on the basis of admission policies that prioritised children with a particular religion.

CNS schools have open enrolment policies which give equal access to children of all backgrounds, abilities, faiths and beliefs. This allows all children in a community to attend the same school. During the pilot phase, the Minister for Education was the patron of these schools, with the VECs/ETBs acting as de facto patrons. Patronage is formally transferring to the ETBs from 1 September 2016.

These schools are committed to a spirit of inclusion and equality, where each child and member of the school community is valued and treated

**C**ommunity National Schools (CNS) have open enrolment policies which give equal access to children of all backgrounds, abilities, faiths and beliefs.

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with dignity and respect. They recognise and celebrate diversity in the community. CNS schools encourage children to have pride in what makes them different and instil in them a belief that difference, when valued and respected, gives strength and vibrancy to the whole school community. These values are taught explicitly throughout the curriculum and are also reflected in all school policies and practices. As state-funded, publicly owned and democratically accountable schools, they play a key role in developing citizens capable of contributing positively to society.

As these schools are multi-belief, each part of the child’s identity is acknowledged and catered for in the school day, including religious belief/ identity. Parents are recognised as primary educators who play a vital role in this aspect of their child’s identity. Teachers inform parents weekly about the common themes being discussed in school, and parents are asked to speak to their child about these themes from their own religious belief or perspective. During lessons, children share their experiences of the theme discussed at home. This promotes inter-belief dialogue amongst the children and their teacher.

Each school makes every effort to meet the belief-specific needs of the entire community by consulting with parents and local religious/belief leaders. Parents can ask the school to provide more belief-specific teaching on particular faiths or beliefs. For example, many Catholic parents request that work be done on the sacraments.

Because CNS schools support the beliefs of all students during the school day, all students in a community can attend their local school and learn together, irrespective of religion or belief. This school model can meet the needs of all families in a community in an Ireland that is increasingly diverse. An oft-repeated criticism is that the CNS model ‘separates’ children into different religion groups, giving the impression that they remain in separate classes throughout the year. This claim seriously misrepresents what actually happens in CNS schools.

Diversity of belief is not confined to urban areas. But when it comes to less populated communities, providing a separate ‘school for everyone in the audience’ is simply not economically viable. Yet Ireland has no option but to address this issue rationally and realistically in a timely fashion. As the CNS school caters meaningfully for children of all faiths and beliefs in the school day and addresses the needs of the local school community, it provides a real alternative to the current system.

### Second-level Education

ETBs and their predecessor VECs have vast experience in collaborating with other patrons in the joint patronage or management of second-level schools. For example, while ETBs operate 264 second-level schools, 56 ‘designated community colleges’ are managed in accordance with a specific agreement between the ETB and a ‘trustee partner’ – the local diocese or a religious congregation or other recognised school patron. This gives the trustee partner a role in managing the school and determining its characteristic spirit. All students in a community are eligible to attend such schools irrespective of religion or belief. Furthermore, ETBs are joint patrons for all 97 community and comprehensive second-level schools.

**T**he CNS school caters meaningfully for children of all faiths and beliefs in the school day

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2013/act/25/enacted/en/pdf>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2001/act/42/enacted/en/html>



## Potential for ETBs to support other education or training providers

We have looked at how much the Irish educational landscape is characterised by many small independent schools at first and second level, and, apart from ETB schools, at the absence of intermediate structures to support the work of schools.

The governance and management of schools, irrespective of size, has become exceedingly complex. This means that, absent the external supports that in other jurisdictions are provided by a local authority, those who govern and manage non-ETB schools can find themselves distracted from the core work of teaching, learning, and supporting their students.

Here, it is significant that the ETB Act of 2013 gives ETBs the legal capacity<sup>10</sup> to provide support services to non-ETB education or training providers. Section 22(9)<sup>11</sup> says these support services include: the holding, management, maintenance or development of land, project management, help in purchasing or procuring goods and services, human resources, financial services, legal services, information and communication technology, and corporate governance. Each area is best addressed by personnel with particular competence and experience, and this cannot be acquired by persons working in small schools, where the opportunity to practice the competence is limited. Another interesting provision of the Act is Section 53(2),<sup>12</sup> which gives the Minister power to direct an ETB to ‘acquire, hold or dispose of land, or an interest in land, where he or she considers it necessary having regard to the interests of the local community’.

Clearly, the legislature, in enacting the Act, had an eye to remedying weaknesses in how Irish education and training is structured. The Act gave ETBs the capacity to provide support services to other education or training providers, and already some schools have availed of this support. But how much this capacity is realised will depend on the willingness of non-ETB providers, for example schools, to request ETBs to provide such supports, as Section 22(3) of the Act stipulates that such supports can only be provided after a request from an education or training provider. In this regard, independent providers may be wary of seeking supports from ETBs as, for example, independent schools may see themselves as competing with ETB schools. This impediment must be overcome if we are to ensure that learner outcomes are maximised at minimal cost to the exchequer. To fully realise the potential for small schools to be appropriately supported by ETBs will also require a resourcing model to be put in place to provide such support. Ideally, a national framework needs to be developed around the whole matter of ETBs supporting small education or training providers within their remit.

It is surely not beyond our capacity to develop protocols around ETBs providing such supports which will guarantee the independence of the school receiving the support. The State has committed to implementing a

Providing a separate school ‘for everyone in the audience’ is simply not economically viable.

The ETB Act of 2013 gave ETBs the capacity to provide support services to other education or training providers.

shared-services approach across the public sector to maximise efficiency and, within the ETB sector, shared services are about to be implemented in such areas as payroll and finance.

Public services are being reformed across the OECD with a view to ensuring better services for citizens and better value for taxpayers’ investment. While in the past, public services grew organically and not always in the context of a national strategy, the State is everywhere today either devising strategies to ensure the coherence and effectiveness of new services, or seeking to put new structures in place to improve the coherence and efficacy of existing services. To a significant degree the establishment of ETBs is in the latter category. How much the vision of the legislators in 2013 is realised will depend on how much all stakeholders in education and training commit to this realisation. With stakeholder cooperation, we can ensure that the great strength of a system that grew organically, and the independence of providers to meet local and particular needs, can be integrated into a framework that delivers service coherence and efficacy cost-effectively.



Pictured at the Educate Together Ethical Education Conference in Dublin in November 2016 (l-r): Dr Niall Muldoon, Ombudsman for Children, and Minister for Education and Skills, Richard Bruton TD.

<sup>10</sup> See **Section 10(d)** and **Section 22** of ETB Act 2013.

<sup>11</sup> See **Section 22** of ETB Act 2013.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2013/act/11/section/53/enacted/en/html#sec53>

## 'Informal' Education in Ireland

An exemplary education system – operating right in our own front garden

Imagine an education system that is truly learner centred; an education system with the needs of the young person at its heart; an education system dominated not by a test of ability to learn by rote but by meeting the needs of the learner as he or she develops. Imagine an education system that actively seeks to identify the risks that young people face, reactively and proactively creates and adjusts curricula to reduce, manage and prepare young people to deal with those risks.

Most educators, policymakers, parents, and probably students, would agree that this is an education system that we should be striving to achieve. Many would also say that our school system, especially at second level, has not achieved these goals. Whilst there are huge positives to the way we school our young people, there is undoubtedly much room for improvement.

When we talk about education system reform, however, we are inclined to look to our international neighbours as sources for inspiration. We frequently read of the excellent systems the Nordic countries deploy, the nationally celebrated role of the teacher, the flexible assessment models. But in looking abroad we are missing an example of an excellent education system in operation far closer to home. In fact, right in our own front garden.

Indeed such an education system exists, and it exists in Ireland today. Known variously as the 'informal' education system, the youth sector, or maybe just 'youth clubs', this system is often ignored in our conversations about the good and the bad of how we address the educational needs of our young people.

To many, the words 'youth club', 'youth worker', 'youth centre' etc. conjure up images of after school clubs for kids to hang around, play pool and be kept off the streets of the local estate. For some the youth sector is seen merely as a mechanism to engage young people from economically and socially disadvantaged areas, a way of 'mopping up' kids who are disengaged from school.



**By Steven Daly**

Manager of Camara Ireland, the Irish Education Hub of the International Charity Camara Education

Steven Daly challenges educators, policymakers, parents and students to stop constantly looking abroad to Nordic countries and elsewhere for examples of best practice and to pay attention instead to an excellent education system in operation right under our noses here in Ireland – the informal education system/ the youth sector/ youth clubs. Call it what you will, Steven describes it as large, professionalised, well established, and focussed on quality and cost effective education outcomes.

The youth sector in Ireland reaches over 380,000 young people every year.

The total number of people in full time employment in the sector [is] approximately 1,400 [along with] 40,000 volunteers.

Not so.

Many of us are unaware that Ireland is home to one of the most professionalised youth services in the world, with a cohort of full time youth workers trained to degree level and beyond, along with a small army of dedicated and committed volunteers working throughout the country.

In 2001 youth work was given formal statutory recognition in the Youth Work Act. This Act defines youth work as, "a planned programme of education designed for the purpose of aiding and enhancing the personal and social development of young persons through their voluntary participation, and which is complementary to their formal, academic or vocational education and training; and provided primarily by voluntary youth work organisations."

The National Youth Council of Ireland translates this well, in practical terms, 'youth work is above all an educational and developmental process, based on young people's active and voluntary participation and commitment [...] Youth work is for all young people, with particular focus on those aged 10 to 25 from all aspects of Irish life, urban, rural, all nationalities and social classes.'

In practice this means running youth education programmes that seek to enable young people to gain new knowledge and skills, develop their ability to manage personal and social relations, gain greater capacity to consider risks and consequences, making better and more informed decisions.

This is not an insignificant part of our national education infrastructure. The youth sector in Ireland reaches over 380,000 young people every year. That represents over 43% of the total youth population in Ireland. The total number of people in full time employment in the sector seems small at approximately 1,400. However when you add in the approximately 40,000 volunteers working across the sector we begin to get a better picture of the scale of the system in comparison to the approximately 55,000 teachers in the formal education system.

The breadth and depth of the programmes delivered to young people all over the country is staggering. At a time when large multinationals are decrying the lack of 21st century skills in our country's school leavers and college graduates, the youth sector is delivering programmes to young people focused directly on these needs – everything from life skills, such as leadership, teamwork, critical analysis and creative and reflective thinking, to welfare and well-being including mental health promotion, relationships and sexuality.

With a national requirement for the educational outcomes of these programmes to be mapped to the National Quality Standards Framework for Youth Work, quality of service provision is a huge focus for all youth organisations.

Despite the size and importance of the sector, it has seen huge setbacks over the last number of years. An independent report carried out by Indecon



found that for every €1 invested in youth work, the State ultimately saves €2.20 in reduced welfare, justice and health costs for young people.

Here is a sector, then, that is large, professionalised, well established, and focussed on quality cost effective education outcomes. As noted above, youth work is not designed to be a replacement or alternative for the school system – nor does the sector want to play that role. But what can the formal school system learn from youth work? Are we missing opportunities for sharing practices, experiences, methodologies, and pedagogies?

Societal and economic changes are creating the greatest demands our education systems have seen since the Victorian era. It is now vital that learners leave not just with a bank of knowledge, but also with a bank of skills. Chief amongst them must be the ability to continue adding to and challenging that knowledge base. Not to mention the skills to walk into work environments that demand a level of critical thought, creativity and communication never before expected of a generation of students. To respond to this we can't afford to continue to work in silos.

One of the most powerful elements of youth work is its basis in young people's active and voluntary participation and commitment. In practice this means that youth work places young people as central to decision making, partnering with their youth worker in programme planning. The relationship between young people and adults in the youth work environment is one based on dialogue.

Of course this approach is not directly transferrable to the school system. Indeed, many youth workers would speak of the challenges such an approach can present in a youth centre, never mind a school. It does however have relevance, and when implemented in an adjusted form can yield powerful results in a classroom, especially at senior cycle.

Another core element of youth work is the concentration on a holistic approach to an individual young person. This is summed up neatly by Foróige, one of Ireland's largest youth networks. They describe their overarching aim as "enabling young people to involve themselves consciously and actively in their own development and in the development of society". In practice this means that youth 'starts where young people are at'. It is flexible in its approach and is focussed on moving the young person from their current situation towards successful outcomes. This removes the 'one size fits all' approach that we associate more commonly with formal education curricula, allowing a youth worker to engage a young person in their own interests and build from there.

Again, this approach is not directly applicable in a formal education system dominated by an end of cycle major test – but again there are lessons to be learned here for how we design and deliver our formal education programmes.

Ultimately, all teachers and youth workers are striving to achieve the best for the young people in their care. This is full-on, intense, and challenging work that is unceasing in its demands. However this pressure should not prevent us from looking up from time to time, looking out from over the top of our silos, and casting an interested eye over what others are doing.

**Y**outh work is for all young people, with particular focus on those aged 10 to 25 from all aspects of Irish life, urban, rural, all nationalities and social classes.

**T**he breadth and depth of the programmes delivered to young people all over the country is staggering... everything from life skills to welfare and well-being including mental health promotion, relationships and sexuality.

## Climate Change: Education's New Integrator

"The greatest crisis facing a world beset by crises"  
(UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon)



**By Prof John Sweeney**  
Emeritus Professor of Geography,  
Maynooth University

**P**rof John Sweeney presents us with the stark truth about climate change but offsets this dire reality with an exciting challenge to educators. Here is their opportunity to engage students in a wider, richer interdisciplinary educational experience involving not only science but also trade policies, agriculture, legal frameworks, national self interest versus global interest, ethics...

Confusion between weather and climate continues to be a characteristic of public discourse on climate change in Ireland. A short term extreme event, such as a wet summer or cold snap in winter, almost immediately prompts tabloid headlines to the effect that global climate change is a hoax or, in the words of one – normally respectable – Irish broadsheet editorial: "So much for all that guff about global warming!" (Irish Times 2010).

The educational damage of such misrepresentations is considerable and educationalists have a profound responsibility to sensitise and mobilise their charges to tackle what UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon has referred to as "*the greatest challenge facing a world beset by crises*". But this is not a case of simply improving science education and science communication. The educational brief required is much more comprehensive, encompassing a wide range of other related aspects beyond the confines of science.

For example, to mention only one related strand, the same Secretary-General during his visit to Ireland in 2015 emphasised the inseparability of development issues with climate change issues when he said: "Ireland has been a champion of efforts to counter hunger, but today one cannot be a leader on hunger without also being a leader in climate change." (Ban Ki Moon, 2015). The world of interdisciplinarity has arrived and is exemplified by climate change issues. For educationalists it can be argued that these issues provide an ideal platform for the long awaited assault on narrow disciplinary 'silos'. In addition to providing a vehicle for interdisciplinary integration, though, they can contribute wider educational benefits.

### Educational benefits inherent in confronting climate change issues

#### 1. Learning skills based on scientific realities rather than subjective opinions

##### The Facts

Average global temperatures have increased by 1°C since the last two decades of the 19th century, with greater warming over land areas and over the

middle and high latitudes. No person alive today under the age of 30 has experienced a month in which the average surface temperature of the Earth was below the average of the entire 20th Century. Heat waves have increased in frequency. An increasing precipitation trend exists in middle and high latitudes of the northern hemisphere, strongly evident after the 1950s. Intense rainfall events have significantly increased in frequency in a majority of regions, especially Europe and North America. Tropical Atlantic storms have increased in intensity, though trends in other areas are not as clear. Greenland's ice sheets are melting much more quickly in recent years, with average annual losses six times higher than in the early 1990s. Over 200 Billion tonnes of meltwater are added to the world's oceans from this source every year. In the Arctic, sea ice cover has decreased by 4% per decade since 1979 and winter sea ice thickness has halved. The Antarctic ice sheet is now losing mass five times faster than in the early 1990s, contributing approximately 150 Billion tonnes of meltwater annually to the global oceans. Unsurprisingly, sea-level rise has accelerated from 1.7mm per year over the 20th Century to 3.2mm per year over the past two decades.

Virtually everywhere in Ireland is 0.50C warmer than the 30-year average of 1961–90. A trend towards a greater number of warm days (>20oC) and a reduction in frost days is apparent over the same period. Rainfall amounts have generally increased by around 5% and the number of days with heavy rainfall shows increases in the north and west of the country. Recent years have seen notable extremes such as the stormiest winter on record (2013/14) and the wettest winter on record (2015/16).

The above are all facts and it is important to communicate them as such. Appreciating these as established, objective, measurement-based conclusions is an important learning outcome and the basis for informed future research. Thus when 97% of the world's atmospheric scientists and 195 of its governments agree the statement that *"It is extremely likely that human influence has been the dominant cause of the observed warming since the mid 20th century"* (IPCC, 2014), a basic learning outcome is that a similar level of certainty exists with reference to human causes of climate change as with smoking and lung cancer. Armed with this knowledge, a student can then begin to appreciate where misinformation is coming from, why it is being peddled, and where scientific objectivity is being concealed by individuals with vested interests and frequently non-scientific credentials.

## 2. Skills acquisition in ethics, personal judgement, citizenship and climate justice

The World Health Organisation estimates that currently climate change is estimated to indirectly cause over 150,000 deaths annually from malnutrition, malaria, diarrhoea and heat stress, a figure that is expected to rise to 250,000 over the period 2030–50 (WHO, 2014). Extensive biodiversity losses are also expected. If climate change continues along expected lines, one in six species are threatened with extinction (Urban, 2015). As the ultimate threat multiplier, climate change will impact most heavily on those least able to cope. Food insecurity, conflict over resources, susceptibility to increased hazards such as coastal flooding and drought, pests and diseases, windstorm, riverine floods and heat waves

**A**rmed with knowledge, a student can begin to appreciate where misinformation is coming from, why it is being peddled, and where scientific objectivity is being concealed by individuals with vested interests.

**T**he ability of a young student to see what is the right thing to do, and to circumvent society's obstacles in achieving an objective, is one of the most rewarding experiences education can provide.

**N**owhere are interdisciplinary skills needed more than in addressing climate change.

**F**or education-ists it can be argued that these [climate change] issues provide an ideal platform for the long awaited assault on narrow disciplinary 'silos'.

**C**oncepts such as vulnerability, resilience, adaptation, forward planning and risk management can provide a spectrum of educational benefits grounded in an interdisciplinary setting.

will predominantly afflict those peoples in the Developing World. These have very little culpability for global climate change.

In the mega-deltas of the Developing World, subsidence of the land under the weight of alluvial sediment brought down by the rivers means that vulnerability to sea-level change is telescoped into a much shorter time period. A one-metre rise in sea level in the Nile or Ganges delta displaces many millions of people with few relocation options. In the semi-arid zones of sub-Saharan Africa, irregular rainfall patterns have already developed with consequences not just for carrying capacity and food security in the rural parts, but also for hydro-electric energy production for major towns and cities. In some of the low lying island states of the Indian and Pacific Oceans, plans for evacuation are being formulated as rising sea-levels infiltrate their subterranean freshwater supplies and storm surges swamp their coasts. The risk of loss of cultures is a real one and again it is at the Developed World that the finger must be pointed. Consideration of such issues of climate justice is an important learning tool for inculcating individual and societal responsibility in an educational environment.

But climate justice is not a concept confined to the Developing World. Using climate model output to drive hydrological models for Irish rivers suggests Ireland will experience significant impacts in both winter and summer. While greater uncertainty surrounds future rainfall changes, most models suggest increased flooding frequencies in winter. Indeed major flood events in 2009 and winter 2015/16 have produced what might be arguably termed Ireland's first 'climate change refugees', though multiple causal factors are invariably involved in flood events.

The link, however, between such events and climate change actions is seldom explicitly explored. Irrespective of what global policies emerge to tackle emissions, the lengthy residence time of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere means coming decades will experience changes driven by emissions from up to a century ago. Accordingly, adaptation to climate change as well as mitigation of future scenarios will both be required.

In Ireland, 300 areas with a significant level of present and future vulnerability to flooding have now been identified and €430M allocated to be spent on defences. As projected rainfall changes proceed, new areas exposed to flooding will become vulnerable and existing areas more frequently flooded. Much less attention has been given to projected rainfall reductions in the summer months, especially in eastern Ireland.

The need to plan now for infrastructure to ensure adequate water supplies for towns and cities, as well as for agriculture, is pressing. How priorities should be set, for how many, and for whom, is an issue requiring informed discussion. To aid this, concepts such as vulnerability, resilience, adaptation, forward planning and risk management can provide a spectrum of educational benefits grounded in an interdisciplinary setting.

Ireland emits more greenhouse gases than the 400 million poorest people on earth. The average Irish person is responsible for approximately 40% more emissions than the average UK or EU citizen. What is the educational

message here? It is surely one of ethical responsibilities, global citizenship and the need to inculcate concepts of global climate justice. Learning about climate change thus becomes a wider educational experience, overlapping with concepts of sustainable development, development aid, migration, agriculture, trade policies, national self interest versus global interest, and personal responsibilities. Many of these were expertly explored by Pope Francis in his 2015 encyclical *‘Laudato Si’*.

### 3. Interdisciplinary Skills

The era of disciplinary ‘silos’ is over. We no longer have the capability of solving problems one-by-one, especially in topic areas related to the environment. Nowhere are interdisciplinary skills needed more than in addressing climate change. Today’s educated individual needs to be aware of the science, and also needs to be aware of the legal and policy framework within which solutions must be found. The idea that the scientist can provide the technological or scientific ‘fix’ is flawed. The social, political, economic context within which science operates must now be fully inculcated into educated individuals. This is particularly demonstrated in tackling the international politics of climate change.

The much heralded Paris Agreement of 2015 provided aggregate national pledges only capable, at best, of holding global temperature to an increase of 2.7 °C, well above the danger line identified by scientists and accepted by governments. National self interest and an unwillingness to take the radical steps necessary to avoid this supposed red line lie behind this failure. Countries, like individuals, recognise the magnitude of the problem, and espouse noble sentiments in public about tackling it. But in many cases they want someone else to bear the burden. Sectors within countries seek economic advantages at the expense of society as a whole. In negotiating pollutant emission ceilings and greenhouse gas emissions targets, powerful vested interests have sought to protect their economic interests first and foremost and achieve lesser burdens for themselves. Within Ireland we do not have to look too far to identify these.

Scientific and ethical considerations do not dominate policy either at national or international level, and awareness of this requires a range of interdisciplinary skills to be fostered as part of the educational experience. Climate change studies provide an ideal integrator.

### 4. Learning by Doing

The ability of a young student to see what is the right thing to do, and to circumvent society’s obstacles in achieving an objective is one of the most rewarding experiences education can provide. Climate change is a topic in which enthusiasm can be harnessed and directed at individual level by skilled educators, even in the absence of political leadership at national level. This is best exemplified by the success of the An Taisce Green Schools Programme, where climate change considerations permeate the criteria for the attainment of the coveted Green Flags. Widely recognised as the ‘best practice’ internationally, Ireland has the highest percentage of awards in this programme around the world. During the academic year 2014/15 it succeeded in diverting 4,700 tonnes of waste from landfill, saved

**T**oday’s educated individual needs to be aware of the science, but also of the legal and policy framework within which solutions must be found.

**T**he need exists now to prepare society through the education system for the radical changes coming down the line.

**T**he CO<sup>2</sup> emitted will be present in the atmosphere for a century.

**S**ectors within countries seek economic advantages at the expense of society as a whole.

**T**hose being educated today will provide the key shapers of Irish society over the next 35 years.

**C**limate change issues can, and should, become a powerful educational integrator.

**T**he era of disciplinary ‘silos’ is over. We no longer have the capability of solving problems one-by-one, especially in topic areas related to the environment.

15.6M units of electricity, 370M litres of drinking water and 1.5M litres of petrol and diesel (Figure 1). Educational skills such as team working, target setting etc. are collateral benefit, along with the obvious health and economic benefits to the State. The latter can be estimated at €8M in direct financial savings and exemplify the very favourable cost-benefit relationship evident in addressing climate change.

### 5. Intergenerational equity

The Principle of Intergenerational Equity argues that we *‘hold the natural and cultural environment of the Earth in common both with other members of the present generation and with other generations, past and future’* (Weiss, 1990). Education is ultimately about the next generation. The question of what legacy we bequeath to the next generation in terms of a climate-change damaged earth is central to this principle. This was exemplified by a core finding of the IPCC 5th Assessment Report where a clear relationship between cumulative carbon dioxide gas emissions and global warming was established (IPCC, 2014). To have a greater than 2:1 chance of limiting warming to less than 2°C the remaining carbon budget is today around 240 Billion tonnes. With current emissions contributing around 10 Billion tonnes per year, the budget is set to be exhausted in a couple of decades in the absence of radical emission cutbacks. Thereafter there is no return, since the CO<sub>2</sub> emitted will be present in the atmosphere for a century. This is the stark reality of intergenerational inequity which educators and their pupils have to come to terms with.

#### Towards 2050

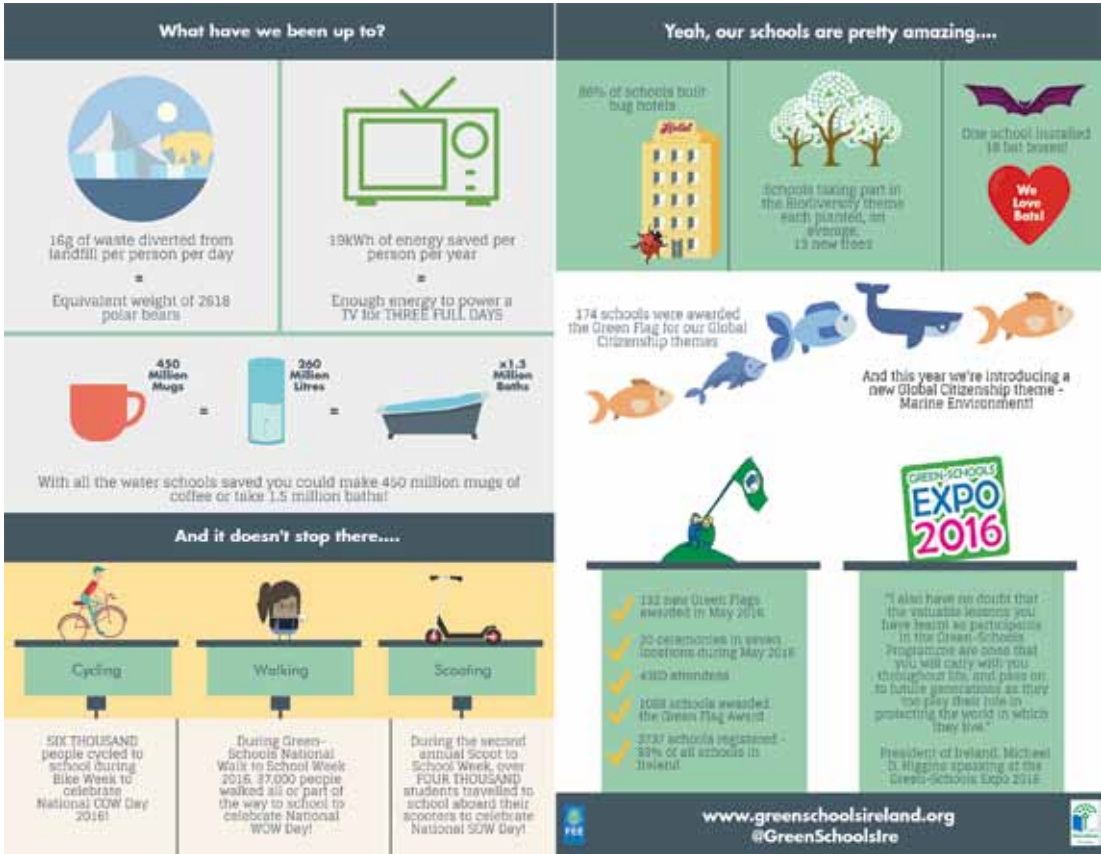
Those being educated today will provide the key shapers of Irish society over the next 35 years. A very different Irish society will by then be in existence, profoundly influenced by a transition from the fossil fuel age to a low carbon society. In providing a roadmap for this transition, the National Policy Position on climate change emphasises the objective of Ireland, as a developed country, achieving a reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 80–95% by 2050 as compared with 1990. The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015 provides the legislative vehicle for achieving this. But the need exists now to prepare society through the educational system for the radical changes coming down the line.

The technicalities of homes without gas or oil burners, transport systems without petrol or diesel, food production which is carbon neutral – these are all realistically feasible. But what is more difficult are the interactions with social, economic and political systems described above. It is clear that climate science, climate policy and climate justice have become intertwined and have gained considerable traction in the public consciousness as awareness of the shortening timescales for effective action has become clear. There is now a unique opportunity to use the interconnectedness of these issues to progress a student-centred, holistic and integrated educational curriculum. Climate change issues can, and should, become a powerful educational integrator.



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An Taisce Green Schools Performance 2016

Green-Schools is an environmental management and award programme that works with primary and secondary schools across the country to promote long-term, whole-school action for the environment. The programme is operated and co-ordinated by the Environmental Education Unit of An Taisce.

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development  
Transforming our World



By Moira Leydon  
Assistant General Secretary, ASTI

The author describes Ireland's role in the historic process of achieving world leaders' agreement on a Global Agenda for Sustainable Development. She outlines the 17 Global Goals, noting that Goal 4, which focuses on education, has been identified as the "catalytic goal" for the achievement of all other sustainable development goals.

The **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** is an ambitious, aspirational and universal agenda which was adopted in 2015 by a total of 193 world leaders who committed their governments to the achievement of 17 Global Goals for Sustainable Development – SDGs – to end extreme poverty, fight inequality and injustice, and protect our planet by 2030. (1)

Ireland played a unique and central role in this historic process. In 2014, the President of the UN General Assembly appointed Ireland's UN Ambassador, David Donoghue, to facilitate the final inter-governmental negotiations. He shared the role with Kenya's UN Ambassador, Macharia Kamau. Throughout 2015, Ireland and Kenya brought together all UN member states, civil society, the private sector and others in a series of formal negotiating sessions and informal consultations. It should be noted that the Irish education unions – ASTI, IFUT, INTO and TUI – also took part in these consultations through their contributions to Education International, the global federation of education unions representing over 32 million education workers.

On 2nd August 2015, agreement was finally reached. In an historic moment, Ambassador Donoghue and Ambassador Kamau informed the gathering of all UN Member States that agreement had been reached, and presented the final text, "*Transforming our World: the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda*".

**This agenda is different!**  
However, what is truly significant about the 2030 Agenda is that it is truly global. The 17 SDGs establish a universal agenda; they do not differentiate between rich and poor countries. Every single country is challenged to achieve the SDGs. The old dichotomy of North and South no longer prevails as humanity faces what some increasingly describe as existential challenges.

While the agreement on the Sustainable Development Goals is not legally binding, each UN member state has committed to achieving them. The agenda includes a review and follow-up process to measure progress towards achieving the Goals over the next 15 Years. This process is voluntary, with specific guidance for



national, regional and global processes. All Member States are encouraged to develop national responses to the Sustainable Development Agenda. Another key difference in this new global agenda is the focus on targets and indicators to measure progress in meeting those targets. Hundreds of civil society groups and NGOs in Ireland are already working to ensure that the Irish government develops a national plan to meet its commitments under the Agenda.

### Education is the catalyst

Goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) seeks to ensure “inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”. Underpinned by ten targets, Goal 4 has correctly been identified as the “catalytic goal” for the achievement of all other sustainable development goals. There is overwhelming evidence of the impact of education on all societal development goals. For example, one additional year of schooling increases an individual’s earnings by up to 10%, thereby contributing to reduce poverty. Similarly, each additional year of schooling raises average annual gross domestic product (GDP) growth by 0.37%. Education is fundamental to ending gender inequality: each additional year of schooling can increase a woman’s earnings by 10% to 20%; it also has immediate benefits for women’s health and thereby that of their children. (2)

To bring these metrics closer to home, the 2006 OECD Economic Survey for Ireland noted that the increasing educational attainment contributed 2.1 percentage points per annum to economic growth over the period 1994–2003. The same Report noted that, had the educational attainment of the Irish population remained at its 1980 level, national income per head would be 20% below its current level. (3) Clearly, investment in education is an investment that pays off.

### SDG 4 is an opportunity for us all!

Progress towards the achievement of national targets identified in SDG 4 will become a feature of the national and international educational policy discourse. It is of note that the Editorial of the 2016 OECD global education report – Education at a Glance – is titled “*Measuring what counts in education: Monitoring the Sustainable Development Goal for education*”. Moreover, the Editorial contains a table benchmarking countries progress towards achieving the 10 sub-goals. This international focus will invariably influence national education policy concerns.

Thus, while educators – and most policy makers! – know intuitively that the most important dimensions of education cannot be measured in quantitative terms, the introduction of a new metric in education policy isn’t necessarily a bad thing. Having an evidence base is essential to good policy making. The recently published Cassells report is a good example in this regard. Moreover, a solid – and comparable – evidence base enables policy makers to look at the impact of policies. The latter is often overlooked in the focus on getting the policy framework right. Thus, while Ireland currently exceeds many of the targets contained in SDG 4, there are areas of our educational provision where the SDG targets have yet to be achieved. For example, SDG 4.3 – “*by 2030 ensure equal access for all*

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**T**he 2030 agenda strongly emphasises the need for education systems to ensure that all learners are exposed to citizenship education.

women and men to affordable quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university” – is highly relevant for Irish education policy.

### Education for global citizenship

The 2030 agenda strongly emphasises the need for education systems to ensure that all learners are exposed to citizenship education. SDG 4.7 aims to ensure “*by 2030 that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development.*” This goal is already focusing renewed attention on the Department of Education & Skills current policy on education for sustainable development – “*Education for Sustainability: The National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development in Ireland, 2014–2020*”.

### Irish Forum for Global Education

The Irish Forum for Global Education is an alliance of the teacher unions and development NGOs which focuses on SDG 4 and engages with policy makers on key targets. Currently, it has three working groups – Education in Development; Adult Education and Lifelong Learning and Education for Sustainable Development – which will monitor aspects of Ireland’s progress towards meeting the SDG 4 targets. For further information, contact the author, Moira Leydon at moira@asti.ie.

### NOTES

- The 17 Sustainable Development Goals are:
  - Goal 1 – End poverty in all its forms everywhere
  - Goal 2 – End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture
  - Goal 3 – Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
  - Goal 4 – Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
  - Goal 5 – Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
  - Goal 6 – Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
  - Goal 7 – Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
  - Goal 8 – Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
  - Goal 9 – Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and foster innovation
  - Goal 10 – Reduce inequality within and among countries
  - Goal 11 – Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
  - Goal 12 – Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
  - Goal 13 – Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts\*
  - Goal 14 – Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
  - Goal 15 – Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
  - Goal 16 – Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
  - Goal 17 – Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development

#### Goal 4 Education: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all

- 4.1 by 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes
- 4.2 by 2030 ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education
- 4.3 by 2030 ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university
- 4.4 by 2030, increase by x% the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship
- 4.5 by 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and children in vulnerable situations
- 4.6 by 2030 ensure that all youth and at least x% of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy
- 4.7 by 2030 ensure all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including among others through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development
- 4.a build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all
- 4.b by 2020 expand by x% globally the number of scholarships for developing countries in particular LDCs, SIDS and African countries to enroll in higher education, including vocational training, ICT, technical, engineering and scientific programmes in developed countries and other developing countries
- 4.c by 2030 increase by x% the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially LDCs and SIDS

2. <http://www.globalpartnership.org/focus-areas> (retrieved 10/10/16)

3. OECD Economic Survey Ireland 2006 ( p.66)



In 2016, NUI Galway launched a new sustainability initiative aimed at making the campus one of the greenest, smartest, healthiest and most community-focused in the world with an ambition to be internationally recognised by 2025 for its culture and practice of sustainability.

Pictured here at the launch of the university's new Sustainability website are (l-r): John Gill, Chief Operating Officer, NUI Galway; Professor Colin Brown, Director Ryan Institute, NUI Galway; Michelle O'Dowd Lohan, Sustainability Engagement Associate NUI Galway; Declan Meally, Head of Emerging Sectors, SEAI; and Professor Pól Ó Dochartaigh, Registrar and Deputy President, NUI Galway.

## Entrepreneurial Thinking in Education

The workplace of the future will demand skills that we have not yet imagined



By Claire McGee,  
Senior Innovation and Education Policy  
Executive, Ibec

**E**ntrepreneurial thinking is an attribute to be highly valued and as education is central to shaping young people's attitudes skills and culture, it is vital that entrepreneurial thinking in education is addressed and delivered from an early age, writes Claire McGee.

The need for entrepreneurship has never been more widely acknowledged than it is now. In September 2014 the government launched a national policy statement on entrepreneurship in Ireland, which singled out the education system as critical in influencing entrepreneurial attributes from an early age.

A thriving society backed by a strong economy can only be achieved with innovative, well-rounded, educated and entrepreneurial people, regardless of their career path. They have the spirit and courage to think in new ways and adapt to challenges. As education is key to shaping young people's attitudes, skills and culture, it is vital that entrepreneurial education be addressed and delivered from an early age. Reinforcing it in schools and higher and further education institutions will have a positive, lasting impact on the dynamism of our economy and society.

Many different challenges are associated with entrepreneurial education. The first is to define what is under discussion and clarify the language used. To move forward, we need a new language that defines entrepreneurship in a way that is not inimical to education values and reinforces the type of learning outcomes to which educators are committed.

The second challenge is whether entrepreneurship can actually be taught and learned or whether it is innate. This raises the question of what entrepreneurial education looks like and how it can be developed across the education system.

Young people who benefit from entrepreneurial learning develop latent business knowledge and essential skills and attitudes, including creativity, initiative, tenacity, teamwork, understanding of risk and a sense of responsibility and social resilience. These are the high-level skills necessary for all commercial and social endeavours, making young people more employable and more 'intrapreneurial' in their work in existing organisations, across the social, public and private sectors. Investing in

entrepreneurial education is therefore one of the highest-return education investments that a government can make.

### Entrepreneurial Education: 5 key points

1. The what: focus on creating value, be it economic, social or cultural, by harnessing the potential of learners and the education system.
2. The how: embedding entrepreneurial education across the education system to enrich the learning experience.
3. The where: engaging and aligning government policy with school and college activity with local businesses
4. The why: to develop learners' skills, attributes and competencies that are closer to the needs of a changing society and economy
5. The wow: young people who are more resilient and have the skills to manage and adapt to new situations.

### What do we mean by entrepreneurial education?

We need to understand clearly what we mean by entrepreneurial education and thinking. Entrepreneurial thinking gives people a new way of thinking, courage to meet and adapt to challenges, and the capacity to be more opportunity-oriented, proactive, innovative and resilient. That may involve developing their own commercial or social ventures, or becoming innovators in their organisations.

Drawing on the experiences of Denmark, the most accurate and comprehensive definition of entrepreneurial education can be neatly summarised as the methods, activity and content that underpin the following definition:

*“Entrepreneurship is when you act upon opportunities and ideas and transform them into value for others. The value that is created can be financial, cultural or social.”<sup>1</sup>*

The main goal of entrepreneurial education is to develop some level of entrepreneurial competencies. These can be defined as the knowledge, skills and attitudes that affect the willingness and ability to perform the entrepreneurial job of value creation.

### Why is entrepreneurial education so important?

For much of the past decade, the European Commission has held that entrepreneurship must be embedded in the education system and should be available to all primary, secondary and third-level students.

International evidence increasingly shows that students whose education emphasises entrepreneurial thinking show improved academic performance, school attendance, and educational attainment. Students also have better problem-solving and decision-making abilities, interpersonal relationships, teamwork, money management, and communication skills, and are more likely to find employment. It also enhances social psychological development, including resilience, self-esteem, motivation and self-efficacy. Students achieve such benefits because the primary goal

<sup>1</sup> Moberg, K., Stenberg, E. & Vestergaard, L., 2012. Impact of entrepreneurship education in Denmark, 2012. Odense, Denmark: The Danish Foundation for Entrepreneurship – Young Enterprise.

**Ireland possesses a wide variety of initiatives across all levels of education... they are highly fragmented, lacking overall purpose and direction, and not meeting the country's needs.**

of entrepreneurial education is not necessarily to get them to start their own business but to enable them to think positively, look for opportunities to make things happen, have the self-confidence to achieve their goals, and use their talents to build a better society, economically and socially. It recognises that students of all academic abilities can be part of this process, and that success does not depend on examination success but on how they fulfil their potential and live their lives.

### Where does Ireland stand regarding entrepreneurial education?

Ireland possesses a wide variety of initiatives across all levels of education. While many are effective individually, they are highly fragmented, lacking overall purpose and direction, and not meeting the country's needs. A coherent entrepreneurial education policy is required, integrated across all education levels and government departments. It must provide entrepreneurial education to a wider number of students throughout the education system, including non-business students.

Research (ACE 2009)<sup>2</sup> tells us that entrepreneurial education not only helps to create entrepreneurs and new business ventures but also develops more creative and self-confident people, who are equally valuable in organisations. Such an approach will support the continued attraction of foreign direct investment and deliver graduates who can create employment or contribute to the potential of the organisation for which they work.

### When are we currently going wrong?

Entrepreneurial thinking in education has primarily been viewed from an economic perspective. This works well for elective courses at third level, many of which are in business disciplines. But infusing entrepreneurial thinking into non-business disciplines such as arts, humanities and science, and at primary and secondary-school level, is critical.

Most entrepreneurship courses are underpinned by 'business planning and management', but evidence suggests that successful entrepreneurs depend more on their ability to adapt to the market than on formal business planning. Causal processes in the linear progression from idea to market research to finance to market tend to be taught in classrooms. Serial entrepreneurs suggest, however, that surprises and deviations are integral to the entrepreneurial experience, and that the ability to adapt and deal with the unexpected is more valuable. We need an education system that reflects this reality.

Entrepreneurial learning requires experiential, real-world and problem-based learning to enable people to learn from doing and risk-taking. This needs to be incorporated into existing models of education, coupled with more innovative ways of teaching and learning. It lends itself more to a cross-faculty or multi-disciplinary approach rather than the traditional structures and programmes of theoretical learning.

<sup>2</sup> Coleman, M. & Cormican, K., 2009. The Accelerating Campus Entrepreneurship (ACE) Initiative: Creating entrepreneurial graduates for Ireland.



## How can we deliver this?

### 1. Promote experiential learning at all education levels.

Entrepreneurial thinking and mindsets cannot be encouraged or achieved through traditional teaching and instruction alone. To give all students an opportunity to develop and enhance the creative skills that are closely associated with entrepreneurial thinking, action-oriented learning, mentoring and group projects are vital additions. New teaching methods and innovations must be given the necessary support and space to develop and succeed.

It is important to recognise that this approach will not threaten academic abilities formed by conventional teaching practices, but rather enrich the academic experience and outcomes for both the student and educator.

### 2. Provide professional development and opportunities for educators to encourage entrepreneurial thinking.

Our best teachers, working in primary, post-primary or third-level education, keep their methods and practice under review, adjusting to developments in teaching pedagogy. To facilitate this, teachers and educators need opportunities to acquire and enhance their knowledge, skills and attitudes to include entrepreneurial education and learning in their work programme.

Introducing entrepreneurial thinking into teacher training programmes would enable teachers to understand the distinction between entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial thinking and how it supports education. It will emphasise the common understanding of the need for entrepreneurial education, to dispel any myths and misunderstandings around the concept, and how it can be incorporated into existing school curricula, learning outcomes and school activities. Training should focus on supporting educators to make entrepreneurial education more explicit in learning outcomes and on how current academic activity and entrepreneurial thinking correlate. Teachers should be encouraged and rewarded for engaging with and developing links with local business and social enterprises to enhance the experiential learning opportunities for students.

Existing in-service training provisions should also provide continuous professional development opportunities for current teachers to receive ongoing entrepreneurial education training. To support this, teachers need to possess a range of competences related to creativity and entrepreneurship, and to work in a supportive school environment where this activity is encouraged and mistakes can be learned from.

### 4. Inspire the student.

Individual students should be front and centre of any initiative to encourage entrepreneurial thinking. Students should be encouraged to take on the responsibility to initiate and seize opportunities which allow them to process entrepreneurial skills outside the classroom without a teacher

**Y**oung people who benefit from entrepreneurial learning develop latent business knowledge and essential skills and attitudes.

**T**eachers should be encouraged and rewarded for engaging with and developing links with local business and social enterprises.

**T**he development of entrepreneurial thinking and experiences should be valued and accredited.

**W**e must foster a culture that supports risk-taking, curiosity and learning from mistakes or failures, not punishment for failure.

or lecturer watching over. The development of entrepreneurial thinking and experiences should be valued and accredited, such as involvement in clubs, societies and civic society projects, particularly at third level.

This is also an excellent chance to foster greater understanding of social entrepreneurship and the social economy. Students must be given opportunities to develop, implement and participate in social and civic society projects. Benefits such as fun, engagement, creativity and learning by taking on societal challenges could be a more viable reason for students, teachers and academics to engage in entrepreneurial education and practices.

Education of wider society to appreciate the importance of entrepreneurship is crucial if we are to create the jobs that are needed in the future. We must foster a culture that supports risk-taking, curiosity and learning from mistakes or failures, not punishment for failure. Failure and dealing with failure must be addressed in education to counteract the perceived risk aversion more generally fostered in the curriculum.

### 5. Encourage and reward the role of business and civic society.

Our society and economy change constantly, including business organisations and available jobs. Creativity and innovation are becoming important graduate skills for the future. To respond to and prepare for these requirements, new and different opportunities must be sought to develop young people's talents and skills. Acquiring a high level of academic skills, literacy and numeracy will remain important, but learning how to use these skills and apply them in an organisation is critical. Entrepreneurial education prepares young people for their role in society and the working world. For it to be effective, the business community must be involved.

Ireland's business community has already contributed much to enterprise experiences in schools and higher education institutions. Developing a comprehensive strategy may be the opportunity to formally recognise their input and build upon it. It will ensure tighter programming of activity to reflect the common needs of business and education to improve the overall experience. Those in the front line of enterprise and entrepreneurial activities can set an example that inspires others to follow their lead. Business champions are the right people to convince their peers and followers of the importance of entrepreneurial education.

Initiatives such as the Business in the Community Schools' Business Partnership, Junior Achievement Ireland and the Smart Futures programme have already fostered productive links between companies and schools. But there is a limit to the absorptive capacity of schools for this type of activity. A national framework for an 'adopt-a-school' type of programme is therefore required.

### 6. Implement a coordinated approach to national policy.

Support for entrepreneurship has never been greater. Nonetheless, government support and policy measures to advance an entrepreneurial ecosystem are taking place in different pockets of government and at



different paces. Many place skill development and human capital at the centre. While each activity is positive and welcome for its own merit, the various strands must be coordinated to ensure they are appropriately aligned to deliver the desired outcome.

### Conclusion

Fostering a new entrepreneurial culture in Ireland requires a clear strategy for entrepreneurial education across the full spectrum of our education system. Building creativity, innovation, problem-solving and risk-taking, including entrepreneurship at all levels of education, is necessary for our economic future. Whether internal or external entrepreneurs, development of entrepreneurial thinking will ensure that people can adapt to and deal with the challenges of the dynamic environment of our global economy.

The ambition should be to develop students as they move through the education system and take their place in society with the ability to communicate, participate, initiate, innovate, contribute and adapt to change as society and the economy evolve. Our entrepreneurial talent must match our academic ability if we are to harness our full potential to create value for our society and economy.

We may not all be entrepreneurs, but we can all be entrepreneurial thinkers.



**A** acquiring a high level of academic skills, literacy and numeracy will remain important, but learning how to use these skills and apply them in an organisation is critical.

### 'Many Paths to Success'

Speakers from the line-up of TEDxShannonED pictured at the launch on November 28th, 2016: (L-R) Brendan Kavanagh; Mairead Crosby; Barbara Moynihan; John Walshe; Michael Mooney and Margaret Reilly.

The TED event was organised independently by SOLAS, the Further Education and Training Authority, in partnership with Atlantic Aviation.

TEDxShannonED takes place at the Atlantic Aviation Institute which officially opens on December 7th, 2016. The state-of-the-art training facility at Shannon for aerospace and aviation training is equipped with a dedicated training aircraft, the latest aeronautical education and training equipment, and is near a live aircraft maintenance environment.

## The need for a Symbiotic Relationship between Industry and Education

Bringing education and enterprise together



By Eimear Sinnott

Managing Director of CareersPortal.ie

We live in a world few could have imagined 50 years ago. While many workers will continue to have occupations requiring no degree or postgraduate education, the best jobs will require further or higher education. In fact, the 20 occupations with the highest earnings all require at least a bachelor's degree.

From an early age, we're told that education is the key to success. Study hard! Get good marks! Go to college! But we need to question whether further and higher education in Ireland meets the needs of tomorrow's individual, industry, society and workforce.

Education does not have a single purpose; it serves multiple objectives, whose relative importance can be very personal because of diverse economic, social, spiritual, cultural, and political realities. What industry expects from our educational system might not be the same as what society or the individual requires.

In this context we may note the words of David Orr to Arkansas College graduates in a commencement speech in 1990: 'What Is Education For?'

*The plain fact is that the planet does not need more 'successful' people. But it does desperately need more peacemakers, healers, restorers, storytellers, and lovers of every shape and form. It needs people who live well in their places. It needs people of moral courage willing to join the fight to make the world habitable and humane. And these needs have little to do with success as our culture has defined it.*

In an ideal world these traits would be more marketable and carry more currency, but this can be a difficult sell to some of our ambitious students and the various industries trying to attract them.

Students and career-seekers need to be able to research the various career and educational options available to them, and they need to understand what else might be required in the future world of work. The need for cooperation between industry and education

**A** closer working relationship between all HEIs and industry is fundamental to achieving the 'step change' proposed in the National Action Plan 2016–2019, Eimear Sinnott writes. Since industry, broadly defined, is the beneficiary of the education sector's output, it must now play its part.

to provide this information was recognised in July 2006 when a report from the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs recommended that a central careers portal website be created, as a resource for six communities: job seekers, adult learners, second-level students, third-level students and graduates, parents and guardians, and career guidance professions. It was to provide up-to-date, relevant career information to these communities, each of which has different educational and employment needs. The report recognised there was low awareness of labour market and careers information in Ireland at the time:

*Students and adults need to make career decisions based on their own aptitudes and preferences, but they also need to do so based on the best career and labour market forecasts available. In the long run, acquiring skills that are in demand is the best thing for individuals and the economy.*

In 2006 no such resource existed, but the report set in motion the creation of the new portal. Over the last nine years, [www.careersportal.ie](http://www.careersportal.ie) has partnered with public and private organisations to give the various communities up-to-date information on the labour market and the ever-increasing educational choices and pathways.

Individuals must make educational and career decisions based on their interests. Those who genuinely pursue a line of study that interests or excites them are much more likely to succeed. Using the free self-assessment tools on [www.careersportal.ie](http://www.careersportal.ie) can help in this early stage of career research. The Career Interest Profiler, one of the site's most popular tools, gives users an eight-page report highlighting career and educational areas that meet their top three interest types.

Armed with the knowledge of one's interests, it is useful to see how closely these relate to the most up-to-date labour market information. In other words, where are the current skills shortages and jobs in demand, and where are future opportunities likely to be?

Individuals can access detailed, up-to-date information on over 1,000 occupations in 33 employment sectors across the economy. There is specific information on each occupation: typical tasks and activities undertaken, knowledge requirements, skills needed, personal qualities, and entry routes into the job.

Working closely with public and private organisations ensures that employment information is fed directly from experts working in the various sectors, making it very real, practical and current. In each sector information is provided on labour market trends, including skills shortages and links to job vacancies, and on various educational routes into the sector. These options are provided across the framework of education.

There has been too much emphasis on encouraging all students to aspire to higher education; further education has not received the same emphasis and status. With the demise of vocational schools and regional technical colleges, vocational education in Ireland has been neglected for many years. It is heartening now to see new apprenticeships rolled out and existing ones promoted, offering students real opportunities to earn

**The skills and competencies required cannot be delivered by the education sector alone... it is now time for industry to reconsider its contribution.**

**Students and adults need to make career decisions based on the best career and labour market forecasts available.**

**What industry expects from our educational system might not be the same as what society or the individual requires.**

**There has been too much emphasis on encouraging all students to aspire to higher education**

and learn – opportunities that are currently profiled on the site. These programmes will provide a really positive opportunity for industry and education to work closely together.

The National Skills Strategy 2025 is predicated on having a well-educated, well-skilled and adaptable workforce. It seeks to ensure our people have the relevant skills to succeed and that business operating in Ireland has the capacity to expand.

We are pleased to see the new Network of Regional Skills Fora emerge, created as part of the government's National Skills Strategy 2025. These seek to provide increased opportunities for employers and education and training providers to work more closely together on a regional basis.

The question is, what skills and competencies must we develop at all levels of the education system, to ensure our future employees are appropriately qualified and have the skills needed to take advantage of emerging opportunities? A recent Forbes study on the '10 skills that employers want' shows that the employability skills needed are universal, and can be learnt across all academic disciplines and in any job where you are working with others:

1. Ability to work in a team structure
2. Ability to make decisions and solve problems
3. Ability to communicate verbally with people inside and outside an organisation
4. Ability to plan, organise and prioritise work
5. Ability to obtain and process information
6. Ability to analyse quantitative data
7. Technical knowledge related to the job
8. Proficiency with computer software programs
9. Ability to create and/or edit written reports
10. Ability to sell and influence others

No matter what you studied in college, whether anthropology, German or engineering, you had to learn the top five skills on the list.

Work experience, at both second and third level, becomes critical in delivering the remaining skills. Our students must be able to understand these career skills and recognise which skills and competencies they have already developed and which ones they need to work on. Competitions such as the **Careers Portal National Career Skills Competition** were developed for this reason, to encourage students both in second-level and further education to recognise these employability skills and have the maturity to reflect on their own competencies.

The future success of our economy depends on bringing education and enterprise together, to expose students as early as possible to the world of work and produce employees who are equipped not only with the necessary educational qualifications but also, just as importantly, with the career skills needed to succeed.

The National Action plan for Education 2016–2019 promises a ‘step change’ in the development of critical skills, knowledge and competencies:

*While in the past, educationalists may have been wary that the narrow repetitive tasks of the workplace should not crowd out the broader agenda of education, now, the demands of the workplace are increasingly focussing on the very characteristics education nurtures – critical thinking, creativity, innovation, adaptability, collaboration. Learners gain experience from placement in real world settings, while organisations and enterprises (public and private) enhance their capacity to innovate and embrace new insights and technologies through interaction with education.*

In an increasingly dynamic world it is becoming more difficult to predict the attractive jobs of the future. In the U.S., 40 percent of the workforce will be freelancing by 2020. 60 percent of the best jobs in the next ten years have not yet been invented! As Alvin Toffler wrote, ‘The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn.’

Blended learning and digital technologies will be an increasingly important part of delivering specific knowledge requirements, particularly for established occupations. Educationalists at all levels will face the challenge of identifying and developing skills and competencies among their students to make them future employees equipped to deal with an as-yet-unimagined world of work. Understanding the shape and nature of these competencies, and guessing who the main players in their delivery will be, are clearly important.

Bill Drayton, CEO and founder of Ashoka, sees empathy as ‘fundamental to creating a world of changemakers — where citizens lead the solutions our society needs.’

At all levels of education, from preschool to fourth-level, the educator’s role is changing from imparter of facts to facilitator of experiential learning and personal development. The sort of educational experiences which currently develop the attributes so highly prized by employers includes a long list of established activities. A brief list of those at post-primary level includes:

- » Coder Dojo
- » Scifest/Young Scientist
- » Gaisce Awards
- » Mini Company/Get up and Go
- » Scouting and Guiding
- » Volunteering.

In higher and further education this is expanded to include:

- » Entrepreneurial activities
- » App development
- » Yearlong work experience
- » Study abroad

**A** recent Forbes study on the ‘10 skills that employers want’ shows that the employability skills needed are universal and can be learnt across all academic disciplines and in any job

**T**he future success of our economy depends on bringing education and enterprise together.

**T**he plain fact is that the planet does not need more ‘successful’ people. But it does desperately need more peacemakers, healers, restorers, storytellers...  
*David Orr*

**E**xposure to the world of work... can only be delivered through better cooperation between industry and educators.

- » Social entrepreneurship
- » Business start-up
- » Funding rounds.

Critical to these activities are mastering successful teamwork and applying critical thinking and problem-solving in real-life situations. Exposure to the world of work will become increasingly important and can only be delivered through better cooperation between industry and educators. In addition to the skills and competencies above, tomorrow’s workforce must be lifelong learners who are both adaptive and resilient.

Despite the reducing budgets available to our HEIs, many are already successfully addressing the development of these skills and competencies. Such institutions typically have a close relationship with industry and leverage this to enhance students’ experience and employment prospects. Should anyone doubt this, a brief perusal of the annual HEA First Destination Report will confirm which courses and institutions are succeeding most.

So how can the ‘step change’ in the National Action Plan 2016–2019 be achieved?

It is easy to promise a step-change, difficult to deliver it. Fundamental to achieving it will be a closer working relationship between all HEIs and industry. The skills and competencies required cannot be delivered by the education sector alone. While appropriate state funding is an obvious requirement, industry too must play its part. Industry, broadly defined, is the beneficiary of the education sector’s output, and it is now time for industry to reconsider its contribution. Industry scholarships and other supports are welcome but must develop and deepen if Ireland is to meet the challenges ahead.

Industry must be mindful that key career decisions are often made long before students enter further or higher education and can be influenced by parents, peers, guidance counsellors and teachers who may not be privy to information and collaboration between industry and HEIs. To inform this career decision-making, and to ensure that appropriately qualified and skilled candidates are available in the future, industry must communicate and connect directly with various communities, including second-level students. This communication must be in the form of up-to-date career information and meaningful work experience placements.

Through collaboration with public and private organisations and providing associated information on CareersPortal, Ireland has a unique position where industry can directly inform and support our future workforce, as the EGFSN envisaged ten years ago. CareersPortal is now used by over 2 million people annually to help their career and educational decisions.

Having spent the last nine years working closely with both industries and educators, I can’t overemphasise the importance of timely and accessible career information from industry, organisations and educational institutions. Without it, it is difficult for students, career seekers and



those that support them to know where current and future employment opportunities lie and to gain understanding and knowledge of the educational pathways and career skills needed to succeed.

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Professor Brian MacCraith, keynote speaker at the National Conference of The Institute of Guidance Counsellors, with (right) Betty McLaughlin and (left) Jalanta Burke.

## The drive for Technological Universities

Will TUs fulfil the dream post-designation?



By Prof Tom Collins  
 former President of Maynooth University

Prof Tom Collins analyses the ongoing push in Ireland for Technological Universities in light of the most recent changes in Higher Education and in Irish society as a whole. He examines both new and historical challenges, setting these against a backdrop of international priorities for Higher Education.

### The ever-changing panorama

The Irish Higher Education landscape is a rapidly evolving one, with an array of new challenges presenting themselves to both sectors – universities and institutes of technology – and having specific impacts upon each of them. The policy environment has changed markedly in recent years, with developments in the areas of compacts, clustering, mergers and re-designation all underway. Similarly, developments in the wider society, particularly to do with the opportunities which a recovery from the recession represents, dealing with the legacy of the recession, and demographic changes in the short- and long-term, all present opportunities and challenges.

### New challenges

The changing structure of the Irish economy, which has already resulted in skill shortages in some areas and emerging shortages in others, together with the ever growing centrality of sectors such as food, bio-pharma, ICT and tourism means that Irish higher education must keep a vigilant eye on economic trends if it is to remain relevant. Globalisation and the internationalisation of higher education present opportunities for Irish Higher Education institutions as they attempt to attract students from abroad, but equally present challenges as the sector itself becomes an internationally traded commodity. The emergence of private players in the field at a time when public institutions receive reduced levels of public funding, and the awaited deliberations of the HEA on the funding issue, must also be considered. Likewise, the emergence of distance delivery and its potential impact on the campus of the future require some deliberation.

### Historical challenges

While many of these are new, some of the historical challenges remain. For the institutes, these include parity of esteem with the university sector, differentiation along the binary divide, the preparedness level of the student intake for the demands of higher education, a complex HR environment, constrained budgets, a decade of cuts in staffing levels and the ongoing degradation



in buildings and equipment. Collectively, these present something of a perfect storm to this sector.

International priorities for Higher Education

Against such a challenging background, it is possible to identify a number of general priorities which characterise higher education policy internationally and within which it is possible to locate the drive in Ireland for technological universities. These include:

- » Mass participation and generalised access
- » Competing demands of attaining world class research reputation while sustaining a teaching agenda
- » Need for closer inter-institutional collaboration to enhance economies of scale and increase efficiency
- » The internationalization agenda, both as a source of revenue in a period of declining state subvention to higher education and to promote greater inter-culturalism
- » The opportunities and the challenges of digital learning
- » The threat of private providers to the sustainable and ongoing development of the public higher education system.

Mission differentiation

The binary divide has come to be seen by higher education policy makers in Ireland as a mechanism through which all of these policy objectives can be kept afloat, with the concept of the Technological University a further iteration of this strategy.

The HEA, for instance, notes that a high level of institutional diversity has come to be recognised internationally as one of the key strengths of a well-functioning higher education system. Accordingly it advocates “a system approach” where different institutions deliver in different ways against overarching national objectives. Mission differentiation, therefore, especially between the institutes and the universities has emerged as a key policy priority.

With regard to the international situation, Clancy<sup>1</sup> employs a threefold categorisation of OECD countries. Unified (or unitary) systems include post binary systems such as UK and Australia and university dominated systems such as Italy. Binary (incorporating dual systems) relates to the development of institutions to complement or possibly rival universities. Such systems emerged from government’s desire to create a clear and distinct alternative to the universities, to meet the needs of the labour market and strengthen regional economies.

Ireland is categorised as binary in such international categorisations, although as noted by Skillbeck<sup>2</sup>, the system in Ireland is more complex and varied than the term usually suggests. Diversified systems are those inspired by the US where higher education is conceived as a total system

1 Clancy (2015) following on from international work by Furth (1973), Scott (1996) and Kyvik (2004).  
2 Skillbeck, M (2003) Towards an Integrated System of Tertiary Education. Unpublished Discussion Paper.

Collectively, these [challenges] present something of a perfect storm to this [IoT] sector.

Mission differentiation, especially between the institutes and the universities, has emerged as a key policy priority.

Irish higher education must keep a vigilant eye on economic trends if it is to remain relevant.

The emergence of distance delivery and its potential impact on the campus of the future requires some deliberation.

but where there is a great diversity of institutional types and where there is a hierarchy of higher educational establishments where different institutions are allocated specific roles within the overall system.

Numbers of students in IoTs

As the following table shows, the institutes are generally far more successful in attracting non-traditional students, and in operating a ladder of progression through the qualification framework, i.e. they make a major contribution on the participation and access dimension. For much the same reason they have lower levels of retention and completion than the universities.

Table 1: Institute of Technology Student Base as Share of Total Public HE Provision

| Level                   | IoT % | Number of students in IoTs |
|-------------------------|-------|----------------------------|
| Apprenticeships & other | 100%  | 2,821                      |
| Undergraduate           | 46%   | 78,630                     |
| Level 6                 | 60%   | 8,979                      |
| Level 7                 | 100%  | 25,665                     |
| Level 8                 | 32%   | 38,333                     |
| Occasional              | 63%   | 5,653                      |
| Postgraduate            | 18%   | 6,850                      |
| Level 8 & 9 Taught      | 20%   | 5,399                      |
| Level 9 Research        | 42%   | 575                        |
| Level 10 (PHD)          | 7%    | 566                        |
| Occasional              | 23%   | 310                        |
| Total                   | 42%   | 88,301                     |

Similarly, the institute sector as a whole fares less well in winning research income than the university sector, though there are big differences between the different institutions within each of the sectors in this regard.

Perceived benefits of mergers

Reflecting a growing trend throughout Europe, national policy in Ireland has moved significantly in favour of the merging of smaller institutions from within the institute of technology sector in the belief that the system differentiation is best secured by the scale, cohesion, singularity of purpose and greater efficiencies of amalgamated unitary bodies – hence the policy preference for technological universities. The proposed TU4D, for instance, involving a merger between DIT, IT Tallaght and IT Blanchardstown, will be Ireland’s largest third level institution, with close to 30,000 students.

### Conclusion

However, critical mass and coherence of provision will not alone differentiate the technological sector from the university sector post-designation. This will require a compelling vision within the technological sector around its pivotal position in the emergence of a society in Ireland which has an ongoing capacity for self-generation and redefinition; which can support an energetic and expansive, indigenous economic development agenda; which is democratic and inclusive; which can enhance the career potential of both staff and students and which can provide hope and possibility to a future generation of learners in Ireland.

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**T**he institutes [of technology]... make a major contribution on the participation and access dimension.

### Intel Women in Technology Award

Louise Ni Chonghaile, a fourth year student in the GMIT School of Engineering, is a winner of the Intel Women in Technology Award for achieving a Distinction in her Bachelor of Engineering degree in Computer & Electronic Engineering (Level 7).

Louise, who is now in the fourth year of the honours degree programme, was presented with the Award at a formal ceremony in Dublin in November 2016 alongside her lecturer Natasha Rohan, Dept of Electronic & Electrical Engineering, and GMIT Careers Officer Bridie Killoran, both of whom nominated Louise for her award.

Pictured here are (centre) Louise Ni Chonghaile from Carna, Co Galway, (left) Bridie Killoran, Careers Officer at GMIT and (right) Natasha Rohan, Lecturer at GMIT.

## The pressing problem of third level funding

We need to recommit and reinvest in Higher Education



### By Peter Cassells

Executive Director, Edward M Kennedy Institute for Conflict Intervention, Maynooth University

**S**erious failures and risks in Ireland's third level funding necessitate the urgent introduction of a new system. Peter Cassells proffers guiding principles to assist in the debate towards such a system. It is important, he says, that people understand the value for all citizens of a flourishing Higher Education system in terms of its matchless contribution to public life and the collective good.

As a country, we are once again at a turning point as we seek to transition out of a deep crisis, revive development and lay the foundations for future prosperity, balanced growth and greater social cohesion.

As a people, we need to rebuild and enhance our capabilities at the personal, inter-personal and institutional level to address these challenges and opportunities. This will require significant investment in education, including higher education, further education, apprenticeships and other post-second level opportunities.

This requirement for further investment is coming at a time when, despite a stabilisation of the national finances, public resources and household incomes remain stretched and we are facing multiple competing choices with understandable demands for increased resources for housing and health services in particular.

### Failures and risks in the current system

It is also coming at a time when the current system of funding higher education is no longer fit for purpose. The existing system fails to recognise the pressures facing higher education institutions and the scale of the coming demographic changes. It also fails to fully recognise the pressures on families and students, not just because of the €3,000 fee but also the high living and maintenance costs associated with studying and successfully progressing through college. Indeed there is a growing level of risk for students, their families and the higher education institutions that these funding pressures will damage the quality of provision.

### Need for a reformed integrated funding system

We need, therefore, an immediate increase in resources to deal with the current pressures followed by agreement on a reformed integrated funding system for higher education covering operational (core) funding, student supports and capital expenditure.

Reaching agreement on a reformed funding system will require a constructive and realistic discussion of the funding challenges and options set out in the *Report of the Expert Group on Future Funding of Higher Education*.

Different stakeholders will naturally have different first preference models of funding. However, a discussion that does not converge, yielding only restatement of first preferences and consequent stalemate, will simply consolidate the status quo.

It is important to see that the status-quo is not a cost-free option. The existing funding system imposes costs in terms of the quality of student experience, the exclusion of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, the future career opportunities for Irish graduates in a mobile labour market and, ultimately, the overall contribution of higher education to Irish economic and social development.

People will also seek refuge in funding models from abroad that we might imitate. There are available international approaches that have attractive features; but some of them also have significant drawbacks that cannot be ignored. Beyond that, some of them depend on wider conditions that do not exist, and are unlikely to materialise, in Ireland in the coming years. The challenge is to identify a model suited to the Irish context which draws on some of the best features in other countries.

### Necessary elements in new funding system

There are a number of guiding principles that will assist the debate on a new funding system. Any new system must lead to:

- » *An ambitious increase in investment* to create the kind of engaged, small group, high trust, and high expectation teaching and learning necessary for the next phase of Ireland's economic, social and cultural development. Countries at similar levels of development – with whom we compete in the development of capabilities, innovation, inward investment and public services – devote more attention and resources to ensuring high-quality education that is free at the point of access to students from a range of social backgrounds;
- » *Increased investment in quality*: high quality scholarship, student experiences and learning outcomes based on excellent teaching, research and scholarship across the full spectrum of humanities, social sciences and STEM disciplines.
- » *A major increase in access, participation and progression* among all socio-economic groups as a part of the social contract.

These guiding principles help to frame consideration of a reform package for higher education which goes beyond comparing a reformed system with the existing system.

In any deliberations of funding options, the strengths and weakness of each funding option must be taken into account. It is important that each option be considered together, since it is their relative advantages and disadvantages that are relevant. Every funding instrument has a tangible negative aspect – taxes, fees or student debt repayments or a

**T**he challenge is to identify a model suited to the Irish context which draws on some of the best features in other countries.

**T**he status-quo is not a cost-free option.

**T**here is a growing level of risk for students, their families and the higher education institutions that funding pressures will damage the quality of provision.

**W**e can be proud of our graduates and what they achieve from poets to doctors; film animators to neuroscientists; historians to app designers.

combination of these. It is not realistic to cite the negative character of any one instrument in isolation – as if there were a way of funding higher education that did not draw resources from some source.

Above all we need as a people to come to a shared understanding about the different contributions of higher education to the development of our people, our society and economy and spell out what we require from the sector if these contributions and their continued worth is to be maintained and enhanced. The overall future system of funding higher education should then be designed to meet each of these requirements in a long term sustainable way.

### Understanding the Contribution of Higher Education

In the decades since the 1950s our higher education system has been at the heart of an enormous economic and societal transformation in Ireland. The numbers going into higher education have soared, with almost half of all workers now having a third level qualification. Its contribution to our society, economy, culture and public life, including the formation of citizens, is widely understood and valued.

Higher education adds to the understanding of, and hence the flourishing of, an integrated social, institutional, cultural and economic life. It contributes both to individual fulfilment and the collective good. It is also an end in itself, through its pursuit of knowledge, understanding and meaning. Its contribution reflects both the distinctive disciplines—arts, humanities, social sciences and STEM—and the overlap and cross-fertilisation that take place between them.

Ireland is unique in Europe: we have a large, growing and highly educated population of young people. Demand for education expanded during the crisis and it looks set to grow further. There are now 210,000 students in our Universities and Institutes of Technology (IOTs). This is set to grow by a third in the next ten years as secondary school students enter higher education. We must as a society respond proactively and progressively to this desire for knowledge and development.

There can be little doubt that investment in higher education has been key to enabling our economy and our social services to grow in recent decades. We know that graduates' knowledge and capabilities enhance productivity. Universities and IOTs are key centres of research and knowledge generation and engines of regional and local economic development. In overall terms the State—through higher tax contributions and lower calls on welfare—benefits significantly from its investment. OECD estimates a cumulative return of 27 per cent (for males) and 17.5 per cent (females) over a 40 year span.

In social terms there are also strong gains. Our third level institutions enrich Ireland's cultural life. It is through higher education that we inform and nurture an understanding of our national identity and that of other cultures and belief systems.

We can be proud of our graduates and what they achieve from poets to doctors; film animators to neuroscientists; historians to app designers. In personal terms



graduates also gain. Alongside social and cultural benefits they earn more: an honours degree or higher is linked to earning 100 per cent more than adults whose highest educational attainment is a Leaving Certificate or equivalent. This brings into focus a key issue, how we as a society view individual and collective success. It is my view that the collective success of our society and economy cannot be separated from the opportunities and flourishing of the individual; and indeed from the environment in which we all live and work. My idea of the public good is one that sees individual flourishing achieved through higher education and other activities, as contributing to public life and the public good. Higher education contributes both to individual fulfilment and the collective good. This is the core idea that underpins Ireland's long-standing drive to widen access to higher education. It is also an important consideration in determining how higher education should be funded.

### Maintaining and Enhancing these Benefits

I believe that we now have an opportunity to recommit and reinvest in higher education. We have the opportunity to set a new level of ambition for the system and restore it as a key enabler of our future development. This will require a step change in quality levels, comprehensive student financial support and a more holistic treatment of all students across the spectrum of undergraduate, postgraduate and part-time provision.

In return, we need to spell out what we require from our universities and IOTs.

First, they must maintain and enhance the quality of their teaching and learning. This is the single most important way in which higher education serves its students and the public good. We need graduates who can understand our past, engage with the present and imagine the future. This requires renewed attention not just to what graduates learn; but how they learn.

Second, the universities and IOTs need to further adapt and respond to the fundamental changes taking place around innovation and how knowledge is generated. It is helpful to view that as happening through four spheres— university, business, government and civil society— and how they overlap and interact in a very open manner relies on a wider range of disciplines being fully engaged.

Third, we require that universities and IOTs become more responsive to the changing needs of our economy, society and public system in the medium and long-term. This means giving more attention to how employability of graduates can be improved and the role of high-quality, informed, career advice and support to students.

Fourth, access to the opportunities in universities and IOTs, of those from disadvantaged backgrounds, needs to be improved dramatically. It must be recognised and accepted that addressing current inequities in access will be challenging and resource-intensive.

This in my view will require a comprehensive and fundamental change to our funding model. We should have an open and considered discussion on this challenge but one that ultimately leads to bold decisions and decisive action.

**O**ur universities and IOTs must maintain and enhance the quality of their teaching and learning. We should have an open and considered discussion... that ultimately leads to bold decisions and decisive action.

**E**very funding instrument has a tangible negative aspect—taxes, fees or student debt repayments or a combination of these.

## The search for quality assessment practice

Putting teacher judgement back into the frame



By Prof Val Klenowski

Professor of Education at Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia

**T**his paper on Assessment was first delivered by Prof Val Klenowski in Maynooth University in June 2016 at a conference titled Dismantling 'The Murder Machine'? – *Interrogating Cultures of Assessment*. The conference was attended by strategists, policy makers, researchers, practitioners in education and others who had gathered in the centenary year of 1916 to review Assessment across the Transitions through the prism of Pádraig Pearse's 'Murder Machine.'

### Introduction

Millennials, in their search for employment opportunities, are looking for 'authenticity, autonomy, purpose and passion in their jobs'. And businesses expect graduates to have competencies to contribute to innovation and growth.

While our assessment practices across the sectors need to be aligned to these learning outcomes, my proposition is that these will only be realized if we take seriously the role and expertise of teachers' professional assessment judgements and capabilities in the process. I use the term teacher judgement in classroom assessment to include judgements involving pedagogical decisions, use of criteria and standards, and critical inquiry of assessment data and practices.

In seeking to improve classroom assessment practices, there is a tendency for many policy officers to seek 'what works' or what is innovative or new. I will consider examples of transformation in classroom assessment practice within particular assessment contexts that illustrate the restoration of the important teacher-student-learning relationship, and the agency of the school, in developing quality assessment for all. Most frequently in my research I have used a case study approach as I believe that we learn best from a close study of the particular (Simons, 2014) which in terms of classroom assessment heightens the importance of the interactions involved in the teacher-student-learning relationship, and teacher judgement for understanding how to use assessment to support learning. Teacher development is a precondition for assessment development and I contend that teachers must be generatively involved in the formulation and development of better assessment practice.

To begin I discuss the millennial generation and the expectations of industry and business and what this means for teacher and classroom assessment. I want to draw on some fundamental pedagogical understandings and school reform principles to argue for a more generative role for teachers in the formulation of better assessment practices and policies and, in so doing, emphasise the importance



of restoring teachers' professional assessment judgements to meet the learning needs of students for our changing world.

### The Millennial Generation

The Millennial Generation comprises 25% of the world's population and is aged between 16–30 years. From the research it would seem that this generation values authenticity, autonomy, purpose and passion in their work, and has a social conscience. Those of this generation want to make a difference and have impact. We know that in their lifetime they have experienced the power of social media, digital media, authenticity, word of mouth advertising and the online market place. Startups of this generation have emerged with such businesses as Airbnb, Uber, Etsy. At a recent Business Summit in Australia this generation was described as “Risk Takers Growth Makers” (<http://www.afrsummit.com/>). Key ideas from this summit included the need to nurture the right skills, the changing expectations and role of the consumer and that a shift in our thinking is required for the innovation we need. It was also noted that some of our policies are not helping and I would argue that a strong parallel exists within education.

The shift in values and expectations is having a profound effect on the way millennials are living, learning and working. In Singapore, a country that has a history of examination and high stakes assessment, this generation was reporting that in assessing applicants for particular startup positions it was not so much the ‘stellar grades’ that mattered but rather that the applicant would have the right attributes to fit in with the team and have a good work ethic. We also know that for this generation many will change jobs more frequently and have more jobs in their life time than those of earlier generations.

With the shift in expectations comes a corresponding shift in values and principles of the startups that have emerged and this context has important implications for learning and assessment. Research suggests that students today are learning more outside of the formal classroom context and they want to develop competencies and skills for innovation and growth (Potter, 2016; Stasio Jr, 2013).

### Competencies for Innovation and Growth

Guy Claxton and Bill Lucas in their book: “Educating Ruby: what our children really need to learn” indicate that “confidence, curiosity, collaboration, communication, creativity, commitment and craftsmanship” are skills needed. Such competencies and skills for innovation and growth also include personality traits such as emotional resilience, emotional stability, conscientiousness and economic traits such as risk aversion, trust and altruism.

To achieve these learning outcomes our assessment policies and practices need to nurture and support the development of the right skill sets, motivate our students by providing opportunities to achieve something meaningful and something that matters. In addition, we also need to involve our students in suggestions for change and create assessment experiences that provide them with the cognitive challenges to up

**I**n assessing applicants for particular startup positions it was not so much the ‘stellar grades’ that mattered but rather that the applicant would have the right attributes to fit in with the team and have a good work ethic.

**T**he student–teacher–learning relationship... is essential in a changing world of uncertainty that is causing increasing stress and suicide among our younger generation.

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**A**t a recent Business Summit in Australia the Millennial Generation was described as “Risk Takers Growth Makers”.

skill. Such assessment change requires an understanding of important pedagogic practices and reform principles.

In a recent Australian Research Council project which focused on the use of assessment data to promote equity in schools, a particular teacher chose to focus on two students who were struggling with their writing and appeared to be “slipping through the cracks.” In this project we were building teacher capacity by supporting the use of critical inquiry to interrogate the assessment data and the use of professional judgement to modify teaching practices (Klenowski & Ehrich, 2016). This teacher worked closely with the two students because she was concerned about their emotional stability, their lack of confidence and progress in their writing. In her inquiry she came to understand their interests, their difficulties and what she needed to change both in her pedagogy and curriculum to motivate and engage these students in their writing. This example of teacher judgement highlights the importance of the teacher–student–learning relationship.

### Understanding in Context

Too often policy makers and stakeholders are seeking “what works” yet, as Simons (2014) suggests in this search for general laws we can not only lose sight of the uniqueness and humanity of individuals but reduce them in the process. In Australia and elsewhere, we have witnessed how large scale testing practices and policies such as Queensland's Great Results Guarantee bring focus onto the results while the student is reduced to a statistic or a grade. The importance of the student–teacher–learning relationship in understanding the particular student's learning needs and emotions is essential in a changing world of uncertainty that is causing increasing stress and suicide among our younger generation. An assessment practice that exemplifies authenticity, autonomy and ability to present an argument is the presentation of a portfolio of evidence and a defense or final oral examination. The skills and attitudes needed in such a presentation are important for preparation for college and in transitioning to higher education.

### Could assessment be organised differently?

In transitioning towards classroom practice that incorporates assessment for learning (AfL) strategies, there also needs to be a shift in the prevailing assessment culture to one that values relationships, that respects people's feelings and fears, that works towards a collaborative and community approach and that engages the collective. Many teachers, working in contexts that have traditionally and culturally valued high–stakes testing, often argue that to engage in AfL strategies requires time which is difficult to find in a curriculum, pedagogical and assessment context that has historically valued competition and a focus on results. With the move to the valuing of skills and attitudes as well as knowledge, we need to consider alternative ways of assessing student learning.

Where the introduction and use of teacher judgement has been advocated for the development of improved learning through the use of criteria and standards for more effective feedback and teaching, moderation or calibration<sup>1</sup> of teachers' judgements for consistency and comparability is also supported. Yet in some contexts, such as in Ireland, some teachers

and teacher unions have claimed that the teacher's role is to be an advocate of the student and not the judge. This claim is based on processes of responsabilisation which places far too much emphasis on the capacity of the individual teacher rather than the collective.

Teacher judgement for grading and marking purposes incorporates moderation. The process of calibrating teachers' judgements involves the responsibility of the collective and is not the sole responsibility of the individual teacher. When a teacher is making a judgement about a student's work, in relation to the stated criteria and standards, he or she is seeking evidence to support their judgement which is then calibrated with the judgements of others. As Torrance (2015: 10–11) suggests:

*... with much more emphasis being placed on the collective responsibility of teachers, students and their peers to understand that educational encounters are a collaborative endeavour which should produce outcomes that benefit communities as well as individuals. And outcomes ... which must self-consciously look to the sustenance and long-term development of collective knowledge and culture not simply to short-term utility and market advantage.*

As described by Torrance (2015, pp. 10–11)

*We ... have moved from using assessment to identify and certify the actual practical skills, competences and educational achievements of (a minority of) individual students, to a mass system of assessment and testing which focuses on the indicators of achievement (grades and test scores) rather than achievement itself. Moreover ... accompanied by an increasing emphasis on the personal responsibility to engage with the system and maximise outcomes.*

Further, he explains how many countries have been driven by neo-liberal policies and ideologies to take up neo-liberal processes of responsabilisation that “over-emphasise the individual nature of responsibility and far underplay the collective element... thereby producing a very inefficient and ineffective form of social and educational investment in the future.” He places much more emphasis on the collective responsibility of teachers, students and their peers to understand the collaborative endeavor of education to produce outcomes that benefit communities as well as individuals.

The implications for assessment in a move towards a culture that focuses on the development and identification of collective understanding, collaboratively produced through educational experiences, is a valuing of difference in terms of ways to identify and report on a variety of complex, contingent and uncertain outcomes. To develop skills such as curiosity, flexibility and resilience, it is important to acknowledge that success and failure are inherently unstable and equally required.

### The Conditions of Community

Changing an assessment culture occurs incrementally and slowly. To achieve a collaborative assessment culture those from outside the schools will find it difficult to improve the quality within for it is the quality of the

**T**eacher development... is a precondition of curriculum development, and teachers must play a generative role in the development of better curricula.

**A**n assessment practice that exemplifies authenticity, autonomy and ability to present an argument is the presentation of a portfolio of evidence and a defense or final oral examination.

teachers themselves and their commitment to change that determines the quality of teaching and classroom assessment.

*Teacher development... is a precondition of curriculum development, and teachers must play a generative role in the development of better curricula. Their understanding, their sense of responsibility, their commitment to the effective delivery of educational experience for their pupils, is significantly enhanced when they own the ideas and author the means by which ideas are translated into classroom practice (MacDonald, 1991, p. 3).*

McDonald (1991) adds:

*...try to bring pupils in on the logics of school and classroom policies for change. ... lateral rather than vertical lines of communication are more effective in transmitting ideas and practices, a point of considerable relevance to the concept of teacher, school and community collaboration. (MacDonald, 1991, p. 4)*

I would argue that teachers also have an important generative role to play in the development of improved assessment policy and practices and I agree that the voices of students need also to be heard to ensure collaboration and collective responsibility.

### A 'Remarkable' Assessment System in the Context of Change

Queensland's system of high stakes certification has been described as remarkable with school-based assessment which is externally moderated and where teachers' judgement and professionalism are respected (Stobart, 2015). The strengths of the Queensland assessment system include the acknowledgement that students will have different skills and different learning needs. School Based Assessment allows teachers to develop work programs and assessment based on the syllabus that meet the needs of the particular student cohort being taught. The flexibility of such a system provides for a diversity of assessment which addressed important equity and access issues. The teacher's role in the design of the assessment task and the importance of teacher judgement about the assessment, and in the judgement about the folio of evidence, are key features. Recently, the Queensland assessment system has been reviewed with some important changes recommended. There will now be 75% School Based Assessment and 25% external assessment with Maths and Science subjects assessed 50% by exams.

Many have asked why such a change was necessary given the strengths of the previous system. The review was completed by the Australian Council for Education Research which is an independent non-government organisation that “generates its entire income through contracted research and development projects, and through developing and distributing products and services, with operating surplus directed back into research and development” (<https://www.acer.edu.au>). We know that there can be no development in curriculum and assessment if there is no teacher development and from the review it was concluded that in Queensland there continues to be a need to ensure that the teacher-based assessments are valid and reliable, in that they provide sufficient opportunity for

students to demonstrate syllabus objectives and standards. With the shifts in the curriculum and the focus on 21st century skills, it is equally important that teachers receive the necessary support and opportunities to develop their repertoire of assessment skills. Consequently, a system of endorsement of school-based assessment will be introduced to ensure that teachers' assessment literacy is developed and an enhanced culture of assessment construction is supported. A process of incremental change will be introduced to develop and re-vitalise school-based assessment. A process of accreditation of assessors is underway with the following key changes:

- » Endorsement is a process to ensure school-devised assessment instruments meet the requirements of the current syllabus and provide sufficient opportunities for students to demonstrate the syllabus objectives and standards before they are used in schools.
- » The Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority is developing learning modules that will form the initial part of a formal program of accreditation for review panelists.
- » The accreditation program will incrementally support and replace current panel training processes with a system of structured, professionally recognised and certified training pathways. It will underpin the development of a shared assessment literacy among teachers, and an enhanced culture of assessment construction.
- » The accreditation trial began with State Review Panel Chairs, State panelists and District Review Panel Chairs in 2015. This learning is being extended across the state with all schools offered the opportunity to nominate a key teacher to participate.

<https://www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/senior/new-snr-assessment-te/revitalising-school-based-assessment/accreditation-trial>

Conclusion

Previously, I have argued for authentic assessment practice as exemplified in the portfolio (Klenowski, 2002). The key competencies for our changing world and the needs of the millennial generation include skills that are difficult to measure and capture through paper and pencil examinations alone. Essential key competencies are the focus of assessment that is reliant on exhibitions of student learning and teacher professional judgement through the portfolio of evidence of one's learning. Here, teacher judgement and calibration of that judgement are important in assessment that helps teachers in their own learning, the learning of their own students and their understanding and use of the assessment tool. Critical questioning, teacher and peer feedback are important strategies that are built into this collaborative and collective approach. Teacher judgement will continue to fulfill an important role in the revised Queensland system with greater training and rigour to support teachers to develop their judgement capacity to consistently and accurately identify evidence in student work that addresses the criteria for the standards. It is important that with such assessment change that the focus does not shift to a concentration on the grade or the marks to the detriment of the important teacher-student-learning relationship. We need collective

There can be no development in curriculum and assessment if there is no teacher development.

efforts and means to achieve the intended learning outcomes and desired ends such that our students can live safe, healthy and fulfilling lives.

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FOOTNOTES

1. This practice is termed standardization in some contexts such as in Singapore.

Pictured at the Maynooth Education Forum which took place in June 2016 with the theme: Dismantling 'The Murder Machine'? - Interrogating Cultures of Assessment, are: Prof David Carless, Faculty of Education, University of Hong Kong; Prof Jannette Elwood, Queen's University Belfast; Prof Val Klenowski, Queensland University of Technology.





# Stress, Resilience and Quality of Teachers' Lives

## Recent Perspectives

Many countries report a lowering of teacher morale and a rise in stress and burnout resulting in a high level of teacher attrition. For this reason it is crucial to examine the level of stress experienced by teachers. It is equally important to examine the question of how teachers' experience of stress can be addressed through exploring how and in what manner teachers can learn to be more resilient in meeting the everyday challenges that are an inherent part of the profession of teaching. Here we discuss studies in this area, two of which were concerned with the level and causes of stress among primary and post primary teachers in Ireland and another which focused on the resilience of beginning teachers in Ireland. In conclusion, we propose recommendations relating to stress and resilience arising from the findings in these studies.

### Teacher Stress: International Research

Themes of 'teacher attrition' or 'stress' have dominated the educational research literature over the last decade (e.g., Kyriacou, 2000; Troman & Woods, 2001; Ingersoll, 2003). As might be expected, the definitions and conceptualisations of stress vary considerably. While the defining feature is regarded by many as the experience of unpleasant emotions including anxiety, frustration and depression, some research adopts a perspective which claims that stress should be thought of as the degree of pressure and demands that are made on teachers, while others claim that stress refers to a mismatch between the demands made and the persons' ability to cope with these.

In the UK, Chaplain (1995) identified biographical factors as important with regard to job stress in UK primary schools; he found significant differences between men and women, and between teachers of different ages and length of teaching experience. Male teachers reported more stress than their female counterparts in relation to professional tasks and pupil behaviour/attitude. Female teachers scored higher than men on professional concerns. When specific facets of job satisfaction were examined, teachers were most satisfied with their professional performance and least satisfied with teaching



By Prof Mark Morgan  
& Dr Margaret O'Donnell

The authors address the issue of stress and burnout among teachers resulting in high levels of attrition. They examine two research projects concerned with the level and causes of stress among primary and post primary teachers in Ireland, and a third project which focuses on the resilience of beginning teachers in Ireland.

The number of teachers who leave teaching within a relatively short time... is significantly higher in comparison to other professions.

resources. Teacher stress and job satisfaction were found to be negatively correlated, with high reports of occupational stress related to low levels of job satisfaction.

In Canada, Ma and MacMillan (1999) surveyed over 2,000 teachers. Their study found that female teachers were more satisfied with their professional role as a teacher compared to their male counterparts. The gender gap in professional satisfaction grew with increased teaching competence. The study also found that teachers who stayed in the profession longer were less satisfied with their professional role.

### Research methods

The most widely accepted way of investigating teacher stress is in terms of self-report, that is asking teachers how stressful they find teaching or being a teacher. Earlier studies sometimes used a single item (How stressful do you find being a teacher?) while subsequent work devised scales that enabled more reliable measurement and allowed for a more sophisticated conceptualization of stress, including considering the various dimensions on which stress might vary.

A second approach to the investigation of stress involves gauging the indicators of stress. A particularly useful approach involves asking teachers about their health and a variety of physical symptoms that might arise from prolonged stress (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). Some studies have gone beyond asking about indicators and have sought to obtain physiological indices of stress including stress hormones and cardiovascular measures. As well as health indicators some research has sought information on outcomes of stress like alcohol use, being absent from school, disturbance of thought processes and changes in lifestyle.

### Framing the question

The important question regarding the prevalence of stress among teachers has received considerable attention. While Kyriacou (2001) concluded that the extant literature showed that about one quarter of teachers conceded that teaching was 'very or extremely stressful', it remains the case that the precise figure is dependent on the framing of the question, on the age/gender of the teachers and on the stage of their careers. A particularly valuable insight emerges from the work of Huberman (1993) who studied Swiss teachers with different lengths of experience. His work showed that teachers at each stage developed worries and self-doubt at each stage. What was crucial was whether they resolved these tensions and continued in teaching or were unable to do so and left teaching. This study is especially valuable in demonstrating the link between stress and the decision to quit teaching.

### Causes of stress

Several studies have sought to identify the causes of teacher stress. Guglielme & Tatrow (1998) put forward a number of theoretical models of teacher stress based on a widely accepted etiological model in which the relationship between stress and the outcome (strain) is mediated by individual difference factors. In other words, they propose a generic transactional model of stress in which the three features are the work environment, the person and the strain (outcomes). The work environment

includes unfavourable working conditions, excessive workloads, scarcity of resources and lack of autonomy. Under the heading of ‘person’, is included the individual personality make-up, ability to cope, perception of context as well as gender, home life and possibly genetic make-up. The strain (outcomes) come under three headings, physiological dysfunctioning (e.g. effects on the cardiovascular system), psychological dysfunction (e.g., anxiety or depression) or behavioural dysfunction (e.g. absenteeism, excessive drinking).

### Stress in Irish Teachers

A major survey of stress among post-primary teachers, 97% of whom were in their mid-careers, was carried out by the Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland (ASTI) in 2007. In the survey the respondents were asked about the frequency and severity of the stress that they experience in a large number of work-situations. As might be expected some situations occur only occasionally but cause a high level of stress while others occur quite frequent but do not cause an especially high degree of stress. With regard to **frequency of stress**, a large number of areas were identified and many of these related to time pressure including not having enough time during the working day for non-class contact work (65%). Close to the same percentage (62%) indicated that the increase in form-filling and administrative tasks was a source of stress. A relationship may be seen between these features and the fact that the same percentage (62%) said that they experienced a lack of time to be involved with individual pupils. It was also of interest to find that nearly the same number (59%) took the view that marking and preparation of work outside school was a source of stress.

With regard to **severity of stress**, some of the outcomes could be predicted on the basis of the ‘frequency’ question. At the top of the list was ‘having too much work to do’ which was endorsed as a severe stressor by 60% of the respondents. There were also some specific features that may not occur frequently but which are stressful when they happen. These included ‘aggressive behaviour of students’ thought to be a severe stressor by 51% and preparation for school inspections and for whole school evaluations (57% and 55% respectively).

### Job satisfaction

Two other contextual features of this study are especially worth noting. The first concerns overall job satisfaction. The respondents expressed high satisfaction that derived from their work with young people. Over 70% of respondents said that they got job satisfaction from the feeling that they are making a difference to students’ lives and helping them to reach their potential. Just over half reported satisfaction from the way they contributed to society through the work of schools. However, it is worth noting that only a minority thought that the work of teachers was valued by society.

### Coping responses

A second important contextual feature concerned how teachers coped with stress. As might be expected on the basis of research on stress the most frequently used strategies were either task oriented and social support in nature. The task oriented strategies usually involved techniques like

**Research suggests that when the social organisation of the school is characterised by supportive trusting and collegial relationships, teachers’ collective capacity, commitment and effectiveness are fostered.**

**Only a minority thought that the work of teachers was valued by society.**

**Administrative work was not perceived by the teachers as contributing to quality teaching and learning for students.**

**“The amount of paperwork is killing us. Sometimes you feel it is more important than actual teaching”**

‘planning ahead’ or ‘dealing with the problems immediately after they occur’; almost all of the teachers reported use of these approaches. Similarly, social support strategies like ‘seeking support and advice from colleagues’ or from family and friends were utilised by a very large number while only a minority sought assistance from professionals outside the school context.

### Primary teacher survey

It is interesting to compare the ASTI results with a similar study carried out with primary teachers. The recent survey by Morgan & Nic Craith (2015) was concerned with stress among a random sample of INTO members and particularly with teachers’ perceived changes in workload and stress levels over recent years. The survey was also concerned with factors that may have made teachers’ work more or less challenging over these years including curriculum changes, administrative demands, as well as changes relating to employment like job mobility. The 332 respondents were broadly representative of the primary teachers with just over 82% of the respondents being female and 18% male, while just under 70% qualified through the B. Ed and 29% through a post-graduate course, either in Ireland or abroad. Nearly 21% of those responding were principal teachers, 55% were class teachers and 21% were either learning support or resource teachers.

### More stressful

The results showed that the vast majority of the teachers thought their work had become more stressful. When asked if teaching had become ‘more stressful or ‘about the same’ or ‘less stressful’, almost 90% of the sample said ‘more stressful’. In contrast, only just over 1% thought that teaching had become less stressful. When teachers asked in a similar format about whether teaching had become more/less demanding, challenging and hectic, the pattern was almost exactly the same with 90% or more indicating more demanding/challenging while only about 1% said ‘less’ on these dimensions.

### Factors causing stress

Of various factors that contributed to this increase in stress, the increasing level of documentation was identified as a major issue. In fact, 96% of the respondents took the view that the requirements for ‘documentation relating to policies and practices’ had increased the stress level while virtually no respondent disagreed with this. A great many open-ended comments underlined the effects of administrative work with a particular focus on documentation. One respondent’s comment was ‘... *the amount of paperwork is killing us. Sometimes you feel it is more important than actual teaching. On some occasions, I spend more time on completing forms than on the application of the relevant policy in the school...*’

### Relatively high level of job satisfaction

However, there is an important feature of the results relating to job satisfaction that is worth mentioning. In response to “whether teaching has become more or less satisfying, enjoyable, rewarding and worthwhile” about half of the respondents thought that the job was ‘about the same’ and about one-fifth were of the view that teaching had changed positively in these respects. Finally, just about one-third took the view that teaching

had become less satisfying, enjoyable and rewarding. What is especially noteworthy about this finding is the contrast with the number who reported that teaching was stressful. It would appear to be the case that teachers remain highly motivated and derive satisfaction from their work despite the constant demands especially in relation to documentation.

### Demands of documentation

Looking at the two surveys, the pattern is quite similar. Teachers at both primary and post-primary levels report increasing levels of stress partly arising from what they see as demands for documentation. However, they seem to cope with these experiences in ways that maintain their job satisfaction. This raises the question of how teachers can be so resilient in these circumstances.

### What is the importance of resilience and how can it be developed?

Below we firstly look at the origin and development of the concept of resilience while the second part looks at the significance of the organisational context of school. Finally we examine some precise factors that enhance beginning teachers' capacity for resilience based on work with newly qualified teachers in Ireland.

Historically, the concept of resilience as outlined in the psychology literature referred to an ability to overcome severe adversity (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000). From this perspective, certain individuals possessed a capacity for resilience which enabled them to bounce back and maintain equilibrium when faced with challenging and adverse experiences. However, in recent times, our understanding of resilience has changed to one where resilience is viewed as a relative, multidimensional and developmental construct with an emphasis on the social context and the strategies and skills available to the individual (Gu & Day, 2007). This perspective highlights the dynamic and changing nature of resilience (Day et al., 2006, 2007) and suggests that recovery from adversity results from the interaction between psychological, behavioural and cognitive aspects of functioning as well as emotional regulation (Luthar & Brown, 2007). In other words, resilience involves the interaction of individuals and their environments, and their capacity to cope with challenges and avail of the opportunities for personal growth that are available through such difficulties. In the case of teachers, resilience needs to be nurtured and developed over time in order to develop specific strategies to remain committed to the teaching profession and to deliver quality teaching and learning for all pupils in varied contexts (Day et al., 2007). Research has shown that teachers can be supported in developing strategies and skills to negotiate and overcome everyday challenges inherent in teaching (e.g. Castro et al., 2010).

Because of the link of teachers with colleagues and students, it has been suggested that resilience should be regarded as a relational dynamic which resides not in the individual but in the capacity for connection (Jordan, 2012). Trusting and open professional relationships, once established, nurtured and developed, may function in a way that allows teachers to pursue their goals, enhance the collective efficacy of the school staff and ultimately to enhance the academic achievement of the students

**I**n Ireland, it is striking that form-filling and administrative tasks emerged as a source of stress for both primary and post-primary teachers.

**R**esilience, as outlined in the psychology literature, refers to an ability to overcome severe adversity.

**T**he focus of [the EU initiative] ENTREE is to provide professional development modules to enhance teacher resilience.

**I**n the case of teachers, resilience needs to be nurtured and developed over time in order to develop specific strategies to remain committed to the teaching profession...

(Goddard et al., 2004). Likewise, research suggests that when the social organisation of the school is characterised by supportive, trusting and collegial relationships teachers' collective capacity, commitment and effectiveness is fostered (Sammons et al., 2007). As relationships are critical to resilience, the occurrence of distrust and insecurity, can threaten resilience as well as the personal growth that might otherwise have enhanced it resulting in the belief that teacher resilience is dependent on the interplay of both individual and contextual factors working in harmony (Mansfield et al., 2014).

### What precise factors enhance the resilience of beginning teachers?

In recent years concern regarding the level of resilience of beginning teachers has emerged as a result of the relatively large number of number of teachers who leave teaching within a relatively short time. This number is significantly higher in comparison to other professions. The departure rate of newly qualified teachers is especially high in both the US and UK with estimates of those leaving the profession within the first five years ranging from one third to one half (Hanushek, 2007; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). While current approaches such as mentoring, professional development training and promoting stronger collegiality are showing small improvements, teacher attrition continues to be a major issue in most western countries.

The findings reported below are based on a study of the resilience of newly qualified teachers in Ireland. Given that teacher attrition has not been a major issue in Ireland, it is of interest to examine their experience of adverse events and the various ways in which they cope with such problems (Morgan, 2011). The study strategy is based on the findings of outcomes in other areas of research in which resilience has been studied with an attempt to apply the finding to the stressful experiences of beginning teachers.

The findings in three areas of research converge in suggesting that **personal strengths**, **social support** and **coping strategies** are particularly important assets in resilience and are likely to facilitate the capacity of teachers to bounce back from adversity. The significance of **personal strengths** in overcoming adversity has been documented in relation to children's experiences of marital breakdown, poverty and bereavement. Studies of teachers' motivation have demonstrated that positive attributes, including belief in internal control, have a moderating effect on strain factors in school and on burnout (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007). Along the same lines, a recent study found that the absence of positive experience was a more potent influence on teachers' motivation than the occurrence of negative events (Morgan, Ludlow, Kitching, O'Leary, & Clarke, 2010).

The case for the contribution of **social support** to resilience has been argued in the context of evidence of an interaction between experiences of life outside work and satisfaction at work. For example, there are demonstrations of 'ripple effects' in the case of dual earner families; in instances where hostility is experienced at work by one partner, there is a knock-on effect on the psychological distress of the other partner (Luthar



et al., 2000). More generally, a key feature in recovery from stressful and traumatic events is the level of social support available in the course of recuperation.

**Coping strategies** can either mitigate or exacerbate the impact of distressing factors in teaching. An approach that involves the mastery of problems (a problem-focused approach) may be likely to assist in the coping with setbacks as has been shown in studies of stressful experiences in organisations (Beltman et al., 2011). In contrast, emotion-focused approaches may often exacerbate the challenges of adverse events. It is worth noting that the research demonstrating the impact of ‘strengths’ has involved mainly children, the work showing the effects of ‘support’ has involved adults and children, as is the case with the findings in relation to ‘coping strategies’. Thus, a study that examined all three potential contributing domains with an adult population including teachers would add significantly to available research evidence.

The study involved completion of a questionnaire by 408 teachers who had just completed their first year of teaching and who were participants in the National Induction Programme (Morgan, 2011). By the due date, 225 were returned, giving a response rate of 54%. Of the completed questionnaires, 46 were from males and 87 from teachers serving disadvantaged communities. While the National Induction Programme was not available to all beginning teachers at that time, the sample chosen is typical of Irish teachers in their first year of teaching, at least in terms of gender and type of school. The focus of the study was whether particular assets emerging in earlier work (personal strengths, social support and coping strategies) enhanced the ability of beginning teachers to recover from setbacks.

The **Teacher Resilience Scale** was created for this study and was concerned with measuring levels of confidence of recovery from setbacks. Participants were asked to indicate on a seven point scale their level of confidence from ‘absolutely confident’ to ‘not confident at all’ with regard to how that they could succeed on a regular basis in ‘getting over problems that upset me’ and ‘overcoming setbacks in school’. Three other scales used for the study related to the level of perceived school support, satisfaction with life outside school and perceived coping strategies (problem solving vs. rumination). All four scales used had a very satisfactory reliability rating, with alpha ranging from .71 to .93.

The results showed a strong relationship between the capacity for resilience (as measured by the Teacher Resilience Scale) and the measures of the assets that are hypothesised to enhance resilience. The scale to measure perceived **social support in school** was found to be a strong factor in resilience. This was concerned with perception of overall support from colleagues: the teachers in this sample were very supportive of each other. As noted above, this finding is in line with studies of resilience not only in teaching but also in childhood.

Secondly, the satisfaction of teachers with their lives outside school also emerged as an important predictor of teachers’ resilience. Specifically, when teachers indicated that they ‘derived fulfilment from involvement in activities away from school’ they were better able to deal with negative

**The ‘overloaded curriculum’ also contributed to levels of stress, leaving teachers with little time for involvement with students...**

**The satisfaction of teachers with their lives outside school also emerged as an important predictor of teachers’ resilience.**

**Some level of stress is an inevitable part of teaching since adverse outcomes are unavoidable in school and classroom events.**

events that occurred in school. This is an important finding since it indicates that the importance of the holistic and emotional dimension of teachers’ lives is relevant to their experiences in school.

Finally, the measures of coping which are based on teachers’ descriptions of their efforts to deal with adverse events also related to resilience but in opposite ways. A problem solving approach was found to enhance resilience whereas rumination (when teachers continued to think about events that went wrong in school, their causes and consequences) was negatively related to their capacity to bounce back.

### Implications

The studies reviewed here point to a number of important implications for the education system and specifically for teaching. In every country including Ireland in which data has been gathered, there are indications that stressful experiences are commonly experienced by teachers in the system. What is significant is that some features of these experiences derive from national policies. This is the case in relation to the factors that result in attrition in the UK and the US. In Ireland, it is striking that form-filling and administrative tasks emerged as a source of stress for both primary and post-primary teachers. It is especially noteworthy that this administrative work was not perceived by the teachers as contributing to quality teaching and learning for students. The ‘overloaded curriculum’ also contributed to levels of stress, leaving teachers with little time for the kind of involvement with students that they regarded as important. The implication is that changes in curriculum and policies that make demands on teachers’ time should be examined with a view to establishing teachers’ view on the contribution of these new developments and the extent to which the additional work is worthwhile.

Another implication of the research examined here is that some level of stress is an inevitable part of teaching since adverse outcomes are unavoidable in school and classroom events. The implication of the research is that rather than attempting exclusively to minimise stress, an approach that emphasises the assets and strengths to deal with resilience may be more fruitful. While there is a tradition in other caring professions of either professional ‘supervision’ or similar forms of support (psychiatry, counselling, clinical psychology), only recently has an awareness of the importance of self-care emerged in the teaching profession. The study of beginning teachers reported here suggests that a component involving the understanding and promotion of resilience would make a major contribution to the lives of beginning teachers and by implication for the learning and development of their students. In this context, an EU initiative (ENTREE) and which involves Ireland and five other countries is worthy of attention. The project is informed by trends both in Europe and internationally that recognise the need to safeguard and promote teachers’ wellbeing. The impetus for this project grew from the recognition of the increasing demands and challenges that teaching presents. The focus of ENTREE is to provide professional development modules to enhance teacher resilience. In support of this aim – six modules were developed to support teachers in developing the resilient skills and strategies in support of quality teaching and learning. This is an extremely promising initiative and has great potential to enhance the lives of teachers.

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## CHAPTER 1

# EARLY CHILDHOOD



## EARLY CHILDHOOD Contents

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## A Vision for Early Childhood Education

Ensuring every child and family in Ireland receives the early years care and education they need



**By Dr Katherine Zappone TD**  
Minister for Children and Youth Affairs

Minister Katherine Zappone's message is a reassuring one: she is fully committed to addressing the major challenges that exist within the early years sector and she will be strong in doing so.

Ireland's Early Years sector is at a critical point. Whilst there has been significant investment in recent years to address affordability and quality, major challenges remain and need to be addressed in a committed fashion over a number of years. Now is the time to ensure that every child and family, regardless of their social or economic background, receives the kind of early years care and education that they need and deserve. I intend to use the strong evidence base that exists internationally to inform how Ireland should best prioritise investment. We know that early childhood care and education is important for individual educational and social progress as well as national economic development. A large body of evidence from social science, psychology and neuroscience demonstrates the importance of early years for later development.

I am committed to ensuring that quality, affordable early education and childcare is made available to every family in Ireland. I am working with my Department to develop our first ever Early Years Strategy, intended to be cross-cutting in nature, with a whole of Government approach to all of the areas that impact a child's development during the first six years of his or her life. This will build on successful initiatives such as the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme, which has been a significant benefit to children and families since its inception in 2010, with almost 96% uptake levels.

Early Years education and care must be fully inclusive and that is why it was so important for the Department to introduce the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) this September. AIM ensures that children with a disability can fully participate in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme.

Let me take you through some of my vision for Early Years education in Ireland.

### Early Years Strategy

The 'Better Outcomes Brighter Futures' report was the first overarching national policy framework for children and young people in Ireland. Published in 2014, this contains a commitment to produce Ireland's first-ever National Early Years Strategy. I intend to deliver on that commitment within my first year in office.

As well as a comprehensive review of existing policy and analysis in the Early Years field, I have ensured that consultation has been undertaken with children aged 3–5 on the National Early Years Strategy; the results of which will inform the final Strategy. I also intend to host a one day Open Policy Debate with stakeholders. My vision for policy development is one of open and inclusive discussion and debate, producing policies that have the support of providers and families, as well as Government and administrators.

### Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme – Expansion

The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme was introduced in 2010. The objective of the programme is to make early learning in a formal setting available to eligible children before they commence primary school. From September 2016, the ECCE Programme has been extended to make free pre-school available for 15 hours per week (i.e. 3 hours per day for 5 days), for 38 weeks per annum, to all children from the time they turn three until they go to primary school. There are now three opportunities each year – in September, January and April – for eligible children to enrol for the free pre-school provision. On average, children will benefit from 61 weeks, up from the previous provision of 38 weeks. Access to 61 weeks of ECCE can reduce the cost of childcare by €4,000 per child. The expansion of the ECCE programme will increase the number of children benefitting from 67,000 to 127,000 in a given programme year. On coming to office I initiated a number of measures aimed at ensuring the success of this expansion, including increasing the provision of capital funding to services seeking to increase capacity by €2.5million in 2016. I intend to build upon this in 2017.

Expansion has not been blind: The DCYA, along with County Childcare Ireland (CCI), carried out an analysis of capacity within each county area as of January 2016, in order to identify areas of additional need. This was accompanied by ongoing monitoring of feedback from parents and service providers across the sector via the City/County Childcare Committees, as well as through correspondences made to the Department itself. In addition to these measures, a second analysis of capacity was conducted in summer 2016 which identified that a sizable proportion of services had increased their ECCE capacity for the September intake and that the Department could be reasonably satisfied there would be sufficient capacity for the opening of the 2016/17 preschool year.

### Single Affordable Childcare Scheme (SACS)

DCYA currently administers four targeted childcare programmes to support low income families, of which the Community Childcare Subvention (CCS) scheme is by far the largest.

**I have ensured that consultation has been undertaken with children aged 3–5 on the National Early Years Strategy.**

**I intend to host a one day Open Policy Debate with stakeholders.**

**The new SACS scheme will provide a robust platform for future investment with a view to ensuring that childcare is more affordable.**

**The Programme for Government commits to conducting and publishing an independent review of the cost of providing quality childcare.**

These four programmes are administratively very complex and are widely varied in terms of budget, access and eligibility criteria, rates, duration and coverage. Under Budget 2016 funding was allocated to convene a Design Team to develop a single affordable childcare scheme to replace these four.

I have prioritised the development of this new scheme, with the intention of making it available before the end of 2017. The new scheme will provide a simplified subsidy programme, replacing the four existing programmes, available to both community and private childcare providers. The scheme will also provide a robust platform for future investment with a view to ensuring that childcare is more affordable.

### Independent Review of Cost

The Programme for Government commits to conducting and publishing an independent review of the cost of providing quality childcare. This commitment aligns closely with work on the design and development of a new Single Affordable Childcare Scheme and is currently being progressed in that context.

I have tasked officials to review previous published research and analysis on the cost of childcare provision, assess available data sources and scope the precise requirements for the independent review. I intend to proceed with a tender for independent expertise to conduct the review in the autumn with a view to ensuring that the review is commenced later this year.

### AIM Policy

Since coming to office I have strongly supported measures to include all children in the ECCE scheme, particularly children with disabilities. From September 2016, a suite of measures, including additional funding and grants for building works are available to accommodate children with disabilities in ECCE centres. The **Access and Inclusion Model** or AIM, involves seven levels of progressive support, moving from universal to highly targeted, based on the strengths and needs of both the child and the pre-school. Over one thousand applications have been made so far under this programme, with more coming on a daily basis.

I have secured funding for a new higher education programme (LINC) from 2016, which will see up to 900 pre-school staff graduate each year and proceed to work as Inclusion Co-ordinators in the ECCE setting. I am also ensuring funding for a broad, multi-annual programme of formal and informal training for pre-school staff in relation to disability and inclusion.

The AIM information website [www.preschoolaccess.ie](http://www.preschoolaccess.ie) was launched on 15th June 2016.

A Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter and Guidelines for Early Childhood Care and Education has now been published and distributed to childcare services throughout the country. The development of a broad programme of formal and informal training for pre-school staff in relation to disability and inclusion has commenced.

Finally, a word of support for the Early Years providers and the professionals working in the sector. Through my involvement in childcare and education over many years, I have seen the extraordinary dedication of those working in often challenging conditions, with very limited funding and little or no security. It is important that I as Minister state plainly that wages in the sector are too low, and do not reflect the value our society places on those working with children.

I am aware of many highly qualified, experienced staff working on 38-week contracts at below a living wage. To attract and retain quality staff, the sector needs to be able to offer realistic wages. I believe that the sector is competitive and, given that costs to parents are already high, increased wages can only come through increased public funding. This is always difficult to deliver, and at the cabinet table many difficult decisions have to be made about where priorities lie. I will be strong in delivering the case for the Early Years to Government, and I hope to work with the sector to ensure that Ireland moves to the front of the class in how it treats childcare workers, and therefore children, over the coming years.

**I** will be strong in delivering the case for the Early Years to Government...



Pictured at the official launch of the new BA in Children's Studies at NUI Galway (l-r): Dr Michal Molcho, Course Director; Dr Katherine Zappone TD, Minister for Children and Youth Affairs; and Dr Jim Browne, President of NUI Galway.

## Early Childhood Care and Education in Ireland

### 2016: A year in which previously mooted initiatives came to fruition



**By Dr Thomas Walsh**

Department of Education,  
Maynooth University

**D**r Walsh charts the considerable progress made within the Early Years sector in 2016 and looks in particular at four major developments: expansion, inspection, revision of regulations, and initiation of the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM).

The year 2016 was indeed a busy one in the early childhood care and education (ECCE) sector. Many policy initiatives mooted for a number of years came to fruition and began to impact on early childhood educators. One catalyst for this activity was the provision of an additional €85 million in funding for the ECCE sector in budget 2016 which enabled the roll out of many new initiatives for the sector. This necessary increased investment will need to be sustained into the future to support the evolving role and continued vibrancy of the ECCE sector. While an increased focus on and funding for the sector is welcome, one concern is the challenge of managing and supporting change in a sector that has grown exponentially in recent years. Much of this change has added to the complexity of the role undertaken by early childhood educators, in particular in the interface between individual settings and new state initiatives (Walsh, 2016).

While there was a number of important broad developments in ECCE in 2016, this chapter will focus on four key developments in the sector, as follows:

- » The expansion of the ECCE Programme from September 2016
- » The initiation of education-focused early childhood inspections
- » The publication of the revised regulations for pre-schools in May 2016
- » The initiation of the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) for children with special educational needs

#### Expansion of the ECCE Programme

The ECCE Programme, commonly referred to as the Free Pre-school Year, was introduced in Ireland in 2010 and entitled all children between the age of three years, two months and four years, seven months to one year of free pre-school education for three hours per day over 38 weeks. The popularity of the initiative is evident in the fact that approximately 95% of eligible children avail of the scheme annually. In recent years, consideration has been given to extending the scheme to two years' duration. Caution was urged by the Expert Working Group that was convened to inform the development of the Early Years Strategy



in terms of developing the quality of existing provision before considering expansion (Department of Children and Youth Affairs [DCYA], 2013).

**From September 2016**, children from the age of three will be eligible to enrol in pre-school services until they transfer to primary school, meaning children could attend for up to 88 weeks under the scheme. Moreover, rolling enrolments have been allowed so that children can be enrolled in September, January or April (DCYA, 2015). It is estimated that these changes will increase the number of children in the scheme from 67,000 to 127,000. Standard capitation rates have increased marginally to €64 per week per child and to €75 per week per child in settings where all staff are qualified to Level 5 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and where the leader is qualified to Level 7 on the NFQ.

While positive in terms of provision for children and parents, and for the development of the sector, the expansion of the ECCE Programme will prove challenging to implement from September 2016. Issues of sustainability arise in terms of the 38-week contract, as do the low levels of capitation set by the DCYA that apply across all settings in all parts of the country. Meeting the demand for places in certain areas will be difficult as will the new provision around rolling enrolments throughout the year. Moreover, increased qualification requirements for the Free Pre-school Year are resulting in serious challenges for settings in recruiting suitably qualified staff. Indeed, in some instances, it is resulting in the move of the most qualified staff within settings to work with children over the age of three to the detriment of children under the age of three. The professional and administrative expectations on service providers operating under the ECCE Programme are extensive and it is regrettable that no provision has been made for paid non-contact hours or for engagement in continuing professional development as part of the new contract.

### Focused Early Childhood Inspections

In 2011-12, a joint pilot inspection initiative was organised between the Pre-school Inspectorate and the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills (DES). As part of its quality agenda, the DCYA invited the DES to undertake education-focused inspections in settings operating the ECCE Programme. Following an extensive period of developing and piloting the inspection quality framework (DES, 2016), and of consulting the sector about the purpose and shape of the inspections, early-years education-focused inspections commenced in April 2016. The inspection quality framework is informed by both Aistear (national curriculum framework) and Siolta (national quality framework) and explores a number of outcomes across four broad areas:

1. Quality of context to support children's learning and development
2. Quality of processes to support children's learning and development
3. Quality of children's learning experiences and achievements
4. Quality of management and leadership for learning

An Assistant Chief Inspector and a cadre of nine early childhood inspectors have been recruited by the DES Inspectorate on a permanent basis and these work alongside existing DES inspectors in undertaking

**Provision of an additional €85 million for the ECCE sector in budget 2016 enabled the roll out of many new initiatives.**

**Increased qualification requirements for the Free Pre-school Year are resulting in serious challenges for settings in recruiting suitably qualified staff.**

**The professional and administrative expectations on service providers operating under the ECCE Programme are extensive.**

**The inception of education-focused inspections is potentially very significant for the early childhood education sector.**

education-focused inspections in settings operating the ECCE Programme. It is envisaged that these education-focused inspections will complement the existing TUSLA Pre-school inspections. To facilitate coherence, a Strategic Alignment Group has been developed between officials in the DCYA, DES, Pobal and TUSLA. The first inspection reports emanating from the process were published in June 2016 and will be published on a rolling basis into the future (see <http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Inspection-Reports-Publications/Early-Years-Education-Reports/> for published reports).

The inception of education-focused inspections is potentially very significant for the early childhood education sector and places an emphasis on the core work of early childhood settings. However, at present, early childhood settings also are subject to TUSLA inspections based on the pre-school regulations and Pobal compliance visits, as well as employment and food preparation inspections. There is scope to further align the various elements of the regulatory framework for the sector so that it is more manageable for settings to navigate. The Strategic Alignment Group should continue to explore opportunities for greater cultural synergy and consolidation between the various existing regulatory and inspection systems so that they interface in a simpler fashion with individual settings.

### Publication of the Revised Regulations 2016

Pre-school Regulations were first introduced in 1996 and provided the first framework for the inspection of pre-school services. As a result of significant changes within the sector in recent years, particularly the creation of TUSLA under the Child and Family Agency Act 2013, a review of the regulations was initiated a number of years ago and the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016 were published in May 2016 (Government of Ireland, 2016a). These regulations mark a significant re-development of the existing regulations and came into operation from June 30th 2016 on a phased basis (DCYA, 2016). The regulations are presented in nine key areas. The regulations apply to all settings catering for children under the age of six who are not attending a primary school. The main changes to the regulations include:

- » Services will be required to register with TUSLA ahead of opening rather than notifying TUSLA under the previous regulations. A pre-registration visit is undertaken prior to any new service opening and services will be required to re-register every three years.
- » By December 2016, all early childhood educators will be required to hold, at a minimum, a Level 5 qualification on the NFQ.
- » All services must demonstrate that they have a clear management structure with clarity around staff roles and responsibilities.
- » Other changes are included in areas such as records, policies and procedures and vetting disclosures.

The 2016 Regulations will be accompanied by a Quality Regulatory Framework (QRF) to provide clear guidance on expectations under each of the regulations for the TUSLA Pre-school Inspectorate and service providers. Until the QRF is published in 2017, a Focused Inspection Tool has been published by TUSLA to inform the inspection process in the interim.

### Access and Inclusion Model (AIM)

Arising from the report of the Interdepartmental Working Group on *Supporting Access to Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme for Children with a Disability* in 2015 (Interdepartmental Working Group, 2015), an Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) of supports has been developed to support access and inclusion for children in the ECCE Programme (see <http://www.preschoolaccess.ie/>). Supporting access includes removing barriers and catering for the individual needs of the child, while inclusion refers to the child's ability to participate as fully and actively as possible in the pre-school programme. This model became operational in **September 2016** and aims to ensure that children with disabilities can access and meaningfully participate in the ECCE Programme. AIM involves seven levels of progressive support, moving from the universal to the targeted, depending on the needs of the child (see Figure 1 below).

**Figure 1: Access and Inclusion Model.**  
Accessible at: <http://www.preschoolaccess.ie/>.



The new initiative is being framed within an *Inclusion Charter and new Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Guidelines for Early Childhood Care and Education*. A programme of training in the Charter and Guidelines is being planned in conjunction with the City and County Childcare Committees. Central to the roll out of AIM is a higher education programme for early years' practitioners, Leadership for Inclusion in the Early Years (LINC), which will provide for 900 graduates annually to take on a new leadership role of Inclusion Co-ordinator within their pre-school setting. This programme of training is being offered by a consortium of Mary Immaculate College of Education, Early Childhood Ireland and the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education, Maynooth University (see <http://lincprogramme.ie/>). Settings with an Inclusion Co-ordinator will attract an additional €2 in capitation per child per week from September 2017. The Better Start National Early Years Quality Development Service will also offer a national specialist service providing expert advice, mentoring and support to pre-school providers catering for children with disabilities. In 2016, an additional 50 Early Years Specialists (Access and Inclusion) have been recruited to fulfil this support role nationally. Other supports under

Services will be required to register with TUSLA ahead of opening [and] to re-register every three years.

AIM include additional capitation to fund additional assistance in settings and grants for equipment and alterations.

This is a timely and significant development in the provision of support for settings catering for children with disabilities. It provides a framework along a continuum for accessing and delivering services to children with additional needs and is holistic in nature. While it applies only to children in the ECCE Programme at present, it could provide a model for expanding such provision to other areas of the sector into the future.

### Conclusion

In the *Programme for a Partnership Government* (Government of Ireland, 2016b:76), the government has promised a broad range of measures comprising "...a targeted investment approach based on international best practice for young children." The continued and increasing policy focus on ECCE in 2016 is underpinned by the growing acknowledgement of the importance of investing in the care and education of our youngest children. The current work being undertaken by the DCYA to replace the existing myriad of childcare programmes with a Single Affordable Childcare Programme by September 2017 is welcome. The four initiatives outlined above, amid many other policy and practice changes in 2016, is very challenging for a sector to accommodate and implement following numerous years of rapid policy changes. It is important that this focus and investment is cohesive in nature and that the expectations for a historically under-funded sector are reasonable and manageable.

At present, there is scope to improve policy cohesion for the sector at a national, departmental and agency level and to reduce the necessity for individual settings and early childhood educators to navigate the multiplicity of policy initiatives emanating from many government sources (Walsh, 2016). The establishment of the Early Years Forum in September 2016, with an objective to facilitate discourse between the DCYA and the wider sector, has the potential to enhance communications but it is important that key messages are communicated to all departments and agencies with a remit for ECCE. However, there is a similar Forum under the remit of the DES and there is a concern that too many fora established by various departments and agencies could exacerbate the lack of policy cohesion in the sector. The scope and remit of the Strategic Alignment Group, comprising of representatives of the key government departments and agencies, could be explored as a means to increase policy coherence for the sector.

Central to the roll out of AIM is a higher education programme for early years practitioners, 'Leadership for Inclusion in the Early Years' (LINC).

Too many fora... could exacerbate the lack of policy cohesion in the sector.

The promised national Early Years Strategy, which has not been published to date, has the potential to provide a unified vision for the sector around which policy and practice will be centred. Care must also be exercised not to exacerbate further the divide between provision for children aged birth to three and those aged three to six, as most 2016 policy initiatives are targeted at children above the age of three. Reassuringly, 2016 witnessed key investment in early childhood educators who are central to the quality of experiences of our youngest children and this focus needs to continue into the future. It is hoped that 2017 will continue with many more positive developments for the sector, especially around issues of quality,

sustainability and affordability, albeit in a more streamlined and strategic fashion.

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Early Childhood educators came from far and wide to attend the conference of the European Early Childhood Education Research Association (EECERA) held in the Helix DCU in September 2016, hosted by Early Childhood Ireland.

## Establishing an inspectorate for the ECCE programme

Promoting improvement through evaluation of key aspects of the work in educational settings



### By Dr Maresa Duignan

Assistant Chief Inspector, Early Years Inspection and Policy Unit, Department of Education and Skills

The thinking underlying the establishment of the new inspectorate for the ECCE sector is explained here by Dr Maresa Duignan as well as the development and implementation to date of Early Years Education-focused Inspection.

### Introduction

The Department of Education and Skills (DES) works to improve the quality of learning for children and young people in a range of educational settings, including primary schools, post-primary schools and centres for education. Our aim is to evaluate key aspects of the work in educational settings and to promote improvement.

The Inspectorate of the DES, at the request of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA), has developed a model of inspection that focuses on the quality of educational provision in early-years settings participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme.

The ECCE programme provides a free pre-school experience for children prior to starting primary school. This scheme was introduced in 2010 by DCYA for children aged more than 3 years 2 months and less than 4 years 7 months on 01 September in the relevant pre-school year. In Budget 2016, this Programme was enhanced to allow children aged 3 years avail of free preschool until they commence primary school, with an upper age limit of participation set at 5 years 6 months. Both the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Department of Education and Skills recognise the critical importance of high quality early education for optimising children's learning and development.

The education-focused inspections seek to ascertain the nature, range and appropriateness of the early educational experiences for children who are participating in the ECCE programme and are underpinned by a number of principles including:

- » Early childhood is a significant and distinct time which must be nurtured, respected, valued and supported in its own right
- » High quality educational experiences in early childhood contribute significantly to life-long learning success



- » Children's well-being and holistic educational development should be supported in early childhood in accordance with their needs
- » The role of the practitioner within early education settings is central
- » Children should be active agents in their learning and development, and enabled to achieve their potential as competent, confident learners, through high quality interactions with their environment and early childhood practitioners
- » Children's strengths, needs, opinions, interests and well-being are integral to the early education provided for them
- » Play is central to the learning and development of young children
- » Each child has his/her own set of experiences and a unique life story. The child's identity as an individual and as a member of a family and wider community is recognised
- » The role of parents as children's primary educators is recognised and supported
- » Education-focused inspections take cognisance of context factors related to the ECCE setting, including socio-economic circumstances
- » The ongoing development of quality through co-professional dialogue between practitioners in early years settings and DES Early Years inspectors is promoted

It is intended that early years education-focused inspections will complement a range of other measures that have been taken to support the ongoing improvement of quality in early education. The model of inspection builds on existing national frameworks: *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*, and *Síolta: the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education*. Education-focused inspections are conducted in accordance with the *Code of Practice for the Inspectorate*<sup>1</sup> (DES, 2015) and a full Guide to Early Years Education Focused Inspections is published on the DES website<sup>2</sup>.

### Development to date

The development and implementation of Early Years Education-focused Inspection (EYEI) to date has involved the drafting of a framework for inspection in early years settings; recruitment of Early Years Inspectors into the DES Inspectorate team; the completion of a pilot programme of inspection; a national consultation process with all partners and stakeholders in the early years' sector and final sign off by both the Minister for Education and Skills and the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs on the EYEI model for full implementation in April 2016. This document briefly discusses each of these stages in the development and implementation of EYEIs and concludes with a brief look to the future.

<sup>1</sup> DES (September 2015) Code of Practice for the Inspectorate. DES, Dublin <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Inspection-Reports-Publications/Evaluation-Reports-Guidelines/Professional-Code-of-Practice-on-Evaluation-and-Reporting-for-the-Inspectorate.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> DES, 2016 A Guide to Early Years Education-Focused Inspections (EYEI) in Early Years Settings participating in the ECCE Programme. DES Dublin. <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Inspection-Reports-Publications/Evaluation-Reports-Guidelines/A-Guide-to-Early-years-Education-focused-Inspection-EYEI-in-Early-years-Settings-Participating-ECCE-Programme.pdf>

**T**he Department... recognises the critical importance of high quality early education for optimising children's learning and development.

**A** full Guide to Early Years Education Focused Inspections is published on the DES website.

**T**he role of the practitioner within early education settings is central.

**T**he newly appointed Early Years Education Inspectors were provided with an intensive 6 month induction period.

### The EYEI Quality Framework

Early-years Education-focused Inspections are based on a quality framework that is informed by the principles of *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* and *Síolta: the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education* as well as national and international research related to early childhood education and inspection.

The Quality Framework incorporates the key elements of best practice in early education and categorises provision under four broad areas:

- » 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.

In evaluating each of these areas, an inspector also considers how successful the early-years setting has been in implementing relevant actions advised in previous EYEI inspection reports, where this applies.

Key outcomes (20 in total) are identified for each of the four broad areas which describe aspects of best practice. To ensure optimum transparency for early-years practitioners about the focus of the inspections, each outcome has been further described through the use of a number of possible signposts of practice. The lists of signposts of practice are neither prescriptive nor exhaustive. It is acknowledged that there are different approaches among early-years service providers and that providers are at different stages of development. It is not expected that all signposts will be evident in a given setting.

### Recruitment and induction of Early Years Education Inspectors

Almost 600 applications were received for the post of Early Years Education Inspector and considering that the eligibility criteria included a requirement that applicants had at least achieved an honours bachelor degree in Early Childhood Education plus at least 5 years practical experience in a relevant early years setting, this was a very positive reflection of the increasing qualification profile across the Early Years sector in Ireland. After an extensive selection process which was managed by the Public Appointments Service, a panel of Early Years Education Inspectors (EYEI) was created, with 10 posts offered for appointment in November 2015. The newly appointed EYEIs were then provided with an intensive 6 month induction period which included theoretical training as well as extensive practical experience of inspection in a wide range of education settings.

## Pilot and Consultation Processes

*The DES Inspectorate is committed to working in partnership with the early years sector and will liaise regularly with practitioners, policy makers and stakeholders. Regular opportunities will be provided for stakeholders within the early years sector to provide feedback and make suggestions which will inform the Inspectorate's review and development of inspection processes<sup>3</sup>. DES 2015, p. 10*

This commitment to consultation with partners and stakeholders in the Early Years sector was fulfilled through the completion of a pilot for the EYEI model and a series of 9 regional consultation seminars which included the opportunity for staff in early years settings who had participated in the pilot process to give public feedback on their experiences. These events proved to be very popular and, when further complemented by an online survey, contributed feedback on the EYEI Model and process from almost 2,000 respondents.

Analysis of the feedback provided a very positive endorsement for the content of the Quality Framework and the inspection process. There were some recommendations made in relation to the inspection process and the most significant change that was precipitated by the feedback was a decision that 48 hours' notice would be provided to Early Years settings in the majority of cases. This was in acknowledgement of the unique context of Early Years Education settings where the age profile of children and the part-time nature of some employment contracts for staff may require advance notice to prepare for the inspection visit (e.g. notify parents and children of visitors to reduce any unnecessary stress and allow staff to make arrangements to participate in feedback sessions) The Inspectorate reserves the right to conduct unannounced inspections.

## Roll out of Early Years Education-focused Inspection

On April 12th 2016, the Ministers for Education and Skills and Children and Youth Affairs signed off on the Early Years Education-focused Inspection Model and thus allowed for the commencement of a full programme of EYEIs nationally. During the period to the end of June 2016, one hundred and eighty-two inspections were conducted in a diverse range of Early Years settings. The first forty-four reports arising from these inspections were published on June 30th 2016 on the Department of Education and Skills website <http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Inspection-Reports-Publications/Early-Years-Education-Reports/>. Inspection and publication of reports recommenced in September 2016 and it is anticipated that up to five hundred inspection visits will be completed by the end of 2016.

## The Inspection Process

As conducted, the central practical focus of an EYEI is on the quality of the processes that facilitate children's learning in an early-years setting.

**A**lmost 600 applications were received for the post of Early Years Education Inspector.

**T**he inspection reports show a range of pedagogical approaches in the early-years services inspected, including Montessori, Steiner, High/Scope...

**T**he first forty-four reports arising from these inspections were published on June 30th 2016 on the Department of Education and Skills website.

**I**nitial analysis of the inspectors' advice given in reports points to... a tendency in services to make the early-years experience for children overly formal rather than play-based.

Accordingly, the main activity of the inspection is the observation of those processes. Each EYEI provides evaluative information, advice and support with reference to the four broad areas of practice as outlined above. Each inspection results in oral feedback to the practitioner(s)/manager of an early-years setting and a written report on the quality of education provision in the setting. The reports for these inspections are subject to a rigorous quality assurance process with the early-years settings to ensure factual accuracy and to allow each setting the opportunity to provide a response to the content of the inspection report. The setting response is appended to the published inspection report.

## Initial review of Early Years Education-focused Inspections

The inspections have taken place in community pre-schools, in privately owned and managed pre-schools, and in a range of pre-schools operating through the medium of Irish (Naíonraí), including Naíonraí in Gaeltacht areas. All counties are represented in the inspections conducted to date. The inspection reports show a range of pedagogical approaches in the early-years services inspected, including Montessori, Steiner, High/Scope, played-based approaches, and approaches that blend a number of pedagogies. A particular focus of the inspections is the extent to which children's learning and development are facilitated through play and, in that context, all of the inspections evaluate and report on how early-years services are implementing the curriculum framework for early years, *Aistear*, the *Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*.

The inspections acknowledge and take account of the particular context of each pre-school service inspected, including its size and pedagogical approach; these and other contextual factors are noted in the preamble to each report and inform the inspection judgements. Each service inspected receives oral feedback and a report which contains evaluative comment on how it provides for the educational development of the children attending it. In addition, the inspectors provide advice and guidance as to how that provision can be developed further. In each case, a judgement is also made about the capacity of the pre-school to implement the inspectors' advice.

Initial analysis of the inspectors' advice given in reports points to a number of emerging themes, including a tendency in several services to make the early-years experience for children overly formal rather than play-based. It is reported that this tendency can be influenced by parental expectations, resulting in provision which prioritises 'academic' skills such as knowing letters and being able to hold a pencil over the development of important learning dispositions such as creativity, problem solving, self-regulation and persistence. There is also strong evidence of the challenges being faced by practitioners in finding time for systematic review processes and planning and development work. Capacity in this regard could be improved through continuing professional development opportunities especially in relation to the use of the *Aistear Síolta Practice Guide*.

Other trends in the advice is the encouragement given to services to provide regular outdoor play experiences for children, to use children's own interests as the basis for planning the learning activities, and to share children's learning regularly with parents in different ways.

<sup>3</sup> Department of Education and Skills, (2015) Early Years Education-focused Inspections In Early Years Settings Participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Scheme: Briefing Paper 26 May 2015. DES, Dublin

Conclusion

With universal provision of pre-school education now an established reality in the landscape of early years services and in the lives of the majority of our youngest citizens, it is essential that we strive to optimise the quality of this provision. Early Years Education-focused Inspection fulfils a very valuable role in this regard by evaluating the processes that we know specifically support quality early learning. The process of the inspections offers early years practitioners the opportunity to engage with highly skilled and expert early years inspectors in professional dialogue that validates and supports their key role. The reports of inspections proved unique insight for parents on the range and nature of activities that support their children’s early learning and the composite findings serve to provide policymakers with strong practice-based evidence of what is working well and areas that need to be further developed when making decisions about the deployment of supports and resources.

To date the positive messages contained in the EYEI reports identify the strong commitment of practitioners in the early-years sector to delivering high quality early education experiences for children. There are also challenges identified which need to be addressed. Overall, the EYEI reports confirm the significant potential of the universal free pre-school programme to impact positively on the immediate and long term educational experiences of young children. It is a potential that we must seek to realise and enhance.



Taking a break at the conference of the European Early Childhood Education Research Association, held in the Helix DCU in September 2016, are Dr Carmel Brennan (right), head of practice Early Childhood Ireland and Dr Alison Gopnik, Professor of Psychology and Philosophy at the University of California, Berkeley.

Expansion of the Early Childhood Care & Education Programme

Providing free education for children from the age of three



By Fiona Healy  
Co-ordinator, Meath County  
Childcare Committee

While welcoming the expanded age eligibility for free early years education, Fiona Healy highlights a number of challenges presented by this initiative in relation to capacity, resources, cohesion, quality and qualifications.

Changes for Early Years Provision

The early years sector in Ireland has seen many changes in 2016 including, importantly, the expansion of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme, or the free pre-school year or as it is more widely known. On initial announcement in October 2015 many mistook this for a second free year, when in fact it was simply an expansion of the age eligibility. Provision of free pre-school for children from the age of three was a key recommendation of the Expert Advisory Group on the Early Years Strategy.

The Expansion of the Programme

The expansion, resulting from additional funding provided in Budget 2016, means that children can now access a free pre-school place from the age of 3 at the appropriate time for entry (September, January or April). Children will then remain in free pre-school until they transfer to primary school – provided they are not older than 5½ years at the end of the pre-school year.

To ensure that children can benefit from free pre-school as soon as they are eligible, parents may now enrol their child at three different points during the year: September, January and April. The free pre-school year will continue to run three hours a week for five days from September to June over a 38-week period. The total amount of weeks to which a child is entitled will depend on date of birth. The table below from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) sets out the age criteria and the entry point to the programme. Both community and private service providers can apply to participate in the ECCE programme.

| To avail of the ECCE programme with effect from | Children must have been born between the following dates (both dates inclusive) |
|---|---|
| September 2016 – June 2017                      | 1 <sup>st</sup> January 2012 – 31 <sup>st</sup> August 2013                     |
| January 2017 – June 2017                        | 1 <sup>st</sup> January 2012 to 31 <sup>st</sup> December 2013                  |
| April 2017 – June 2017                          | 1 <sup>st</sup> January 2012 – 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2014                      |



### Physical capacity of the services

Prior to expansion, 67,000 children nationally availed of the free pre-school year and it is estimated *that there are as many as 127,000 children eligible to participate in the ECCE programme in 2016*. Much has been made of the issue of access and the capacity of the sector to cater for this expansion. Childcare Committees Ireland (CCI), the local agents of the DCYA, completed a survey of the 4,300 service providers with whom they communicate daily, to get a live picture of the capacity of the services. This information was presented to the DCYA.

### Sector concerns

Some representative organisations within the sector felt that the first free year was not perfect and a full review should have been completed prior to a second year being announced. However, the argument for investment in a quality early years programme is well documented both internationally and nationally so any investment in this sector is to be welcomed.

### Multiple entry points

The introduction of multiple entry points (September, January & April) presents challenges both in terms of logistics and organisation of enrolment. Multi-entry is a new departure for sessional service providers, although their full day counterparts will have some experience of taking children during the course of the year. The service providers themselves have identified concerns: *“Whilst an additional 2nd free preschool year for the ECCE scheme sounds great, it is important that we do not forget about quality, staff training and qualification, and non-contact time for staff”*. (Early Childhood Ireland discussion 2016)

### Quality Provision

To achieve the DCYA’s objective of making early learning in a formal setting available to eligible children in the year before they commence primary school, age-appropriate activities and programmes must be provided to children within a particular age cohort. For this reason, it is necessary to set minimum and maximum limits to the age range within which children will qualify to participate in the programme (DCYA 2016).

Many providers have struggled with the practical implementation of the quality and curriculum frameworks *Siolta and Aistear*. The main reason has been the limited resources available to support their implementation, with not all locations having access to Siolta Mentors. Providers now have the additional challenge of catering for mixed age groups – in any September the age range in an early years setting could vary from 2 years 4 months to 4 years 6 months.

### Necessary resources

Early years’ professionals have been vocal in looking for paid non-contact time to assist them in achieving the levels of quality expected (ACP 2015). The greatest challenge now, rather than insufficient spaces for all children aged 3 to 5½, may be equipping early years settings with the tools necessary to ensure an appropriate curriculum for the children in attendance.

**P**roviders now have the additional challenge of catering for mixed age groups... in any September, the age range in an early years setting could vary from 2 years 4 months to 4 6 months.

**T**he greatest challenge now... may be equipping early years settings with the tools necessary to ensure an appropriate curriculum for the children in attendance.

“ It is important that we do not forget about quality, staff training and qualifications, and non-contact time for staff”

**P**rovision of free pre-school for children from the age of three was a key recommendation of the Expert Advisory Group on the Early Years Strategy.

**P**arents may now enrol their child at three different points during the year: September, January and April.

### Qualified staff

Early Years is a vital part of any education system and having trained professionals impacts on the overall quality of children’s experiences (Rhodes & Hennessy2000, Early & Winton 2001, Miller & Bogatova 2009 and Fukkink&Lont2007).

### Conclusion

The expansion of the ECCE programme marks a significant change in the development of the programme. The extent of the growth in the programme in terms of volumes of children creates a correlated growth in administrative burden on providers of early years education. Consideration should be given to some form of tangible recognition of this non-contact time. In addition, as discussed, multiple entry points and an expanded age range may create some challenges to providers inexperienced in dealing with variable age ranges in terms of curriculum development and delivery. A concerted and consistent effort needs to be resourced and implemented by those agencies tasked with supporting quality development to assist the sector adapt and respond to these challenges successfully to ensure the highest possible quality of early years education and care to young people is delivered.

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# Building a sustainable model for Early Years provision

The viability of services depends on funding

## Introduction

According to Danish sociologist Esping-Anderson (2008), “it is only quite recently that we have come to realise that the foundations of learning, as well as the chief mainsprings of inequalities, lie buried in the pre-school phase of childhood and that schools are generally ill-equipped to remedy a bad start.”<sup>1</sup>

Over the past half century, our investment in children has been almost exclusively directed at school based education and has ignored the international research telling us that investment in pre-school offers a better financial return to the State and society than investment at any other life stage.<sup>2</sup> We are increasingly aware that experiences in children’s earliest years lay the critical foundations for future learning and social and emotional development. Despite this knowledge, the early care and education (ECE) sector in Ireland remains woefully under-resourced. At 0.3% of GDP<sup>3</sup>, Ireland’s investment in ECE falls well short of the 0.8% average investment across the OECD, and the UNICEF international benchmark of 1% of GDP. Despite some improvement in State spending on ECE in recent years, the level of investment is inadequate to catch up and this has had a detrimental effect on the sustainability of the sector.

## The situation of the ECE sector at a glance

The ECE sector is grappling with a number of interconnected challenges. Well qualified staff is essential for the delivery of a quality ECE service to children. The increasing difficulty faced by services in retaining and recruiting well qualified staff will not be resolved without dealing with the low pay and poor conditions in the sector. Low pay cannot be addressed without proper funding that also supports sustainable business models for childcare provision. The viability of services depends on such funding



By Amy McArdle

Policy Officer at Early Childhood Ireland

Amy McArdle paints a grim picture of the threat to sustainability caused by the ongoing underfunding of the Early Childhood sector. In spite of international research documenting the benefits of investment in pre-school, providers continue to be cash-strapped with early years educators earning just €11.12 per hour.

The average Early Years Educator, who requires a minimum QQI Level 5 in Early Childhood Care and Education, is earning €11.12 per hour.

and ultimately there can be no positive progression in any of these areas without significant investment by Government.

We must ensure that all investment, new and existing, is building a model of early childhood care and education in Ireland that is fit for purpose and can deliver:

1. The best **quality** care and education for children in the most formative years of their development;
2. Viability and **sustainability** for both early childhood services and their staff;
3. Access and **affordability** for parents to childcare facilities and services.

## The current trend in early childhood care and education

However, a recent report by Early Childhood Ireland, *Doing the Sums: The Real Cost of Providing Childcare* (September, 2016), has identified worrying trends to the contrary. A major finding of the report is that the State’s focus on the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme, which offers two free pre-school years to children aged 3–5½ years and receives by far the largest proportion of funding of all ECE programmes in the sector, is causing displacement and shifting capacity of providers from birth to 3 years provision. This is negatively impacting the financial viability, and thus availability and affordability for parents, of wider childcare services, such as year-round full day-care and care and education for the under 3s. The report further finds that the average ECE service in Ireland, whether private or community run, urban or rural, operates on a breakeven basis and simply cannot afford to pay staff for the invaluable and highly professional job that they do.

## Staff Pay in the ECE Sector

According to Early Childhood Ireland’s report, the average Early Years Educator, who requires a minimum QQI Level 5 in Early Childhood Care and Education, is earning €11.12 per hour. This is below the living wage in Ireland of €11.50 per hour. The average Room Leader, who requires a minimum of Level 6 on the NQF and a bachelor degree in Early Childhood Studies/Early Education in order for its service to receive the higher ECCE capitation payment, is earning €12.30 per hour. This is just over €1 extra per hour for having completed third level education and compares very badly to the average wage in the education sector of €33.90.<sup>4</sup> In addition to poor pay, Early Years Educators engage in a significant amount of unpaid non-contact time. The work done in this time is absolutely essential to the delivery of a quality pre-school experience for children and includes: planning and evaluating curriculum; engaging with the national quality frameworks Aistear and Síolta; working with parents; participating in staff meetings; completing required recording and documentation, including for inspection purposes; and supporting good governance. With the more recent introduction of the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM), early years

Only 15% of educators working in Ireland’s childcare sector currently hold a degree at Level 7/8 in early childhood education and care (Pobal, 2015).

<sup>1</sup> Esping-Andersen, G. (2008) ‘Childhood investment and skill formation’, *International Tax and Public Finance*, 15: 19-44.

<sup>2</sup> See The Heckman Equation on the rate of return to human capital investment by Nobel prize-winning economist Professor James Heckman <http://heckmanequation.org/>.

<sup>3</sup> When expenditure for young children in primary school education is excluded.

<sup>4</sup> As stated in the Earnings and Labour Costs Quarterly, Q1 Final, Q2 Preliminary Estimates, CSO, 2016.

professionals also work with parents to identify the needs and supports of children with additional needs participating in ECCE programmes.

While Budget 2017 made much welcomed provision for limited paid non-contact time, the measure did not go far enough to tackle pay and conditions in the sector in a meaningful way. This is a major strategic challenge for the sector, which cannot deliver on the Government's policy to expand ECE if it cannot retain and attract the qualified staff needed to provide quality services to children.

The EU recommends a 60% graduate led ECE workforce by 2025.<sup>5</sup> However, only 15% of educators working in Ireland's childcare sector currently hold a degree at Level 7/8 in early childhood education and care (Pobal, 2015). This is hardly surprising when the ECE sector continues to be characterised by low wages, additional unpaid work, low social status, a heavy workload, a lack of career progression paths and a lack of incentive to professionalise. This inevitably impacts on staff retention and attracting new staff into the sector, which is crucial to the expansion of the ECE sector.

### Conclusion

There are three major and interconnected challenges facing the ECE sector: quality for children; sustainability for services and their staff; and affordability for parents. Nothing short of a significant injection of investment into the sector will be sufficient to address all these challenges and it is essential that the investment is targeted and strategic in nature.

Low pay and poor conditions in the sector is causing increasing difficulty in the recruitment and retention of staff, which in turn impacts the quality of services for children. Two targeted initiatives the Government can undertake in this regard are to:

1. **Work with the sector to agree recognised salary scales for early years educators.** Additional investment in the sector needs to take account of the need to increase salaries, where Government works closely with the sector to develop agreed salary scales in the medium term.
2. **Initiate a new 'Early Education and Care Workforce and Professionalisation Plan'.** Government should conduct research and engage with the sector to develop a Workforce Plan that sets out a realistic assessment of the number of early childhood professionals that are needed, and where, over the next 5-10 years, including their levels of qualification and how we recruit and retain them.

The sector looks forward to playing its part and working constructively with Government and policy makers to build a sustainable model of early childhood care and education that provides children with the best possible start in life.

<sup>5</sup> Joint Oireachtas Committee on Health and Children (January, 2016) 'Report on Affordable and Quality Childcare.' p.25.

**A** major finding of the report is that the State's focus on the Early Childhood Care and Education programme (3-5½) is causing displacement and is shifting capacity of providers for children 0-3 years.

**T**he report further finds that the average ECE service in Ireland, whether private or community run, urban or rural, operates on a breakeven basis and simply cannot afford to pay staff for the invaluable and highly professional job that they do.

## The Better Start Access and Inclusion Model (AIM)

Ensuring equal opportunities for children with disabilities and/or special educational needs (SEN)



**By Dr Margaret Rogers**  
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National Early Years Quality  
Development

**T**he Better Start Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) was developed to ensure that the fundamental right of children with disabilities to inclusion is afforded to children in Ireland. Dr Margaret Rogers explains the programme which is child-centred and strengths-based and involves seven levels of progressive support.

Inclusion of children with disabilities is a fundamental right (Polat, 2010; UNICEF, 2012). In order for all children, and particularly those with disabilities and SEN, to have equal opportunities, governments should be aiming to give access and offer the opportunity to use supportive services and technology so that every child will be able to take his or her place in the community and contribute to it (UNICEF, 2013a). The Better Start Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) has been developed in order to ensure this fundamental right is afforded to children in Ireland.

### The Better Start Access and Inclusion Model (AIM)

AIM is a cross-departmental initiative, introduced by Dr. Katherine Zappone T.D. on 15 June 2016. It is led by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) and involves, inter alia, the Department of Health and the Department of Education and Skills. The programme is a child-centred, strengths-based model (Campbell, Milbourne and Silverman, 2001) involving seven levels of progressive support, moving from the universal (Levels 1-3) to the targeted (Levels 4-7). Support allocation is based on the abilities and needs of the child and the capacity of the service provider. AIM is rooted in extensive national and international evidence that demonstrates the benefits for all children participating in high quality, inclusive early year's settings. Parents and early years providers were consulted in the development of the model and it has been widely welcomed.

The seven levels of support offered through AIM are depicted as a progressive continuum, but they are neither linear nor even necessarily sequential. They are designed to progressively build capacity and skills within the ECCE sector to develop inclusive practice which will benefit all children and to ensure the small number of children with complex additional needs (estimated at 1.5%) will experience high quality, welcoming and inclusive early education and care. A variety of resources and supports can be selected and applied in response to the abilities and needs of all children, an individual child or an early years setting.



They represent a range of universal supports which benefit all children availing of the ECCE year including training and resources to promote diversity, equality and inclusion<sup>1</sup>, information for parents to enable them to choose the appropriate supports for their individual child<sup>2</sup>, and a programme of training to promote professional development and enhance the skills and capacity of early years practitioners and educators<sup>3</sup>. Universal supports such as information and locally provided training will be coordinated through City and County Childcare Committees, working in collaboration with specialist professionals and trainers to provide information, advice and training opportunities.

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



For many children, the universal supports offered under the model will be sufficient (Nutbrown, Clough and Atherton, 2013). For others, one particular discrete support may be required to enable participation in pre-school, such as access to a piece of specialised equipment. Not all children with disabilities have SEN as many need only special adjustments and have no difficulty in accessing learning and have abilities which can be supported in an inclusive setting (Cross et al, 2004; DeVore and Russell, 2007). For a small number, a suite of different services and supports may be necessary. These could include mentoring and advice support from an Early Years Specialist (Level 4), capital grants for equipment or minor alternations (Level 5), specialist therapeutic advice from the HSE (Level 6) or increased capitation to reduce ratios and allow for additional support to a child in the preschool setting (Level 7). In other words, the model is designed to be responsive to the needs of each individual child in the context of their pre-school setting. It will offer tailored, practical supports based on need and will not require a formal diagnosis of disability.

**A** IM is a cross-departmental initiative, introduced by Dr. Katherine Zappone T.D. on 15 June 2016.

**U**niversal supports such as information and locally provided training will be coordinated through City and County Childcare Committees.

**T**he role of the AIM Early Years Specialists is to support a range of diverse early years ECCE settings through a mentoring process.

### The Role of Early Years Specialists in implementing AIM

To support the implementation of this model directly in practice, Better Start National Early Years Quality Development has employed an additional 45 Early Years Specialists. The role of the AIM Early Years Specialists is to support a range of diverse early years ECCE settings, through a mentoring process, to assist them in enabling inclusive practice and the optimal participation of a child with a disability in the pre-school room. Evidence has shown that children with disabilities often do not get to participate in as many activities and settings as other children (Buysse, 2012). Skilled mentors can support settings to reflect on their practice and identify purposeful adaptations and strategies to involve children and promote a sense of belonging, competence and meaningful participation.

Promoting children's functional skills in communication, mobility, self-management and social skills are effective ways to support children's inclusion and participation. This requires professionals and parents to work in partnership pooling their knowledge and experience to support the child.

An Access and Inclusion Profile has been developed which enables ECCE providers in consultation with parents to identify a child's abilities and support needs. The use of an Access and Inclusion Profile ensures that decision-making and the provision of support guided by this profile is consistent and equitable at national level, and not geographically determined. In addition to identifying key individual areas of functional need the use of an Access and Inclusion Profile limits the degree to which individual beliefs and/or the perspectives/concerns of decision-makers could skew or negatively affect decisions as has been found in some studies (Guscia, Harries, Kirby and Nettelbeck, 2006; Harries, 2008).

The Access and Inclusion Profile is integrated within an on line application process available through the PIP Portal<sup>4</sup> which enables ECCE providers in partnership with parents to apply for support at levels 4, 5, 6 and 7 of the model. The information provided in the profile will be used to determine the type of support which can be offered to support a child to meaningfully participate in the free pre-school (ECCE) programme. Parental consent is a necessary element of the profile and additional information such as medical reports can be included, where relevant.

Targeted supports are intended to promote access and inclusion for children with complex or highly complex needs, who would otherwise find it difficult to access or participate in a mainstream pre-school setting. This would include children with complex health and /or learning needs. The child does not need a pre-existing diagnosis to apply for support, although many children are already receiving health or early intervention services.

<sup>1</sup> Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter and Guidelines for Early Childhood Care and Education, DCYA, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> A dedicated website which can be accessed at [www.preschoolaccess.ie](http://www.preschoolaccess.ie)

<sup>3</sup> Information on the LINC programme can be accessed at [www.lincprogramme.ie](http://www.lincprogramme.ie)

<sup>4</sup> The PIP portal is managed by Pobal and is the system through which all ECCE providers currently access capitation funding.

## Promoting inclusive practice

UNESCO defines inclusion as:

*An ongoing process aimed at offering quality education for all while respecting diversity and the different needs and abilities, characteristics and learning expectations of the students and communities, eliminating all forms of discrimination (UNESCO IBE, 2008, p.18).*

Characteristics of inclusive settings and inclusive practice have been identified through research and include:

- » representation of children with disabilities, and facilitation of participation activities;
- » accessibility, adaptations and modifications of materials and equipment;
- » individualised programmes and curriculum modified and adapted to facilitate inclusion
- » collaboration with parents, families and professionals to address children's needs (Hollingsworth and Buysse, 2009; Siraj-Blatchford, Clarke, Needham, 2007).

Research into the benefits of mentoring and on-site professional development and coaching also pointed out that experimentation in practice contexts and shared reflection were the most meaningful and facilitative strategies for practitioner learning. (Zaslow, et al, 2010; Yoshikawa, et al, 2013 op cite).

## Promoting inclusion in children's play

Research has found that even at the preschool level, children with no disabilities may overlook children with disabilities as friends or playmates due to their belief that those children are not interested or able to play or interact. Therefore it is incumbent on preschool professionals to work to alleviate the prejudice against children with SEN, particularly within the early years, and involve their peers (Bruce Marks, 1997; Aboud et al, 2012; Abrams and Killen, 2014).

This requires settings to adopt policies of inclusion and to ensure that children with a differing range of abilities, backgrounds and needs can participate in preschool settings. To support this in practice the Department of Children and Youth Affairs has published a revised Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter and Guidelines for Early Childhood Care and Education (DCYA, 2016) to promote inclusion in early year's settings in Ireland.

Children's perception of their inclusion is as important as their actions. Children are active agents in their own cultural learning and are engaged in reproducing and resisting the world around them. To lessen social exclusion Ramani and Brownell (2014) and Buysse, Goldman and Skinner (2002), confirmed the value of cooperative problem solving within social play among pre-primary peers in gaining critical knowledge and developing joint goals.

**A**n Access and Inclusion Profile has been developed which enables ECCE providers in consultation with parents to identify a child's abilities and support needs.

**T**he early benefits are already beginning to be felt in terms of information, training, mentoring and additional funding sources.

## Conclusion

The development and initial introduction of the Better Start AIM programme marks another significant step forward in the development of high quality, inclusive preschool experience for all children. As this programme takes its first steps in implementation, in collaboration with parents and ECCE providers, the early benefits are already beginning to be felt in terms of information, training, mentoring and additional funding sources. As the programme grows towards full implementation over the next three years, it is to be hoped that services will grow in capacity towards more inclusive practice and children throughout the country will achieve the intended outcomes of high quality inclusive ECEC practice.

Further information on Better Start Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) is available at [www.preschoolaccess.ie](http://www.preschoolaccess.ie). Further information on Better Start National Early Years Quality Development is available at [www.betterstart.ie](http://www.betterstart.ie). Information on local supports and services is available through local City or County Childcare Committees.

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# National Higher Education Programme for Inclusion Coordinators in Early Years Settings



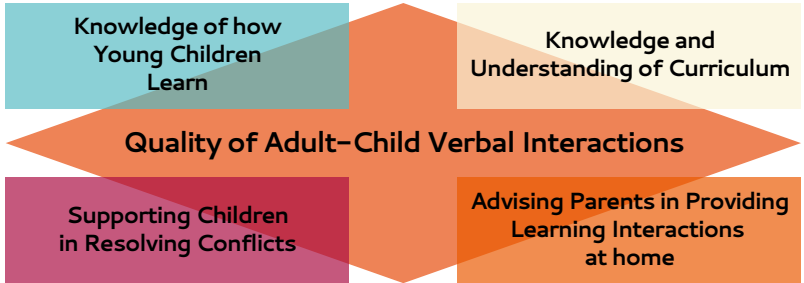
**By Dr. Emer Ring**  
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The contract for the delivery of the **National Higher Education Programme for Inclusion Coordinators in Early Years Settings** was recently awarded to a consortium led by Mary Immaculate College and including Early Childhood Ireland and Maynooth University – Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education.

The LINC (Leadership for INclusion in the Early Years) programme focuses specifically on facilitating the creation of a new role of Inclusion Coordinator in each ECCE setting registered for the Free Pre-School Year (FPSY). Successful graduates of the programme will acquire an NFQ Level 6 (Higher Education) Special Purpose Award from Mary Immaculate College Limerick, which will enable them to successfully perform the role of Inclusion Coordinator in an ECCE Programme setting.

The programme, which is designed to provide for 900 students each year over a 4-year period, commenced in September 2016 and is being delivered in nine regional centres in a blended format, comprising face-to-face classroom-based sessions and online delivery.

The programme is aligned with *Aistear – the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* and *Siolta, the National Quality Framework* and is embedded in best practice with regard to the indicators of high quality education in early years education summarised in Figure 1.



**Figure 1. Indicators of High-Quality Early Years Provision**

The LINC programme is designed to equip participants with the knowledge, understanding, skills and competence to support the participation of children with additional needs in the early years.

In particular, the programme will focus on preparing participants to adopt a leadership role within early years’ settings to enable them to support and lead other staff in the setting to plan for, implement and review inclusive practice.



## Outdoor Pre-Schools

Shifting the concept of education to the natural processes and developments of the world and nature

The roll-out and implementation this year of the new Pre-School Regulations (DCYA, 2016) represents a major shift for Irish childcare. From now on, any newly established Early Years service will be required to incorporate outdoor play space under regulation 20 (Ibid, p19) in order to become eligible for registration. Up until this year, there had been no requirement for Early Years settings to provide any outdoor play space whatsoever. And although most settings would take it upon themselves to facilitate some outdoor provision, it would actually have been enough to open a window in order to comply with regulations (DCYA, 2006), which stated that children should at the very least have access to fresh air during the day.

The Outdoors is an environment that provides boundless opportunities for children to learn and develop and it is a widely held view both nationally and internationally that Early Childhood Care and Education should provide opportunities for outdoor experiences (Waller, 2014; Pettersen, 2012; NCCA, 2009; CECDE, 2006). Traditionally, however, playing outdoors has not been foregrounded in the daily routine in Irish pre-schools. One reason for this, as described by O’Kane (2007, p16), is that the provision of pre-school education in the state has been aligned with an emphasis on preparation for primary education and accordingly the educational activities have been happening indoors in an environment of a transmissive pedagogy. Another reason is that the training programmes leading to professional awards in Early Years education have had little focus on the learning opportunities and developmental gains afforded by the outdoors (Pettersen, 2012) and playing outdoors was often associated with the requirement for staff to have a break, as well as the prescribed access to fresh air.

The past decade has brought forward a trend of increasing awareness with regards to the benefits from children’s exposure to the outdoors on the back of research and practice (Sandsaether 2013; Waller, 2014), but also as a result of a targeted approach by the state through the many regional childcare committees.



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**N**ew pre-school regulations implemented in 2016 require any newly established pre-school services from now on to incorporate outdoor play space in their facilities in order to become eligible for registration. Jan Pettersen is persuasive about the potential of the Outdoors to provide boundless learning opportunities for pre-school children – and at little cost.

**U**niform surfacing of playgrounds can only be seen as a limitation to learning.

**R**esearch shows that children who are exposed to physical activity during the day will outperform control groups in reading, writing and mathematics.

**U**ltimately, the shift towards the outdoors depends on adults who value and enjoy the outdoors.

The outcome is that Early Years practitioners in Ireland have become more informed and interested in including outdoor play activities in their curricula as a way of driving holistic development. And notably, we are seeing the establishment of settings which build their entire programme around the outdoors, such as Glen Outdoor Early Learning Centre in Barrack, Co Donegal and The Park Academy Nature Kindergarten in Kilruddery, Co Wicklow. Other settings, such as Daddy Daycare in Gorey, Co Wexford and the Bessborough Centre in Cork, apply an extended use of the outdoors in their daily routine akin to what one would find in Scandinavian childcare. Even though the approach to outdoor learning chosen by any of these settings has been left entirely up to the owner/operator, what these settings share is the view of the Outdoors as the ultimate environment for holistic learning and development.

The presence of designed outdoor playgrounds in Irish Early Years settings is on the rise, but few operators/ owners take sufficient account of variety with regard to challenge and exploration of natural materials. From a developmental perspective (Wyver, et. al, 2010), uniform surfacing of playgrounds can only be seen as a limitation to learning. A child whose major play experiences are on consistent, predictable surfaces is likely to miss many of the valuable learning experiences relating to locomotion, physics and aesthetics as outlined above.

Children are motivated by the ever changing beauty of nature and the opportunities on offer in the expanse of the natural landscape, such as the cyclical changes of trees and plants, the sensorial experiences through free exploration with soil, grass, stones, blowing wind and running water. The varied and complex experiential learning environment in nature is so intricate that it can never be fully be replicated (Pettersen, 2012) in the indoors of traditional early years provision.

The outdoor environment usually offers more freedom and space to move, and inspires different movement from that indoors. It is vital (Bilton, 2010) for young children to develop their coordination, build muscle mass, and experiment with moving their bodies. In the outdoors, children can hear and respond to a different range of sounds, beginning to recognise and distinguish between noises. They can use actions and movement alongside words and sounds to convey their ideas and meanings, develop storytelling, songs, and share and enact rhythm and rhyme.

While the activities indoors typically require children to be sedate and quiet, the outdoors offers children exciting opportunities for developing upper body and limb strength through physical activity and movement. As Early Years services often find themselves struggling with funds to buy equipment, one very important point to make is that good outdoor provision does not rely on expensive equipment, but rather on making the most of the space and resources available. Nature itself provides an abundance of open-ended materials and opportunities to stimulate all categories and types of play.

These experiences will have a positive impact on the development of control and co-ordination of small muscles needed later for successful handwriting. There is also a body of research (Ericsson & Karlson, 2014;

Ostroff, 2012) which demonstrates that children who are exposed to physical activity during the day will outperform control groups in reading, writing and mathematics.

Results from the 'Growing Up in Ireland' (GUI) study (DCYA, 2011, p14), informs us that Irish children are becoming more inactive and that obesity is on the increase in this country. A strong recommendation from this study is to encourage behavioral change by increasing children's activity levels. As with so many other issues, early introduction to the enjoyment and the benefits of nature is critical with regards to the development of attitudes to the outdoors.

Ultimately, the shift towards the outdoors depends on adults who value and enjoy the outdoors and who will support children to feel safe and secure outside. Attitude, understanding and positive thinking are important attributes of the Early Years professionals who are hoping to develop a successful outdoor approach. Equally, they need to gain the skills of how to use the outdoor space to make the most of what the space has to offer. Adults are role models for children and need to display qualities that we would like young children to develop – enquiry, motivation, willingness to try and a positive attitude.

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The past decade has brought increasing awareness with regards to the benefits from children's exposure to the outdoors.

We are seeing the establishment of settings which build their entire programme around the outdoors, such as Glen Outdoor Early Learning Centre.

## The Meath Tiny Talk Programme

Targeting speech and language deprivation in children from 0–6 years



By Aoife Hughes  
Speech and Language Therapist,  
HSE North East

The Meath Tiny Talk service, delivered to participating preschools in Co Meath, provides training to preschool teachers in speech and language development within the classroom environment. The service also provides support and coaching to preschool teachers throughout the year.

Almost 40 per cent of ECCE settings have 3 or more children with additional needs, according to an Early Childhood Ireland survey (2015). The National Disability Authority (2011) advises that all children should as far as possible attend mainstream ECCE settings and that health therapies should be delivered on-site focusing on supporting the teachers who will be working with the child on a daily basis. In recent years there have been many initiatives and programmes introduced at local level across the country with the aim of providing integrated services to meet the needs of children and their families within their communities. Meath Tiny Talk is one such programme.

#### The Meath Tiny Talk service

Meath Tiny Talk targets speech and language deprivation in children in Meath from 0–6 years through early detection, prevention and intervention. Since its initiation as a pilot project in 2011, it has expanded and developed and is currently operating as an independent branch of Primary Community and Continuing Care Speech and Language Therapy services in Meath, working in conjunction with Meath County Childcare Committee and Meath Partnership.

#### Teacher training

The positive influence of high-quality preschools and better-trained practitioners on the academic and social outcomes of children has been highlighted in the National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011–2020. This is particularly true in the case of those who are at risk of school failure (Dept. of Education and Skills, 2011). In line with this, preschool teacher training is one of the mandatory components of the Tiny Talk service. Its training course is specifically designed for staff working within ECCE settings and each year a new group of preschool leaders participates. The training increases practitioners' understanding and knowledge of typical speech, language and communication development, how to identify relevant areas of concern and how to adapt interaction style and daily activities to support the speech, language and communication development of

each individual child within the classroom. Currently, there are 20 ECCE settings involved with the Meath Tiny Talk service.

### Early detection

Following the Tiny Talk training course, preschool teachers are well-equipped to identify those children who would benefit from a Speech and Language screening assessment by the Speech and Language Therapist. These screening assessments are carried out in the preschool environment. In this way, through the preschool leader training courses and preschool Speech and Language screenings, the Tiny Talk service manages to detect any speech, language or communication difficulties early on so that intervention can begin during the child's most important formative years where maximum impact for later successful outcomes can be made.

### Early intervention

International evidence emphasises the superior results achieved for children through prevention and early intervention approaches rather than later intervention (Harvey, 2014). There is significant research to indicate the presence of a sensitive period for acquiring language – after which linguistic gains are markedly reduced despite intervention. The Bercow report (2008) highlights that, if children receive the right early intervention, they increase their chance of tackling problems, communicating well and making progress. On the other hand, multiple risks are associated with not receiving adequate early intervention, such as lower educational attainment, behavioural problems, emotional and psychological difficulties, poorer employment prospects, challenges to mental health and descent into criminality.

### Using the classroom environment

There is growing evidence in the field of Speech and Language therapy to support the movement of services from clinically based to within the community or social contexts of the clients involved. After all, children learn language within their social context – which for preschoolers is their home and preschool / crèche environments. So, in order to effectively achieve change for children with speech and language difficulties, it is necessary for intervention to target all of these contexts (Gascoigne, 2006). There is also substantial evidence from the Better Communication Research Programme that intervention, ranging from speech and language therapy to small group interventions delivered by the wider children's workforce to changes to setting and classroom environments, can improve children and young people's language and communication skills (Gascoigne, 2010; p10). The Tiny Talk service provides coaching and support to the preschool teachers throughout the academic year within the classroom environment. The team works closely with preschool leaders in planning and implementing universal enrichment activities in the classroom aimed at supporting the speech, language and communication development of all the children in the class while meeting many of the goals and aims of Aistear's Theme: Communicating at the same time.

### Sharing with parents

ECCE settings should play an important role in “empowering and informing parents in their efforts to support their children's literacy and numeracy” (Department of Education and Skills, 2011; pg. 19). Through our

**T**he Tiny Talk service manages to detect any speech, language or communication difficulties early on.

**E**arly intervention will involve the parents, preschool teachers and Tiny Talk Speech and Language Therapist working together collaboratively...

**T**he National Disability Authority (2011) advises that... health therapies should be delivered on-site focusing on supporting the teachers.

**P**reschool teacher training is one of the mandatory components of the Tiny Talk service.

**T**here is significant research to indicate the presence of a sensitive period for acquiring language.

Tiny Talk preschool leader training programmes and in-service coaching throughout the year, the preschool leaders' confidence and competence in sharing knowledge and information with parents are enhanced.

### Expansion of Tiny Talk service

The current expansion and development of the Tiny Talk service brings exciting new changes with regards to the provision of intervention for the 2016/17 academic year. Those children who were up until recently referred onwards for specialist intervention and management once they were identified as having speech, language or communication difficulties, will now receive early intervention as part of the Tiny Talk service. The early intervention will involve the parents, preschool teachers and Tiny Talk Speech and Language Therapist working together collaboratively on specific goals individual to each child's identified needs. This model of working is in line with the idea of 'Partnership' promoted by Aistear where parents, families and practitioners work together to benefit the children (NCCA, 2009). The ultimate goal of this is that more children will reach age appropriate speech and language skills during their formative years and prior to entering primary school, therefore increasing their chances of achieving successful academic and social outcomes in the future.

Along with the introduction of funding for a second free preschool year, Budget 2016 has introduced funding to implement a new model of support to enable children with special needs to fully benefit from their free preschool years (DCYA, 2016). At level 3 of this model “A qualified and confident workforce” is the aim while Level 6 involves enabling access to HSE therapeutic services in order to achieve maximum participation in the preschool classroom. Through our teacher training courses and in-service support as well as the early intervention initiated within all the child's social contexts, the Tiny Talk service actively targets these two levels of The Model to Support Access to the Free Pre-School Year for Children with Disability.

### Facebook

As part of the Tiny Talk service's universal or preventative intervention, we have developed a Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/meathtinytalk/](http://www.facebook.com/meathtinytalk/)) which provides regular advice and information regarding typical speech and language development, updates about the Tiny Talk service as well as useful activities and strategies that can be used with children to develop their speech and language skills.

### Supporting parents

Also as part of our universal intervention we have considered how the care and education that children receive from their parents and family, especially during their early months and years, greatly influence their overall development (NCCA, 2009; p.9) “Parental support for young children not only makes a real difference to their development but, in some circumstances mitigates the negative effects of low socio-economic status or low parental educational attainment” (Dept. of Education and Skills, 2011, p19). We in the Tiny Talk service have prioritised expanding our service to educating and informing those parents of young babies about early language stimulation and promoting positive interaction experiences from early on. In the coming academic year, we will be



meeting with mothers attending breast feeding support groups in Meath to increase their understanding and knowledge of the importance of early interaction for their child's later cognitive, linguistic, social and emotional development.

### Conclusion

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the Tiny Talk service and to inform future service planning and development, the Tiny Talk team will be doing a full analysis of our figures over the 2016/17 academic year. We are hopeful this will support an ongoing move, as encouraged by recent literature, towards services provided in the community where children live and play, with a strong focus on prevention, universal education and early intervention. Tiny Talk is a positive move towards multi-agency working in the best interests of the children of Meath that will hopefully continue to expand and grow to encompass the whole population.

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**T**hrough Tiny Talk training programmes and in-service coaching, the preschool leader's confidence and competence are enhanced...

## Improving outcomes through collaboration

'Making learning enjoyable and something to be shared across the community'



**By Dr Josephine Bleach**

Director of Early Learning Initiative,  
National College of Ireland

**D**r Josephine Bleach describes how early intervention and collaborations across the community can lead to better outcomes for children and their families.

An innovative education project, Early Learning Initiative (ELI), pioneered by the National College of Ireland and situated in the Dublin Docklands, has been collaborating since 2005 with parents, public health nurses, Early Childhood Care and Education services, schools, and statutory, voluntary and corporate organisations to address educational disadvantage in the area. Approximately 81 organisations are now engaged at local level.

At national level, the ELI programme is involved in the Area Based Childhood (ABC) Programme (DCYA 2014b) which is co-funded by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and Atlantic Philanthropies, as well as other organisations committed to improving outcomes for children and their families.

ELI aims to enhance children's complex interactions with their immediate environment and provide sustained and integrated community based educational support to children and their families over the course of the children's developmental and educational stages.

'Cross-government and interagency collaboration and coordination' is one of the key transformational goals of the *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures, The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020* (BOBF)(DCYA 2014a). This involves the State and its partners working better together and planning services in a way that is child-centred. The challenge here is in transferring national policy into practice at local level, while ensuring that practice is of a high quality and evidenced informed. In order for ELI to implement its mission of "working in partnerships with local communities to support educational journeys and achievements", it needs the support of others locally, nationally and internationally.

### Developing a collaborative Community Network

ELI began with local community consultations along with reviews of best national and international practice. The following research findings have shaped ELI's development and its interactions with others:

- » While local parents had high aspirations for their children, they did not understand their pivotal role in enhancing their own children's learning (Dartington 2006; ELI 2008).
- » Research, from a wide range of countries, indicated that early learning was the foundation for all subsequent learning (Heckman 2006; OECD 2006) with vocabulary use at age 3 a predictive measure of language skills and reading comprehension scores at age 9–10 (Hart and Risley 1995).
- » Protective interventions occurring at different stages from birth significantly enhance children's life chances (ELI 2008).

This initial exploration provided a preliminary local network of local parents, schools and ECCE services, which has been extended over the years. Additional funding through the ABC Programme (DYCA 2014b) allowed ELI to extend its catchment area and address gaps in supports to children and their families.

The number of participants in ELI's programmes has grown from 448 (ELI 2008) to 8,484 (ELI 2016). The initial programmes, which focused on parental involvement and literacy, have been refined and extended through annual action research cycles to include Home Visiting, Restorative Practice, Educational Guidance and Numeracy Programmes. Having started with 15 families in the Docklands, the Parent Child Home Programme (PCHP) has now spread to other communities in Dublin, Galway and Limerick with 143 families taking part in 2015–16. The number of professionals involved in ELI has increased from 119 to 837. Teachers and ECCE practitioners have been joined by afterschool services, public health nurses, social workers, librarians, youth workers, corporate volunteers among others. With external and internal evaluations highlighting how ELI programmes have improved outcomes for children, families and the community (Share et al 2011; Lalor 2013; McKeown et al 2014; ELI 2016), there is more interest in ELI from other communities and organisations, both in Ireland and abroad.

ELI's child-centred approach and respect for people's knowledge, experiences and circumstances is at the heart of its interagency collaborations. A key criterion for collaboration whether at local, national or international level is the question: How will this support ELI's vision of *'enabling children, young people and their families to develop the dispositions, skills and knowledge needed to achieve their educational, career and life goals'*? Commitment to improving the quality of practice and partnership with others are essential. Relationships which are free, open and sincere, unhampered by oppressive power relations, hidden agendas and bad faith (Park 1999) are prioritised. The disposition and skills of participants to engage in an open dialogue of equals is critical as is their willingness to share their knowledge and practice. While each participant at each level may have a different role and level of expertise, each are considered by ELI as equal in personal and professional value. The willingness to work with others to improve outcomes for children and their families is the overriding consideration.

Over the past nine years, a learning community of trust and reciprocity (Elliot 2010) involving children, parents and professionals has been built.

**I**t [the learning community] has enabled all the participants to work smarter together, rather than harder alone.

**I**nvolvement in the ABC Programme has deepened our sense of common purpose, improved our existing infrastructures and enabled us to learn from other ABC areas.

**I**nvolvement needs to be intrinsically emotionally, socially and intellectually rewarding

**W**hile] local parents had high aspirations for their children, they did not understand their pivotal role in enhancing their own children's learning.

**R**elationships which are free, open and sincere, unhampered by oppressive power relations, hidden agendas and bad faith, are prioritised.

**T**he willingness to work with others to improve outcomes for children and their families is the overriding consideration.

By learning from others who understand the opportunities and constraints of the culture of their communities and organisations, it has enabled all the participants to work smarter together, rather than harder alone. Dynamic conversations (Schön 1983) support participants to develop their own personal 'voices' and to share, through a variety of media and forums, their learning. Involvement in the ABC Programme has deepened our sense of common purpose; improved our existing infrastructures and enabled us to learn from other ABC areas. It has supported our community to address local needs and implement national policy, in particular BOBF (DCYA 2014b). Working together, we are improving the quality of the services available to children and their families and ensuring education, health and social care services are integrated and accessible to all.

However, there are challenges. The time and resources required from all involved is a major issue. Effective collaboration and coordination requires regular structured networking opportunities. Parents and professionals are very busy people with lots of demands on their time. The recent recession has impacted on everyone and getting involved in ELI is an additional burden on top of already stretched workloads. In addition, balancing the learning from a programme with meeting children's immediate needs can be a real dilemma, particularly when resources are tight.

Working with real people within real social systems, people do not act as one might wish and things do not always go according to plan (Bleach 2016). Ensuring continuity and progression in an evolving, rapidly changing environment of constant feedback and change is important. Engaging a range of stakeholders in the action research process and ensuring that all voices are heard can be challenging. Involvement needs to be intrinsically emotionally, socially and intellectually rewarding. The perception of ELI as a safe space, where participants can ask questions openly, discuss issues freely, and seek information from their peers without fear of humiliation or shame, is critical.

### Conclusion

ELI's model of community action research has enabled the development of truly innovative initiatives which are making a real difference to children and their families. Participants' skills in working collaboratively to provide a positive, supportive, yet challenging learning environment for children have increased. Upskilling local people to work in programme delivery means that many families who might otherwise have shied away from involvement have embraced the ELI. ELI's inclusive social networks bridge the activities of different interest groups, making it easier to create and share knowledge about what works, learn from each other's experience and find solutions to common problems. Nurturing collective reflection, dialogue and action planning is critical, if ELI's learning networks are to continue to improve outcomes for children and their families through introducing changes that are locally appropriate and in line with national policy.

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## Practitioner research in early years care and education settings

A tool for learning, empowerment and change



By Triona O'Connor  
 Bessborough Centre Crèche, Cork

Triona O'Connor describes the innovative method of early years teaching being pioneered at Bessborough Centre Cork. Based on practitioner research, the tools of observation, listening and reflection are those used to shape pedagogy and gain insight.

There is no such thing as teaching without research or research without teaching, according to Freire (1993). We at the Bessborough Centre agree. Children live in a state of constant enquiry, review and revisit. For educators, this means that we are observing and sharing experiences with children and continually adapting our responses and the environment to support their search for understanding. This is our research and its purpose is primarily to guide practice but also to inform national policy for the early years sector.

The latter objective requires that we come together as researchers and share and coordinate our research to give our findings validity and clout. Together, we also want to establish the importance of what we do and generate more respect for our profession. We are loyal to and acknowledge our own needs – for self improvement, job security and professional development. As Oberheumer and Ulich (1997) state, ‘decisions made about staffing will be decisions made about the quality of services’.

### What we do

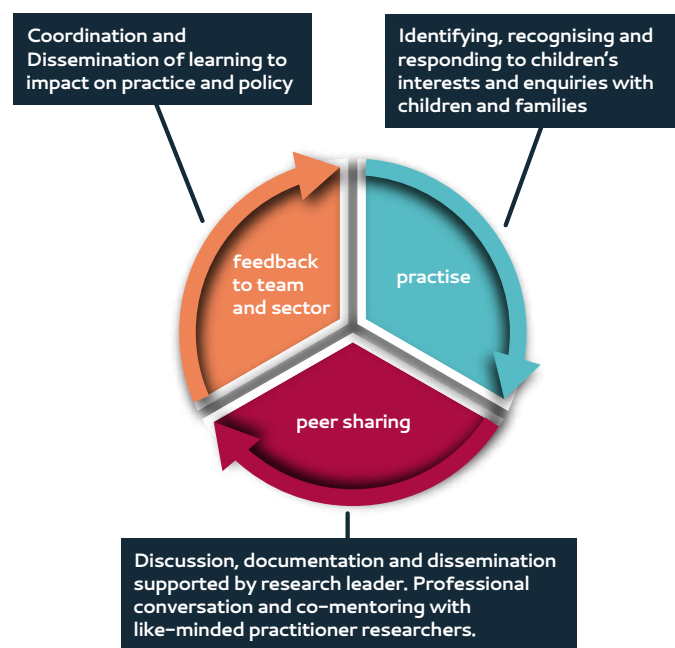
We use observation, listening and reflecting as tools that give us insight and shape our pedagogy. We take time to ‘stop, think and change’ (O'Connor & Diggins 2002, p.9), sometimes with the children and sometimes as a staff team – because we see this time as fundamental to our work as educators and researchers.

### Focused research circles

Then we come together as local research networks to engage in professional conversation. Early Childhood Ireland has responded to this desire among early childhood educators to get more involved in research and has established several focused research circles around the country to help encourage and nurture it. These circles attract educators who are passionate about what they do, who are respectful listeners and contributors, and who are open to rethinking their practice and to change. We share our observations, our data and our analysis and, in the conversation, we gain new insight. Questions or items brought to the



circle are discussed from several different perspectives, informed by our learning from both practice and theory. In this way practice informs theory and theory informs practice – there is no great divide between them. The diversity of experiences combines to create excitement, reassurance and new possibilities.



### Example

Outdoor play is an integral part of the curriculum at the Bessborough Centre crèche and we believe it enhances the child's holistic development and learning. A broad range of research and theory supports this view (WHO 2012; Louv 2005; Sandseter 2011; Gray 2005). At Bessborough, children explore our extensive outdoor environment at least twice daily for up to 6 hours, all year round. We have designed the outdoor space to include a range of areas that reflect all aspects of Aistear.

### Learning through the body as well as the mind

The outdoors is particularly important for movement and we understand that children learn through their bodies as much as through their minds. Our intelligence, as humans, is embodied – a concept that is often forgotten in our education system. Working in the outdoors raises many questions for us as educators. It seems to us that children are more motivated, independent and proactive in the outdoors – so much so that we often feel redundant as teachers. At the same time, children take more risk outdoors, particularly physical risk, which we see as important to their growth and development but which at same time poses challenges for understanding our roles and responsibilities.

### On a journey

In compiling Learning Stories (Carr 2001), and through conversations with the team, we keep coming across this concept that the children are on a

**A**t Bessborough, children explore our extensive outdoor environment at least twice daily for up to 6 hours, all year round.

**H**ow, as educators, do we manage our own anxiety about danger, in a world where children are supervised and constrained more and more?

**W**e come together as local research networks to engage in professional conversation.

**F**ocused research circles attract educators who are passionate about what they do, who are respectful listeners and contributors, and who are open to rethinking their practice and to change.

journey in relation to their competences but we too are on a journey in our role as practitioners. This is what we wanted to evaluate. How much should we intervene in children's explorations of their environments and skills? Were we doing the right thing? Were we standing back when we needed to? Were we offering enough support? We wanted to take on the challenge to make our policies and procedures more explicit, a challenge presented in Siolta, the national quality framework Standard 5 on interactions "Fostering constructive interactions (child/child, child/adult and adult/adult) requires explicit policies, procedures and practice that emphasise the value of process and are based on mutual respect, equal partnership and sensitivity." (CECDE 2006)

### Compiling exemplars of children's physical play

Our research involved collecting exemplars of children's physical play in the outdoors. We studied these episodes and considered what children gained from pursuing their own efforts and how educators might support them. One such exemplar, documented with photographs, involved Annalyce. Annalyce is 2 years old and very adventurous. We watched her clambering on all fours over the rocks, full of determination and grit. We could see her gradually growing in confidence. Her observer notes 'At one stage she stumbled, locked eyes with me and waited for a nod. Once she got that smile she smiled back and was on her way again'. With confidence came the ability to observe the other children. When she spotted an older child passing by, walking erect, she decided to do likewise. She moved from crawling to walking from rock to rock, showing remarkable balance and assurance.

This observation provoked in-depth analysis and conversation. How important is it to give children the opportunity to experiment and push the boundaries of what they can do? How, as educators, do we manage our own anxiety about danger, in a world where children are supervised and constrained more and more?

### 5-point framework to guide our work as educators

We looked at many other episodes – involving children climbing trees or using materials such as mud and water and concrete blocks. We questioned the supports that were visible in each episode. How are the children managing? What more can we do? From our discussions, which often involved the children, we identified the following 5-point range of supports as a framework to guide our work as educators.

1. Balance – where children need support in order to take risk, there is shared involvement between adult and child and between children themselves.
2. Trust – adult needs to take signals from children and trust in their direction as they begin to understand the skills they need and test them.
3. Confidence – adult needs to stay present but display confidence in child's abilities
4. Caution – a time when the child's confidence is growing and they are moving towards further risk – adult must be attentive to small cues but be cautious in not jumping in prematurely. Some children love

this stage and seem to be continually pushing the boundaries in every task.

5. Growth – both parties move to a new level of understanding. Adult steps back and is present from a distance. Child has mastered the skills needed to be safe and to assess risk themselves and to ask for help when needed.

Children move back and forth along this range. In the growth stage, for example, we have reached a platform – the child may move into balance again but we must remember where the platform of the previous learning has brought them and not move them backwards. Educators find these guidelines helpful and at the same time respectful of their professionalism and the need for professional decision making.

The Bessborough staff has shared its work at the Early Childhood Ireland Research day and at onsite workshops for early childhood educators in the region. The feedback from such events is very positive and an affirmation of the power of practitioner research. Educators like to hear from one another because they know that they share real life conditions, concerns and contexts and they feel empowered in knowing what other educators have found to be successful.

### Reflection and self reliance

One of the most valuable learning tools I have developed in my professional career is allowing myself time to reflect, to investigate and act on my findings, as opposed to always relying on direction from other more learned sources. Practice based research has allowed me to feel connected to change, engage with it and own it. It has provided me with a mechanism to ensure I keep connected on the ground with the children, tracking progress and driving the development of our service. It really contributes to staff morale and participation. Hopefully, with my team, we can bring some influence to bear on the wider sector as we share our findings and our journey.

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**P**ractice based research... really contributes to staff morale and participation.

## The 2016 EECERA Conference

A worthy commemoration of 1916



**By Dr Carmel Brennan**

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**D**r Carmel Brennan reports from the EECERA international annual conference held this year in Dublin and hosted by DCU with the theme Happiness, Relationships, Emotion and Deep Level Learning. This atmospheric account includes many names, themes and aspirations and also provides links to keynotes and research projects.

The conference of the European Early Childhood Research Association (EECERA) takes place each year over four days in September in a selected European city. Dublin was the venue in 2016, with Dublin City University playing host to 900+ Early Childhood Researchers from all over the world from August 31 to September 3.

Early Childhood Ireland, as the liaison agency for EECERA, was a key player in organising the event in Ireland both in 2005 and again in 2016. As this was the year that marked the 100th anniversary of the 1916 Rising, it was appropriate that the theme of the conference reflected the theme of the 1916 Proclamation's commitment "to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and of all its parts, cherishing all the children of the nation equally." The conference theme, 'Happiness, Relationships, Emotion and Deep Level Learning', reflected not only the Proclamation's national commitment but also a growing international awareness of the centrality of emotions in the learning and development of young children.

Opening the conference, Teresa Heeney, CEO of Early Childhood Ireland, said:

*"With this theme, we want to pause and allow a space to give serious thought to our role as early childhood educators in creating a society and an early education system that keeps children's sense of well-being, identity and belonging at its core, in the sure and certain knowledge that these very attributes are the foundation of lifelong emotional happiness and deep level learning. And while this conference takes place on the very small island of Ireland, we are each conscious that we need to look beyond our nation boundaries, especially in this era of forced migration, and recognise that the right to happiness brings with it roles and responsibilities that are global."*

Reflecting other international concerns, she called on all to keep the rights of children and the reality of the work conditions of early childhood educators at the heart of their discussions. Minister for Children Katherine Zappone echoed these concerns and

declared her commitment to tackling the issue of low wages in the sector and her intention to improve and simplify funding schemes.

### Posthumous tributes

Two major early childhood education researchers were remembered. Aline-Wendy Dunlop gave a very warm tribute to **Jerome Bruner** (1915 – 2016) who died earlier this year. In reviewing his life work, she foregrounded his influence in bringing education internationally into the age of socioculturalism and establishing the concept of the competent child, particularly with his theory of the ‘spiral curriculum’. Noting his connection with Ireland, she referred to *The Culture of Education*, written in his holiday home in West Cork, in which he connects the importance of culture and narrative, a theme he championed to the end of his life.

Chris Pascal paid tribute to Irishman **John Bennett** who died last year. John authored a series of reports for the OECD on early childhood education, entitled *Starting Strong: early childhood education and care*. A dedicated advocate for children’s rights, his most recent work with the University of London involved researching public policies for young Roma children, a cause that was very close to his heart. A regular participant at EECERA, his presence is now sorely missed. The first keynote at the conference has now been named the *John Bennett Address*.

### Conference format

The conference involves presentations from internationally renowned keynote speakers but more importantly it’s a forum where researchers, including practitioner researchers, share their research and have an opportunity to learn, challenge, contest and support each other’s work and to continue the struggle to bridge the gap between research and practice. The 2016 conference hosted 189 symposia, each involving 3 research presentations, and they covered an extensive range of topics ranging from children’s health, wellbeing and emotional development to play and the arts in early education to teaching, learning and assessment strategies, management, leadership, partnerships and national policy development. Significantly, we seem to have reached an age where the contribution of parents, families and communities is getting due recognition.

### Researchers and long-term friends of ECCE sector in Ireland

Many of these researchers are long-term friends of the early childhood sector in Ireland.

**Margy Whalley** and the Pen Green research team presented research on children’s transitions and on adult learners.

**Milda Bredykite from Lithuania** has taken a phenomenological approach to her research with children, describing the personal experience of playing with children and highlighting the sense of achievement in making genuine contact with them in play and the challenge of sustaining it. Her video excerpts were delightful.

**Wendy Lee from New Zealand** was there with her colleagues, **Lorraine Sands** and **Tania Bullick**. They shared their constantly developing work

**M**ental health is now number one in terms of the global disease burden... [Hirokazu Yoshikawa from New York University said].

**D**r Anne Looney... proposed that the solution to the problem of education is ... practitioner research that ensures children’s engagement, agency, relationships and an enquiry approach in everyday practice.

**T**he conference theme, Happiness, Relationships, Emotion and Deep Level Learning, reflected a growing international awareness of the centrality of emotions in the learning and development of young children.

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on assessment and the use of the narrative form (Learning Stories) to give feedback to children, as well as their more recent thinking that brings into focus the concepts of co-construction and collaborative learning and the need to move from ‘me’ to ‘we’ in the interest of sustainability into the future.

**June O’Sullivan** has researched the use of pedagogical conversation as a way of sharing learning, an approach that resonates with the concept of professional conversation underpinning the Department of Education and Skill’s (DES) approach to inspection here at home.

**Kathy Silva** and colleagues presented on the economic findings of the EPPSE (effective pre-school, primary and secondary education) study in England, while people like **Stig Brostrom** focussed on educators’ perspectives on children’s learning and **Julia Formosinho** on the documentation of toddlers’ learning.

**Tony Bertram** and **Chris Pascal**, long-term leaders of the EECERA project, presented on the difference parents make to children’s achievement. These were all strong themes throughout the conference.

### Irish research

Ireland was well represented. The Universities, Institutes of Technology and various agencies and projects were there presenting on prevention and intervention programmes, on transition to primary school, engagement of parents, arts projects including ‘artful dodgers’, and equality and diversity initiatives. The outdoors featured strongly, among them a range of presentation from early childhood educators involved in research circles facilitated by Early Childhood Ireland. It was good to see many research alliances in the sector between colleges, agencies and statutory bodies such as the symposium organised by Dr Noirin Hayes of Trinity College with the NCCA and Early Childhood Ireland – a real sense of people working together to improve the lives of children and families.

You can access the abstract book with a brief account of each research project at <http://www.eecera.org/conference/2016/>.

### Keynotes

The first keynote was from **Hirokazu Yoshikawa from New York University**, who conducts work on child development in the United States, Colombia, Chile and Peru. He is involved in developing the global Sustainable Development Goals 2015–2020 with the UN. Mental health, he told us, is now number one in terms of the global disease burden and so they are interested in developing and evaluating programmes that address social and emotional health in very young children and are proven to improve obesity levels, literacy levels and behaviour and cognitive outcomes among the world poor. The presentation was very informative.

In contrast, **Dr. Anne Looney’s** (previously Director of the NCCA; now Director of the Education Institute in DCU) presentation was highly motivational. She described the hedge school era when teachers were valued as ‘imaginative adventurers’ – a term that became a buzz word throughout the conference. She talked about the standardisation that



came with mass education and expanding capitalism and the subsequent movement towards holding education responsible for the world's ills. She quoted Pasi Sahlberg and proposed that the solution to the problem of education is not so much big data research as practitioner research that ensures children's engagement, agency, relationships and an enquiry approach in everyday practice. She encouraged us to be catalysts and counterpoints to the narrowing discourse of education and pointed to the need to build a collaborative, coherent force for change. She left us with an image of Scielg Mhichíl and the Star Wars' blessing: *'May the force be with you'*.

Similarly, the contribution from **Leon Feinstein** (Director of Research at the Early Intervention Foundation, UK) and **Alison Gopnik** (Professor of Psychology and Philosophy at the University of California, Berkeley) were located in very different paradigms and approaches. Leon's job is to identify rigorous research evidence that appeals to policy makers who want to see a return on public investment and of course he finds that this is challenging because children's lives are complex and it's difficult to prove that any one element makes a significant difference. Alison Gopnik's research on the other hand focuses on children's learning strategies and brain development. Her laboratory research shows that when we use a didactic approach with children they imitate what they're taught but when they're allowed to explore and play, they think. Her presentation was entitled 'Against Parenting' and her thesis is that the word 'parent' is not a verb – it's a relationship – and the job of a parent is to nurture the child for what s/he is and let them know they're valued. She says we are not carpenters, shaping children into what we want, but rather gardeners creating good environments so that children can grow and flourish and be themselves. Gopnik is a highly regarded, well published, cognitive scientist bringing a simple message – relationships and play are the generators of human learning and development.

### Accessing Conference Presentations

Early Childhood Ireland has videoed these keynotes and conducted brief interviews, all of which are available on the website <https://www.earlychildhoodireland.ie/eecera-2016-2/>

The online videos, combined with the book of abstracts give insight into the major trends in early childhood research at present. Two very strong trends certainly feature and sometimes conflict: one following big data research and the development of programmes that 'work' to improve educational outcomes and 'narrow the gap' between disadvantaged populations and the more prosperous, and the other that centralises the human processes that are critical to emotional and social health and consequently human learning.

One is inevitably left with the impression that emerging out of this research is the importance of relationships and play for young children because it is through warm, supportive, stimulating relationships and environments that children come to see the world as a place of adventure, respect and love and see themselves as competent, caring and creative.

“ ... it is through warm, supportive, stimulating relationships and environments that children come to see the world as a place of adventure...”

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## CHAPTER 2

### PRIMARY

## PRIMARY Contents

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## The 2016 Primary School Year in Review

The big positive that ran through the year



**By Brendan McCabe,**  
IPPN Board Member and Retired  
Primary Principal

**A** calm and balanced appraisal of significant events in the primary sector in 2016.

Let's start with a big positive – the 1916 flag presentation ceremonies. After all the parades and local ceremonies have died down, this event will have long-lasting results. Every school in the country, islands included, was visited by members of the Defence Forces and given a copy of the 1916 Proclamation along with our national flag. It was impressive logistically, but hugely important in changing perceptions of the flying of the tricolour and what that signifies. Children and teachers will long remember the day the flag arrived in their schools and how they celebrated the occasion.

Unfortunately, the part in the Proclamation about cherishing all the children of the nation equally still rings somewhat hollow. Underfunding remains a problem in many primary schools. The capitation grant is meagre compared to second or third level (€170 for a child in sixth class, €296 when they move into post-primary), leaving many primary schools dependent on local fundraising. The irony is that the Department of Education and Skills (DES) knows that most primary schools will embark on fundraising activities and, in doing so, will keep the ship floating where otherwise it would flounder. So they know they can get away with underfunding primary schools.

Ireland, like most developed countries, has a growing gap between those who have and those who don't. Research tells us that children who live in disadvantaged circumstances will be a full year behind their middle-class counterparts in school readiness by age three, and fifteen months behind by age five. The second free ECCE year for all children is a necessity and its introduction greatly welcome. It offers all children at least limited access to pre-school and so helps level the playing pitch for all children before entry to primary school.

We also need to level the field for our teaching principals, who are doing a job that has simply become unsustainable. They presently have 14–22 days 'release' time from teaching (depending on the number of classroom teachers) to work on all the tasks and responsibilities of school leadership. Teaching principals have two roles to fulfil: full-time



duties as teachers, usually in a multi-grade setting, and full-time roles as school principals. Teaching principals must be given at least one 'release' day per week. Their colleagues in Northern Ireland now get two days.

Another inequity in the system is the ongoing moratorium on filling middle-management posts in schools. The moratorium has disproportionately affected schools with senior staff members who have retired. Many large schools have had their entire management team wiped out, with the exception of the post of deputy principal. Principals' workload is a well-documented issue. For many, their desire to engage with new initiatives, ongoing school development planning, school self-evaluation and mentoring of new staff members has become impossible.

On a positive note for leadership development, it is encouraging that the DES is investing more in this area through the Centre for School Leadership. The CSL is being established for an initial pilot period of three years, with an investment of over €3m over that time. It will be operated on a partnership basis between the DES, the Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN) and the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD). The CSL is intended to become a centre of excellence for school leaders, and the partnership will have many benefits for the profession in terms of quality of training programmes, coordination of provision and increased accessibility. The centre's responsibilities will cover the range of leadership development for school leaders, from pre-appointment training and the induction of newly appointed principals to continuing professional development throughout careers.

There were other announcements during the year, such as the welcome news in January regarding improvements in literacy and numeracy assessments in primary schools. Overall performance in second and sixth class was significantly higher than in 2009. There were fewer lower-achieving pupils in the system and more higher achievers in both English reading and mathematics than in 2009.

The DEIS scheme – one of the success stories in Irish education – began in 2005 and provides increased State supports to over 800 schools in disadvantaged areas. In June the Minister for Education and Skills, Richard Bruton, announced a new Action Plan which will be published before the end of this year aimed at strengthening and supporting the scheme.

Also in June – a good month for primary education – the government announced sanction for the recruitment of a further 860 special needs assistants to work with children with disabilities and difficulties in schools. The move, for which funding will be available by the end of the year, will bring to 12,900 the number of SNAs working in classrooms to support the State's 50,000 teachers.

Droichead remains something of a thorny subject in primary schools. On the positive side, a lot of schools which have engaged with it have found it an excellent means of inducting and mentoring young teachers into the profession. The teachers who have been probated through Droichead have preferred it to the old inspector-based process. So where is the impediment to its adoption? For most principals who have not engaged

Every school in the country was visited by members of the Defence Forces and given a copy of the 1916 Proclamation along with our national flag.

We need to level the field for our teaching principals, who are doing a job that has simply become unsustainable.

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Those contravening the Professional Code of Conduct may, from now on, be subject to disciplinary proceedings.

with it, there appears to be one major problem – workload. If and when union objections to Droichead are resolved, it will probably be primarily through the provision of additional release days for principals, especially teaching principals.

The scarcity of jobs for young teachers coming out of college remains a problem. Redeployment panels seem to absorb virtually all of the permanent positions, leaving young graduates picking at the bones of short-term jobs. Many find it difficult to secure jobs even long enough to complete their probation. The Teaching Council has been looking at teacher supply at first and second level for some time, and is researching how it can best be addressed.

Finally, Part 5 of the Teaching Council Act, on fitness to teach, has been enacted. Those contravening the Professional Code of Conduct may, from now on, be subject to disciplinary proceedings. Normally, though, other than in cases of gross misconduct, this will only happen after local efforts to address the issue have been exhausted.

#### PROCLAMATIONS FOR A NEW GENERATION PROJECT



The "Proclamations for a New Generation" project involved students from Irish primary and secondary schools writing a new proclamation for 2016. This graphic was created from the themes emerging and is quite inspirational as it exemplifies the social consciousness amongst this cohort of students.

In keeping with the aspirations of the 1916 signatories, the theme of equality emerged as the most important topic. In addition, students indicated the environment, education and health were also extremely significant. Students' concerns in relation to homelessness also emerged quite strongly. Other interests included racism, bullying and global warming.

However, the themes are in the main extremely positive and, interestingly, are in keeping with the 1916 proclamation. Irish culture and children's rights also feature.

It is worth taking some time to study the graphic and to interpret for yourself what this future generation is telling us about the Irish society they wish to live in. *Nuala Harding, Lecturer, Athlone Institute of Technology*

# The Centre for School Leadership

Celebrating the first successful year

The Centre for School Leadership (CSL) is celebrating its first successful year and looking forward to further opportunities and wider recognition in 2017. Established in September 2015 as a partnership between the Department of Education and Skills (DES), the Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN) and the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD), the Centre's administration work is provided by Clare Education Centre in Ennis.

Development of CSL came at a difficult time for the Irish education system, which was – and still is – reeling from cutbacks imposed in a long economic recession. Addressing the Annual Conference of European Network for Improving Research and Development in Education Leadership and Management (September 2015), Chief Inspector Dr. Harold Hislop reflected the current situation whilst acknowledging the excellent support provided for school leadership by the professional associations:

*'We have not invested significantly in the professional development and growth of our principals and school leaders in the past.'*

*'A particular success story in the Irish context is the two professional associations of school leaders, the IPPN and the NAPD. They receive modest public funding, but they have enabled extensive sharing of good practice and the provision of co-professional support.'* (Reflection on Leadership Challenges for Irish Schools, September 2015)

The birth of CSL as a three-year pilot coincided with DES's development of the Quality Framework for Schools. The framework has two dimensions: teaching and learning, and leadership and management. Although it does not become part of School Self-Evaluation until 2020, the leadership and management framework underpins the work of CSL. Its four domains – leading learning and teaching, leading school development, managing the organisation, and developing leadership capacity – have informed CSL's work plan and will continue to be used as a guide by the CSL team throughout the pilot.



**By Anna Mai Rooney,**  
Deputy Director Primary,  
Centre for School Leadership

**T**he author explains the context of the birth of the Centre for School Leadership (CSL) and describes a very full and productive first year which saw the introduction of almost 200 trained mentors into the primary and second level schools system.

**T**he pilot project's main remit is to provide quality CPD for school leaders along the continuum of leadership, from aspiring, to newly appointed, to experienced.

The pilot project's main remit is to provide quality CPD for school leaders along the continuum of leadership, from aspiring, to newly appointed, to experienced. CSL recently provided a formally trained mentor to all newly appointed primary principals in Leinster and all post-primary principals countrywide.

The quote from the Wallace Foundation, 'Good principals aren't born, they're mentored' formed the basis of CSL's research into how a formal mentoring programme could enhance and support the role of the newly appointed school leader. The team then developed a mentoring training programme for experienced school leaders.

Lois Zachary's work was used as one significant approach to a mentor training programme, as was work by the Scottish College of Educational Leadership (SCEL), which is collaborating with CSL. The research of the Ministry of Education in Ontario was included by CSL as a very useful source of information about mentoring.

*'Ecologists tell us that a tree planted in a clearing in an old forest will grow more successfully than one planted in an open field. The reason it seems is that the roots of the forest tree are able to follow the intricate pathways created by former trees and thus embed themselves more deeply.'* (Zachary, *The Mentor's Guide*, 2000)

Using Zachary's theory as an introduction, the team, in consultation with an extended team of CSL facilitators, developed a three-day training programme looking at the qualities and skills of an effective mentor, phases of the mentoring relationship, care of the mentor and mentee, management of common challenges, a suite of rules, procedures and protocols, and the importance of support, challenge and vision in the mentoring relationship. A Shared Learning and Celebration Day completed the training for the first 125 primary mentors and 65 post-primary mentors last June.

The mentees attended Misneach One in August, and completed two modules on mentoring in preparation for the mentoring relationship. Feedback has been very positive, and much learning will occur in this academic year as these relationships, based on parity of esteem, progress towards closure in June 2017.

In August, the CSL team engaged in a matching process which will continue after another opportunity for newly appointed principals to attend Misneach One in October. This catch-up day will cater for those unable to attend in August or appointed since the summer. It will result in 150 formal mentoring relationships in the system.

Twelve of the trained mentors will attend further training as CSL cairde. Their remit will be to support a group of seven or eight mentors in their work with mentees. Policy has been developed on this by the CSL team, with confidentiality of the relationship being paramount.

**G**ood principals aren't born, they're mentored'.



The training programme served well as quality CPD for the school leaders, who generously gave of their time to engage in it. Substitute cover by the DES for participants' attendance was essential and much appreciated. Challenges at primary level included school contexts, encouraging teaching principals to engage whilst managing their overwhelming workload, and the shortage of substitute teachers during the 2015/16 school year.

The tapestry of Irish education became apparent in the matching process, as school contexts are so varied. Normal school challenges such as new builds, developing schools, DEIS and amalgamations made the task even more complicated – hence the real need for engagement in the programme by school leaders from all contexts.

The training is being rolled out countrywide this year and is open to all principals who have five years' experience in the role or are within two years of retirement. Access is by application form available on the CSL website at [www.cslireland.ie](http://www.cslireland.ie).

The second remit of the CSL pilot is to provide a coaching service for experienced leaders. CSL has tendered for the services of professional coaches in the six Association of Teachers' Education Centres in Ireland (ATECI) regions. Four hundred coaching places will be available in 2016/17. This service will support principals wishing to move their practice to a higher level or who may be facing a particular challenge in the role. The professional coaches may or may not be from the education sector. The coach facilitates the coachee's learning by allowing them to find the answers within themselves: 'The coachee does not acquire the facts from the coach, but from within himself, stimulated by the coach' (Whitmore 2009).

The third area of focus for CSL is the provision of a new third-level postgraduate course for aspiring leaders. This will replace the very successful Tóraíocht course which has served potential school leaders so well over the years. CSL has tendered for this 18-month Level 9 Post-Graduate Diploma in School Leadership. The programme, which will begin in September 2017, will include elements such as reflective practice, action research, and work placement in a school other than the participant's and in a setting outside of education. Practitioners will be involved in design and delivery. The programme is structured around the Quality Framework for Leadership and Management. It will combine face-to-face and online delivery and will be offered regionally.

Finally, CSL is developing a Quality Assurance Process to quality-assure and benchmark DES-funded leadership provision. During 2015/2016, this was guided by a specially designed template developed by CSL in consultation with PDST. An interim review of the Misneach programme was completed. CSL will be continuing this work to review all PDST programmes and the CPD provided by professional associations.

It is a privilege to be part of this important work, and to be developing and growing support for principals all over Ireland. In the ever-demanding environment of Irish schools, investment in CSL by the DES could not be timelier.

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**I**n August, the CSL team engaged in a matching process which will... result in 150 formal mentoring relationships in the system.

'Our progress as a nation can be no swifter than our progress in education.'  
(John. F. Kennedy, 1961)

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# The Primary School Curriculum in Ireland

## Looking at the Past – Learning for the Future

2016, the centenary of the 1916 Rising – a milestone in the quest for Irish Independence – has proven an apt year for pondering the past. In our reflection we find many resonances between past and present as we negotiate and plan for the future. This is true of the education system, and particularly the primary school curriculum, which has been shaped and reshaped by many over the past 100 years. This article reflects on the key milestones in curriculum development since the start of the twentieth century, examines the context and rationale for these developments, analyses what was considered important for young children to learn at various junctures, and assesses the success or lack thereof in implementing curriculum policy. Four key policy eras are examined:

- » *The Revised Programme of Instruction* introduced in 1900
- » The curricula introduced in the 1920s following Independence
- » *The Primary School Curriculum* (1971)
- » *The Primary School Curriculum* (1999)

### **The Revised Programme of Instruction (1900)**

The *Revised Programme of Instruction* was developed and introduced by the Commissioners of National Education in 1900. As a colony of the British Empire, Ireland had an education policy that was heavily influenced by international developments, and this was no exception. The curriculum replaced the earlier didactic system of Payment by Results and was very progressive. It introduced a wide range of new subjects that focused on developing children's manual and practical aptitudes and on hands-on and discovery-based learning. Particular attention was paid to educating young children, and schools were to be humane and interesting sites of learning.

The radical change inherent in the philosophy and content of this curriculum caused many challenges in its adoption by schools and teachers. The necessary financial and pedagogical supports were slow to materialise, and while some changes did occur in



**By Dr Thomas Walsh,**  
Department of Education,  
Maynooth University

**T**he author examines the four key milestones of the century in primary level curriculum development, looking at them in terms of their content and rationale and their level of success within the schools system.

**T**he revival of the Irish language was seen as central... and the education system was seen as having a central role in that revival.

children's experiences, these fell far short of policymakers' inspiring aspirations.

### **The curricula introduced in the 1920s following Independence**

In the lead-up to achieving political independence, there was much planning to ensure the education system would be much better aligned to Gaelic ideals and sensibilities. The revival of the Irish language was seen as central to asserting Irish identity and building nationhood, and the education system was seen as having a central role in that revival. Consequently, Irish language, history and culture became central to the primary school curriculum (having been largely omitted since the inception of the national system in 1831), and many manual and practical subjects were removed. The Irish language was to be the medium of instruction in the infant classes and to be taught for at least one hour per day in other classes from 1922. Overall, the programme was developed along a nationalist and political frame of reference, as opposed to a pedagogical underpinning that was inspired by the needs, interests or abilities of individual children. A symbiotic relationship developed between the Catholic Church and State from the 1920s, and the education system was heavily influenced by church involvement in the ownership, management and control of schooling.

The radical nature of the changes in the 1920s, especially the Irish language requirements, proved very challenging for many teachers who had little or no competence in the language. Progress in reviving the Irish language through the school system was poor, yet there was no fundamental State reappraisal of the curriculum policy until the late 1960s. The inordinate attention on the Irish language during these years reduced the time and attention for many other subjects, particularly English, and undoubtedly affected the general education of many pupils.

### **The Primary School Curriculum (1971)**

The 1960s witnessed a reconnection between Ireland and the wider world and a move away from the isolation and insulation that characterised the initial decades following Independence. Combined with national influences, the 1960s were characterised by a wide range of educational developments and reforms, including planning for a revised primary school curriculum (commonly known as the 'New Curriculum'), introduced in 1971. In philosophy, tone, content and methodology, it proved to be a radical departure from its predecessor and resonated more with the 1900 curriculum than with those from the 1920s. It was underpinned by a child-centred philosophy, encouraged the use of a wide range of activity and discovery methodologies, and significantly expanded the range of subjects. Its principles included a focus on the individual child, the use of the local environment, integration of subjects and discovery-based learning. This transformed the concept of the child as a learner relative to the preceding curriculum. The additional subjects widened the focus from literacy and numeracy to providing for children's aesthetic, physical, creative and emotional development.

Many teachers found it challenging to incorporate into their practice the radical changes in ideology and content. Again, the proposed supports

**F**rom the 1920s, the education system was heavily influenced by church involvement in the ownership, management and control of schooling.

to help introduce the New Curriculum did not materialise to the degree envisaged, hindering its implementation. While many elements of the curriculum were adopted and implemented, these were evidently not introduced in all schools or classrooms. Most pupils experienced a broader curriculum with the introduction of new subjects, but the change from a didactic to a child-centred and discovery-learning approach proved very challenging for some teachers. There was general consensus that the standards of pupils' English increased after 1971 but that conversely, their competence in Irish decreased as less time was afforded to the subject. The range and depth of work achieved in many of the new subjects introduced in 1971, such as Social and Environmental Studies and Art and Crafts, varied, but evidence suggests that the ambitious curricula set out in these subjects were rarely experienced by pupils.

### *The Primary School Curriculum (1999)*

The *Primary School Curriculum* (1999) was the first curriculum in twentieth-century Ireland that built on the philosophy and content of its predecessor. It represented a development of the best aspects of its predecessor, revising, refining and updating its content, while still solidly based on the philosophy and principles of the New Curriculum of 1971. Ireland's economy grew rapidly from the 1990s, and consequently there was increased expenditure on social services, including a national priority of investment in education. The decade saw key policy and legislative developments in education, and seminal educational documents recommended or supported a revision of the primary school curriculum. The *Primary School Curriculum* (1999) followed almost a decade of development work that included national and international research data and wide-ranging consultation with key stakeholders, including the Department of Education, teacher organisations, parents, school managers and teacher educators. It contained six main subject areas: Irish; English; Mathematics; Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (History, Geography and Science); Arts Education (Music, Visual Arts and Drama); and Physical Education. It was introduced on a phased basis from 1999 to allow schools and teachers to become familiar with its provisions and to prepare for its implementation. Importantly, investment continued to provide resources to support its implementation, including the establishment of the School Development Planning Support (SDPS) and the Primary Curriculum Support Programme (PCSP), showing an understanding that curriculum implementation is an ongoing process, not a discrete, once-off event.

The scope and extent of the primary school curriculum developed in 1999, and the range of initiatives introduced into primary schools in the years thereafter led to widespread complaints of curriculum overload. Evaluations of the curriculum indicated challenges in the use of group work as a methodology, in the use of assessment and differentiation strategies, in providing for subject integration, in the underuse of ICT and in the dominance of textbooks over curriculum documents. Overall, it deepened and extended the child-centred philosophy evident in schools and the range of subjects pupils experienced. The current revisions of elements of the curriculum, by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, will build on the philosophy and content of the 1999 curriculum.

**T**he 'New Curriculum' introduced in 1971 proved to be a radical departure from its predecessor in philosophy, tone, content and methodology.

**T**he Primary School Curriculum (1999) was the first curriculum in twentieth-century Ireland that built on the philosophy and content of its predecessor.

**E**volutionary change and reform prove more steadfast and manageable than revolutionary change.

**T**eachers' professionalism as 'curriculum makers' as opposed to 'curriculum implementers' needs to be recognised in policy development.

### *Conclusion*

Historical analysis has much to offer for our contemporary understanding and future planning of the primary school curriculum in Ireland. Three key themes from the current analysis are worthy of note for future developments. First, the impact of wider societal factors in curriculum development and implementation cannot be underestimated. Political, social, economic, religious, cultural and international influences coalesce to affect what is deemed worth learning and how it is learned in schools. Curriculum policy makers must mediate these influences to ensure pupils' best interests are at the heart of policy development. Second, evolutionary change and reform prove more steadfast and manageable than revolutionary change. Many curriculum changes in Ireland in the twentieth century represented seismic shifts in ideology, methodology and content from preceding curricula. The education system is a large and complex structure that responds better to gradual change, organic adaptation and evolution. Third, curriculum development in the past largely neglected providing for the crucial phases of support and implementation. Policy development was often viewed as the end of the process, with little focus on the supports needed to move from contemporary practice to policy aspiration. Teachers as individuals and schools as institutions occupy the pivotal position of translating the policy vision into reality. Teachers' professionalism as 'curriculum makers' as opposed to 'curriculum implementers' needs to be recognised in policy development to ensure ownership of change and an internalising of new provisions with existing practice.

For further reading on the evolution of the primary school curriculum in Ireland, please see:

Walsh, T. (2012). *Primary Education in Ireland 1897-1990: Curriculum and Context*. Bern: Peter Lang International Academic Publishers.



Suzanne Conneely of the DES Inspectorate presenting at the inaugural IPPN One-teacher School Seminar in Ballinasloe in September 2016.

## Changing Faces in Irish Education

### Creating Opportunities for All Learners in Multilingual Classrooms

While waiting in the departures area for my return flight to Ireland, my attention was drawn to a Lithuanian family. They conversed in their home language until the mother had to deal with an official, to whom she explained their circumstances using basic, key words in English. It was their first visit to Ireland, where they hoped to make a better life for their young family – a girl of about eight and her three-year-old brother. The girl was engrossed in a book. Her brother, excited about the airport and interested in everything around him, continually asked questions, making observations and clarifying his parents' responses. Both children displayed an engagement with language typical of a nurturing background that supports children's development and learning.

I couldn't help but wonder what kind of reception these parents would receive when they applied to their local schools. Would they find a school where the cultural and linguistic background of their avid reader and chatty pre-schooler would be valued and nurtured alongside the language of schooling, or would they be advised to forget their first language (L1) and concentrate their efforts on learning English? Would the advice they received be consistent across and even within these schools? I could only begin to imagine the confusion, anxiety and doubt that these parents, whose children already had significant competence in their home language, would experience in this situation. Would their home language – this tool that is crucial to their children's communication, cognitive development and socialisation skills, to say nothing of their identity and confidence – have to be left at the school gate?

As educators, we know that new learning begins with what learners already know. This is a fundamental principle of the child-centred primary school curriculum (PSC), where 'the child's existing knowledge and experience form the basis for learning' (Government of Ireland, 1999: 8). The language that children have experienced from birth, the lens through which they see and negotiate the world, is an essential component of their knowledge



By Déirdre Kirwan,  
former Primary School Principal

**T**he author explores attitudes in schools towards cultural and linguistic backgrounds of newcomer children and highlights the lack of a cohesive policy within and across schools in this regard. She cites advantages for all students of a multilingual environment and calls for a change of outlook on plurilingualism.

**A**s educators, we know that new learning begins with what learners already know.

**I**n a school environment where everyone is valued, monolingual learners have much to gain from the presence of plurilingual peers.

and experience and a vital asset in their intellectual development and learning.

When children step over the threshold of school, their basic need is to be valued. In responding to this, we must also be cognisant of their greatest tool for learning: their home language. If they are to reach their full potential, they must learn the language of schooling, be it English or Irish, but this does not have to be at the expense of their home language. In fact, greater development of their first language will help them to learn further languages and much more besides. Where the child's home language is welcomed into the process of learning, she uses it to drive her own learning. As she learns the language(s) of schooling, she brings her innate and comprehensive understanding of her own L1 to bear on the process. Far from being a hindrance, this is of enormous support to her, as her home language is 'the cognitive tool that she cannot help but apply to formal learning, which includes mastering the language of schooling' (Little, 2015: 7). The outcome for the child could not be more attractive educationally, as she develops competence in English, Irish and her home language as well as cognitive benefits, reflective and analytical skills, and increased engagement in her learning, each a transferable asset not only to STEM subjects but to all areas of learning.

While it is clearly not possible to teach all L1s present in a school, developing and learning home languages can be supported through parental involvement, parents being 'the child's primary educators, and the life of the home [being] the most potent factor in his or her development during the primary school years' (Government of Ireland, 1999: 24). Parents have expertise in their home language that schools can harness for children's benefit. Encouraging L1 use at home and allowing whatever language that comes naturally to children in school affirms and engages learners in a way that exclusion of their L1 never can. As children develop readiness for literacy, parents, in collaboration with teachers, can provide the written equivalent in their home language of what is being learned in school, all at a level appropriate to the child's stage and rate of development. Incorporating home languages into curriculum delivery ensures that the knowledge children bring with them becomes a valued part of the daily interactions of the classroom. This begins with Junior Infants, where teachers encourage pupils to count from 1 to 5 in all the languages they know, and to use the same languages to compare vocabulary used in topics under exploration; to writing parallel texts in two languages as soon as children show readiness for literacy; through to Sixth Class where pupils produce complex written texts in three, four, and in some cases more languages. Home languages become an asset to be explored in teaching and learning.

Exposure to this kind of learning environment leads to critical thinking, questioning, exploration and the beginning of self-evaluation. Pupils display their understanding of the skills involved in language learning when discussing their competence in listening, speaking, reading and writing in the languages they use. In time, they also begin to appreciate the inter-dependence of these four skills in developing their language proficiency. This awareness leads to increased engagement and self-direction in learning, all necessary components of lifelong learning. It



also affirms their self-confidence, identity and engagement in learning in a way that will support their development ‘as a human being . . . and so contribute to the good of society’ (Government of Ireland, 1999: 7). Neglect of this area may lead to marginalisation and disaffection, with damaging educational and social consequences.

In a school environment where everyone is valued, monolingual learners have much to gain from the presence of plurilingual peers. Experiencing at first hand the positive aspects of expressing oneself in several different ways can lead to outcomes such as that seen at the European Language Label Awards 2016, where a 16-year-old post-primary student showed what could be achieved in his school’s multilingual environment. He engaged with his peers using their home languages, and can now converse in at least six (Léargas: 2016). Development of learner autonomy such as this has also been observed at primary level, where pupils have identified a language they would like to learn, and through interactive communication with native-speaker peers have begun to experience the success that such learning can bring. Equally, when used in an integrated manner with the language of schooling and home languages, the Irish language can acquire increased status in the eyes of learners, who begin using it to communicate.

A whole-school environment where everybody’s language is valued does not require a programme or method for implementation. What is needed is a shift in attitude that allows all languages present in classrooms to be included in curriculum delivery. This approach is eminently suitable for dissemination in schools, but it is important that teachers be prepared for such teaching in the changed landscape of Irish education. An obligatory pre-service module for all student teachers should address not only intercultural issues but specifically the area of language, as it is the conduit through which learning happens and on which success in school depends (Kirwan: 2014). We owe nothing less to our pupils and society.

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## School Placement

Reviewing aspects of the reconceptualised programmes



By Neil Ó Conaill,  
Director of School Placement,  
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**S**chool Placement is a major feature of the revised 4-year BEd programmes for trainee teachers. This component has more than doubled in length and, for the first time, it attributes a key role to the co-operating teacher. The author examines these important changes in detail, their pros and cons, and their feasibility in practice.

The revised 4-year BEd programmes, which commenced in September 2012, included significant changes to the school placement component. These changes centred on a significantly extended duration of students’ time in schools and formal recognition – for the first time – of the role of the co-operating teacher. Now, as the first cohort graduates from the reconceptualised programmes, it is time to take stock of the how both these changes are taking effect.

### Background to changes

When the DES published its *Draft National Plan to Improve Literacy and Numeracy in Schools* (DES, 2010), as an immediate and visible response to the disappointing PISA results of 2009, few in teacher education expected the announcement it contained on Initial Teacher Education programmes. The Plan stated that Initial Primary Teacher Education programmes would increase from three to four years (undergraduate) and to two years (postgraduate) and that 25% of students’ time would be ‘school-based professional development experience’ (DES, 2010:18). Kellaghan (2002) had recommended a move to four years for Primary Teaching undergraduate programmes but his recommendations had been overlooked by successive ministers. The DES announcement came with a target date of September 2012 for commencement of the new undergraduate ITE programmes at primary level.

In June 2011, the Teaching Council followed up the DES announcement with the publication of its *Criteria and Guidelines for Programme Providers* (Teaching Council, 2011). The *Criteria* detailed the requirements to be met for programme accreditation and elaborated on the requirements for the school placement. The significant placement criteria relate to the extended duration of the placement element of programmes and the involvement of the co-operating teacher as mentor to the student on placement, both of which were included in the Council’s draft *Continuum* policy document published in December 2010, which allowed a three month window for response submissions.

Regarding school placement, there is no discernible difference between the December Draft *Continuum* (Teaching Council, 2010), the June Policy on the

*Continuum of Teacher Education* (Teaching Council, 2011a) and the *Criteria* (Teaching Council, 2011). The Teaching Council did not make publicly available submissions made to the Draft Continuum document; therefore, it is difficult to determine the response made at that time by sectoral stakeholders to the increased duration of school placement, and to the formal role of co-operating teacher. This contrasts with the DES approach of making all response submissions to the *Draft National Plan to Improve Literacy and Numeracy in Schools* available on its website.

### School placement replaces teaching practice

The opportunity to reconceptualise programmes was long overdue and the emphasis on the school as a site of student teacher learning as well as student teacher teaching was welcomed. *School placement* extends beyond the conventional focus of teaching practice, and provides student teachers with opportunities to become involved in a range of activities other than whole class teaching. Involvement in team teaching, co-teaching and engaging with SEN provision is now possible, as deemed appropriate by the host school. The extended placement, which has to be a minimum of ten weeks in the second half of a programme, offers opportunities for whole-school involvement and, while extremely valuable for the student and for the school, does demand co-ordination within the school.

### The role of the co-operating teacher

Traditionally the class teachers had no formal role in teaching practice and their exclusion from the teaching practice process has been lamented as missed opportunities (Coolahan, 2001; Kellaghan, 2002); Zeichner *et al* (2015) more stridently declare teacher education programmes which fail to access and harness school-based expertise and knowledge as fundamentally undemocratic. The Teaching Council acknowledged for the first time the significant role that the co-operating teacher could play in supporting the student on placement. The *Criteria* called on co-operating teachers to provide structured support including ‘mentoring, supervision and constructive feedback on practice’ (2011: 15). The *Guidelines on School Placement* (Teaching Council, 2013) elaborated on the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders and helpfully clarified the references made in the *Criteria* to the ‘supervision and mentoring’ role of the co-operating teachers.

To date co-operating teachers’ engagement with the student on placement has been locally negotiated and occurs without clear guidelines (Young and MacPhail, 2016). The *Guidelines on School Placement* give legitimacy and encouragement to the professional dialogue between the co-operating teacher and the student and between the co-operating teacher and the HEI tutor. While both documents represent the first policy acknowledgement of the significant role of the co-operating teacher, linking the caveat ‘*having regard to capacity*’ (Teaching Council, 2013:15) to the support offered by principals and co-operating teachers dilutes the commitment to empowering their involvement. While the *Guidelines* set out the roles and responsibilities of the co-operating teacher (see p. 18 – 20 for the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders) it is vague on resource commitments. In the absence of resources to promote and implement the partnership approach envisaged in both the *Criteria* and the *Guidelines*, the meaningful involvement of the co-operating teacher in professional

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dialogue with the student and tutor remains a laudable but aspirational concept. Encouraging this professional dialogue, while welcome, does not in itself infer competence to implement it. The historic recognition of the co-operating teachers’ expertise is diminished if it remains proclaimed in policy but not facilitated in practice.

### Crisis in capacity

The jump from the 13/14 weeks of placement required previously on the 3-year programmes, to 30 weeks required on the current 4-year programmes (and twenty-four on postgraduate programmes) is significant. Concerns were raised at the time regarding the capacity at primary level to cope with this increase and with the feasibility of introducing a partnership model without extensive engagement with all key stakeholders (Ó Conaill, 2011). Contrast the approach in the Republic with the approach taken by the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI). The GTCNI, in collaboration with schools, produced a Teacher Education Partnership Handbook of which the language has been described as ‘*sensitive and cautious, reflecting the voluntary, delicate nature of the new partnership arrangements*’ (Moran *et al.*, 2009).

With an unregulated number of entrants to primary teacher education programmes (Hibernia College is not subject to a DES enrolment cap), the capacity of primary schools to host students for the duration demanded by the Teaching Council is becoming exceedingly difficult. In the last school year there were 21,724 teachers teaching mainstream classes (DES, 2016), where school placement largely occurs. When one removes from that number those classes that are geographically remote from reasonable student access, classes being taught by non-probated teachers, classes unavailable due to job-share/leave situations and classes deemed by a principal or teacher unsuitable for placement, the number of mainstream classes available for placements reduces significantly. To meet the Teaching Council’s 30 weeks and 24 weeks requirement, approximately 8,600 placements occur annually (O’Neill, 2015). All of the stakeholders involved in arranging and facilitating placements – students, HEIs and schools – are well aware of the difficulties associated with sourcing classes for placement. Imposing a criterion of 30 weeks placement (and 24 weeks at PME level), without investigating the system’s capacity to cater for these placements, has led to the current situation where students and colleges face extreme difficulty in securing classes for placements and schools are inundated with placement requests.

Delivering on the Teaching Council’s expectation that one in every two eligible teachers will host a student on placement is extremely challenging (Harford and O’Doherty, 2016). It is common now for schools to limit placement opportunities to past pupils – if all schools adopt this approach, or if schools decide not to engage with placements at all, how will students amass the placement experience deemed necessary by teachers’ professional body?

Though the ‘past-pupils only’ policy is a seemingly ungenerous approach, it is indicative of the pressure schools are under to host students and invites scrutiny of what has led to this situation. Other teachers will recognise their school as one of the cohort of schools which facilitate students in

each class in the course of the year, without any preconditions relating to the students' origins or competence. Just as students' experience with co-operating teachers varies, so too does schools' participation in school placement, not all of which is related to the school's geographic location.

### Going forward

The capacity crisis and the meaningful participation of co-operating teachers in the placement process need to be addressed. Four recommendations are made, only one of which has a significant resource implication:

#### 1. Reviewing requirement of thirty weeks placement

The requirement for thirty weeks placement (and twenty four weeks on the PME) should be revised. In 2011 the concept of structured induction for NQTs as envisaged in Droichead was not developed. In light of the intention that all NQTs will engage in structured induction from September 2018, it is time to revisit the insistence of thirty weeks placement on initial teacher education programmes. Furthermore, the difficulties experienced by students and providers in sourcing placements, and the difficulties experienced by schools in fielding placement requests, should prompt the Teaching Council to undertake a feasibility study of the capacity at primary level to cater for the level of placement required by the Council.

#### 2. Investing in partnership

The *Criteria* (Teaching Council, 2011) and the *School Placement Guidelines* (Teaching Council, 2013) are significant, and mark an historic first in policy terms, in that they recognise the value of and promote the engagement of the co-operating teacher with the students and with the HEI tutor. Unfortunately the Teaching Council's commitment to involving the co-operating teacher in the placement process has proven to exemplify policy as discourse rather than policy as practice (Green, 2002). Devolving responsibility to the HEIs for the dissemination of Teaching Council documentation (e.g. the *Guidelines on School Placement*), and for the development of mentor programmes for co-operating teachers, questions the understanding of partnership if the operation of the partnership becomes the responsibility of one partner (the HEI) and optional for the other (the school).

**The LINC programme** (Leadership for Inclusion in the Early Years) is a one-year Level 6 programme to train inclusion co-ordinators in early education settings. Costing €5.5 million and funded by the DCYA, the DES and the Dormant Accounts Fund, it will train 900 co-ordinators annually over the next four years. Blending on-site (in nine regional locations) and on-line learning, it is a model which could be replicated to develop the role of co-operating teacher.

A second example of investment in capacity building is the **DES mentoring programme for newly appointed school principals** and a professional coaching service for serving principals targeted to support 400 principals per year as announced in the *Action Plan for Education 2016 – 2019* (DES 2016a). Budget 2016 allocated €7.75 million to strengthen

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**R**eference to school placement in inspection reports would indicate that value is attached to such commitment.

**P**rofessional recognition for participation in partnership is appropriate.

school leadership. Both these initiatives illustrate an understanding of the importance of resourcing capacity building. Similar initiatives are required to ensure that the potential of a partnership approach to school placement is realised. Without meaningful preparation for the role, the potential of partnership will be short-changed as procedural issues rather than pedagogic issues dominate interaction. The policy imperative and the training models exist, funding is required. The Teaching Council's own *Guidelines for School Placement* commits the Council to developing 'national framework for continuing professional development which will underpin some of the professional development commitments included in these guidelines' (Teaching Council, 2013: 18). It is time to fulfil this commitment.

#### 3. Recognition under Cosán

In recognition of the professional development intrinsic in engaging with a student teacher, co-operating teachers' participation in school placement should be recognised as a dimension of teachers' learning as envisaged under Cosán (Teaching Council, 2016). Professional recognition for participation in partnership is appropriate, particularly when assuming the role remains at the discretion of individual teachers.

### DES School inspection Reports

Currently school inspection reports exclude any reference to the participation by schools in school placement. As an indicator of a school's commitment to the profession and to collaborative learning, reference to school placement in inspection reports would indicate that value is attached to such commitment. Such reference would indicate recognition by the DES of its role as a key stakeholder in the placement process.

### Conclusion

Despite the manner in which partnership has been advocated, the willingness of teachers to embrace the opportunities presented by the new models is evidenced in their engagement with students. It behoves the Teaching Council to address the current lacuna in partnership policy (Lynch and Mannix McNamara, 2014) and establish structured and resourced programmes for co-operating teachers so that they can assume the role and responsibilities envisaged in the Council's policy documents. Teachers have illustrated considerable professional integrity and goodwill in their interaction with students on placements and this merits recognition and reciprocation through Teaching Council and DES investment in their professional development.

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An Taoiseach Enda Kenny delivered the keynote address at the IPPN Conference 2016.

## LGB Teachers in Irish Primary Schools

### Ongoing Challenges for LGBT pupils, parents and teachers



By Dr Declan Fahie,  
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The author explores the lived experiences of LGBT teachers working in Irish primary schools, pointing up the competing tension between their professional and personal identities. He looks at reasons for fear – a defining emotion of LGBT teachers – as well as self-reproach for hiding their authentic selves.

*On 19 January 2015, the Irish Independent reported on the case of a primary teacher who was awarded compensation following an interview for the principalship of her school. The teacher had been asked 'What about the homos?' during questioning on the Forum on Pluralism and Patronage by one member of the interview panel, a religious sister. The investigating Equality Officer found this question and others discriminatory, and therefore unlawful, and awarded €54,000 to the teacher.*

Schools are busy places, and school managers are under significant pressure to identify, acknowledge and accommodate the needs of an increasingly diverse school community. For some members of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community, however, schools remain sites of embedded heteronormativity, where sexual 'otherness' is positioned as inappropriate, unhealthy, unwelcome or non-existent (see Fahie et al., 2017). Nonetheless, many schools, both primary and second-level, have worked diligently and sensitively to support pupils, staff members and parents in both recognising and celebrating the myriad of sexual (and other) identities which shape and enrich every school community. The consistent good practice of individual schools and teachers, along with the steadfast support of advocacy groups like Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN) and the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) LGBT Group, for example, has consistently positioned LGBT rights as central to the dynamic interplay between discourses of social justice/human rights and Irish educational systems and structures.

Considerable challenges remain, and the journey towards true inclusion remains long. There has been tangible if modest improvement in the visibility of LGBT people in Irish education, but challenges remain for LGBT pupils, parents and teachers. What follows is a brief exploration of some experiences of LGBT teachers who teach, or have taught, in Irish primary

<sup>1</sup> No members of the transgender community were interviewed for the study which underpins this paper. The author would be delighted to meet with transgender teachers, parents or pupils for future research.

schools, pointing to the competing tension between their professional and personal identities.

### The Legislative Context – An Evolving Landscape

I have previously written on the difficulties brought about by Section 37(1) of the Employment Equality Acts 1998–2011 (Fahie, 2016), which was ostensibly designed to allow institutions or organisations with a denominational ethos (most schools, hospitals, etc.) to protect their religious ethos from being undermined. Gay-rights advocates long argued that this legislation offered a derogation or legal loophole, which in turn crafted a legislative regulatory device that destabilised the occupational security and increased the personal vulnerability of LGB teachers working in Irish primary schools. Because of Section 37(1), LGB teachers said they felt exposed and did not enjoy the same level of legal protections as their heterosexual colleagues. This, they maintained, was inherently unjust and perhaps unlawful.

An absence of choice in relation to their workplace (with over 96% of Irish primary schools having a denominational ethos of some kind) meant that LGB teachers had little option but to work in religious schools. While employed in these schools, they were then subject to the provisions of Section 37(1). On foot of consistent lobbying from groups like GLEN and the INTO, however, amendments to the provisions of Section 37(1) of the Employment Equality Acts 1998–2011 (*Equality (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2015*) were passed on 10 December 2015. These amendments specifically address workplace discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation in organisations like schools and hospitals which have a denominational ethos and are paid for by the public purse. These changes require that any employer who wishes to apply Section 37(1) must satisfy three tests – that:

1. religion is a genuine occupational requirement of the position;
2. the action is objectively justified; and
3. the means of achieving the aim are appropriate and necessary.

While Section 37(1) was not repealed, any action to take place under its remit must relate directly to an employee's conduct and not their sexual orientation. Critically, it also copper-fastens the right to privacy of those who work in religious-run institutions. Despite these amendments, there remains disquiet among many LGB teachers, who feel that denominational schools by their very nature still embody an organisational workplace culture shaped by norms and values which may be inconsistent with and, unwittingly perhaps, anathema to the healthy expression of an LGB identity.

### LGB Primary Teachers – Their Lived Experience

Discrimination of LGBT people in work and in the provision of goods and services remains a considerable problem across the EU (FRA, 2014). In Ireland, despite the changes outlined above, many LGB teachers working in denominational Irish primary schools still experience difficulties negotiating a safe space between their professional and personal identities. For many of these teachers, fear is a defining emotion (Fahie, 2016): fear of being 'discovered', fear of parents' or pupils' reaction, fear of losing

Many schools have worked diligently and sensitively to support pupils, staff members and parents in both recognising and celebrating the myriad of sexual identities

With over 96% of Irish primary schools having a denominational ethos of some kind, LGB teachers had little option but to work in religious schools.

For many [LGB] teachers, fear is a defining emotion: fear of being 'discovered', fear of parents' or pupils' reaction, fear of losing their jobs, and fear that they would be undermined professionally in terms of promotion...

their jobs, and fear that a revelation of their sexuality would undermine them professionally in terms of promotion or permanency. To mitigate these fears, some teachers adopt protective or masking strategies: monitoring their dress, self-censoring their social media profiles, and editing their language (hypervigilance in the use of personal pronouns, for example). Paradoxically, these teachers also reported being particularly fearful of addressing sexuality, in the broad sense, in their classrooms – they believed it could highlight their own sexual identity and increase the likelihood of 'discovery'.

There is also evidence to suggest there are a growing number of LGB teachers who have experienced considerable support from colleagues and principals, who find the experience of teaching in a denominational school enriching, and who have no desire to mask their identities to 'pass' as straight. Younger teachers were more likely to feel this way, but some more mature teachers also said that as they approached retirement they felt increasingly unconcerned about any potential negative repercussions from public knowledge of their sexuality.

Working in a denominational school usually brings an expectation that the teacher teaches religion, as well as a tacit agreement not to actively undermine the religious spirit/ethos of the institution. However, teaching religion can pose a personal or professional ethical dilemma for LGB teachers – as in the case of the Roman Catholic Church, which sees homosexuality as 'intrinsically disordered' (Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2003). Recent research suggests that some LGB teachers experience a type of *psychic dissonance* when teaching religion, deliberately uncoupling their professional obligations from any personal misgivings. The study details how the teachers felt reluctant to seek formal permission from school management to opt out of teaching religion, as to do so, they argued, would draw attention to their personal circumstances (Fahie, 2017).

Interestingly, while a number of LGB teachers considered teaching religion to be their moral duty and saw no contradiction between passing on a faith that traditionally has been hostile to homosexuality, others articulated ambivalence towards their contracted obligation to teach religion. To reconcile this apparent tension, some sanitised their religious instruction, modifying or omitting parts of the programme which they felt contradicted their belief systems. This adaptive strategy was not without cost; many LGB teachers articulated a profound sense of guilt and self-reproach at what they saw as their failure to reveal (expose?) their authentic selves. They felt they were in some way 'letting the side down', and that by not publicly acknowledging their sexuality, they were doing a disservice to LGB pupils and to all members of the school community who had lost the opportunity for positive LGB role models.

### Conclusion

Long-established systems of governance and patronage in Irish primary schools are currently being challenged and destabilised, leading to uncertainty on the shape of the future educational landscape. What is nonetheless clear is that each school must challenge its own praxis and the assumptions and values that underpin it, specifically in respect of



the (r)evolution that has taken place in Irish societal attitudes towards minority sexualities (Healy et al., 2016). To do otherwise is to perform a profound disservice to the hundreds of LGB teachers across the length and breadth of the country.

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**T**eachers reported being particularly fearful of addressing *sexuality*, in the broad sense, in their classrooms – they believed it could highlight their own sexual identity and increase the likelihood of 'discovery'.

## Wellbeing: At the Heart of School Communities

'There is no force so powerful as an idea whose time has come.' *Victor Hugo*



By Angela Lynch,  
Leadership Support Manager IPPN

In recent times there has been a growth in mass consciousness of the importance of emotional wellbeing. For educators its centrality to learning and school improvement is clearly researched and documented. There is strong evidence that children whose wellbeing is high, who experience fewer mental health problems and who have greater connectivity to their school, achieve higher performance outcomes, better attendance figures and fewer instances of early school leaving. There is also strong evidence that social and emotional skills are more significant than IQ for higher academic attainment.

In our schools we encounter few children with serious mental health problems, some children who need support to achieve their goals, and all children who experience distress and anxiety that may very often be overlooked. Many surveys indicate that 20% of children suffer significant anxiety. Teachers have said they are insufficiently trained or lack the necessary skills to deal with children's emotional wellbeing issues, particularly their anxieties.

As educators, we are comfortable discussing areas such as literacy and numeracy. Emotional wellbeing is much less quantifiable. In communication, words account for only 7% of your message. Most comes from the core of your person and from your firmly held beliefs. To communicate from this place, you have to begin by knowing yourself, your emotions, your strengths and beliefs as well as your vulnerabilities and dark places. Only then can you connect with others on a human level. My primary relationship is with myself. All other relationships are mirrors of it. We cannot give to our children what we do not have ourselves. If you yourself are not well, you cannot hope to support others' emotional wellbeing adequately.

As teachers we cannot deal with the problems of the few children with mental health issues. There are professionals specifically trained to do this. Some children require additional supports to help their learning. Schools have very effectively taken on that challenge. Then there are all children whose emotional wellbeing needs supporting. Many schools



Centre for School Leadership Mentor Training in Athlone, June 2016



have taken this on and do excellent work. There are superb programmes and guidelines such as the NEPS guidelines on implementing wellbeing in schools. This is the work on which we must build to ensure that emotional wellbeing is the focus and centre of each school.

In November 2015, a National Symposium entitled 'Emotional Wellbeing at the Heart of School Communities', hosted by IPPN and NAPD, set out to challenge current thinking on how emotional wellbeing is handled in the education sector and to build on existing work. It also set out the importance of primary and post-primary schools embracing the emotional wellbeing of children and staff as a key measure of success. This means establishing and embedding a culture where all children feel safe to express their anxieties and develop resilience to meet the challenges they will face as they go through life. For staff it means acknowledging that they themselves may be experiencing difficulties, and the importance of looking after themselves and supporting colleagues. Consequently, Wellbeing for Teachers and Learners (WTL) was established, a group comprising the Ombudsman for Children, the Teaching Council, National Parents Council, IPPN, NAPD and others to progress work in this area. Whilst home and family are recognised as the primary source of nurturing and support for children, emotional wellbeing is everyone's business and involves the whole community.

The My World Survey (Headstrong 2012) found that the presence of one supportive adult in a young person's life is critically important to their wellbeing, sense of connectedness, self-confidence and ability to cope with difficulties. The adult may be a parent/guardian, relative, teacher, sports coach or youth leader. You as an educator can transform the world. The children in your school will probably not remember what you taught them, but they will remember how you treated them. In a time of initiative overload, new programmes for every facet of societal ills, this is not just another initiative. It is not about being a mental health expert, sorting another societal problem or just about the emotional wellbeing of children. This is about the adults in the school community contributing to a culture that is welcoming, with a shared belief that everyone in that community belongs to something special and great, a culture where the relationship with oneself is acknowledged and supported by personal development, and where meaningful and sustained connections and relationships are central. It is a culture where emotional wellbeing is embedded in everything the school does.

Begin where you are now, with whatever tools are available. You may already work in developing such a culture, or the conversation may not yet have started in your school. Regular conversations with board, staff, parents and students are essential. Starting those conversations may be the hardest part. Remember that the best teachers teach from the heart, not from the book.

'It's impossible,' said Pride.  
'It's risky,' said Experience.  
'It's pointless,' said Reason.  
'Give it a try,' whispered the Heart.

**T**eachers have said they are insufficiently trained to deal with children's emotional wellbeing issues, particularly their anxieties.

**T**he children in your school will probably not remember what you taught them, but they will remember how you treated them.

## Recent expansion of special classes in Irish mainstream schools

'If you build it, they will come?'



**Dr Selina McCoy**  
Research Coordinator at the ESRI  
and Adjunct Professor at Trinity  
College, Dublin.  
**Dr Joanne Banks**  
Research Officer at ESRI

**T**he authors provide analysis of newly published research on 'Special Classes in Irish Schools' carried out by the Economic and Social Research Institute and Trinity College Dublin. The report includes new guidelines for school principals wishing to open a special class.

Special classes have been part of the Irish education system for over forty years. Over the last decade however their numbers have grown dramatically, particularly classes for students with autism. It is now estimated that over 1,000 special classes operate in primary and post-primary schools, a substantial increase in the last 10 years. This expansion has taken place with little understanding of the prevalence of special educational needs in Irish schools and limited knowledge of the gains of students being placed in this form of provision.

The increase in provision has meant increased expenditure with the overall special education budget costing the state €1.5 billion in 2015 and making up 17 per cent of the total education budget. While special classes make up only part of this allocation, there is no real consensus around the benefits of special classes for students with SEN and little consistent evidence that they improve the education of students attending them. The change to this type of provision and the dramatic changes in special education policy increase the relevance of an in-depth examination of the experiences of students in special class settings.

**The aim of this paper** is to analyse the findings of newly published research on 'Special Classes in Irish Schools' carried out by the Economic and Social Research Institute and Trinity College Dublin. This mixed-methods longitudinal study provides a much needed examination of the operation and key features of special classes in Irish primary and post-primary schools. Made up of two distinct reports, this research provides a timely insight into a number of key areas including: whether special classes are the optimum setting for students with different types of SEN, whether special class teachers are sufficiently supported in their role, and whether schools influence the level of inclusion for students placed in special class settings. Based on the research findings, this paper outlines a number of key policy recommendations for the development of special classes in the future.

Ireland is not alone in its lack of clarity around the purpose and function of special classes within mainstream education. Internationally, studies vary widely with findings extremely mixed around the benefits of children being placed in special classes. On one hand, studies have highlighted their effectiveness in increasing the levels of inclusion for students with SEN (OFSTED 2006). Research has shown that students can benefit from special class placement not only because of the appropriate curriculum but also because attending classes with classmates with the same disabilities enhances their confidence and self esteem (Jenkinson 1997). On the other hand, research has identified the ways in which special classes play a role in segregating students. This separation from their peers in mainstream classes is thought to undermine the self-esteem of students already perceived to be lacking the intellectual and physical ability to participate in the normal classroom (Crockett et al. 2007; Griffin et al. 2007; Tankersley et al. 2007). Furthermore, focusing on the attainment of these students in special classes or mainstream settings, studies have concluded that those with disabilities placed in special classes did not achieve better results than those placed in ordinary classes and that the dominant trend was in favour of regular classes (Jenkinson 1997; Hegarty 1993). Comparative studies on special classes are scarce due mainly to the variation in the definition and purpose of these classes in different national contexts.

### What is a special class?

In any discussion of special classes it is therefore necessary to define what is meant by a special class. This research shows however that reaching a definition, even within a single education system, can be complicated with different meaning across different school contexts. Most special classes are sanctioned by the Department of Education and Skills and are the responsibility of the National Council for Special Education. Earlier research (Ware et al., 2013) shows there is a small number of special classes operating without official sanction by pooling resource hours within schools.

Sanctioned special classes always have a reduced pupil-teacher ratio and an allocation of SNA support. In the case of ASD classes, for example, the pupil-teacher ratio is 6:1, while in the case of classes for students with mild general learning disabilities (MGLD) one teacher is appointed for every 11 students and no more than 11 students can be placed in such a class. To retain sanction for a special class, the school must maintain a certain number of students in the class as specified by the retention ratios.

This study used a broad definition of special classes in the national survey of schools that included those with no official sanction. Using this definition the findings show that 0.5 per cent of the primary school population and 1.2 per cent of the post-primary population are being educated in special classes (5.1% and 13% of the population of primary and post-primary students with some form of SEN are educated in special classes). There has been a particular policy emphasis on supporting students with autism especially at primary level where over 60 per cent of these classes are designated for children with autism. In line with Ware et al (2013), this research also found that some schools, and in particular second-level schools, operate informal special classes or classes with no official sanction. Half of those run by second level schools are considered

**Studies have concluded that those with disabilities placed in special classes did not achieve better results than those placed in ordinary classes.**

**Most special classes are sanctioned by the Department of Education and Skills and are the responsibility of the National Council for Special Education (NCSE).**

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**To retain sanction for a special class, the school must maintain a certain number of students in the class as specified by the retention ratios.**

to be informal special classes with some of these classes being used as a low stream class for those of lower academic ability.

With no guidelines on how to establish a special class available at the time of the survey<sup>1</sup>, principals have varied ideas about the purpose of special classes and diverge in the way that they establish and operate these classes within the broader school context. In some schools, special classes – and in particular ASD classes – were seen to offer students a safe haven away from the mainstream environment. In other schools, classes with MGLD designation or the speech and language class were seen as providing a mechanism in which to bring students academically up-to-speed with their mainstream peers. Some school principals felt the objective of the class was to offer both social and academic support tailored to the needs of the students. These findings highlight a number of concerns about the role of special classes in creating difference among students particularly those with lower levels of need in post-primary settings. Schools also have differing approaches to integrating special classes with mainstream classes and to moving students into and out of special classes.

### Guidelines

This report has allowed for the publication of special class guidelines for school principals. By gathering this baseline data it was possible to create a set of guidelines for school principals wishing to open a special class. This important step might reduce the level of variation in how special classes are established and how they function in the wider school. Other areas of support are recommended however including a network of support and an information contact point would provide crucial support for principals in implementing best practice when setting up and running special classes.

### Special class – the optimum setting?

The research sought to establish whether the special class is the optimum place for students with SEN. The findings were mixed. Overall, the findings indicate that the experiences of students in special classes vary widely by type of school and designation of the special class. In particular, qualitative teacher interviews highlight the significance of having a whole-school approach to inclusion and teacher expertise in SEN education to achieve positive student experiences. Students in classes designated for children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) reported the most positive experience. These students were more likely to have tailored lesson plans and were more often integrated with students in mainstream classes. ASD students were more likely to have teachers who emphasised social development in addition to strong parental involvement in the class. The Phase 1 report noted how ASD classes are generally well-resourced and attract lower pupil-teacher ratios. However, there were fewer opportunities to integrate students into mainstream during the school week. Such inclusion seemed more evident where there is a whole-school approach to inclusion and where teachers have gained expertise in SEN.

<sup>1</sup> Guidelines for Setting Up and Organising Special Classes published in 2016. <http://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/NCSE-Guides-Special-Classes.pdf>

There are mixed findings in relation to the experiences for students with medium levels of need in classes with MGLD and speech and language designation. Students in these classes seem to make progress, according to the special class teacher, where teachers have high levels of expertise, feel supported by outside professionals (such as SLTs and OTs) and have support from the school principal and mainstream staff.

Special classes for students with no identified need produced the most negative experience. Students reported feeling stigmatised and had low self-esteem. In some cases parents were not even aware that their son or daughter had been placed in one of these special classes. This pattern is most marked at post-primary level where special classes are more likely to be negatively perceived by the students attending the class and their peers in mainstream.

### The challenges of teaching a special class

The process of allocating teachers to special classes varies considerably, with some principals carefully selecting teachers according to their level of experience and qualifications. In other schools, however, findings show that special class teachers felt ill equipped to meet the needs of students. These findings highlight the increased strain on teachers teaching in special classes where they do not have adequate qualifications and there is a lack of support from the school principal and colleagues working in mainstream classes. The importance of developing strong school leadership when setting up special classes is clear. Although some special class teachers reported feeling isolated from the school, many thought that more support from colleagues could counteract that. The findings suggest that the special class teacher position needs to be held in higher esteem and that perhaps financial incentives may increase the appeal of teaching special classes and promote a higher regard for the position. The findings also show however that teacher capacity greatly improved when they had access to additional professional support or had qualifications specific to SEN. Access to training, both prior to teaching a special class and on an ongoing basis, is critical to enhancing teacher ability and confidence. These findings point to the need to increase teacher capacity and expertise in the area of SEN in order to improve both the social and educational outcomes for students in special classes. It would seem that by helping principals to implement a positive whole-school approach to inclusion results in teachers feeling supported and having greater access to professional development. In addition to teacher supports and access to professional development, the findings raised concerns about the suitability of the curriculum for some students particularly during exam years at post-primary level. Others questioned the value of the curriculum when students were not academically able for the junior and senior cycle programmes. While alternative programmes, such as JCSP and LCA, were available in some of the schools, the findings raise questions over the adequacy of curricular provision for students with SEN, particularly where schools are not in a position to offer these alternative programmes.

**I**n some schools, special classes... were seen to offer students a safe haven away from the mainstream environment.

**T**his report has allowed for the publication of special class guidelines for school principals.

**T**he research highlights how certain special class settings appear to provide a positive environment for students.

### Conclusion

The findings of this research, as outlined in the Phase 1<sup>2</sup> and Phase 2<sup>3</sup> reports, highlight the complex nature of special class provision in Irish primary and post-primary schools. The growth in special classes in recent years has added to the changing profile of mainstream education and SEN provision more generally. One of the primary research questions for this study was whether special classes work for students with special educational needs. These findings suggest that there is no simple answer to this due mainly to the wide variation in the models of special class provision. This variation is deeply influenced by school contextual factors, leadership and the nature of need within the class setting. The research highlights how certain special class settings appear to provide a positive environment for students. The findings highlight the need for greater discussion around how best to provide for the full diversity of need within the school system. In particular, there seems to be policy emphasis on providing special classes for students with ASD raising questions over whether the level of resourcing for students with other types of need is being impacted. Furthermore, greater consideration of the relationship between prevalence of different types of SEN and provision is required.

2 Selina McCoy, Joanne Banks, Denise Frawley, Dorothy Watson, Michael Shevlin and Fiona Smyth, (2014) *Understanding Special Class Provision in Ireland: Findings from a national survey of schools*, Dublin: ESRI and NCSE.

<http://www.esri.ie/publications/understanding-special-class-provision-in-ireland-findings-from-a-national-survey-of-schools/>

3 Joanne Banks, Selina McCoy, Denise Frawley, Gillian Kingston, Michael Shevlin and Fiona Smyth (2016) *Special Classes in Irish Schools, Phase 2: A Qualitative Study*, Dublin: ESRI and NCSE.

<http://www.esri.ie/publications/special-classes-in-irish-schools-phase-2-a-qualitative-study/>



An Taoiseach Enda Kenny attends Celebration of Science showcase



## Educational Disadvantage

### Another False Dawn?

During my teaching career I was employed in two very different settings. Chalk and cheese doesn't adequately capture the contrast. For fifteen years I was employed by the CDVEC at Rathmines Senior College. At that time it specialised largely in repeat Leaving Certificate classes. It was possible to amalgamate Leaving Cert results over two years to maximise points for entry to third-level. My time was devoted to teaching these students. Classes were large, usually 40–50, and it was a case of lecturing rather than traditional second-level teaching. With due respect to friends at third-level, and bearing in mind their other responsibilities, 'taxing' is not the word I would use to describe the task. Coming from a line of school principals stretching back into the mid-19th century, maybe I was genetically programmed to seek promotion at some stage. However, I am clear in my own mind that when I decided to do so in 1984, boredom and the need for a challenge were foremost in my mind – though I'm fairly sure I didn't emphasise the boredom issue to the interview board. Anyway, the County Dublin VEC appointed me to the principalship of Collinstown Park Community College, which was due to open in September 1984. Boredom or absence of challenge was never an issue in the twenty-five years I served there.

Before taking up duty, I was well aware it was an extremely disadvantaged area and acknowledged as such in independent official reports. It had been developed for the purpose of dealing with the huge demand for social housing. Unemployment amongst parents was over 60%. Before the school opened, a survey had measured the educational attainment of adults living in North Clondalkin. Nobody had a third-level qualification, very few had sat the Leaving Certificate and the vast majority had left school at 14 or younger. As a staff we started on a steep learning curve. There was little research available on educational disadvantage in this country, and no organised support mechanism. Fortunately for me, one or two experienced principals in the city were generous with their time and advice. Operating a school in a disadvantaged area is different from the norm, a distinction not widely understood even today, in my view. Happily, the founding members of staff were not only expert at their own jobs but an excellent



By Dr Brian Fleming,  
Retired School Principal

**T**he founders of the State proclaimed a vision of equality of educational opportunity. This vision has been re-iterated by various administrations since.

An objective stated in the Education Act, 1998 is to promote equality of access to and participation in education. Yet we all know there are fundamental inequities in our system. Why is this? And can we expect radical change from Minister Bruton and his government?

*Dr Brian Fleming*

**T**he harsh reality is that the two-tier education system I saw in 1984 was not greatly changed when I retired in 2009.

**I**n January 1919, the Democratic Programme was adopted by the first Dáil Éireann.

**I**t promised 'an intellectual analysis, economic practice and social reconstruction that would have... transformed the independence project into a social revolution.'

group at establishing structures and practices which served the pupils well over the years. We had the advantage of a 'greenfield' situation. Creating a positive culture is far easier than trying to change a deeply ingrained negative one. Support from a particularly understanding CEO of the VEC was also crucial in those early years.

Necessity is the mother of invention, so curriculum initiatives and practical innovations such as a book rental scheme were introduced quickly. We had our successes along the way. Past pupils returning to join the staff is one that stands out. From early on, glossy official reports began to arrive in my office which identified educational disadvantage as a national priority and held out hope of a serious commitment to tackle inequality in our education system. Green Papers, White Papers, analyses of the social divide in access to third-level education, National Wage Agreements, Report of the National Education Convention and myriad others adorned my office. By the time I left, two long shelves were groaning under their weight. There were policy improvements over the years and it would be unfair to suggest otherwise. Yet the harsh reality is that the two-tier education system I saw in 1984 was not greatly changed when I retired in 2009.

Why this was so clearly the case perplexed me, so in 2010 I enrolled at the School of Education in UCD to do further study. I was really seeking answers to satisfy myself rather than anything else. The 1916 Proclamation seemed a good place to start, but given our idiosyncratic education system I delved back into the 19th century. The book which resulted from my research is *Irish Education, 1922–2007: Cherishing All The Children?* (details at: [www.educationhistory.ie](http://www.educationhistory.ie)).

A section of the Proclamation that is often referred to states:

*The Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunity to all its citizens, and declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and of all its parts, cherishing all the children of the nation equally.*

In January 1919, the Democratic Programme was adopted by the first Dáil Éireann. It was quite explicit:

*It shall be the first duty of the government of the republic to make provision for the physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing of the children, to secure that no child shall suffer from hunger or cold from lack of food, clothing, or shelter, but that all shall be provided with the means and facilities requisite for the purpose of education and training as citizens of a free and Gaelic Ireland.*

As Brian Farrell describes it, 'this was the rhetoric of progressive social democracy' and it promised 'an intellectual analysis, economic practice and social reconstruction that would have revolutionised early twentieth-century Ireland. It would have transformed the independence project into a social revolution.'

My approach was to assess what happened after 1922 in the light of the objectives that policy-makers set for themselves rather than what I might

think was appropriate. It became clear that the policy objective of equality of educational opportunity was reiterated right through the period under review. In implementing the policy, however, three distinct phases emerged. During the first period, until 1959, no serious effort was made to implement the policy. In fact, opportunities to take steps in that direction were rejected because of political considerations, particularly a fear of upsetting the status quo of Church domination of the education system. The second phase lasted for two decades from 1960. For about eight years in the 1960s, education became a primary focus of government policy for the first and only time since Independence. This was for economic reasons rather than social justice. However, considerable reform was introduced. At the same time, the intractable nature of some problems in achieving equality of educational opportunity was not recognised. By the time keen observers were pointing this out, government attention had moved on. The second half of this period was marked by a contest over control of education, which has been a striking feature of Irish education to date. The third period, from 1980 to 2007, was notable for the wide-ranging policy discourse including publications by government and various research institutions, comprehensive consultation involving the groups engaged in education provision, and an unprecedented amount of legislation. Equality of educational opportunity was again a prominent objective throughout.

It is true that the concept of equality of opportunity was not clearly defined until 1998, but Ireland was not unique in that. The Education Act of that year clarified the national objective: 'to promote equality of access to and participation in education and to promote the means whereby students may benefit from education.' Clearly we are far from achieving that vision. So if the ideals of 1916, further clarified in 1998, have not been realised, the question is why. In an attempt to answer it I interviewed thirty-three people: experienced politicians who had served in the Department of Education, former senior department officials, trade unionists, representatives of management bodies and parents' organisations, education correspondents and academics. A wide range of conflicting opinions might be expected from such a group, but there was much agreement on the main issues. In the space available I will attempt a summary.

At one level there is what might be described as cultural and systemic issues. The history of education in Ireland since the 19th century inevitably impacted on the culture of the DES from its foundation in 1922. The Department has never really been in control of policy formation. For a long time it was not even the leading player in this regard. The constitutional provisions in relation to education circumscribe the role it can play, though some would argue that the Department has been over-enthusiastic in using these to disavow responsibility, as in the case of the courageous Louise O'Keeffe and other victims of abuse. So, after a period where it deferred to the Church authorities in determining policy, the state flexed its muscles briefly in the 1960s. Since then, the view of one long-time politician of the period is that the Department's ambition was always to 'juggle the interest groups and keep everyone happy'. This reflects the general consensus of those interviewed. The post of Minister for Education is not seen as high-status in political circles. It is more a role that one passes through either on the way up or down. Between 1981

Until 1959, no serious effort was made to implement the policy... because of political considerations, particularly a fear of upsetting the status quo of Church domination of the education system.

The Department has never really been in control of policy formation...

The Department's ambition was always to 'juggle the interest groups and keep everyone happy'.

The teacher unions are described as having a virtual veto over policy initiatives.

Significant change is likely to occur only through exceptional political leadership.

Is Richard Bruton another Patrick Hillery?

and 2007 the average tenure of an occupant was twenty-one months. The same relatively low standing applies in administrative circles to the ranking of departments: the DES is not viewed as a strategic policy-making organisation. Someone with extensive experience described a reactive approach to forming policy with a strong tendency 'to patch things up more so than in other departments'. In forming policy, the DES consults with a wide range of 'education partners', some with far more influence than others. The teacher unions are described as having a virtual veto over policy initiatives, whereas those who might reasonably be expected to prioritise pupil interests above every other consideration – parent and student organisations – are seen to have far less impact.

Insofar as all have some part in determining policy, it is important to bear in mind that these are all representative bodies with members throughout the country and the educational system. One experienced negotiator summarised the social partnership process for me: 'There had to be something in it for everyone.' In such a circumstance, a decision to apply a pupil-teacher ratio throughout the education system, for example, was always going to take priority over targeting resources to those most in need. While regular consultation with education partners is desirable, we must bear in mind the cautionary observation of Basil Chubb that 'a close relationship between government and pressure groups tends to become a closed one'. Nowhere is this more clearly illustrated than in the case of the Educational Disadvantage Committee which was formed on a statutory basis from 2002 to 2005. It contained a high level of genuinely independent expertise which seemed threatening to some. So when a latter-day Sir Humphrey Appleby set about removing it from the policy arena, there was a notable lack of protest from education partners and the political arena.

The historical trajectory has also impacted on the role of political parties. Until the 1960s they also left educational policy formation to the bishops (the Labour Party being an occasional exception) and rarely, if ever, debated what the priorities should be. Nowadays they seem unable to shake the habit. So at election time the various manifestos endeavour to outdo each other in incorporating as much as they can of the wishes of the different interest groups without subjecting them to any serious analysis. Detailed costings are avoided totally or tend to be of dubious validity.

Failure to make more progress towards nationally declared objectives can be blamed on successive political and administrative leaders. At a deeper level, however, the question arises of what Irish society wants. At election time education does not generate great interest or debate. There is no evidence that it affects how people vote. We are all concerned about our children and young people and those in our wider circle of family and friends, but the same concern doesn't extend to those in wider society. It's almost as if children and young people are viewed as adjuncts to their parents rather than as citizens in their own rights who have entitlements. The fact that our education system is failing so many does not seem to prompt significant disquiet in the general community. So, significant change is likely to occur only through exceptional political leadership. Of course, it is always possible that somebody will come along to challenge the status quo. Is Richard Bruton another Patrick Hillery?

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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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A photograph of two young women in school uniforms. The woman on the left is wearing a green sweater over a striped shirt and has a name tag that says 'Niamh'. She is holding a white smartphone. The woman on the right is also wearing a green sweater over a striped shirt and has a name tag that says 'Niamh'. She is looking at the phone. The background is a blurred green field with trees. The text 'CHAPTER 3' is overlaid on a teal background in the top right corner.

## CHAPTER 3

## SECOND LEVEL

## SECOND LEVEL Contents

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## Post Primary Education in Ireland: 2016

The thoughts of a retired but interested observer!



### By Ferdia Kelly

former secretary general of the  
Joint Managerial Body

In this insightful article, Ferdia Kelly discusses major trends and issues of the year in education including industrial unrest, centrality of the learner, making ends meet, pressure on principals, resistance to junior cycle reform, faith based education.

It's amazing how quickly one diverts one's attention from an area which a few months earlier absorbed all one's thoughts and most of one's actions. Since retiring in December last after over forty very fulfilling and enjoyable years in the world of education, I have become an observer of developments in general without having to become familiar with too much of the detail.

### Industrial unrest

At the time of writing, the voluntary secondary and community and comprehensive sectors are going through a very difficult period of industrial unrest. It is everybody's wish that a solution can be found through negotiations so that teachers can return to doing what they do best – providing quality learning opportunities for this generation of young people. Issues that lead to the withdrawal of teachers from the classroom are always complex, but the need to provide continuity of teaching and learning for pupils is a goal that must focus minds and lead to an early resolution.

### New Minister: a very experienced politician

2016 has been a difficult year in other ways as for a number of weeks in the early part of the year we had a caretaker government in place as the political parties came to terms with the outcome of February's General Election. As we all know, a minority government was eventually elected and Richard Bruton, T.D., was appointed Minister for Education and Skills. With a very experienced politician in the Department, it was hoped that we would see a period of stability in education as the system recovered from the recession and the impact of the severe decrease in resources, both human and financial.

### Action Plan for Education and Training 2016 – 19

An Action Plan for Education and Training 2016 – 19 was launched in mid-September with a number of very welcome targets to promote improvements in the education system at all levels over the next three years. A cursory examination of the introduction to the Action Plan 2016 –19 identifies targets such as, 'To create the best education and training system

in Europe’ and ‘to provide an education and training system that equips learners with the knowledge and skills that they need to achieve their potential and to participate fully in society and the economy’, which all of us readily support. Further on the Action Plan refers to the ‘delivery of high quality education and training experiences which will make best use of resources and will lead to improved accountability’.

My disappointment with the Action Plan lies in the absence of an overarching vision for the Irish education system which speaks of the learner at the centre as outlined in the following quote which the Chief Inspector, Dr Harold Hislop, shared with the audience at the Joint Managerial Body Education Conference in September 2014: ‘Learning is about developing young people and setting them on the road to learning for life’. Dr Hislop emphasised that education focuses on the ‘rounded development of the individual’, and ultimately ‘it’s about enabling young people to lead lives as full and productive citizens – economic contributors, yes, but much more than that’. Let’s hope the next three years sees the ‘much more than that’ becoming the focus of attention in our education system.

In the Action Plan 2016 – 19 the following areas are highlighted:

- » The publication of a DEIS Plan by the end of 2016
- » Improvements in subject choice through assisting schools to extend their curriculum with subjects such as Coding and Mandarin being introduced.
- » Mental Health and Wellbeing – with a national programme being rolled out with guidelines being issued to all primary and post-primary schools
- » A Parents Charter and a Learners Charter will be published
- » Costs – measures to reduce costs for parents in areas such as school uniforms and books
- » Leadership supports through the Centre for School Leadership in areas such as mentoring, coaching and a postgraduate qualification.
- » More hours available for teacher Continuous Professional Development (CPD)
- » The development of an inclusion support service in the area of Special Educational Needs (SEN)
- » A school building programme geared at providing 60,000 additional permanent school places
- » Wider access to Teacher Education from particular groups in Irish society such as the Irish Traveller Community.
- » An education strategy for Gaeltacht areas.

### Too many losses

Action Plans such as the one for education are laudable and one hopes that the very worthy goals will be delivered. However, until the loss of resources during the recession in areas such as an 11% reduction in the capitation grant to schools, a reduction in the pupil teacher ratio including the loss of guidance hours, the loss of specialist teachers in areas such as Traveller Education, a 15% reduction in the provision of Special Educational Needs hours, the loss of middle management posts due to a strictly applied and

**O**ver 70% of school principals have less than six years’ experience in the role, indicative of an alarming early retirement rate among principals.

**A** major transformation in the approach to school management in post-primary schools is urgently required.

**A** policy pause is required for the next five years to provide an opportunity for developments currently in the system to be embedded.

**V**oluntary secondary schools... are funded by the State on a lower level than schools in the other two post-primary sectors.

rigid moratorium etc, are restored the education system will continue to struggle. Such losses cannot be sustained and resources must be restored. Otherwise the use of flowery language in an Action Plan in aiming ‘to create the best education and training system in Europe’ will continue to be pie in the sky and a source of great frustration.

### Fundraising for survival

Research in the voluntary secondary sector has consistently shown that 30% of the annual expenditure in a typical voluntary secondary school must be raised through local fundraising such as school walks and voluntary contributions. Try to tell the management, staff and parents in voluntary secondary schools that we are aiming to have ‘the best education system in Europe’, when they have to fund-raise each year to keep the lights and heat on. The challenge for voluntary secondary schools is even greater when one realises that they are funded by the State on a lower level than the schools in the other two post-primary sectors. There is no doubt that the issue of appropriate resources for schools must be addressed immediately.

### Undue pressure on school principals

The challenge of making ends meet is one of the numerous pressures that school management and, in particular, school principals must deal with. The extent of the pressure on school principals is starkly highlighted when one reflects on recent research in voluntary secondary schools which illustrates that over 70% of school principals have less than six years’ experience in the role which is indicative of an alarming early retirement rate among principals. The announcement in Budgets 2016 and 2017 of the appointment of additional deputy principals and the restoration of some posts of responsibility is most welcome. However, a major transformation in the approach to school management in post-primary schools is urgently required. What is certain is that principals cannot sustain the workload especially the challenge of coping with a deluge of policy and other initiatives. The proposals set out in the publication in 2015 of *Management Structures for Post-Primary Schools* by the three post-primary management bodies, the Joint Managerial Body, the Association of Community and Comprehensive schools and the Education and Training Board of Ireland, must be implemented. In addition, a policy pause is required for the next five years in order to provide an opportunity for the developments currently in the system to be embedded. What is known is that school management wishes to lead teaching and learning, but is not facilitated to do so by the current system.

### Hindering of new Junior Cycle programme

It is a matter of great regret that the introduction of the proposed new Junior Cycle programme continues to be hindered by the refusal of the members of the Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland (ASTI) to support aspects of the programme especially in the area of the classroom based assessment of their own pupils. There’s no harm in reminding ourselves of the five main principles which Minister O’Sullivan set out in May 2015 as the basis of any change in the approach to teaching and learning at Junior Cycle:



- » The need to recognise a wide range of learning
- » A requirement to considerably reduce the focus on one terminal examination as a means of assessing our students
- » The necessity to give prominence and importance to classroom based assessment
- » Greater professional collaboration between teachers to be a feature of our schools
- » Both parents and students to get a broader picture of each student's learning throughout the whole of Junior Cycle.

### Frustrating and unacceptable

In an age when our students are faced with many new and exciting challenges when moving on to further study or the world of work, it is most frustrating and unacceptable that the education system they are experiencing in the first stage of second level has been with us since 1989. When one considers that many of the careers with which young people currently in the Junior Cycle phase will engage have not yet been created, one has to be very disappointed at the way the education system is failing them. This situation cannot be allowed continue, particularly when you have the stark prospect of students following the Junior Cycle programme in one type of school system receiving an assessment based on internal and external modes of assessment and other students in schools operating under a different system being seriously disadvantaged through being assessed through the traditional external model only. Let us remind ourselves that ultimately our education system must serve the needs of our students through relevant and quality learning opportunities. We cannot allow the current impasse to continue.

### Faith based education

The future role of faith based education in an ever increasing secular society is an area of debate in Ireland. One of the notable features of the debate is the reality that 96% of primary schools in Ireland are faith based with 50% of the post-primary schools being denominational in character. Every school has its own ethos or characteristic spirit. Catholic schools are challenged to give expression to their characteristic spirit through the lens of the Catholic faith, i.e. an invitation to allow Catholic faith to inform the values and traditions that are lived out on a daily basis in schools. Catholic schools can usefully focus on the following principles as a resource in supporting their ethos:

- » Catholic schools continue the work of Jesus the teacher
- » Catholic schools are part of a living tradition
- » Catholic schools respect both faith and reason
- » Catholic schools integrate Religious Education in the curriculum while providing opportunities for catechesis
- » Catholic schools give expression to the teachings of the Second Vatican Council
- » Catholic schools educate to intercultural dialogue

Where does such a value system stand in a society where more and more people find that they can live without any reference to God? Pope Benedict

**T**he refusal of members of the ASTI to support aspects of the [new Junior Cycle] programme ... is a matter of great regret...

“ Education is the kindling of a flame, not the filling of a vessel” *Socrates*

clearly identified the challenge for Catholic schools today as ‘speaking about God to people who no longer know where to find Him’.

Archbishop Diarmuid Martin cautions us about becoming uncertain and having a fear of witnessing to our faith in the structures of society and a fear of offending others. The challenge for Catholic schools is to engage with their school community to develop an understanding of the relevance of the founding intention of the school to the current reality for the people in the school community today. We can no longer take it for granted that parents will want to choose Catholic schools for their children and that is fine as long as we provide parents, as the primary educators of their children, with the opportunity to choose a Catholic school into the future. Simply providing the opportunity is not enough, we must also make it clear to them as to what the Catholic school stands for and at the same time display a willingness to welcome students from a diverse range of backgrounds including other faith traditions and none.

### A challenge and an opportunity

The future for Catholic schools in Ireland is one of great challenge, but it also offers opportunities for Catholic schools to clearly show a commitment to living out a set of values based on the Gospel of Jesus Christ. There is no doubt that the next twenty years will see rationalisation and change in the diversity of provision of schools at both primary and post-primary levels. The challenge for Catholic schools is to ensure that they offer students and parents an education process that is clearly based on the Gospel of Jesus Christ and at the same time relevant to the lives of the members of the school community.

Socrates said that, ‘Education is the kindling of a flame, not the filling of a vessel.’ Let us hope that schools in Ireland will strive to provide opportunities for our young people to light many flames in their hearts and minds in 2017.

**T**he education system [which students] are experiencing in the first stage of second level has been with us since 1989.



## Leadership in Partnership

A vision for teachers' professionalism in the 21st century

Every day in Ireland, parents and guardians leave nearly a million children and young people in the professional care of teachers. Why do they do this? Firstly, because we have a deep cultural and historical regard for education and its capacity to empower us to transform our lives. And, secondly, because we trust teachers.

Teaching is one of *the* most important professions in society, if not the most important. All other professions and all other pathways of progress in life depend on good teaching. In Ireland every citizen spends an average of 14,000 hours being taught by teachers. No other profession comes close to having such a deep and lifelong impact on our personal and social well-being and progress. Simply put, teachers matter, and they matter a lot.

Meanwhile, the teacher's job is becoming ever more complex and challenging in our fast-paced digital world. Consider this extract from an OECD publication cited by Prof John Coolahan at the International Forum of Teaching Regulatory Authorities (IFTRA), held in Dublin in June this year:

*'Teachers are central to schooling... They must be in the vanguard of innovation, including the informed, judicious use of ICT. Teachers must work in collaboration with colleagues and through networks, as well as through active links with parents and the community. This calls for demanding concepts of professionalism: the teacher as facilitator; as knowledge expert individual; as networked team participant, oriented to individual needs; engaged both in teaching, and in research and development.'*

That conference demonstrated clearly how vital a high-quality, supported teaching profession is to society's overall well-being, including social and economic progress. But it also emphasised that teachers cannot take on all these challenges on their own, hence the use of the phrase 'leadership in partnership' as the conference theme.



By Tomás Ó Ruairc,  
Director of the Teaching Council

**T**he importance of teaching as a profession, the valuable and complex job of a teacher, the Teaching Council's mandate and its various initiatives including the Fitness to Teach complaints process which commenced formally in July 2016, are discussed and clarified in this article.

**I**n Ireland every citizen spends an average of 14,000 hours being taught by teachers.

**T**he teacher's job is becoming ever more complex and challenging in our fast-paced digital world.

**F**ÉILTE offers teachers a space to showcase their innovative practice to fellow professionals, parents and the wider public.

### The Teaching Council's role

The Council has a dual mandate in law – to promote and to regulate the teaching profession. Its remit covers each phase a person goes through after deciding they want to become a teacher. We are responsible for advising the Minister on the standards of entry for admission into programmes of Initial Teacher Education. We also periodically review and accredit all programmes of Initial Teacher Education. Without the Council's accreditation, graduates of those programmes could not become registered teachers. The Council is also responsible for the induction and probation of all newly qualified teachers (NQTs). We recently established the first national framework for teachers' learning (CPD), Cosán. And since 25 July 2016, the Council is charged with addressing complaints against registered teachers under a Fitness to Teach process.

### What else does the Teaching Council do?

#### FÉILTE (Festival of Education in Learning and Teaching Excellence)

On the first Saturday in October each year, the Council hosts FÉILTE to mark World Teachers' Day. FÉILTE is first and foremost a celebration of great teaching by teachers. FÉILTE also offers teachers a space to showcase their innovative practice to fellow professionals, parents and the wider public. In 2015, over 1,000 people attended. It included over 50 showcases of professional practice, Teachmeet, Researchmeet, Rang Bianca and panel discussions. Keynote speakers included the noted psychologist Maureen Gaffney, and motivational speaker Mark Pollock.

#### Droichead

In March this year we formally launched an integrated induction framework for NQTs, called *Droichead* (Irish for *bridge*). This programme was designed in collaboration with the teaching profession to reflect the importance of induction for new teachers as they transition from college to classroom. It is a formal welcome for NQTs into the profession by their more experienced colleagues. Droichead is scheduled to be the recognised route of induction for all new teachers from September 2018, subject to the required resources and supporting actions being in place.

#### Teachers' learning

Cosán (Irish for *path*), the national framework for teachers' learning, emerged from a comprehensive consultation which began in October 2014 with members of the teaching profession. In a unique approach, the Teaching Council did not prepare a draft document in advance. Instead it sought out the views of the profession to inform the content, language and structure of the initial draft from its very inception. The final framework document was adopted by the Teaching Council and launched in March this year.

The next phase in Cosán's development is to allow space and time for different approaches to be explored, trialled and adapted in different contexts. This will involve teachers exploring how Cosán can work best, both for them as professionals who wish to learn, and for the quality of

their students' learning. It began in April this year and is set to conclude in 2019, before implementation in 2020.

### ***Fitness to Teach***

Another major development in the Council's mandate, as it relates to regulating teachers' professional conduct, was the formal commencement in July this year of the Fitness to Teach complaints process. This means that complaints relating to professional matters can be made against a registered teacher to the Council.

I would like to stress that Fitness to Teach is about improving teaching, not punishing teachers. For this reason, it includes a number of options where findings are made against a teacher, ranging from advising, admonishing or censuring the teacher, to requiring the teacher to comply with conditions as part of their registration; for example, attending a professional learning programme. On the other hand, if very serious charges are proven, the sanction of suspension, or removal from the Teaching Council Register, will be available to the Council's disciplinary panels. These provisions are in line with those of other professional standards bodies, such as the Medical Council and the Nursing and Midwifery Board.

For its part, the Council will ensure that the Fitness to Teach complaints process will be fair and balanced for all involved – those who make complaints, and teachers against whom complaints are made. Given the progress that teachers and other stakeholders have made in enhancing professional standards through the Teaching Council, we should all approach Fitness to Teach in the same responsible spirit.

### **Collaboration**

Collaboration between teachers is essential to realising the full potential of teaching and learning for our overall well-being, and achieving social and economic progress. It takes space and time for any group to work well together. We must therefore explicitly acknowledge and value teachers' learning as a hallmark of their professionalism.

As the Teaching Council acknowledges in our current Strategic Plan, we understand that we have a responsibility to facilitate the national conversations that will underpin this process. We believe that these conversations will enhance the quality of learning experience for all learners in our education system, teachers and learners alike. We look forward to engaging with you as part of this process.

**D**roichead is scheduled to be the recognised route of induction for all new teachers from September 2018, subject to the required resources and supporting actions being in place.

**F**itness to Teach is about improving teaching, not punishing teachers.

## Wellbeing Curriculum at Junior Cycle 2017

The positive significance of this new curriculum



**By Betty McLaughlin**  
Wellbeing Team Leader,  
Junior Cycle for Teachers,  
Department of Education and Skills

**T**he many important benefits of wellbeing are outlined here leading into the watershed moment in September 2017 when a new area called Wellbeing will become a central part of the student experience at Junior Cycle with the focus switching from mental ill-health to building strengths and capabilities.

Everyone in the field of education has long known that learning and wellbeing are inextricably linked, that students learn best when their wellbeing is optimised, and that they develop a strong sense of wellbeing when they experience success in learning.

**Happy, healthy and confident young people are vital in securing a strong future for Ireland**

Schools are only too aware that students with high levels of wellbeing make better learners — they demonstrate more effective academic, personal and social functioning and generally behave more appropriately at school. Parents and guardians have the most significant impact on their child's wellbeing, so their participation in school activities is welcomed and encouraged. Not only do confident, resilient, emotionally intelligent children perform better academically, these skills can also contribute to strong social bonds and supportive communities, and to maintaining healthy relationships and responsible lifestyles.

In turn, the Department of Education and Skills (DES) recognises that schools play a vital role in promoting the social and emotional development and wellbeing of young Irish students. This is why the new Junior Cycle curriculum, with its focus on wellbeing, will be introduced in Irish second-level schools from September 2017. The DES recognises that resilience and wellbeing are essential for students' academic and social development. It is therefore introducing a curriculum that acknowledges this and focuses on providing safe, supportive and respectful learning environments. The DES's objective is to ensure that student resilience and wellbeing are a priority in curriculum delivery and in all aspects of education policy and practice in the Junior Cycle curriculum.

**Wellbeing is both central to learning and an outcome of it, characterised by feeling well and functioning well**

In numerous research studies students themselves have identified school as a key influence on their wellbeing. Whether it is a great teacher, an inspirational classroom lesson, or that extra support



the guidance counsellor provided at just the right time, there is no doubt that a student's experience at school has a significant impact on their wellbeing.

Students play a powerful role in developing and maintaining a safe school. They can contribute positively to the wellbeing of all students in the school, their families, and members of the broader community. By taking responsibility for their own safety and wellbeing, and those of others, students develop a sense of connectedness and add meaning and purpose to their lives.

### Wellbeing is enhanced when it is embedded in the curriculum and becomes a whole-school responsibility

Promoting the mental health and wellbeing of all young people is a vital part of the core business of teachers and guidance counsellors, who create a supportive school environment that is conducive to learning. Students with well-developed social and emotional skills find it easier to manage themselves, relate to others, develop resilience and self-worth, resolve conflict, engage in teamwork and feel positive about themselves and the world.

The new Junior Cycle framework connects the elements of curriculum, environment, policy and community that enhance wellbeing for learning and life — complementing the exceptional work already happening in Irish schools. It identifies ways to support students and will be a useful, important and practical resource for Irish second-level schools to improve outcomes for all students.

### The Junior Cycle as we know it is coming to an end

September 2017 will be a watershed moment in Irish education. For the first time in our education system, a new area called Wellbeing will become a central part of the student experience at Junior Cycle. The pillars for wellbeing will be delivered directly by PE, SPHE, CSPE and Guidance, but in all subjects students will be learning for wellbeing as teachers apply key skills, wellbeing indicators, and principles of learning in all classrooms. The Draft Guidelines on Wellbeing (NCCA, 2016) acknowledge that learning and wellbeing are inextricably linked and identify the school's role as central to supporting students learning about and for wellbeing. In doing so, the emphasis will switch from a focus on mental ill-health to building strengths and capabilities.

The Wellbeing principle provided for in the Framework for Junior Cycle 2015 is one of eight fundamental principles. Learning will focus on eight key skills, underpinned by the following eight principles for Junior Cycle education:

- » **Quality**  
All students experience a high-quality education, characterised by high expectations of learners and the pursuit of excellence.
- » **Wellbeing**  
The student experience contributes directly to their physical, mental, emotional and social wellbeing and resilience. Learning takes place in

**P**arents and guardians have the most significant impact on their child's wellbeing.

**S**chools play a vital role in promoting the social and emotional development and wellbeing of young Irish students.

**B**y taking responsibility for their own safety and wellbeing, and those of others, students develop a sense of connectedness...

**S**tudents with well-developed social and emotional skills find it easier to manage themselves...

**T**he new Junior Cycle framework connects the elements of curriculum, environment, policy and community that enhance wellbeing.

a climate focused on collective wellbeing of school, community and society.

- » **Creativity and innovation**  
Curriculum, assessment, teaching and learning give students opportunities to be creative and innovative.
- » **Choice and flexibility**  
The school's Junior Cycle programme is broad enough to offer a wide range of learning experiences to all, and flexible enough to offer choice to meet students' needs.
- » **Engagement and participation**  
The experience of curriculum, assessment, teaching and learning encourages participation, generates engagement and enthusiasm, and connects with life outside the school.
- » **Inclusive education**  
The educational experience is inclusive of all students and contributes to equality of opportunity, participation and outcomes for all.
- » **Continuity and development**  
Curriculum, assessment, teaching and learning enable students to build on their learning to date, recognise their progress in learning, and support their future learning.
- » **Learning to learn**  
High-quality curriculum, assessment, teaching and learning help students develop greater independence in learning and in meeting the challenges of life beyond school, of further education, and of working life.

These principles will inform the planning, development and implementation of Junior Cycle programmes in all schools. *These skills were not formally accessed in the old system, as before now there was no formalised focus on the holistic importance and development of the student as Wellbeing becomes a core part of the students' Junior Cycle experience.*

### Summary

Developing Wellbeing capability is a foundation for learning and citizenship. It encompasses students' personal and emotional learning, social and relational character development, intelligence and learning. It develops their effective life skills, including understanding and handling themselves, their relationships, learning and work. The more students learn about their emotions, values, strengths and capacities, the more they can manage their emotions and behaviours, understand others and establish and maintain positive relationships – a key to success not only in school but throughout their lives.

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## The Points Race

Are parents driving or responding?

In opening up the discussion about the points race, it is important to look at the players and the associated issues. There are many drivers and mixed agendas and a lot of interacting pressures and tensions.

Parents worry, some more than others. Most will readily admit that the worry of an unhappy or an unwell child is the greatest burden of all. Some parents with the best interest at heart can inadvertently place undue pressures on students to achieve beyond their ability, building anxiety and fears around the academic experience.

Regardless of socio-economic background, every generation, in the main, wants more for its children. Some will say it is more of a middle class phenomenon when it comes to the drive for high points and the economics associated with the adoption of the grinds culture that is so prevalent today.

Some parents can get fixed on the notion that certain career paths must be followed, that the student must be somebody, must be something, must do what they (parents) have or haven't done. This is intertwined with the model of the more traditional careers of the graduates of years gone by, not taking into account the breakthroughs in science and the advent of an information and digital age.

Career paths have changed and movement between jobs and across sectors, often quite unrelated to the study path taken at third level, is not unusual as employers seek out specific sets of skills to fill roles that have yet to be created and defined to meet social, economic and cultural challenges.

Parents of this generation are accused of 'hovering' and 'helicoptering' students as they facilitate the educational experience, keeping the student on a tight leash and then letting go without adequate preparation and due warning about the first solo flight into the abyss of third level independent thinking and learning.

Some parents feel the need to broadcast to the world about how academic/intellectual/non-academic their sons or daughters are and how many points are achieved or not achieved.



**By Catherine O'Connor,**  
Education Consultant at Trinity  
College Dublin and Author

**A**ll the world's a stage,  
And all the men and  
women merely players;

They have their exits and their  
entrances,

And one man in his time plays  
many parts,

His acts being seven ages.

**As You Like It** – William Shakespeare

**R**egardless  
of socio-  
economic  
background,  
every generation  
wants more for  
its children.

There is also competition within families, between families, between city/town and country. The question of students 'wasting' excess points gained in the Leaving Certificate, maybe studying Botany instead of Medicine, History of Art instead of Actuarial Science, Business instead of Law, or attending an Institute of Technology over the traditional university can be a source of serious irritation to some parents.

In these situations students can feel the pressure not to let parents down. What does it matter if the students are happy and the outcome is that they 'stay the course', enjoy the experience and mature to become contributing, mobile, employable and fulfilled citizens at the end of the journey? Life is for looking forward, not for looking back.

The purpose of the CAO system is to handle the administrative function of allocating places to students entering undergraduate courses in the third level system. It is a cruel system that requires students to place courses in order of their choice on a list. By process of elimination under the allocation of points, places are offered primarily based on availability and demand. Students who score top end points tend to enter what would be termed the higher professions of medicine and law; however, they may also choose other course options such as English and History, Business or Science.

Is there something seriously amiss when a student gains 500+ points out of a maximum score of 600 (approx. 10% of Leaving Certificate students), yet fails to get a place on the course of choice, leaving him/her with a sense of failure, raising anxiety levels not only within themselves but within their family unit?

Equally, is there something awry when a Leaving Certificate student could gain a place on a particular course in 2008 with 300 points and in 2015 needs a staggering 515 points to gain a place on the same course?

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student on a  
tight leash.

What do high results in the Leaving Certificate examination tell us? Are they evidence of brilliance of mind and/or brilliance of application to a process? Is it evidence of a clever approach to the choice of subjects studied, of getting to know a system and work it to best advantage? Is it evidence of money talking, playing to the grinds culture? Is it evidence of a good memory and learning by rote? Is it a test of suitability to any particular profession? Is it a middle class phenomenon? Is it a combination of all? This makes uncomfortable reading as it questions both fairness and privilege.

Anxiety not only rests with these 'high achievers' but also with students who have equally worthy aspirations of gaining good average points and wishing to follow a particular course of study at a chosen institution. These students may be pipped at the post and have to bear the consequences of random selection, standing by while others who get the identical points are accepted. This rigid structure is killing the passion, the dream, the wants and the interests of so many. It makes a mockery of the concept of career choice and questions the place of career guidance in matching student desires for this cohort. Are we saying that this system helps fulfil student wishes in terms of preference, potential and profession?

Those who score much lower will have different but again equally worthy aspirations, choosing to opt for different pathways and access routes through Further Education and Training, PLC courses or apprenticeships which have proven their worth over many years not least within the accounting, legal and insurance professions.

The student is the most important person in all of this discussion. This fact we cannot and must never ignore. The third level experience is a costly process, requiring a massive economic and social investment with a substantial price tag for state, student and family.

The question is often asked if the 'herd mentality' influences direction, making particular courses and colleges fashionable and popular. Classes of students can have an undercurrent of fixed interests such as business or engineering. Students need to be cognisant of this space and not feel pressure to follow the pack, doing the same thing with the same set of people – repeating their life cycles albeit in its different stages.

The need to conduct research for all courses and options cannot be underestimated. Students must accept that a strong work ethic will be required during college with the responsibility lying solely with them to earn the academic reward. This approach has to be fostered much earlier in the second level cycle, empowering the student to put context on decision-making for third level. Such decision-making requires serious reflection, time and effort. The race for points can act as a barrier to such reflection.

The second level system is perceived as rigid with the points race driving the senior cycle. Teachers are often placed in the difficult situation of preparing students for one examination at the risk of sacrificing a deeper engagement in the broader aspects of these students' general education.

Some will say that as long as there are teachers who will give grinds and grind schools that will 'hothouse' students, there will always be a natural feed into the points race. Class sizes, temporary employment contracts and recent cutbacks in the education sector only fuel this grinds culture.

Ireland needs to continue to produce highly skilled graduates who can contribute professionally in their chosen careers at the earliest possible opportunity to meet economic and societal needs, both at home and abroad.

The generation of students starting college today have come from a different age, the age of 24/7 interaction. The pace of life has quickened with technology and social media facilitating a world of instant answers. While our society has changed dramatically, it doesn't alter the fact that college students need:

- » to learn how to learn
- » to develop a strong broad base of knowledge within the discipline of study
- » to develop thinking skills – make sense of learning, how to analyse and sort data, how to solve problems

**S**ome parents with the best interest at heart can inadvertently place undue pressures on students to achieve beyond their ability, building anxiety and fears around the academic experience.

**T**he CAO is a cruel system that requires students to place courses in order of their choice on a list.

**C**lass sizes, temporary employment contracts, and recent cutbacks in the education sector fuel the grinds culture.

**C**ould we consider abolishing the CAO system and replacing it with something different?

- » to be entrepreneurial, intrapreneurial and innovative
- » to think outside the box – to be confident to question
- » to be flexible and adaptable, able to deal with the unexpected
- » to extend what they learn and to generate new ideas and concepts
- » to deal with knowledge in a critical and analytical way
- » to communicate information and argument in a well-reasoned manner
- » to deal with the fast moving changes in a technological and digital age
- » to become 'work ready'

It is widely acknowledged that the current Leaving Certificate process encourages 'rote learning' with the sole purpose of gaining points. The third level system seeks to move away from this type of learning to a deeper understanding of the subject matter and to rewarding evidence of engagement and development of sound argument, critical thinking and evaluation.

The CAO first came into being in 1976. Surely some reform is required, given that in 1980 only 20% of the second level school population in Ireland went to college and digital technology and scientific advances as we know them today had yet to be discovered. Google hadn't quite made it to the Oxford dictionary and the concept of Social Media didn't exist.

A big player in all of this is the Media – all sizes, shapes and formats. Is there unnecessary hype each year with too much focus on the technical aspect of the system? Guides are churned out, top tips squeezed into A4 pages and again the 'rote learning' is encouraged. Some will say these are of great benefit to students while others will say it only adds to the hype and creates consequent nervous tensions.

Could we consider abolishing the CAO system and replacing it with something different? This is not to advocate a return to the old fashioned queuing system that was prevalent in the 50s and 60s – many a surgeon and lawyer will tell the tale of how they managed to get their places and those who are still alive to remember will tell you that the queue was shorter for engineering than for medicine! The braver of these will say, if pressed, that their points equivalent might have been a little short of that required today.

Is it now time to look at the transformation of the education sector as a whole? Is it not possible to seek a better, fairer and more comprehensive solution to the points race, one that improves quality and satisfies all the stakeholders involved: students, parents, employers, academics, professional bodies, state agencies and government?

Educational reform is a slow and tiresome process but maybe the moment has come to put the Leaving Certificate, the CAO and the 'fit for purpose' debate firmly on the table.

All the world's a stage and there are many players.



# How Irish education can benefit from Erasmus+

In 2015, Léargas awarded over €10m of Erasmus+ grant funding in the education, training and youth work sectors. In 2017, the amount of funding available will be close to €13.5m.

## What does this funding enable and how can those working in Irish education access it?

This article provides a quick overview. If you're interested in finding out more, visit our website [www.leargas.ie](http://www.leargas.ie) or find us on social media.

### Wide scope

Erasmus+ allows organisations and professionals in education to access a diverse range of activities in projects, large and small. This diversity in scope means that an individual school might receive a grant of €2,000 for teacher training in languages while an Education Centre can receive over €300,000 for a three-year partnership project. An FE college can ensure its professionals attend training courses overseas in areas relevant to their own practice. A technical institute can grow its overseas placements from six to 200 in a few short years and integrate this offering into its own development strategy.

Erasmus+ thus has great scope for integrating change and innovation into the Irish education setting. Yet it can be difficult to know where to start.

### Organisation-based approach

To begin, it's essential to know that Erasmus+ has an organisation-based approach: funded projects need to address the identified needs of the entire organisation rather than of individual staff members, and must be in the context of a European Development Plan. In effect this means that organisations must agree what their development or strategic priorities are, and use Erasmus+ to pursue these goals.

There are two types of projects available to do this, known as 'Key Actions'.

**Under Key Action 1**, staff members can travel abroad for short teaching assignments or training periods designed to assist the whole organisation. In the case of vocational education and training colleges, learners can carry out placements abroad also. For example, an Irish school recently used Key Action 1 funding to develop intercultural competencies among its staff. A cross-section of staff, including class teachers and a senior manager, attended a training course on 'European Diversity Education' in Latvia, and some job-shadowed teachers in Slovenia using CLIL strategies in their classrooms. Irish colleges and institutes have started to build in overseas placements as part of their QQI Level 5 and 6 offerings.

**Under Key Action 2**, organisations can lead or join a Strategic Partnership – a collaborative international project where organisations work together to raise standards in teaching and learning, by developing and sharing new working methods or research. These partnerships may be cross-sectoral, but do not have to be! They may be as straightforward as a group of schools using ICT to work together on national myths and legends while developing students' literacy skills. Or they may involve multi-national, cross-sectoral organisations working together over a few years to develop tools for digital literacy.

No matter which type, a successful Erasmus+ project is one that becomes central to the life of the organisation and is beneficial to educators and learners.

### Erasmus+ applications

Organisations that are considering Erasmus+ applications should be aware that it is a competitive programme, and that applications require a good deal of planning and forethought. There is one deadline each year for applications:

- ▶ 2 February 2017 for Key Action 1
- ▶ 29 March 2017 for Key Action 2

Léargas provides advice and support throughout the whole process, which includes information and application sessions before each deadline and project management days as projects start. See [www.leargas.ie](http://www.leargas.ie) or contact [schoolsvet@leargas.ie](mailto:schoolsvet@leargas.ie) for more information.



## Senior Cycle Education in Ireland

What could be wrong with it?



By Clive Byrne,

Director NAPD and current  
President of the European School  
Heads Association

The author Clive Byrne challenges us to think laterally about our education system and attempt to fix what is not working optimally. Should we, for example, explore the concept of middle school? This would enable pupil-centred teaching methodologies to be continued into the post-primary system. Or are we willing to decouple university entry from the Leaving Certificate, thus allowing for more meaningful opportunities for senior students to grow and develop as individuals in senior cycle?

In Ireland, things happen in education because matters have always been thus. We start primary school aged four, move through the years until we transfer to post-primary, do the Junior Cert, move on to the Leaving Cert and then college for most of us. What could be wrong with it? In truth, the Irish education system succeeds despite itself, and while we have good school retention rates and excellent teachers, our system isn't maximising the potential of a fifth of our students. Education is a form of cultural capital, and because the system suits the majority there is reluctance to change. But we need to convince policy makers and parents that the world won't end if their son or daughter is assessed by ways other than just a terminal exam.

Over the last while, though, there have been huge changes. Early childhood education and the free school year will make an enormous difference to our school-going population by stressing the role of play in fostering children's physical, cognitive, social and emotional development. Our pupil-centred primary curriculum is well regarded internationally but is the subject of review at the moment, because although called the new curriculum it has existed since 1999. We have a good transfer rate to post-primary but too many post-primary schools offering similar curricula under different patronage, and there is a hierarchy of esteem among schools by the parents. In parts of the country this causes major difficulty because certain schools are oversubscribed.

Over the last number of years I've experienced education systems in different European countries. The EU has no right to interfere in educational policy in individual member states. I've noticed good and bad aspects of education in each country and wonder how things would be in Ireland if we structured our system differently. Research has shown that too much time in fifth and sixth class is spent preparing students for entrance tests with little value for transfer to secondary. Emer Smith from the ESRI maintains that sometimes there is significant regression in children's progress as they enter first year, particularly in literacy and numeracy. The studies also show that students become uninterested in second year, maybe

because the curriculum is too content-laden and it is difficult to motivate such students for the future.

In addition to primary and post-primary, should we explore the concept of middle school, as in other countries? This would enable pupil-centred teaching methodologies to be continued into a post-primary system where new models of teaching and learning are at the core of the new junior cycle reform. There are implications for how we train our teachers, but I believe it is worth exploring. It will also demand re-imagining the educational campus, but planners have recently shown greater willingness to co-locate schools to enable greater use of resources and facilities.

We struggle to fit square pegs into round holes in our efforts to suit an academic curriculum to students who are more suited to a practical one. In the past there wasn't parity of esteem between the vocational and the academic. In recent years, through the work of SOLAS and the Further Education sector, apprenticeships are being seen as a way forward to meet societal and labour market needs. What age is best to direct young students towards a vocational track? I feel the German model is probably too young, even though experience shows that opportunities exist for students taking the practical route to continue to level 10 qualifications if they wish. A challenge is to highlight the benefits of apprenticeship in terms of personal fulfilment, social status and salary. Another is to dispel the myth that third level is the only option – in many respects the high numbers of students attending higher and further education are creating a cohort of disillusioned young adults who find that their hopes and expectations can't be realised.

One way to tackle this may be to restructure how we view senior students in second-level schools. The way our second-level system has evolved, the Leaving Cert exam seems to be at the heart of much that is good and much that is bad. Many articles have commented on the backwash effect of the exam on junior cycle and even back to primary school. There is an urgent need to decouple university entry from the Leaving Certificate and to provide meaningful opportunities for senior students to grow and develop as individuals in senior cycle, so they are better placed, more adaptable and resilient when they leave the formal school structure.

On a visit to Finland by an NAPD delegation I visited two schools – both part of the same education system, but with differing interpretations of their role within it. Saarnilaakson Koulu in Espoo, 30 minutes outside Helsinki, catered for 420 13–16-year-olds. I was envious of the 10:1 pupil-teacher ratio: they had 43 teachers. The total number of staff was 53, including a full-time nurse, social worker and guidance counsellors. Fifty-five students had special needs, and seven teachers were allocated to special education. The students were offered a broad curriculum. Finnish, Swedish and English were compulsory but French, German, Spanish and Italian were also offered, along with the subjects we're used to at junior cycle. Drama is also compulsory because the school aims to give students skills in civilised manners, communication and different forms of self-expression alongside theoretical content. Each class is 45 minutes long, and students take 30 lessons per week. School starts at 8.00am and finishes at 3.00pm. The school is organised over five terms, but while the

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working day is about the same as in Ireland, students are in school for 190 days per year. The culture of the school in Espoo was informal, happy and relaxed. At the end of their time here the students will apply to continue their education on an academic or vocational track in a nearby school. In deciding what direction they should take, they will have their teachers' assessments and will have benefitted from guidance counsellors' input.

Ressu, an upper secondary school in Helsinki, catered for 16–19-year-olds and had 800 students and 60 teachers. The school is run like a pre-university and students from all over Helsinki and further afield apply to attend. We saw clear evidence of a culture of trust with independent self-directed learning. If a teacher is absent or ill, supervision or substation as we know it here doesn't apply. The students are free to study, chat, or leave. The school is structured around five terms, and students study six to eight subjects per term. Each class is 75 minutes long, and students take each subject three times per week. Some students may take four or five languages, but they don't have to take each subject for an entire year. They can dip in and out, because each student has an individual timetable which might change each term. Students know they must do a minimum of 75 courses to matriculate – 50 are compulsory and the rest are optional. The onus is on students to choose. Teachers do regular assessments for each module. An interesting phenomenon is that students know they must finish in 2–4 years but most finish in 3. This is an interesting aspect of the system which won't sit easily with the Irish mindset, but don't forget there is no Transition Year in Finland. The students matriculate, but that certification is not linked to university entry. It is a testament to what students have participated in and achieved at Ressu. The principal believes in students' motivation, talent and autonomy and in teachers' competence and innovative spirit.

A similar model would go a long way towards changing how senior cycle operates in Ireland. Automatic progression from third year or TY into fifth year in the same school need not be the norm. Students would apply and have to sell themselves to be accepted. Senior cycle schools could develop a character of their own in the courses they offer – languages, sciences, engineering, tourism, business, catering, etc., as well as compulsory subjects. These schools could have bespoke student timetables, different staffing structures, different student voice mechanisms, and different supervision arrangements, but for them to succeed, the Leaving Cert would have to be decoupled from university entry. Can we aspire to a situation like they have in other countries, where universities set their own entrance exams, tell students what to study, and give them three weeks to prepare? Probably not in the short term, but it's worth starting a discussion.

## Admissions Policies

Making the system fairer for all

Schools admissions policies are contentious in many parts of the world for parents. In Ireland, it's a bit like the CAO where the only 'fair' system is the one that gets your daughter or son where you really want them to go.

We all know the statistics at this stage – in Ireland, about 80% of schools are able to take all comers, but the problem arises in the other 20% which are oversubscribed. As we have 4,000 primary and second level schools, it follows that around 800 reject some of the applications they receive, causing annoyance, angst and anger for many parents and their children.

These primary and second level schools are in areas that are rapidly expanding or they are in high demand because they are regarded as 'good' schools or they give priority to children of their particular creed over those of different or no beliefs who are in the same catchment area.

'Outsiders' and newcomers to an area are often at a disadvantage when it comes to enrolling their children in local schools.

'Insiders' know how the system works. They get their children's names down for 'good' schools as early as possible. Daft.ie recently reported on a study which asked if proximity to secondary schools is reflected in the value of homes. Overall, a home that is 100m away from a secondary school is worth on average 2.6% more than one that is 1km away. In the current market, this translates into an average "school premium" of €5,600. It's about location, location, location and it costs more.

There is the apocryphal story of the pregnant woman who turned up with a scan to put down her unborn and unnamed daughter on the waiting list for a place in a well-known secondary school in south County Dublin.

Some schools, let it be said quietly, are in demand because they have a low number of pupils with special



**By John Walshe,**  
former special adviser to Education  
Minister Ruairí Quinn

**I**t was during Ruairí Quinn's term as Minister for Education that agreement was reached on drafting an admissions bill that promised no more waiting lists; no more 'administration' or 'booking' fees; no pre-enrolment interviews of parents or pupils; a simplified school level arrangement for enrolment appeals; and a limit of 25% on number of past pupils' children enrolling in any school year. Education expert John Walshe discusses the progress of the admissions bill since then.

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needs, an attitude of mind for which Dublin Archbishop Diarmuid Martin has rightly excoriated schools and parents.

He said that sought-after Catholic schools were in danger of becoming elitist by excluding students with special needs or ethnic backgrounds. He added that "every Catholic school has an obligation to make an annual examination of conscience and carry out its very own elitist check".

The Archbishop also had a pop at parents who baptised their children simply to get them into a particular school, describing it as an abuse of baptism. It was natural for parents to choose schools on the basis of their good reputation. However, he warned: "The temptation can easily emerge to look on those with learning difficulties or from different cultural or social background as a threat to such success, a temptation to close ranks".

### Challenges facing newcomer children

We've been aware of the challenges facing newcomer children for some time. An ESRI study (2009) *Adapting to Diversity: Irish Schools and Newcomer Students* looked at the experience of schools in accommodating immigrant children and young people. It drew from the first national survey of primary and second-level principals on diversity (1,200 schools) and complemented this with twelve detailed case-studies of primary and secondary schools.

**O**utsiders and newcomers to an area are often at a disadvantage when it comes to enrolling their children in local schools.

The study found that newcomer students comprised 10% of the school-going population in primary schools and 6% of the post-primary school-going population in 2007. Notably, in primary schools, this was not evenly distributed and 4 in 10 primary schools had no newcomer children, while others had a very high proportion of newcomer children. Those with a high proportion of newcomer children tended to be urban schools, often catering for more disadvantaged students. Where schools are oversubscribed, they tended to operate enrolment policies which favoured 'first come, first-served' and priority to siblings etc. These policies favoured more settled communities and newcomer students tended to be under-represented in these schools.

The ESRI study was published two years after an audit of enrolment practices in schools commissioned by the then Education Minister Mary Hanafin. While it found no evidence of systematic or what it termed problematic discrimination the audit came across instances of parents being encouraged to take their children with special needs to other schools on the basis that they had 'better facilities'. These 'soft barriers' were highlighted also by a subsequent report from the National Council for Special Education.

She said she resisted public pressures to name and shame individual schools with restrictive admission policies. But she gave the example of an unnamed school in the west where just 0.5% of students were foreign nationals and another school in the mid-west which had no special needs provision. In both cases the audit indicated that other local schools had above average provision for newcomer and special needs students.



Expectations were raised that some legal change would be introduced quickly by either Minister Hanafin or her successors Batt O’Keeffe and Mary Coughlan to make admissions more transparent and fair. But it can take a long time to get legislation onto the Statute Book. When he came into Ministerial office in 2011 Ruairi Quinn discovered that a lot of preparatory work on a draft bill had been done by Department officials.

### Discussion document: making the system fairer

Within a few months he published a discussion document outlining options for making the system fairer. These included abolishing waiting lists and the use of first-come, first-served policies which made it difficult for newcomers – either from abroad or from different parts of the country – to get a place for their children in high demand schools. Other options mentioned were to end the practice of giving priority to children of past pupils – which subsequently became a hot political issue – as well as banning priority to children of staff and members of the board of management. The proposed abolition of a booking deposit won favour with parents but not with schools that claimed there was a cost involved in processing multiple applications. Nor were the Gaelscoileanna happy with the suggestion that parental competence in a particular language (Irish in this case) be replaced by a criterion that parents should respect the linguistic policy of the school.

Predictably the discussion document proved very controversial as the suggestions had the potential to upset ‘insiders’ who knew how the system worked to ensure their children got into a ‘desirable’ school. Some Fine Gael people saw the bill as interfering too much in the autonomy of schools and were unhappy with the proposed limit on places to children of past pupils which, they said, could hit the fee paying sector and make it more difficult to secure funding from past pupils.

It was followed by a memo to Cabinet which was the subject of a number of rows before agreement was reached on drafting a Bill which promised no more waiting lists (enrolment would open on 1 October of the preceding year); no more ‘administration’ or ‘booking’ fees; no pre-enrolment interviews of parents or pupils; a simplified school level arrangement for enrolment appeals and a limit of 25% on the number of children of past pupils that could enrol in any school year.

Many members of the Oireachtas committee on education wanted a complete ban on reserved places which they saw as perpetuating an old boy and old girl network of influence, but that was not to be. In the meantime, Gaelscoileanna had won the battle to retain the demand that parents had some proficiency in Irish if they were trying to enrol their children in an all Irish school.

Quinn had left office before the bill could be enacted as had his successor Jan O’Sullivan which left it to her successor Richard Bruton – the first Fine Gael Minister for Education since Paddy Cooney 30 years earlier – to re-introduce it into the Oireachtas.

Admissions policies have become a much more sensitive political issue since Mary Hanafin announced her intention in August 2006 to carry out the audit of enrolment policies. For instance, a number of cases involving

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traveller children received plenty of publicity over the past few years. In Clonmel, Co Tipperary a school gave priority to children of past pupils and a traveller boy whose father had not attended the school failed to get a place in 2010; he was also unsuccessful in a lottery of the remaining places. His family said he had suffered indirect discrimination (under the Equal Status Act 2000–2008). His mother argued that the school’s admissions policy that gave priority to the sons of past pupils disproportionately affected members of the Traveller community as they were statistically less likely to have a father who attended secondary school. But the family lost the case which went all the way to the Supreme Court.

In a more recent case in August 2016 a secondary school in Dublin was criticised for refusing admission to a child from a traveller background because his parents had not applied in time. The boy’s parents, who could not read or write, said they did not know they had to apply to the school. Following several media reports and pressure on the school it reversed its decision and he was allowed to enrol.

Cases such as these are influencing the final shape of the admissions act and the regulations. So too are the demands of parents who are unable to get their children into overcrowded local Church linked primary schools which give priority to children of their faith. The number of pupils seeking access to non-denominational or multi-denominational schools has escalated much more rapidly than the provision of places for them as Ireland has become a more multi-cultured society. In the 2011 census over a quarter of a million people were registered as having ‘no religion’. Fifty years earlier their numbers were so small – at 1,107 – that they were registered literally as a footnote in the census returns. Politicians may be able to ignore footnotes but not over a quarter of a million potential voters.



The **Irish Science Teachers' Association, Eol Oidí na hÉireann**, is the professional association for teachers of science in the Republic of Ireland. As such it is represented on the relevant subject development groups of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. Since its foundation in 1961 it has been providing continuous professional development and support for its members at both national and branch levels.

The Association has close affiliations with the Association for Science Education in the UK and is a founding member of ICASE, the International Council of Associations for Science Education. It is also represented on SCIENTIX which promotes and supports a Europe-wide collaboration among STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) teachers, education researchers, policymakers and other STEM education professionals.

Members are also supported and informed of developments through the Association’s website ([www.ista.ie](http://www.ista.ie)) and through its Journal, *SCIENCE*, which is posted to members three times per annum.

The major national ISTA events are the Senior Science Quiz – held during Science Week since 1990 and the Annual Conference which provides members with the opportunity to hear and meet national and international experts in areas relevant to science education. The next conference will be held in **NUI Maynooth on 7th – 9th April 2017**.



For up-to-date information visit:  
Website: [www.ista.ie](http://www.ista.ie)  
Twitter: @IrishSciTeach  
Facebook: IrishScienceTeachersAssociation

## 'Smart Futures: Guiding students in a world of choice'

Our rapidly growing world population is facing significant challenges. The race is on to develop renewable energies, sustainable clean water and food sources, as well as to better manage the threat of new and re-emerging diseases.

Education can help humanity to be knowledgeable enough to address these global challenges. Fair and equal access to science and information-communications technologies (ICT) is the first step towards inspiring and motivating our young people to be the next generation of innovators and creative problem solvers.

### Importance placed on "fitting in"

Ireland has attracted and created many businesses that provide jobs and contribute significantly to our economy, employing local people across an array of roles in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM). Yet some students are still being held back by negative, out-dated stereotypes about the kind of people who work in STEM, dismissing STEM opportunities before exploring them properly.

In 2014, Science Foundation Ireland surveyed over 2,000 undergraduate students across Ireland to find out what most influenced their decision making when choosing what career path to follow. The results found that 62% of students surveyed felt that 'fitting in' was the most important factor when choosing a course or college.

### Challenging stereotypes

Meeting the people that work in STEM can open the eyes of young people and help them to think differently about their futures and where they fit in. It can also inspire them and challenge stereotypes. As more jobs become automated, the skills acquired by studying STEM subjects will equip students with the ability to prosper in an increasingly digital world.

### Smart Futures programme

The Smart Futures programme offers secondary schools free access to STEM volunteers, who can visit your school and talk with students and parents. Hundreds of volunteers with STEM-related backgrounds, from pharmaceuticals to biotechnology, food science and health to software engineering, are available to help students to learn more about what a career in STEM is all about. This can be a huge help to students making subject choices for Senior Cycle, or deciding their post Leaving Certificate paths.

### Register your school

Secondary school teachers, TY coordinators and guidance counsellors are encouraged to register their school on [www.SmartFutures.ie](http://www.SmartFutures.ie) for these free career talks at any time over the school year. The website also provides videos, free teacher resources and over 160+ STEM career stories.

Showing students that science isn't just for the lab is an important step in making the connection that science is relevant to everything in their daily lives. Science and technology are relevant to business, geography, art, home economics, sport, music and even language students.

Together we can open the eyes of our young people and guide them towards a future where they can make a difference to tomorrow's world. Smart Futures is managed by Science Foundation Ireland in partnership with Engineers Ireland and has directly engaged with over 100,000 teenagers since 2013.

For more information visit [www.SmartFutures.ie](http://www.SmartFutures.ie) or contact the team on (01) 6073042 or [SmartFutures@sfi.ie](mailto:SmartFutures@sfi.ie).



## The Introduction of 'Free Education'

### The Golden Jubilee



By Assoc. Prof Judith Harford,  
School of Education,  
University College Dublin

As the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of free education in Ireland dawns, this article gives context to its introduction in 1967, describing how ambitious young politicians along with key individuals in the Department of Education combined their energies and vision to bring about radical change.

### Context for Reform

2017 represents a very significant year in the history of education in Ireland, marking the fiftieth anniversary since the introduction of the 'free education scheme', or free post-primary education. Until this point, only a minority of pupils financially able to attend post-primary schools did so (O'Donoghue and Harford, 2016). The 1960s were one of the most progressive decades in Irish educational history, ushering in a more ambitious and strategic policy approach. The impetus for much of the policy formulation of the 1960s was the economic crisis of the late 1950s, which had profoundly impacted Ireland's political, social and economic development (Fleming and Harford, 2014). High inflation, a balance-of-payments crisis, industrial and agricultural decline and mass emigration characterised this period. Education policy was characterised by what Walsh (2009) refers to as a 'conservative consensus, which was shared by politicians, senior officials and educational authorities'. This consensus was based on the assumption that the state should exercise a limited role in providing education and shaping policy, ceding control to private interest groups, in particular the Catholic Church. Indeed, the Constitution adopted in 1937 defined the education system as state-aided rather than provided. This stance is probably best illustrated by a statement from the Minister for Education, Richard Mulcahy, expressing his view of the Irish educational system to the Dáil in 1956:

*You have your teachers, your managers and your churches and I regard the position as Minister in the Department of Education as that of a kind of dungaree man, the plumber who will make satisfactory communications and streamline the forces and potentialities of the educational workers and educational management in this country. He will take the knock out of the pipes and will link up everything. I would be blind to my responsibility if I insisted on pontificating or lapsed into an easy acceptance of an imagined duty to philosophise here on educational matters (Dáil Debates, vol. 159, col. 1494, 19 July 1956).*

In *Preventing the Future* (2004), Garvin identifies a dysfunctional education system as a main contributor

to Ireland's economic condition and central to why Ireland was 'so poor for so long'.

### The New Guard

The economic policy reorientation from the 1950s onwards was gradually translated into education policy under a series of younger ministers born or raised after Independence (Walsh, 2009). This period witnessed significant post-primary structural change, expansion of technical education and curriculum modernisation at all levels of the education system. Key individuals emerged who collectively transformed the policy agenda. Seán Lemass (1899–1971) took over as Taoiseach from Eamon de Valera (1882–1975) in 1959, quite late in his career. Determined to reform the economy following the deep recession, he saw education as central to this ambition, a view shared by his close associate T.K. Whitaker, Secretary of the Department of Finance. Over the seven years of his premiership, Lemass appointed, in turn, three ambitious young politicians as Minister for Education: Patrick Hillery (1923–2008), George Colley (1925–1983) and Donogh O'Malley (1921–1968). In the Department of Education itself there were also key individuals who contributed to the reform agenda. Seán O'Connor, then a senior official, was arguably one of the most outstanding officials in Irish education. A contemporary (Tony Ó Dálaigh, private secretary to successive ministers during this period) described him as 'the intellectual powerhouse of the Department and the bête noir of the hierarchy'.

### Investment in Education

A key development at this juncture was the OECD report, aptly titled *Investment in Education* (1965), which significantly informed the state's policy for educational expansion. It was part of a wider analysis of education systems across a number of countries. The survey team, led by prominent economist Paddy Lynch, began work in 1962 and published its report in 1965. The report highlighted marked inequalities based on social class and geographical location, and the high dropout rate after primary school. In Seán O'Connor's opinion, 'the importance of the report to the Department of Education cannot be over-emphasised'. By this time, following a General Election, Lemass had been returned to office and he appointed George Colley to the Education portfolio. Although Colley displayed a key interest in education, his tenure was short-lived (1965–66) and he soon became Minister for Industry and Commerce. Donogh O'Malley replaced him as Minister for Education in July 1966. O'Connor recalls that within a few days of taking up office, O'Malley raised with him the question of providing for free post-primary education: 'From O'Malley we expected fast and furious action' (1986, p. 139).

### Donogh O'Malley

Despite limited enthusiasm from his officials, O'Malley submitted a proposal to the Taoiseach on 7 September 1966, in which he made a strong case for introducing free post-primary education and mentioned that Fine Gael was about to launch a similar plan. In his first major speech as Minister, he condemned the inequalities in the existing system, describing the fact that one-third of young people received no education beyond primary level as 'a dark stain on the National conscience'. He continued: 'I am glad to be able to announce that I am drawing up a scheme under which,

**T**he Constitution adopted in 1937 defined the education system as state-aided rather than provided.

**T**he 1960s were one of the most progressive decades in Irish educational history, ushering in a more ambitious and strategic policy approach.

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**O**'Malley's achievements during this period are such that he has been described as 'the folk hero of Irish education'

in future, no boy or girl in this State will be deprived of full educational opportunity – from primary to university level – by reason of the fact that the parents cannot afford to pay for it' (*Irish Times*, September 12, 1966). As the speech was made to journalists it received widespread coverage. The *Irish Times* editorial observed:

*Startling is the word for the speech made by the Minister for Education on Saturday. It startles firstly because, in the world of cutbacks, it indicates a considerable investment; priority for education had been promised by the Taoiseach, but no one can have expected either so sudden or so mighty a leap forward.*

Although, in principle, there was widespread support for democratising post-primary education, operationalising it brought considerable comment and debate. Furthermore, O'Malley's proposals were never authorised by the government; in particular, the Department of Finance had no knowledge of them. The Secretary of that Department, T.K. Whitaker, commented in a letter to Lemass:

*This 'free schooling' policy has not been the subject of any submission to the Department of Finance, has not been approved by the government, has certainly not been examined from the financial (whatever about the educational) aspect, and therefore should have received no advance publicity, particularly of the specific and definite type involved in Mr O'Malley's statement (NAI, DT, 96/6/356, S12891F, letter from Whitaker to Lemass, September 12, 1966).*

In the same letter, Whitaker referred to O'Malley's record in the Department of Health, which he had left 'gravely insolvent' on his departure. Scholars have debated whether O'Malley had Lemass's tacit support in publicising the initiative. Whatever the extent of this support, there is a general belief that consultation between the two had taken place. Farrell (1971, pp. 69–70) recounts that five members of the Cabinet told him they believed Lemass had seen the speech and arranged for parts to be amended before it was delivered. The new provisions were to take effect the following September. In the interim, the Minister and his officials held detailed negotiations with the managerial authorities and members of the hierarchy, neither of which was completely happy with the proposals as outlined.

O'Malley's achievements during this period are such that he has been described as 'the folk hero of Irish education' (O'Connor, 1986, p. 192). Department of Education officials had plans to introduce free education, but not for some time. While O'Malley clearly built on the important work of Patrick Hillery and George Colley, the Duggan Committee and the *Investment in Education* team, he was more ambitious and courageous in his vision for free second-level education. As Sean O'Connor observed: 'Donogh O'Malley shattered our plans and left Ireland in his debt' (*ibid.*).

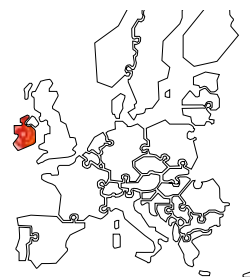
This article draws on research published with Dr Brian Fleming in the international journal *History of Education*. See: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0046760X.2014.930189>



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## The Advent of High-Speed Broadband

### Teaching and Learning in Second-Level Schools



By Selina McCoy,  
Seán Lyons, Bryan Coyne and  
Merike Darmody

The authors provide an accessible outline of research findings involving, among other methods, surveys of school principals and teachers before and after broadband roll-out in 436 schools. Issues addressed include: how ICT is used in teaching and learning following high-speed broadband installation; the role that technical support plays in the extent and nature of ICT integration across school contexts; the key challenges facing teachers in using ICT; the role of ICT-related professional development.

#### High-speed broadband

The Irish government has invested significantly in the provision of high-speed broadband to all second-level schools in the country, as part of Ireland's National Digital Strategy (DCENR, 2013). In many cases, this initiative represents a significant upgrade from a slow and often unreliable broadband connection that has inhibited the use of ICT<sup>1</sup> within education (Coyne et al., 2016). However, the improved broadband infrastructure has presented a new series of questions, such as how can ICT enhance, support or transform teaching and learning in schools?

#### Digital Strategy for Schools

The Department of Education and Skills has recently published a Digital Strategy for Schools (DES, 2015b), outlining a range of policy objectives addressing: teaching, learning and assessment using ICT; teacher professional development; leadership, research and policy; and ICT infrastructure. This research helps to provide evidence from a large-scale mixed methods study drawing on surveys of school principals and teachers before and after broadband roll-out in 436 schools, combined with in-depth case-study research in ten schools, encompassing interviews with school principals, ICT co-ordinators, teachers and student focus groups. The research complements current policy objectives in addressing five main research questions:

1. How is ICT used in teaching and learning across schools following high-speed broadband installation?
2. What role do school processes like culture, leadership, staff collaboration and technical support play in the extent and nature of ICT integration across school contexts?
3. What are the key challenges facing teachers in using ICT? How do teachers view the types of ICT

1. In this study, ICT (Information and Communication Technology) is defined as any electronic hardware or software which is used for the purpose of teaching, learning and administration in schools. This includes equipment such as computers, internet infrastructure, projectors and computer software.

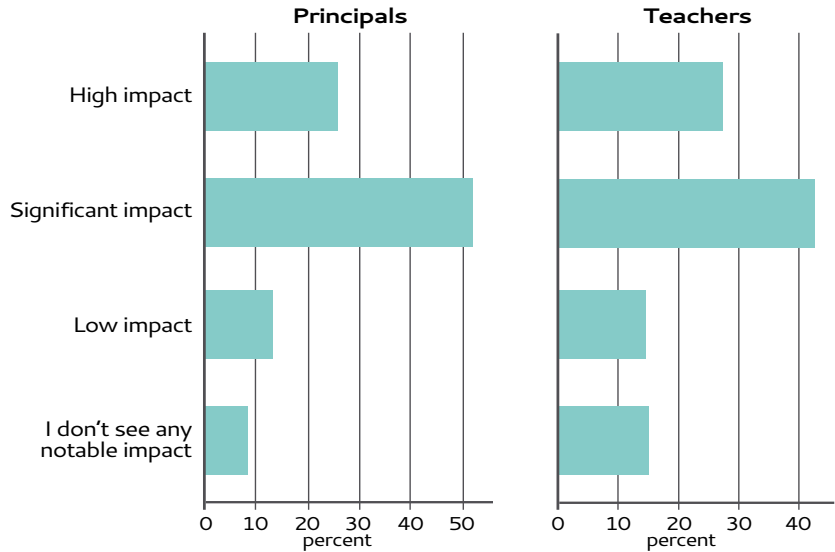
- and online resources available to them and what role does ICT-related professional development play?
- 4. How do students view different teaching methodologies and to what extent do they see ICT-based approaches as enhancing their engagement?
  - 5. How do students reflect on the ICT skills and competencies they are gaining while at school and to what extent does current curricular provision, particularly relating to computer studies, facilitate the development of these skills?

Although the full report (available from [www.esri.ie](http://www.esri.ie)) contains in-depth analysis across each of these areas, the key findings for each research question are outlined below. Surveys were administered to principals and teachers in schools shortly before the installation of their high-speed connection. Schools in Group 1<sup>2</sup> received service in the second half of 2013 and schools in Group 2 received service in the second half of 2014. A second round of survey data (post-installation) was collected during the second half of 2015 (summer) for both groups simultaneously, giving a time lag ranging from six to 24 months.

KEY FINDINGS

Perceptions of Broadband Impact

Principals’ and teachers’ reactions to the high-speed broadband programme were highly positive, with the vast majority reporting ‘high’ or ‘significant’ impact on teaching and learning (Figure 1). Principals who received broadband earlier were significantly more likely to report that it had an impact on teaching and learning.



**Figure 1 Perceived Impact of Upgraded Broadband Connection**  
Source: Analysis of post-installation survey responses. (N=158 principals, N=380 teachers).

2 Group 1 schools are based in Dublin, Kildare and Meath. Group 2 schools are based in Waterford, Wexford, Cork, Kerry, Kilkenny and Limerick (See Coyne et al., 2016)

**F**indings show how influential school leadership is in directing and shaping policy development in schools.

**W**ith inadequate technical support, many schools felt their teachers were over-burdened with technical issues and troubleshooting.

In line with a theory of educational change, the change process through which broadband affects teaching and learning seems to be slow and incremental. Our research took place within a relatively narrow time frame around the broadband upgrade, so it is likely that some effects of improved connectivity will take longer to manifest. Despite this, there is some evidence of a shift towards more student-centred ICT usage and methodologies in the period between the pre- and post-installation surveys, with teachers noting how students engage with ICT-based exercises and how it complements the teacher:

*Nowadays kids need to see it on screen... it [ICT] just reinforced the point I was trying to make... it's there to support me... obviously I'm the teacher; the IT is not going to do the work for me.... Everyone sees the benefits... it makes the teacher's job easier.*  
(High ICT integration school, Teacher)

Although the use of ICT and online resources is becoming more frequent in school administration and communication (particularly for attendance monitoring), classroom usage is highly variable across teachers and schools. Principals and students distinguish between early adopters, ‘reluctant’ teachers and those who are risk-averse. School structural and climate factors play an important role in shaping and supporting change, particularly change relating to teaching and learning methodologies.

School Climate, Leadership and Technical Support

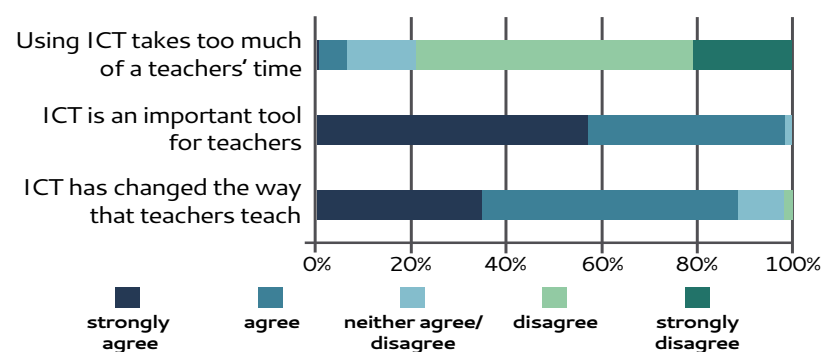
Findings show how influential school leadership is in directing and shaping policy development in schools. Schools differed in the extent to which they had developed technology-specific policies. While having a formal ICT policy was important in some schools, others preferred a more ad hoc approach, whereby each subject department decided its own procedures.

Many principals felt that guidance on the integration and use of ICT from the Department of Education and Skills had not kept pace with developments in technology. Furthermore, principals and ICT co-ordinators highlighted challenges around the maintenance and upkeep of equipment. With inadequate technical support, many schools felt their teachers were over-burdened with technical issues and troubleshooting. Further, ICT co-ordinators were often limited to a technical role rather than guiding future developments in ICT integration and pedagogical change.

Teaching and Learning

School principals and teachers pointed to benefits of ICT for student learning ranging from enhanced student participation and achievement, greater collaboration among students, to the development of higher order thinking skills and transversal skills. Teachers spoke about particular advantages in terms of meeting diverse student needs. Principals observe how ICT has changed the way their teachers teach:

**T**he centrality of the high stakes Junior and Leaving Cert examinations serve to limit opportunities for more interactive teaching approaches drawing on ICT.



**Figure 6.1 Principals' Views of the Role of ICT in the Classroom**

Source: Post-installation survey of second-level school principals (N=158).

The potential for ICT and online resources to support and expand social learning was noted. However, the case-study evidence also underlines structural constraints on the scope to use ICT in teaching and learning. In particular, the centrality of the high stakes Junior and Leaving Certificate examinations serve to limit opportunities for more interactive teaching approaches drawing on ICT and online resources, particularly in the pre-examination period. The current junior cycle reforms may well address some of these challenges, in particular in placing digital technology as central to many of the statements of learning and key skills comprising the programme (DES, 2015a).

### Factors Shaping ICT Usage

High-quality broadband has lifted one of the biggest barriers constraining ICT integration in schools. Despite this, teachers emphasise that other infrastructural deficits remain, covering limited Wi-Fi connectivity, hardware reliability and insufficient technical support. Moreover, teachers raised concerns over school organisational issues, including the requirement for teachers to move between classrooms, classroom design and internet content filtering restrictions. Teachers across a broad range of subject domains reported a high level of reliance on online teaching resources, from both national and international sources. Within and across schools, teachers varied with regard to their confidence in using ICT and in their participation in professional development opportunities:

*If you're not proficient or comfortable using ICT yourself, you're not going to use it in front of students... you're not gonna put yourself in that situation. (Medium ICT integration school, Teacher)*

The findings suggest that professional development (both initial and continuous) will play a key role in embedding ICT within teachers' pedagogical practices, increasing teachers' competence and confidence in using ICT, and achieving the desired teaching and learning outcomes.

### The Student Voice

Junior and senior cycle students provide a unique and important insight to the study. Overall, students are broadly receptive to most of the ICT-related changes that have occurred in classrooms and highlight

**I**f you're not proficient or comfortable using ICT yourself, you're not going to use it in front of students...

the importance of active engagement in enhancing their learning. The introduction of high-speed broadband has given teachers another avenue through which to actively engage students. ICT-based teaching methods can be valuable, providing teachers can use them effectively with minimal disruption. Students noted that teachers should be supported in their role as educators by equipping them with the skills to utilise ICT-based teaching methods effectively:

*It's nice to have a bit of a break from taking down notes and watch a video on it, I think you learn a bit more... The documentaries and stuff, there's some great stuff... It complements the teacher rather than independent of it. (Medium ICT integration school, 5th Year focus group)*

Students were generally positive about the benefit and convenience that personal electronic devices (tablets) provided. However, they highlight issues ranging from the poor quality of certain educational applications ('apps') to the significant financial cost associated with the purchase, maintenance and eventual replacement of devices. Students mention the importance of internet access (both at home and in school) to maximise the functionality of their device.

### Policy Implications

The findings of this study have implications for a broad range of policy issues and provide an evidence base to help inform the implementation of the Digital Strategy for Schools (DES, 2015a). We outline the implications in three key areas: supporting school leaders and ICT co-ordinators in ICT-integration; investment in infrastructure; and addressing structural and curricular constraints.

Effective leadership is crucial to the smooth integration of ICT within schools. School leaders need support and clear guidelines/information, in terms of the types of ICT options and resources available, the value of planning and whole-school collaboration, the requirements in relation to infrastructure and teacher professional development. The newly established Centre for School Leadership<sup>3</sup> should play an important role in meeting these needs for school leaders. Ongoing investment in continuous professional development for teachers is also a key requirement.

While the roll-out of high-speed broadband has removed a significant barrier for schools, namely an inadequate internet connection, other infrastructural issues have now become more prevalent (such as internal school network reliability, ICT equipment quality, the availability and accessibility of online resources, capacity to meet the requirements of the reformed junior cycle and technical support). There will be a need for ongoing investment in schools to address these issues.

**T**he reform of junior cycle education involves... more innovative approaches to teaching and learning where digital technologies are central.

<sup>3</sup> The Centre's responsibilities will cover the continuum of professional development for school leaders, from pre-appointment training and induction of newly appointed principals, to continuing professional development throughout careers. The Centre is operating on a partnership basis between the Department of Education and Skills, the Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN) and the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD). For further details see <http://cslireland.ie>.



Finally, the study has highlighted many structural constraints that discourage the use of ICT, such as rigid class timetables and structured syllabi for State Examinations. The reform of junior cycle education involves a shift away from an exam-dominated mode of assessment, a focus on embedding key skills in teaching and learning and more innovative approaches to teaching and learning where digital technologies are central (NCCA 2011, DES, 2015a). It remains to be seen whether similar measures will be applied to senior cycle education. In any case, lessons can be learned from the Transition Year programme, where innovative teaching and learning methodologies incorporating ICT are encouraged. Finally, additional Departmental advice and guidance may be helpful for specific IT courses/subjects in second-level education.

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Lessons can be learned from the Transition Year programme, where innovative teaching and learning methodologies incorporating ICT are encouraged.

## Globalisation

The allegory that is influencing teachers' resistance to Junior Cycle Reform



**By Chris Byrne**

PhD student at Trinity College  
Dublin and teacher at Oatlands  
College Dublin

Chris Byrne places globalisation – economics, technology and increased ethnic diversity – at the heart of the longstanding dispute over Junior Cycle reform. Globalisation, he says, has left us reassessing the fundamental question of formal schooling: 'What knowledge, skills and values are most worthwhile?'

## Introduction

One of the societal catalysts for current international trends in curriculum reform is globalisation. It could be argued that this is also the basis for certain levels of resistance amongst teachers towards such reform, for example the Junior Cycle reform in Ireland.

It is important at this juncture to outline what is meant by globalisation, as there is no definitive definition of this term and as social changes occur within society, so too can the meaning of the term change.

It is clear that the most significant factors influencing international educational policy at present are economics, technology and an increase in ethnic diversity, all of which can be considered in this context as globalisation. Although an increase in ethnic diversity does not play a significant role in either the rationale or the content of the new Junior Cycle Framework, it is a fundamental component and a key goal of most other countries that have recently implemented curriculum reform. On the other hand, both economics and technology have most certainly played a role in changes to Irish educational policy.

## Global markets driving education policy

Currently, countries within the OECD rely increasingly on cross-border trade, foreign investment, cooperation between governments and international market stability. However, the international struggle for foreign investment is probably the most prevalent economic factor that influences educational policy. The national concern around Ireland's 2009 PISA results is a paradigm of how influential foreign investment is in educational policy. This, coupled with the 'digital revolution', has changed people's perceptions of not only how we learn but how we access information and what significance we place on knowledge. In fact, globalisation has left us reassessing the fundamental question of formal schooling: 'What knowledge, skills and values are most worthwhile' (Cuban, 1992. p. 221).

In these terms, globalisation has led countries to realise the uncertainty regarding the skills students will require in the future and the importance of being

able to combat this uncertainty to attract foreign investment. However, within this uncertainty some common trends have been recognised by observers. The number of unskilled jobs is diminishing at an exponential rate and there is a requirement for a future workforce of problem-solvers for both existing challenges and those that are still unforeseen. Among those challenges that future generations will have to face are: achieving environmental sustainability; new challenges within medical and health fields; and the ability to be adaptable to cater for demands in new jobs that don't currently exist.

To achieve these aims, modern curriculum development internationally has reflected the need for students to become learners for the twenty-first century. The process for achieving this is often to teach students how to learn and encourage them to become life-long learners. The philosophy behind students becoming life-long learners is that certain skills will allow them to be more adaptable in the future and supply a workforce that is attractive to employers.

Most OECD countries have already begun developing curricula to reflect these capitalist requirements. In Ireland we have already seen this shift in educational culture towards developing subject syllabi that try to reflect the working environment. An example of this is the recent reform of the post-primary mathematics curriculum in which the subject is now taught and assessed using 'real life' scenarios. Considering the recent technological advances, there is certainly a need for a philosophical shift in Irish post-primary education which is in keeping with the needs of a contemporary working environment. However, it must be noted that an over-dominance of a capitalist education system could leave students with a deficiency in traditional subject knowledge, threatening future advances within disciplines.

### Soft-skills in education

With this shift in curriculum content already underway, governments are striving for new ways to attract foreign investment and current employer groups are seeking graduates with more 'soft-skills'. Development of such skills would see teachers integrating a combination of interpersonal skills, career attributes, social skills, communication skills and 'appropriate' attitudes into class content. Such changes would result in further reductions in more traditional subject content and have led some critics to condemn such curricula as having been 'dumbed-down' (Donnelly, 2014). Such curriculum meritocracy derived from postmodern capitalistic needs, which evaluate soft-skills, jeopardises equality within the education system. Honda (2005) sees the increasing educational trend of assessing students on the combination of their ability to solve tasks associated with real-life circumstance and the 'functional potentials' of individuals as the creation of a system which lacks procedural fairness. Yamada (2011) also argues that such a system based on soft-skills is considerably subjective, and success is dependent upon similarities between the attitudes and values of the student and those of their teacher. Bernstein (2000) also highlights how students will be more likely to succeed if they come from families where informal interactions and discussions are commonplace. As a result, families of higher socio-economic background are more likely to achieve higher grades (Bernstein

**T**hose with a neo-liberal view... believe in following education trends towards a school-based curriculum centred on the needs of a globalised society that creates a strong workforce and attracts foreign investment.

**N**eo-Marxists believe that allowing our education system to be hijacked by neo-liberal views will result in greater social inequality and only benefit large multi-nationals.

**T**he international struggle for foreign investment is probably the most prevalent economic factor that influences educational policy.

**A**n over-dominance of a capitalist education system could leave students with a deficiency in traditional subject knowledge, threatening future advances within disciplines.

2000, 2003, Honda 2005, Kariya 2010, Takayama, 2013). Dempsey (2016) however argues that the Junior Certificate is not a high stakes examination and questions the lack of interpersonal competences that students of the traditional Junior Cycle are exposed to.

### Curriculum structure

Demands in globalisation and social changes have also resulted in an international shift in curriculum structures from centrally controlled curricula towards school-based curricula within a central framework. This shift is also reflected in the NCCA's decision to implement a school-based curriculum for the new Junior Cycle Framework. It is this battle between a centrally-based curriculum with traditional content, and a school-based curriculum within a central framework with new learning styles, that is focal to the resistance to change amongst some teachers.

Traditionally the Irish education system has employed centrally based curricula. In this model a centralised body creates the curriculum, prescribing what schools should teach. In a school-based curriculum within a central framework, a centralised body (the NCCA in the case of the new Junior Cycle) devises a framework allowing teachers and schools to devise their own curriculum or syllabi within the confines of this framework. Centrally based curricula benefit from experts, employer groups and a broader knowledge of new innovations and ideas of which stakeholders at a local level may not be aware of. However, their limitations lie in their inflexibility to adapt to new innovations and the limited influences that stakeholders – teachers, students, school management and the community – have at a school level (Kärkkäinen, 2012). School-based curricula, where the teachers or the school take full autonomy over curriculum content, have the advantage of being much more flexible and proactive to the adoption of new global innovations and trends. These are among the main reasons cited by the NCCA for the need for change of the Junior Cycle.

However, school-based curricula will only be successful when teachers and other stakeholders are aware of such changes and when they have the motivation to implement the changes. If the teachers devising the content of the curriculum are unaware of new changes within their area, then it is unlikely that these changes will ever be implemented.

Currently there is an international trend towards a mix between centrally controlled curricula and school-based curricula. This form of curriculum structure is called a school-based curriculum within a central framework. This model allows teachers and schools to design and tailor a curriculum to the needs of their students while also affording curriculum development bodies or government influence over the national curriculum. This approach allows schools to identify the needs of the local communities alongside national objectives and to incorporate them into their curriculum. Such a system allows quick reactive change to new innovations that would generally take much longer to be adopted within a central system.

For school-based curricula within a central framework to be successful, teachers need to be extremely motivated, aware of globalisation, the social needs of the country and kept abreast of changes and developments

within their area. If these requirements are in place, then the development and implementation of a curriculum at school level within a central framework that encompasses local needs, societal needs and is tailored to the learning styles and needs of the student, is possible. However, this may be too much to expect from teachers given their existing heavy workloads and the quantity of change that has already been implemented. For example, while reforms in other countries have shown that there can be considerable benefits to such a curriculum structure, these benefits can be short lived as teachers within this style of implementation can burn out quickly or just move out of teaching (Huberman, 1983).

### School-based assessment

It is this change in curriculum structure between centrally controlled curriculum and school-based curriculum within a central framework that has been the centre of disgruntlement between teacher unions and the government. It is easy to see why a government would want to employ a school-based curriculum within a central framework as it is reactive to the fast paced changing needs which are a result of globalisation. On the other hand, it is easy to see why teachers would resist a curriculum that represents such huge change and threatens traditional subject content.

Also central to this row has been the refusal of teachers to mark their own students work for the purpose of state examination. At its essence, a school-based curriculum requires a school-developed assessment. Without this, one of the main reasons for employing such a curriculum does not exist. If a central body, such as the State Examinations Commission, develops summative assessments, then school-based curricula simply cannot work as the assessment will dictate the content of the curriculum. Hence, contrary to speculation in some quarters, the removal of the Junior Certificate summative exam is not a cost-saving exercise. A 1999 report by the NCCA entitled Junior Certificate: Issues for Discussion did outline how concerns had arisen over the strain that two state examinations place on the State Examinations Commission and the Department of Education (NCCA, 1999). Although this may be a factor, the main reason is that real change cannot happen when employing centrally-based assessment in a school-based curricula system which is what is now in place. This will most certainly render the implementation of the school-based curricula system a failure.

### Neo-liberalism in Education

The result of this strong divide between those that support school-based curricula and those that support a centrally controlled curriculum should not be a source of surprise, especially when it is fuelled by a social change such as globalisation. This rationale will instantly put those with neo-liberal and neo-Marxist views at loggerheads with each other. Those supporting a neo-liberal view will see open markets, a reduction in financial regulation and reduced state power as a prerequisite for economic success. This means they believe in following education trends towards a school-based curriculum based on the needs of a globalised society that creates a strong workforce and attracts foreign investment. Neo-Marxists, on the other hand, believe that allowing our education system to be hi-jacked by neo-liberal views will result in greater social inequality and only benefit large multi-nationals. They view international

**R** eal change cannot happen when employing centrally-based assessment in a school-based curricula system [because] the assessment will dictate the content of the curriculum.

**R** esearch has shown that teachers tend to have a traditional approach to education and... the move to a school-based curriculum within a central framework is a departure from that.

**F** or successful change to be implemented, a shared vision must be created and a unified understanding of the purpose for the change must exist (Vandenberghe, 1988)

**A** s greater emphasis is placed on soft-skills, the more traditional content within the curriculum must be cut.

trends to provide multi-national companies with an education system and workforce that suits their needs as an affirmation of the liberalisation of education. Waks (2003, p. 387) argues that:

There is a growing consensus that an adequate understanding of the curriculum change process will have to draw upon both political-economic components to explain the pressures elites impose upon curriculum making at the boundary of the educational institution, and institutional components to explain how the institution's internal processes respond to these pressures.

Although limited work has been carried out in this area, there is no doubt that post-primary schools are responding to these pressures with resistance. This is not to say that teachers are resisting change because they share neo-Marxist views, but their resistance may be seen as an allegory of neo-liberal views steaming from a globalised marketplace.

When we take the Junior Cycle as an example of curriculum reform in Ireland, one could speculate that teachers are resisting such a change because of factors within curriculum structure and implementation; however, these reasons still have trickled down from factors originated from issues associated with globalisation and neo-liberalism. As a result, they have acumined in three main reasons for resistance towards the introduction of the new Junior Cycle.

### Outcome-based education

Firstly, research has shown that teachers tend to have a traditional approach to education and within an Irish context the move to a school-based curriculum within a central framework is a departure from that. Outcome-based education (OBE) is commonly employed by change agents when implementing a school-based model within a central framework. This allows the curriculum developer to build a framework but also to give autonomy to teachers or the school and is the model that the NCCA has decided to employ for the new Junior Cycle. With this model, students are expected to have achieved predetermined outcomes or statements of learning by the end of the process. As a result of the focus on 'soft-skills' that lends itself to OBE system, the statements of learning are often equivocal and vague. In the case of the new Junior Cycle, all teachers of different subject areas pick from a list of twenty-four statements of learning and this has resulted in extremely ambiguous statements. Since learning outcomes of OBE tend to focus on soft-skills that employer groups currently seek in graduates, these are difficult to measure from a classroom teaching perspective. Thus, OBE assessments tend to adopt a variety of assessment techniques throughout the course of study, which is often necessary to validate the range of objectives in communication skills, teamwork, social skills, etc.

Moreover, as greater emphasis is placed on these soft-skills, more traditional content within the curriculum must be cut. Many teachers may view this and the introduction of common levels as a reduction of standards; hence, some have rejected the new Junior Cycle as an attempt to 'dumb down the curriculum'. Teachers' jobs revolve around raising standards and when they perceive governmental decisions to reduce



standards by cutting traditional content, as happened in the case of the mathematics reform, it is not surprising that they would then resist the change.

Also, as stated earlier, for this type of system to be successful assessments must be developed by the teacher. The changes negotiated by the teacher unions to maintain centrally developed assessment will result in summative assessment being the dominant curriculum developer. As a result only moderate surface change will occur at best in most schools and the planned 'fundamental change' (Cuban, 1992) that the NCCA strived to implement will never be instigated. This means that before the Junior Cycle was ever implemented it had changed so much from its original conception that it will be impossible to evaluate if it would have ever been a success or a failure.

### Clear vision

Secondly, OBE curricula rely on a looser framework that does not specify what the student will learn or how they will learn it. By its nature, therefore, this type of system creates uncertainty for teachers as to what it will look like when implemented. For successful change to be implemented, a shared vision must be created and a unified understanding of the purpose for the change must exist (Vandenberghe, 1988), not only by political stakeholders and economic elites but also by educators, students and society. If a common vision is not shared by all parties, then the change is more than likely to be altered or rejected by those implementing it. Care must be taken when implementing this level of autonomy that it does not result in a lack of coherent vision. Manouchehri and Goodman's (2000) study supports this belief that teachers need concrete images that depict what it is like to teach in ways that are consistent with the reformed methodologies of teaching. When these images are not depicted clearly, and a shared vision is not held, efforts towards implementing reform may often fail (Senger, 1999). In the absence of a shared vision, it is even more essential that curriculum implementers convey the rationale for change and have a clear process of how the change will be implemented. Unfortunately in the case of the new Junior Cycle, teachers have not been engaged in the rationale for the change or a concrete depiction of what the new courses will entail. This has resulted in a lack of shared vision and resistance to its implementation.

### Change theory

The third and final reason why the new Junior Cycle will struggle to gain acceptance lies in change theory. With change, there often comes some expectation of resistance. However, this is not necessarily true and change is often embraced and sought by those working in organisations. Change theory tells us that when people see the benefits of the change, and see that the risk of implementation is less than the rewards of implementation, then the change will be successful. When we look to see the personal benefits to teachers of introducing the new Junior Cycle Framework, it is hard to find any. However, there certainly are plenty of disincentives, such as recent reduction in teachers' salaries or a reduction in internal supports, such as the moratorium on middle management posts that has also resulted in a lack of career progression, an increase in the working week and cuts in spending on education. These coupled

Some have rejected the new Junior Cycle as an attempt to 'dumb down the curriculum'.

The changes negotiated by the teacher unions to maintain centrally developed assessment will result in summative assessment being the dominant curriculum developer.

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Change theory tells us that when people see the benefits of the change, and see that the risk is less than the rewards, then the change will be successful.

with the risk of reducing educational standards for their students means that implementation of the new Junior Cycle was destined to struggle. In an economic climate with few incentives, the will of teachers to bring about change is low. Until the factors mentioned above are altered, these changes will only be superficial at best.

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## CHAPTER 4

# FURTHER EDUCATION & TRAINING



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# Further Education and Training: 2016

Building Skills for the Economy and Social Cohesion Nationwide



**By Pat O'Mahony,**  
Education Officer, ETBI

**I**n this comprehensive overview of Further Education & Training in 2016, we see a burgeoning sector with an energetic and proactive management that is leaving no stone unturned to fulfil its role in Ireland's achievement of smart, sustainable, inclusive growth.

## Background

For decades, the vocational education committees (VECs) and FÁS provided adult education and training on two separate tracks. But their excellent work was low-profile, undervalued and seen as relevant mainly to those who did not make it to third level. Until relatively recently, indeed, third-level was the only game in town. But the times they are a-changing. Today, Ireland's focus on school leavers directly accessing third-level education is under the microscope. Concern abounds worldwide about how work-ready are newly qualified third-level graduates.

The European Commission places FET<sup>1</sup> at the centre of Europe's strategy for achieving smart, sustainable, inclusive growth, and for addressing diverse challenges: adapting new technologies, coping with rapid economic change, addressing skills deficits and building social cohesion.<sup>2</sup> The Commission has called on governments, social partners and education and training providers to promote apprenticeships and other forms of work-based learning.

A recent UK report<sup>3</sup> finds that apprentices' earning potential is not significantly different to that of degree holders, and that for some the projected net lifetime earnings significantly exceed third-level graduates'. Interestingly, the SOLAS PLC review provides evidence that PLC graduates' employment

1 In much of the EU and in several other OECD countries, the term *Vocational Education and Training* (VET) is used instead of *Further Education and Training* (FET).

2 See for example:

- *The Helsinki Communiqué on Enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training* [http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/helsinkicom\\_en.pdf](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/helsinkicom_en.pdf)
- *The Copenhagen Declaration* [https://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/copenhagen-declaration\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/copenhagen-declaration_en.pdf)
- *ET2010* <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=URI:SERV:ef0016&from=EN>
- High-performance apprenticeships & work-based learning: 20 guiding principles file:///C:/Users/pat/Downloads/ET%202020%20WG%20VET%2020%20guiding%20principles%20publication\_finalised\_to%20EC\_09%2012%202015%20(13).pdf

3 <https://documents.vuelio.uk.com/DocumentView.aspx?id=d5d0db29-0992-4f74-b992-645c9ff42866.pdf&token=6430e8af-d765-4481-ae0b-fbe162feee33>

and earning capacity can compare very favourably with those of higher education graduates.

### Legislative reforms of 2013

The 2013 legislative reforms which established a national training authority, SOLAS,<sup>4</sup> and the Education and Training Boards (ETBs)<sup>5</sup> provided Ireland with the structure needed to position FET at the heart of building prosperity and social cohesion. The Further Education and Training (FET) Strategy (2014–2019)<sup>6</sup> then charted the development of FET to the end of the decade, clearly defining FET for the first time:

*FET provides education and training and related supports to assist individuals to gain a range of employment, career, personal and social skills and qualifications at Levels 16 on the NFQ<sup>7</sup> or equivalent, and is aimed at jobseekers, school leavers, labour market returners, employees, those interested in new career direction, those wishing to access 'second chance' education, those wishing to re-engage in learning and to prepare schoolleavers and others for higher education. FET also plays an important role in helping people to lead fulfilling lives, supporting some of the hardtoreach individuals and groups to achieve their potential and reducing the costs to society of exclusion.*

Since 2014 there have been many developments in the FET sector, and this year several milestones were reached.

### Participation in FET 2016

Data gathering and analysis in FET have improved greatly. This writer estimates that in 2016<sup>8</sup> there were some 72,000 full-time learners in FET and 275,000 part-time. For the same period, there were 196,187<sup>9</sup> students enrolled in higher education. On numbers alone, FET affects significantly more people than does higher education. While the exact proportion of adult FET learners (as distinct from school leavers) has not yet been documented fully, a large proportion of FET learners are mature adults returning to education to improve the quality of their lives. Adults are increasingly seeing FET as a way to achieve personal goals, and FET is touching the lives of adults in every community in Ireland in an unheralded way.

The vast majority of this FET provision is delivered by the 16 ETBs across the country in a wide range of programmes. While many programmes focus on the skilling, reskilling or upskilling of unemployed and employed members of the workforce, covering every career area, others focus on empowering individuals irrespective of whether they are in the workforce. For example, in 2016 some 40,000 undertook what are generally termed literacy programmes. These ETB programmes, usually at levels 1 to 3 on the NFQ, enable adults of all ages to improve spelling, reading, writing, maths

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A major step was achieved in 2016 with the launch of a new FET Course Hub which brings together for the first time up-to-date information on all SOLAS-funded FET courses.

and ICT skills. Some 50,000 participated in ETB-run community education programmes which offer people a way to re-engage with learning, support their health and wellbeing, strengthen their families and communities, and find pathways to further education and employment. FET programmes also prioritise cohorts such as the long-term unemployed and unemployed youth.

### Progress in implementing the FET Strategy in 2016

The FET Strategy sets out five goals in the period to 2019:

- » Skills for the economy
- » Active inclusion
- » Quality provision
- » Integrated planning and funding
- » Standing of FET

Significant progress was made towards achieving these goals during 2016. While the goals distinguish between skills for the economy and for active inclusion, the focus in planning for FET provision is on FET contributing to both the collective (social) good and the economy. The success of one often depends on and contributes to the other.<sup>10</sup>

Historically, funding was allocated by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) on a programme-by-programme basis, but since 2015 funding for FET provision has been sought by ETBs and granted by SOLAS on the basis of an ETB's entire FET programme. While this has added to ETBs' workload, it enables planning to be more coherent and gaps and overlaps in provision to be identified.

The overall long-term goal is to develop a fit-for-purpose planning, funding and reporting process for FET. 2016 was the second year of a three-year cycle in developing a new funding and planning model for FET.

### New FET Course Hub

Planning and reporting will be greatly facilitated when the new Programme and Learner Support System (PLSS), a joint initiative between SOLAS and the 16 ETBs, is fully rolled out. A major step was achieved in 2016 with the launch of a new FET Course Hub which brings together for the first time up-to-date information on all (4,000 plus) SOLAS-funded FET courses, and gives the public access to this information via a one-stop portal: [fetchcourses.ie](http://fetchcourses.ie). This will allow learners, prospective learners, and those who influence them to access information about FET opportunities nationwide, such as Post-Leaving Cert courses, the latest traineeships, the Back to Education Initiative, and many more.

### Professional Development of FET Practitioners

The competence of those who design, manage, deliver and support FET provision determines its quality. In late 2015 SOLAS, in collaboration with the ETBs, surveyed all involved with FET provision in ETBs to establish a

4 <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2013/act/25/enacted/en/pdf>

5 <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2013/act/11/enacted/en/html>

6 <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/Further-Education-and-Training-Strategy-2014-2019.pdf>

7 NFQ refers to Ireland's 10-level National Framework of Qualifications

8 These figures are extrapolated from data published in the 2016 Further Education and Training Services Plan: <http://www1.solas.ie/SolasPdfLibrary/FET%20Services%20Plan%202016.pdf>

9 <http://www.heai.ie/en/statistics/overview>

10 See SOLAS FET Services Plan, p. 14 <http://www1.solas.ie/SolasPdfLibrary/FET%20Services%20Plan%202016.pdf>

profile of the FET workforce. This provided detailed information for the whole ETB FET sector and for each ETB separately about the professional development needs of the FET workforce – managers, learning practitioners, support personnel. In 2016, the profile data informed the development of an FET Professional Development Strategy 2016–2019. A plan for implementing and resourcing this strategy is currently being finalised, and a key feature will be the extent to which it explicitly responds to the expressed professional development needs of the FET workforce.

### FET Policy Framework for Employee Skills Development

As Ireland moves towards full employment, FET provision must develop a renewed focus on those who need upskilling to retain employment in workplaces where skill needs are changing. Target groups here include those with low-wage and low-skill jobs, those working in SMEs, and older workers who may find upskilling difficult. The challenges are to identify those who need upskilling, convince them and their employers of the need for upskilling, design and deliver accessible and relevant programmes, and devise a value-for-money resourcing model to facilitate all this.

In mid-2016 SOLAS established a working group involving the ETBs, IDA, Enterprise Ireland and Regional Skills Fora, to help develop a policy framework for employee skills development to guide FET provision for those in employment. Employee skills development applies to all manner and modes of such provision, whether formal, informal or non-formal, and is not limited to development situated in the workplace. It may, for example, take place on the job, be provided externally, be full- or part- time, and be delivered by traditional or developing modes such as open and e-learning options. A draft framework has been prepared, and implementation is expected to begin in early 2017.

### Apprenticeships

Over the last two years, five ‘established’ apprenticeships in craft areas have been reviewed and new curricula for them were introduced in 2016. Review of the remaining 22 apprenticeships has begun, and new curricula will also be put in place for these trades. Overall, apprenticeship numbers for the ‘established’ trades have picked up considerably, and the apprentice population to the end of September 2016 is estimated to show growth of 15% over the whole of 2015.

Developing new apprenticeships presents more challenges than were envisaged at first. Occupational standards and curricula must be developed, programmes must be validated by QQI or another body with delegated authority (such as institutes of technology), and employers with appropriate in-house training capacity must be attracted to host apprentices. The consortia have worked well over 2015 and 2016, and several new apprenticeships will have begun by year-end, including an Insurance Practice apprenticeship leading to a Level 8 award on the NFQ and an Industrial Electrical Engineering apprenticeship leading to a Level 7 award.

Much has been learned in developing these new apprenticeships, and it is expected to gather pace in the coming years, with a commitment to

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**S**everal new apprenticeships will have begun by year-end, including an Insurance Practice apprenticeship leading to a Level 8 award on the NFQ.

**O**ne of the first degree courses for apprentices, a two-year Bachelor of Engineering led by Limerick IT, is designed as an add-on for qualified electricians.

**S**OLAS, the ETBs and industry are currently collaborating on developing an effective model of Work-Based Learning (WBL) for implementation in the FET sector.

having 100 apprenticeships operational by end of the decade.<sup>11</sup> The glass ceilings between the trades and white-collar world and between trades and professions have also been breached. These developments could transform education and training over time. In particular, they should ensure the gap is closed between the skills of those leaving education and training and the skills required in the workplace, allowing Ireland to move away from exclusive reliance on the ‘points race’ as the route to higher levels on the NFQ, and slow growth in the costs of financing third-level education.

Interestingly, one of the first degree courses for apprentices, a two-year Bachelor of Engineering (industrial electrical engineering) led by Limerick IT, is designed as an add-on for qualified electricians to meet the needs of electrical, engineering, automation and manufacturing employers. These apprentices will spend 70 percent of their time on the job, with two 15-week college-based blocks at Limerick IT over two years.

Clearly, many challenges lie ahead for ETBs in the area of apprenticeship training. Over time such training must be integrated into the work of more further education colleges, as many of the ‘white collar’ apprenticeships are well suited to the programmes already being delivered in these colleges. The appointment of FET directors in each ETB should greatly enhance integration of the many extant strands of FET provision into a single coherent FET service, as should the recently appointed Training Function Support Officer in ETBI.

### Work-Based Learning Project–Career Traineeship

SOLAS, the ETBs and industry are currently collaborating on developing an effective model of Work-Based Learning (WBL) for implementation in the FET sector. WBL is learning which occurs when learners are doing work that leads to the production of goods or services, rather than in an education or training setting. WBL is about ensuring that those completing FET programmes have the skills required in the workplace.

Career Traineeship is a WBL initiative that involves trainees doing off-the-job training in an ETB-approved centre and on-the-job training with an employer that is long enough to develop their professional and practical competence, thus facilitating transition to employment. Traineeships last six to eighteen months and are in general accredited at NFQ levels 4 or 5, depending on labour market needs and trainee entry levels.

SOLAS, in partnership with the Irish Hotel Federation, MSLETB, LCETB, LOETB and CMETB,<sup>12</sup> has developed two national Career Traineeship programmes in Hospitality, at levels 4 and 5. Skills to be provided were determined in partnership with participating hotels, to ensure the skills, knowledge and competence required in the workplace were addressed in the traineeship. Four Hospitality Traineeship programmes are currently running in Cavan, Mayo, Sligo and Limerick, with further programmes planned for Louth, Meath, Wicklow, Kildare and Tipperary.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Corporate-Reports/Strategy-Statement/Department-of-Education-and-Skills-Strategy-Statement-2016-2019.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Mayo Sligo Leitrim ETB, Limerick Clare ETB, Laois Offaly ETB and Cavan Monaghan ETB.



SOLAS has also been working with LCETB, WWETB, Cork ETB, GRETB and MSLETB<sup>13</sup> in developing a Career Traineeship programmes in Engineering. A pilot in Engineering has already been delivered in CMETB.

Work has now begun on developing processes and systems that will support ETBs in scaling up application of the Career Traineeship model to meet a wide range of identified labour market needs.

### FET Programme Review

The FET Strategy's implementation plan committed SOLAS to evaluating the following FET programmes: PLC, VTOS, BTEI,<sup>14</sup> Youthreach, Specific Skills Training and Traineeships. Other FET provision will be evaluated by SOLAS in due course.

In 2015, SOLAS commissioned the ESRI<sup>15</sup> to conduct an independent evaluation of PLC provision, for which specification was endorsed by the DES in March 2015. An evaluation oversight group involving SOLAS, DES, DPER, ETBs, NCGE, JMB, ISME<sup>16</sup> and independent expert Dr Gerard Lum of King's College, London, advise SOLAS on data collection, methodology, reporting and interpretation of findings.

A series of workshops were organised by SOLAS in February 2016, where representatives from the ETB sector discussed initial ESRI findings on three strands of the research: Learner Survey (data unweighted), Provider Survey, and Desk-Based Research. The summary initial findings related to geographical distribution of PLC provision; the structure of provision vis-à-vis economic change; the emphasis on a small number of PLC programmes, e.g. early childhood care and education, community and health services; the goals and objectives of PLC programmes; decisions around course provision and closure; and spread of teacher/tutor qualifications.

The ESRI has now submitted a comprehensive report to SOLAS for consideration. SOLAS is examining the report, considering its findings and will, where appropriate, recommend to DES improvements to the National PLC Programme.

### Awareness Campaign to Improve Basis Skills

In September 2016 SOLAS launched a major new awareness campaign to encourage adults to **'Take the first step'** to improve their reading, writing, maths and computer skills. Taking the first steps on any difficult journey requires courage and commitment – and for those with difficulties reading or writing, the stigma can prove daunting and discouraging. The campaign aims to dispel this stigma by focusing on the benefits of returning to learning, and encouraging those interested in improving their basic skills to contact **Freephone 1800 20 20 65, Text LEARN to 50050** or log on to **www.takethefirststep.ie** to get the help they need.

<sup>13</sup> Wexford Waterford ETB, Galway Roscommon ETB.

<sup>14</sup> Post-Leaving Certificate courses, Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme, Back to Education Initiative.

<sup>15</sup> Economic and Social Research Institute.

<sup>16</sup> Department of Public Expenditure and Review, National Centre for Guidance in Education, Joint Managerial Board, Irish Small and Medium Enterprises.

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**I**n April 2016 QQI published new Quality Assurance Guidelines outlining the core areas that providers need to address in... their quality assurance policies and procedures.

The campaign features four adults sharing their positive stories about returning to education to improve their literacy and numeracy, on radio advertising, video and digital advertising on social media, posters and public relations activity. The **'Take the first step'** campaign is a key action in the FET Strategy and is being managed by the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) on behalf of SOLAS. It brings together stakeholders including ETBs, libraries, Skillnets, AONTAS, ISME, IBEC,<sup>17</sup> DES and the Department of Health.

### Developments in Quality Assurance (QA) in ETBs

The Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act (2012) made the quality assurance of FET programmes the primary responsibility of individual ETBs. This work advanced significantly during 2016.

In April QQI<sup>18</sup> published new QA Guidelines outlining the core areas that providers need to address in designing, establishing, evaluating, maintaining and reviewing their quality assurance policies and procedures. It requires ETBs to have a fit-for-purpose system for managing quality assurance and for systematically monitoring, evaluating, reviewing and improving programme quality. QQI has also published new QA guidelines for the new Apprenticeships, and there are new policies and criteria for validation of education and training programmes. Sectoral QA guidelines for ETBs should be published by year-end.

During 2016 ETBs have made significant progress in working collaboratively to enhance the quality assurance of FET across the sector. A sectoral strategic work plan is being finalised, and a number of sectoral QA projects have been identified and will be progressed collaboratively. This work is greatly helped by the work of the ETBI QQI Collaborative FET Forum, which meets regularly. The forum's work is supported by ETBI's Further Education and Training (QA) Officer, Marie Gould. A critical next step is to establish appropriately resourced QA units in each ETB.

### Concluding Remarks

This article is intended to give some flavour of the progress made over the last year in building a best-in-class FET system. However, what is described here is akin to the visible part of an iceberg. Much other work is going on in SOLAS and ETBs that is currently invisible. All this work will, in the medium to long term, be critical to national prosperity and social cohesion.

<sup>17</sup> [www.skillnets.ie](http://www.skillnets.ie), [www.aontas.com](http://www.aontas.com), [www.ibec.ie](http://www.ibec.ie).

<sup>18</sup> Quality and Qualifications Ireland.

# Building the future

As the economy improves construction graduates are in big demand

This is a very good time to be considering a career in construction. The sector is on the rise again in Ireland.

There are now 116,700 people working in construction in Ireland. What's more, that number will rise over the coming years. The Government is targeting the creation of an extra 60,000 construction jobs by 2020. That will create a lot of opportunities for people looking to begin their career. What other sector will provide so many possibilities for those who are completing their education?

A growing industry always creates more jobs and no sector will grow as quickly in Ireland as construction will over the next few years.

Construction professionals work in three broad areas: civils, building and the mechanical and electrical sector.

Civils deal with big infrastructure projects like roads and flood defences, while professionals working in the building side of the industry will be involved in projects like shopping centres and industrial units.

The mechanical and electrical sector, as the name suggests, is a specialist area dealing with the 'fit-out' of a building, including heating, ventilation, air-conditioning and electrical works.

The nature of construction work means it's a varied and challenging career. People who



Michael Stone,  
President of the Construction  
Industry Federation

study construction related subjects in college move on to work for some of Ireland's best known construction firms.

Aoibhin Gaynor is one such graduate. "I have a First class honours degree in Mechanical and Manufacturing engineering BAI and a Bachelor's of Arts degree in Mathematics BA from Trinity College Dublin (TCD)," she explains.

"I am currently employed as a mechanical engineer with the Jones Engineering Group. At present I am working on one of the largest Building Information Modelling (BIM) projects in Europe at the Intel campus in Leixlip, Co Kildare. As a team lead my day-to-day activities involve managing a group of 3D Virtual Construction Designers in preparing 3D models using several Autodesk software packages.

"The greatest benefit of a degree in engineering is it offers a wide range of career possibilities, and provides you with a set of skills highly adaptable to many sectors. Choosing to study mechanical and manufacturing engineering was the first major milestone in my career development. The thing I love most about engineering is that it enables you to work as part of a diverse, collaborative team of professionals and teaches you how to communicate complex ideas. Projects are always changing, and developing – particularly as the technology area of expertise develops. Engineering involves creativity, innovation and allows you to work on interesting projects, with the opportunity to travel."

As CIF President Michael Stone says, "The most enjoyable challenge in the construction industry is that no two days are ever the same. Each day brings a new challenge and new possibilities. I don't think I would have had the same prospects in any other sector."



Aoibhin Gaynor, a young graduate who is working as a mechanical engineer with Jones Engineering.





## Addressing the Skills Gaps

### Planning for an unpredictable future

The labour market is constantly evolving, and the occupations, skills and qualifications that are required change over time. The increasingly interdisciplinary nature of the world of work is also resulting in overlaps in the skills required across different sectors and occupations.

Planning for an unpredictable future is a complicated and uncertain business. To remain competitive in an increasingly interconnected world, the workforce must have the skills for the jobs of tomorrow. While we cannot predict what changes technology may bring to the workplace of tomorrow, nor what specific skills will be needed, we can ensure that people have the basic skills and competences they need to play an active role in society, and that we have a system in place to ascertain what skills the economy needs as they arise.

Considerable work has been undertaken over the past year to address skills gaps in certain sectors and to work towards a system that responds to skills gaps as they arise.

#### Action Plan for Education

A new Action Plan for Education was launched by the Taoiseach, Minister Bruton and Minister Halligan on 15 September. Its central vision is that Irish education and training should become the best in Europe over the next decade. The plan contains hundreds of actions to be implemented, with particular focus on disadvantage, skills, and continuous improvement in the education service. The plan has five high-level goals:

- » Improve the learning experience and the success of learners
- » Improve the progress of learners at risk of educational disadvantage or learners with special educational needs
- » Help those delivering education services to continuously improve
- » Build stronger bridges between education and communities
- » Improve national planning and support services.



**By Kathleen Gavin,**  
Head of Skills Planning and  
Enterprise Engagement Unit,  
Department of Education and Skills

**K**athleen Gavin details the considerable work undertaken over the past year to address skills gaps in various sectors and to work towards a system that responds to skills gaps as they arise.

**T**he fora will provide a cohesive, education-led structure for employers and the further and higher education system to work together...

Among its actions, the Plan incorporates the implementation of the National Skills Strategy, which was published earlier in the year.

#### National Skills Strategy

The new National Skills Strategy contains over 120 actions, involving over 50 stakeholders, and aims to provide a framework for skills development that will help drive Ireland's growth both economically and societally over the next decade. The Strategy underlines the importance of key skills in entrepreneurship, ICT and other transversal skills. It consolidates several actions already underway under six priorities, and proposes new actions in each area. These include producing employability statements by further education and higher education institutions, developing a new Entrepreneurship Education Policy Statement, and promoting lifelong learning.

#### New Skills Architecture

A key element of the National Skills Strategy is to create a new Skills Architecture. This will include a new National Skills Council, which will oversee research and give advice on the prioritisation of identified skills needs and how to deliver them. The Council will receive information from many sources, including the Regional Skills Fora, which form a key part of this new Skills Architecture.

Nine Regional Skills Fora have been established, providing a single point of contact in each region to help employers connect with the range of services and supports available across the education and training system. The fora's innovative structure sees the work plan in each region being driven by key stakeholders, including employers, enterprises, and education and training providers, ensuring that the responses developed are tailored to the unique skills needs identified. The fora will also provide a cohesive, education-led structure for employers and the further and higher education system to work together in building the skills needs of their regions. The outcomes of the fora's deliberations will be considered by the National Skills Council, along with other sources of skills data.

By the end of May 2016, the fora had appointed a dedicated team of nine Regional Skills Forum managers to be the key contact points and lead the forum's work in each region. Each manager will establish and manage a strong network of working relationships between the region's stakeholders. Their priorities will include facilitating the involvement of enterprise stakeholders in a collaborative framework with education and training partners in identifying, developing and delivering skills development responses, and sharing and disseminating information to external stakeholders.

Work has already begun: each region is using existing evidential data and developing new approaches to establishing the skills needs in their areas, and engaging with enterprise and education and training providers.

#### Addressing the Skills Gaps

The FE and HE systems have responded strongly to national needs during the economic crisis. Both are performing strongly, with the skilled

**U**p to 10 [new apprenticeships] will be launched over the coming months, spanning the insurance industry, international financial services, industrial engineering...



labour force available through the sectors being a major draw for foreign companies.

### Apprenticeship and Traineeship

After some years of decline, registrations in the 27 existing apprenticeship trades are rising as the employment and economic situation improves. This trend is forecast to continue in the coming years. SOLAS forecasts that registrations will increase to 3,390 in 2016, 4,219 in 2017 and 5,089 in 2018.

New apprenticeships are also being progressed through the Apprenticeship Council. Up to 10 will be launched over the coming months, spanning the insurance industry, international financial services, industrial engineering and a range of new craft and service areas. In September 2016, the Insurance Practitioner Apprenticeship was the first of the new programmes to be launched, with the Industrial Engineer Apprenticeship due to launch in October.

In 2015 a new Career Traineeship initiative was instigated, to develop a more effective model of work-based learning, primarily at NFQ levels 4 and 5, incorporating best national and international research and practice. The Career Traineeship model of work-based learning is currently being piloted with the hospitality and engineering sectors, with seven ETBs involved. A range of programmes are currently in development, with the first Career Traineeship having begun in hospitality in Laois Offaly ETB and Limerick Clare ETB in the final quarter of 2015.

### Targeted Skills Provision

The skills provision of the mainstream HE and FE sectors is complemented by targeted skills programmes that aim to provide upskilling and reskilling opportunities in areas of skills needs. Springboard+, since its inception in 2011, has provided over 30,000 people with free higher education courses in areas of skills needs, and recently rolled out its sixth programme of courses. In 2016, the ESF co-funded programme is providing 180 courses comprising almost 6,000 places in areas such as ICT, manufacturing (including biopharma), entrepreneurship, cross-enterprise skills and international financial services. The courses will be at levels 6–9 on the National Framework of Qualifications.

A new development in 2016 is a pilot programme under the ICT Conversion programme, whereby almost 700 places on two-year, part-time courses in ICT will be provided in 16 public and private institutions, building on the successes of the previous one-year full-time ICT Conversion courses. These courses, under Springboard+, enable graduates in cognate disciplines to reskill in the area of ICT, providing, in combination with the part-time Springboard courses, over 6,000 graduates in the area of ICT between 2012 and 2015.

### Next Steps

Over the coming months the focus will be on establishing the National Skills Council and developing its work plans, as well as moving forward with all the initiatives set out in the National Skills Strategy. It is an exciting time for all of us involved in advancing the Skills agenda, and I look forward to reporting next year on progress in our ambitious and challenging plans.

**S**OLAS forecasts that registrations [for apprentice-ships] will increase to 3,390 in 2016, 4,219 in 2017 and 5,089 in 2018.

**O**ver the coming months the focus will be on establishing the National Skills Council.

## Entrepreneurship in FET

Fostering an entrepreneurial culture



By Dr Derek Walsh,  
Project Manager SOLAS

**T**he Government's ambition is that Ireland will be among the most entrepreneurial nations in the world and acknowledged as a world-class environment in which to start and grow a business. Dr Derek Walsh discusses the actions being taken towards this and related goals.

### Introduction

Early in 2016, SOLAS commissioned consultants Tom Martin & Associates/TMA to examine the nature and extent of entrepreneurship education and training provision in the FET sector. More specifically, the research project was designed to:

- » Generate policy-relevant knowledge about entrepreneurship education and training in FET
- » Identify and document best practice in entrepreneurship education and training in FET
- » Propose measures whereby the lessons from these best-practice exemplars might be further diffused in the FET system
- » Identify the resource and organisational issues that would need to be addressed to further develop this provision
- » Make recommendations on improvements and adaptations to existing provision.

First it is worth considering definitional issues of entrepreneurship education and training that were used to guide the research. The literature shows two quite differing views expressed on what is meant by entrepreneurship, one 'broad' and one 'narrow'. The narrow definition is about opportunity identification, business development, venture creation and growth, i.e., becoming an 'entrepreneur'. The broader definition is much wider in scope and more widely used:

- » It includes 'intrapreneurship' in an existing organisation – individuals can act entrepreneurially in a wide range of roles in work organisations, large or small.
- » It includes social entrepreneurship in non-work activities such as voluntary work in the social sphere, creating social added value.
- » It includes personal entrepreneurship in the behaviour of individuals who take responsibility for their lives and demonstrate entrepreneurial spirit in the face of challenges and opportunities.

According to the OECD (2009: 14), ‘entrepreneurship education should not only focus on narrowly defined tools (e.g. how to start a business, financial and human resource management) but also to broader attitudes (like creativity and risk taking etc.)’. The broader definition was adopted for the SOLAS research.

### Policy context

Recent years have seen increasing emphasis placed by governments across a range of countries, including Ireland, on stimulating greater commitment to enterprise and entrepreneurial activity as part of a broader set of economic goals. According to the Action Plan for Jobs 2014, government ambition is for Ireland to be among the most entrepreneurial nations in the world and acknowledged as a worldclass environment in which to start and grow a business. Growing the number of entrepreneurs and startups is hugely important for Ireland’s economic development. Government therefore aims to build the pipeline of entrepreneurs by increasing the numbers of those who will be actively engaged in creating business startups and employment across the country.

It also aims to build capability by developing the requisite skills among the general population to nurture entrepreneurial thinking and talent. In a further iteration of the Action Plan for Jobs in 2016, a stated objective is to ensure that our education and training system can deliver the skills, training, attitudes and culture required to deliver on our entrepreneurship objectives and targets.

The National Skills Strategy (2007) and Ireland’s New National Skills Strategy 2025 (2016) also point to the importance of skills for enterprise development. These are the skills viewed as the basis for the survival, growth and success of enterprises in the knowledge economy. Other policy documents have emphasised the role of education and training in developing entrepreneurial talent. For example, the National Policy Statement on Entrepreneurship in Ireland (2014) says the education and training system will continue to play a critical role in developing Ireland’s enterprise and innovation infrastructure. The recently launched Action Plan for Education (2016) notes that a stronger focus on entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation will be created across the education and training system.

While the FET sector and ETBs play their part in providing relevant training and education programmes, there is a need to co-ordinate provision to further government aims of building entrepreneurial capability. According to the Entrepreneurship Forum, established in 2013 by the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, ‘If we want to increase the pipeline of people choosing an entrepreneurial career, then Ireland must encourage entrepreneurship as a norm rather than an exception.’ The Forum recognises that many initiatives are currently being undertaken to enhance entrepreneurship education and skills development in Ireland, but they remain highly fragmented. EU and OECD reports over the past decade have repeatedly highlighted the lack of a coherent overarching strategy for these activities. Supporting entrepreneurship therefore requires a whole-system approach that encourages and supports business development and ownership as a career.

**T**he broader definition [of entrepreneurship which includes creativity and risk taking] was adopted for the SOLAS research.

**T**he recently launched Action Plan for Education (2016) notes that a stronger focus on entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation will be created across the education and training system.

**T**he FET Strategy 2014–2019 acknowledges the need to provide FET programmes to help people start and sustain their own business.

It is now recognised that the benefits of entrepreneurship education are not limited to the creation of new business ventures and new jobs. These skills can also be used to address wider societal issues (i.e., social entrepreneurship), not just commercial applications.

The FET Strategy 2014–2019 acknowledges the need to provide FET programmes to help people start and sustain their own business. The range of skills and knowledge needed by aspiring entrepreneurs can be quite challenging as they try to get started in business. The need to ensure that further education and training programmes are developed in line with the needs of entrepreneurs is highlighted, and is listed as a strategic objective in the FET Strategy. This objective was the trigger to initiate the piece of research entitled ‘Best Practice in Entrepreneurship Education and Training in the Further Education and Training Sector’.

### The research process

The research used a mixed-methodology approach, with both qualitative and quantitative components. The research design was informed by the SOLAS specification, which comprised the following eight elements.



**E**arly in 2016, SOLAS commissioned research entitled ‘Best Practice in Entrepreneurship Education and Training in the Further Education and Training Sector’.

### The SOLAS research specification requirements

The specification included the requirement to make specific recommendations and, where appropriate, to propose adaptations for change with regard to:

- » The scale, nature and context of education and training for enterprise in FET, including optimising the geographic spread of programme provision
- » The structures and systems which are required to foster its development, including certification systems
- » The most effective structure and format for delivering entrepreneurial education and training in FET, as this relates to different forms of FET provision

- » How to support Continuing Professional Development that will be required for FET teachers and others relating to the above
- » How partnerships could be developed between enterprises and FET providers to improve effectiveness of provision
- » Improvements to existing award/programme specification to produce better outcomes
- » The case for (or otherwise) funding and support for such programmes
- » Facilities for new product development, prototyping and business incubation facilities.

A comprehensive range of provision was examined to determine how the topic is being handled by different providers in different settings and in different types of FET programmes. It included PLC, FE College Evening Courses, VTOS, ETB Training Centre, Youthreach and Local Training Initiatives which are funded through ETB community services. To gain a wider perspective on this type of education and training, and for comparison purposes, the approach and delivery methods in the Belfast Metropolitan College were also included.

The components of the study included a literature review, interviews with stakeholders and informants, an online survey and best-practice case studies.

The literature review covered national and international literature on entrepreneurship education and training, reports, statistical data on existing provision, QQI certification levels, and submissions to the National Skills Strategy.

Interviews were then conducted with principals/managers, teachers, tutors, and learners past and present in FE colleges and training centres. Among the other interview participants were private training providers, programme co-ordinators, ETBI and the Further Education Support Service.

To broaden the research scope, a further cohort of entrepreneurship education and training providers were surveyed using an online questionnaire. This sought to gather data on a range of topics related to their provision, including learner profiles, pedagogical approaches, outcomes and outputs from programmes, and mentoring and other supports provided to learners. The providers who participated in the interviews were also asked to complete the online survey. This enabled them to include any further reflections.

Based on the outcomes of the surveys and the interviews with stakeholders and informants, four best-practice case studies were included in the report. Their main focus was to identify the salient best-practice elements that could be replicated by other providers, and also to identify the resource implications, if any, of reproducing such practices.

### Early indications

Early stages of the study are providing useful insights on the scale, nature and scope of current enterprise FET provision. Examples of best practice

**C**onstraints on providers [of enterprise FET provision] reported by survey participants included insufficient teacher/tutor CPD, award structures, availability of incubation facilities and effective linkages with support agencies.

**S**OLAS... will examine the findings of the report [on provision of education and training for entrepreneurship] before making recommendations...

have been identified in a number of locations and in different programme types which could possibly be replicated across the sector. In many instances, effective experiential learning processes are also in place, which help to foster an entrepreneurial mind-set among learners. This is consistent with the broader definition of entrepreneurship. This type of experiential learning often takes the form of public-facing events which are organised by course participants.

Constraints on providers [of enterprise FET provision] that were reported by survey participants included insufficient teacher/tutor CPD, award structures, availability of incubation facilities and effective linkages with support agencies. Indications are that many information deficits exist in the benefits and impact of entrepreneurship education and training, and in how to assess the effectiveness of this type of education and training. Issues were also reported in the lack of co-ordination and the fragmented nature of provision at local, regional and national level.

Finally, SOLAS would like to thank all the FET providers and other informants who contributed to the research and provided such valuable insights. SOLAS expects to have a final report in autumn 2016 and will then examine the findings before making recommendations on future development and improvements to the provision of education and training for entrepreneurship in the FET sector.

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## TEL Strategy – What is it?

Facilitating innovative teaching and learning practices

SOLAS and ETBI recently launched the first Strategy for Technology-Enhanced Learning (TEL) for the further education and training (FET) sector in Ireland.<sup>1</sup> The strategy defines this form of learning as ‘using technology to facilitate and support innovative teaching and learning practices’. Success in implementing the strategy will result in:

- » Learners who are skilled and confident in using technology as part of their work, study and home life
- » Technology being used appropriately as part of all teaching and learning
- » Significant improvement in access to further education and training
- » Learners being more engaged, and achieving more from their learning.

Technology can be used to enhance learning on initial engagement, as part of course delivery and assessment, and to support career progression. Learners may access technology in all course areas and models of provision, including in-class, full- or part-time provision, blended learning or exclusively online learning.

Developed in cooperation between SOLAS and an ETBI advisory group chaired by Cynthia Deane, CEO of Carlow Kilkenny ETB, the strategy marks the culmination of over a year of consultation and development work. It spans the entire FET system and builds on the excellent practice already in the sector. It supports the overarching strategy for FET and the goals to provide skills for the economy, active inclusion, quality provision and integrated planning and funding, and to improve the overall standing of FET in Ireland. It also aligns Ireland with leading practice on technology-enhanced learning in Europe and further afield.



**By Michael Mooney**  
Manager of SOLAS eCollege

**V**ISION FOR TEL STRATEGY: By 2019, technology-enhanced teaching and learning will be providing greater access to FET and achieving positive outcomes for learners, enterprise, and our wider society and economy.

**T**he strategy marks the culmination of over a year of consultation and development work, spans the entire FET system, and builds on excellent practice already in the sector.

**W**ithout a strategic approach... there is a risk of technology becoming a distraction rather than an enhancement to learning.

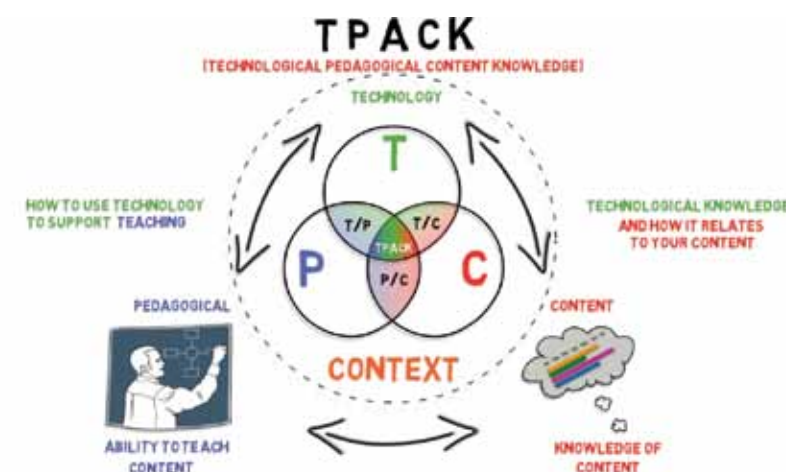
### Why do we need a TEL strategy?

Technology increasingly underpins day-to-day life and interactions, so it needs to be an integral part of what, how and where people learn. The ‘internet of things’ – a vast global network connecting things and people via the internet – is gaining currency as a vision of the future. To be ready for this, and to benefit from the opportunities that technology brings, citizens of all ages must be equipped to engage with the digital world.

Educators in all environments have recognised that technology, through the internet, open learning resources, and new modes of teaching, can transform learning experiences and outcomes. From early childhood to postgraduate education, FET staff and teachers/trainers increasingly use technology to great effect in their practice. Through the internet, learners can decide when and where they engage with their learning, receive individualised feedback, and interact and share learning in small and large online-learning groups. Complex concepts can be explained with simulated and real-life audiovisual examples, and the learning environment can become more flexible and interactive than ever before.

Technology can also be used to increase access to education and training opportunities by all members of society. With economic improvements this can include access for the most marginalised in society as well as those in employment seeking career-progression opportunities.

However, without a strategic approach to adopting technology in the classroom, there is a risk of technology becoming a distraction rather than an enhancement to learning. Research shows it is the combination of technology content and pedagogical knowledge and approaches that affects learning.



### How will it be implemented?

The TEL strategy aims to achieve its vision through the implementation of 18 practical actions, grouped under three themes: building on existing capacity, expanding access, and continuous improvement and innovation.

<sup>1</sup> Available for download here: [http://www1.solas.ie/SolasPdfLibrary/TEL\\_Strategy.pdf](http://www1.solas.ie/SolasPdfLibrary/TEL_Strategy.pdf)

**Theme 1** of the strategy focuses on building on existing good practice. Actions in this theme aim to embed a systemic culture, structures and practices so that technology-enhanced learning becomes an intrinsic part of FET in Ireland. A set of interconnected elements are required for success: staff with technologically appropriate pedagogical skills and confidence; access to digital learning content and resources; appropriate technology infrastructure and supports; and high-quality programme design and assessment. Each relies on the others and must be in place to avoid the challenges that have at times been reported in the adoption of technology in education and training around the world. SOLAS will work closely with the Department of Education and Skills (DES) to implement the strategy.

**Theme 2** focuses on expanding access. The actions in this theme aim to expand access to FET for people who need flexible learning opportunities. Target groups include those in employment who wish or need to up-skill, and those who are disadvantaged by circumstances such as remote location, personal circumstances or disability.

**Theme 3** focuses on continuous improvement and innovation. The actions in this theme aim to support continuous improvement in provision of technology-enhanced learning, drawing on national and international policy and good practice. Collaboration with the wider education and training system – primary, post-primary and higher education, and the enterprise community – will support high-quality, expert teaching and learning.

## Who will be responsible for delivering the strategy?

Key partners in achieving the strategy are learners and teachers in each of the 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs), community education and training centres, and other providers, supported by management and administration colleagues. Lead partners include SOLAS, Education Training Boards Ireland (ETBI), individual ETBs and the Further Education Support Service (FESS).

SOLAS will support and facilitate achievement of the strategy through its funding and coordinating responsibilities. It will liaise closely with teams working on national initiatives to build shared service platforms and technology infrastructure.

## What is the implementation timeline?

The strategy includes a number of examples of existing practice; these are just a snapshot of how technology is being used to engage learners and ensure a high-quality, relevant learning experience. By building on existing good practice, the strategy includes 18 actions with proposed dates for implementation over the next three years. A national symposium took place in September 2016 where interested parties shared in the implementation planning and roll-out of individual initiatives.

Developing this strategy was a very positive experience, with a wide range of stakeholders engaging through an ETBI/SOLAS advisory group, working meetings with representative groups, and online consultation. We look forward with confidence to similar strong engagement and success in implementing the strategy.

**T**he strategy includes 18 actions with proposed dates for implementation over the next three years.

**L**ead partners include SOLAS, Education Training Boards Ireland (ETBI), individual ETBs and the Further Education Support Service (FESS).

The background of the entire page is a photograph of a historic stone building, likely a university hall, with a large clock tower featuring a green copper dome. In the foreground, three students are sitting on a green lawn. A young woman with short brown hair and a white scarf is holding an open book. A young man in a red and blue jacket is looking at the book. A young woman with dark hair and glasses is also looking at the book. A red and black backpack is on the grass next to them.

## CHAPTER 5

# HIGHER EDUCATION



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## 2016: A critical year for Higher Education

Reports, strategies, political developments, innovations



**By Dr Eucharía Meehan**  
Director, Irish Research Council

**E**nhanced investment in research, 1916-themed projects, the Enterprise Partnership Scheme, reports on Gender Equality and Funding, student engagement, student accommodation, what graduates do – these are among the many pivotal topics treated in this overview of 2016.

This year has been a critical one in the world of higher education and research, with a number of significant events and policy decisions. The centenary of the 1916 Rising, it has been a year for reflection and for celebration of all that is good in Irish education, as well as a time to take stock of past and future policies, actions and decisions.

**Encouraging developments**

The ever-increasing profile of STEM subjects in Ireland, the recent articles and surveys supporting the importance of Arts, Humanities, and Social Science graduates to business employers, and the strengthened commitment across the higher education sector to promote gender equality, all combine to reassure graduates across all disciplines of a bright future.

**Innovation 2020**

The launch of the Government's new five-year research strategy, *Innovation 2020: Excellence, Talent, Impact*, in December of last year was a very welcome development and will ensure continued progress towards the goal of making Ireland a global innovation leader, driving a strong sustainable economy and a better society. The Government has committed to seeing public and private investment in research reaching 2.5 per cent of GNP by 2020, with forty thousand research personnel working in enterprise.

This enhanced investment in research will ensure stronger indigenous enterprise, help to secure foreign direct investment, lead to the licensing of new technologies and the establishment of new companies, and provide the highly-educated workforce needed to ensure the continued development of our economy and society.

**Student Engagement**

An engaged student body is an important element of a well-functioning higher education system. Thus, the publication of the Higher Education Authority's report of the Working Group on Student Engagement in Irish Higher Education was a welcome development earlier this year.

The report recommended that all higher education institutions complete a co-led (staff and student) evaluation of formal and informal student engagement practices and opportunities at every level. It further recommended that, once the self-evaluations are complete, institutions and students should co-author a student engagement policy that places the principles included in the Working Group's report at the heart of each institution. These principles include: democracy, transparency, inclusivity and diversity, feedback, professionalism and collegiality.

An engaged student body will increase retention rates, and help foster a culture that enables students to get involved in all areas of higher education institutes, from governance and quality assurance, to teaching and learning. The impact of the recommendations of the Working Group on Student Engagement – and the way in which these are taken on board by higher education institutions nationwide – will be interesting to monitor in the coming years.

### What do graduates do?

In May 2016 the HEA published its annual 'What do graduates do?' report, looking at how 2014 graduates – from Degree, Postgraduate, Masters and Doctorate courses – have fared in relation to employment and further education. The report revealed some interesting findings, with particularly welcome news that employment rates for Honours Bachelor Degree graduates have risen significantly in recent years from 45 per cent in 2009 to 58 per cent in 2014.

Other key findings include:

- » Sixty-five per cent of all graduates are in employment, with 82 per cent employed in Ireland.
- » Thirty-five per cent of Honours Bachelor Degree graduates; 14 per cent of Higher and Postgraduate Diploma graduates; and 10 per cent of Masters and Doctorate graduates are engaged in further studies / training.
- » As education increases, so too does salary: over half of Honours Bachelor Degree grads earn €25,000 or over; this increases to 91 per cent for those with Doctorates with thirty-one per cent of Doctorate graduates earning over €45,000.
- » At Honours Bachelor Degree level, Computer Science / ICT graduates are the highest earners, with 62 per cent earning €29,000 or more.
- » International graduates are choosing to remain in Ireland rather than moving overseas, which shows that Ireland continues to be a popular destination for employment.

### #LoveIrishResearch

The Irish Research Council started 2016 on a positive note with the launch of #LoveIrishResearch in January by the then Minister for Skills Research and Innovation, Damien English. This initiative is aimed at increasing public awareness of the important research conducted in higher education institutions throughout the country.

**The Government has committed to seeing public and private investment in research reaching 2.5 per cent of GNP by 2020, with forty thousand research personnel working in enterprise.**

**An engaged student body will increase retention rates.**

**At Honours Bachelor Degree level, Computer Science / ICT graduates are the highest earners.**

Ireland has been consistently punching well above its weight across a range of research disciplines in recent years. Eleven Irish researchers are listed among the top one per cent of researchers currently practising worldwide. As a country overall, Ireland is listed in ninth place on the most recent Thomson-Reuters InCites global scientific rankings. However, despite such significant achievements, public awareness of the research community remains low. #LoveIrishResearch aims to address this.

The beginning of 2016 saw the publication of 'Discovery Ireland', a book exploring the role of discovery research, celebrating the achievements of great Irish scientists, and highlighting the fundamental research currently underway in Ireland. Alongside this publication, the Irish Research Council published a series of blogs throughout the year by a wide range of researchers, focusing on diverse research topics each month.

### Decade of Centenaries

The Irish Research Council is marking the Decade of Centenaries by supporting flagship research projects that focus on the period 1912–1922, including 1916. Over €144,000 was awarded to seventeen 1916-themed research projects. The funded projects focused on topics ranging from hunger strikes and the Battle of Mount Street Bridge to how nuns and schoolgirls fared during 1916 and how Moore Street's historical significance has impacted on regeneration plans. The diversity of the research topics being funded reflects the complexity of our history, and demonstrates that academic discourse and research are vital to all acts of national commemoration.

### Enterprise Partnership Scheme

Since partnerships and the need to work together are of the utmost importance to the continued success of the higher education sector, this year the Irish Research Council undertook a review of the Enterprise Partnership Scheme. This is an innovative initiative whereby the Irish Research Council, in partnership with private enterprises and public bodies, awards co-funded postgraduate scholarships and postdoctoral fellowships to the most promising researchers in Ireland.

Key findings of the review included:

- » 71% of awardees agreed/strongly agreed that their enterprise partner facilitated access to expertise and networks that would not have been otherwise available.
- » 76% of awardees either agreed/strongly agreed that working with their enterprise partner had enabled them to carry out research that otherwise they would have been unable to do.
- » Over 80% of the enterprise partners stated that they were either somewhat likely or very likely to employ an awardee at the end of their award.
- » On the question of possibly recommending an awardee to future employers, 85% of enterprise partner respondents said they were very likely to do this.

Overall, the results from all involved in the Enterprise Partner Scheme were very positive, further cementing the importance of collaboration among Higher Education Institutes and industry.

The Irish Research Council has awarded €24.7 million to 318 researchers from 39 countries to date in 2016. In the coming years, we will continue to prioritise maximising the impact of the funding invested and fostering creativity to build on our vision of developing Ireland as a world centre of research.

### Political Developments

2016 was a transitory year politically. We bade farewell to our pre-general election Ministers Jan O'Sullivan TD and Damien English TD, and welcomed the new Ministers – Richard Bruton TD as Minister for Education and Skills, and John Halligan TD as Minister of State for Training, Skills and Innovation.

One of the most significant political developments outside of Ireland this year was Brexit, the repercussions of which are still being assessed across all sectors, including higher education. It's important that we future-proof against any possible negative outcomes once the UK's exit from the EU is complete.

### Report on Funding

In July, the report of the Expert Group on Future Funding for Higher Education was published. The report articulates the role, value and contribution of higher education, as well as addressing the serious lack of investment in our universities, institutes of technology and specialist colleges. It highlights the need for the funding system to reflect the balance between the public, private and enterprise benefits of higher education.

### Report on Gender Equality

Regarding gender equality policies, 2016 is likely to be remembered as the year in which real change took place. The report of the Gender Review group, chaired by former EU Commissioner for Research and Innovation, Mrs Máire Geoghegan-Quinn, was published by the HEA in June 2016. This was one of the most keenly anticipated publications in higher education and research.

The report set out a number of much-welcomed objectives to increase the representation of women across higher education institutions. Coinciding with the publication of the report, the Irish Research Council published an update on its own progress on gender equality, which included indicators of the positive impact to date of our gender strategy and action plan.

Many research funding agencies in Europe and beyond look to the Irish Research Council's gender policies as a model of good practice that can be replicated locally and we are leading on gender internationally. In addition to gender-blinding of applications for evaluation in order to mitigate against any gender bias in assessment, the Irish Research Council has also introduced gender balance in assessment panels for Council awards. Since 2013, almost 60 per cent of Council panels have comprised a minimum of 40 per cent female representation.

**T**he Irish Research Council is marking the Decade of Centenaries by supporting flagship research projects that focus on the period 1912–1922, including 1916.

**T**he ultimate responsibility for the achievement of gender equality sits with the Presidents of the higher education institutions.

Now, as a result of the Gender Review report, higher education institutions nationwide will be compelled to promote gender equality. The recommendations included in the report were deliberately ambitious and radical, recognising that productivity cannot be maximised without the full development of the workforce. Achieving gender equality will require genuine, long-term commitment and investment from managers at every level, and this must be led from the top, with the ultimate responsibility for its achievement sitting with the Presidents of the higher education institutions

### Student accommodation

A challenge that persists in higher education – and that was, once again, the focus of much public debate when the new academic year commenced this autumn – is the shortage of adequate student accommodation. The shortage is particularly acute in Dublin and other large cities, with Dublin universities providing on-campus accommodation for only 6,000 of the 79,000 student population.

The HEA report on student accommodation published last year estimated an existing level of unmet demand of approximately 25,000 student bed-spaces nationally.

Housing for all sectors of society is being prioritised by the Government, and we would hope to see concrete measures for the sustainable development of student housing emerging alongside policies to tackle other housing challenges.

### Conclusion

While challenges persist in higher education and research, 2016 has been an exciting year for the sector and a welcome opportunity to celebrate our researchers. The Irish Research Council's #LoveIrishResearch campaign in particular builds on our core belief that research is all about people, as well as highlighting the positive impact research has on our society, contributing to our understanding of the world and to national and global progress. The coming year is an opportunity for us to build on the successes of 2016 and to continue enhancing public awareness of and engagement with research.

**D**ublin universities provide on-campus accommodation for only 6,000 of the 79,000 student population.



Students make their way to a Careers Fair in IT Sligo.



## Removing the barriers to progress for women in Higher Education

HEA National Review of Gender Equality in Irish Higher Education Institutions

### Values

In today's febrile political climate, as Europe struggles to manage the greatest mass migration since the Second World War, there is a real danger that the values of equality, diversity and inclusivity will be eroded. Within this context our report on gender equality in Irish higher education institutions is timely, sending out the message that in Ireland all talent is valued equally and that we are strongly committed to ensuring that it will flourish in our higher education sector.

### International and Irish problem

When I and my fellow members of the Expert Group commenced the National Review of Gender Equality in Irish Higher Education Institutions on behalf of the Higher Education Authority in September 2015, the scale of the challenge we faced was immediately apparent. The under-representation of women among senior staff in higher education is an intractable problem internationally to which Ireland is no exception. In Irish higher education institutions 81% of professorial positions are held by men, who also represent 72% of the highest paid non-academic staff. Furthermore there has never been a female university president in Ireland. The focus of our review was on changing this status quo to ensure that we fully realise the talents of present and future staff in Irish higher education.

Gender equality benefits all staff – men and women. The journey on which we embarked over the 10 months of the review confirmed our belief in the need for radical change. We met with a wide range of stakeholders – including senior representatives from higher education institutions, government departments, unions, and research-funding agencies, as well as with leaders of EU-funded projects dedicated to addressing gender inequality – as well as conducting a public survey to which we received nearly 5,000 responses. While many of these survey-responses told tales of inequality and discrimination, all too often unacknowledged, they were also an important source of inspiration, strengthening our



By Máire Geoghegan-Quinn

Chair of the Expert Group  
commissioned by the HEA to review  
Gender Equality in Irish Higher  
Education Institutions

**M**áire Geoghegan-Quinn recounts the 10-month journey she undertook with fellow members of the Expert Group, established by the HEA to carry out a national review of Gender Equality in Irish Higher Education Institutions. The journey ended in June 2016 with the publication of the report.

**N**eed to ensure that men will not feel judged by their decision to work in an area perceived by society as 'women's work'....

**I**f we are to address gender inequality, we need to remove organisational and cultural barriers through targeted action.

resolve to eliminate sexism, misogyny and an unfair lack of recognition in the everyday lives of many women who play such an important role in shaping future generations of citizens. They also highlighted the need to ensure that in the future men will not feel torn between family commitments and pressure to act in an overtly 'masculine' way in order to progress, nor feel judged by their decision to work in an area perceived by society as 'women's work'. Gender equality will help all staff in Irish higher education institutions to progress in their careers and, in turn, will enable Irish institutions to compete within the global higher education landscape.

### Culture-change

In undertaking the review, we quickly realised that the default 'fix-the-women' approach to addressing gender inequality, which focuses on enabling women to conform to existing gendered organisational cultures, will never work. Rather we need culture-change. Numerous factors within higher education institutions—conscious and unconscious, cultural and structural—mean that women currently face numerous barriers to progression which do not impede that of their male colleagues to the same extent. If we are to address gender inequality then we need to remove organisational and cultural barriers through targeted action.

### Vision of Ireland as a world leader in gender equality

As we gained insight into these challenges, the scale of our ambition increased. Looking beyond EU averages and international benchmarks, we developed a vision for Ireland as a world-leader in gender equality in higher education—and for a higher education system in which women and men are to be found in equal numbers across all levels of employment and in which they no longer experience gender inequality in their daily working lives. Convinced of the overwhelming moral, economic and social imperative for gender equality, and of its critical importance for the future of Irish higher education, we seized the opportunity presented to us by the HEA to initiate radical action to end gender inequality once and for all. We acknowledge that the challenge we face in this endeavour is formidable, but we believe that the recommendations presented in the report offer the possibility of lasting change.

### Links to funding

Building on the momentum that has been generated by the extension of the Athena SWAN Charter to Ireland, our recommendations make provision for a direct link between success in progressing towards gender equality and institutional funding. In addition we recommend that gender equality and gender-awareness in research should be rewarded by Irish research-funding agencies. Links to funding will bestow upon higher education institutions and research-teams who demonstrate the greatest gender equality a two-fold benefit: they will experience the value of gender-balanced work-forces as well as being assured of the financial backing to support their work. Thus the question for institutions is not whether they can afford to invest in gender equality but rather whether they can afford not to do so. It is clear that this investment will pay substantial dividends.

### Deeply ingrained cultural problem

Gender inequality is a deeply ingrained cultural problem which has prevented humanity from realising its full potential. Indeed it is so ingrained that we – women and men alike – are all too often unaware of it. It is incumbent on all of us to reflect on our everyday interactions in order to ensure that we do not contribute to perpetuating damaging stereotypes which benefit nobody. We need all staff in higher education to engage in this self-reflection if we are to succeed in eliminating the unconscious as well as the conscious bias which leads to discrimination in higher education.

We are confident that, with courage and determination, gender equality can become a reality in Irish higher education. To this end, we implore you to read our report and to engage proactively with our recommendations so that the benefits of gender equality are reaped across the higher education sector and beyond. Only if everyone's potential is fully realised – and talent fairly recognised and rewarded – do we stand a fighting chance of tackling the global challenges we face and of eradicating the inequality which is fuelling such discontent across the world.

For full report on the HEA National Review of Gender Equality in Irish Higher Education Institutions see:

[www.heai.ie/sites/default/files/hea\\_review\\_of\\_gender\\_equality\\_in\\_irish\\_higher\\_education.pdf](http://www.heai.ie/sites/default/files/hea_review_of_gender_equality_in_irish_higher_education.pdf)

**I**t [gender inequality] is so ingrained that we – women and men alike – are all too often unaware of it.

**I**n Irish higher education institutions 81% of professorial positions are held by men... Furthermore there has never been a female university president in Ireland.



**POWERING PROGRESS**  
**ILLUMINATING SECRETS OF THE PAST**  
**TRANSFORMING THE WAY WE THINK**  
**ABOUT THE WORLD**

Last year, the **Irish Research Council** invested **€34 million** to support **1,613** researchers across all disciplines

Visit [www.research.ie](http://www.research.ie) to find out more

**IRISH RESEARCH COUNCIL**  
 An Chomhairle um Thaighde in Éirinn

## Trilogy of International STEM Education Conferences

In 2017, a trilogy of major international conferences on STEM education will be hosted at Dublin City University by CASTeL researchers. These conferences jointly are likely to attract in excess of 2,300 international researchers.

This is a unique opportunity for Science and Maths teachers, researchers and communicators to engage in conference workshops and presentations.

1. **Tenth Congress of the European Society for Research in Mathematics Education (CERME)**  
 1st–5th February 2017  
 Chair: Dr Therese Dooley  
 Venue: Croke Park  
[www.cerme10.org](http://www.cerme10.org)
2. **Joint Conference:**  
 – International Research Group on Physics Teaching (GIREP)  
 – International Conference on Physics Education (ICPE)  
 – European Physical Society Physics Education Conference (EPEC)  
 3rd – 7th July 2017  
 Chair: Dr Eilish McLoughlin  
 Venue: Dublin City University  
[www.girep2017.org](http://www.girep2017.org)
3. **European Science Education Research Association (ESERA)**  
 21st–25th August 2017  
 Co-hosted by CASTeL at DCU and EPI-STEM at University of Limerick  
 Chair: Dr Eilish McLoughlin  
 Venue: Dublin City University  
[www.esera2017.org](http://www.esera2017.org)

"The legacy of these conferences will be to inform the development of STEM curriculum, teaching and learning, as well as teachers' knowledge and skills for teaching STEM subjects across all levels of education," Dr Eilish McLoughlin, Director of CASTeL, said.

### About CASTeL

CASTeL – Centre for the Advancement of STEM Teaching and Learning – at Dublin City University is Ireland's largest research centre in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) education.

CASTeL's mission is to support the development of STEM learners from an early age, and so enhance the scientific, mathematical and technological capacity of Irish society.

CASTeL encompasses research expertise from across the Faculty of Science and Health and the DCU Institute of Education, the leading provider of teacher education in Ireland. This enables CASTeL to be at the forefront of the development of prospective teachers' knowledge and skills for teaching STEM subjects.

Furthermore, CASTeL has the capacity to provide sustained Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in STEM education, embracing both coherence and breadth.



Find out more at [www.castel.ie](http://www.castel.ie)

## Higher Education, Research and Innovation

Work of lecturers does not begin and end in the lecture theatre.

Higher education is not just about education. It also delivers research and innovation, which intertwine with the education mission in a system of mutual reinforcement that is key to the success of the leading economies and societies worldwide.

What this means is that the work of lecturers and professors does not begin and end in the lecture theatre, and nor is it restricted to the academic year. As faculty members apply their expertise to the education of students, they are at the same time applying it to generate ideas that are new and important. To implement these ideas, they assemble and lead a team that may include postgraduate research students, postdoctoral researchers, laboratory staff and other support staff, having sourced the funding for the team through highly competitive schemes. They publish their findings in the international literature in journal papers and books, once again following detailed peer review. These findings are published only if they expand the frontiers of knowledge in their area.

These research outputs can deliver impact to society and the economy, and enhancing this impact is now a central part of the research endeavour. In many cases the research can lead to new products or processes, which may be captured in patents. In others it can solve problems of public policy, or enable new societal opportunities. The impact may be felt in health, in the environment or in culture. It might support jobs within major employers, attract a new industry to the country, or underpin the development of entirely new companies.

Of course, not all research is conducted in higher education institutions: it is also conducted within companies, stand-alone research organisations and other research performers.

However, all successful innovating economies have realised the particular benefits to be derived from the combination of research and innovation within higher education. The mix of a relatively small cohort of academic leaders with a larger throughput of postdoctoral and postgraduate researchers delivers research that is efficient, dynamic and agile. The



**By Professor Orla Feely**

Vice-President for Research,  
Innovation and Impact, UCD

**A** major part of the work of academics is to generate new ideas and implement these ideas through research and publishing. This in turn can often lead to the creation of new products or processes, solutions to public policy problems, new opportunities – all of which are of immense value to society as a whole.

Professor Orla Feely shines a light here on of this important element of university life.

**T**he work of lecturers and professors does not begin and end in the lecture theatre, and nor is it restricted to the academic year.

international networks of academic research encourage sharing of ideas and mobility of talent. Postgraduate students and postdoctoral researchers who develop their skills in research go on to apply them across the economy and society. Similarly, undergraduates educated in a research-intensive environment understand how knowledge advances, and how it can be applied in fast-changing environments. The outward flow of talent at both postgraduate and undergraduate level is the main benefit of research-intensive higher education.

A strong higher education environment is essential to deliver national strength in research and innovation. Without it, the system lacks the talent streams, the ideas and the international credibility to thrive in a competitive global environment.

Likewise, a strong research and innovation environment is essential to deliver strength in higher education, enriching the experience of our students and the quality of our graduates. If leading faculty members believe that they cannot deliver on their research ideas within that environment, they will leave or see their ambition ossify.

If both of these systems are delivering as we would wish, we have a virtuous circle supporting our ability to attract foreign direct investment, grow indigenous enterprise and tackle the problems of a changing society. If either is weak, the combination cannot deliver.

**I**n many cases the research can lead to new products or processes, which may be captured in patents.

We see this interdependency in the metrics. The main funder of research in Ireland is the Higher Education Authority. Without the ongoing support for research faculty through higher education funding, there would be no meaningful research system in Ireland. The global innovation index is based on national performance under a number of indicators, a large number of which relate to expenditure and metrics in education at all levels. Similarly, look under the hood of the university rankings and you will see the central role of research funding, publications, citations and PhDs. Withdraw or substantially reduce the grants from the research funding bodies that flow into our higher education institutions and watch them plummet off the bottom of the rankings.

International innovation rankings, then, rely in large measure on education funding and performance, and international higher education rankings rely on research funding and performance.

So how well is this combination working for us in Ireland?

### Late entrants

The first thing to say is that we are very late entrants to this competitive arena. It was only towards the turn of the millennium that we set a national ambition for research and innovation that was at all comparable to those that had long prevailed internationally.

That is not to say that we did not have outstanding researchers in Ireland before that time. We had many, but the funding and infrastructure of the time did not permit the amplification and scaling of that individual research excellence.



Through the early years of the state, much of the research activity in our universities was concerned with supporting the need of the fledgling state to attain self-sufficiency, addressing problems such as those associated with the peat industry and other forms of import substitution. Academic departments were tiny, and facilities poor by international standards. Ireland's two Nobel Prize winners in the sciences won their awards for work conducted outside the country. David Attis, in his book "Mathematics and the Making of Modern Ireland" describes how after returning to Trinity from the work at Cambridge that would win him the Nobel Prize, Ernest Walton dedicated the rest of his career to teaching. When invited to join what later transpired to be the Manhattan project, he declined. Apart from his own disinclination to participate, "Provost Alton wouldn't hear of me going... If I had gone it would have left two people to run the department."

As the century progressed the deficiencies in this position became increasingly clear, against the backdrop of a more open economy, enhanced horizons in education, advances within Irish industry and the attraction of foreign direct investment in fast-moving sectors such as the new fields of electronics and computers.

Research funding began to increase from both national sources and the vital European programmes. It was still low by international standards, and a step change was needed.

This came about in the 1990s through supportive political leadership combined with strong and coherent input from the research community, industry and other stakeholders.

The Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions was initiated, with substantial government and philanthropic funding, to support the development of human and capital infrastructure. Science Foundation Ireland and the Irish Research Councils were created, funding research primarily in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, but also in the arts, humanities and social sciences.

The research system in Ireland was transformed by these decisions. One of the earliest indicators of this was in publication activity. In Scopus, one of the main international databases for research publications, we see that the number of publications from Ireland grew from 3,500 in 2000 to over 13,000 by 2015. The citation impact of those publications – the rate at which other researchers reference them – was 15% above world average in 2000 and 53% by 2015. There was a doubling of PhD graduates from Ireland working in industry from 2000 to 2010.

Research infrastructure on our campuses improved dramatically, and research groups of scale developed, attracting significant inward flow of mobile research talent. Supports were developed for commercialisation of research outputs, including the development of spin-out companies, and links with industry strengthened.

### Economic crisis

With the economic crisis, the situation in relation to national funding for both higher education and research and innovation changed dramatically.

**L**ook under the hood of the university rankings and you will see the central role of research funding, publications, citations and PhDs.

**I**nnovation 2020: Excellence, Talent, Impact, Ireland's national strategy for research and development, science and technology, was launched in December 2015.

**T**he Strategy recognises that support for excellent research across all disciplines (including arts, humanities and social sciences as well as science, technology, engineering and mathematics) is essential.

**M**uch of the strategy is focused on supporting the important translation of research results into innovative products, processes and services.

Core funding per student in Irish higher education fell by 22 per cent in the seven year period to 2015, and direct public spending on research and development in Ireland fell by that same percentage from 2008 to 2013.

It is important to note that the levels of competitive national funding for the schemes of agencies such as Science Foundation Ireland and the Irish Research Council were broadly maintained through extraordinarily difficult circumstances. One major development was that research funding was increasingly directed to areas of perceived near-term economic impact, particularly those aligned with fourteen areas identified as national research priorities. There have been some important successes deriving from this, but also very substantial unease on the implications for balance, for broad-based excellence and for future-proofing within our research system.

Many faculty members in our higher education system experienced a combination of blows to their research capacity. The funding crisis in higher education required them to deliver more courses to more students, eroding the time they had available to deliver world-class research and innovation. At the same time, they found that competitive funding mechanisms through which they would have previously have funded a research team around them were no longer open to them, due to shifts in national priorities.

PhD enrolments, following a period of steady increase, started to fall. The number of scientific publications nationally, again following a period of growth, began to fall. Concerns were repeatedly expressed nationally and internationally that by eroding the broad base of fundamental research we were choking the pipeline that supports a lively higher education sector, enriches the intellectual life of a country and ultimately feeds the application domains not just of today but also of tomorrow.

### National strategy

In the light of all this, *Innovation 2020: Excellence, Talent, Impact*, Ireland's national strategy for research and development, science and technology, was launched in December 2015.

The strategy was developed following detailed stakeholder consultation, and presents a vision of Ireland as a global innovation leader driving a strong sustainable economy and a better society. Key to delivering the vision is a commitment to increasing public and private investment in research to a target of 2.5% of GNP by 2020. This will be a big increase, up from 1.81% in 2013. It will not close the gap on our competitors, but it will significantly reduce it.

Much of the strategy is focused on supporting the important translation of research results into innovative products, processes and services. This has been a priority of the national research effort for some years now, but the strategy presents a more rounded perspective than may previously have been perceived. The strategy recognises the importance of supporting the full continuum of talent development in order to ensure that the quantity and quality of trained people is sufficient, and also to support the full continuum of research, from research at and beyond the frontiers of current

human understanding to the creation and development of research-informed innovative products, processes and services. It recognises that support for excellent research across all disciplines (including arts, humanities and social sciences as well as science, technology, engineering and mathematics) is essential, as is the provision of adequate research infrastructure to ensure that our researchers have access to the best possible equipment and facilities.

The strategy was generally well received by the research community, which saw in it a renewed national ambition, based on building on the best of what the system had delivered in recent years, while correcting some imbalances that had emerged during the response to the crisis.

Minds then turned to implementation, to see how the strategy would convert into reality. The early period was seen to be crucial, with key steps to be taken that would influence the shape of the national research and innovation landscape for many years to come.

The other major report that landed around the same time was that of the Expert Group on Future Funding for Higher Education, entitled (appropriately) *Investing in National Ambition*. The report stated that we need once again to recognise higher education as a key enabler as we transition out of a deep crisis and rebuild our capabilities to create more jobs, restore living standards, enhance social services and address societal challenges. The current funding system, it said, is simply not fit for purpose, and fails to recognise the pressures facing higher education institutions and the scale of the coming demographic changes.

With *Innovation 2020* and *Investing in National Ambition* on the table, there was heightened expectation around Budget 2017, bearing in mind Joe Biden's maxim "Don't tell me what you value; show me your budget, and I'll tell you what you value."

The fuller response on higher education funding will take more time, but the budget did bring enhanced funding for the sector. Research and innovation funding also increased. While the increases closed only a small part of the gaps with our competitors that were identified in the two reports, they were nonetheless a positive development.

In research, funding was announced for a new programme for funding of frontier research in line with in *Innovation 2020*. The programme, which has been awaited with a huge sense of anticipation, is to be run by the Irish Research Council. It will address a significant gap on the national funding landscape and allow us to leverage more of our research capacity across a whole range of areas in which we have real excellence.

Planning is also underway in relation to the Programme for Research in Third-Level Institutions. This programme was transformational in raising national research capacity across all areas, through structured provision of human capital as well as the infrastructure needed to allow us to compete internationally. Both of these are in urgent need of new investment across our research system with the end of PRTL Cycle 5, and are the subject of specific actions in *Innovation 2020*. Also underway is a new cycle of

**T**here is a sense that we are turning the page again in our national approach to research and innovation and higher education.

**W**e need once again to recognise higher education as a key enabler as we transition out of a deep crisis.

research prioritisation, which will be absolutely critical to the ongoing success of our system of research and innovation.

There is a sense, then, that we are turning the page again in our national approach to research and innovation and higher education. The enhanced funding in the budget is a good start.

We have achieved a lot in Irish research and innovation since the turn of the millennium, a short space of time that included extraordinary economic swings. We built a strong research base from a very low starting point, and then focused on deriving outputs from that base to support the enterprise system. Some gaps and imbalances that arose in the process are now being addressed. Through this Ireland can show how a broad base of research excellence and an agile enterprise facing system of research and innovation, far from being mutually exclusive, can in fact be mutually reinforcing, and that they support and are supported in turn by an excellent system of higher education.

#### **NUI Galway Academic elected Fellow of prestigious International Society**

Dr Tony Hall, Lecturer in Educational Technology at NUI Galway, was elected a Fellow of the International Society for Design and Development in Education (ISDDE) in September 2016.

He joins 150 other active educational designers and technologists who are connected as Fellows of the society.

The ISDDE was founded to bring together outstanding education course designers and developers from around the globe. The society aims to promote excellence in educational products and materials, particularly for science mathematics and technology, by creating a professional community that shares knowledge, research, approaches, and critiques.

Dr Hall is a lecturer with NUI Galway's School of Education. His role in collaboratively designing NUI Galway's Bachelor of Arts Mathematics and Education, the national Professional Diploma in Mathematics for Teaching, and EU H2020 Q-Tales Project contributed to his election as Fellow of ISDDE.





**Ollscoil na hÉireann**  
National University of Ireland

# Ollscoil na hÉireann National University of Ireland

## NUI Constituent Universities *Na Comh-Ollscoileanna*

**University College Dublin**  
An Coláiste Ollscoile, Baile Átha Cliath

**University College Cork**  
Coláiste na hOllscoile, Corcaigh

**National University of Ireland, Galway \***  
Ollscoil na hÉireann, Gaillimh

**Maynooth University**  
Ollscoil Mhá Nuad

## Other NUI Member Institutions *Baill Eile d'Ollscoil na hÉireann*

**Recognised Colleges *Coláistí Aitheanta***  
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Institute of Public Administration - *An Foras Riaracháin* (UCD)  
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- providing a forum for research, debate and discussion on major issues of importance to Irish society as a whole.
- administering the matriculation regulations and providing an information service on university entry.

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## Improving success in third level education in Ireland

The need for Institutions to concern themselves with study success

### Study success in higher education

Throughout much of Europe there is national interest in improving student study success in higher education; it is on the policy agenda in 28 of the 35 countries in Europe (Vossensteyn et al 2015<sup>1</sup>). However, there are different interpretations and understandings of the concept of success. In a survey of HE experts from across Europe we found a strong focus on the employment outcomes of graduates, as well different priorities within the HE system:

- » **Completion:** to have students successfully complete their study programme with a degree.
- » **Time-to-degree:** to have students complete their study programme within a reasonable time period.
- » **Retention or dropout:** aim to have students re-enrol in a study programme until they complete their degree and to reduce the likelihood they drop out before completing their programme.

While Ireland has become a leader in Europe with regard to the 'social dimension' of higher education, and has made huge strides in widening access and increasing diversity, there has been less acknowledgement and focus on the success of students – particularly those from non-traditional groups – once in HE and beyond. Study success is on the agenda in Ireland, but it is not high or very high on the agenda, as it is in many countries. Putting it higher up the agenda is however essential because "Access without support is NOT opportunity" (Tinto 2008), and furthermore, the concept of success within HE is embedded into the Bologna process. The London Communiqué (2007) notes that:

*"...the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels should reflect the diversity of our populations", and students should be "... able to complete their studies without obstacles related to their social and economic background".*



**By Professor Liz Thomas**

Director and Chair of Widening Participation Research Centre, Edge Hill University, Lancashire

**T**his paper on student retention and study success was first delivered by Prof Liz Thomas at a conference on 'Transitions in Education' held in Mary Immaculate College Limerick in September 2016.

**S**everal European countries have used finance to incentivise students to complete, or to complete more quickly...

England has done more than many European countries to address the issue of success for non-traditional students, and indeed this is included in the new Higher Education and Research Bill which is currently going through the House of Commons Committee stage. The 'Teaching Excellence Framework' (TEF) connects quality and social mobility and in the second phase of the TEF, which will enable institutions to increase tuition fees above the rate of inflation quality, is being equated with student retention, satisfaction and graduate employment outcomes particularly for those from widening access and equality groups. Part of this concern stems from analysis which demonstrated that groups who are most likely to participate in higher education are also the most likely to achieve positive outcomes in relation to achieving a degree (retention and completion), gaining a good degree (attainment), progressing to employment or further study (employability) and entering graduate employment or postgraduate study (graduate progression) (HEFCE 2013).

### So what should Ireland do about this?

The government, the public and higher education institutions need to be interested in and concerned about the success in higher education of all students, particularly those from historically under-represented groups. This requires a shared definition of what success is, and an agreed measurement that can be used across the sector – and this will promote greater accountability. But this does not indicate what should be done about it. Across Europe 170 specific policy instruments were identified, and twenty two 'typical' policy approaches, which were categorised into three broad types: funding, information and support, and the organisation of higher education. Of the typical approaches, eight focused on funding and financial incentives, five on the provision of information and support for students, and nine looked at the organisation of higher education.

### Funding

Broadly, funding can be allocated to students or to institutions. Several European countries have used finance to incentivise students to complete, or to complete more quickly, for example, by converting loans into grants for completing sufficient credits each year and/or for timely completion. The impact of this approach however has been limited, and a more effective strategy seems to be to use funding to incentivise institutions to address this issue. In England – both before and after the introduction of tuition fees – funding is explicitly connected to the student and their on-going enrolment and progression in the system, rather than simply being paid on enrolment. Thus, in the English context there is a strong financial incentive for institutions to recruit students that can be successful, and support them to achieve positive outcomes within the specified timeframes. Other European countries, including but not limited to Scotland, have used outcome agreements to tether some institutional income to student success outcomes. In other countries, such as Germany, project funding has been used in some federal institutions to support them to develop innovative projects to improve student retention and success.

### Information and support for students

So we learn that incentivising institutions to address the problem is more effective than using finance to incentivise students to complete, but this still does not tell us how to improve retention and success. The money

<sup>1</sup> Vossensteyn, J.J., B. Stensaker, A.Kottmann, E. Hovdhaugen, B. Jongbloed, S.Wollscheid, F. Kaiser, L.Cremonini, L. Thomas & M. Unger (2015): *Dropout and Completion in Higher Education in Europe*. HEDOC Main report. Brussels: European Commission

can be spent in relation to the two other broad categories of intervention: information and support for students, and the organisation of higher education. In the context of Ireland it is worth drawing attention to a couple of specifics. The first is helping students to make more informed choices about what to study in higher education. Students often have little understanding of many of the subjects and courses in higher education, and receive little or no guidance to inform their choices. Some HE systems build the learning about subjects and course choice into the first year, with students having the opportunity to choose at the end of the year, or to transfer courses relatively easily – sometimes between institutions. But in countries such as the UK and Ireland this is less often the case. In the Netherlands they have sought to improve students' pre-entry choices bringing the application date forward and requiring higher education providers to engage with potential students about their choices. This includes discussing the course contents, academic skills and interests and employment outcomes. Institutions have elected to deliver this guidance in different ways, including face-to-face and online. The evaluation of this intervention is broadly positive although the improvements in study success are modest – it is believed because the advice is not binding. But this does suggest one important way in which the university and IT sector in Ireland could try to improve students' decision making about HE programmes.

### The organisation of higher education

One approach to changing the organisation of HE is to restrict who has access to study programmes, but this runs counter to Irish and European commitments to widen access and expand the diversity of who has access to HE. Another approach is to explore changes to the curriculum design and associated pedagogy, such as a focus on the first year transition experience, different assessment regimes and developing students' academic confidence and skills. Such approaches have a direct impact on the study experience, but they are not widespread across Europe as they require more substantial institutional change.

Research in England<sup>2</sup> has found that using the curriculum is the most effective way of reaching all students in contrast to additional support mechanisms which are frequently not utilised by the students they were intended to benefit. However this does need to be underpinned by monitoring of a number of issues, such as student attendance, use of the VLE, time on campus, engagement in co-curricular activities, submission of assessed work and performance. Students who appear to be engaging or performing below the expected or typical levels must then be followed up. Students' responses to this monitoring seem to be positive viewing this interest in them as an indication that the institution both knows them and cares about them.

Changing pedagogical practices is however more challenging than adding additional pre or post entry information and support – but the improvement in outcomes can be far more significant.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas, L. (2012) *Building student engagement and belonging at a time of change in higher education*. London: Paul Hamlyn Foundation

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## Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)

### Life after amalgamation – new challenges for QQI

*Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)* is a state agency responsible for quality assurance and qualifications in education and training. The agency was established in November 2012 by the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act. QQI was formed through the amalgamation of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI), the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB), the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) and the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC).

QQI is now the external quality assurance agency for Ireland's universities, institutes of technology, private higher education institutes and the further education and training colleges operated by the Education and Training Boards. QQI also awards the certificates that apprentices receive after completing their time in college and industry.

QQI is responsible for the 10-level National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). QQI maintains *Qualifax*, the National Learners' database of course and career information and also manages *NARIC Ireland*, which provides advice that assists people from overseas in getting their qualifications recognised and understood in Ireland and also provides information for Irish graduates to get their qualifications understood if they choose to travel and work or study abroad.

The QQI provider base currently consists of close to 50 Higher Education providers (both public and private) and approximately 600 providers of further education and training including private colleges, private training entities and community and voluntary sector organisations.

#### 'Quality and Qualifications'

QQI has responsibilities in both the quality assurance and qualifications domains. The 2012 Act establishing QQI is based on the principle that providers of education and training have primary responsibility for the quality of their provision and its assurance. QQI's responsibility is, following consultation with providers, to issue quality assurance guidelines. Providers in turn are responsible for developing quality assurance procedures consistent with these



**By Dr Padraig Walsh**  
Chief Executive, QQI

**D**r Walsh explains the role of Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) as state agency responsible for quality assurance and qualifications in education and training and describes important initiatives rolled out in 2016.

**Q**QQI has responsibilities in both the quality assurance and qualifications domains.

guidelines and agreeing the procedures with QQI. On a periodic basis, QQI is then required to review the effectiveness of these procedures.

In the case of providers without their own awarding powers, QQI is required to validate programmes of education and training and to issue certificates to providers on behalf of learners who have successfully completed programmes of education and training that entitles them to a QQI Award. In 2015, the 'QQI Award' brand replaced the legacy FETAC and HETAC brands and by 2016, QQI can present a continuum of QQI policies, procedures, criteria and methodologies across further and higher education and training.

#### Quality Assurance Guidelines

Following extensive consultation with stakeholders, QQI has published core quality assurance guidelines<sup>1</sup> for all providers of further and higher education and training. These have been informed by previous quality assurance guidelines from further and higher education and training and by international reference points such as the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*<sup>2</sup> (revised, May 2015) and the *European Quality Assurance Reference Framework*<sup>3</sup>. The core guidelines cover areas such as the governance and management of quality; staff recruitment, management and development; assessment of learners, support for learners and public information and communication.

QQI recognises that providers have different levels of autonomy and offer a range of programmes types and delivery modes. We have therefore supplemented the core guidelines with sector-specific and topic-specific guidelines. In 2016, QQI has already published quality assurance guidelines for independent/private providers<sup>4</sup> and guidelines for statutory apprenticeship programmes<sup>5</sup>. The latter have been developed as part of the widening of offerings beyond traditional craft-based apprenticeship. This has already resulted in the launch in September 2016 of the Insurance Practitioner apprenticeship, the first apprenticeship at Level 8 in the NFQ.

QQI has also published sector-specific guidelines for Universities (and other designated awarding bodies)<sup>6</sup> and Institutes of Technology<sup>7</sup> and expects to do so for the Education and Training Boards by the end of the year. To further complement the core guidelines, QQI will publish quality assurance guidelines research degree programmes and for flexible and distributed learning later in 2016.

This full suite will supply education and training providers with a fit-for-purpose set of guidelines which they can utilise, as appropriate to the diversity of their education and training offerings. Providers are expected to review their current quality assurance procedures in the light of these guidelines, amend and improve them where necessary and be in a position to submit them and/or agree them with QQI. This formal process of 're-engagement' will mark a clean break with the past and put the relationship between QQI and its provider base of a new statutory footing under the 2012 Act.

**Q**QQI has recently published core policies and criteria for the validation of programmes of education and training that apply to all programmes leading to QQI Awards.



### Programme Validation and Institutional Review

Following consultation with stakeholders, QQI has also recently published core policies and criteria for the validation of programmes of education and training that apply to all programmes leading to QQI Awards. These have been augmented with specialised policies and criteria for the validation of programmes leading to Common Awards Systems (CAS) awards in further education and training. The new policies and criteria have already commenced for apprenticeship programmes, English Language Education programmes and programmes of higher education and training that lead to QQI awards. A significant challenge will be the rollout of the new validation policy and criteria for further education and training providers.

One of the other cornerstones of QQI's work is the cyclical review of the effectiveness of quality assurance. This is QQI's primary quality assurance relationship with the universities, RCSI and the institutes of technology. Following on from the 2014 *Review of Reviews*<sup>8</sup> and an extensive consultation process, QQI published a *Policy for the Cyclical Review of Higher Education Institutions*<sup>9</sup> in February 2016. This is consistent with the provisions of the 2012 Act and the 2015 revised European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG).

QQI is in the process of developing a methodology and a timetable of reviews that will allow the commencement of the next cycle of reviews of higher education institutions to commence in 2017. One of the new requirements in the 2012 Act relates to the quality assurance of linked providers, institutions that receive awards from one of the universities. QQI is currently undertaking an institutional review of one such provider, Mary Immaculate College, at the request of their awarding body, the University of Limerick.

The publication in 2016 of QQI quality assurance guidelines, policy and criteria for programme validation and policy for the review of the effectiveness of providers' quality assurance procedures marks the formal break with the primary quality assurance mechanisms of the four legacy bodies and presents a unifying but not unitary approach to quality assurance in Irish further and higher education and training.

### Quality Enhancement

QQI is also conscious not only of its role in quality assurance but how the agency can support providers in enhancing quality. In April 2016, QQI held its first Further Education Quality Enhancement Seminar in Farmleigh House. This was attended by representatives of all 16 Education and Training Boards and considered approaches and models of self-evaluation and reflective practice informed by Irish and international speakers.

In May 2016, QQI launched its National Student Engagement Programme where the agency will work with students (with the support of Sparqs Scotland) to support learners in discovering how they can engage most effectively with higher education institutions.

Conscious of the potential impact of the reduction in human and financial resources available to higher education institutions over the period since 2008, QQI commissioned a study to analyse the statutory quality review

A significant challenge will be the rollout of the new validation policy and criteria for further education and training providers.

In April 2016, QQI held its first Further Education Quality Enhancement Seminar in Farmleigh House.

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In 2016, QQI worked with Teagasc and Fáilte Ireland in publishing revised standards in Agriculture and Tourism Guiding respectively.

reports of academic departments, schools and programmes published by the Irish universities and institutes of technology. Although such quality review reports routinely highlight aspects of good institutional practice, the analysis undertaken focussed specifically on commentary in the institutional reports on any perceived impact on the quality of teaching and learning as a consequence of the reduced funding available to the institutions, over the period in question. The report highlights matters such as the reduced spending on equipment and facilities and the knock-on effects reported by the institutions of the employment control framework on the quality of the teaching and learning offering and environment. The final report *Quality in an Era of Diminishing Resources* (2008-15)<sup>10</sup> was published in March 2016.

### Standards and Qualifications

One of QQI's main functions under the 2012 Act is to develop, review and revise award standards, in partnership with stakeholders. In 2016, QQI has worked with Teagasc and Fáilte Ireland in publishing revised standards in Agriculture and Tourism Guiding respectively. QQI has also published award standards for Pre-Higher Education Foundation QQI Awards for International Students. These standards describe minimum expected learning outcomes for educational awards to be made following successful completion of an International Foundation Programme.

QQI is the main provider of awards and certification in the further education and training sector in Ireland and also makes some higher education awards, mainly in the private sector. In 2016, QQI developed a new *Infographics*<sup>11</sup> service on its website which provides a convenient interface for viewing what awards it is making and where. This new service enables providers and other interested parties to view and filter graphics which present the award achievements of learners. They can be viewed on the basis of award type, NFQ level, by geographical location and at the level of the provider. Data on the 164,000 QQI awards made in the calendar year 2015 were published on *Infographics* in March 2016.

### Updating of Legislation

The Department of Education and Skills, in its published briefing to the new minister, noted that following an adverse High Court ruling in January 2015, QQI conducted a review of its powers under the 2012 Act. The review identified a number of issues that are impeding QQI's role in relation to the areas of quality assurance and qualifications. These issues were subsequently confirmed by the Attorney General's office.

A number of amendments are required to QQI's existing legislation to give, among other things, QQI the explicit authority to recognise awards within the NFQ and to provide for the introduction of the International Education Mark (IEM) for higher education and English language education providers. The amended legislation will be introduced in 2016 and is designed to strengthen QQI's role in regulating providers' access to QQI awards and to provide improved procedures for the protection of enrolled learners in the private education sector.

The new legislation will assist QQI in realising its vision of extensive high-quality education and training opportunities with qualifications that are widely valued nationally and internationally.

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TY Ireland Expo 2017 will take place 11–12 September 2017 at Punchestown Race Course, Naas, Co. Kildare. Supported by QQI.

In 2016, QQI developed a new *Infographics* service on its website which provides a convenient interface for viewing what awards it is making and where.

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## Digital & Online Learning in Higher Education

Mapping the Digital Landscape – Skills and Confidence in an era of rapid change

### 'Learning Management System'

Digital technologies now pervade all of higher education, both in the lecture theatre and online. Every institution in the country, for example, now makes use of a 'Learning Management System'. These are sometimes also referred to as a 'Virtual Learning Environment' which suggests a more exciting prospect than the reality of a large and often 'clunky' database and bulletin board. These have, over the last ten or so years, become part of the plumbing of our institutions, providing students with lecture notes, online assessments and communication tools. Many academic staff members have unleashed their creativity in these spaces by embedding video and interactive content, setting up virtual meeting rooms and integrating them with other tools and apps. And this isn't just for online courses, but to support on-campus programmes. We used to speak of face-to-face, distance, online and blended courses – but it is getting increasingly difficult to draw the boundaries between each in this wifi-enabled, always-on culture. We are all cyborgs now!

### Residents and visitors in digital spaces

But that is not to say that everyone is comfortable or confident in the use of the technologies. The 'digital native' discourse has now been recognised as a cliché which obscures the reality of the variation in levels of skill and knowledge within each generation. White & Le Cornu's (2011)<sup>1</sup> more nuanced approach which talks of *residents* and *visitors* in digital spaces, more accurately captures the pragmatism of using particular technologies when we really have to and playing creatively with others only when we feel confident.

### Learning 'on the job'

The old model of skills training, then, faces some particular challenges when it comes to *the digital*. There's a wide range of skills and knowledge across



By Dr Iain MacLaren  
Director, Centre for Excellence in  
Learning and Teaching (CELT),  
NUI Galway

Dr Iain MacLaren describes how digital technologies have permeated the higher education environment and 'we are all cyborgs now'. Confidence is the key to enjoyment of this wifi-enabled, always-on culture – a state of mind encouraged in the *All Aboard!* project which 'aims to demystify rather than to deify the digital'.

Learning Management Systems... have, over the last ten or so years, become part of the plumbing of our institutions.

Not everyone is comfortable or confident in the use of the technologies.

Learning new tools and techniques 'on the job,' or when we need them, is increasingly what is required.

any student cohort or staff group. The idea of an all-encompassing, monolithic certification scheme (such as the earlier versions of the ECDL) is inflexible and ill-suited to a continually, and rapidly, evolving technological landscape. Learning new tools and techniques 'on the job,' or when we need them, rather than having to recall content from a course we took several years ago, is increasingly what is required.

### Confidence v competence

In the project "All Aboard!"<sup>2</sup>, supported by the *National Forum (for the Enhancement of Teaching & Learning)*, the emphasis has additionally been placed on *confidence* rather than simply looking to improve the technical *competence* of staff and students. This is a subtle, but crucial, distinction, in that being technically competent in the most basic sense of the word does not necessarily presage an enthusiastic disposition towards seeking further learning, as newer and newer technologies come on-stream. Nor indeed does it, by itself, encourage creativity in the use and adaptation of technologies to support teaching and learning. Both of these are more likely when people have the confidence to experiment, and to be able to recognise the limitations of each technology as much as its promise. In one sense then, the project aims to *demystify rather than to deify the digital*. Those apps on your phone aren't magic spells, they're badly written lines of code by an underpaid (or unpaid) dabbler and have had layers of complexity grafted on by digital duct-tape!

### All Aboard

*All Aboard* (<http://allaboardhe.org/>) started by mapping out areas of technology use and skills that were relevant to all those who work (not just academic staff/faculty) and study in higher education. Suggestions of topics were gathered through open consultations, reviewing policy documents, from suggestions at workshops and events. It's not meant to be definitive, indeed it is unlikely that, given the rapid pace of change, a comprehensive, definitive listing of topics could ever be achieved – the very act of doing so freezing it in time. Witness perhaps some of the extant (over 60 at our last count) formal digital literacies/skills frameworks that the project team reviewed<sup>3</sup>. So there's a recognition that items will change and perhaps even the broad categories will evolve in time. For the moment, though, the 2016 snapshot spans a wide range of topics clustered into six broad themes:

- » Find & Use
- » Tools & Technologies
- » Teach & Learn
- » Communicate & Collaborate
- » Create & Innovate
- » Identity & Wellbeing

<sup>1</sup> White, D.S., Le Cornu, A., (2011) "Visitors and Residents: A new typology for online engagement", *First Monday*, Vol 16, 9, 5 Sept. Available online: <http://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/3171/3049>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.allaboardhe.org/>

<sup>3</sup> "Towards a National Digital Skills Framework for Irish Higher Education: Review and comparison of existing frameworks and models." Available online: <http://allaboardhe.org/DSFramework2015.pdf>



Of particular note is the last of these themes<sup>4</sup>. This represents emergent concerns (particularly in recent years) identified by students, staff, and the wider public, over the ‘dangers’ or potential negative impact of reliance on and use of digital technologies, spanning issues from the technical (e.g. account security) to the personal (e.g. cyber-bullying, trolling).

The project also devised a simple visual metaphor that captures this basic structure – that of a ‘metro map’ with each theme corresponding to a metro line and each topic, a station. ‘Travelcards’ list a small set of stations/topics which learners can visit and work through – a sort of mini-course. This design has attracted considerable national and international interest and the project is now looking to develop beyond higher education.

In the project “All Aboard!”, the emphasis has been placed on confidence rather than simply looking to improve the technical competence of staff and students.

and within the corporate training sector<sup>5</sup>. Complying with the *Mozilla Open Badge Framework*<sup>6</sup> ensures technical interoperability, facilitating their exchange and reuse on social networks, e-portfolios, LMS/VLEs and online personal profiles.

As we can see elsewhere in this volume (“Graduate Attributes”), digital badges are also particularly appropriate for capturing transferrable skills and co-curricular learning. Care, of course, needs to be taken to ensure that the value of badges is not undermined by producing badges for relatively trivial achievements – they need to have clear, meaningful and evidence-based criteria for their award.

Some of the criticism of badges is directed towards their close association with both gaming and behaviourist psychology. Yet, there is little denying the power that many implementations have demonstrated in how well they can combine learner motivation and a sense of fun – two critical success factors for education. Badges and their associated technology have now well and truly crossed from *beyond the horizon*<sup>7</sup> into the developing practice of many organisations and their success as a viable means of capturing educational attainment will be determined in the coming few years.

“Here a MOOC, there a MOOC, ...”

Robert Zemsky surely deserves an award for one of the most amusing titles for a journal article<sup>8</sup>, but his point is a serious one. We’ve moved some considerable way in the last year or so from the hype around MOOCs (Massive Online Open Courses), which we were promised would ‘disrupt’ higher education and change utterly the experience of learning. The more sober observers of the phenomenon of course realized that much of what was being served up in the early MOOCs was almost, in fact, the antithesis of learning – the delivery of ‘content’ trumping intellectual engagement. Far from being representative of the latest thinking about education, many such MOOCs were a throwback to a very ‘traditional’, detached form of university teaching. Just as Uber has been recently criticized for “using 21st century technologies to resurrect 19th century labour practices”, many MOOCs perhaps did the same with the lecture format.

Of course, with any new initiative there’s a period of adaptation, of settling and reconfiguring and the more recent variants of MOOCs have built on this naïve first wave and the sector has perhaps now recovered from the early ‘sugar highs’ stoked by the millions provided by venture capital funds. MOOCs are now often more targeted towards particular niche, specialist markets, particularly for CPD (continuing professional development), they are usually far shorter in length (4 to 6 weeks, from 8-12) and frequently integrated within a wider strategic development

Credentials in a Digital Age

For each topic the project team has been developing and collating self-study materials, workshop packs and have designed ‘digital badges’ which can be obtained by anyone successfully completing a set of assessment items. Digital Badges are a means of recognising a particular skill or achievement and are ideally suited to the fluid, ‘just in time’ needs for training in the digital domain. Such forms of *micro-credentials* are acquiring currency in formal education systems, informal learning, CPD

4 It is an area that Helen Beetham in the UK has highlighted and indeed it was she who coined the ‘digital wellbeing’ term.

Digital badges are particularly appropriate for capturing transferrable skills and co-curricular learning.

5 “Badging for Professional Development”, Educause, “7 things you should know about.” series, 2014. Available online: <https://library.educause.edu/resources/2014/8/7-things-you-should-know-about-badging-for-professional-development>  
6 Mozilla Open Badges: <http://openbadges.org/>  
7 NMC Horizons Reports: <http://www.nmc.org/nmc-horizon/>  
8 Zemsky, R., (2014) “With a MOOC MOOC Here and a MOOC MOOC There, Here a MOOC, There a MOOC, Everywhere a MOOC MOOC.”, Journal of General Education, Vol 63, 4, pp 237-243. Available online: <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/564411/pdf>

such as for the promotion of existing online (fee-based) postgraduate qualifications and programmes; for the orientation of new students into higher education; or as part of the public outreach expectations of research groups.

‘Pedagogy first’, has been the clarion cry of educational developers, and Diana Laurillard<sup>9</sup> has many times noted that higher education has a legacy of incorporating each new technology or medium and using it purely for ‘information transmission’. So how does one actually move towards a more enlightened system?

### Designing for Learning

Laurillard’s book, “Learning as a Design Science”, emphasises, as does other work (e.g. Bransford, Brown & Cocking<sup>10</sup> and the reports of the *European High Level Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education*<sup>11</sup>) that teaching in higher education deserves to be shaped by systematic research, by informed and validated approaches to curricular design and therefore, by implication, considered as a legitimate professional domain, rather than an ‘amateur’ activity undertaken by researchers (in their own particular academic discipline). Yes – there is still a vital need for creativity, for experimentation and a role for an intuitive feel for learner needs – but ignorance (or, in extreme cases, willful disregard) of what we know about how people learn is increasingly difficult to justify in an era in which greater numbers, and a greater diversity, of learners are entering and hoping to succeed in higher education.

An effective approach to *Learning Design*, in which technologies represent part of the available repertoire of tools and techniques, where there is encouragement for the sharing of materials, ideas and approaches, requires institutions to place appropriate value on such activity through their organizational culture and systems for promotion and reward.

It also requires a balance between technological enthusiasm and educational scrutiny, a critical pragmatism. We need to be able to ask serious questions of emerging trends<sup>12</sup>, to be able to explore *possibility space*, but also to be aware of the wider context of the particular innovation. We need, in other words, to be able to take preventative measures in order to avoid another bout of MOOC-aholism. Amongst current trends, for example, is ‘learning analytics’. If we subject this (or other technologies) to such critique, we would ask questions such as: to what extent do any of these systems actually measure ‘learning’, rather than simply accumulate data on clicks; to what extent do these realistically meet the actual needs of students (often for better staff-student ratios, mentoring, feedback and support); what are the implications in terms of privacy and data security,

9 Laurillard, D., (2012), “Teaching as a Design Science,” Routledge, London.

10 National Research Council, “How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School: Expanded Edition” Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2000. doi:10.17226/9853.

11 Report to the European Commission on “New modes of learning and teaching in higher education”, 2014, High Level Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education. Available online: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/library/reports/modernisation-universities\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/library/reports/modernisation-universities_en.pdf)

12 And commentators such as Audrey Watters (<http://hackeducation.com/>) and Neil Selwyn (author of, for example, “Is Technology Good For Education?”, Polity Press, 2016) are particularly worthy of attention.

**D**ebates about education and technology often come back to the central question of what we think learning is and what are the approaches... most likely to enable the learner to flourish.

who are the proponents and what do they (rather than the students) stand to gain; how can we undertake a detailed independent evaluation; what is the economic model on which the systems are based (e.g. from ownership to rental); etc?

### Moving Forward

In short, the debates about education and technology often come back to the central question of what we think learning is and what are the approaches, techniques and perspectives which are most likely to enable the learner to flourish. As I have suggested, the answer is most likely to be a ‘hybrid pedagogy’, curricula which are the result of purposeful design rather than either the weight of tradition or blind enthusiasm for the latest gadget. It is possible to navigate such a path, but it needs confidence and creativity just as much (if not more) as it needs technical competence.



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## One Good Solution to Large Lecture Teaching

A contemporary method of keeping students engaged, talking and learning

Electronic clicker devices have transformed the way I teach large undergraduate classes. These small voting devices encourage conversation between students, invite them to think during the lecture as opposed to just taking notes, and keep them motivated.

For many of us, our first experience of university was in large lecture theatres. These are daunting places to teach and learn. For students, the tight rows of tiered seating and never-ending didactic PowerPoint serve to increase the fear of speaking out and stifle any form of interaction with lecturer or peers. These settings are more like cinemas than learning spaces. For lecturers too, the physical form of the room and the large numbers of students are limiting. Typically, if lecturers pose a question they are met with silence – so they revert to PowerPoint and the safety of the podium. It is not surprising that many researchers have shown that traditional lectures have limited effects on student learning. Plainly speaking, they don't work (Redish and Steinberg 1999). And while universities in Ireland have made efforts to improve learning environments, most of their reforms have focused on smaller classes. Larger classes, where we cram our first- and second-year students into conventional lecture halls, remain mostly unchanged.

Some years ago, when I was asked to teach a first-year class of 250 physics students, I felt underwhelmed by the idea of presenting 24 lectures in the usual didactic style. Following conversations with colleagues, I agreed to trial Eric Mazur's *Peer Instruction* approach to large lecture teaching (Mazur 1997). *Peer instruction* actively involves students in the teaching process. Instead of content-heavy PowerPoint slides, each lecture was built around concept questions. For each concept, students were first asked to consider the question on their own. They voted with their electronic clicker and the results appeared immediately on the projector screen. At this point, you would typically begin to hear murmurs from the class. Students were then asked to turn to their neighbours and discuss the question at hand. After a few minutes they were invited to vote again on the same question using their electronic clicker. In the majority of cases, the percentage of students who voted for the correct answer increased during the second vote. This led to



By Dr Shane Bergin

Lecturer at the School of Education,  
University College Dublin

Dr Shane Bergin describes in simple and clear fashion his use of electronic clicker devices to teach physics to university students. Five years on from first trialling Eric Mazur's *Peer Instruction* approach to large lecture teaching involving electronic clickers and 'concept questions', Dr Bergin encourages others to try out the method, alleging that it never fails to "spark debate and conversation".

Instead of content-heavy PowerPoint slides, each lecture was built around concept questions. For each concept, students were first asked to consider the question on their own.

If the students did not converge on the correct answer, I would interject and scaffold their thinking, leading to another round of voting.

discussion on the concept. If the students did not converge on the correct answer, I would interject and scaffold their thinking, leading to another round of voting. Here's a typical question:

Consider a metal washer. When it is heated, does the hole in the centre

- 1) Expand?
- 2) Contract?
- 3) Stay the same size?



I encourage you to try out this question. It has never failed to spark debate and conversation among students or colleagues when I ask it. Such conversations are how scientists construct and test their own conceptual models of everyday phenomena. If you are hesitant to pose this question to a friend or colleague for fear of being wrong, imagine how first-year students feel in a class of 250 people whom they barely know.

At the end of the year, having used Peer Instruction in every class, I wanted to learn what my students thought of this approach to teaching physics. I constructed an on-line questionnaire with a small student advisory group. This approach (Murphy, Lundy et al. 2013) provided a variety of different responses to open questions which, they felt, would represent the range of views of students in their respective cohorts. A selection of these responses, purposefully representing diverse and contrasting views, was selected by the advisory groups and incorporated as prompts within the questionnaire. An example of one such question is:

We asked students in your class about using clickers in lectures. For the questions below, please read through the student comments and add your own response.

We asked the students: **'What effect, if any, did clickers have on your lectures?'** They said:

"Yes, you were more involved in the lectures. The questions help you learn the material. Clickers help you talk to people and find out the different opinions on the questions. The bar charts make you feel reassured if you get a question wrong because you are not the only person to get it wrong."

"Yes. It's more interactive. Made me actually think about the answers to questions myself and forced us to answer them. Also, they made lectures more interesting and engaging. It was interesting to see what everyone else thought the answers to the questions were. It was good to talk to other people about their answers – this helped with my understanding."

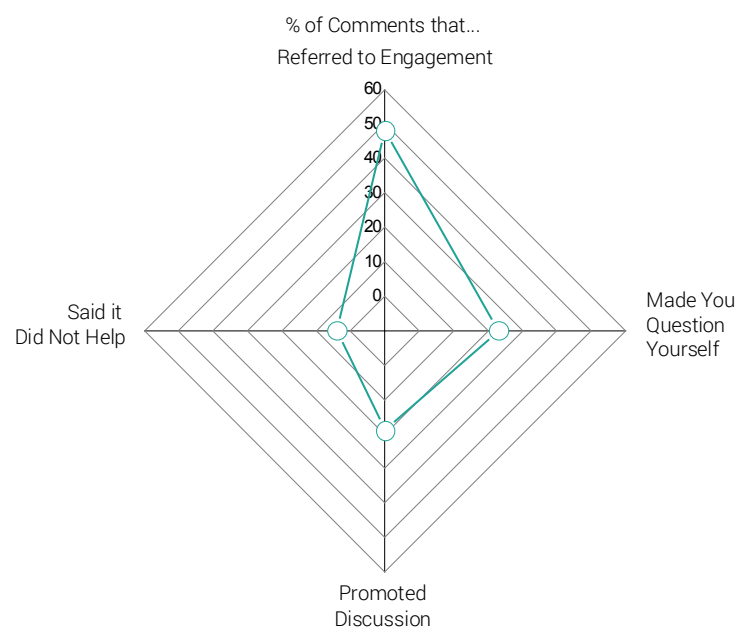
"Yes, because you could get involved without speaking out loud. The questions got you thinking as they were directed towards everyone and not just one individual."



*"Yes. The discussion section after the initial question helps everyone confer on the right answer."*

What do **you** think? What effect, if any, did clickers have on your lectures?

This participant-led methodology provided a 'bridge' between the researchers and those participating in the research. Student responses (n = 230) were coded according to parsed phrases. Figure 1 shows the themes that emerged from the student responses.



**Figure 1.** Coded student responses to the question 'What effect, if any, did clickers have on your lectures?'

50% of the student responses referred to being engaged in their learning as result of clicker assisted *Peer Instruction*. Typical student comments in this area included:

*"It means you're not just sitting there listening. u actually have to think about the question and quickly"*

*"Yes. It breaks up the tediousness of traditional lectures and prevents your brain from otherwise inevitably falling asleep after 20 minutes."*

*"They are great because they allow the whole class to take part in answering a question, so it isn't just one individual who's answering. They show you the way different people think, and that many people think in a similar way to you. They show that it's okay to get a question wrong, there will be a bunch of people with your same answer."*

*"Yes, you were more involved in the lectures. The questions help you learn the material. Clickers help you talk to people and find out the different opinions*

**S**uch conversations are how scientists construct and test their own conceptual models of everyday phenomena.

**P**eer Instruction resulted in a bustling learning environment where my students were building and defending their concepts – arguably through such conversations, they were doing physics as opposed to listening to me talking about physics.

**C**lickers help you talk to people and find out the different opinions on the questions. The bar charts make you feel reassured if you get a question wrong because you are not the only person to get it wrong."

*Student*

**Y**ou could get involved without speaking out loud. The questions got you thinking as they were directed towards everyone and not just one individual."

*Student*

*on the questions. The bar charts make you feel reassured if you get a question wrong because you are not the only person to get it wrong."*

There is an increasing body of literature to show that students who are engaged and enjoy learning have improved learning outcomes over those who find it less enjoyable (Finkelstein and Pollock 2005). *Peer Instruction* resulted in a bustling learning environment where my students were building and defending their concepts – arguably through such conversations, they were doing physics as opposed to listening to me talking about physics. Furthermore, they were giving each other instant feedback on their learning – something rather rare in large classes. In traditional lectures, students take notes and defer most of their thinking on content covered to a later date. I would argue that *Peer Instruction* encourages many of them to think during the lecture. This is important as they are better equipped to solve issues and apply their conceptual understanding that may arise when they revisit the topics in labs and tutorials. I have often found many undergraduate students cannot even begin to build bridges between material covered (but rarely uncovered) in lectures with other areas of their course where they are asked to use or apply that knowledge. This frustrates learners and teachers alike. 25% of student comments (to the question posed above) referred to them questioning themselves. Indicative comments include:

*"Yes the use of clickers adds to one's learning experience for physics. It increases your involvement in the lecture which should help you to learn even if do not wish to be there in the first place. It allows you to actually think and as a result understand what's going on there and then, as opposed to having to go home and try figure everything out again. It also helps to sometimes discuss the answer with the people beside you in case you don't understand something and then narrow down the correct answer that way."*

*"Yes because you're answering a question with time to think rather than the lecturer asking one person and that person having to produce an answer in a few seconds. So it was very productive."*

A common thread throughout many student responses was that they wish to engage with their lectures but find the traditional format to be a barrier to engagement. Sitting in a large room and raising your hand or answering lecturers' questions on-the-spot with 250 people looking at you can be very off-putting for a student. I was pleased to read how many student comments spoke of the 'easy conversations' that *Peer Instruction* facilitated.

*"People are often too shy to speak out in lectures or afraid they will get something wrong or there are just too many people there. This fixes that."*

*"Yes. We were a lot more involved as everyone gives an answer, not just the one or two who always answer. The discussion afterwards with our classmates helps a lot."*

Considering the wider issue of student attrition and difficulties associated with adjusting to university, I would suggest that clickers are an excellent tool to spark conversations between students. Such conversations may

lead to study-groups, friendships, and peer-support – all essential in making our students feel involved, empowered and part of a community.

While most of my students' comments were positive, some students did raise some concerns:

*“to a certain extent since you were unafraid to answer a certain question. although, they didn't necessarily enhance the lecture since it's just another way of answering the lecturer's question”*

*“I feel as if clickers delay moving on to things that are genuinely more interesting opposed to topics that require extra explanation.”*

In responses to other questions posed, students made some interesting suggestions as to where *Peer Instruction* could be applied to other subjects. Many of them felt they could be easily applied to any discipline.

Personally, I feel it is quite important that the student voice is present and respected when considering educational reform. How can we as educators genuinely know what it is like to be sitting in a first-year lecture? What are their expectations, values, backgrounds, etc.?

Some five years after trialling *Peer Instruction* in my large lecture classes, I now teach the majority of my classes with them. I feel more satisfied with the attitudes my students have towards physics class and their learning outcomes have improved. Visiting science education researcher collaborators in the USA, I note that students use them in most classes. Considerable research has been done in the USA to demonstrate the 'gain' in student learning associated with *Peer Instruction* (Crouch and Mazur 2001). The strategic plans of Irish universities all speak of promoting student-led and peer-to-peer activities through curricula and assessment. I feel *Peer Instruction* offers universities the opportunity to realise these goals for less than the price of a first-year physics text-book per student. Our universities need to promote and reward high-education research to source, create, apply and analyse best practices in how we educate in our universities. I would hope the student voice and my own experience that I have presented in this article can positively affect such change.

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## The Professional Masters in Education (PME)

Reflections on personal experience and on the system

Education is an ever changing concept, not only in Ireland, but worldwide. One of the latest significant changes within Ireland's educational field has been the shift from a one-year higher diploma to a two-year full-time masters to qualify as a second level teacher. Some may ask why this change was made, and may question the advantages and disadvantages of such a bold move.

Like its European counterparts, Ireland is faced with the challenge to provide a talented, educated and skills equipped workforce. Was this move made to further advance our teacher training and to produce a more highly qualified, expert and proficient body of skilled newly-qualified teachers? Was it made to stagger the number of teachers streaming out of college competing for a limited number of viable teaching positions? Or was it made to give more status and prestige to the demanding profession that is teaching in the hope that over time this change will raise the calibre of the teaching force?

This article is written by two 2016 first class honours graduates from the first cohort of the Professional Masters in Education (PME) programme. It will explore these questions, while reflecting back on our own experience of teacher training. The article will discuss the PME both personally and systemically, in a way that highlights the positives and benefits of the new two year course, while also touching on possible amendments to the course to ensure that a constant supply of high quality teachers are produced in Ireland.

Throughout this article we highlight the need to address the numbers training in certain subject areas, the Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT) process after completion of the PME – which remains unchanged – and also the financial strain on students of undertaking the two year programme. By doing so, we hope to shed light on our experiences of the PME course and give an insight into the reality of this new post-primary training programme. Ultimately, we aim to generate ongoing reflection within the third level and post-primary sectors, and in the other



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Oman, Middle East

**L**ively discussion of the PME teacher qualifying programme written from the perspective of two very successful graduates of the first completed course. Finances and unpaid work are identified as big issues as well as the neglect so far of the Teaching Council to adjust its induction requirements for PME graduates.

**B**y the end of this new course, trainee teachers actually know if they want to teach or not.

relevant bodies, in order to further improve the PME course and the post-primary teaching experience.

### Length of programme

Now that the State, through the Teaching Council, is mandating two years of initial training, the first question we ask is, whether this length of a programme is actually needed to produce high quality Irish teachers? For years people passed through the one year higher diploma (H Dip) and went on to secure jobs in their subject areas, with just a single year of experience in a classroom setting under their belt. The big difference now is that, by the end of this new course, a trainee teacher actually knows if they want to teach or not, and whether or not teaching is the right career path for them to choose.

### Personal Reflections

In the first year of our programme, we felt as if we were doing everything we needed to in order to get by, but by the second year we were able to take ownership of our teaching and really try out new ideas and methods, and truly get involved in school life as we would hopefully do when fully qualified. In short, we felt like real teachers in our second year.

The requirement for teachers to undertake a two year programme means that graduates can no longer complete a degree in college and think *'Sure, I'll just do that H Dip there, so then I can fall back on teaching in a few years if I can't get anything else.'* Following the introduction of the two year PME, trainee teachers now have a summer break between the first and second year to regroup, and having gone through year one – the assignments, the stress, the supervisions, the testing students, the moments that make you realize *'This is why I want to teach!'*, and those that make you feel the opposite – they have had the time to make the decision to keep going and come out the other end with a PME, or to leave teaching and pursue a different career path. The two year PME course therefore ensures that people are in teaching for the right reasons. Converting the H Dip into a two year Masters therefore has enhanced its societal status and people can no longer just fall into it.

**T**he experience gained from this process [placement] is immeasurable and... one from which we benefitted greatly.

There is no question in both our minds as to whether or not the two year placement in schools is of benefit. PME students are obliged to carry out placements in two schools which, under Teaching Council regulations, have to differ in certain aspects such as gender or location. The experience gained from this process is immeasurable and is a definite improvement to the H Dip, and one from which we benefitted greatly. We were able to see ourselves develop and tackle challenges in both school settings – something that H Dip students never had the chance to experience until they were fully qualified.

The new PME course allows you time to develop as a teacher. It gives you more opportunity to engage in the teaching world, receive continuous feedback from tutors and supervisors, learn through various methods and workshops offered through the colleges, and improve as a teacher overall. There are very few people who could say that they did not benefit from the two years as opposed to the one-year course. That said, as this was the first year the PME has been offered, there is obviously room for improvement.



## Finances

One of the factors of greatest concern among students of the new PME, and the most onerous for both of us writers of this piece, is the financial strain that comes with it. The change from a one-year higher diploma to a two-year masters course has caused the fees to increase to over €12,000 in some colleges. In order to pay these fees, students need some sort of income. For some students, this comes in the form of paid substitution from the school. However, for most PME students, paid substitution is not available. Certain schools, either by choice or by regulation, do not give paid substitution to PME students. This forces the trainee teacher to do part-time work after the school day and/or at the weekend.

From firsthand experience, I can assure you that the juggling of school work, college work, part-time work and personal life was the biggest challenge on the PME journey. This challenge could be reduced by the introduction of compulsory paid substitution for PME students, similar to the payment which final year nurses receive. This income would not pay for the college fees, but it would certainly help in the financial struggle and might even allow a student to let go of part-time work outside of teaching.

## Systemic review

In terms of a systemic critique of the two-year PME, we must explore in depth the concept of the societal need for teachers. The fact is that people are always going to need to be educated and that a certain number of teachers will be needed to replace those retiring or leaving the profession for various reasons. However, another question also arises – will there be enough positions available to match the number of those graduating the PME, or is Ireland simply training up new teachers for export?

In our opinion there are four systemic issues within the PME that need to be addressed:

- » The number of students taken into the PME annually
- » The number of trainee teachers in certain subject areas
- » The variance in the curriculum offered by different colleges
- » The induction programme for the newly qualified teacher (NQT) following qualification.

## Numbers

Every year the varying educational bodies such as University College Dublin, Trinity College and University College Cork, to name but a few, take in a cohort of up to 100 new trainee teachers each. On a national scale this amounts to 1,200 per annum over the two years of the programme. In terms of the Dublin region alone, there are three colleges offering the PME; that's at least 600 Dublin based students, representing half of the teacher trainee cohort nationally, competing for placement hours every year. And so our first question emerges; do colleges need to begin to consider a review of these numbers?

## Subjects

Furthermore, it is not just the quantity of students accepted into the PME that needs to be addressed, but also the number of teachers in each specific

**W**e felt like real teachers in our second year [of the programme].

**C**ertain schools, either by choice or by regulation, do not give paid substitution to PME students.

**T**he system within colleges in terms of the overall numbers, and within certain subject areas, seems unplanned, uncoordinated...

field needs to be reviewed. From our experience this issue is something that is crying out for attention. The variance between numbers offering themselves for teacher training across the full range of teaching subjects is extraordinary.

Should specific, popular subjects such as English or History be capped at a certain number to ensure that all students accepted into the PME can receive adequate placement hours? Furthermore, do colleges also need to ensure that they have reached a certain quota per teaching subject, so that they can ensure that there will be a supply of qualified Irish or Maths teachers graduating every year to meet the demands of Ireland's growing population? We believe that a subject based quota or cut-off point would increase the number of teachers of required disciplines, while also decreasing the number of teachers of subjects for which there is little demand at a given time.

## Unplanned and uncoordinated

At the moment, the system within colleges in terms of the overall numbers, and within certain subject areas, seems unplanned, uncoordinated and takes little regard of the requirement of schools and trainee teachers themselves. The reality is that until these number issues are addressed, not only will it have a knock-on effect on PME graduates seeking to secure a teaching job in Ireland, but schools also will continue to struggle to recruit the required number of teachers in certain disciplines such as Irish, Maths, the Sciences, Business subjects, etc.

## Curriculum, programme structure and placement

Currently six colleges offer the PME course: University College Dublin (UCD), Trinity College Dublin (TCD), University College Cork (UCC), NUI Galway (NUIG), Maynooth University (NUIM) and Hibernia College. Each one has its own unique methodology and structure in delivering the programme. For example, TCD students are not required to complete a full academic school year for their placements, while UCD students must complete two full academic school years for theirs. The problem with this variance is that principals, who draft teaching timetables which operate for the full academic year from September-May, are less attracted to offer placements to PME students who do not have to complete the entire teaching year in their school. Therefore, the students of colleges which are required to carry out a full year's teaching placement are at an advantage when it comes to securing these trainee teaching hours.

**A**re some trainee teachers delivering more class contact hours than others?

It is perfectly understandable that teacher training colleges offer the same course in different ways as they are competitors. However, if the requirements of the course are affecting the students' chances of securing a placement, then action must be taken in order to standardize the placement criteria between colleges. Questions can also be raised about the amount of teaching time that students from all of these colleges complete, and if they meet the requirements that the Teaching Council of Ireland has set down. Are some trainee teachers delivering more class contact hours than others – and if so, shouldn't this be standardised across the board?

There is no doubt that the introduction of the PME has changed the system of training post-primary teachers in Ireland for the better. However, the Teaching Council has not adjusted its requirements in response to the doubling of the course duration. This is a major flaw that has been pointed out, not only by the two authors of this article, but by many of our fellow PME students. The Teaching Council ignores the fact that the Newly Qualified Teacher has completed an additional year of placement and it still requires 300 hours of teaching plus a number of workshops to be completed in order to become a fully qualified post-primary teacher.

### Droichead

Droichead is a new model of induction and schools may apply to opt in. Those that do will then be deemed a recognised training facility with a trained support system of experienced teachers to mentor the NQTs. If an NQT secures a teaching position in a Droichead school, the number of hours of teaching and workshops required by the Teaching Council is reduced and they are supported by said mentor teachers, who observe their classes to monitor their progress through the academic year. The concern for a NQT is attempting to secure a teaching job in order to sign off on these hours required by the Teaching Council. As previously mentioned, the competition for teaching jobs is high in certain subject areas.

### Workshops

The general consensus of NQTs is that the introduction of the new PME course reduces the need for workshops to be carried out after completion of the course. These requirements were put in place during the time of the previous one-year H Dip.

So, the Teaching Council and teacher trade unions need to amend these criteria for NQTs. A possible change that we feel might be adequate would be to assign these hours later in a teacher's career. Rather than complete them straight after the PME, a teacher might complete them as a means of continuous training throughout their years of teaching, therefore keeping on top of their various subject curriculum developments and in tune with new methods of teaching.

Where are the NQT's now and what are the prospects for NQTs in 2017? There are teaching jobs in Ireland. However, the number of teachers seeking these jobs is huge and so a large percentage of these teachers need to consider other options. British schools are crying out for post-primary teachers trained in Ireland. This is an option which quite a number of recently qualified teachers have chosen. It allows them to teach, to complete the required hours, and to remain relatively close to home. Another option for NQTs is to go further afield and teach in the Middle East, which constantly seeks western teachers. For NQTs who do not choose these options, the application process for teaching jobs continues within Ireland.

Advertisements for jobs can appear plentiful but this very fact has created false hope in many an NQT who is unaware that often these positions have already been secured by redeployment teachers or teachers already in situ and are advertised only to fulfill a legal requirement that all positions be

**Ireland's teacher training programme is well on the way to providing Irish schools with world class teachers.**

**Another option for NQTs is to go further afield and teach in the Middle East.**

**The course required me to work for the two years and teach without being paid for the work I was doing.**

**Allowing or obliging post-primary schools to give paid substitution to PME students would make a huge difference to future PME students.**

advertised. It may also be the case that schools frame their advertisement to suit a specific person and their specific subject requirements.

### Postscript

We, Alison and Kate, have both succeeded in our journey to become second level teachers in our respective subject areas. Having both qualified with first class honour degrees, we are happy to say we have secured teaching jobs. One of us is teaching in Dublin, and the other in the Middle East, in Oman. However, these successes do not mean that the two-year PME course was easy for us – it wasn't. Taking on a commitment at that level presented many challenges. For me, Alison, the challenge was financial. The course required me to work for the two years and teach without being paid for the work I was doing. I had friends training in various fields such as Nursing and the Guards, and while I knew that teaching was what I wanted to do and I was passionate about it, I couldn't help but feel at times that my work wasn't as highly valued as theirs. For some reason our government feels that there is no need to pay trainee teachers. Yet trainee Guards and nurses, in their final year, get a small payment while completing a Bachelor's degree, but a trainee teacher now tackling a full time masters does not. Having said that, I enjoyed immensely my time spent training to become a teacher immensely. I was lucky to have a strong support system at home and within my friends, and also to secure teaching placement near to home. I know that not everyone in my position was as fortunate.

Foe me, Kate, I also found the financial aspect very difficult – I had to continue with part-time work for the entire two years of the programme. Trying to juggle part-time work at the weekend, travelling to Kilkenny three times a week for GAA ladies county training, preparing myself for the school day, and completing college assignments, was the ultimate challenge for me. It taught me a lot about time management and prioritisation. Allowing or obliging post-primary schools to give paid substitution to PME students would make a huge difference to future PME students. I also believe that amendments to the criteria for NQTs need to be discussed. As previously mentioned, the workshops might be of more benefit if completed a year or two after the completion of the PME itself.

### Final Thoughts

Our opinions might only be a drop in the ocean concerning what could be said about the new teacher training programme in Ireland, but we hope that in some way it sparks questions and ideas for the further improvement of the new PME course. With some minor tweaks to the system, the Irish teacher training programme is well on the way to providing Irish schools with world class teachers. We hope that this article has offered not only an insight into what new trainee student teachers experience, but also has presented ideas and suggestions as to how the PME may be shaped and developed over the coming years to suit, not just colleges, but the schools inducting new PME students on an annual basis.

## Graduate Attributes

What are they and why should we have them?

Graduate Attributes have been part of the vocabulary in higher education internationally for quite some time. More recently they have become a focus in Irish higher education. Most of the seven universities, for example, over the past few years have developed statements of graduate attributes, outlining the kind of skills and dispositions graduates of their institution are supported to develop during their university experience.

Graduate attributes usually describe the skills, attitudes and dispositions a fully engaged graduate will have the opportunity to develop through the whole of their third-level experience.<sup>1</sup> This experience will include timetabled curricular activities but also other activities through clubs, societies, volunteering, work and other co- and extra-curricular activities. Institutions have approached the development of graduate attributes in different ways, some stating that all graduates will possess them, and others – perhaps more realistically – proffering them as goals or opportunities for students.

Still smarting from the task of developing programme and module learning outcomes in line with the requirements of our National Framework of Qualifications and the Bologna Process, some may wonder what the difference is between graduate attributes and programme outcomes, and why we need yet another set of outcome statements. Graduate attributes should not mirror or replace programme outcomes, which are based purely on the academic programme of study, but instead complement them, outlining a broader set of skills that can develop from living and learning university life and all that it entails.

### Opportunities

Taking a very positive view, by engaging with the development and potential of graduate attributes, educational institutions have the opportunity to think beyond the formal curriculum. They can



**By Dr Michelle Tooher**

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**T**his article examines how higher education institutions can best use their statements of Graduate Attributes to market themselves, enhance student engagement, help students to set and achieve goals and develop a vocabulary to articulate their achievements.

**G**raduate attributes usually describe the skills, attitudes and dispositions a fully engaged graduate will have the opportunity to develop.

**E**ducational institutions can consider students' other activities as an integral part of the whole university life and the qualities of the people that emerge from that life.

**T**here is no doubt that graduate attributes offer opportunities to engage and inspire students.

consider students' other activities not as discrete and optional extras to the curriculum but as an integral part of the whole university life and the qualities of the people that emerge from that life. Students' higher education experience runs the very apparent risk of becoming a set of discrete experiences which bear little relation to each other, and between which students themselves have difficulty finding links. Programmes are divided into years, years into semesters, and semesters into modules, with modules sometimes seemingly bearing no relation to other modules or unfortunately even to the programme. Extra-curricular activities are extra, and some might say they take students away from the real business of formal education. Graduate attributes may help us refocus on the bigger picture, the whole student experience, education beyond the transcript, and the importance of balance, a life skill we all struggle with at times.

Presenting higher education to students in this way, and helping them see how differing experiences can contribute to their whole development, is also an opportunity to engage and encourage them to achieve these skills that we sometimes assume they just assimilate. Graduate attributes can give students a vocabulary to better express, and impress on others, the skills they have but might not yet have learned to articulate. Employers find that graduates are lacking in skills essential to the workplace, despite having engaged in their studies for three, four or more years. We may need to be more explicit in the transferrable skills students need to acquire to succeed past third-level, and to suggest ways they can achieve and recognise skills and the vocabulary of those skills, such as critical thinking and active citizenship.

### Thinking Practical

Key to the success of graduate attributes as tools for engagement is to recognise achievement.<sup>2</sup> However, we need to be careful to avoid yet another assessment. Students are already subjected to a multitude of assessments which test their academic knowledge and skills, but for graduate attributes to mean something and be more than just aspirational statements, we need to find ways of acknowledging their attainments. It is far better to set realistic goals that students can strive towards, and demonstrate within and beyond their educational setting. By doing so, we give them a value that can inspire students and also give confidence to employers.

Some institutions have successfully implemented initiatives that encourage students to collect artefacts as they progress through their education and engage in various academic and non-academic activities. These artefacts can then be used to demonstrate a level of competence in a particular attribute. For example, a common graduate attribute may be that a student can communicate appropriately in different contexts. Artefacts that might demonstrate this skill could come from coursework assessments such as group or individual presentations and a graded essay, taking part in a debating competition, acting as a class rep, and publishing an article in a students' union publication.

<sup>1</sup> Bowden, J., Hart, G., King, B., Trigwell, K. & Watts, O. (2000) Generic capabilities of ATN university graduates. Canberra: Australian Government Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs.

<sup>2</sup> Hughes, C. & Barrie, S. (2010) Influences on the assessment of graduate attributes in higher education. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 35:3, 325-334.



An approach worth noting is that of Deakin University<sup>3</sup> in Melbourne, Australia, which through its Hallmarks system awards achievement of each Graduate Learning Outcome (or attribute). Individual hallmarks are awarded to students who submit evidence showing competence and meeting the criteria of the hallmark. Students are encouraged to present artefacts from both their coursework and activities outside the formal curriculum as part of their evidence. Recognition is via a digital badge and inclusion on their final formal academic transcript. Digital badges<sup>4</sup> are becoming popular in academia and other sectors as a credential that allows recipients to display achievement or skills on their online social profiles. The badges have associated metadata which can include information verifying standards, assessment criteria and the awarding body.

### Coherence

Ideally, to extend graduate attributes' potential beyond vague statements and glossy marketing, attributes should be embedded, as much as possible, into the curriculum. Attributes will of course be developed differently in disciplines, and this should also be respected in order for academics to engage and value their potential (KW2010, p. 107).<sup>5</sup> There will be opportunities outside the curriculum to better develop some attributes, but the curriculum should seek to contribute to their development, acknowledge them and use them. Doing so adds coherence to programme offerings and identifies longer-term goals for students.

The University of Aberdeen<sup>6</sup> took the opportunity to define its graduate attributes as part of a major curriculum reform. As part of a personal development plan, students are given resources to self-assess and reflect upon their skills and personal development needs in and outside the curriculum, and to help them identify opportunities for development outside of but complementary to the curriculum. Individual programmes state clearly how they help students develop the university graduate attributes, and a communication strategy was used to make the vocabulary of graduate attributes commonplace amongst staff and students.

### Where next?

Irish higher education institutions are at different stages of their graduate attribute development and implementation journey. A quick web search confirms this. Some are already using graduate attributes as part of their marketing to students and employers. Some are using ePortfolio tools to allow students to start charting their journey, and others are still working on internal communication and implementation before they apply the external gloss. There is no doubt that graduate attributes offer opportunities to engage and inspire students. The trick will be to manage the process and find ways to make them meaningful and worthwhile, without overburdening students or the limited resources available to many.

<sup>3</sup> Deakin University: <http://www.deakin.edu.au/>.

<sup>4</sup> Mozilla Open Badges: <http://openbadges.org/>.

<sup>5</sup> KW2010, Creating a 21st Century Curriculum: The King's-Warwick Project, Final Report, <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/study/learningteaching/kings/kwp-finalreport2010.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Aberdeen University: <http://www.abdn.ac.uk>.

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# Casualisation of Teaching in Higher Education

Precarity in the ivory cage: neoliberalism and the casualisation of work

## Introduction

The casualisation of teaching is a key manifestation of the funding crisis in Irish higher education. It affects not only those engaged in precarious work but also has serious implications for the sector as a whole. Casualisation of teaching adversely affects student learning, equality and diversity within our institutions of higher learning, and erodes the commitment to education as a public good.

In the UK, higher education is the sector most likely to use zero-hour contracts after the hospitality sector. In Australia, 60% of contact hours are delivered by 'adjuncts' while in the US, 70% of academic staff are adjuncts.

Though Irish institutions have yet to make public the number of precarious workers employed (or contracted, self-employed, unpaid) in the sector, casualisation and its effects are widely apparent here in Ireland. Official reports use "full-time equivalent" numbers as a measure of part-time work but this completely overlooks those on hourly pay and other forms of "occasional" work, which are the most widespread and exploitative forms of precarious labour across Irish higher education institutions.

Rising student numbers and decreasing numbers of full-time posts have led institutions to rely increasingly on graduate and other precarious workers to cover much of the teaching.

## Online survey

The authors of this article launched an online questionnaire in 2014 in order to document the extent and effects of casualisation as well as to reach out to precarious colleagues. It was addressed explicitly to those identifying as precarious workers and it received 270 responses. The format we chose allowed us to collect very detailed and personal accounts of the lived experience of precarity. From our research we wish to share eight conclusions.



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**T**he woes of casualisation and 'occasional' work in higher level institutions are outlined graphically here as well as the detrimental effects on the quality of the student experience and academic life in general. Findings are based on an online survey of precarious workers.

**R**ising student numbers and decreasing numbers of full-time posts have led institutions to rely increasingly on graduate and other precarious workers to cover much of the teaching.

**H**ourly pay and other forms of 'occasional' work... are the most widespread and exploitative forms of precarious labour across Irish higher education institutions.

## 1. Casualised academic work takes many forms

Casualised academic work takes many forms and consequently is difficult to map. One or multi-year contracts have long been a common feature of academic employment as traditionally these posts were springboards into permanent academic posts. Now however 9-month or 12-week contracts are common where 12-month positions were once the norm. Hourly paid work has proliferated and core modules are now taught on this basis. New insidious types of casualised work have emerged, in the form of 'permanent hourly paid' contracts, unpaid internships, unpaid teaching carried out on behalf of colleagues, bogus self-employment and so forth.

Conditions vary within departments and institutions and across them. Often institutions do not have standardised rates of pay for new, temporary contracts. In some departments there are large discrepancies between the salaries or rates of pay for equivalent work. In many cases, precarious workers are employed without any form of contract.

Much work is hourly paid or paid per course, while preparation, corrections and student consultation may not be paid at all depending on department or institution. Hourly rates of pay for both lecturers and graduate workers ('teaching assistants' or 'tutors') vary greatly across institutions as well.

## 2. The working poor of the university

Of our non-permanent respondents, 66% earned significantly less than the average industrial wage. A further 46% reported annual earnings below €10,000 per year, namely below the poverty threshold in Ireland.

The situation was markedly worse for hourly paid workers. Nearly 80% of those doing hourly paid teaching earned less than 10,000 a year. These respondents were fully qualified lecturers, with years of experience, teaching as many as four full modules – an entire teaching load for most full-time staff.

In addition, hourly paid workers have little recourse under the law and are denied basic rights and entitlements. Hourly paid work offers no paid leave, no sick pay and no maternity pay. Unfair dismissals are moot because universities can simply choose not to offer any subsequent work the following term. Women who are pregnant are particularly vulnerable.

A number of respondents reported juggling hourly paid work between several institutions. Many float in and out of employment, drawing social welfare or relying on the support of others. Poverty, fear of dismissal, insecurity and diminished health and wellbeing as a result of precarity are common concerns amongst these workers. It is not uncommon for such workers to be forced out of the sector – at a time when student-staff ratios have reached critical levels and Irish higher education institutions need these talented and experienced academics more than ever.

### 3. The hamster wheel of precarity

Casual work has become so systemic and endemic that many are now trapped in a hamster wheel of precarity. Precarity is no longer a temporary phase in early academic careers; it is now a permanent position in and of itself.

Many of our respondents had worked over 10 years in higher education and continue to do so on a casual basis. Thus, time spent in the sector does not result in an improvement of conditions – in fact for many, conditions deteriorate over time and workers remain trapped in precarious, low-paid employment.

As permanent staff are under increasing pressure, the teaching burden of departments is gradually passed onto casual staff. Casual workers rarely have the opportunity to teach the same course year after year; instead they are forced to prepare new material, often for free, while having little time to strengthen their expertise in modules related to their research interests.

This work offers no scope to develop a research profile. Precarious workers are often excluded from applying for research funding. Professional memberships and conferences are paid for out of pocket with no institutional support. Thus dissemination of research and networking, essential CV-building exercises are in fact hampered by employment status. This creates a situation whereby temporary workers are caught in a cyclical process, trapped in precarity, with diminishing exit points into secure academic work. This too has implications for teaching as research is increasingly divorced from teaching and research-informed teaching, the core of higher education itself, is undermined.

### 4. Reclassification of academic work

Casualisation devalues scholarly research. Universities demand increased research productivity from staff. Yet, for casual workers, research is increasingly defined by institutions as extraneous unpaid work conducted outside the confines of contracts.

In effect, these workers are engaged in research and intellectual work full-time, but are only remunerated for classroom activities. This threatens the very nature of academic work. Teaching and research inform each other. Their compartmentalisation undermines knowledge work as a whole and feeds into the assumption that our work as academics is seasonal.

The increasing segmentation of academic labour marginalises these workers in their departments, where many do not have an office and are invisible in spite of their vital contribution. This poses a serious threat to collegiality, knowledge innovation, and our ability to protect our sector collectively.

**I**n many cases, precarious workers are employed without any form of contract.

**C**asual workers rarely have the opportunity to teach the same course year after year.

**H**ourly paid work offers no paid leave, no sick pay and no maternity pay.

**C**asual work has become so systemic that many are now trapped in a hamster wheel of precarity.

### 5. Increased workload for permanent staff

A small number of permanent staff responded to our questionnaire and an overall theme of workplace discontent and dissatisfaction emerged. The reforms within higher education mean that the work of permanent staff is increasing. This is very much connected to casualisation, as permanent positions are no longer replaced and part-time posts are used to cover full-time work. Permanent staff are having to pick up the slack in research, teaching, administration, and student support. Attempts to make academic jobs seasonal neglect the year-round cycle of academic work and shift work onto the shoulders of those in more secure posts.

### 6. Learning conditions

The quality of education received by students is under threat as teachers' working conditions are students' learning conditions. Fees are increasing alongside staff-student ratios. Consultation and feedback are now unpaid work in many universities. In many cases, grading exams and essays are unpaid or underpaid, encouraging a system of assessment that leaves little space to foster skills like writing or critical thinking, once the foundations of higher education.

Precarious academics are discouraged from teaching to their fullest potential and providing students with the full range of supports they need throughout their education. As student numbers rise and the student population diversifies, a thorough review of institutional practices in relation to academic labour is urgently needed. The current overreliance on disposable, underpaid staff is not only unethical but also unsustainable.

### 7. Equality

Casualisation is also a threat to gender equality in the workplace as women are concentrated in some of the worst forms of precarious academic work, particularly hourly paid and pro-rata work, and many are caught there for longer than their male counterparts. If we are to adequately address gender inequality in the academic workplace, casualisation must be tackled.

### 8. Higher education as a public good

Academic freedom cannot be guaranteed for casual workers. Due to lack of security, casual workers have no protection should they wish to explore contentious or critical research. Teaching staff on temporary contracts are often prohibited from continuing work started on previous contracts so as to prevent any claims to permanency under the law.

How can the foundational principles of higher education, like academic freedom and intellectual integrity, remain intact under a system that denies a large portion of its workers the protection offered to permanent staff regarding their work?

Academic freedom comes with tenure and its denial to a large number of scholars chisels away at the very foundation of the university as a public good. As public monies are withdrawn from the staffing of



permanent positions how can we ensure that free and independent thinking survives? These values are at the core of the university and the erosion of tenure threatens our ability to protect and nurture them.

### Conclusion

There are ways to resist and revoke this casualisation that affects all those connected to the university. Ending casualisation requires a concerted effort. We propose the following five first steps to reverse the trend towards a complete casualisation of higher education teaching:

- » Further document the extent of casualisation, including the number of individuals filling in time sheets and the proportion of contact hours taught by the different categories of non-permanent workers at each institution.
- » Abolish low and unpaid forms of academic labour. Work towards the abolition of unpaid and hourly paid work for regular teaching.
- » Resist the erosion of academic work into seasonal employment. One-year contracts should be a minimum starting point.
- » Revise the guidelines for teaching buy-out when permanent staff embark on funded research projects (at present the budget available to replace a member of staff on research leave does not allow institutions to provide a living wage to the worker they hire to cover the teaching load of a member of staff).
- » Increase the number of full-time permanent academic positions across all institutions.

Further detail on our study can be accessed here:

Courtois, A. and T. O'Keefe: Precarity in the ivory cage: Neoliberalism and the casualisation of work in the Irish higher education sector. *Journal of Critical Education Policy Studies* 13(1). 2015 <http://www.jceps.com/archives/2458>

**A**cademic freedom cannot be guaranteed for casual workers.



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# The funding dilemma in Higher Education

Private colleges can contribute to the solution

## Introduction

The much awaited (and frequently leaked) Report of the Expert Group on the Future Funding for Higher Education<sup>1</sup> was published in March 2016. Mirroring debates which are taking place in many countries across Europe, it states very clearly the stark choice facing policy makers in relation to higher education in Ireland – invest or stagnate. Government cannot avoid this. Policy makers are challenged to find the most appropriate mechanisms available to fund the required increased level of investment for a quality and sustainable higher education system.

The report is welcomed on many different levels. It quantifies with great clarity the scale of the problem, but it also acknowledges the potential of privately funded higher education institutions to play a role in responding to these challenges.

## Privately Funded Higher Education Institutions (PF HEIs)

The Higher Education Colleges Association (HECA) has long been campaigning for such an acknowledgement from policy makers. HECA was originally set up in 1991 by four National Council of Education Awards designated colleges. It has since expanded to 15 Colleges and in the past 20 years, HECA has become the recognised voice of PF HEIs in Ireland. It has sought to develop the role and value of PF HEIs in Ireland. Member institutions have established relationships with State accreditation bodies and their activities are underpinned by externally validated quality assurance processes.

Yet in the cynics' eyes, these institutions are motivated solely by profit, driven by the marketplace and designed to get numbers through the door with no regard to quality of the education programmes. Indeed, many point to the recent failures of the English Language schools as illustrative of institutions driven by profit with little regard for the well-being of students. On the other hand, there are many stakeholders who claim that State-aided Institutions are slow to adapt to the changing education landscape



By Ian McKenna

Director, Saint Nicholas Montessori College Ireland

**I**an McKenna reviews the Cassells Report on the Funding of Higher Education and outlines the potential response of privately funded higher education institutions (PF HEIs) to the money crisis in higher education.

**T**he report acknowledges the potential of privately funded higher education institutions to play a role...

**I**n the cynics' eyes, these institutions are motivated solely by profit.

**T**hey all fall within the scope of the same quality assurance legislative framework – the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012.

and needs, choosing to focus on building empires and competing for scarce prestigious research projects. The crowded agenda in higher education – resource allocation, cluster, technological universities and collaboration – has distracted institutional management away from the core mission and tenets of higher education. Fortunately, most rational commentators would acknowledge that both representations are unfair. Somewhere in between the 'profit driven' providers and the 'empire building' State-aided institutions lies the reality. Within both models of provision reside persons dedicated to all that is good and valuable to higher education. They are equally committed to assist school leavers and others to realise their professional and personal ambitions.

Yet, the question is – can this shared ambition be harnessed to provide the basis for an innovative approach by policy makers to deliver a solution to the many challenges for higher education in Ireland?

## PF HEIs and Quality Assurance

The starting point must be to understand the quality assurance context for HECA members. It is important to note that many will share a common standing with universities and institutes of technology. First of all, they all fall within scope of the same quality assurance legislative framework – the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012. This should be a vital source of assurance for students who make their choice to pursue their study with PF HEIs. Institutions such as Dublin Business School or Saint Nicholas Montessori College Ireland are subject to the same rigorous external quality assurance evaluation by Quality and Qualifications Ireland as Dublin Institute of Technology, Limerick Institute of Technology or University College Dublin.

This externality is more obvious in terms of programme accreditation. While universities and institutes of technology can develop and deliver programmes on the basis of self-awarding and delegated authority respectively, the programmes delivered by PF HEIs and accredited by QQI have been the subject of rigorous assessment by external academic peers, drawn mainly from State-aided HEIs. These panels will inevitably include industry or sector expertise. As part of this process, it is complemented by compliance with protection for enrolled learners, which ensures that the professional and personal ambitions of students are protected from the start of the programme until the completion. Indeed, HECA HEIs have gone beyond the requirements of the 2012 Act, by establishing Trust Funds to address any cost issues arising in such situations. It is core to HECA values not to betray the trust given by students.

## What is the Higher Education Crisis?

Ireland is quite rightly proud of its participation rate in higher education. In many respects, it represents the strong cultural affinity and value attached by all to education beyond post-primary education. While it is also very important to debate and firmly establish the complementary role and value of further education, Ireland records one of the top participation rates in higher education in the OECD. However, if the present rate of 56% is to be maintained, then it will be necessary for Ireland Inc to increase the number of available HE places by 29%. If this does not take place, the risk of reverting to an elitist system would represent a serious retrograde step

<sup>1</sup> Investing in National Ambition: A Strategy for Funding Higher Education (March 2016)

and compromise the contribution the higher education system has made to Irish society in the past. The report noted that the funding could not be addressed through “*further efficiencies, use of technology or a cap on numbers.*”<sup>2</sup> On this basis, it recommended additional core funding starting at €600 million by 2012 and €1 billion by 2030, in addition capital funding of €5.5 billion over the next 15 years. Finally, it recommended an additional €100 million to put an effective student financial aid system in place.

These demands must be set in the context of the overall education provision and the various demands which the Minister for Education and Skills is required to balance and moderate. In turn, education expenditure must be set in the context of overall provision of key services by the State – health, housing, social supports etc. Financial resources are limited and the scale of the task facing policy makers is evident to all. The response required to the higher education crisis must be innovative and imaginative. It must explore all options to ensure that opportunities remain open and available for those seeking to pursue it.

### Activity with the PF HEIs

While recognising the status attaching to universities in Ireland, it would be fair to say that a more realistic comparator for PF HEIs would be institutes of technology. This reflects the close alignment of both sectors with local and regional industry.

HEIs within HECA account for an estimated 15,000 students overall. Up to 20% of these are pursuing professional qualifications such as ACCA, CIMA, CIFA, while the remaining 12,000 are pursuing QQI validated programmes. This accounts for 7% of all students pursuing higher education programmes in Ireland from Level 6 (Higher Certificate) to Level 9 (Masters). There is a very limited Level 10 activity taking place in the National College of Ireland. It should also be noted that up to 10% of all taught post-graduate activity in Ireland takes place in PF HEIs. Mature learners also form a strong element of the student population within HECA HEIs – 53% of the undergraduate cohort is mature, while this figure increases to 70% within postgraduate programmes.

This student profile illustrates some of the key strengths of HECA HEIs’ provision – it is provided within a flexible and credible context. Class groups tend to be small, which allows for greater interactions between lecturer and student. PF HEIs have demonstrated their capacity to undertake the required re-skilling and up-skilling sought of today’s adaptable workforce. This is one of the consistent responses to surveys undertaken within the institutions. It also serves to illustrate the innovative approach which has been associated with PF HEIs. For example, Dublin Business School and Lidl provide an opportunity for the provision of a Bachelor of Business Retail programme for their store management teams. Griffith College Dublin law degrees were amongst the first to be recognised by the Law Society in Ireland. Graduates of the Hibernia College primary teaching qualification now account for 45% of the newly qualified primary teachers, while other HECA members have continued to provide niche programmes at a variety of levels in Montessori education,

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

**T**he response required to the higher education crisis must be innovative and imaginative.

**C**lass groups tend to be small, which allows for greater interactions between lecturer and student.

**T**his provision takes place at no expense to the State and has complemented the activity within the State aided sector.

**T**his is the first time that a report on higher education funding or policy has explicitly referred to the potential role which can be played by PF HEIs.

counselling and psychotherapy, strength and conditioning, quality management processes etc. This provision takes place at no expense to the State and has complemented the activity within the State aided sector. However, the continued increase in numbers within HECA HEIs is not just indicative of the choice and flexible delivery for undergraduates, it also is a consequence of the State’s own policies. The current student contribution now stands at €3,000 while the average programme fee for undergraduate programmes in HECA colleges is about €5,150. The tax relief available for higher education programme fees reduces the differential and when combined with flexible delivery and small class sizes, some students are prepared to pay that differential.

### What did Cassells say about the PF HEIs?

In order to contextualise the potential contribution of PF HEIs, the Report states that “*a return to gradual, marginal increases in State funding will not be sufficient to create the kind of engaged, small group, high trust, high expectation teaching and learning that underpins quality.*”<sup>3</sup> While the 2016 budgetary announcement of an additional €160 million over three years is welcome, the fact is that most of this expenditure will be directed at specific targeted measures including increasing participation amongst disadvantaged backgrounds, attraction of researchers from abroad. Clearly, these are welcome and reflect Ireland’s determination to maximise participation in higher education, but they will not have the required impact to address the funding crisis in the higher education system.

In drawing on international experience, the Cassells Group noted the US experience where the private sector was used to assist in meeting the increasing demand. The report also cited experiences in Nordic countries where State funding reflected perceived contribution to a “*broad set of economic, social, public governance and public service goals.*”<sup>4</sup> These perspectives have clearly informed the Expert Group’s recommendations. Recommendation 6 of the report states that the “*the student support funding model should provide for a more holistic treatment of learners by ...examining the potential of extending support under the student grant scheme to part-time learners and learners in private institutions.*”<sup>5</sup> This is the first time that a report on higher education funding or policy has explicitly referred to the potential role which can be played by PF HEIs. For many of us leading these organisations, this reflects on the increased willingness of the State to recognise the competence and experience with PF HEIs. This was first evident with the launch of the Springboard labour activation programme. PF HEIs were invited to tender for the provision of specific discipline programmes such as ICT and business management. Their participation and capacity to deliver the programmes has been positively acknowledged in subsequent Springboard evaluations. Critically, the State, through the Higher Education Authority (HEA), saw at first hand the capacity to deliver and achieve measurable outcomes without compromise to quality or wider Springboard objectives.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Ibid



In many respects, this debate rests on opening student choice – while many State interventions rest on arguments such as public goods and correction of market defects like availability of information, these would appear to be of lesser significance in the context of higher education. The provision of information for students through the provision of programme accreditation documentation is available on the QQI website, in addition to resources within each organisation, as required by the 2012 legislation.

One must recognise that there are private dimensions attaching to the individual's pursuit of higher education. There are also substantial public good characteristics associated with higher education. This must be balanced not only in the context of higher education, but also in the context of the wider education system itself. Should the State's focus on the provision of genuinely equitable and properly resourced compulsory education system? This is not to question the merits of public goods of higher education – it is to air a philosophical and political basis for PF HEIs providers to complement the activity of the State aided institutions. Indeed, when the Expert Group was considering various funding options, it noted:

*“Some will consider that the combination of public and private return warrants a sharing of cost between the State, student/ graduates and employers. Of course, the State funds many things which are not pure public goods such as health and welfare; but the case for this is made in terms of equity, fairness or justice, rather than the public nature of the good in question....some of the relevant dimensions include fairness and balance between those who receive higher education and citizens who do not...”*<sup>6</sup>

The inclusion of students who are attending PF HEIs, as well as those pursuing part-time provision, in possible funding options including income contingent increases the choice for potential students – a financial burden on these students will be set aside. This will facilitate PF HEIs to contribute to the response to the crisis in higher education.

### Competition

While the Expert Report may represent a shift in public policy, some commentators will present the possibility of choice for this shift as the privatisation of higher education or the creation of competitive market for higher education. This competition already exists within State-aided HEIs. HEA Calls for Proposals are conducted on an inter-institutional competitive basis, with successful and unsuccessful bids. Research initiatives by Science Foundation Ireland are similarly conducted on the basis of competition. These calls are set in a framework of targeted initiatives, with HEIs choosing to participate in the process.

Many PF HEIs would see their role as complementary to that of the State-aided sector. Clearly, they would not have access to the HEA funding streams, but many have carved out sustainable provision in key areas such as business, ICT, counselling and psychotherapy, education. The capacity to cope with increased student numbers exists in PF HEIs – it has the agility to adjust as appropriate without compromise to quality of provision.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

### Conclusion

As Director of a PF HEI focussed on the delivery of single discipline programme of Montessori, my ambition for each student undertaking the SNMCI programme is undoubtedly the same as that of each President in the State-aided HEI. We are accountable to students who have entrusted our respective organisations with their professional and personal ambition. No leader of any HEI takes this lightly.

As Ireland slowly emerges from the crisis, the role of higher education is now more critical than ever. The funding premise of a HEI should not be the determinant of its capacity to be part of the “virtuous circle of investment, quality and verification.”<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

### New appointment for NUI Galway Professor

Professor Daniel Carey of NUI Galway has been appointed to the Board of the Irish Research Council (IRC).

Established in mid-2012, the IRC is a merger of two former councils – the Irish Research Council for Humanities and Social Sciences (IRCHSS), and the Irish Research Council for Science, Engineering and Technology (IRCSET).

Professor Carey is a graduate of McGill University, Trinity College Dublin, and Oxford University. He is currently Director of NUI Galway's Moore Institute for Research in the Humanities and Social Studies.



# IRISH RESEARCH IN NUMBERS

10<sup>th</sup>

MOST HIGHLY  
CITED RESEARCH  
PUBLICATION  
OF ALL TIME

10 IRISH RESEARCHERS

among the top 1% of highly cited researchers worldwide



8,000

students on research  
programmes

35

PRESTIGIOUS ERC  
GRANTS UNDER  
HORIZON 20207<sup>th</sup>

MOST INNOVATIVE COUNTRY IN THE WORLD

SOCIAL SCIENCE & HUMANITIES OUTPUTS  
FROM FOUR IRISH UNIVERSITIES RANK IN  
THE TOP 1% OF PUBLICATIONS WORLDWIDE

Ireland ranked 9<sup>th</sup> in the world overall  
in global scientific rankings

●●●●●● 1<sup>st</sup> IN NANOSCIENCES & NANOTECHNOLOGY

●●●●●● 1<sup>st</sup> IN IMMUNOLOGY

●●●●●● 1<sup>st</sup> IN COMPUTER SCIENCE

●●●●●● 3<sup>rd</sup> IN NEUROSCIENCES & BEHAVIOUR

●●●●●● 6<sup>th</sup> IN MATERIALS SCIENCES

●●●●●● 6<sup>th</sup> IN MOLECULAR BIOLOGY & GENETICS

1<sup>st</sup>

IN EUROPE  
in terms of  
knowledge transfer  
performance  
of public research  
organisations

## 'My Experience' Toolkit

An advanced-entry college application tool for recognizing prior learning



By Dr Carina Ginty

Project Manager My Experience,  
Galway-Mayo Institute of  
Technology

The My Experience RPL online assessment toolkit helps those applying for Recognition of Prior Learning to gain entry to a programme or seek exemptions from parts of a programme.

### Background to the My Experience Project

Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT), Institute of Technology Sligo (ITS) and Letterkenny Institute of Technology (LYIT) have launched the My Experience RPL (Recognised Prior Learning) online assessment toolkit this year. The toolkit includes an information website and an online RPL application tool for candidates looking for access or advanced entry to a higher education programme. In addition, a free open online course has been developed for Higher Education staff seeking professional development in RPL assessment skills and supporting RPL applicants effectively (<http://cpd.learnonline.ie/>). The Connacht Ulster Alliance (GMIT, IT Sligo and LYIT) initiated this project back in 2013 to inform, support and facilitate Irish or international applicants in applying for RPL to gain entry onto a programme or seek exemptions from parts of a programme.

A dedicated web portal ([www.myexperience.ie](http://www.myexperience.ie)) has been created to provide relevant information on RPL through short videos and text. The website defines the different mechanism of RPL assessment, provides details on the process, and links to the RPL ePortfolio assessment tool. The ePortfolio application tool was created in Moodle (i.e. an online learning development tool) as this provides for assessment of learning. As a paperless tool, it provides an electronic submission of evidence and allows the learner to submit their portfolio in a sequence of stages resulting in the creation of a professional RPL portfolio. The ePortfolio of evidence includes: certified learning; experiential learning; references; work experience outputs and motivational statements. The RPL ePortfolio tool has been piloted in GMIT, IT Sligo and LYIT with over 80 applicants. [www.myexperience.ie](http://www.myexperience.ie)

Accredited module for higher education staff In addition an accredited RPL module for higher education staff (Level 9, worth 10 ECTS) has been developed. This module aims to provide participants with a deep understanding of the policies and procedures associated with the process of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). It provides participants with an appreciation of the complexities associated with

the management of RPL at a Higher Education Institution. This module, which is practically based and interactive, is aimed at developing mentors and assessors with the knowledge and competencies to enable them to become effective assessors of RPL candidates.

### The term RPL explained

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is the generic term for learning assessment mechanisms and is used within Higher Education Institutions to describe the awarding of credit/exemptions to applicants on the basis of demonstrated learning that has occurred prior to admission.

RPL is defined as a process whereby prior learning is given a value and this provides opportunities for advanced entry to a further or higher education programme and/or awarding credits for elements within programmes and in some cases RPL can result in a full award from a higher education institute<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, the European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning, country report Ireland 2014, explains “RPL incorporates prior, formal, informal and non-formal learning and that which is validated within the context of a specified destination award from level one to ten on the national framework of qualifications” (p. 3, European Commission, CEDEFOP, ICF International; 2014)<sup>2</sup>.

The National Strategy for Higher Education (2011, p.55)<sup>3</sup> states that “RPL is particularly important as flexible and workplace learning opportunities expand. A national framework for RPL must be developed, based on the expertise and experience already built up in the higher education institutions. Progress in this regard will help to shift the emphasis from educational inputs towards learning outcomes. This student-centred philosophy lies at the heart of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)”.

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is therefore a key foundation for lifelong learning policies and it is critical to the development of an accessible, further and higher education system. RPL encourages people of all ages to participate in learning and attributes value to all of their work and life experiences.

### Why My Experience RPL Toolkit?

The need to develop the My Experience RPL Toolkit arises from a number of factors including the fact that lifelong learning participation rate is just 7.3% in Ireland compared to the EU average of 10.5%. With regards to the employed sector, it is just 6% participation in Ireland, compared to the EU average of 11%<sup>4</sup>. Therefore, there is great potential to promote RPL

1 National Forum (2015), *A Current Overview Of Recognition Of Prior Learning (RPL) In Irish Higher Education*. Available at <http://www.teachingandlearning.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Project-2.pdf>

2 European Commission; Cedefop; ICF International (2014), *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2014*. Final synthesis report <http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2014/87244.pdf>

3 Hunt, C. (2011) *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030*. Report of the Strategy Group. Department of Education and Skills, Government Publications, Ireland.

4 CEDEFOP (2015), *European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning*. Available at <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/3073>

**R**PL is defined as a process whereby prior learning is given a value and this provides opportunities for advanced entry to a further or higher education programme

**A** dedicated web portal has been created to provide relevant information on RPL through short videos and text.

**A**n accredited RPL module for higher education staff (Level 9, worth 10 ECTS) aims to provide participants with a deep understanding of the policies and procedures associated with the process of RPL.

**T**here is a lack of awareness that Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) actually exists or candidates are unsure how to build a portfolio of evidence.

pathways to higher education among the experienced workforce in Ireland that are seeking to up skill and gain a formal qualification

Further challenges identified include the lack of awareness that Recognising Prior Learning (RPL) actually exists or candidates are unsure how to build a portfolio of evidence. The My Experience RPL toolkit helps address these issues and it will create more opportunities for mature learners to gain advanced entry to programmes at GMIT, IT Sligo and LYIT.

### National Forum, Learning & Teaching Enhancement Fund

In January 2016, the Connacht Ulster Alliance was awarded funding from the National Forum for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching to deliver a six month RPL project. Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT) led this project with partners IT Sligo and Letterkenny IT. This project involved technical enhancements to the RPL online ePortfolio application tool at [www.myexperience.ie](http://www.myexperience.ie); the development of an open online educational course for staff working in higher education (<http://cpd.learnonline.ie>), and a roadshow and webinars to demonstrate how the tool works at GMIT, IT Sligo, Letterkenny IT, DCU and Waterford IT. As a result of the roadshow, WIT and DCU will now activate the My Experience RPL ePortfolio assessment tool in their own institutes.

### The Student Experience

Among the students who completed the My Experience application tool this year and have success stories to tell include Lucy Bracken from GMIT and Alan Lowe from IT Sligo.

IT Sligo student, Alan Lowe, explains “While I did not meet the standard entry criteria for an online programme at IT Sligo, I was made aware of the [www.myexperience.ie](http://www.myexperience.ie) website and that experiential learning could form part of a successful application. So I reflected on my membership of numerous professional and trade association committees and regular attendance at conferences and seminars and I realised I had developed knowledge and skills associated with a Level 8 Civil Engineering degree. This enabled me to gain advanced entry to the Level 9, Certificate in Road Maintenance Engineering and Network Management programme at IT Sligo.”

GMIT student, Lucy Bracken explains “I read about the Certificate in Food Innovation and Entrepreneurship course available in GMIT School of Science and instantly made inquiries knowing it would be something that might help me embark on my business idea. My only concern was that, although I had a vast amount of relevant experience, I had no formal third level education and I felt I would not be eligible to apply for the Level 9 certificate. On meeting with the RPL mentors and assessors in GMIT, it was confirmed that I did not meet the formal entry requirements but that RPL was an access route and my 25 years of relevant experiential learning would be recognised when making my application. Using the [myexperience.ie](http://myexperience.ie) website, I submitted my RPL ePortfolio including all supporting evidence required for the application. I found the tool very user friendly and felt that I gained a lot from creating the ePortfolio realising the importance of my experience and skill set which I took somewhat for



granted. I am delighted I was accepted onto the course and I now have the opportunity to pursue my goals at GMIT”.

Candidates who are interested in applying for RPL and advanced entry to a programme at GMIT, IT Sligo and LYIT are encouraged to visit the website at [www.myexperience.ie](http://www.myexperience.ie) and seek advice from the institute heads of department on making an application through the My Experience online tool.

For further information on this CUA collaborative initiative visit [www.myexperience.ie](http://www.myexperience.ie) or contact the project development team: Dr Carina Ginty (GMIT), Mr Gavin Clinch (IT Sligo), Mr Oran Doherty (LYIT).

### About the Connacht Ulster Alliance (CUA)

The Connacht–Ulster Alliance (CUA) was established by the three Institutes of Technology of Galway, Letterkenny and Sligo in July 2012, through the signing of a formal MoU. Since their establishment in the early 1970s, the CUA partners have made a substantial contribution to raising the educational profile of the region and to attracting innovative enterprises into the region, and have demonstrated their capability to evolve over the last 45 years to meet regional needs. The CUA is committed to continuous change to meet the future needs of the region. In becoming a TU, the ambition is to enhance the services and programmes provided to students, widen the access from the dispersed population across the region, and to deepen the regional embeddedness and the level of engagement with enterprises.



### HONORARY FELLOWSHIP AWARDS

GMIT Honorary Fellowships were presented to John Crumlish, CEO of the Galway Arts Festival, for his vast contribution to arts and culture in the west, and to John Muldoon, Connaught Rugby Captain and a graduate of GMIT, for his major contribution to rugby and sport. They are pictured here after the awards ceremony in the Radisson Hotel Galway, on 17 November 2016.

## Equity of Access to Higher Education

### A National Social and Economic Priority



By Caitríona Ryan

Head of Access Policy Office, HEA



New approaches were needed to make higher education opportunities

a realistic prospect for all citizens.” The rationale and the implementation of the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015–2019 are the focus in this article.

### A National Priority

Achieving equity of access to higher education continues to be a significant challenge for our policy makers and education professionals. But overcoming this challenge is an overriding priority if our citizens are to live in a country epitomised by social justice, equality of opportunity and economic progression.

Higher education has the capacity to increase standard of living, and investment in it is a matter of self-interest for both the individual and the country. The rationale is compelling and is the driving force behind the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education, 2015–2019:

- » At an individual level, a higher education graduate is likely to earn higher income and is far less likely to experience unemployment. Even during the unprecedented economic crisis from which Ireland recently emerged, the chances of a graduate experiencing unemployment were half that of non-graduates. As we see employment levels increase, it is graduates who are being employed faster than non-graduates. The minimum requirements for education are rising fast. A secondary school qualification will no longer be sufficient to build prosperous careers. Graduates enjoy a significant earnings premium, on average 84% more than those without a higher education – the OECD figure for Ireland (Source: Education at a Glance, 2015 (2013 data)). Added to the substantial earnings premium enjoyed by higher education graduates are the many non-financial benefits linked to having a higher education, including better quality of life, increased job satisfaction, greater societal participation and increased health outcomes.
- » At an economic level, the Irish economy needs more people to take up higher education. Ireland is a dynamic knowledge economy. Our economic success will depend on our knowledge base and ability to innovate; higher education is the mechanism through which we can develop these. Our citizens must have the ability to innovate and generate new knowledge and to adapt to technological change. An educated population

attracts inward investment. Countries with lower levels of education are vulnerable to losing jobs to better educated ones. We know that new job openings in our economy will predominantly be met by graduates. We need to ensure that the supply of graduates is there to address these skills needs. To do this, the economy needs to tap into the skills and talents of all our population so it can continue to grow and prosper. Equality of opportunity in our higher education system is as much an economic imperative as it is a social one.

- » At a societal level, participating in education is about ensuring that all citizens have the capacity and understanding to have successful personal lives, and to contribute to society at all levels and in all ways – in arts and culture, in community activity, in protecting our environment, and in understanding society's global challenges and engaging in political discourse.

### How is Ireland doing?

The Department of Education and Skills (DES) and the Higher Education Authority (HEA) have continually prioritised improved equity of access to higher education. Since the early 1990s, specific funding has been allocated to higher education institutions to build an access infrastructure and implement strategies to improve equity of access. Ireland is one of only a few countries in the European Higher Education Area that sets targets to improve equity of access to higher education. These targets frame our equity of access policy and the corresponding investment of resources that has helped to increase the numbers of students from non-traditional backgrounds attending higher education.

Studies have been undertaken to assess how institutions are performing. These studies show there has been considerable progress in the last two decades, but it is insufficient. There has been a notable increase in participation by students with disabilities and by those studying on a part-time or flexible basis. For example, the overall rate of participation in higher education among 18–20-year-olds has grown from under 40% to over 52%. Participation by mature learners has grown from 4% to 13% of entrants, and by people with disabilities from 1% to 6% of students. Participation in part-time programmes of higher education has also seen significant growth over the last decade, from 7% to 17% of all students.

Notwithstanding this progress, Irish higher education does not fully reflect the diversity and social mix of Ireland's population. In particular, young people and adults from disadvantaged communities continue to participate at a much lower level than their peers from other areas. This is most starkly illustrated by Dublin postal code data, which ranges from near 100% participation in Dublin 6 to 16% in Dublin 10: a distance of just five miles.

### National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education, 2015–2019

It is against this background that the DES and the HEA worked together to develop a new plan for equity of access to higher education. From the outset it was acknowledged that new approaches were needed to make higher education opportunities a realistic prospect for all citizens. Better

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**A**n educated population attracts inward investment.

**Y**oung people and adults from disadvantaged communities continue to participate at a much lower level than their peers from other areas.

understanding and targeting of communities with low participation levels would need to be part of the Plan. Accordingly, the DES and HEA engaged in a process of wide consultation. In addition to education stakeholders, the consultation included engagement with public, private and voluntary groups working in communities that experience significant social exclusion with very low rates of participation in higher education. This extensive and diverse consultation brought a new depth of knowledge that contributed to developing new approaches and strategies.

The Plan sets out a framework of challenging but realistic objectives and actions for the next five years. Its vision is that by 2020, through actions progressed in collaboration with a range of stakeholders, the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels reflects the diversity and social mix of Ireland's population. The five goals in the National Access Plan are:

1. To mainstream equity of access in higher education institutions (HEIs)
2. To assess the impact of current initiatives to support equity of access in HEIs
3. To gather accurate data and evidence on access and participation and to base policy on what that data tells us
4. To build coherent pathways from further education and to foster other entry routes to higher education
5. To develop regional and community partnership strategies for increasing access to higher education, with a particular focus on mentoring.

Each goal includes a detailed suite of actions and key performance indicators. At the core of the Plan are new targets to achieve significant increases in participation by 2019 by the underrepresented groups: people disadvantaged by socio-economic barriers, people with disabilities, mature students and Travellers. Targets have also been set to increase participation in higher education by graduates with further education qualifications and in part-time/flexible learning.

### Implementation – Overview of Some Initiatives to Date

Implementing the National Access Plan began in January 2016. The DES has established a high-level implementation group to oversee progress. Work is currently advancing in priority areas that emerged in the consultation during development of the Plan: community engagement and relationships, initial teacher education, student completion, and data enhancement.

The DES has allocated additional funding to support implementation. This funding is supporting a competitive call for funding proposals from the regional clusters of HEIs and the centres for teaching education. It will support new projects within the clusters in two priority areas that emerged from the consultation during development of the Plan:

- » Projects that increase access to initial teacher education by students from the target groups identified in the Access Plan. Teachers are critical role models and influencers for students from target groups. The aim of this funding is to support more students from the target groups to enrol in and complete initial teacher education. It is important that potential students from the target groups see teachers who have come from the same target groups.
- » Projects that identify particular communities with low rates of higher education participation and develop targeted local community and voluntary partnerships and mentoring strategies, that significantly influence student expectations and access and completion levels from these communities. The priority will be on areas with the lowest participation rates: very targeted projects that concentrate on the areas of most significant disadvantage in society. Achieving real increases in participation in these areas is a major priority of this Plan.

Work is advancing on the issue of student completion, with a particular focus on students from the target groups. In line with the action identified in the Plan, the HEA has established an expert working group that will work with the National Forum for Teaching and Learning to develop practical recommendations for HEIs on increasing the completion rates.

The HEA is managing independent reviews of the Student Assistance Fund (SAF) and the Fund for Students with Disabilities (FSD). This is in relation to the goal to assess the impact of current financial initiatives to support equity of access in higher education, including examining what impact systems of institutional and student financial support have on participation in higher education by under-represented groups. Implementing the recommendations of the review will begin in autumn 2016.

Work is continuing to develop data collected on student participation and completion. It is important that our knowledge of target groups and communities be increased, to better inform policy making and practice for supporting students. The HEA and DES are progressing a data strategy for equity of access. This includes a review of sources of data on socio-economic disadvantage and how these might develop in the future, including new systems of identifying geographic areas with high levels of disadvantage. The outcome of this work will be presented as part of a mid-term review of progress in 2017 and will advise the development of new targets from 2020 onwards. Work on a pilot study to develop a profile of the geo-codes of new entrants to higher education has begun. The ultimate aim is that where you live will not affect participation in higher education. For each year of the plan the DES plans to convene an annual forum of stakeholders to consult on progress and advise on the further stages of implementing the Plan.

Work is on-going with HEIs to mainstream the delivery of equity of access actions within institutions. A key theme in the Plan is how access is 'everyone's business', and while the pioneering phase of work on access served us well, more strategic and holistic approaches are now required

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**W**e know that new job openings in our economy will predominantly be met by graduates.

**T**he Plan [National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education, 2015–2019] sets out a framework of challenging but realistic objectives and actions for the next five years.

from the higher education sector. A continuing focus is necessary to ensure that the access mission is more fully integrated across all faculties and areas of work in each HEI. As student bodies become more diverse, it is not sustainable that work to increase access and support participation be solely the responsibility of access officers and a few committed faculty members. Equity of access should have a champion in every faculty. A number of institutions have led the way in this regard and have developed good practice approaches; the HEA will continue to support sharing and embedding these, in particular through support for the work of regional clusters.

In the HEA itself, the equity of access agenda is firmly integrated into core business and in day-to-day interactions with HEIs. Strategic dialogue is the primary mechanism the HEA uses to formally assess HEI performance across all of the DES's objectives for higher education and to allocate performance funding. Equity of access is an important part of this strategic dialogue, and HEIs must be able to show the steps they are taking to advance the national priority for equity of access and how they are contributing to the goals, objectives and targets of the National Access Plan.

### A coherent cross-governmental approach

In addition to the work being carried out in the HE sector, the HEA also strongly welcomes the work being carried out in other parts of the education sector, which also has a direct bearing on this issue. Of critical importance are the initiatives at primary and post-primary that support students to progress and succeed at those levels of education. SOLAS's work in implementing the new further education strategy is also important. We have seen in recent years more students entering higher education on the basis of awards made in the further education sector and the Access Plan targets for significant additional growth in these numbers. These related actions are critical building blocks in enhancing equity to higher education.

### Conclusion

The National Access Plan 2015–2019 renews everybody's commitment to an inclusive higher education system. The challenge is now to ensure the goals and actions are implemented so that the substantial increases in participation occur over the lifetime of the Plan. Successful implementation of this Plan will take place in the context of changes in the higher education system, e.g. the on-going implementation of the National Strategy for Higher Education and the Report on Future Funding for Higher Education.



## Higher Education in Ireland

### Taking a different path

Each year, Irish media and academia eagerly await the publication of world university rankings. Columnists laud the few – if indeed any – institution that inched higher, and disparage those who suffered decline. Higher education officials cry once more that Ireland's overall sinking trend is a result of continued underfunding from Government. Economic commentators tell us that Ireland's economic competitiveness is being compromised.

Too much is made of these rankings. They grade a traditional education model that is facing a technological revolution and is in decline. In this rapidly changing industry, aspiring to compete with the dying makes little sense. The world of learning is changing radically and these dated institutional comparisons are both wasteful and dangerous.

Huge amounts of knowledge and information are now provided for free online. Free courses are available to study on every conceivable subject at every level, and what is not already available can and will easily and speedily be published and disseminated in the years ahead. Whatever you want to learn, or teach, you can now make it happen online. However hard-wired the views of the higher educational establishment may be, it is a simple fact that at nearly every level it faces the prospect of disintermediation out of an exciting new world of learning.

Our current higher education systems are not fit for purpose. They teach too few, impart too little knowledge too slowly, and do so at an untenably high cost. Globally, young people are laden down with college debt, which cripples them for much of their early adult lives. Often the debt is incurred for courses and qualifications that do not enhance their personal competitiveness in the job marketplace. How many of us know someone who has an expensive traditional master's degree and is working long-term in a café or similar? This represents a wasted personal education experience and misdirected state resources.

Why is government policy not taking advantage of the revolutionary change in education? A part answer is that Government is asking the wrong people



**By Mike Feerick**  
Founder and CEO of  
ALISON.COM

**P**repare to be shocked by this bold attack on higher education systems. Get online is the mandate and if you retain fond memories of your own 'campus experience' you may worry now lest that opportunity will have disappeared for your children. The author promises a disruptive revolution within higher education in Ireland and proffers his own funding solution. Could any of this make sense?

**W**hatever you want to learn, or teach, you can now make it happen online.

**O**ur current Higher Education systems... teach too few, impart too little knowledge too slowly, and do so at an untenably high cost.

**R**emarkably, [in the US in the 1900s] not one large provider of the old [horse and car] mode of transport made it successfully into the new [motorized] industry.

for strategic input on how the industry is unfolding. To understand the future, policy makers must take on board the views of innovators who are doing things differently, yet providing newly competitive solutions to the market. A favourite example is the transport industry in the United States, which moved between 1900 and 1920 from 95% horse and car driven, to 95% motorised. If you asked the "Horse and Car" people how they thought the industry would develop in 1900, or even in 1905, how many would speak about the potential of motorisation? Remarkably, not one large provider of the old mode of transport made it successfully into the new industry. Yet, the Horse and Car people talked of innovation in their day, much as University and College leaders do today.

Despite compelling economic rationale for wholesale changes in higher education, the sector is extraordinarily resistant to change. Across the world, there are two consistently recognisable factors at play. Firstly, education has traditionally been highly political, as knowledge is power, and control of education has always been seen as a conduit to that power. Secondly, educational systems have largely been national systems.

The Internet is dismantling this old structure. National politics no longer has a stranglehold on what people can or cannot learn. People who wish to learn can do so more and more online, using resources that are international rather than national. With 6.1 billion people expected to have access to smartphone devices by 2020 (Ericsson 2016), any learning that can be made available online for free will be made available online. Experts on any subject are now more likely to be found working in industry than in academia. What is different is that all these experts can now publish and teach what they know online. Experts now have the tools to publish directly for anyone who wishes to learn. Some may be restricted within commercial boundaries, but society only needs one expert on a given topic to publish his knowledge or skill for free online and it becomes the gift of everyone.

With this explosion of free learning and course publishing, and the increasing pace of publication and subject knowledge development, the idea that a national higher education system will continue to dominate higher educational learning across its local geographical domain makes no sense. Local universities will be junior partners in providing for the advanced educational needs of local workers in modern economies. If it was possible a century ago in the United States to transform the entire transport industry over a 20-year period, how much more quickly can education be transformed today?

Disruptive technological change is becoming ever more constant. When television arrived in Ireland in the early 1960's, the Irish government met its responsibility to develop a basic national TV broadcast service. However, there is much greater choice and further competition in the industry today, and few suggest that the Irish Government's role is to engage in this industry at every level as it once did. In a similar way, the mandate for government to be the financial underwriter of all activity within the higher education industry, especially beyond specific strategic areas, when so many alternative and accessible high quality services are developing worldwide, is a less and less compelling argument.

A disruptive revolution of access, choice and cost is now arriving within Irish higher education. The continuing dominant format of teaching at Irish Universities and Colleges alone screams out impending change. Large classes are still very common, and resources which can easily be accessed outside of a paid educational environment remain core elements of the learning product. Students continue to enjoy minimal one-to-one contact with even junior lecturers and are entitled to next to no time with faculty professors. Courses are habitually out-of-date, not least in economically important sectors such as the sciences.

The French statesman Charles De Gaulle famously remarked that “One must always fight with the inevitable”. In the same way, Irish government policy makers must embrace the future. Firstly, Irish higher level institutions should be instructed to immediately develop free courses online for all its lower level teaching. If these institutions are not providing their basic teaching online for free, then someone else will. Therefore, lead rather than follow. Funding should be withdrawn from colleges and universities for teaching in a wholly traditional manner, forcing them to charge or receive subsidies only for services they can uniquely provide and where they provide unique value. Indeed, the positive international development impact of doing this could greatly outsize the impact of Ireland’s foreign aid budget – an enthralling subject for discussion another time.

Disruptive as this may be to traditional education systems, there are many great benefits to having broad free access to quality higher education online. It allows, for instance, students of any and all ages to assess for themselves whether or not they truly have an interest in the subject area they have chosen to study, before they commit too much. In Ireland, our student attrition statistics are reaching appalling new highs. Students are strongly encouraged across society to go to college, often choosing to study courses for which they are unsuited and from which they quickly drop out. This is a huge cost on the state, on the families that support them, and on the mental state of the students who are burdened, if only in the short term, with a sense of failure. All students should be compelled to complete free online courses on their “chosen” subjects before they attend any state sponsored institution. Remember, because the content is digital, the marginal cost of sharing with extra learners is essentially zero.

Some traditional educationalists might offer the view that public free courses cannot be of the same quality as courses taught within their educational institutions. That, in most cases, is simply not true, especially at the lower levels of higher education. There are ways to ensure very high quality. Consider the two hugely successful internet businesses that have profoundly disrupted their industries – UBER and AirBnB.

New advances in information technology now allow industrial-sized spare capacity within industries to be utilized. Cars were sitting on driveways, and bright sparks realised that they could be used to facilitate transport needs as taxis. Similarly, households across the world have had spare accommodation capacity which they can now offer to the hospitality market at an attractive price. Similarly, why restrict teaching to academics and higher institutions when so many others who know more can teach much more efficiently?

**K**nowledge is power, and control of education has always been seen as a conduit to that power.

**N**ational politics no longer has a stranglehold on what people can or cannot learn.

**T**he mandate for government to be the financial underwriter of all activity within the higher education industry... is a less and less compelling argument.

**I**rish higher level institutions should be instructed to immediately develop free courses online for all its lower level teaching.

**A**ll students should be compelled to complete free online courses on their “chosen” subjects before they attend any state sponsored institution.

**O**ften, these services which higher educational institutions uniquely provide are mispriced (most often underpriced!) and beg a review of their funding/business model.

Consider what happens when either a driver or passenger on UBER, or a tenant or guest on AirBnB, misbehaves: they quickly get sanctioned and black-listed. This process of using the “power of the crowd” to maintain quality control is also enabling across education. Within higher education online, the “power of the crowd” can preserve and enhance quality. What will continue to be offered and retained by the universities and colleges are services that are locally based, i.e. the provision of laboratory facilities or one-to-one access to experts, or the teaching of a small number of subjects that do not lend themselves so well to online learning. Often, these services which higher educational institutions uniquely provide are mispriced (most often underpriced!) and beg a review of their funding/business model.

Irish higher education providers are attempting to diversify. Note how the turnover of accommodation services at some Irish Higher Education institutions now matches or exceeds R&D turnover. These institutions, whether they realise it or not, are entering more and more the educational tourism business, seeking customers from abroad who are coming to Ireland less and less for education and more for social experience and personal development.

In anticipation of a world where higher education becomes less and less the responsibility of national government, and traditional institutions decline in relative importance as players in higher education, there are three steps the Irish government should consider:

Firstly, it is important that the digital skills of every member of Irish society are developed. A comprehensive national digital skills programme where every member of the population is incentivised to learn new online skills, particularly via mobile devices which have become the internet access platform of choice, should be introduced.

Secondly, the government must begin a nationwide lifelong online learning campaign. If someone learns online once, they will learn twice. From helping with problems of social isolation and integration, to raising the productivity of the nation, everyone benefits. The biggest challenge is to get people learning online in the first instance. Once they achieve any level of learning success online, they are often hooked for life so a premium should be considered to encourage this.

Finally, as a nation, we need to start treating the international university rankings systems with the limited and measured respect they deserve. Times are changing in higher education and the old systems are already in decay. We are a small nation, but we are highly creative and capable of charting our own best course. We need to embrace in full the powerful possibilities of free online education, and call out those who want only the grossly inefficient, self-serving status quo to remain.

By rapidly changing the focus of our higher education system to online, our national higher education sector of new and old actors could expand to become a world leader, incomparable with legacy institutions worldwide. If we take on this challenge, we will empower our people like never before. And that will set us uniquely ahead and apart.



**JP McManus Scholarships 2016**

JP MC Manus scholarships were awarded to 125 students from the 32 counties of Ireland in the University of Limerick (UL) on 19th November 2016. The scholarships were valued at €6,750 per year of undergraduate degree programme. They were awarded to students not liable to pay the Leaving Cert fee who achieved, in their first sitting, the highest Leaving Cert and A level grades in non-fee-paying schools.





#LoveIrish  
Research

RESEARCH

Annual Report 2017  
Irish Research Council

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## Research in Practice

### Bridging the 'Implementation Gap'



**By Sarah Rochford**

Project Specialist with the Centre for Effective Services (CES)

**A** more collaborative approach to research is advocated here, with opportunities for teachers to communicate the type of research they need and what issues they need addressed. The author also highlights the onus on researchers to present evidence in an understandable way.

The need for evidence-based decision making in both policy and practice is now, thankfully, well established. Regardless of the context, as citizens we expect that the interventions or services we, our families, friends or children receive are based on research evidence to indicate they work. Education is a crucial universal public service. It helps us empower, enrich and create a valuable social good. Using good-quality, robust research in educational practice can enhance, support and improve outcomes and experiences for students and teachers alike.

There are exciting developments in education at the moment to support teachers as researchers and consumers of research. The provision of access to research databases for all registered teachers through the Teaching Council, and research bursaries from the Council and other bodies such as the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment are valuable core resources to support the use of research in practice. CES is also involved with these two organisations and Professor Mark Morgan in a partnership called 'Research Alive!' where we work together to host and promote events and other learning opportunities for teachers interested in research.

Using research in practice is not always straightforward, and providing opportunities to access and produce research is only part of the puzzle. Challenges at practice and broader systems level can impede the use of research in practice, but they are not insurmountable. This article will discuss some of these challenges, and potential ways the education and research community can work together to bridge this **implementation gap**.

Firstly, it is important to distinguish between **evidence-based** and **evidence-informed** approaches to practice. In CES, we talk about an evidence-informed approach to practice. It is more nuanced in that it calls for the **integration of various forms of evidence** to support our practice and decision making. At its core, an evidence-informed approach is about integrating practice-based evidence with research evidence and other evidence obtained from the wider system and from those whom a service serves. It

involves a focus on good-quality research evidence, but also evidence from practice wisdom, policy and the views and needs of students and other stakeholders to decide the best course of action. It is about supporting and empowering teachers to critically engage with research, and giving them agency to use the best available research evidence to make decisions about their practice.

In 2012, as part of the *Research Alive!* partnership, a national survey was conducted with teachers on how they used research in practice, and what some of the main barriers were. The results confirmed feedback we had received anecdotally from practitioners we work with – **lack of time** was the most commonly reported barrier. Practitioners are under increasing time pressure in their roles, and with core practice and various administrative and reporting commitments, making time to search for and engage with research can be challenging. Schools are hubs of learning, but not just for students. It is important that teachers, and indeed other front-line practitioners, be supported by their schools and the wider system to use research as part of their practice, and promote it as an ongoing, integral part of their work, not something confined to further education, training and continuous professional development opportunities. The culture of the school needs to be one where ongoing learning and practice development is supported, encouraged and celebrated, and where teachers are facilitated to give time to critiquing, discussing and exploring the evidence base for their work.

Related to lack of time is the **rapid growth in research**. Depending on the issue or topic, some areas have lots of research and some very little. It's difficult to know where to start when a search on a research database returns thousands if not tens of thousands of hits. Estimates indicate that the growth in journals and peer-reviewed articles has been increasing steadily over the past two centuries, and shows no sign of abating. Teachers simply do not have the time to trawl through and keep up to date with this information as part of their daily workload. There are excellent resources available through organisations such as the National Foundation for Educational Research, the Education Endowment Foundation and the Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education, which offer toolkits, briefings and literature reviews on 'what works' in education. While these still have applicability for teachers in the Irish context, more high-quality research syntheses are needed which review the available literature and make clear and concise conclusions on topics of interest and relevance to the Irish education system.

Bridging the gap between research and practice also depends on **bridging the gap between teachers and researchers themselves**, at both the start and end of the research process. Whether working on a presentation, report or lesson planning, we all know the importance of 'knowing your audience' and tailoring the message accordingly. As Ben Goldacre wrote in his 2013 paper 'Building Evidence in Education', more collaboration is needed to support teachers and researchers to work together on research, be it in forming research questions, making recommendations for research or actively collaborating on research projects. It is important that there are opportunities for teachers to communicate the type of research they need, and what issues they need addressed, to ensure what is published is aligned

**C**ES is involved with the Teaching Council, the NCCA and Prof Mark Morgan in a partnership called 'Research Alive!'

**W**e work together to host and promote events for teachers interested in research.

**B**ridging the gap between research and practice also depends on bridging the gap between teachers and researchers.

**A** more collaborative approach can ultimately help ensure a more pragmatic approach to research – one that meets the needs of teachers.

to the realities of front-line practice. A more collaborative approach can ultimately help ensure a more pragmatic approach to research – one that meets the needs of teachers and helps them address the issues they face on a daily basis in their classrooms.

**More participatory and innovative approaches are also required in producing and disseminating the products of research.** As much as there is an onus on teachers to use evidence, there is also an onus on researchers to present evidence in an understandable way, and for more innovative dissemination methods. There is no point in having the best available evidence but not communicating and disseminating it in a way that it gets to the people who need to use it. This is a critical barrier to implementing research in practice and is often overlooked.

Some of the most common methods of dissemination for researchers are academic conferences and peer-reviewed journals. Peer-reviewed journals are quality-assured, and what they publish goes through external review to ensure the reporting is transparent, replicable and robust. However, the language of academic journals can often be overly technical, and it's not uncommon to find no reference to the implications for practice emerging from the research conducted. Presenting technical research or information in a clear, tailored and concise way with tangible implications for readers is referred to as **knowledge translation**. This can be difficult, especially developing real-world practice implications. Just as no-one expects all practitioners to be research experts, nor do they expect researchers to be practice experts. A **co-production approach**, where researchers work with and consult with teachers, can help ensure the resources use practice-relevant language and communicate meaningful implications which can be readily implemented.

We have adopted this co-production approach as part of our **Access Evidence** project in CES, which involves conducting brief research syntheses for practitioners working with children, young people and families. We quickly realised that extracting the implications for practice from a body of research is a complex task. So we convened a multi-disciplinary group of front-line professionals, including teachers and early years professionals, to work with us to ensure the resources are relevant, speak the language of practitioners and meet their needs. This ensures that valuable 'practice wisdom' can become part of the research communication process.

Academic conferences, while of interest to some practitioners, can sometimes just be dialogue between researchers. **More innovative dissemination methods** should target publications which practitioners read, events they attend and their professional networks. These activities need to be valued and encouraged by the higher educational institutions many researchers work in. Where a culture change in schools can help support teachers to consult and use research in their practice, so too can a culture change in higher education support researchers to go beyond the traditional dissemination methods expected, and put more of an onus on communicating research to practitioners in more innovative ways.



It is also critical to keep in mind the science and art of implementation. In CES, we are committed to using the learning from **implementation science** to inform how we support practitioners to use evidence to inform their work. Implementation science is a rapidly developing field of knowledge, spanning a wide variety of sectors, on how to successfully implement new services, policies and other interventions. One of the main findings from this emerging field is that implementation takes time – new programmes or comprehensive service/practice innovations take 2–4 years to be fully implemented. What this means for teachers using research in practice is: Do not be perturbed if positive outcomes or results are not immediate. Much like the move to using evidence in practice, seeing these improvements, especially in educational outcomes, can take time and perseverance.

**Using research in practice is a journey, not a destination.** The body of knowledge in education is constantly developing and diversifying. What we know to be best practice is changing and improving, just like schools, teacher training, educational policies and the students themselves and their needs. A commitment to using research, in addition to other valuable sources of evidence, is a commitment to improvement and striving for the best for students. Much like research itself, it involves experimentation, trying out different approaches (which may work or may not), admitting you don't have all the answers and seeing where you can find them. It takes time, effort, resources and overall a drive to build relationships and work together to make sure the investment in research meets the needs of teachers and can be implemented in classrooms. As with all improvement processes, there are challenges, but the substantial benefits are well worth going on the journey.

## Research and Practice Seminar

**Date:** 31st March 2017

**Venue:** O'Brien Centre for Science,  
UCD, Dublin

### Call for Proposals

The Early Childhood Ireland Research and Practice seminar is an opportunity for researchers and practitioner educators to share their research towards developing evidence-based thinking and practice within the early childhood sector in Ireland.

Educators and researchers are invited to submit a research abstract and share their work and learning.

Conference title *'You Matter: supporting early childhood educators'*

[www.earlychildhoodireland.ie/?s=research+seminar](http://www.earlychildhoodireland.ie/?s=research+seminar)

A commitment to using research... is a commitment to improvement and striving for the best for students.

## A Difficult Crossing

### The Transition from Primary to Secondary School Mathematics



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Central Statistics Office, Dublin

A conclusion drawn by the authors from their study is that it is of paramount importance that primary and second level teachers are given opportunities to develop knowledge of each other's maths curriculums. Relationships must be encouraged between secondary schools and their feeder primary schools and initiatives such as the Education Passport must be endorsed and encouraged.

### Introduction

The transition from primary to secondary education is one of the greatest challenges that young people experience during their school years. Internationally, much research has investigated this transition and the issues surrounding it in more detail. According to Bicknell, Burgess and Hunter (2009), such issues are complex and involve challenges from social, academic and systematic perspectives. The consequences include a decline in students' attitudes, academic performance and confidence (Attard, 2010; Paul, 2014). In mathematics, in particular, students' attitudes have been found to become more negative after they transition from primary to secondary school (Galton et al., 2003; Grootenboer & Marshman, 2016). This was mirrored in findings reported by the TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) in a large-scale international comparative study conducted in 2011. On average, across countries that participated in the TIMSS fourth-grade study, 84% of 9–10-year-old students (upper primary) reported that they either liked or somewhat liked learning mathematics, while 16% said they did not. However, for countries participating in the eighth-grade study, 68% of 13–14-year-old students (lower second-level) on average either liked or somewhat liked learning mathematics, and 31% did not (Mullis et al., 2012). The transition from primary to secondary mathematics therefore appears to be a potential time when students begin to develop more negative dispositions to the subject.

In light of this, and as part of their 2015 New Foundations Scheme, the Irish Research Council funded research specifically to investigate issues surrounding the transition from primary to secondary mathematics education in Irish schools.<sup>1</sup> Two key aims were to:

- » Determine primary and secondary mathematics teachers' opinions on the key barriers to successful transition.

<sup>1</sup> Further funding from SCoTENS has been sourced in collaboration with Queen's University Belfast in order to conduct similar research in Northern Ireland as part of a cross-border study.

- » Establish teachers’ levels of awareness of each other’s curriculums at the key transition stages of both sixth class and first year.

Methodology

To address these research aims, the authors distributed questionnaires to a representative sample of sixth-class teachers in primary schools and first-year mathematics teachers in secondary schools. The paired questionnaires, which contained both open and closed-ended questions, were distributed to 700 primary and 200 secondary schools in early April 2016. There was a response rate of 296 primary (approx. 42%) and 171 second-level teachers (approx. 43%). The primary teachers who responded were distributed across 271 schools (38.7% of schools surveyed), while the second-level teachers who responded were distributed across 101 schools (50.5% of schools surveyed).

Results of the research

At the outset, teachers at both levels were asked their opinions about the transition and to rate their agreement with the following statement: ‘There is a fluid transition between primary and secondary mathematics.’ While a large number of teachers indicated that they were unsure by neither agreeing nor disagreeing (43% of primary teachers, 34% of second-level teachers), 45% of respondents at both levels disagreed with the statement. Such concerns were drawn out in the qualitative data as teachers were asked to outline their opinions on the main barriers to successful transition. A preliminary analysis of the responses was arranged in common themes, the most prevalent of which are outlined in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. Main Barriers to Successful Transition (Responses of Primary School Teachers)

| Reason   | No.of Participants | Sample Responses  |
|--|--------------------|---|
| Lack of continuity between curriculums                 | 88 (38%)           | P27: Maths curriculum changed at Junior Cycle level in the recent past while we still work off the 1999 curriculum. Hard to believe that these are aligned with each other.<br>P83: There seems to be only a very small connection with relation to maths between the two levels.<br>P242: Curricula don’t complement each other. |
| Teachers’ lack of knowledge of each other’s curriculum | 79 (31%)           | P1: Lack of familiarity on both sides – what has been done/what is needed for secondary school.<br>P34: Lack of knowledge of secondary curriculum by primary teachers and vice versa.<br>P269: I teach primary curriculum and am unaware of curriculum of secondary school.   |
| Lack of communication between both levels              | 58 (25%)           | P7: There needs to be more communication between schools.<br>P15: Not enough communication between primary and secondary teachers.<br>P171: There is no interaction between 6th-class teachers and 1st-year teachers to promote understanding and a smoother transition.  |

Teachers at both levels were asked to rate their agreement with the statement: ‘There is a fluid transition between primary and secondary mathematics.’

Table 2. Main Barriers to Successful Transition (Responses of Secondary School Teachers)

| Reason   | No.of Participants | Sample Responses   |
|--|--------------------|--|
| Incoming students’ lack of basic knowledge             | 30 (23%)           | S10: The basics of numbers, tables, fractions, decimals etc. are not to a good enough standard.<br>S82: Basic building block for maths not coming from primary school.<br>S92: Students coming through from primary unable to do what would be considered the basics – multiplication, division etc. |
| Lack of continuity between curriculums                 | 28 (21%)           | S53: Maths is taught differently in both levels.<br>S77: Methods adopted in primary school differ greatly to secondary school.<br>S105: The gap between what they do in primary to first year is too wide.   |
| Lack of communication between both levels              | 22 (17%)           | S48: Lack of communication between primary and secondary teachers.   |
| Variety of standards and levels from feeder schools    | 18 (14%)           | S13: Students from different schools seem to have different levels in maths.<br>S59: Different feeder schools doing different amounts of their course.<br>S75: Not all primary schools ensuring the same content completed.  |
| Teachers’ lack of knowledge of each other’s curriculum | 14 (11%)           | S47: Not enough awareness of curriculum between primary and secondary.<br>S137: Not knowing what students have covered before they enter your classroom.<br>S150: Lack of genuine information as to material actually covered in 5th and 6th classes and methodologies used.                         |

Many responses on the barriers to successful transition also mentioned ‘teachers’ lack of knowledge of each other’s curriculum’.

As can be seen from Tables 1 and 2, certain themes were mentioned by both primary and secondary teachers. For example, a ‘lack of continuity between curriculums’ was cited by 38% of primary teachers and 21% of secondary teachers. This is worrying, as much research on what constitutes problematic transitions makes reference to curriculum continuity. For example, Elkins (1989), Green (1997) and Tilleczeck (2007) all found that the attainment and motivational losses that students often experience when moving from primary to secondary school can, in no small way, be attributed to a lack of continuity in curriculum approaches.

Many responses on the barriers to successful transition also mentioned ‘teachers’ lack of knowledge of each other’s curriculum’. This was investigated further in the quantitative aspect of the study: teachers at both levels were asked to indicate their level of familiarity with each other’s syllabi and teaching methods. The findings show that teachers at both levels have a deficient understanding of the curriculum that their students were or will be exposed to in their previous or next year of schooling. Over half of sixth-class teachers (56%) reported that the first-year mathematics syllabus was either highly or slightly unfamiliar

to them. The corresponding figure for second-level teachers was 49%. The responses regarding knowledge of teaching strategies were even more pronounced. Almost three-quarters of sixth-class teachers (73%) said they were highly or slightly unfamiliar with the teaching approaches used in mathematics classrooms at second level. Likewise, 77% of first-year mathematics teachers said they were highly or slightly unfamiliar with the pedagogical approaches employed by sixth-class teachers.

### Conclusion

This research has demonstrated that many issues remain regarding the transition from primary to secondary mathematics education in Ireland. The lack of fluidity in transition reported by teachers in this study is unsurprising, as without an in-depth understanding of the previous or subsequent curricula, it is difficult for teachers to ensure continuity. Such continuity is critical for a smooth transition from primary to second-level mathematics education (Evangelou et al., 2008).

It was noteworthy that there was an overlap in many of the barriers to a successful transition mentioned by both sets of teachers. Now that these barriers are recognised, it is important that steps be taken to address them to ensure a smoother transition between primary and secondary mathematics education. Primary school teachers need to be more familiar with the mathematics that students will learn in second level, in order to ensure greater continuity and progression in their learning. Second-level teachers need to build on the skills, knowledge and attributes which the learner has developed in the preceding phase (Prendergast et al., 2016).

On the back of this study, we believe it is of paramount importance that teachers be given the opportunity to develop knowledge of each other's curriculums. To achieve this aim, there is a need for joint professional development opportunities, both formal and informal. Relationships must be encouraged between local secondary schools and their feeder primary schools. Initiatives such as the Education Passport must be endorsed and encouraged. Only when such efforts have been made will the hurdle of discontinuity be overcome and students' experience of transition be addressed and enhanced.

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**S**econd-level teachers need to build on the skills, knowledge and attributes which the learner has developed in the preceding phase

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130403150653/https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/RSG/AllRsgPublications/Page101/DCSF-RB019>.

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## International STEM Education Conferences

CASTeL Researchers will host three conferences on STEM education in 2017

### 1st–5th February 2017

Venue: Croke Park  
[www.cerme10.org](http://www.cerme10.org)

### 3rd –7th July 2017

Venue: Dublin City University  
[www.girep2017.org](http://www.girep2017.org)

### 21st–25th August 2017

Venue: Dublin City University  
[www.esera2017.org](http://www.esera2017.org)

It is estimated that, jointly, these major international conferences will attract in excess of 2,300 researchers.





# Experiences of Minority Faith and Non-Religious Students in Irish Catholic Post-Primary Schools

How do Catholic post-primary schools include non-Catholic students?

Globalisation, immigration and socio-political shifts have increased the diversity of Irish society, creating new challenges for a traditionally homogenous Catholic school system. The census reports in 2006 and 2011 show a decreasing population identifying as Catholic and an increasing population identifying as Orthodox, Apostolic, Pentecostal, Muslim or no religion. The rationale for the present research was based on the premise that it was unclear how Catholic post-primary schools include non-Catholic students. Twenty-one students of minority faith or non-religious world view were interviewed about their post-primary school experiences of religious ethos. Analysis suggests students' sense of belonging and well-being may be affected by negative stereotyping, Catholic-centric practices and coercion to acquiesce to Catholic norms. The development of cultural humility 'practices' is recommended as an avenue to address the needs of an increasingly diverse school population.

## Background

Currently, 70% of Ireland's state-funded second-level schools are managed solely by religious trustees or by religious trustees in partnership with the State (Catholic Schools Partnership, 2014). The remaining 30% are in the main managed by Education & Training Boards (ETBI), and it is argued that they also have a traditionally Catholic ethos to cater for a majority Catholic school population. There are nine Educate Together post-primary schools, which are non-denominational. The current school patronage system is problematic for some non-Catholic students, as it is impossible for the State to provide a school which caters for the beliefs of all students and parents in every community (Hickey, 2012). Moreover, segregation on religious grounds challenges ideals of social cohesion.



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**T**his article explores the experiences – sometimes negative – of non-Catholic and lapsed Catholic students in a Catholic environment and proposes the practice of cultural humility to address inherent power imbalances.

**E**leven minority faith students and ten non-religious students were interviewed between November 2014 and March 2015.

**R**esearch argues that Irish Education guidelines on intercultural education support the habitus of the dominant group while leaving minorities vulnerable to power imbalances.

**N**on-religious people who live in predominantly religious societies are vulnerable to discrimination.

## Research Methodology

As the focus of this research was to understand the experiences of non-Catholic students in Catholic schools, a qualitative method of research was chosen. Semi-structured interviews were used to help the researcher better understand the experiences of these students (Stokes, 2006; Cohen, Mannion & Morrison, 2007; MacLeod, 2014). A convenience purposive sample of research participants was sourced by contacting post-primary schools, minority faith and non-religious groups and integration centres. Eleven minority faith students and ten non-religious students were interviewed between November 2014 and March 2015. All were aged 14–18 years and self-identified their religious status.

## Research Findings and Analysis

It is beyond the scope of this article to describe all the themes which emerged from analysis of the interview transcripts. Key themes of 'otherness' and 'challenges' are explored.

### Theme – 'Otherness'

'Otherness' can be understood as being different in some way (Volf, 2010). Bauman argues that identities are set up as dichotomies; 'othering' gives identities meaning and the belong-to-group power to suppress the other (cited in Zevallos, 2011). Research by Bryan (2008, 2012) argues that Irish Education guidelines on intercultural education support the habitus of the dominant group while leaving minorities vulnerable to power imbalances.

At interview, students articulated how their religious difference was negatively stereotyped, describing the effects of 'othering' on their sense of belonging and in some cases on their well-being. Stereotyping may be understood as generalising and labelling particular groups of people with often negative traits or characteristics (Devlin, 2006). Non-religious students were acutely aware of the negativity towards their worldview:

*'No morals. Atheists have no morals.'* (S11)

*'My class tutor told my class not to hang around with people who weren't Catholic, because they were a bad influence. I was in the classroom when this was said.'* (S12)

*'Like since I have no religion, people assume I'm against all religions, that I like hate them, but that is not true. Like I said before, I respect people more, I wish I could believe in a religion, I just can't.'* (S9)

Most non-religious students pointed out that they were not anti-religious and felt strongly that Catholicism should be respected. Some expressed regret that they could no longer believe. One student articulated his need to hide his atheist beliefs in order to protect those he loved:

*'It would break my Granny's heart completely if she heard I was an atheist. She would not be able to cope with hearing something like that. I wouldn't want her to hear something like that.'* (S1)

Harper (2007, p. 551) describes non-religious people as 'a potentially maligned social category to belong to'. Downey (2004, p. 42) found that non-religious people who live in predominantly religious societies are vulnerable to discrimination. In an Irish context, voluntary secondary

schools may legally give preference to co-religionist students and teachers in order to maintain their religious ethos (section 37 of the Employment Equality Acts 1998–2015, and section 7.3(c) of the Equal Status Act 2000–2015).

Students holding minority religious beliefs also articulated the negative stereotypes associated with their beliefs:

*'Yeah, when they put that 9/11 on TV in school, they were talking so bad about Muslims.'* (S11)  
*'I stopped wearing the hijab coming to the school, which just makes me feel so horrible, like this is my religion, I should be wearing the hijab, but I can't. I know everyone is going to be looking at me: Why are you wearing that thing on your head?'* (S6)

These findings on Muslim students' experiences concur with research by Carr (2016, p.30), who found that 'Muslim students felt excluded and indeed abused through discriminatory practices visited upon them by teachers, and classmates'. The impact of 'othering' on a student's sense of belonging and well-being was clearly articulated:

*'You just feel so horrible, so disheartened, you think of all the other people who are coming to the school with the same religion, same culture, it's not the same fate for them.'* (S11)  
*'I was really scared. At times I felt really bad. I thought if everyone else is Catholic, I should be Catholic too. These thoughts I'm having about it not being real are idiotic and I shouldn't believe it. I felt really horrible for quite a long time.'* (S7)

Adolescents have an intense need to feel they belong (Levine, 2000). Research has found this need may cause some low-status group members to internalise or adopt a negative stereotype, thus damaging their self-esteem and putting them at risk of becoming radicalised (Branscombe et al., 1999; Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002; Latrofa et al., 2012).

### Theme – Student Challenges

At interview, the key challenges identified by students included Catholic-centric practices and coercion to acquiesce. Catholic-centric practices of particular concern included faith formation, graduation ceremonies, school retreats and admissions policies. Graduation ceremonies which centred on a Catholic service caused distress and exclusion:

*'My parents want to come to school and celebrate my graduation; they can't, 'cause it's all Catholic and in a church. My mum just feels so horrible.'* (S6)

Students were very clear at interview on the need to acquiesce with Catholic school practices. They articulated how their religious freedom was controlled and Catholic values imposed in their schools:

*'I am expected to go to the masses. I go along.'* (S17)  
*'It's obligatory to stand for the prayer.'* (S2)  
*'I wasn't allowed to opt out of religion. I knew I just had to suck it up, and there was nothing I could do. I was in a Catholic school.'* (S13)

**G**raduation ceremonies which centred on a Catholic service caused distress and exclusion.

**S**ome Catholic parents may not be supportive of their children's non-religious beliefs.

*'I am the only Hindu student in the school. My parents told me to blend in. That is what I do. I blend in. I learned the Catholic prayers, so I could join in.'* (S16)

Parents and students of 18 years have a legal entitlement to opt their children or themselves out of religious services and classes, as stated in Articles 44.2.4 and 42.1 of the Irish Constitution. Section 30 (2)(e) of the Education Act 1998 also underpins this legal right. Research on the 'Opt Out' provision found that it exacerbates feelings of difference and isolation (MaWhinney et al., 2012; Faas, Darmody & Sokolowska, 2016). Furthermore, it came to light during interview that some Catholic parents may not be supportive of their children's non-religious beliefs.

### Recommendation

The practice of cultural humility as described by Fisher-Borne et al. (2015) is recommended as a possible avenue to balance the constitutional right of the Catholic majority to choose a Catholic religious education (Article 41, Irish Constitution) with the rights of non-Catholic minorities to attend their local school and feel they equally belong. Cultural humility may be understood as the 'ability to maintain an interpersonal stance that is other-oriented (or open to the other) in relation to aspects of cultural identity that are most important' to the person (Hook et al., 2013, p. 2). It is not about diluting anyone's religion but rather making space for everyone's beliefs. Cultural humility is increasingly part of initial education programmes for health care and social service providers. The intrinsic links between Irish culture and religion or 'Cultural Catholicism' (Demerath, 2000; Inglis, 2007) make it particularly appropriate in an Irish context. Key elements of cultural humility include an individual focus rather than a cultural focus, thus endeavouring to respect the beliefs, uniqueness, individuality and human dignity of every person while ensuring religious stereotyping is avoided.

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Secondly, cultural competency is considered illusive and unattainable. It would challenge any teacher to name all religions; understanding the tenets, personal interpretations and traditions is nigh on impossible. Competency is replaced by good communication, taking time to listen to individuals, and agreeing on workable strategies to support the best possible educational provision for each student. Cultural humility also demands that individuals critique existing practice and challenge social inequalities. It challenges inherent power imbalances, asking teachers to recognise that 'among a dominant culture's deeply ingrained values are those that perpetuate separation and discrimination' (Dunn, 2002, p. 107). This is particularly important in Irish schools, where Catholicism is predominant and was only recently problematised by an increasingly diverse student population.

In summary, the findings suggest that non-Catholic students' sense of belonging and well-being are challenged by some school practices. Practising cultural humility could address the inherent power imbalances, enabling schools to cherish all students equally.



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The Irish Research Council brought its #LovelishResearch campaign to Culture Night on September 16th, 2016 in the beautiful surroundings of Boston College Ireland with a jam-packed schedule of family friendly activities. 17 researchers were given the opportunity to showcase their work and to take part in the single largest cultural event in the calendar.



## Multiculturalism or Interculturalism in Irish Higher Education

### What Does the Muslim Students' Experience Tell Us?

Ireland has transformed from being historically a country of emigration into one of immigration over the past two decades (Daly, 2003). The rapid transition finds resonance in higher education institutes as well as in society. According to Higher Education Authority (HEA) and Education Ireland reports, the number of international students was expected to increase by 50% to approximately 38,000 by 2015 (Education Ireland 2010). In Ireland's International Education Strategy 2010–2015 report, Ireland is referred to as being reliant 'fundamentally on international engagement' (p. 3), and internationalisation in higher education is expected to provide the students with 'intercultural expertise demanded in the global economy' (ibid.).

The Higher Education Authority in Ireland is the executive body that acts to 'create a higher education system that maximises opportunities and ensures a high-quality experience for students'. To develop and contribute to the internationalisation of higher education in Ireland, the HEA recently began collecting data through nationwide surveys of students and employers, which indicates that the student experience is placed at the heart of the internationalisation. The efforts were created to become a benchmark in the post-secondary education sector.

What do these actions and initiatives mean for higher education in an increasingly multicultural country with a relatively short history of immigration? While they indicate a void of research in areas such as internationalisation of higher education, international student experience and intercultural contact, they also make Ireland a place where current research might shape future practices and policies. With this in mind, my PhD project focused on the experiences of international students, in particular Muslim international students in Irish higher education.

The study took place in Dublin City University (DCU) and was conducted through interviews with



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**I**n this study of Muslim international students in Irish higher education, carried out at DCU, one of the most significant findings was the institutional support and completeness in DCU. This is a significant factor in increasing international Muslim students' sense of belonging and decreasing the likelihood of discrimination based on religious identity.

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international Muslim students enrolled in a bachelor's or master's degree. One of the most significant findings was the institutional support and completeness in DCU. Institutional completeness indicates that culture or ethnic groups can independently conduct their systems of cultural and social practices on campus (Breton, 1968; Kim, 2008). Another significant finding is the discovery of a multicultural campus environment in DCU. 'Multicultural' here means there are multiple culture and ethnic groups on campus (e.g., international students, Muslim students, Irish students), although they do not necessarily interact with each other regularly. The lack of interaction was particularly evident during participant interviews, when students discussed how they socialised on campus. Participants suggested their relationships with Irish students were mostly limited to small talk, and indicated a lack of interaction outside curricular activities. Two significant questions arise from these key findings:

1. Why did international Muslim students suggest their communication with Irish students was limited on a multicultural campus?
2. Could there be opportunities to increase intercultural student interaction?

Before trying to answer these questions, we turn first to look at why DCU emerges as an institutionally complete and multicultural campus from the perspective of international Muslim students.

### Institutional Support and Completeness

From the data analysis, 'institutional support' and positive relationship with lecturers are two key factors that facilitate international Muslim students' well-being and sense of belonging on campus. For instance, 'Being Happy with/in DCU' and 'Being Happy with Campus Facilities' are heavily cited by participants to indicate their level of satisfaction with the institutional completeness in DCU:

*I'm happy about what [we have] in DCU rather than in any other university. I'm happy because I have a room [that I can] pray in. I'm happy because we are respect[ed]. I'm happy about also for the prayer on Friday, you know, we have a little long prayer. I'm happy about DCU in Ireland. (Amber)*

As this student quotation shows, Amber is content with the receptivity she receives from DCU, especially for students like her who practise Islam as religion. She associates this kind of receptivity with 'respect' for her identity. The perceived respect has a positive impact on her general well-being and self-esteem in the host culture.

Hopkins (2011) identifies the 'campus' as a unique environment where members are inclined to be equals under a grand student identity. In the same study, Muslim students report low levels of receptivity received from the institution, since the praying facility is located in a remote area of the campus. In the case of DCU, high levels of institutional completeness and support become a significant factor in increasing international Muslim students' sense of belongingness and decrease the likelihood of discrimination based on religious identity in the institution. Therefore, DCU's institutional support and receptivity are a win-win situation for both institution and students.

This kind of receptivity is in line with a holistic approach to internationalisation which values student diversity, student needs and intercultural engagement, as opposed to being overly concerned with revenue generation through recruitment of international students. Closely related to this argument is the role of international office and academic staff. An internationalised university campus cannot be imagined without active, approachable and non-discriminatory international office staff and lecturers. The participants in this study suggest that the presence and approach of the international office have a direct role in their well-being in the host institution. A positive relationship with academic staff is mainly associated with academic success in the host institution. Availability of halal food is also a positive factor in international Muslim students' well-being on campus. Successful internationalisation predicts inclusion and accommodation of diversity; therefore, DCU's policy towards observing students' dietary requirements is well received by international Muslim students.

### Separated Spaces on Campus

Having discussed the institutional support in DCU that contributes to the well-being and success of international Muslim students, it is now time to explore the factors that lead to a lack of interaction between student groups on campus. First and foremost is the fact that students can socialise in separated spaces. That is, while a Muslim student can choose to socialise in the praying facility, an Irish student may be more inclined to spend time in the campus pub. Muslim students interviewed in this project refer to Islam as their lifestyle. Islam in this way resonates in many aspects of Muslim students' lives, instead of merely being a religion that they follow.

For instance, the students not only pray five times a day but consider this their daily schedule. One participant, Malik, said Islam divides the day into five for him and he can organise his day according to these slots. Another participant, Inbar, said she made most of her campus friends while praying in the Interfaith Centre on campus. Participants' daily schedules, inspired by their Islamic lifestyle, have an immediate effect on when they socialise and who is available to them at the time of socialising. In other words, praying together in the facility on campus increases the likelihood of Muslim students' interaction with one another (Contact Hypothesis, Allport 1954). The praying facility on campus then becomes a hub for socialising among Muslim students. Successful accommodation of cultural differences on campus increases students' well-being and sense of belonging, according to the participants. Nevertheless, interaction with host students is still largely missing from the picture.

### Host Students' Lack of Interest in Intercultural Contact

Secondly, participants mention their Irish peers' lack of interest in intercultural communication. This is a significant finding, since it points to the need for internationalisation at home in third-level education in Ireland. A successful internationalisation, where intercultural contact among students is facilitated, cannot be achieved without internationalisation at home. In that sense, Irish students, who are the host students in Irish higher education, should be prepared to live in diversity and be encouraged to engage in intercultural communication. As the findings highlight, increased campus diversity is a reality of Irish

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**H**ost students in Irish higher education, should be prepared to live in diversity and be encouraged to engage in intercultural communication.

**C**urriculum is the most powerful tool to facilitate intercultural communication among students.

**L**ecturers [need to] encourage students to form culturally mixed groups instead of working with co-nationals.

**I**t is imperative that Irish third-level education incorporate an intercultural dimension into the curriculum and make effective use of it.

higher education; nevertheless, diversity alone is insufficient to facilitate intercultural communication among student groups on campus, since students tend to interact with culturally similar peers (McPherson et al., 2001). If the aim of internationalisation of higher education in Ireland is to educate global citizens who are competent in communication across cultures, how can we tackle this big challenge on campus?

### The Power of Curriculum

The data suggests that curriculum is the most powerful tool to facilitate intercultural communication among students. Like Islam's role in organising participants' lives, timetable emerges as an important factor bringing students together under a common objective. In a similar vein, group assignments or projects are identified as effective factors that facilitate intercultural contact among students. This is achieved through lecturers' involvement in the process by encouraging students to form culturally mixed groups instead of working with co-nationals. The participants stated in the interviews that they were able to learn how to work in groups of students from different backgrounds, improve their English and intercultural communication skills, and gain more insights into Irish culture by engaging more with the host students. Considering the shortcomings of multiculturalism with regard to the lack of interaction among groups, and the perpetuation of stereotypes, the need for and benefits of an intercultural curriculum that facilitates student interaction is evident in the findings of this research. Extra-curricular activities also offer opportunities for increased intercultural engagement. From that perspective, clubs and societies on campus might have a significant role in revolutionising mono-cultural student socialisation spaces (e.g., praying facility, pub) by adding more intercultural spaces based on students' interests and activities.

### The Need for an Intercultural Dimension in Irish Higher Education

Earlier, we asked why international Muslim students suggested their interaction with host students was limited. The data indicates that it stems primarily from the lack of opportunities that could be used to facilitate interaction among culturally diverse students on campus. The study's findings show clearly that institutional completeness and support are essential for successful internationalisation in higher education institutions. Host receptivity is positively associated with international students' well-being and adjustment. However, institutional completeness and support alone are insufficient to facilitate intercultural interaction between students on campus. The participants confirm the role of curricular and extra-curricular activities in order to experience intercultural contact with their international and host peers. It is therefore imperative that Irish third-level education incorporate an intercultural dimension into the curriculum and make effective use of it. This way, Irish higher education can aim to educate global citizens who are competent in intercultural communication in the global arena, regardless of their status as Muslim, international or host (Noddings, 2005).

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### Making an Impact

Researchers Paul O'Dwyer and Dayna Killian from Waterford Institute of Technology were among the five finalists in the 'Making an Impact' competition organised by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) in conjunction with the Irish Independent. The objective of the competition is to support researchers in communicating their work effectively to a lay audience.

## Talking the curriculum into the historic environment

Pairing heritage and 21<sup>st</sup>-century learning to teach the curriculum in context



**By Danielle O'Donovan**

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**T**he author focuses on the development of activities at Fota House Cork for teaching the 'Five Styles of Language' Leaving Certificate English curriculum content. Five rooms/ areas at Fota House are used to teach a different language style with a situated, real-world task.

The most wonderful thing about my post-doctoral research journey, funded by the Irish Research Council between 2013 and 2015, is that it is not over! Projects I worked on as part of my research, such as the 1641 Depositions Learning Website (<http://1641.tcd.ie/learning/>), are still in use in Irish classrooms. Activities I developed while part of the Bridge21 team are still in use in teaching. The Great Famine Voices website (<http://www.greatfaminevoices.ie/>), developed in collaboration with the ADAPT Centre in Trinity College Dublin, is the subject of a recent funding submission and we hope to be soon developing new classroom materials to complement it. I apply the lessons learned as part of my post-doctoral fellowship every day as Curator of Learning and Digital Engagement with the Irish Heritage Trust. And as the present article will demonstrate, I continue to actively research with the Centre for Research in IT in Education (CRITE). I am regularly asked to speak about heritage education, history education and digital cultural heritage education.

My post-doctoral research, conducted in partnership between CRITE, TCD and the Irish Heritage Trust, explored the potential of pairing IT and built heritage to improve students' attitudes to curriculum content. There are multiple benefits to learning from, and in, our historic environment. Recent research suggests that visiting historical sites has a significant positive effect on life satisfaction and, importantly for this study, visiting heritage sites when young is a predictor of becoming a habitual visitor later in life (Maeer et al., 2016). A 2004 survey of learning in the historic environment in the UK and Ireland found that learning provision was focused on younger learners, with little for teenagers, students and adults, mostly taking a very traditional approach. It also found that compared to the UK, Ireland had very underdeveloped learning offerings (Waterfield, 2004). Thus, my research sought to do two things: to bring the use of built heritage into the classroom in ways relevant to the



curriculum, and to bring 21st-century classroom techniques to learning in the historic environment.

The research was situated in the Bridge21 learning lab at TCD and at Fota House, Co. Cork. The new learning designs had at their heart the Bridge21 model of 21st-century learning. The model is both innovative and pragmatic, specifying a set of flexible components for designing 21st-century learning experiences in formal and informal educational contexts. These elements include teamwork, task-based learning, teacher as facilitator, and a focus on skills (Johnston et al., 2014; Lawlor et al., 2015). The Bridge21 activity model was designed to augment the model for learning by orchestrating learning activities. It involves team-building and warm-up activities, project/problem description and exploration, group planning and research, a workshop phase, a multimodal oral presentation to the whole group, and a reflection phase. Initial research shows that the Bridge21 model can provide a productive framework for teaching curriculum content (Conneely et al., 2015).

The Bridge21 model of learning and activity directly addresses many of the 'suites of factors' described in the Contextual Model of Learning devised by Falk and Dierking (2000) to explain how learning happens in the museum context. They identify the 'personal context', which encompasses motivation and expectations, prior knowledge, interests and beliefs, and choice and control over the experience; the 'sociocultural context', including the group dynamics of visitors and the facilitation by museum staff; the 'physical context', which encompasses how exhibition design can influence the visitor experience, like positive feelings of orientation and negative ones of disorientation; and visitors' experiences outside the museum that reinforce the museum experience. By designing activities that combine aspects of this and the Bridge21 theoretical models, I was sure we could create affective learning experiences in the classroom or the museum.

In the limited space available for this piece I would like to focus on the development of activities at Fota House for teaching the 'Five Styles of Language' Leaving Certificate English curriculum content. For seven years Fota has been facilitating a visit focusing on this content for students of an inner-city Cork school. Since taking on the orchestration of this visit I have been researching it as a case study. Exploratory data was gathered in 2013–14 and explanatory data in 2015–16.

In 2014 I collaborated with Sharon Kearney, a PhD candidate at CRITE and an English teacher, to devise activities for each style of language. We have been focusing on students' emotional and behavioural engagement. Behavioural engagement relates to participation in the learning activity and environment, manifesting in behaviours such as 'effort, persistence, and concentration; attention, asking questions and contributing to class discussion' (Fredericks et al., 2004). Emotional engagement refers to students' affective reactions in the classroom, including 'interest, boredom, happiness, sadness and anxiety' (ibid). To do this we designed tasks that reflect activities that were authentic to the house in the past (letter writing, reading rules of behaviour) or that are the 'real work' of employees at Fota now (writing persuasive social media posts, telling

**M**y post-doctoral research explored the potential of pairing IT and built heritage to improve students' attitudes to curriculum content.

**T**he Bridge21 activity model... involves team-building and warm-up activities, project/problem description and exploration, group planning and research, a workshop phase, a multimodal oral presentation to the whole group, and a reflection phase.

**‘Real world’ activities, carried out in a heritage context, can have a real impact on student engagement and student attitudes to learning.**

**O**n average, 85 students visit the house in one school day. Students rotate around the house, completing five activities in five rooms.

stories about those who lived in the house, advocating for the work of the Irish Heritage Trust, a charity). The use of 'real world' tasks is argued for both in educational research and in new approaches to creating 'participatory museums' where 'participatory projects invite visitors to do work that contributes content or research to institutions' (Simon, 2010).

We use five rooms or areas at Fota House to teach a different language style with a situated, real-world task. The room and language style complement each other: aesthetic language is worked on in the beautiful gilt and stuccoed drawing room, through brainstorming of sound and imagery devices. The language of information is learned about in the servants' quarters by addressing the work of servants and the terse 'Rules' that once adorned the hall wall. In the wood-panelled Long Gallery students learn about the people who lived at Fota, upstairs and downstairs, and write digital stories using tablet devices. Out in the 'secret' Victorian walled garden, students use the language of persuasion in social media posts to persuade the public to visit.

On average, 85 students visit the house in one school day. They are divided into small teams, and each room houses four teams simultaneously for 40 minute intervals. Students rotate around the house, completing five activities in five rooms. In the plenary session at the end of the day they are asked to try to turn Fota into a memory palace, situating their understanding of each style of language in the room where they learned it. To date, 369 students have taken part in the study.

A mixed-methods approach has been taken in gathering data, including student focus group interviews, teacher interviews, a before-and-after English Technology Attitudes Scale (ETAS) to capture data quantitatively, a written questionnaire of open-ended questions, and ethnographic observations of student activity. Analysis of the quantitative data shows that participants reported feeling more engaged – emotionally and behaviorally – in English while learning in this method. The ETAS also revealed improved confidence in English and in attitudes towards using technology in English. From the qualitative data we learned that group work and collaborative use of digital technology ranked highly as success factors. The work that student teams create at Fota always astounds us. In short spaces of time they manipulate and remix content, absorb and rewrite arguments, create and retell stories and devise new ways for us to speak to our audience.

In a further museum-studies aspect of the work, we have been seeking to strengthen students' intrinsic motivation and develop their individual interest in heritage. Interest is often simply situational and prompted by environments where there is uncertainty, challenge or novelty – generally this has only a short-term effect. Individual interest is an enduring preference for certain topics, subjects or activities. The pursuit of individual interests is often associated with increased knowledge, positive emotions and an intrinsic desire to learn more (Csikszentmihalyi & Hermanson, 2004). We asked students if their feelings about heritage sites like Fota changed after their intensive learning experience at the site. The findings were positive, with answers such as 'I never knew how beautiful it was here', 'I'd love to come back again', and 'I'd love to see more heritage

sites'. Due to the longitudinal nature of our study, we are now returning to the school to ask students who took part last year if they have indeed used Fota as a 'memory palace' and whether, through individual interest, they have returned to the house.

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Students from St. Angela's School, Cork City, taking part in a day of active English learning at Fota House in September 2016.

**T**he affordances of mobile technology can play a powerful role in enhancing student teamwork and creativity in a heritage context.

## Researcher-Practitioner Design Research Projects. The Way Forward?



**By Paul Flynn**  
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**By Dr Mary Fleming**  
Director of Teaching  
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**I**t may be time, the authors suggest, to establish a more formal forum here in Ireland for educational professionals to disseminate research from their classrooms in practitioner tracks as part of educational conferences and settings supported by initiatives from educational institutions.

The relationship between educational research and innovative practice in second-level classrooms is growing in importance, particularly in relation to new developments in initial teacher education (ITE). Graduates of ITE programmes, as they progress through their careers, will lead the way for a new generation of engaged and committed professionals. Those who help them to transition into third-level education, and towards professional practice as educational researchers, push the boundaries of our knowledge base as they inform in-service practice. Projects such as Breaking the SEAL at NUI Galway begin this process of transition and provide interested educators with opportunities to engage with their local university. However, those engaged in full-time teaching at secondary level are also, independently, pushing the same boundaries without disseminating it to the educational community. We may be missing out on a significant amount of innovative practice with the potential to change how we engage with students, to change our perspective on educational research topics, and to deepen and develop our understanding of learning in Irish second-level classrooms. Can projects that unite both communities for the benefit of the students involved provide an arena for such collaborative work to be carried out, and is it time for practitioner research to become a research track in its own right?

For those engaged in pre-service teacher training, in-service practice, continuing engagement with education and lifelong learning in this sector, limited opportunities exist to showcase research activities through specialist exhibitions and established national and international educational conferences. These conferences very often do not cater for educational research projects with a small participant number and a narrative-style submission, leaving opportunities few and far between for those willing to communicate their experience and findings beyond the bounds of their classrooms and schools. Progress is being made, however, and the field of the learning sciences has, in recent years, encouraged in-service practitioners to present side-by-side with seasoned, professional researchers at major international conferences such as the International Conference on Computer-Supported Collaborative Learning (CSCL).



and the International Conference on the Learning Sciences (ICLS). Recent editions of such conferences have seen the rise of a practitioner track of research presentation in both poster and paper formats, with a significant amount of research methodology taking the form of lesson study, action research and design-based research.

The iterative process of design-based research is becoming prevalent, as it gives innovative teaching practitioners the opportunity to critically engage with established theory and to develop, over a period of time, new methodological approaches to the classroom, while contributing to the field of educational research and practical application in cognate settings. At a national level in Ireland, limited opportunities do exist to showcase best practice or the findings of research projects for those engaged in professional classroom practice. Events such as Féilte, an annual celebration run by the Teaching Council of Ireland, facilitates those who are willing in a friendly and informal context. Perhaps it is time to establish a more formal forum here in Ireland for educational professionals to disseminate research from their classrooms in practitioner tracks as part of educational conferences and settings supported by initiatives from educational institutions. Breaking the SEAL is a project rooted in the senior cycle history syllabus that aims to develop and deepen students' learning, not only in history but also in the transitional skills of collaboration, critical analysis, academic writing and digital skills. It brings together contemporary academic research and the experience of seasoned in-service teachers by introducing students to these key skills as they explore the important archives at the James Hardiman Library at NUI Galway. This project connects future undergraduate students with the beating heart of the university and exposes them to an array of innovative services offered by the library and its dedicated staff.

By reaching out into the daily work of participating practitioners, the potential exists to push the boundaries of educational research from the ground up, through an iterative process of programme refinement. Providing a forum that is part of the third-level academic community and the second-level educational system may provide valuable opportunities for outreach, for mutual learning environments to be developed and for collaborative projects to flourish, with the explicit aim of bringing together professional researchers and in-service practitioners, where a deeper understanding of learning in real-world settings, such as that in Breaking the SEAL, is at the core.



Four exceptional early stage career researchers, recognised for excellence in physics by the Irish Research Council, travelled to Lindau, Germany, to participate in the prestigious 66th Lindau Nobel Laureate meeting. Professor Dame Jocelyn Bell Burnell presented the recipients with their awards. Pictured (L-R): Mark Kennedy University College Cork, Professor Dame Jocelyn Bell Burnell, Dr Kangpeng Wang Trinity College Dublin, Maria O'Brien Trinity College Dublin, Dr Antonio Benedetto University College Dublin.

**P**rojects such as Breaking the SEAL at NUI Galway... provide interested educators with opportunities to engage with their local university.

**I**s it time for practitioner research to become a research track in its own right?

**B**reaking the SEAL aims to develop and deepen the transitional skills of collaboration, critical analysis, academic writing and digital skills.

## Good and promising international practice in Lifelong Guidance



**By Dr Deirdre Hughes OBE**  
Principal Research Fellow, Institute for Employment Research, University of Warwick

**B**uilding on her definition of Lifelong Guidance, Dr Hughes draws upon good and promising lifelong guidance policies and practices from across Europe and internationally. Overall content is designed to provide stimuli material for policymakers, researchers, managers and practitioners across Ireland. Brief vignettes are offered to illustrate varying approaches to key elements of policies and practices.

### Context

Across the globe since the early 1950s, successive governments have persistently challenged those working in the Lifelong Guidance sector to demonstrate the educational, social and economic value and impact of their work. In this context, Lifelong Guidance remains a political business. The marketisation of Lifelong Guidance policies and practices has expanded, with a growing assumption that market-based goods and services ensure greater responsiveness to consumer choice and offer better and/or more innovative services for lower prices. Yet, this assumption is highly contested. Many leading academics argue for the adoption of 'seamless' Lifelong Guidance policies for young people and adults in order to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of education, training and labour markets through its contribution to reducing drop-out; prevent skill mismatches; boost productivity; and also to address social equity and social inclusion.

### Introduction

Lifelong guidance covers "all activities designed to help individuals, at any point in their lives, to make educational, training and occupational choices and to manage their careers" (ELGPN, 2015, p. 9).<sup>1</sup> Two EU Resolutions of the Education Council (2004 and 2006) highlighted the need for strong guidance services throughout the lifespan to equip citizens with the skills to manage their learning and careers and the transitions between and within education/training and work. Since then, technological advancements, mass migrations and fast changing labour markets bear down heavily on governments with new challenges that have significant social, cultural and economic implications.

Lifelong Guidance is both a public good as well as a private one. Good and promising policies and practices aim to keep more young people and adults switched on to learning, to encourage them not to close down opportunities too early and to broaden their horizons (Hughes, 2015). A major international symposium (USA, 2015)<sup>2</sup> revealed many countries are investing strongly in their lifelong guidance systems. This is mainly due to the landscape of 21st century



learning and work becoming increasingly complex. Signals to young people and adults about the added-value of learning and career pathways are becoming more blurred. For many young people, their careers information often comes from distorted or unreliable sources such as TV and social media. And many of today's young people will go into jobs that did not exist when their parents left school. As a result, new forms of 21st century careers dialogue have become essential.

### Evidence-base

Firstly, evidence from the 7th International Symposium on 'Career Development and Public Policy'(USA, 2015) focusing on youth policies, attended by 103 policy-makers, researchers, and leaders in the field of career development from 20 countries and 6 international organisations, revealed:

- » There is a weak alignment between education and employment. In many countries education and employment are poorly integrated and vocational education is under-developed.
- » Career development policies, systems and services need to support young people to access work-related learning from an early age. Responding effectively to these changes requires significant shifts in both policy and practice.
- » Work-related learning should be a core part of the education system for all young people and include learning about entrepreneurship and social enterprise.
- » Strategies should aim to provide national co-ordination, benchmarks and evaluation, while respecting the need for regional/local tailoring.
- » Career development services need to be both widely available and able to contribute to a range of client needs from supported self-help through to intensive personalised support. This requires a diverse workforce, frequently operating through devolved and dispersed networks.
- » There is a need for a cadre of professional career guidance [career counsellor] practitioners in every country who are able to guide, develop and support diversified delivery networks. There is also a need for some career specialists educated at the second and third levels of higher education, to deliver higher-level training courses, undertake research and evaluation nationally, and engage with the international academic community.

Secondly, international literature reviews highlight emergent themes from policy discourse that merit greater attention. Some selected findings include (in alphabetical order):

### National Guidance Portals for all ages

**In Denmark**, the Ministry of Children & Education oversees the management and delivery of an all-age National Guidance Portal 'UddannelsesGuiden'.<sup>1</sup> This has been described as an electronic career index with a number of extra self assessment and skills health check tools and simple interest inventory.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ug.dk/>

**N**ew forms of 21st century careers dialogue have become essential.

**L**ifelong Guidance is both a public good as well as a private one.

**T**here is a weak alignment between education and employment.

**W**ork-related learning should be a core part of the education system for all young people and include learning about entrepreneurship and social enterprise.

Alongside this initiative, a Ministry led 'e-guidance centre' serves the needs of young people, adults, parents, schools, colleges, training providers and employers. The centre is managed directly by the Ministry for Children & Education. This work is also linked directly to the Youth Guidance and/or Regional Guidance Centres focusing mainly on targeted provision. A professional development section is available on the website for guidance practitioners working with young people and adults (eVejledning).

eVejledning is a platform for webchat, telephone & email guidance. A systematic study by the Danish Clearinghouse for Educational Research<sup>2</sup> noted a number of features of effective provision, including the use of a range of interventions that are organised into a coherent whole and are well-connected to curriculum; the development of a strong personal connection between the career counsellor or career educator and the students; and the importance of well-trained and knowledgeable career professionals. Visit: <http://www.is2015.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Denmark1.pdf>

**In Estonia**, 'e-Estonia' is a term commonly used to describe Estonia's emergence as one of the most advanced e-societies in the world – an incredible success story that grew out of a partnership between a forward thinking government, a proactive ICT sector and a switched-on, tech-savvy population. For citizens of Estonia, e-services have become routine: e-elections, e-taxes, e-police, e-healthcare, e-banking, e-school and e-guidance. The "e" prefix for services has almost become trite in the sense that it has become the norm. Visit: <https://e-estonia.com/the-story/the-story-about-estonia/>

### Careers education

A report, commissioned by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), supported by the Bank of America Merrill Lynch, provides an overview of the evidence-base underpinning careers education and its impact on pupils' skills and outcomes. Careers education is defined as: 'Careers-focused school- or college-mediated provision designed to improve students' education, employment and/or social outcomes.' This also includes *career dialogue* – a conversation in which a professional helps an individual discover and articulate meaning regarding life or work experiences, and *career guidance [career counseling]* – a process, delivered individually or in groups, that helps individuals to gain a clearer understanding of their career development needs and potential through the successful understanding and application of their career management skills. It includes the use of techniques and tools that focus on personal challenge and growth and career information—the provision and use of a range of resources to enable users to develop a better understanding of occupations, employment types, sectors and employing/learning organisations, current and future employment, and training and educational opportunities.

The main questions addressed by this report include:

<sup>2</sup> Christensen, G. & Søgaard Larsen, M. (2011). *Evidence on Guidance and Counselling*. Aarhus: Danish Clearinghouse for Educational Research.

- » What intervention research has been carried out since the year 1996 measuring the impact of careers education on improving young people's outcomes?
- » What is the strength of evidence of this research?
- » Where are the research gaps that need to be addressed?

Furthermore, this review identifies which interventions might be most appropriate to implement in the UK context to better support careers education, and in turn improve educational, economic, or social outcomes for young people. The research is considered in the context of impact on:

- » *Educational outcomes* such as attainment level, participation in education and/or training, and sustainable progression.
- » *Economic and employment outcomes* such as earnings, employee retention, likelihood of finding work and/or congruence with the work environment, transition from education to work, social mobility, and reductions in those 'not engaged in education, employment or training' (NEET).
- » *Social outcomes* such as cultural capital, community engagement, confidence, resilience, self-esteem, improved non-cognitive skills and/or mental health wellbeing, and not engaging in criminal activity.

The research literature over the last 20 years on the impact of careers education on student outcomes is largely considered weak and fragmented, due mainly to the complexity of differing elements being identified and reported in differing ways. Overall, there are significant shortages in quasi-experimental and experimental studies in the career development field.

While the experimental literature on careers education is weak, it can be seen in the context of stronger related literature. Longitudinal studies suggest that the way in which teenagers think about their futures in education and employment has a significant impact on what becomes of them as working adults. Teenagers who have effectively underestimated the education required for their desired profession, for example, are statistically more likely to end up NEET. In addition, young people from poorer backgrounds are more likely to have career aspirations that are misaligned with their educational ambitions.

The literature suggests that careers education is optimally facilitated when interventions are personalised and targeted to individuals' needs from an early age. There is compelling evidence that career learning should begin in primary school and continue through adulthood, however very few high-quality intervention studies focused on primary pupils were identified. There is strong evidence (from the OECD (2010) among others) that the provision of high quality, independent and impartial career guidance [career counselling] for young people and adults is key to supporting transitions into education, training and employment. Career guidance is separate but complementary to the effective planning and delivery of careers education in schools and colleges. Visit: <https://>

**T**here is a need for a cadre of professional career guidance [career counsellor] practitioners in every country who are able to guide, develop and support diversified delivery networks.

**T**eenagers who have effectively underestimated the education required for their desired profession are statistically more likely to end up NEET.

**C**areer dialogue [is] a conversation in which a professional helps an individual discover and articulate meaning regarding life or work experiences.

[educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Publications/Careers\\_review.pdf](http://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Publications/Careers_review.pdf)

In Canada, there are 13 different provincial /territorial systems with varying levels of careers education. Four provinces have come together via the Council of the Atlantic Ministers of Education and Training (CAMET) to look collaboratively at careers education in their jurisdictions. A new careers strategy was released in 2015. Prince Edward Island (PEI) has developed a Careers Strategy for the province, including an expansion of work experience and every Year 9 & 10 teacher has been trained in career development. Nova Scotia has produced an 'Action Plan 2015-2020' including a Careers Education Framework for Grade 4-12 and 300 hours of experiential learning. New Brunswick has published 6 career development outcomes for the curriculum. In Ontario, an 'Education and Career/Life Planning Program for Ontario Schools'<sup>3</sup> has made a significant positive impact on student outcomes. Visit: <http://www.is2015.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Canada.pdf>

### Career stories

In New Zealand, a resource designed by the National Careers Services aims to help young people understand more about how people make career decisions and what career management is. It presents the personal stories of 18 young New Zealanders, aged between 17 and 29, in a series of short video clips. The stories represent a range of different career journeys and choices. Each story has something to offer. None necessarily represents the best or only choice the person might have made. The guide can be applied in a variety of career education and guidance contexts. Visit: <http://iagonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/career-stories-teachers-guide.pdf>

### Experience of work

In the USA, evidence collected from various youth training programs has identified several effective strategies to enhance program effectiveness. For youth, the evidence suggests that job-related training and opportunities that provide youth with **work experience contributes to positive educational outcomes**. In addition, earlier exposure to career and educational information has also been related to improved post-secondary outcomes. Visit: <http://www.is2015.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/USA.pdf>

In contrast, the South Korean Government, in partnership with major industries, has developed an incredible work experience theme park called 'Job World'.<sup>4</sup> The aim of this facility is to help young people (and their parents) experience various jobs and encourage them to pursue various pathways to their future career. Job World is a 200 million-dollar building that receives 1.2 million visitors per year. It has a job exhibition hall describing the history of work; a career planning hall; and a range of fully developed rooms that replicate various occupations across all levels. There are 37 rooms for primary school aged children (and parents) that enable them to explore 44 different job roles in a range of work places such

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/policy/cps/CreatingPathwaysSuccess.pdf>

as a hair salon, operating room, construction site and a space centre. Visit: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LlgSJYkVfxM>

In 2011, around 5000 career counsellors were placed in middle and high schools. Five years on, career counsellors will now be appointed in elementary schools. Every career counsellor will have completed 600 hours of training prior to commencement. All levels of schools will have at least one specialised trained career counsellor to enhance the quality of school guidance services. In 2015, the South Korean government introduced legislation for 'Career Education'. Since early 2016, all middle schools have one "Free Learning Semester" among 6 semesters. Students are given a chance to build their creativity and to explore career options through self-leading activities such as reading, sports and arts, or career exploration activities, and through an education that values experiential learning. In addition, national career education goals and achievement standards are made explicit by government. Visit: <http://www.is2015.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/SouthKorea3.pdf>

### Labour market intelligence/Information linked to government open source data

In the UK, 'LMI for All' an online data portal connects and standardizes existing sources of high quality, reliable labor market information (LMI) with the aim of informing careers decisions. Data is made freely available via an Application Programming Interface (API) for use in websites and applications. This supports the wider government agenda to encourage use and re-use of government data sets. 'LMI for All' includes information from two key products from the Office for National Statistics: the Labour Force Survey and the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings; plus data from the UK Employer Skills Survey and UK Working Futures. It also includes vacancy data from Universal JobMatch, and data on skills, interests and abilities from the US O\*NET database. The data within 'LMI for All' is available under an open government license. This means that individuals and organizations can use the data for any purpose, including commercial use. 'LMI for All' data is being used to power apps and websites that are supporting careers work. This has been developed, on behalf of the UK Commission for Employment & Skills (UKCES), by the University of Warwick, Institute for Employment Research (IER) and a consortium of providers Visit: <http://www.lmiforall.org.uk/questionsand-answers/>

The Canadian federal government department of Employment and Social Development recently convened a one-day symposium on '*Learning and Labour Market Information (LLMI)*' (May, 2016). The symposium brought together domestic and overseas experts involved in the production and dissemination of LLMI to provide senior government officials with an overall picture and assessment of the status of data collection systems and dissemination tools being used in different Canadian jurisdictions. Visit: [www.esdc.gc.ca](http://www.esdc.gc.ca)

### National Careers Service website and apps

In New Zealand, the Ministry of Education (MoE) provides funding to Careers New Zealand as the national provider of career expertise, to make available online information, tools and support for career seekers, parents and communities, career practitioners and employers ([www.careers.govt.nz](http://www.careers.govt.nz)).

**C**areer guidance or career counselling [is] a process, delivered individually or in groups, that helps individuals to gain a clearer understanding of their career development needs and potential.

**I**n Finland there is a national recommendation of 250 students per counsellor – counsellors have a Masters qualification in school counselling or equivalent.

**T**he research literature over the last 20 years on the impact of careers education on student outcomes is largely considered weak and fragmented.

govt.nz). There is a drive for websites to be more mobile responsive with apps that appeal to young people. Platforms such as: LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter and blogs. YouTube and other platforms are increasingly being used for presenting information to learners and job seekers. Support for job seekers is also provided through SMS and chat platforms. Visit: <http://www.is2015.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/New-Zealand.pdf>

In Scotland, a key driver for change is to improve ICT capability and service modernization with mediated service and self help provision. A distinctive feature supporting workforce preparation is Scotland's emphasis on labor market intelligence, including high level strategic support from senior staff, a dedicated team and budget, there is a distinction between core LMI and careers intelligence to improve focus, a partnership approach with external providers, consultation and regular dialogue with users-demand led /LMI Group of practitioners – all available in from one place. Visit: <http://legacy.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/resources/labour-market-intelligence/>

### National Strategic Fora

In Austria, there are two major developments designed to achieve greater coherence and dialogue between and across Government departments and allied organisations (i) the development of a Lifelong Guidance Strategy and (ii) the establishment of a National Lifelong Guidance Forum. Visit: <http://www.lifelongguidance.at/qip/mm.nsf>

In Northern Ireland, the Minister for Employment and Learning and the Minister for Education established an Independent Panel to include industry, schools, colleges of further education, universities and the voice of young people to provide advice on the overall direction for careers provision in across the province. This is partly in response to recommendations stemming from the Committee for Employment and Learning's Inquiry into Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance. A recent reconfiguration of government Departments has resulted in the Ministry for the Economy replacing the Ministry for Employment & Learning. Visit: <http://www.delni.gov.uk/review-of-careers>

### One-stop centres underpinned by guidance

In 2014, the Finnish National Board of Education launched a set of quality criteria for career education and guidance in basic and upper secondary level education. Careers guidance/Careers education is a compulsory subject in the student's timetable – a specific 76 hours time slot allocated to career-related activities. The Finnish Ministry of Employment and the Economy monitors on a monthly basis the implementation of their policy targets which relate to transitions from school to work. Finland is developing an integrated multi-channelled information, advice and guidance system (2014-2020) with stand-alone online services and regional low-threshold one-stop centres. This new online service is being developed as a part of the national e-Governance program (SADE program / Service -portal for Citizens). There is a national recommendation of 250 students per counsellor – counsellors have a Masters qualification



in school counselling or equivalent. Visit: <http://www.is2015.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Finland1.pdf>

### Quality Assurance

Ireland and Portugal co-lead a pan-European ‘Quality Assurance and Evidence-Based Framework’ (2010–2015). This is a mechanism that can be used by policy-makers and other interested parties to enhance quality and evidence-based approaches in career development. Five key quality elements, criteria, indicators and examples of possible data emerged including global professional standards (2010–2015). These key quality elements include: Practitioner competence; Citizen/User involvement; Service provision and improvement; Cost benefits to governments; and Cost benefits to individuals. Visit: [http://www.elgpn.eu/publications/browse-by-language/english/ELGPN\\_QAE\\_tool\\_no\\_5\\_web.pdf](http://www.elgpn.eu/publications/browse-by-language/english/ELGPN_QAE_tool_no_5_web.pdf)

### Use of portfolios or personal development plans

In the USA, Colorado, for example, has created a range of tools to support schools to engage in their state-mandated Individualized Career and Academic Plan (ICAP). Efforts occurring in many states, like the one in Colorado, rely on an ePortfolio to demonstrate that youth are achieving “college and career readiness” standards that nearly every state has adopted. Visit: [www.cde.state.co.us/postsecondary/icap](http://www.cde.state.co.us/postsecondary/icap) and <http://www.achieve.org/files/MakingCollegeandCareerReadinessTheMissionforHighSchool.pdf>

Research in The Netherlands examined the use of portfolios or personal development plans to support students’ career development. The study found that portfolios were perceived to be useful by teachers, career counsellors and students when they were used to complement and provide a focus for wider career conversations. Where they were not used as part of a broader career learning process, they were generally not seen as useful. See: Mittendorff, K., Jochems, W., Meijers, F. & den Brok, P. (2008). Differences and similarities in the use of the portfolio and personal development plan for career guidance in various vocational schools in the Netherlands. *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, 60(1): 75–91.

### Conclusion

In many parts of the global economy, employers are experiencing major skill shortages or skills mismatch and see little prospect of improvement. Traditionally, a good choice has been associated with an informed choice. However, actual choices show the limitations of this approach. Research findings (Lengelle & Meijers, 2009) highlight a good choice is the result of a dialogue about the meaning of concrete experiences of learning and work. Investments made in lifelong guidance systems and services must demonstrate more clearly the added-value returns for individuals, communities and societies. Therefore, lifelong guidance policy, research and practice must continue to question how best to stimulate 21st century meaningful careers dialogue amongst young people and adults using a wide variety of approaches.

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