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Education and Training Boards Ireland

Ireland's NATIONAL SKILLS STRATEGY 2025

Religion in Irish Schools:

▸ **Getting the Balance Right**

▸ **Religious/Belief Diversity in Multidenominational Primary Schools**

STUDENT VOICE IN IRISH SCHOOLS: An Increasing Acoustic

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Education and Training
Boards Ireland
*Boird Oideachais agus
Oiliúna Éireann*

Contents

Due to pressure on space, a number of contributions have been deferred for inclusion in a later issue.

Editorial

Political uncertainty and lack of clarity about the future government and its education investment policy has arisen from the stalemate that followed the General Election 2016. While water charges and other matters dominated the election campaign, it is interesting to note some features of the education priorities declared by some of the political parties in the run-up to the General Election.

Skills for the future was a priority objective for Fine Gael, which promised to invest €210 million in digital technology. Promoting entrepreneurship in schools was also a key Fine Gael objective. Fianna Fáil committed to increasing third level funding and developing a new student loan scheme. Labour's focus was on a reduction in class size and ending prefab use by 2021. Sinn Féin's focus was also on a reduction in class size and an increase in special needs resource hours as well as reforming the guidance counselling service. Smaller parties promised a further range of initiatives.

At the time of going to print, there is still uncertainty about future investment proposals for education and training. One certainty however is that the education and training system has been stripped bare over the past seven years and is in urgent need of significant and immediate investment in terms of staffing and resources.

If we are to sustain our key talent pool for future prosperity there is no option but to immediately provide significant investment in all areas of education and training. As IBEC has recently stated, "You can design and build the best country in the world; but only the creativity and talent of our young people can make it a reality".

Nurturing that creativity and talent is what schools and training centres do. Stripped, as they are, of adequate investment and resources, they cannot be expected to maintain and improve educational standards without immediate and prioritised investment in essential supports.

The context for investment in education has now changed. New figures from the Central Statistics Office show that Ireland's GDP increased by 7.8% for the whole of 2015 – the fastest growth since 2000. This made Ireland the fastest growing economy in the Euro Zone for the second successive year.

Front-loading investment in education and training is essential now, as it takes a decade to bear fruit. It could be argued that the current school-going population has been disadvantaged by virtue of lack of investment in recent years. Government did try to mitigate the impact of the near collapse of the economy on education and training provision. Yet the sector still suffered significantly.

Major investment in education and training must now be a key government priority. The economy is growing sharply; the unemployment rate has fallen from a high of 15.1% in 2012 to a seasonally adjusted rate of 8.8% in February 2016; 150,000 jobs have been created between 2012 and 2015. There is, as a consequence of both a growing economy and more persons in employment, a significant investment fund generated by a large boost in tax revenue.

While there are many voices seeking investment, the education and training sector must be a priority, as this is an investment in everyone's future. Ireland's economic recovery now provides an opportunity to reverse some of the serious cuts in the resources which have impacted significantly in education and training provision. Failure to appropriately resource education and training at this point in time will put our continued economic recovery at risk.

Prior to the General Election, ETBI circulated its priorities for investment in the education sector. The key to improving education and training provision is through improving the quality of provision, and it is quality that is most severely affected by inadequate resources.

In a school context, there is a crisis at both middle and senior management levels. While some progress has been made, there is a need to urgently reform and enhance school management capacity. It is worth noting that when government seeks to implement its own key policy priority, it can deliver on resources, as is seen from the current implementation of the new Junior Cycle.

Career guidance and counselling hours need to be restored at least to the level that prevailed prior to 2012 (within the teacher allocation for each school). In addition, there is a need for a root-and-branch review of the entirety of career guidance, with a view to putting in place a fit-for-purpose service. Very obviously there is also an urgent need to now bring about the reversal of the increases in pupil-teacher ratio which were implemented in recent years, and this is really necessary in terms of equity across all schools.

At a corporate level, ETB funding has been seriously eroded at a time of on-going increases in the school-going population. Having said that, it is significant that senior management posts in ETBs are now being filled, as this will support the operational and strategic leadership of the ETBs at a time of massive structural reform. This consolidation of leadership capacity of ETBs is a welcome development.

Further education and training must be targeted as the sector that can deliver on the skills needs of the economy. It is truly astounding that there is still no significant capital budget for FET provision and the State's lack of action in this regard is no longer acceptable.

The European Commission has identified VET as the engine that will regenerate European economies. The "Cinderella" image for this sector still prevails and it does now require a dedicated capital investment programme if it is to stand shoulder to shoulder with other education sectors.

For any new government there are investment challenges and priorities and there are many voices calling for that prioritised investment. Yes, jobs are a priority; but so also are up-to-date skills. Increasing the talent pool remains our key global competitive advantage. It is a matter of spending now on education and training or regret later (for decades to come); and this is our advice to the new government as it addresses its spending priorities for the foreseeable future.

Michael Moriarty, General Secretary.

INAUGURAL
ETBI FET Conference

Conference Rapporteur Dr Dermot Stokes reflects on the event

The inaugural ETBI FET Conference, which took place on 26 November 2015, was a fascinating occasion, full of information, engagement and insight. Looking through the list of participants one was immediately struck by both the geographical spread and the range of designations. Those in attendance include managers and coordinators, teachers, trainers, guidance counsellors and experts. To have such an audience contemplate and discuss the emerging contours of the new landscape of Further Education and Training in Ireland is of great significance. All must hear and all must be heard. There is a great range and depth of educational skills, knowledge and understanding in the sector, not to mention stores of experience. If they can converge to a common purpose, we will most certainly have a FET system that not only *is* world-class, but *is seen to be* such as well.

Great change prompts excitement and nervousness. Familiar with our routines, our systems, our methodologies and the comforts of what we know, we can forget that change is constant. Those nearing the end of their working lives in FET will have seen AnCo (itself established in 1967) replaced in 1987 by FÁS in a new amalgamation with the National Manpower Service and the Youth Employment Agency. That arrangement has now been superseded with the formation of SOLAS and Intreo. They will have seen PLCs emerge from the pre-employment courses of the late 1970s. At that point there were myriad qualifications but no cohesion. There followed the NCVA and, in time, the NQAI and the National Framework of Qualifications, FETAC and HETAC. These, in turn have now been merged in QQI. In parallel we contemplated and then entered the digital age, with all that it has meant and will mean for our personal and working lives.

We are better at handling change than we think. Yet we must also acknowledge that this often demands bravery, resilience and adaptability, especially where new policy frameworks, objectives and structures all arrive together. Listening to the conference presentations I was reminded of one of baseball legend Yogi Berra's gnomic utterances: "When you come to a fork in the road, take it!"

> "We are better at handling change than we think. Yet we must also acknowledge that this often demands bravery, resilience and adaptability, especially where new policy frameworks, objectives and structures all arrive together."

We've done that a lot in Ireland, FET included. For example, the availability of ESF support for education and training brought in very substantial resources over the last 25 years. But it also built distortions into the system as different programmes generated multiple management lines and accounting and reporting demands. The BTEI, to take just one example of many, was originally designed to support part-time participation in Youthreach, VTOS and PLC; but to qualify for ESF support it had to stand alone. As a result it became something rather different.

When people are asked for directions in Ireland they sometimes respond, "If I was going there, I wouldn't start from here." But here is where we are, and it's where the journey must continue from. We've taken the forks in the road and at this stage we have a plethora of arrangements, programmes and structures, and we need to harmonise and realign them so that they make more sense to learners, employers, other educational providers and the wider community. FET is at the point of assuming its rightful place as a pillar of the education and training system and to do so it must be structurally and operationally sound.

SOLAS has been established as the overarching authority in this new dispensation. Its role is broadly analogous to the HEA in higher education. There will always be reservations, perhaps even fears, when a new authority opens its doors for business and the establishment of SOLAS creates no exception. Such cavils should not be seen as opposition. Rather, as was made clear in the comments from many of the conference tables, everyone was keen to make the new arrangements work and they were simply noting the devil in the detail.

Viewed from outside, the new architecture of the system is rational and economic. But that masks differences in topography. For example, it is intended that ETBs will engage in local consultations and generate regional plans accordingly. But the boundaries of many ETBs are not aligned with other regional planning structures such as the NUTS3 regions which are the basis for other linked planning, for example in enterprise and infrastructure. Indeed, in some cases, the ETBs will be linking with several regions. There are other issues, such as the random allocation of staff and resources. No staffing profile was drawn up to establish what an ETB needs in order to do the job it has been handed. In five ETBs, there is no former FÁS Training Centre. Further issues arise in relation to the interface with Intreo. As was pointed out by

conference participants at a number of tables, as well as the tasks in hand within the education and training system there is also a pressing need to align policies, structures, operational systems with other Departments, agencies and sectors.

A daunting mission it may be, but all we can be expected to do is control what we can control. Our mission is captured in the five goals set out in the SOLAS Action Plan – skills for the economy, active inclusion, quality provision, integrated planning and funding and enhancing the standing of FET. At their core is a simple task: to focus on learner experience and outcomes. The conference presentations and the ensuing discussions brought all strands of the system together and initiated the drive towards the common understanding and sense of direction that is essential to a new system.

The first presentations explored these issues from European and national perspectives. Cerys Furlong pointed out that FET in Ireland is not developing in a vacuum. The same issues arise across Europe: the need for skilled workers, the need to address low levels of literacy and numeracy and the mismatch between the outputs of FET and HE and the demands and needs of the labour market. She listed a number of success factors: increasing employers' disposition towards learning; increasing investment and equity of access; delivering learning relevant to both employers and learners; and so on. She called for 'more collaboration and less competition' and for a 'seamless learner journey'.

Fiona Hartley spoke of 'reimagining FET' and asked if there were too many programmes. She outlined the National Skills Strategy and its benefits for the individual, society and the economy, and identified three key challenges:

- Ensuring quality of employment (emphasising levels 5/6),
- Workforce development (noting the importance of guidance) and citing three priorities, standards, curriculum and assessment and aligning different Government Departments (e.g. pathways to Work and the Action Plan for Jobs),
- Basic Skills

FACTORS INFLUENCING WHAT TO DO AFTER SCHOOL

Source: ESPL Leaving School in Ireland study
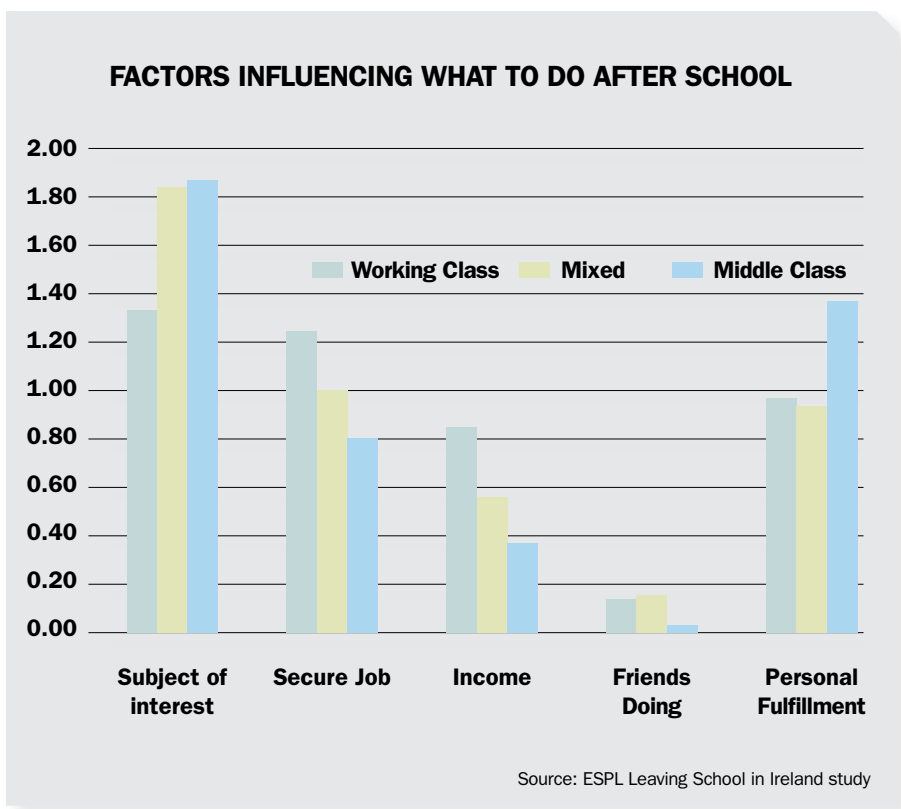
The next presentations turned towards skill needs and demands in the recovering Irish economy and the opportunities opening up for the restructured FET sector. There is a current and foreseeable undersupply of intermediate skills. Indeed, the education system may well be over-producing third-level graduates.

John Sweeney presented what he described as good news for the sector. Formerly FET had a residual role in Irish education and employment planning. Now the FET Strategy offers the prospect of a far more central role. Higher Education may be less of a guarantee of employment success in the future. In Ireland a significant proportion of the workforce is overqualified. Indeed, a significant minority of graduates work in low-skill occupations. He added that 'past performance is no guarantee for the present or the future'. He noted concerns regarding the quality of the education and in turn the job-readiness of graduates. Over coming decades, there will be a strong demand for people with intermediate skills and CEDEFOP (2014) estimates that 40% of jobs will be at this level. Furthermore,

in the ensuing discussion John Sweeney pointed out that flagship sectors are NOT necessarily graduate enclaves and they will need workers with intermediate skills to form and fill work teams.

It is also the case that in Ireland we find it hard to move beyond seeing education and training programmes and qualifications as essentially upward and linear (for example, if a person returns to education and training, s/he should be taking a course and qualification at a higher level than the qualifications s/he holds). This is emerging as a significant issue between FET guidance personnel and Intreo personnel. It appears that sight has been lost of the second key component of the Lifelong Learning model, life-wide learning. In the 21st century, a person may well need a course at the same NFQ level, or indeed at a lower level.

John McGrath noted low levels of FET-qualified personnel in the labour force and argued the need to raise their proportion. He added that employment from training is almost equivalent to that from Higher Education, and that FET outperforms Higher Education in employer esteem in many sectors. This

is underscored by the outcomes of a number of studies. For example, in the Irish Survey of Student Engagement funded by the HEA (survey student-survey.ie, 2015), more than 27,000 students (universities, colleges and ITs) responded. Asked if they thought that they were gaining knowledge and skills that boosted their chances of getting a job, 37% said that they 'sometimes' or 'never' gained these skills. Also, in a study conducted by the Department of Education and Skills which canvassed employer opinions, FE graduates were perceived to have stronger practical skills, business acumen and (interestingly) foreign language capabilities. Employer satisfaction with workplace attributes of third-level graduates was rated at 72% and personal attributes at 87% whereas for FET graduates the satisfaction ratings were 82% and 90% respectively. This, it was noted in a number of table comments, begs a question regarding the relative esteem in which HE and FET are held in the media and amongst parents, school students and schools. That said, John McGrath also noted that follow-up and aftercare of students is poor in FET.

There is general acknowledgement of the importance of the labour market in FET, the links between jobs and good qualifications, and the personal and wider social benefits that accrue, including enhanced employability. However, any discussion of skills for the economy and the role of FET in meeting this goal can trigger some disquiet in the sector. Some FET practitioners argue that education is a right and that there should be an equal emphasis on fulfilment and empowerment, a point made in comments from many tables. For example, one table commented that in focusing on 'the twin pillars of economic prosperity and social justice' we should not lose sight of social justice, especially important to those working with learners at the lower levels of the NFQ. This prompted the comment from another table that 'We need an all-inclusive title that covers community training, basic education, social inclusion, etc. FET suggests the learner has a basic education to start with.'

There is much common ground and maintaining focus on the learners will keep it in view. That said, maintaining

The inaugural ETBI FET Conference in November 2015

this focus must include hearing what the learners themselves say, and designing and delivering FET that responds to what they say they need and want, rather than what we think they need and want. This is especially important at lower NFQ levels where learners may have more complex needs and personal situations to contend with and may be less confident about expressing themselves. Also in this regard, it is important to keep in mind what research reveals. The ESRI tracked a cohort of students from late primary school through secondary education and beyond. Quite significant differences emerged between students attending what the researchers identified as working class, mixed and middle class schools regarding their choices of what to do after school. Those attending a middle class school were more likely to study a subject of interest than those attending a working class school. Likewise, they were more likely to cite personal fulfilment as the basis for selecting the course. In contrast, those attending a working class school were more likely to choose on the basis of a course securing a job and generating income.

One can debate the meaning of these revelations. It could be that those attending middle class schools simply assumed they would find employment and therefore felt free to study what they wanted. Whether this is the case

or not, this research makes it clear that for many learners there is indeed a close association between education and employment.

Equally, the broader benefits of learning must be recognised and endorsed, and Mary Kett's paper introduced us to the findings of the Wider Benefits of Learning project which examines the positive personal and social impact of education and training. The value of this endeavour was not lost on conference attendees. For example, one table noted:

> We welcome the effort to quantify the wider benefits of learning. This should be further developed over time, to map the 'progression' of these learners and see if these benefits continue.

This project is important for (at least) three reasons. Firstly, it builds a rationale for investment in education that extends beyond labour market outcomes – the benefits of general education participation may not mature until many years after participation has ended. Secondly, in reviewing the existing research base and building from there, the project exemplifies how good research can contribute

Images from the inaugural ETBI FET Conference in November 2015

to identifying and disseminating best practice, developing standards, methodologies and new metrics, and generally building the knowledge base of the sector. Thirdly, it helps define the elements of an FET knowledge strategy, one that comprehends strong data, ongoing learner feedback, project and programme evaluation and robust academic research. To date the last-mentioned has been hit and miss. It is clear from the experience in other countries that academic research has an important role to play in the development of FET systems and practice, and it should be built into a knowledge strategy for the sector.

Research is also important in the development of new metrics, what John McGrath identified as 'appropriate indicators'. Since future funding in the FET sector will be linked to 'performance', this is a central and urgent issue. But as the saying goes, what gets measured gets done. Another version has it that 'What gets measured gets managed'. The risk is that this then becomes 'If you can't measure it you can't manage it', a view that has tempted many a manager to jettison all but the most measurable elements. We have a long history of what might be termed compliant reporting in Ireland, rich in facts and figures, especially regarding auditable aspects

and outputs, but scant as regards effectiveness, especially learner satisfaction and outcomes. But many educators argue that many of the most important outcomes can't be measured, or not easily at any rate. Delegates at one table commented that 'Programmes and projects should be evaluated according to stated aims and objectives. Performance indicators need to reflect our work on the achievements for learners. Soft skills needs have to be met but one size doesn't fit all'. It is also the case that what's measured and recorded gets reported and analysed. One table identified a key difficulty:

> Having many systems (e.g. PLSS, FARR, Salespulse, MIT, PBS, SAP) to reflect and record our work is unhelpful and makes it difficult to promote our work in an evidenced-based way. For example, part-time programmes with few resources have to use four systems for reporting at the moment.

As this comment underlines, appropriate indicators can generate performance data that can help

providers promote their work, an essential component in raising the profile of FET. This is a priority in a country which is preoccupied with academic learning and qualifications. Its importance was not lost on conference attendees and Nikki Gallagher's presentation on Building a Recognisable Brand for Further Education and Training and the short video she showed at the end generated much debate and constructively critical comment. One table asked, 'If SOLAS is the brand for the FET, what is the brand for the local centres? ETBs and ETBI is not mentioned. This may create even more confusion.' Another table commented that:

> A national FET brand (is) critically important to incorporate education, training and learners of all ages – lifelong learning, e.g. London Underground Map – all connected, not linear. 'Education with a difference that makes a difference.'

They added that there is a need for care in the use of language; for example, using the term 'better'

courses suggests that current courses are not good. Others argued that it is important that all relevant government departments support the FET branding with one table asking for 'consistent branding between SOLAS, ETB and local Education and Training providers'.
In general, attendees welcomed the intention to promote FET as a brand but many were wary about ownership of the process. One table asked 'Is it an ETBI/ETB on branding or a SOLAS decision?' and another echoed this: 'Brand FET? Brand ETB? Brand SOLAS? (An Independent branding/marketing company to advise – not branding from within).' A third table commented that:

> We believe that good guidance is essential. We need to communicate the opportunities we provide as valuable and valid so that everyone understands that FET is beneficial and provides another way. 'There is another way' should be our key message.

Promoting FET as a quality option for learners, employers and communities requires a simple and direct presentation and a strong evidential base. It isn't something that can be achieved in one short action; nor is it something that can be done quickly. It will take time, unity of purpose and hard graft, in schools, in local employment fora, in the media and, as it were, through the streets broad and narrow. SOLAS officials, ETB officers, College principals, centre directors, programme coordinators, community educators, all must sing from the same sheet. Differences of emphasis, target groups and methodologies will endure but all are now comprehended by a more generic approach and set of structural arrangements. As one table commented:

> Overall (we're) looking at FET provision and changing from the specific programmes with their rules and guidelines and moving perhaps to a sector that is divided on levels and full or part-time provision which gives us more flexibility to provide what is needed.

Images from the inaugural ETBI FET Conference in November 2015

There will be many challenges, and conference participants were under no illusions in this regard. For example, as Minister English pointed out, when developing the new apprenticeships, 'the Apprenticeship Council had to knock on doors, asking enterprises to be involved. Employment links are hard work and need development and maintenance'. Across the board there were calls for cohesion and cooperation. One table said 'Avoid duplication and apply resources where needed'. Others demanded an end to silos.

Some conference participants argued that the term skills should be redefined to include 'soft' skills, life skills and work-specific skills. This fits with their concern regarding the emphasis on skills needs and demands vis-à-vis education needs and demands. This echoes historic arguments about

education and training, a distinction that may be obsolete in the 21st century and the era of lifelong learning. Training is a function of education and education is a function of training. Nonetheless, if it itches it should be scratched.

As regards local engagement and planning, there was a strong sense that the idea is sound, and the intention is good, but it's going to take a great deal of very hard work to make it viable. As has already been noted, ETB boundaries do not accord with those of the regions in any other relevant sphere such as regional development, enterprise planning or health. The difficulty of anchoring long-term involvement by enterprises has already been noted. They're busy and time is money. Different problems arise with other local State agencies. They too have their pressures. Intreo personnel are perceived to be preoccupied with meeting targets for placement, and education providers maintain that they don't understand the FET system.

Issues also arise with regard to regional skills fora – while there was no adverse comment regarding the idea, its execution will demand cohesion between local/regional HE and FE providers. This is easily said but not so easily done. Views noted above espousing collaboration rather than competition also apply here. The hit-and-miss nature of progression arrangements between Higher Education institutions and Further Education providers is another sore point that will demand action, perhaps by QQI.

It may be that an emphasis on the learner may help with these foregoing issues but it is imperative that (i) those who are meeting/teaching clients are able to identify misalignments and lacunae and (ii) the systems respond with information exchange, training/CPD, policy tuning/redirection, and perhaps even arm-twisting. As one table put it, 'In order to meet all requirements under (the) FET strategy, CPD (should be) provided at level 1-6 for all staff. Lifelong learning also includes staff.'

Guidance services are particularly significant when it comes to those

who encounter the missing links, dragging feet, misunderstandings and ineptitudes that frustrate pathway planning and progression, and their importance in the emerging FET scenario was repeatedly emphasised from both the point of view of FET colleges delivering PLCs, which are resourced under second-level formulae and therefore must deliver guidance services from within their teaching allocation, and that of clients of the Youthreach and adult education services, who have separate and so far unconnected allocations. The centrality of guidance in informing, assisting, mediating, advocating and brokering was repeatedly asserted, an importance emphasised by Fiona Hartley: 'guidance, guidance, guidance'.

And so, to conclude I can quote one of the tables: 'This is not the end, this is just the beginning.' Indeed. The changes discussed at the conference are truly substantial, even tectonic. They will take time to play their way through the system. Everyone has a part to play and while the Strategy sets out the vision and the hoped-for outcomes, the dimensions, contours and modalities of the system that is yet to come are far from certain. Events such as the FET conference will be of great importance. The interactivity of this conference has encouraged debate, and as the project unfolds it is imperative that its leaders maintain

> The interactivity of this conference has encouraged debate, and as the project unfolds it is imperative that its leaders maintain this approach, developing a culture of constructively critical engagement and discourse, and cultivating the art of questioning among learners and employers, teachers and trainers and management.

this approach, developing a culture of constructively critical engagement and discourse, and cultivating the art of questioning among learners and employers, teachers and trainers and management. Start as you mean to go on and be consistent. As Cerys Furlong said, 'to gain power you may have to give up power.'

It is also important to encourage education practitioners to learn and practice business skills, and to draw the world of work into learning contexts as well as bringing the learners into the world of work. We must also think beyond conventional work and understand that while a young person who left school in the late 1970s is likely to have five or six jobs in her/his lifetime, one leaving school today is as likely to have five or six jobs at any one time. This may challenge presumptions among some FET practitioners who may have drifted away from active dealings with the cutting edge of employment and would benefit from renewing the intensity of the first pre-employment programmes out of which so much of what we now celebrate in FET arose.

Musicians sometimes talk of the things that are essential to a band or orchestra. Each musician has a function and a contribution to make. They don't do the same things; a bass player and drummer must be extremely tight but what they do is very different. And so on. But they all have to play the same tune and start at the same time, they have to be in time and in tune and they have to trust each other. The four Ts: teamwork, timing, tuning and trust. The same applies to a system or an institution. There will be different roles, there will be targeted programmes and projects, and they may demand separate systems, structures and arrangements. Bu if they have the four Ts, they'll play the same tune and be in (relative) harmony, and that will best address the needs of the various constituencies served by FET in Ireland.

It was a pleasure and a privilege to have been part of the inaugural ETBI conference. I congratulate ETBI for organising it and the ETBs for supporting it so well. It is the first but not the last. I look forward to the gathering discourse and to hearing how the new system grows out of the old.

GOVERNMENT LAUNCHES IRELAND'S
National Skills Strategy 2025 – Ireland's Future

The Taoiseach and Tánaiste launched the new National Skills Strategy 2025 – Ireland's Future, along with Minister for Education and Skills Jan O'Sullivan TD, and Minister for Skills, Research and Innovation Damien English TD, at the Blackrock Further Education Institute, Dublin on Wednesday 27 January 2016.

According to the Taoiseach, "The Government has a long term economic plan to keep the recovery going and the first step of that plan is the creation of more and better jobs. The ability to attract new jobs, and having our people fill those jobs, is dependent on having a well-educated, well-skilled and adaptable work force. This National Skills Strategy aims to provide an education and training system that is flexible enough to respond to a rapidly changing environment and that can provide the mix of skills needed over the next ten years, and beyond. Our commitment to provide 50,000 modern apprenticeship and traineeship places to 2020 is an essential part of our long term economic plan to reach full employment and is something I am determined that we deliver."

The Tánaiste said, "I am particularly pleased this plan will pave the way to provide 50,000 apprenticeships and traineeships by 2020, which I regard as a crucial element in the range of career options for our young people. In addition to assisting those who are unemployed gain the skills needed to enter employment, the strategy also focuses on the need for upskilling of those who are already in employment. As the economy grows and evolves, those in employment will have similarly growing and evolving education and training needs. Upskilling will be important for everyone in employment, regardless of their occupation or current skill levels."

Speaking at the launch Minister O'Sullivan said, "This new National Skills Strategy sets out the Government's commitment to improving and using skills for sustainable economic growth. It outlines how we can develop a well-skilled, adaptable workforce that contributes to, shares in and benefits from opportunities of economic expansion."

"This strategy will ensure increased access to high quality and relevant education and training and skills development opportunities. It will allow people to benefit from workplace learning and experience, and to enable effective participation by all in the economy and society."

The Strategy has been developed around six key objectives and a comprehensive set of actions and measures aimed at improving the development, supply and use of skills over the next 10 years.

Deirdre Hanamy, Principal of BFEI, said, "It is most appropriate that the National Skills Strategy is being launched in a Further Education Institute as this sector has a long history, and a wealth of experience, in delivering innovative courses that respond to industry needs. This sector is unique in that it offers many specialist courses not available in Higher Education. We cater for a broad profile of students from school leavers to those who wish to return to education to upskill in the latest technologies."

As Paddy Lavelle, CEO of DDLETB, brought the launch to a close, he urged the Government to see fit to use the European Strategic Investment Plan model to develop quality further education and training facilities throughout the country. For FET to take its place as a world class sector, Ireland needs to invest significantly both in capital and in resources. Technology training in FET centres requires a solid resourcing plan that is imaginative and bold. His concluding remark was: "Today marks a point in history that we may look back on in time to come, as the seed germinating for a skills tree of the future."

The Strategy Report is available at: www.education.ie/en/Publications/ Policy-Reports/pub_national_skills_ strategy_2025.pdf.

Paddy Lavelle CEO DDLETB, Minister for Education & Skills Jan O'Sullivan, BFEI Principal Deirdre Hanamy, Tánaiste Joan Burton, Taoiseach Enda Kenny, and Minister for Skills, Research & Innovation Damien English, at the launch of Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2025,

Ireland's National Skills Strategy *2025*

Pat O'Mahony, ETBI Education Research Officer

SETTING THE CONTEXT

Ireland's National Skills Strategy to 2025 (Ireland's Future)[1] was launched by the Taoiseach and the Tánaiste at DDLETB's Blackrock Further Education Institute. Given the critical role that further education and training (FET) will play in ensuring our prosperity and cohesion to 2025 and beyond, the launch location could not have been more appropriate. Furthermore, the launch was very timely because, as we hopefully move towards full employment, we must make sure that our workforce has the skills that enterprises of all sizes require for growth.

The Strategy sets an ambitious 10-year trajectory for skills and talent development and highlights the importance of lifelong (from the cradle to the grave) education and training for all. No longer is education and training seen as something that occurs at the front-end of a person's life. Now education and training is integral to the whole of one's life. In terms of its detail, the strategy identifies Ireland's current skills profile, provides a strategic vision and specific objectives for Ireland's future skills requirements, and sets out a road map for how the vision and objectives will be achieved. In particular, the strategy acknowledges the need to include everyone in the upskilling process and to avoid depriving some social cohorts of the fruits of economic growth, as has been the case heretofore.

The new strategy document runs to some 122 pages so it is impossible to do justice to its detail in this relatively short article. The full strategy may be downloaded for free from the Department of Education and Skills website[2]. What follows summarises the new strategy and, in doing so, uses significant sections of the strategy's text without specifically referencing the quotations. This approach has been taken in order to make the summary more readable.

The Strategy builds on the progress made since the last skills strategy was published in in 2007[3]. In a number of respects the new strategy is more realistic than its predecessor in that it does not treat qualifications as a synonym for skills and the assumptions about continuing economic growth that underpinned the 2007 document are tempered by a greater level of economic realism.

Notwithstanding the economic meltdown, a number of the 2007 targets have been met.

- The proportion of young people completing second-level has increased from 81% to 90.6% – exceeding the 90% target set for 2020.
- 93% of 20-24 year olds received an award at Levels 4-5 or more on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) in 2014 – an increase of 7% on the baseline year of 2005 and just 1% short of the target for 2020.
- The progression rate to higher education increased by 14%, from 55% to 69%, while there was an 11% increase in the proportion of the labour force achieving a qualification at Levels 6-10 on the NFQ.

On the other hand, the target to increase the proportion of the labour force holding a qualification at Levels 4-5 was not met. Also, the share of persons with only a Level 3 NFQ qualification is, at 15.4%, nearly double the 2020 target of 7%.

ASSUMPTIONS UNDERPINNING THE STRATEGY

The whole strategy is underpinned by a number of assumptions.

- A well-skilled, adaptable, and innovative workforce can underpin improved living standards for all over the longer term.

> "No longer is education and training seen as something that occurs at the front-end of a person's life. Now education and training is integral to the whole of one's life."

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1   www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/pub_national_skills_strategy_2025.pdf

2   www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/pub_national_skills_strategy_2025.pdf

3   www.edepositireland.ie/bitstream/handle/2262/69844/egfsn070306b_national_skills_strategy.pdf

- The availability of skilled talented people is one of Ireland's key international differentiators – attracting foreign direct investment and driving the success of indigenous enterprises from innovative start-ups to scaling firms with high growth potential.
- The quality of our workforce depends on the extent to which our workforce has acquired relevant knowledge, entrepreneurial agility and analytical skills.
- The effective use of technology is critical to supporting talent and skills, to growing enterprise and enhancing the lives of all citizens.
- The efficacy of education and training will be maximised through active engagement between providers and employers, thus ensuring greater alignment between the skills delivered by education and training providers and those required in the workplace.
- Employers need to participate actively in the development of skills and make effective use of their skills in the workplace to improve productivity and competitiveness.
- There is a need for systematic evaluation of learner outcomes.
- The quality of teaching and learning at all stages of education and training needs to be continually enhanced.
- There must be a much greater focus on lifelong learning – need to increase proportion of population involved in lifelong learning from 6.7% (2014) to 10.7% (2025).

EMPLOYMENT IN IRELAND
- In 2011, some 47 million were unemployed across the EU while 330,000 (15.1%) of the total labour force and 30% of 15 to 24 year-olds were unemployed in Ireland. By December 2015 the comparable unemployment figures were 8.8% and 19.7% respectively.
- Long-term unemployed has fallen from 6.4% to 5% but still is 54% of unemployed.
- There are 1.98 million employed in Ireland and the target for 2020 is 2.18 million. Currently, 1,644,000 of these are employees and 323,000 (16%) as self-employed.
- 150,000 jobs created between 2012 and 2015. 55,000 of these

"The efficacy of education and training will be maximised through active engagement between providers and employers, thus ensuring greater alignment between the skills delivered by education and training providers and those required in the workplace."

in companies supported by IDA and Enterprise Ireland.
- Established business ownership rates exceed EU average by 3.2% while the EU average for early stage entrepreneurial activity exceeds the Irish rate by 1.3 percentage points.
- The Action Plan for Jobs 2016 targets a doubling of the jobs impact from start-ups through supporting survival and the growth of new business.
- Some 1.2 million of employees work in the private sector and a significant proportion of these work in export-oriented companies with strong growth which are supported by Enterprise Ireland (EI) and the IDA.
- 90% of our 185,000 enterprises employ fewer than ten people and thus lack the capacity to identify skills needs, to upskill their workers, and to release workers for off-the-job training.
- 376,000 working in the public sector (121,000 in health and 111,000 in education) and there are also skill issues here.

CURRENT SUPPLY AND DEMAND FOR SKILLS IN ECONOMY
- Skills shortages for Professionals and Associate Professionals across sectors in ICT (Software, Data Analytics, Financial Services and Distribution), Science and Engineering.
- Skills shortages for professionals in Financial Services, Health (medical practitioners and nurses) and Construction - surveyors.
- With renewed economic growth, shortages are evident in Freight Transport, Distribution & Logistics.
- Multilingual skills for Associate Professionals in ICT and Sales & Marketing, and for Administrative staff in Financial Services and Freight Transport, Distribution & Logistics.

A further complication is the high level of turnover in the labour market - mainly at the lower end of the skills scale.

FUTURE EMPLOYMENT TARGETS
+ Government is targeting 2.18 in employment by 2020 with unemployment at 6%. This means the need to create 266,000 jobs between end of 2014 and 2020.
+ 12,500 new jobs are being targeted in companies supported by IDA and Enterprise Ireland (Health Sciences, International Traded Services, International Financial Services, Engineering / Industrial Products and Agri-Food) to 2020 and estimated that each of these jobs will generate a further job in rest of economy.
+ As well as these new jobs there will be demand for 400,000 workers to replace those leaving the workforce between now and 2020.

SECTORAL EMPLOYMENT PROJECTIONS
+ Research personnel across all skills levels (technician to PhD) rising from 20,000 currently to 40,000 in 2020.
+ By 2020 an additional 16,500 in agri-food industry.
+ Growth of 60,000 in construction to 2020.
+ 44,500 extra employees in ICT between 2013 and 2018.
+ 55,000 extra jobs in manufacturing from 2011 to 2020.
+ Data analytics - 18,000 extra jobs between 2013 and 2020.
+ Hospitality – growth of between 9,900 and 21,540 from 2015 to 2020.
+ Freight Transport Distribution and Logistics – from 2015 to 2020.

Overall, there should be employment growth in all occupations except farming – assuming no significant economic contraction across the world.

SKILL NEEDS OF IRISH ECONOMY

Looking to the future, Irish workers will need a mix of sectoral, cross sectoral and transversal skills.

Transversal (Generic) Skills

These (creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship, critical and analytical thinking, team work, communication and business acumen) are critical to obtaining and holding employment, to personal development, and are the building blocks for the development of the "vocational" or "technical" skills required in the labour market.

The increased focus on transversal skills which is reflected in the new Framework for Junior Cycle[4] is not intended to detract from the quality of subject content in education but to

> "These (creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship, critical and analytical thinking, team work, communication and business acumen) are critical to obtaining and holding employment, to personal development, and are the building blocks for the development of the "vocational" or "technical" skills required in the labour market. "

ensure that students acquire the skills to use the most up-to-date subject knowledge to make the most of their lives – in the family, in the community and in the workplace. Knowledge without the capacity to apply it is of limited value.

Cross Sectoral Skills

There is increasing convergence between ICT, business, and

engineering, once considered to be unique in their own right. ICT now permeates almost all sectors, and similarly, strong business skills and foreign language skills are relevant across many sectors.

The skills needs in the above table are likely to be across all qualification and experience levels. While most jobs will require qualifications at levels 5 and

──── SECTOR SPECIFIC SKILLS NEEDS ────

SECTOR	SKILLS NEEDS
FINANCIAL SERVICES	Risk, compliance, accounting, business intelligence, ICT and data analytics. These skills can be found in engineering, mathematics, data analytics, business and law graduates.
ICT SECTOR	Core technology skills, e.g. software developers, cloud, security, networking and infrastructure and a combination of the technical skills with business/analytic/ foreign language skills as the skills requirements become more complex.
MANUFACTURING	Scientists with experience and engineers
MEDICAL DEVICES	Mechanical, automation and validation engineers; polymer technicians, software engineers, quality engineers and regulatory compliance experts
BIO-PHARMA	Technicians and senior process scientists, pharma co-vigilance personnel, biotechnologists, biochemists, engineers including precision engineering
FOOD & BEVERAGES	R&D scientists, food technologists and technicians with new product development skills; international sales/marketing with languages for international trade
LEISURE, TOURISM & HOSPITALITY	Chefs: commis, demi, pastry and chef de partie.
FREIGHT, TRANSPORT & LOGISTICS	Graduate- managers, planners and ICT staff; skilled warehouse staff and HGV drivers
WHOLESALE & RETAIL	Accountancy, supply chain management, retail marketing and data mining of retail data, finance and human resource management
CONSTRUCTION	Chartered surveyors; internationalisation and management capability; ICT, Building Information Modelling (BIM) systems and Green Economy skills.

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4   www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/pub_national_skills_strategy_2025.pdf

6, replacement demand caused by retirements and other departures will result in significant job opportunities at levels 3 and 4.

Skills forecasts need to be mediated by structured and continuous dialogue, locally and nationally, between the education and training providers and employers. The new Regional Skills Fora should assist here.

IRELAND'S LABOUR MARKET

- 1 million of 4.8 million population is under 15 and 60% of workforce will be working in 2035. Given continuously changing skills needs, the education and training sector will have to strike a balance between catering to school leavers and upskilling workers – irrespective of their occupation or educational level. This will present particular challenges for those on NFQ levels 1 to 3.
- Reskilling/upskilling can entail on the job training, short courses, industry certification and formal education and training. People do not need a full NFQ award to progress in the workforce. An intensive short course or a course at the same level in a different discipline combined with work experience is sufficient.
- 30% (900,000) of working age are economically inactive and 17% of those hold a third-level qualification.
- Skills development for long-term unemployed is a priority given that 15.7% of those with less than higher secondary education are unemployed compared with 10.8% of those with a minimum of higher secondary education.
- Those beyond retirement age will grow from 500,000 in 2011 to 855,000 by 2026 and to almost 1.4 million by 2046. These will also have learning needs.
- The recession resulted in large outward migration resulting in the number of 20-29 year-olds falling by 26% (200,000). With recovery,

we are now trying to attract these back home.
- Substantial numbers have migrated into Ireland and gained employment. Despite our unemployment, skill shortages, particularly in ICT and healthcare, see us continuing to bring in workers from abroad – indeed from outside the EU.

DEVELOPMENTS IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN IRELAND

- The *raison d'être* of Ireland's education and training system is to equip people with the skills and knowledge that will best help them as they move through life.
- Since 2008, education and training providers coped well with changing employment circumstances, reduced resources and increased enrolments – 171,000 in the last decade.
- Education and training is being reformed to ensure all learners acquire the knowledge and skills they need to participate fully in society and the economy. This reform recognises the importance of all levels of education and training as integral elements of a framework for lifelong learning and skills development which starts through quality early childhood provision and is continually developed during school years and in learning beyond school. The reforms consist of system reforms at every level – curriculum reforms and initiatives related to improving quality, accountability and inclusion.[5]

- Education and training beyond school comprises further education and training (FET) and higher education (HE). The coherence of these two systems is grounded in the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). Integration between FET and HE, with the interests of the learner and employer central, is central to the new skills strategy by aiming to provide seamless progression routes for learners.
- FET and HE are being comprehensively reformed in line with the Further Education and Training Strategy[6] and the Higher Education Strategy to 2030[7].
- SOLAS (Further Education and Training Authority)[8] plans, funds and coordinates FET provision. A new funding model based on performance is being implemented through the agreement of annual FET Service Plans with ETBs. These plans facilitate framework progress being monitored against agreed quality and delivery targets. In future, only courses that deliver positive outcomes for participants will be funded going forward. Courses with unsuccessful outcomes will be adapted, restructured or terminated.
- The Higher Education Authority leads implementation of the Higher Education System Performance Framework 2014-16[9] which involves agreements with publicly-funded higher education institutions and the rollout of performance funding.
- The work of the public providers of

"This reform recognises the importance of all levels of education and training as integral elements of a framework for lifelong learning and skills development which starts through quality early childhood provision and is continually developed during school years and in learning beyond school.

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5 See Chapter 5 of Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2025; www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/pub_national_skills_strategy_2025.pdf
6 www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/Further-Education-and-Training-Strategy-2014-2019.pdf
7 www.hea.ie/sites/default/files/national_strategy_for_higher_education_2030.pdf
8 www1.solas.ie/Pages/HomePage.aspx
9 http://www.skillnets.ie/ttp://www.hea.ie/en/policy/national-strategy/higher-education-system-performance-2014-16

HE and FET is complemented by that of private providers who have demonstrated good practices in the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and these will be included in the development of system-wide capacity for RPL.

+ The establishment of ETBs facilitates the coordination of FET provision locally and enhances capacity to flexibly respond to skill needs. The former FÁS training centres provide ETBs with a network of local employer links, a system for contracting training provision and expertise in a wide range of specific skill areas.

+ Skillnets[10] enables networks (currently 60) of employers, regionally or sectorally, to come together to procure common training for their employees.

+ Given Ireland's open economy, a key priority is to ensure that education and training produces graduates capable of building and sustaining internationally-oriented, globally competitive enterprises. Language skills are critical to achieving this goal as is study or work placement abroad – for students, staff and researchers. Currently, 14% of level 8 graduates study or undertake a placement abroad and EU target for 2020 is 20%. The implementation of soon-to-be-published International Education Strategy will encourage the attraction of talent from around the world to our high quality education institutions and provide opportunities to send students, researchers and academics to partner institutions abroad.

Other developments in train:

✓ Reform and expansion of apprenticeship system to ensure those entering the workforce at sub-graduate level have appropriate skills and dispositions – with educational progression routes for those completing apprenticeships.

"Employers are well-satisfied with FET and HE graduate recruits across a range of personal and workplace attributes, including computer and technical literacy, working effectively with others and numeracy/processing numerical data. But they are less satisfied with graduates' business acumen, entrepreneurship and foreign languages."

✓ Development of Career Traineeships by SOLAS in collaboration with ETBs and enterprise to develop an effective model of work-based learning, primarily at levels 4 and 5, incorporating best international practice – currently being piloted with the Hospitality and Engineering sectors.

✓ The target is to support the delivery of 50,000 apprenticeship and traineeship places up to 2020. Strong employer commitment is critical to achieving this target.

✓ Ongoing roll-out of Momentum[11] and Springboard[12] to provide enterprise-relevant skills and progression to sustainable employment for unemployed.

✓ Establishment of Technological Universities and formation of regional clusters of higher education institutions.

✓ Introduction of a professional development framework for teachers in higher education.

✓ Development of a CPD Strategy for staff delivering FET in ETBs and the development of a strategy for technology-enhanced learning (TEL) in FET.

✓ Development of a Workforce Development Strategy around upskilling those in employment.

✓ Development and rollout of ICT-related strategies for HE and FET.

✓ Roll-out of National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-2019[13]. Overall participation of students with disabilities in HE grew from fewer than 1,000 in 1993 to nearly 10,000 in 2013, and new plan contains targets for specific categories of students currently under-represented in HE.

✓ Progression of Transitions Reform[14] to help second-level students prepare to enter and remain in HE.

✓ The work of the Expert Group on the Future Funding of HE[15] will lead to the implementation of new approaches to funding third-level studies and probably include some kind of student loan scheme.

SATISFACTION WITH EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN IRELAND

■ Employers are well-satisfied with FET and HE graduate recruits across a range of personal and workplace attributes, including computer and technical literacy, working effectively with others and numeracy/processing numerical data. But they are less satisfied with graduates' business acumen, entrepreneurship and foreign languages.

■ There is dissatisfaction with the responsiveness of education and training to emerging employer needs and the quantity of graduates in STEM disciplines and, in particular, ICT graduates.

■ Employers need to engage with education and training providers to create a shared understanding of their skills needs and how they can be addressed.

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10 http://www.skillnets.ie/ttp://www.hea.ie/en/policy/national-strategy/higher-education-system-performance-2014-16

11 www.momentumskills.ie/

12 www.springboardcourses.ie/

13 www.hea.ie/node/1622

14 www.hea.ie/en/policy/policy-development/transitions-reform

15 www.education.ie/en/The-Education-System/Higher-Education/Higher-Education-Funding-Irish-Higher-education-A-Constructive-and-Realistic-Discussion-of-the-Options-Discussion-Paper-3-.pdf

OBJECTIVES	KEY ACTIONS
OBJECTIVE 1 Education and training providers will place a stronger focus on providing skills development opportunities that are relevant to the needs of learners, society and the economy	1. Students at all stages will learn 21st Century Skills – involving a balance between transversal skills and up-to-date subject knowledge. 2. Participation in STEM education will grow – essential to knowledge intensive industries. Innovation 2020[17] includes a range of measures to support the growth of STEM. 3. Beyond school, there will be enhanced integration, partnerships and synergy between the FET and HE sectors. The capacity of the FET sector to meet demand for mid-level skills is not well understood and needs to be addressed.
OBJECTIVE 2 Employers will participate actively in the development of skills and make effective use of skills in their organisations to improve productivity and competitiveness	1. Employers will participate in skills development through active collaboration with education and training providers – structures will be developed to foster a systematic approach. 2. The capability of SMEs will be enhanced through skills development. 3. Workforce planning in public sector will be improved to ensure the right numbers with the skills are employed in the right place at the right time. 4. Research and innovation will be promoted, SMEs supported to engage in research and innovation, foreign-owned firms encouraged to locate research activities in Ireland, and engagement between industry and higher education facilitated. 5. Improved employer participation will strengthen the promotion and communication of career opportunities.
OBJECTIVE 3 The quality of teaching and learning at all stages of education and training will be continually enhanced and evaluated	1. Quality will be embedded in the delivery of Early-years services and DES Inspectorate will undertake education focused inspections in early childhood education settings. 2. Teaching and learning in schools will be improved by investing in high quality teacher education, continuous professional development and evaluation. 3. FET and HE will provide high quality learning experiences leading to better outcomes. Further Education and Training Strategy 2014 – 2019 is underpinned by several developments: Teaching Council's accreditation of ITE programmes for FET sector, SOLAS profiling of skills base in ETBs to inform the development of a CPD Strategy for ETB staff involved in delivering FET, reviews of FET programmes (PLC Review 2016), QQI's monitoring and promotion of quality in FET sector, QQI's validation of all FET programmes, etc. In HE, a new Systems Performance Framework sets out system-level objectives for all publicly funded HE institutions and this includes teaching and learning and the student experience.
OBJECTIVE 4 People across Ireland will engage more in lifelong (all purposeful learning activity whether formal, non-formal or informal) learning	1. The benefits of lifelong learning will be promoted and communicated to the full population of Ireland. 2. There will be more and easier opportunities for those in employment to engage in education and training – particularly older and low-skilled workers. 3. There will be greater recognition of workplace (in company training, 'on the job' training, team work and problem solving activities, work placement/experience, etc.) learning and capacity for recognition of prior learning will be developed. 4. Career guidance will be strengthened significantly, with the aid of employer engagement.
OBJECTIVE 5 There will be a specific focus on active inclusion to support participation in education and training and the labour market	1. Disadvantaged and under-represented groups will be supported to participate in education and training. 2. Jobseekers will be supported to find the best possible job. 3. Older workers will be encouraged to remain active in the labour market. 4. Economically inactive and under-represented groups will be helped to increase their labour market participat
OBJECTIVE 6 We will support an increase in the supply of skills to the labour market	1. International migrants with in-demand skills will be attracted to Ireland. 2. There will be increased mobility of higher education researchers into industry. 3. Irish emigrants will be encouraged to return home to meet the skills demand.

> "The great strength of the new Skills Strategy is that it pulls together into a coherent whole all that is being done and needs to be done to ensure that Ireland has the knowledge, skills and competences to maximise social cohesion, individual fulfilment and economic prosperity in the period to 2025 and beyond. Achieving the Strategy's vision is not about one element in the whole process working well, it is about all elements working well and working together seamlessly ... "

■ Careers in STEM need to be promoted, particularly to women.

SKILLS STRATEGY – THE UNDERPINNING VISION

Ireland will be renowned at home and abroad as a place where the talent of our people thrives through:

1. The quality and relevance of our education and training base, which is responsive to the changing and diverse needs of our people, society and the economy;
2. The strength of relationships and transfer of knowledge between employers, education and training providers, and all sections of society, and the resulting impact on how people are prepared for life and work;
3. The quality of our workforce – a nation of people armed with relevant knowledge, entrepreneurial agility and analytical skills;
4. The effective use of skills to support economic and social prosperity, and to enhance the well-being of our country;
5. The effective use of technology to support talent and skills provision, to grow enterprise and to enhance the lives of all within society.

Realising this vision will benefit Ireland in a number of ways.

+ It will improve the lives of people of all ages by enabling them to participate more successfully in social, civic and working life and improving their sense of wellbeing.

+ It will make Ireland a better place to live and to work. Well-educated people are less at risk of marginalisation and social exclusion.
+ It will drive sustainable economic growth. A workforce with high-quality relevant skills improves productivity, attracts foreign-owned firms to invest here and drives indigenous enterprise development.
+ Skills Strategy Implementation – a shared responsibility
+ Implementation of the Skills Strategy requires engagement from learners, employers, educators, government departments and agencies.
+ Employers, for example, can ensure that graduates have work-relevant skills by providing high quality work placement

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The great strength of the new Skills Strategy is that it pulls together into a coherent whole all that is being done and needs to be done to ensure that Ireland has the knowledge, skills and competences to maximise social cohesion, individual fulfilment and economic prosperity in the period to 2025 and beyond.

Achieving the Strategy's vision is not about one element in the whole process working well, it is about all elements working well and working together seamlessly – from early

childhood education to education programmes for the elderly. Though Ireland is a small country, we have over time become extremely atomised – with a whole host of publicly-funded independent authorities each working independently. The great challenge for those who lead the implementation of this strategy is to get coherence, integration and collaboration across the myriad of entities, in order, for example, to ensure: integration and progression across all levels of education and training; comprehensive and up-to-date careers advice is available to those in education and in the workforce; employers understand the skills delivered by education and training providers and education; and training providers appreciate the skills needs of industry and commerce; and so on. It is essential that tackling these challenges is appropriately resourced and quality assured.

The decision to establish a new National Skills Council (NSC), involving all stakeholders, to advise on skills priorities and to promote and report on the delivery of responses by the education and training providers to those priorities, is most welcome, as is the decision to establish a new Unit within the DES to support the National Skills Council and enhance a co-ordinated response to skills needs across the different sectors of education and training and oversee the development of the Regional Skills Fora and the development of links between the Council and the fora.

Reliable, relevant and current data is essential to all this work and the development of the SOLAS Programme and Learner Support System (PLSS) should assist in this regard.

The critical question, of course, is how we will evaluate the extent to which the Skills Strategy is having the desired effect. Here, there are a number of national and international metrics that allow us to track the impact of the strategy and these are detailed towards the end of chapter 6[18].

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16 This table on previous page is very much a brief summary of the detail contained in Chapter 6 of the Skills Strategy – pp 67-108
17 www.djei.ie/en/Publications/Innovation-2020.html
18 www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/pub_national_skills_strategy_2025.pdf - pp114-120

FE GAINING CURRENCY AND RECOGNITION

WITH TECH EMPLOYERS

Peter Davitt, CEO of FIT

The recently published National Skills Strategy 2025 states, *"Increasingly Ireland is competing globally on the basis of talent and on Ireland's growing reputation for innovation. Winning the war for talent can be achieved by ensuring that all of Ireland's citizens have access to the skills they need to succeed in life; and Irish business has the people with the skills they need to grow. This is also critical to securing our recovery and ensuring Ireland's people share in that recovery."*

From the FIT perspective we are witnessing significant growth and opportunity for job seekers who attain medium level tech skills (L5 & L6) with practical application. The FIT ICT Associate Professional (FIT ICTAP) programme commenced in May 2015. Already over 80 companies have sponsored 128 unemployed jobseekers across the country on this first-of-its-kind, dual-education / apprenticeship-type programme at L6 and this figure will exceed 220 before the year end. Pillars of the tech industry in Ireland, namely IBEC, ICT Ireland and the Irish Software Association (ISA) describe FIT ICTAP in a recent joint publication **Making Ireland a Global Technology Powerhouse** as a 'game changer' and request that 'the next Government must promote this innovative educational scheme and encourage participation'. Five FIT ICTAP programmes are currently running with the collaboration and support of CDETB, CETB, DDLETB and LWETB, with further courses planned to commence in CDETB, CETB, CMETB, GRETB, KWETB, LOETB, and LMETB during 2016. Feedback to date from sponsoring companies on the calibre of the candidates and their growing competencies is overwhelmingly positive and enthusiastic – to the extent we are now seeing some companies advance-booking places on future planned programmes as part of their talent planning strategies.

It is important to note that the report published by IBEC, ICT Ireland and the ISA emphasises that the single biggest challenge for the global tech sector is access to the *right talent* ... and clearly states that this is not solely about STEM abilities, but access to business acumen and savvy, technical application, critical communications skills, team work, project management and the ability to embrace and be comfortable with ambiguity. It proposes that countries that address these needs best will lead the technology revolution.

The FIT ICT Skills Audit 2014, identified requirements for Third Level qualifications; however the overwhelming demand highlighted within the tech sector was for competent and entry-level tech skills which could well be satisfied through relevant programmes at L5 & L6 on the NFQ. While some may have thought this was wishful thinking on the part of FIT, there is mounting evidence emerging which validates this view.

In addition to the growing demand to engage in FIT ICTAP, which is supported by SOLAS, other recent examples of the reassessment of the currency and contribution of FE that is ongoing include the following.

■ Underpinning the phenomenal rate of advancement in technology is a vibrant and innovative manufacturing sector which is a major employer of maintenance technicians. Intel, a global name and a highly respected and valued employer in Ireland, engaged with FIT in the development of an advanced Manufacturing Technician Programme (L6) which has just commenced in a centre of excellence established in partnership with KWETB in Celbridge and supported by SOLAS. This programme is designed to position female and male candidates to pursue challenging and rewarding careers in the multi-faceted role of manufacturing process support in a wide variety of settings. Candidates who successfully complete this programme are equipped to become members of multi-disciplinary teams of professionals including manufacturing, mechanical and electrical engineers, systems support, process supervisors, safety professionals, quality assurance and others associated with the planning, implementation and maintenance of control systems. The first of its kind, demand for the programme is such that we are having to bring forward the start dates for the subsequent courses planned.

■ 'In-demand' technology courses, developed by FIT as a result of the skills audit findings and run under the SOLAS Momentum programme in collaboration with a number of ETBs, are achieving substantial placements into employment – again these are L5 & L6 programmes.

(L-R): Fiona Hartley, Executive Director Strategy and Knowledge, SOLAS, Sean Ashe, Chief Executive KWETB, Peter Davitt, CEO FIT, Paul Sweetman, Director ICT Ireland/ISA, IBEC, Damien English T.D., Minister for Skills, Research and Innovation and Eamonn Sinnott, General Manager, Intel Ireland.

- Internationally, just last month, Deloitte, a global consulting firm, stated that a third level qualification was no longer a requirement for job applicants.
- FIT partners with ETBs in addressing skills needs and recruitment demands of predominantly tech and related sectors and I am pleased to say that we are seeing significant placements – into real jobs – reminiscent of pre-recession times.
- FIT is currently undertaking research into the tech-related sectors of eHealth, FinTech and the Internet of Things (IoT), and initial findings suggest similar interest and opportunity for jobseekers attaining mid-level skills which can be readily attained through FE programmes.

FIT's goal is to meet the immediate and emerging skills needs of leading employers who are spearheading growth and recovery in the Irish economy – but in doing so, it is committed to providing real opportunities and prospects to those who have borne the biggest burden and experienced the most hardships of the recession, namely the unemployed and in particular, the long-term unemployed.

We live in a time where technology is constantly evolving to make more things possible and all things easier, smarter, and more connected than ever before. Every aspect of our society today, from education, healthcare, enterprise, transportation to our homes and the physical environments around us are being transformed by the potential of technology, which has transitioned to support nearly every aspect our daily lives. With industry analysts estimating that there will be 50 billion connected devices in the world by 2020, it is clear that the potential in terms of growth, innovation and opportunity is unparalleled, particularly for a small open economy like ours. As the economy gains strength and grows, Ireland can benefit greatly and cohesively by tapping into the skills, energy and enthusiasm of a new stream of diverse entrants and encouraging and supporting them to join the multi-disciplinary teams that are core to delivering this vision.

The range of skills needed within knowledge-intensive sectors of the Irish economy is wider than many assume. A key finding of the FIT ICT Skills Audits 2014 is that many of Ireland's flagship sectors (e.g. ICT, business processes, financial and commercial services, logistics, advanced manufacturing, etc.) are not graduate enclaves, and many employed in them are performing roles for which being a graduate is not necessary. The primary concern today of employers in these sectors is access to skills and to those who can do the job, rather than qualifications and where they were acquired. The Skills Audit highlighted that 75% of 7,000 existing vacancies required skill sets that could be addressed through FE programmes ranging from 6 to 24 months in duration. Demand at this level is complementary to the strong demand for graduates, but there needs to be much more awareness of the opportunities at this level amongst students, parents, career guidance specialists, job seekers and the wider community. It is hugely significant for the 35% of young people not entering third level, many of whom may avail of an FE pathway.

FIT has steadily developed and refined its procedures and assessment tools for selecting and placing individuals on courses which they have the capacity and motivation to complete successfully. It attends to trainees with 'wrap-around' supports while on their courses, and for up to three years afterwards, in terms of securing employment, retaining employment and progression. FIT has worked on building employer confidence in the credibility of suitably-trained long-term unemployed as a source of new employees.

FIT's specific mission is to assist marginalised jobseekers, particularly the long-term unemployed, to develop the attributes and acquire the skills and competencies that will win them employment in companies and sectors of the economy experiencing real skill shortages. Through its collaboration with public FE provision, FIT has facilitated training programmes for over 16,500 jobseekers since its inception in 1999, most of which have been delivered through partnership with ETBs (formerly VECs and FÁS Training). To date over 12,500 participants have seized the opportunity, honed their skills, realised their potential and secured quality employment. Our goal is for this figure to exceed 20,000 by 2020 – that is, 20,000 unemployed people will be in employment by 2020 as a result of FIT supported programmes. The leading companies who make up the FIT Board are committed and determined to the realisation of this goal.

With the continuous support of our partners and growing employer confidence in the currency of FE, this goal is not only achievable, but exceedable!

A New Skills Agenda for Europe

By Sarah Kik, Assistant General Secretary EFEE / sarah.kik@educationemployers.eu

At the end of January 2016, the European Commission (EC) launched a consultation for European Social Partners on "A New Skills Agenda for Europe". With this initiative the European Commission aims to contribute to ensuring higher and more relevant skills for all, promoting better visibility and use of available skills, and reaching a better understanding of skills needs and trends in the labour market. The input of the European Social Partners will contribute to a Communication by the EC, which is due to be published in May 2016.

As a recognised European Social Partner for the education sector, the European Federation of Education Employers (EFEE) (www.educationemployers.eu), of which ETBI is a member, was asked to express its views on the priorities for a new skills agenda. In close cooperation with ETBI and other members, EFEE prepared a position paper in which we underlined the strong and urgent need to focus on ensuring higher and more relevant skills for all European citizens. The economic downturn and high unemployment rates have demonstrated painfully the gap that exists in some European countries between the world of work and the world of education. Graduates are unable to find work, while at the same time vacancies remain unfilled and companies are unable to find suitable candidates with relevant skills and competences.

In a world where change is constant, neither education and training providers nor enterprises can predict accurately what specific skills and competences will be required in the workplaces of the future. Consequently, EFEE underlined that the emphasis should be on the provision of key competences and the inculcation of attitudes that provide workers with the capacity to go on learning for the whole of their lives so that they may be able to adapt effectively to the changes that will affect their lives.

Furthermore, EFEE emphasised in its position paper the importance of developing stronger cooperation between the world of work and the world of education and training. Apprenticeships, internships and work-based learning are effective means for improving the transition between both worlds. Local and regional partnerships between schools, businesses and local/regional governments could contribute to ensuring young people acquire the skills and dispositions relevant skills to gaining and retaining employment.

However it is important to underline that education must not be seen only in the context of skills for employability. Education must also provide learners with the skills and dispositions to be critical thinkers and to live fulfilled, sustainable and constructive lives – in the family, in the community and as active citizens in an inclusive democratic

society. In this regard, education systems need to have a holistic rather than a narrow and exclusively vocational focus. This is particularly important nowadays in the light of the Paris Declaration[1], and our wish and duty to promote citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education and training.

In the EC's consultation paper much emphasis has been placed on education and training for the labour market and employability. However, in order to raise the profile and relevance of VET, EFEE is of the opinion that the EC would need to further emphasise the holistic education dimension of VET and thus the requirement for all VET programmes to adequately comprehend the key competences for lifelong learning in order to maximise learner engagement and ensure that learners acquire the capacity to continuously adapt to change.

Moreover EFEE underlined that, in order to provide learners with the competences they need – whether for life or for work – in our fast-changing society, schools need to be modern and offer innovative learning environments. Schools and universities should provide a professional working environment for our teachers, professors and researchers and an interesting learning community for our pupils and students, to foster a culture of openness and continuous learning for all.

EFEE stressed that open learning environments require the leaders of educational institutions to play an active role in developing a strategic vision for their institutions so that they may become connected learning communities that stimulate their staffs to strive continuously for innovation in teaching and learning.

For example, during EFEE's Peer Learning Activity in Flanders on "Excellence and Innovation in Education"[2], we saw the important role school leaders play in creating an innovative working and learning climate at school. Within the framework of GO! Campus Hoboken in Antwerp, three schools (one primary[3], one secondary[4] and one adult education school[5]) work closely together to provide for open and intergenerational education. Youngsters and adults are offered the opportunity to gain work-experience within the campus (for example at the primary and secondary school) and young pupils learn skills and competences from the older students. Everyone works together in the so-called "open learning centre". This open learning centre is also open for youngsters and adults living in the community, and integration courses are being organised in this place, all with a view to lowering the barriers for adults with low skills to enter a learning environment, without being officially registered in a school first. In addition, the school for adult education offers a whole range of distance and e-learning courses to enable their students to combine study with their work-life.

EFEE further stressed that, in order to make efficient use of the possibilities created by new digital technologies, it is essential that the workforce in public services acquires digital skills. EFEE sees the development of digital skills as a necessary investment in our school leaders, professors, teachers and trainers, so that they may ensure the best possible work and life outcomes for their students – thus guaranteeing the prosperity and social cohesion of Europe. Digital skills development provides an opportunity to increase quality, efficiency and equity in education. Furthermore, it is important to mention that initial teacher education is no longer sufficient over the span of a teaching career. All teachers should have their vocational and pedagogical competences regularly updated through participation in appropriate professional development, performance management and self-evaluation programmes.

However, one should also be mindful that acquiring and further developing digital skills is not the sole responsibility of public service employers, but rather a joint effort involving all the key players in the sector: national and local authorities, teacher training institutions, VET providers, teachers, employers, trade unions, schools, school leaders and other stakeholders. Therefore, the financial and administrative burdens need to be shared between these stakeholders. Together, we need to be innovative in providing training: peer learning and train-the-trainers also provide welcome learning opportunities, underlined EFEE.

Regarding better visibility and use of available skills, EFEE stressed the need to improve recognition of skills acquired in flexible, non-school-like settings and through further training. Therefore it would be good to reflect at European level on what is exactly meant by "learning outcomes". However, EFEE is of the opinion that the European Commission should not strive towards standardisation of learning outcomes, as learning, training and education systems are highly diverse in Europe. Instead, we should opt for flexible pathways rather than standardised formats.

Last but not least, EFEE underlined the importance of an interdisciplinary approach to the Skills Agenda. In order to develop higher and more relevant skills for all, there is a need for collaboration between all the stakeholders: education and training providers, public service providers, teacher training institutions, universities, research institutes, businesses, public service providers, SMEs, social partners, etc. EFEE therefore suggested that at EC level all relevant Directorate Generals should be involved in this initiative and that the services of DG EMPL, DG EAC, DG CONNECT and DG RTD work closely together on these issues.

EFEE will closely follow the developments of the initiative for a new Skills Agenda for Europe and will make sure that our voice of education employers will be heard at European level. If you have any questions regarding our work, please do not hesitate to contact us. I can be reached at sarah.kik@ educationemployers.eu

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1   www.ec.europa.eu/education/news/2015/documents/citizenship-education-declaration_en.pdf
2   EFEE Peer Learning Activity to Flanders on "Excellence and innovation in education and supporting a new generation of educators", 15 October 2015, hosted by GO! Education of the Flemmish Community (member of EFEE); outcomes are available here
3   Freinetschool De Pluim: www.freinetschooldepluim.be
4   Atheneum Hoboken: http://kahoboken.sgr1.g-o.be/
5   CVO Antwerpen: http://www.cvoantwerpen.be/

EDUCATION AND TRAINING BOARDS
Safety Management System

By John Kearney and Rosemary Ryan

INTRODUCTION

Safety management is to the forefront of all activities undertaken by the Education and Training Boards (ETBs). The sixteen ETBs have recently engaged in a project to enable them to demonstrate a positive culture to support employees, students, contractors and others by developing and implementing a safety management system (SMS). Legislative compliance is a key requirement of all ETBs and this includes compliance with the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005 and the associated Regulations.

As part of the SMS, ETBs will be required to evidence their compliance and commitment to Safety, Health and Welfare by auditing the SMS. This will support good governance in respect of the management of employee safety, health and welfare and, will have far-reaching effects on those who may be affected by the activities of an ETB. This far reaching effect can be communicated to students and others, such as contractors, while being evidenced by the culture that pervades an ETB. The tone at the top can send a very powerful message to all employees and others such as contractors, of the level of commitment

by management and those who lead within the ETB.

SAFETY MANAGEMENT PROJECT STEERING GROUP

To enhance this positive safety culture, and in the interests of the ETBs as members of the mutual, Irish Pubic Bodies Mutual Insurances Ltd (IPB Insurance) agreed to facilitate the ETBs in their work. A project steering group was established in September 2015 with the support of all Chief Executives. Martin O'Brien, Chief Executive, Cavan Monaghan ETB agreed to act as Project Sponsor; and John Kearney, Education Officer, Cavan Monaghan ETB, was appointed as Project Manager. Each ETB was requested to nominate an employee to represent their ETB on the Project Steering Group and to develop the required outputs for the SMS. The nominees represent all disciplines and include:

PROJECT STEERING GROUP TERMS OF REFERENCE

The terms of reference of the Safety Management Steering Group as agreed at a meeting on 24th November 2015 are:

1. Identify Project Sponsor (one ETB CEO)
2. Identify Project Manager (Education Officer)
3. Identify one representative from each of the 16 Education and Training Boards to participate, contribute and support the development and implementation of a bespoke safety management system for the Education and Training Board Sector
4. Ensure there is representation on the project board from all disciplines within the Education and Training Boards
5. Draft the following outputs to support the Safety Management System:
   a. Guidance on Development of a Safety Management System for Education and Training Boards
   b. Required policies and procedures to support the management of key safety, health and welfare risks
   c. Safety Inspection Toolkit
   d. Safety Management Audit Tool
   e. Required supporting documentation/manuals
6. Provide reports on progress at least quarterly to the Project Manager, and for onward transmission to the Project Sponsor
7. Agree a timetable for the delivery of the outputs
8. Ensure good project governance
9. Review the Terms of Reference on a regular basis.

It is expected that the duration of the project will be two years. When all outputs are produced they will be brought to the attention of all ETBs through awareness seminars.

SAFETY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM OUTPUTS

The SMS outputs will include the development of template policies and procedures (P&P) to support the management of key safety, health and welfare risks. These will support each ETB to demonstrate compliance with legislation, codes of practice, standards and guidance. The prioritisation of the P&Ps is based on the level of risk assessed by the project steering group. To date the following four P&Ps have been drafted:

1. Document control
2. Risk assessment
3. Critical incidents
4. Work related vehicles

These four draft P&Ps are being consulted upon at the moment so please ask your nominated representative for a copy if you have not already seen these documents.

The next P&Ps which are currently under development are:

1. Staff safety induction
2. Incident reporting
3. Electrical installations
4. Statutory inspections undertaken by the Health and Safety Authority Inspector
5. Fire safety

ETB	NOMINEE	WORK TITLE
Cavan Monaghan ETB	John Kearney	Education Officer & Project Manager
Tipperary ETB	Bernie Harty	Head of Corporate Governance
Waterford & Wexford ETB	Fintan O'Reilly	APO, Corporate Affairs
Mayo Sligo & Leitrim ETB	(1) Mary Madden (2) Gerry McGovern	(1) Education Officer (2) Corporate Affairs
Laois & Offaly ETB	Kathleen Donnellan	Administrative Officer
Cork ETB	Mary O'Leary	Assistant Principal Officer
Cavan Monaghan ETB	Fiona Nugent	Corporate Services
Kerry ETB	(1) Jeremy Wrenn (2) Donal Dowd	(1) Education Team (2) Manager, Cappanalea Outdoor Training & Education Centre
Donegal ETB	Frankie Quinn	Corporate Services
Limerick & Clare ETB	Aileen O'Sullivan	Administrative Officer, Corporate Affairs
City of Dublin ETB	Dan Bradley	Principal
Dublin & Dun Laoghaire ETB	Charles Forrestal	Assistant Manager, Training Centre, Tallaght
Kildare & Wicklow ETB	Mary Dillon	Corporate Affairs
Kilkenny & Carlow ETB	Arlene Carrigan	Corporate Affairs
Longford & Westmeath ETB	Christy Duffy	Chief Executive
Louth & Meath ETB	Bernadette Walsh	Head of Corporate & Education Services
Galway Roscommon ETB	Charlotte Quinn	Buildings Project Manager/ Health & Safety

6. Preventative maintenance

Another key activity to be undertaken by the Project Steering Group will be to develop tools to support the ETBs to build a body of assurance to evidence how it is managing safety. The assurance tools will include:

1. Safety inspection toolkit to support those who manage staff safety (commenced)
2. Audit tool to support end to end audit of the safety management system.

CHANGE MANAGEMENT

The implementation of the SMS outputs will be dependent on each ETB ratifying the outputs and supporting their implementation. It is also dependent on each employee demonstrating their commitment to safety management. It should be acknowledged that the outputs when implemented will have a significant impact on each ETB employee as safety management involves everybody.

LEGISLATIVE COMPLIANCE

Part 2; Chapters 1, 2 and 3 of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005 details the responsibilities in respect of:

- General duties of employer (section 8)
- Information for employees (section 9)
- Instruction, training and supervision of employees (section 10)
- Emergencies and serious and imminent dangers (section 11)
- General duties of employers to persons other than their employees (section 12)
- Duties of employees (section 13)
- Interference, misuse, etc. (section 14)
- General duties of persons in control of places of work, etc. (section 15).

Chapter 3 describes the general duties of other persons:

- General duties of designers, manufacturers, importers and suppliers of articles and substances (section 16)
- Duties related to construction work (section 17).

Part 3 of the Act describes the protective and preventive measures that should be undertaken by the employer:

- Protective and Preventive Measures (section 18)
- Hazard identification and risk assessment (section 19)
- Safety statement (section 20)
- Duty of employers to co-operate (section 21)
- Health surveillance (section 22)
- Medical fitness to work (section 23)
- Joint safety and health agreements (section 24).

Part 4 of the Act describes the safety representative and safety consultation:

- Safety representatives (section 25)
- Consultation and participation of employees, safety committees (section 26).

RESPONSIBILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Every employee should ensure they are familiar with their responsibilities as detailed in the legislation. In addition they should be familiar with the requirements of the:

> Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations, 2007 – 2012
> Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Construction) Regulations, 2013.

To support ETB employees, IPB Insurance has published a number of risk guides to support compliance such as:

> Managing the risk of slips, trips and falls
> Securing loads for transport
> Managing statutory inspections of engineering plant and equipment
> Safe use of ladders in the workplace
> Managing serious incidents where there is a risk of criminal investigation
> Managing road and footpath risks
> Managing risk on educational trips
> Managing educational institution risk for students with medical conditions or disabilities
> Managing motorised vehicle risk
> Managing engineering plant and equipment risk
> Managing risk in recreational facilities

The risk guides can be obtained in hard or soft copy by contacting marketing@ipb.ie. These guides can be made available to employees so that they are aware of their responsibilities for managing safety, health and welfare within their ETB.

We would welcome your feedback on the development of the SMS as well as any questions you may have which require clarification; please contact your nominee for assistance.

Useful information resources are available on the Health and Safety Authority website at: www.hsa.ie where you can source information on legislation, codes of practice and guidance. The Authority also publishes safety alerts in respect of serious incidents as well as outcomes of court proceedings where the learning needs to be taken and implemented.

John Kearney serves as Education Officer with the Cavan and Monaghan Education Board and has a keen interest in strategic planning and risk management. He is currently Chairman of the ETB Safety Management System Project Steering Group. Contact John at johnkearney@ipb.ie.

Rosemary Ryan joined IPB Insurance in 2000 as Risk Manager following a career in the health service as Director of Nursing in St James's Hospital, Dublin and Altnagelvin Hospitals H&SS Trust, Derry. She leads the provision of client enterprise risk management services and has developed models of best practice to support the management of business risk in the health service and the local and education authorities. Rosemary also provides expert advice to clients on the management of complex risks. She represents the company at various fora, such as the NSAI standards development committees and the HSA's Work Related Vehicle Safety Consultative Committee and Focal Point Group. Rosemary was instrumental in IPB being recognised at the Insurance Times Awards in 2010 for her work in developing business risk models; and at the international European Risk Management Awards in 2012, where IPB received a 'highly commended' award; and also for the 2012 Chambers Ireland Award for the Local Authority Safety Management System. Contact Rosemary at rosemary.ryan@ipb.ie.

'BEING LGBT IN SCHOOL'
is still not easy for all

By Sandra Irwin Gowran

Earlier this year a new resource for post-primary schools and colleges was launched by the Minister for Education and Skills, Jan O'Sullivan, in the presence of most of the key professionals working within the educational community. That the launch had been much anticipated is an understatement, as a growing number of school leaders have been seeking support around these issues in recent years.

The title of this 76-page document, 'Being LGBT in School: A Resource for Post-Primary Schools to Prevent Homophobic and Transphobic Bullying and Support LGBT Students'[1] is as good a descriptor of the content as any and its publication represents another significant outcome for the Department of Education and Skills National Action Plan on Bullying.

THE LEGACY OF THE MARRIAGE REFERENDUM

With the Yes campaign's handsome win in last year's marriage referendum, one would be forgiven for thinking that LGBT people have achieved equality, and organisations such as GLEN (Gay and Lesbian Equality Network)[2] can shut up shop and move on to other important equality issues. If only that were true. While we have gained enormously in terms of equal status in society and in law, there is still considerable work to be done culturally to get us to the point where one's LGBT identity is 'unremarkable'; where young people can be 'out' as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) in school or in their community without fear or negative consequence.

To date GLEN has focused its schools work on creating the conditions within the education system where

young people can safely come out, if they choose to, and be supported and affirmed in their identity. The endorsement by education stakeholders, including ETBI, of this publication is hugely important in terms of school leaders and teachers feeling confident in applying the guidance it contains.

The real legacy of the marriage referendum is more than about amending the constitution; the campaign itself created the conditions for people to talk openly about their lives, often for the first time; stories like that of Ursula Halligan which headlined in the *Irish Times* (15/5/15) as "Referendum led me to tell the truth about myself" touched the nation and made us realise that we still have a journey to travel so that no one need ever feel 'worthless and useless' as Ursula had in the past. The result was interpreted by many as a benchmark of the value placed upon LGBT people as citizens as evidenced by some of the following quotes from young people from BeLonG To Youth services[3]:

> I want to be VALUED and INCLUDED in MY SOCIETY."
>
> "I want HOMOPHOBIC BULLYING to stop. As long as we are unequal it will NEVER STOP."

GENDER RECOGNITION: THE OTHER STORY OF 2015

The other story of 2015 that could be forgotten about in the colour and fanfare of the referendum and the national celebrations that followed the result on May 23rd is that Ireland became a world leader in the area of gender recognition. In July 2015, the Gender Recognition Act was passed. The Act was the result of a long number of years of campaigning by transgender people and advocacy groups, including Dr Lydia Foy, who for over 20 years fought to have her legal gender recognised as female by the Irish State.

The launch of 'Being LGBT in School', a new resource for post-primary schools and colleges

It was fitting therefore that Foy became the first person to obtain her Gender Recognition Certificate; the certificate would allow her and anyone with such a certificate, to change all other legal documents to their preferred gender.

In passing this Act Ireland became the fourth country globally to remove the requirement for medical evidence from legal gender recognition. Now people over the age of 18 years may self-declare their preferred gender when applying for a Gender Recognition Certificate. The legislation however falls short for those under the age of 18 years; individuals aged 16 and 17 years may seek a gender recognition certificate but the process is much more onerous.

GENDER TRANSITION IS A SOCIAL TRANSITION

That said, for people working with young people in schools and colleges, the issues around supporting a person through a gender transition are not always related to the legal context. In many cases a gender transition is a social transition, whereby the student, who up to a point was known by a certain name and gender, will transition to a new chosen name to reflect their preferred gender and will express themselves in that gender. So the 'transition' really is about the decision of the individual to live in their preferred gender from a particular point

in time onwards. Some, but not all, transgender people will also pursue medical treatment to enhance their social transition.

LGBT people are coming out earlier and people who are transgender are gaining the confidence to come out in numbers that have not been seen before. That this is happening is clear from the growth in demand for the services of support organisations such as TENI (the national organisation providing support and advocacy for transgender people and their families) and BeLonG To Youth Services (a national LGBT youth organisation).

For school leaders who find themselves with a transgender student who is asking for his or her preferred gender to be recognised in the school/college this can be quite daunting in the absence of experience with this issue. School leaders can now turn to a publication that has the imprimatur of the Department of Education and Skills to find guidance on how best they should move forward. As with most situations the key consideration is the welfare of the student and dealing with any barriers to learning that they may experience.

COMING OUT IS A PROFOUNDLY BRAVE ACT

Oftentimes the focus quickly becomes centred on practical issues such as toilet and changing facilities, or how other

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1   www.education.ie/en/Publications/Education-Reports/Being-LGBT-in-School.pdf

2   www.glen.ie

3   www.belongto.org

Images of recent launch of 'Being LGBT in School', a new resource for post-primary schools and colleges

students will deal with the situation, and the point can be missed that what the student has done in coming out is profoundly brave and an act worthy of note for its sheer courage and bravery. A first response should always simply be a conversation with the student about how they're feeling and what support they have in terms of friends, family and external organisations.

It's perfectly reasonable for school leaders to take time to consider how a gender transition will be managed in the school and to work with the student and his/her parents (if they're under 18 years) to draw up a plan for the transition. While the school/college community may find the transition of a transgender student initially challenging, it is critically important to the physical, psychological and emotional well-being of that young person that they are treated with dignity, respect and fairness for his or her preferred gender identity.

It's impossible to estimate the number of trans people in the population, but it is estimated that about 1 percent of the population may be 'gender variant' (i.e., they don't conform to the typical behaviour or gender expression of masculine or feminine gender norms). There are many gender variant people who don't want to pursue a gender transition; some may describe themselves gender fluid. A gender fluid person may at any time identify as male, female, gender neutral, or

"A first response should always simply be a conversation with the student about how they're feeling and what support they have ..."

any other non-binary identity, or some combination of identities. The individual is best placed to identify their own needs in relation to the school/college that they are attending and the best approach of a school leader is to work with the student in identifying those needs and addressing them.

There are a growing number of schools and colleges that have supported students through a gender transition. The new resource provides examples of the approach taken by some of those schools, many of whom have engaged external support through organisations such as the Transgender Equality Network Ireland (TENI)[4], GLEN and BeLonG To Youth Services, or a local LGBT group.

EDUCATION AROUND THE CONCEPTS OF GENDER AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION IS IMPORTANT

The concepts of gender and sexual orientation apply to everyone; they are separate but interrelated. Having the resource 'Being LGBT in School' to hand is a good start for any school/college, but it will be necessary to ensure that staff and students get an opportunity to develop their understanding of these concepts and how we relate to them.

Organisations such as those mentioned above can provide some of that training, but the capacity to deliver to the entire educational community is limited. There is hope however that the Department of Education and Skills will develop further supports in this area. In October last year the Department held a roundtable meeting to explore the implications for schools of the Gender Recognition Act. The high attendance and obvious interest of participants is an indication that there is still plenty of support required for schools in this area.

We have come a long way but there is still much we can do in our schools and colleges to ensure that every student, including LGBT students, feel that they belong, that they are valued and that they can be themselves comfortably and be accepted for who they are.

Sandra Irwin Gowran is Director of Education Policy with GLEN. She has written numerous resources for schools, including guidance and classroom resources, informed in part from her experience as a second level teacher. Sandra is available to provide training and support to schools in the implementation of the guidance contained in 'Being LGBT in School' which she developed in cooperation with education stakeholders.

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4   www.teni.ie

QQI INFOGRAPHICS
– finally, some statistics I can understand

By Deirdre Miller, Strategic Planning and Communications, QQI

Say the word 'statistics' to most people and their eyes will roll. Talk about data and they will run for the hills. For the less numerically-gifted among us, trying to get our heads around rows and columns of data is akin to unravelling a very knotty ball of wool.
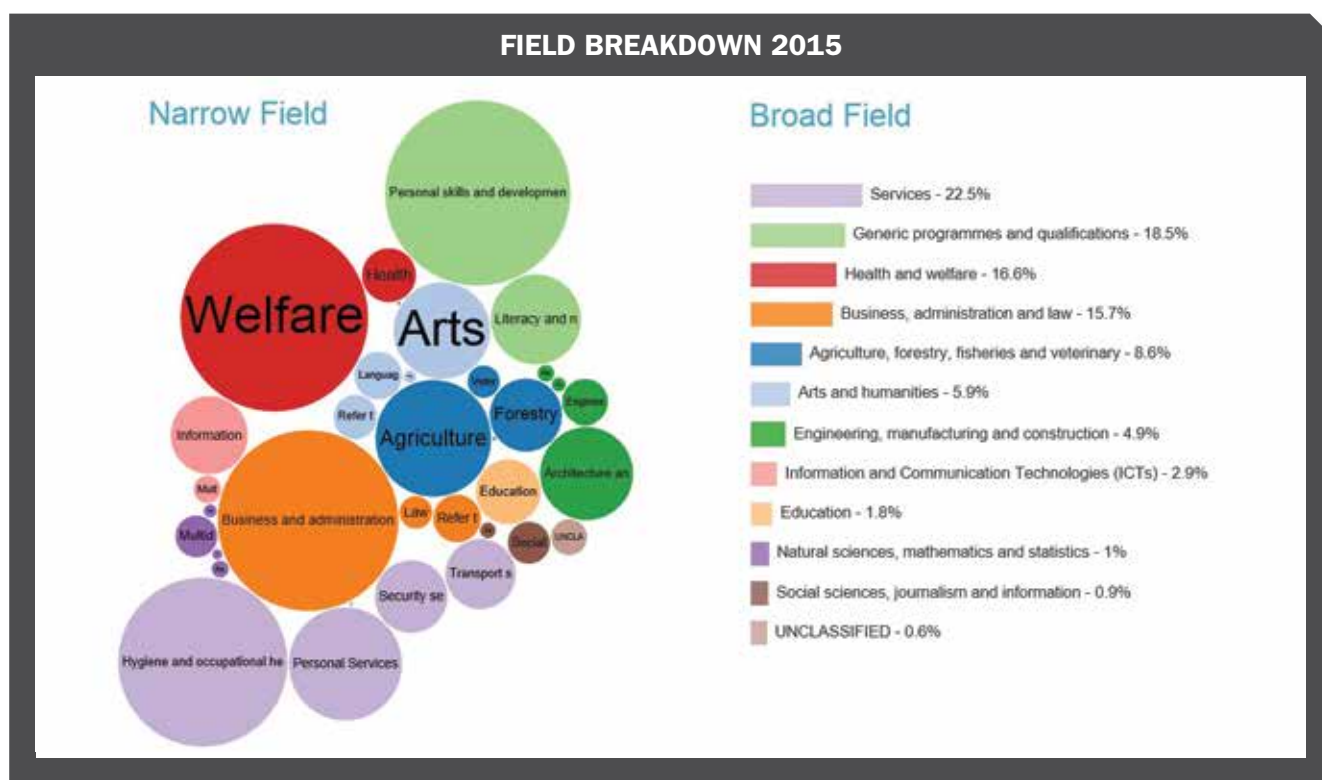
Since the launch of QSearch in 2014, data on providers, programmes and QQI awards has been freely available on the QQI website. The Register of Providers shows information about providers of courses which follow programmes validated by QQI and the OpenData area houses a number of Excel sheets of award, programme and provider

data for download. While the more statistically-gifted among us have been quietly using the information to feed into important research on the scope and breadth of education and training awards in Ireland, for the rest of us this information was still out of reach. That was until now, with the introduction of QQI Infographics.

QQI Infographics is a visual representation of the data already available – and that data is significant. Filtering award data by year, gender, age-band, county, field of learning, award type and level, is now possible through a click of a button. The data set shows awards made by QQI from

2007 right up to the current year and includes both further and higher education and training awards.

Once you start to play around with the filters, interesting trends immediately become apparent. The "view awards by field function", for example, allows us to see year on year, or county by county, which are the most popular fields of learning. In 2015 for example, three of the most popular fields of learning nationwide were business and administration, health and welfare, and personal skills and development. However, this varies hugely county by county, as you might expect. Take the broad field of "Agriculture, forestry,

FIELD BREAKDOWN 2015

Narrow Field

Broad Field

Services - 22.5%

Generic programmes and qualifications - 18.5%

Health and welfare - 16.6%

Business, administration and law - 15.7%

Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary - 8.6%

Arts and humanities - 5.9%

Engineering, manufacturing and construction - 4.9%

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) - 2.9%

Education - 1.8%

Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics - 1%

Social sciences, journalism and information - 0.9%

UNCLASSIFIED - 0.6%

fisheries and veterinary" as a good, if slightly extreme, example. In South Dublin this field is in one of the least popular choices for learners – go to Cork and it's the second most popular choice.

The ratio of male to female learners is approximately 50:50, but if we take the health and welfare awards made in 2015, we can see that 87% were made to women. As you might expect, the percentage shifts to 85% male when it comes to engineering, manufacturing and construction for the same year.

Start looking at the "gender by county" field, and things go in another interesting direction. As you again might expect, the gender balance of learners nationwide is broadly 50:50, but we can see huge discrepancies between counties. What is going on in North Tipperary for example, where 70% of QQI awards made in 2015 were to male learners? Move to Galway and we see the opposite, where 68% of QQI award recipients were women that same year.

While Infographics will not tell us the reasons for these trends, it may help to better understand the demographics of learners within your particular county.

There are also some "here's one I made earlier" graphs which are particularly interesting; such as the bubble diagram representing the broad fields of learning nationwide in 2015 (Figure 1 above) and a nice time lapse style graph (Figure 2) of the age profiles of learners from 2006 to 2015. Incidentally, you might note that the 15-19 and 20-24 age groupings attract the most learners. But don't let this lead you to believe that education and training is a young persons' game.

If you add up all the other age groupings you will find that in 2015, over 35% of awards were made to learners over the age of 40. Drill down further to a particular county such as Kilkenny, and this percentage rises to 61%. While the infographics cannot reveal why this might be the case, they certainly give us food for thought.

The data in QQI Infographics is updated every two months to reflect new certification results data, thereby providing an up-to-date analysis of awards made. So, you don't have to wait for the end of the year to see the distribution of awards. The data is also 'disaggregated', which means firstly that where learners achieved several minors as part of a larger qualification each minor is counted separately. Secondly, where a learner achieved a major, special purpose, or supplemental award, any smaller awards made to the same learner are not counted.

QQI has plans to develop these visualisations further and is currently exploring what functionality might be included in a second phase of the application. Options include an additional filter by provider, which would make it possible to drill down to a provider level and view the data available. A release date for the next phase has not yet been agreed. In the meantime, don't let us have all the fun. Check out the statistics for yourself and marvel at the volume, breadth and variety of QQI awards being made in Ireland and how things have changed – or not – over the years. QQI as always welcomes your feedback and suggestions. You can get in touch through our QHelp service. Go to http://infographics.qqi.ie/ to access the Infographics.

TIME LAPSE OF AGE PROFILE

Religion in Schools:
Getting The Balance Right

Dr Kevin Williams

Religion enjoys a profile in Community National Schools and in ETB schools at second level. Its profile in these schools is perfectly defensible on educational grounds and strikes the correct balance between openness to faith and freedom to reject it. Yet some extreme secularists would advocate the complete exclusion of religion from schools. This attitude is misguided for three principal reasons.

EXCLUDING RELIGION: THE CONSEQUENCES

The first has been exercising the French in the early years of this century and it concerns the cultural impoverishment that has arisen as a result of the lack knowledge about religion and its artistic expression among French young people and many of their teachers. In an effort to address this condition of religious illiteracy, the Ministry of Education has introduced the study, across the curriculum, of le fait religieux. The phrase can be translated minimally as 'religious facts' (les faits religieux) or 'information about religion', but more accurately as 'knowledge or understanding of religion as a human phenomenon', 'knowledge of religion' or, depending on the context, 'teaching about religion' or 'teaching religious information'. Though in 2005 a law was passed that made mandatory the provision of information about religion (le fait religieux) as it arises in other school subjects, the exclusion of religion from schools is a long-standing and respected part of the country's educational tradition. This means that it continues to be difficult for religious themes that are part of common culture to be addressed in the curriculum. Many teachers tend to be uncomfortable when any topic touching on religion comes up and some of them envisage such teaching as a covert way of bringing religion into the school.

The second issue is this. It is not difficult to expel religion from the lives of young people; consequently the only exposure that many young people will get to religion as a good in human life is in school. Understanding the meaning of religious truth claims requires a particular exercise of the imagination that does not sit easily in contemporary culture. Participation in religious ceremonies further demands a discipline of quiet reflectiveness and the practice of this discipline does not always come readily to young people. If a liberal education is to fulfil its remit to be comprehensive, this means that the possibility of there being a religious dimension to human experience needs to be given attention. There is also a danger, if schools do not address religion, that young people may never come to appraise critically views within their families or within religious organisations in society. Accordingly they may be more vulnerable to the attractions of cults or more susceptible to being radicalised by religious fundamentalists.

Thirdly, there is the civic aspect of religious education. The exclusion of religious education from schools does not mean that civic values are not promoted, but the possibility of a religious dimension to life does not secure the focused attention that it requires. This means that future citizens may not get an opportunity to acquire the tools necessary to understand religious

phenomena in their theological, moral or political forms. In response to the absence of knowledge of religion on the part of young Europeans, the Council of Europe (2005) has argued that such knowledge is 'an integral part of the knowledge of the history of mankind and civilisation' (clause 8). The Council therefore envisages the school as playing an important role in providing this knowledge. Quite rightly it notes that this knowledge must be communicated in a critical and non-proselytising spirit. In the context of the United States, educational and legal scholars are coming to defend the place of religious learning as part of the civic remit of the public school (see, for example, DeGirolami, 2008).

One of the reasons for secularist hostility to the teaching of religion is the suspicion of proselytising intent on the part of teachers. Clearly there exists a danger of teachers attempting to exercise undue influence on impressionable young minds. But fear of indoctrination can be exaggerated. Where there exists a suspicion of attempts to exercise coercive religious influence in schools, within liberal democracies it is the role of the inspectorate to protect young people from attempts to subject them to such influence. The danger of the exercise of undue influence can be exaggerated and secularists and religious believers should never underestimate the potential of young people to resist the designs of adults to colonise their minds. Indoctrinatory designs are not only morally and educationally reprehensible but their manipulative intent may well be unsuccessful. The acuity, common sense and intellectual independence of even very young children have been very well demonstrated by the work of Margaret Donaldson (1987) and her collaborators. It is always educationally reprehensible, and often futile, to attempt to subvert young people's capacity for what John Hewitt (1999) in his poem 'The Dilemma,' calls 'the stubborn habit of unfettered thought'.

In Ireland, the dominant Catholic school system has signally failed to create a nation of biddable citizens. The electoral evidence provided by the result of the Marriage Equality referendum is totally at odds with any notion that voters are compliant Catholics assiduously obeying what the Church teaches. Research would probably show that the values of Irish people are not conspicuously different from those of people elsewhere. So where does all of this leave education in religion?

FINDING A PLACE FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Firstly it is necessary to say something about the argument that encounters with different worldviews occur across the curriculum and feature in several subjects. It is true that cosmic questions are addressed in science and moral education, and much emphasis in the contemporary teaching of religion is based on teasing out answers to cosmic questions. The challenge to understand different worldviews must be addressed in the course of many subjects. In History, for example, study of the Reformation or of the Age of Enlightenment requires that students learn about different religious beliefs. They must also learn about the conflict between Christian denominations and between Christianity and Islam and Judaism that has been a sorry feature of much of the civil disorder and war throughout the history of Europe. To understand the history of the United States involves learning why the white colonists settled there in the first place. They were driven by a desire to escape persecution at home and to enjoy the freedom to practise the religion of their choice. The study of literature is another subject where students must come to grips with different worldviews (for example, in reading 'Paradise Lost' or Joyce's Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man) and such study can extend and enlarge students' capacities to understand the beliefs, motivations and behaviour of other people.

The problem with the cross-curricular treatment of different worldviews, however, is that it does not allow for a sufficiently sustained and focused encounter with these worldviews. These encounters can take place within a liberal and imaginatively conceived programme of religious education. Such a programme can also accommodate at an age-appropriate level, the exploration of fundamental philosophical issues about truth, knowledge, belief, morality, God, body, mind, and the afterlife, in the classroom. Secular as well as religious convictions can be included as part of the course, as both offer what might be called 'viable' truth claims that is, considered and plausible accounts of human life and its purposes. These can be described as 'viable' in the sense that they are not contrary to reason. Religious views can be rationally defended as is demonstrated in the work of thinkers from Aquinas, through Newman, to Elizabeth Anscombe. To be sure, the truth claims of religion are contestable and only the most conservative religious people would claim otherwise. Disagreement is endemic among adherents of different beliefs and sceptics reject these beliefs entirely. Secularism is another viable view that is based on reasoned argument, with a long intellectual tradition that includes philosophers from Protagoras to Sartre and Bertrand Russell. Yet only the most fundamentalist secularist would maintain that its claims are so obvious that they do not need to be articulated and defended. Young people need to encounter both responses to the world thoroughly and honestly. Mill's (2015) argument is apposite here. If people do not encounter contrary views 'in their most plausible and persuasive form' and have 'thrown themselves into the mental position of those who think differently from them, and considered what such persons may have to say ... they do not, in any proper sense of the word, know the doctrine which they themselves profess' (p. 37). A comprehensive education requires the cultivation of an understanding of both religious and secular views of the cosmos and a liberal education requires that it be conducted consistent with the spirit of Mill.

A LESSON FROM NORWAY

The approach adopted in ETB schools is consistent with that favoured by policy-makers in Norway. In this country educational policy-makers strive to strike a balance between Lutheranism, Humanism and other faith-traditions in that country. The attitude to the country's peculiarly Christian heritage is very positive.

The Christian faith and tradition constitute a deep current in our history – a heritage that unites us as a people across religious persuasions. It has imprinted itself on the norms, world view, concepts and art of the people. It bonds us to other peoples in the rhythm of the week and in common holidays, but is also an abiding presence in our national traits: in architecture and music, in style and conventions, in ideas, idioms and identity. (The Royal

The very first chapter of the Norwegian document on the core curriculum, *Core Curriculum for Primary, Secondary and Adult Education in Norway* is entitled 'The Spiritual Human Being' with the sub-headings 'Christian and Humanistic Values' and 'Cultural Heritage and Identity'. In the preamble, the document summarises the aims of education as enunciated in the country's Education Acts. The first of six essential aims is called 'Moral Outlook'. The first two of the seven aims in this section are to secure a 'Christian and ethical upbringing' and 'increased awareness and understanding of fundamental Christian values' (ibid., p. 2). The 'principal aims' of primary and lower secondary education are, 'with the understanding of and in cooperation with the home', (to) assist in providing pupils with a Christian and ethical upbringing' (ibid., inside front cover). The aims of upper secondary schooling are to 'contribute to increased awareness and understanding of basic Christian and humanist values' (ibid.). In the body of the document, these aims are given more content. Education 'shall be based on fundamental Christian and humanistic values' and support 'freedoms of faith, thought, speech and action' and serve to counter discrimination based on 'race, religion, nationality or position' (ibid., p. 7). 'Christian and humanistic values both demand and foster tolerance, providing room for other cultures and customs' (ibid.). The authors are not unmindful of the challenge involved in reconciling educational aims. The second of four 'seemingly contradictory aims' is identified as providing 'familiarity with our Christian and humanist heritage – and knowledge of and respect for other religions and faiths' (ibid. p. 39).

CONCLUSION

The Norwegian approach is based on an inclusiveness that is also reflected in the trend of Irish policy. The recent removal of Rule 68 from the Rules for National Schools requiring that a religious spirit 'vivify' the whole life of the school is the most recent expression of the State's abstention from promoting the religious formation of citizens. Yet religion remains salient in the civic space represented by schools. More generally there are grounds for optimism about leaving this space for religion. Great changes have indeed taken place in the role of religious faith in in Irish culture and these have been ably traced in Louise Fuller's (2004) study of Irish Catholicism since 1950. The volume has the provocative sub-title 'The Undoing of a Culture' but if a culture has been undone, it is a custodial culture, preoccupied by institutional considerations. The culture superseded is, as Dermot Lane (1997) puts it, that of the 'Counter Reformation Church' that 'flourished in Ireland, and elsewhere, up to the mid1960s' (p. 130). This understanding of Church, writes Lane, was 'defensive, exclusivist, and introverted' and was given 'expression in claims like "outside the Church, there is no salvation" and "error has no rights"' (ibid.). This culture has very little in common with the inclusive vision of the Christian gospel that is being articulated today.

This vision is also expressed in the generous, non-defensive openness of many clergy and religious. At a Christmas Mass, a curate welcomed parishioners, visitors from outside the parish, visitors from other Christian and non-Christian faith-traditions and visitors who did not believe in God but who wanted to be part of the community's celebration of Christmas. A married couple I know, one of whom had previously been married, met the local parish priest socially and expressed their regret at being excluded from full participation in the sacramental life of the Church. In reply he simply said that the Church was a large place and it had room for everyone. At another Mass before Christmas, another parish priest urged parents of adult children whose lifestyles might not be compatible with Church teaching to invite the children to return to religious practice on the basis that the Church is theirs too. This impulse is further reflected in the outreach of Christian ministry as unconditional, inclusive service to the whole community irrespective of religious affiliation. Here, for example, is a comment from a chaplain in a third-level institute about his ministry to bereaved students, a ministry that takes him literally 'to the edge of the grave' in support of students.

We have a unique role in dealing with bereavement and suicide. Because of our calling we walk that extra mile ... we go to the edge of the grave ... we stand at the foot of the cross with them. (O'Donnell, 2004, p. 35)

Such expressions of religion can enhance the life of schools and the presence of religion is one of the positive features of Irish education. The support of the ETB sector in accommodating this presence is commendable.

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THE QUESTION OF
Religious/Belief Diversity in Irish Multidenominational Primary Schools

By Séamus Conboy, Principal of Scoil Niamh Community National School, Citywest, Dublin 24

'm delighted to inform you that you are being offered the position of principal of Scoil Niamh Community National School", are words I will never forget from our then CEO, Dr Marie Griffin. Having spent the previous three years teaching in the Community National School model, I had some understanding of the exciting task that lay ahead in the setting up a primary school from scratch. For the next two months, operating from DDLETB's head office, I felt like I would have been a very impressive candidate on 'The Apprentice', zig-zagging across the city, looking for school logo designers, leaflet printers, venues for information meetings, etc., all with a view

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increasing the enrolment in the school from zero to twenty so that a second teacher could be appointed.

With the school now open and functioning, having secured the second teacher and with interest in the school increasing daily, I soon discovered that ordering enough waste bins and whiteboard markers was low on my list of things to worry about. As the school community grew, I began to seriously question my ability to manage a school that was clearly going to be very ethnically, religiously, linguistically and culturally diverse. Having impressed the interview panel for the post with references to having taught in Kuwait for a number of years and in another CNS which had over 90% children from ethnic and linguistic minorities, I found myself looking at it all from a totally different perspective now as a school leader. As a classroom teacher, I played an important role in creating a respectful and open environment for the children in my own class. However, in my new role, I was charged with the task of creating a similar environment for the whole school community. Our open enrolment policy was fantastic in terms of allowing equal access to all children into our school; however, catering for all of these children and their families meaningfully was a far bigger challenge.

I sold the school by telling parents that as a Community National School, we would respect the beliefs and values of all members of the school community. However, I soon began to realise that the values of some of the parents were quite at odds with certain aspects of what we were doing in school. So, how could I continue to espouse the equal respect of all values? Add to this the extra challenge of being part of a model of primary education which was still relatively new. As we were

still developing our core values, we did not have clear guidelines as to how best to deal with such conflicts. Finding myself scratching my head, debating and constantly changing my mind, depending on who I was engaging with, I decided that I seriously needed to equip myself with an expertise in this area. As the principal, I felt that the staff needed to be able to come to me with the issues which arose in their classrooms and feel confident that I could help. Therefore, I decided to sign up for the Masters in Intercultural Education in Marino.

For my thesis, I was eager to explore the experiences of other teachers in multidenominational schools. I was particularly interested in the role of religious/belief education and recognition in these spaces. A major part of my research focussed on the challenges which teachers in this sector faced and the different approaches taken to overcome them. I decided that I would open up my research to include both Educate Together and Community National Schools. Although the two school types have significant differences, I firmly believe that teachers and principals working in the multidenominational sector face very similar opportunities and challenges. The purpose of the thesis was not to do a comparative study of the two school types but to look at the experiences of teachers in the multidenominational sector as a whole. I interviewed twelve teachers or principals from six ETNS and six CNS. My research aimed to answer three key questions:

1. What understandings of multidenominational schools are there amongst teachers working in these contexts?
2. How are the religious/belief identities of the school community recognised and catered for in these settings?

3. What are the main challenges for teachers (including principals as teachers) working in multidenominational schools in the Republic of Ireland, with specific regard to issues arising from religious/belief diversity?

SETTING THE SCENE

The Irish Education System is quite unique, with its 'Plurality of Provision' model with different patrons managing schools. When the National School System was established in 1831, it was envisaged that all schools and teacher training colleges would be multidenominational. However, over time, it became a de facto denominational system. Statistics from the Department of Education and Skills (DES) in 2013/2014, show that of the **3,148** national schools in Ireland, **2,848 are Catholic**, **201 are Church of Ireland**, **2 are Muslim**, **1 is Jewish**, **1 is Methodist** and **1 is Quaker**. Therefore, the multidenominational sector still only accounts for a very small minority of the primary schools in Ireland. It could be argued that if this plurality of provision is to be true, it would mean that any sizeable religious/belief group would have a choice of school in line with their religious or philosophical beliefs. In reality, however, there is a binary. On one side, making up 96% of the country's schools, are denominational schools, of which the vast majority are Catholic in ethos. The other side of the binary is schools which are not of a single denomination. These schools are perceived to be catering for a homogenous group of students but in reality the situation is far more complex. Pupils attending multidenominational schools are made up of families who may have been refused entry to a denominational school because of their 'Catholic First' enrolment policies (these families may have favoured their child being educated in their own denominational schools), families with no religious beliefs and families who could gain access to a denominational school but wanted a different type of education for their child. I soon realised that telling everyone who was squeezed into my school for various reasons that all of their values would be equally respected was somewhat naïve.

As schools funded by our State, we

Above: Multi-Belief Space displayed in the foyer of Scoil Niamh CNS. Right: Grounds of Discrimination displayed in the foyer of Scoil Niamh CNS

"Any school that is not of a single-denomination can be described as a common school. Although these schools can have significant differences in their approaches to Religious Education and their interaction with the private beliefs of the school community, they have a number of common characteristics. I thought it would be very interesting to look at Irish multidenominational schools in relation to these characteristics."

have a duty to develop citizens who will be able to contribute positively to society. Therefore, our school's values must be in line with our State's values. My biggest challenge was dealing with situations where these values were in conflict with the values of different members of the school community. One day, as I was walking into the school, I looked at the displays we have in the school foyer and I realised that my biggest challenge was trying to marry the two big displays together.

It struck me that our public values (represented by the 9 Grounds of Discrimination display) were perceived very differently by the groups represented in each of the boxes in the Multi-Belief Space. In a school that puts such emphasis on the inclusion and celebration of each family's faith/belief perspectives, how would I stay true to the rest of our ethos, without offending anyone or infringing on their rights?

THE COMMON SCHOOL

I was keen to explore teachers' interpretations of the role of a multidenominational school. When I started to look at the academic literature, I discovered that very little was written about the multidenominational school models in Ireland. However, I came across the notion of 'The Common School.' Any school that is not of a single-denomination can be described as a common school. Although these schools can have significant differences in their approaches to Religious Education and their interaction with the private beliefs of the school community, they have a number of common characteristics. I thought it would be very interesting to look at Irish multidenominational schools in relation to these characteristics.

A common school can be defined as 'a school that is open to, and intended for, all students in a liberal, democratic society regardless of religious, ethnic,

class or cultural background' (Alexander & McLoughlin, 2003, p. 64). It was clear immediately that both Educate Together and Community National Schools could be described as forms of common schools. Common schools strive to develop a shared value system amongst the entire school community. They aim to create an environment of common belonging where each child is given equal opportunities regardless of their 'specific differentiating characteristics' (McLaughlin, 2003, p. 122). Children learn a type of intercultural literacy where they are encouraged to challenge their own attitudes and develop a critical consciousness of their own identity.

Common schools have a clear link with Multicultural Education. There tends to be a focus on Human Rights Education (HRE) with a view to creating an awareness amongst children of what is fair and just. Children are encouraged to examine their own situations in relation to their rights and this can have an emancipatory impact on children from minority groups (Starkey, 2010). In common schools, it is recognised that mere proximity to children of different cultural and belief backgrounds is not enough (Halstead, 2007). The children's differences are used educationally and they are encouraged to engage critically in debates about identity.

All participants in my own research described their schools' ethos

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and practices in line with these characteristics. However, some participants were concerned that they were not doing enough around the children's differences. Many of the teachers tended to focus on the commonalities between the children as they felt this was safer. The role of inter-religious dialogue was emphasised more in some schools over others, but all participants felt it an important part of the child's intercultural literacy.

RELIGIOUS/BELIEF IDENTITY RECOGNITION

The place of Religious Education in common schools is heatedly debated internationally, from the aggressively secular approach in France and the U.S. to the Irish system where some sort of Religious Education/ recognition is part of all school types. The approach in the more secular states has been linked to the rise in Islamophobia and fundamentalism. Kieran (2013) suggests that Religious Education is necessary as it gives children a deeper understanding of themselves and others. If any part of the child's identity is ignored in school, including their religious identity, it can lead to long-term damage (Irwin, 2009). Interestingly, it has been argued that a child's religious/belief identity can flourish more in a multidenominational setting than in a single-denominational one as children are encouraged to articulate their differences in beliefs. They build up a language around this aspect of their identity which they may not have learnt had this part of their identity been assumed (Smart, 1968).

Providing any form of Religious Education in a multidenominational setting is not without its challenges. Teachers who teach about religions or belief systems other than the one that they have experienced are teaching

'from the outside' (Alexander & McLaughin, 2003). This approach can lead to deep-seated disagreements, usually between well-intended, well-informed people. These disagreements can raise the question about the viability of catering for everyone's religious/belief identity in one space. In the West, our transactional approach to Religious Education, where we unpack the key messages of texts and attempt to interpret them to make them meaningful to our own lives, can be hugely problematic for the more conservative religions, especially Islam (Jackson, 2004; Revell, 2009). The Toledo Principles (2007) acknowledge that there is no such thing as a completely neutral Religious Education programme and say that the more philosophically oriented the teaching of religion is, the greater the possibility for conflict. Added to this is the issue of catering for children from an atheist life-philosophy. Is it fair to bombard these children with information about the beliefs and rituals of all major religions?

Overall, in my own research, teachers were very positive about the role of Religious Education in their school. Many saw the huge benefits in making the links between the children's home and school identities. One really interesting finding was that the level to which teachers engaged with the religious identity of the children in their classes was not dependent on their patron programme or body. Factors such as school leadership, teacher experience and teacher confidence were far more important in dictating the level of engagement with the beliefs sphere, rather than school type.

Many teachers expressed concern about the potential for children to begin questioning their own religious/belief identities when exposed to

other perspectives. Teachers in more established schools were far more confident in this area. In these schools, there was a greater awareness of Haynes' (2005) assertion that teachers need to give greater control to children over the context of their dialogue with one another. Teachers in these schools were more comfortable with challenging the children's inherited prejudices and misconceptions of people from other religions.

One interesting difference between the school types was that teachers from Educate Together schools were worried that they were only skimming the surface with their approach to Religious Education and they questioned the effectiveness of that. On the other hand, participants from Community National Schools were concerned that they were going too deep into this area and did not feel prepared to face the difficulties which could arise from this. Common to both school types was their concern about how they facilitated and acknowledged secular beliefs. Some participants referred to them as 'non-believers' and often in deficit terms.

In one school in particular, a large group of Islamic parents objected to the patron's programme. The programme was suspended because a large cohort of parents felt that it was not in keeping with their beliefs and that it was not respectful of their faith. One of the major criticisms which was made of the programme was that it was too Christian centric in its content and orientation. This issue embodies Jackson and Revell's assertion that any form of religious education 'from the outside' can pose major issues for certain groups.

CHALLENGES FOR TEACHERS IN MULTIDENOMINATIONAL SCHOOLS
Celebratory Rhetoric
It has been argued that many of the efforts to date at respecting and catering for diversity have been largely superficial (Troyna, 1997; Bryan, 2008). Things like Intercultural Days can actually entrench power relations between culturally dominant and minority groups (Bryan, 2009). The word 'celebrate' was used by most participants. Interestingly, the more established schools had

moved away from the big, overt celebrations of diversity. Their approach to acknowledging diversity evolved over time and had become much more embedded in their daily practices. Participants from more newly established schools expressed concern over the limited impact the big celebrations had on deepening the school community's understanding of each other. They felt that the celebrations around the different religious festivals led to the 'othering' (Devine, 2005) of those with secular beliefs. Teachers in the schools which had moved away from this approach felt that their current practices were far more equitable to all groups.

Initial Teacher Education (ITE)/ Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

No teacher is prepared to deal effectively with religious, ethnic, racial or any form of diversity unless they are armed with the necessary knowledge, tools and dispositions to do so (Nieto, 2013). As four out of the five primary school teaching colleges in Ireland are Catholic, how prepared are teachers to deal with the diversity in these schools? Although the ethos of a school can boast inclusion and equality, if the teachers are not adequately trained to provide this, how can this happen? Teachers need to have appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes to cater for diversity effectively. They also need the space to examine their own prejudice and to tackle them (Donnelly, 2004). Jackson (2004) argues that the more knowledgeable a teacher is, the more sensitive they are to children's needs.

All teachers in my research admitted to feeling totally unprepared for their roles in these schools. Their engagement with CPD varied across the schools. A

lot of teachers relied on professional dialogue with their colleagues but felt that this was totally inadequate. Many said that without the necessary training, there tended to be a focus on the superficial side of festivals and celebrations, rather than their true meaning.

Teacher Identity

Added to the lack of training in this area is the fact that the Irish teaching profession is significantly less ethnically and culturally diverse than in any other OECD country (Hyland, 2012), with the vast majority of primary teachers being white, middle-class and settled females. In 2014, 99% of student teachers identified as white Irish in all ITE colleges (Keane & Heinz, 2015). A teacher's personal identity shapes their beliefs and how they perceive diversity. The homogeneity of the Irish primary teaching profession can lead to the inadvertent 'othering' of minority groups. Having teachers from minority groups can have a profound impact on the engagement levels of minority pupils as they are in a better position to understand the kinds of supports they need (Sontoro, 2009).

All the teachers interviewed saw a link between their identity and their ability to deal with diversity. Many thought that parents from minority groups would have far more faith in the system if they were represented in the teaching population. Many felt that these parents must feel that the Irish education system has a 'We have no problem celebrating you, but you can't work here' attitude. Although many participants used words like 'them' and 'non' throughout their interviews, many more were able to offer examples of genuine, deep consideration of the issues they faced and steadfastly refused to observe the minority as

'other'. For some, they felt that their personal identities better enabled them to deal with religious and ethnic minorities. These participants identified with minority groups because of their own beliefs, sexuality or nationality. They felt better able to empathise with minority families because of this aspect of their own identity.

Tension between public and private values

Multidenominational schools are charged with the complex task of developing shared value systems while respecting what makes each child different. It can also be very difficult for teachers to accept aspects of minority beliefs and cultures which contravene the public values of the school (McLaughlin, 2003). Teachers, in these spaces, are charged with the task of creating a respectful space where diversities meet and identities and perspectives are challenged. Children who attend schools where diversity of attitudes are articulated and unpacked must develop a form of 'moral-bilingualism' (McLaughlin, 2003), where they can see the public values of the school and views of others in relation to their own value system. Callan (1995) argues that schools which try to avoid any conflicts in values and who seek out a consensual common education, are naïve. He calls these schools 'Lowest Common Denominator Schools' and claims they do not have a strong identity. Contrary to this, it could also be argued that schools who are slow to compromise on their values or accommodate minority beliefs are assimilationist. This raises the question as to whether these schools can only really cater for the more liberal members of minority groups who are willing to change their value base.

Teachers in my research were very aware of times when parents were unhappy with an aspect of the curriculum or school practice, as they felt it was not in line with their beliefs/values. Words like 'fear' and 'afraid' were often used by the teachers when discussing the tension between competing educational and social values. All participants referred to difficulties they faced in dealing with topics such as homophobic bullying. This fear was far more evident

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in participants from more newly established schools. They felt that their schools had not empowered them to deal head on with such conflicts. One participant summed up the fears of the others in a similar situation by saying 'We're multidenominational to a point....to a safe point... we're afraid people will move if we say anything they don't agree with.' Participants from more established schools were very clear on their school's approach to these issues and were far less apologetic when dealing with these tensions. There was a greater awareness amongst these participants of their contract with the State to develop citizens who are equipped with the necessary skills and attitudes to live harmoniously in a diverse society.

All participants referred to the importance of dialogue when these issues arise. Most teachers were able to speak of times where the school compromised with parents but expected the same in return on other occasions. Again, teachers in more established schools were clearer on when compromise was possible and when it was not. In these schools, they avoided offending people when they felt it unnecessary. An example of this given by a number of participants was the fact that their schools did not celebrate Hallowe'en, as it was not on the curriculum and could be avoided. However, they were also very clear that they could not promise a parent that their child would not be exposed to the school's attitudes towards things like equality and rights as it was an inherent part of their ethos. Parents could exempt their sons/daughters from discrete lessons on these if they felt strongly enough about it but they could not exempt them from the general inclusive culture of the school.

CONCLUSION

Spending hours discussing the issues that I had been struggling with, with such high-calibre teachers and principals working in these settings was a huge help. I now feel much more confident in my own decision-making processes around these issues and feel that the staff have more confidence in me also.

The main learning for me from this process has been that we should not claim or aim to 'celebrate' all values, even if they are associated with certain religious beliefs. Families coming to our schools must be made aware that compromise is needed and that it is a two-way process. We must avoid becoming 'Lowest Common Denominator' schools by deciding on our value base and using that as a yardstick by which all decisions are made and justified. We also need to empower our teachers through CPD and good professional conversations to use the diversity in their classrooms educationally. We all need to be brave enough to challenge our inherent prejudices and assumptions in order to be able to teach children how to do the same.

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School LEAGUE TABLES should carry a HEALTH WARNING

By Dr Martin Gormley

Parents and young people should view with caution the latest school league tables based on the percentages of Leaving Certificate students going to college.

The league tables use data received from the nine universities on the island of Ireland, including two in Northern Ireland, and from the various Institutes of Technology, Colleges of Education and other similar colleges in the Republic.

However, the figures don't record students going to Regional Colleges in Northern Ireland or those travelling to universities in Britain. For instance, here in Donegal there has always been a strong tradition of students travelling to the North West College in Derry, and to universities in Scotland in particular.

The figures also don't take into account the many students who go into further education courses like Post Leaving

Certificate or apprenticeships.

External students can also skew the league table standings for some schools. These are people who sit Leaving Certificate subjects in a school's examination hall and then are counted as 'students' of that school in the figures. Many of these external students have no immediate intentions of going on to third-level.

As an educationalist, I believe the tables should come with a significant 'health warning'. The percentage of students that progress to the listed colleges on the island of Ireland should not be taken as the sole criterion when assessing a school's performance.

Our schools and our education system need to be about much more than getting a bundle of CAO points. Our schools should be places where the emphasis is not alone on academic performance but also on the social, moral and physical development of our children. Such development is much more difficult to measure but is so important for all involved in education.

We must also remember the other options open to Leaving Certificate students that often we as a community fail to recognise, value and consider. I refer in particular to the further education and apprenticeship pathways. It's clear that some students progressing to third level would be more suited to the further education and training route. The statistics relating to progression to third level presented in the media do not refer to the drop-out rate after year one from the third level colleges.

There is a wide range of apprenticeship programmes available. More apprenticeships are coming on stream. In Germany, the education system recognises and values the apprenticeship route as a parallel strand to third level. We need to look at this route as a viable option. There will always be employment in the trades e.g. electricians, plumbers, carpenters, car mechanics, etc.
The Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) provision also offers

> "We must also remember the other options open to Leaving Certificate students that often we as a community fail to recognise, value and consider … It's clear that some students progressing to third level would be more suited to the further education and training route."

good options. PLC courses help young people get set for the world of work or go on to third level better prepared for the challenge. Each year we see a cohort of young people pursuing this strand of education with much success.

I again advise people to look with scepticism at the league tables generated by the third level progression data. At best, these table ratings offer a snapshot of academic performance in our secondary schools. At worst, they mislead many parents, especially as they do not report or represent the complete education and wider benefits that schools offer.

Parents must look at the bigger picture when deciding with their son or daughter the most appropriate post-primary school for them. They should look for more detailed information about schools and look at a variety of outcomes, including academic performance.

What statistics and tables fail miserably to measure or to highlight is that a school may have worked miracles in giving a child the confidence needed to go out in the world and make a success of life. For a school to suggest it is the best because it is high in the statistics and the league is simply wrong by any educational standards.

Dr Martin Gormley is Education Officer with Donegal Education and Training Board (ETB), which operates 15 post-primary schools across Donegal, and also provides further education and training to thousands of people each year.

Recruitment to Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills

The Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills will be recruiting primary and post-primary inspectors this summer. Competitions for the appointment of primary inspectors and post-primary inspectors of Business, French, Geography, Guidance and Physical Education will be held by the Public Appointments Service prior to the summer vacation. If you are interested in these positions, log on to **www.publicjobs.ie** and register your interest so that you will receive notifications when applications open.

STUDENT VOICE
IN IRISH SCHOOLS
An Increasing Acoustic

By Dr Domnall Fleming

The volume of student voice across the education system in Ireland is being raised. This article sets out to give an overview of the acoustic of student voice in Irish education, the issues and complexities that surround it, and current developments in student voice that are impacting on our schools and the experiences of our students.

Student voice is an overarching term that concerns dialogue, discussion and consultation with the students and by students about their experiences in our schools and their classrooms. Student voice is complex and is often challenged by authority, by power and simply by the routine of how we have always done things in schools. Students, the raison d'être of schools, have often been ignored, excluded or even silenced in relation to articulating their experiences, their feelings or their views on what a school provides for them, does to them or does with them, during the years of their primary and post-primary education.

LANGUAGE AND SPACE

The language of student voice is also complex. Across student voice research, guideline and policy documents, the language and terminology includes reference to the 'participation of students' and 'involvement of students', to 'listening to students' and to 'consulting with students', to engaging in 'dialogue with students' or 'researching with students', and to gathering 'students' perceptions and perspectives', or to facilitating 'evaluation by students' and the 'empowering of students'.

Within all of this language sits the fundamental principle that students have a right to have a voice, and a say, and that they should to be listened to, in relation to their experiences of schools, classrooms and of the wider education system. Four conditions are required in schools for a deep and meaningful student voice. These refer to the need for a space or a time within which the students can express their views. Students need to be facilitated to have a voice

or mechanism that will allow them to express their views; to have an audience that will listen; and finally that their expressed views will stimulate a response and action (Lundy 2007).

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

The energy behind student voice in Ireland, as in many countries, has mainly come from a children's rights agenda arising from article 12 of the United Nations Charter on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1992). Article 12 assures… to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child. The thirty-first amendment to the Irish constitution (the Children Referendum) in 2012, which provided for the right of the child to have their views considered in judicial proceedings, was also clearly informed by the obligations of our ratification of the UNCRC as 'the views of the child shall be ascertained and given due weight having regard to the age and maturity of the child' (Referendum Commission, 2012). Both instruments signified a growing awareness, advancement and action in relation to the voice of the child in matters that affect them. In the twenty years between these two events a policy trail that has largely framed student voice in our schools, can be tracked through the White Paper (1995), the Education Act (1998), the National Children's Strategy (2000), the Ombudsman for Children Act (2002), and most recently in 'Better outcomes Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014 – 2020' that points to the creation of…

'mechanisms to provide children and young people with the opportunity to be heard in primary and post-primary schools….through student councils or other age-appropriate mechanisms' (2014, p. 32).

Democracy and active citizenship
The embedding of democratic practices and experiences, towards the creation of engaged and active citizens, should be a principle of our education system. Coupled with this is the concern that students know about and experience democracy and democratic principles in schools to equip them to become these engaged and active citizens.

Civic Social and Political Education (CSPE) and the recent development of senior cycle syllabus for Politics and Society both serve to teach students the fundamentals of active citizenship and democratic principles. These subjects have become the curricular responses to a growing concern across the developed world that education systems should reinforce and develop democracy and citizenship for the sustainable wellbeing of society as a whole. The student voice research and advocacy community, also across the developed world, argues strongly that unless students experience lived democracy in our schools then curricular programmes will be only second best. A meaningful culture of student voice in schools that fulfils Lundy's four conditions will provide for this lived representative and prefigurative experience of democracy and will facilitate the development of active and engaged citizens. Michael Fielding, a leading writer, researcher and advocate for student voice in England speaks of imagining student voice as a central element of a person-centred and participatory and authentic democratic school culture that is underpinned by listening, dialogue, radical collegiality, reciprocal responsibility, and partnership with students (Fielding, 2011)

THE STUDENT COUNCIL

In the Irish education system, as mandated by the Education Act in 1998, the student council became almost the only student-voice mechanism in post-primary schools. It became the only formal structure for student voice and was often the only mechanism for dialogue, discussion and consultation with students and by students. A guideline document: Student Councils – A Voice for Students (DES, 2002) set out the recommended structures, role and functioning of a student council in Irish secondary schools. However, a statement by the Democracy Commission (2005) concluded that 'student councils give students a voice but not a say' (Democracy Commission, 2005, p. 33). As we in Ireland were developing and implementing the CSPE syllabus and discussing the development of student councils, in the UK, the Crick Report (1998) was highlighting concerns about the role of schools and the education

system in laying the foundations for developing sustainable democratic practice and active citizenship. Neither the Crick report nor the Education Act (2002) recommended the establishment of statutory school councils, even though they have flourished and are now present in the vast majority of English schools. School councils are also not currently required by statute in schools in Scotland and Northern Ireland while a school council is a requirement in Welsh schools.

The limited research on student councils in Ireland points to tokenism and poorly-developed democratic structures. A well-publicised study for the National Children's Office looked at 14 student councils in Irish schools and identified very positive views towards the council by boards of management, school principals and teachers. They all saw the educational opportunity provided by the councils to facilitate students to learn about teamwork, democratic processes and negotiation skills, and to identify issues and strategies for sustainable change in the school. The students saw it differently. They saw the role and purpose of the council as one of action: listening to students; representing students' views; contributing to policy; providing feedback to the student body; and changing things. The students' views on the effectiveness of the council were largely negative, citing apathy and difficulties in communication, representation and feedback. Tokenism informed some commentary as, in the view of one student…'the student council is all for show, so that they can say it's like a democracy, but it's not… because at the end of the day, only the staff have a say' (Keogh and Whyte, 2005). This comment echoes a finding of the Democracy Commission, also in 2005, that concluded that 'student councils give students a voice but not a say'

While the rhetoric of the role for the council in a school points towards visibility and potential for student voice as engagement and participation in democratic practice, the lived experience for students appears to be largely negative and tokenistic. The student council as a meaningful, representative and effective construct in Irish schools could effectively link both the children's rights and the

"School self-evaluation arguably represents the most significant and visible policy-driven and mandated advance for the voice of students in pedagogy and in consultation in school decision-making in Ireland to date."

democracy and active citizenship motivations for student voice in Irish schools. In its current iteration, in many schools, it could be argued that the council is tokenistic, and in the context of pre-figurative democratic practice, is functionally redundant (Fleming, 2013). Inspectorate initiatives

Between the bookend dates of the UNCRC in 1992 and the Children Referendum in 2012, it is argued that it was the embedding of external evaluation and school self-evaluation, particularly during the period between 2002 and 2012, that gave further volume to student voice if mainly as a voice of school improvement. The establishment of Whole-School Evaluation (WSE) in 2004 shone a light on the student council as a representative structure for students, as inspectors outlined their intention to interview the student council during evaluations. Whole-School Evaluation: Management, Leadership and Learning (WSE-MLL), introduced in 2010, also included standardised questionnaires for students and their parents as part of external school evaluation.

It was the publication of school self-evaluation guidelines (Inspectorate, 2012) however, that significantly advanced the student voice agenda in post-primary schools. The term student voice was particularly mentioned in the document in the context of a role for students envisaged as 'the inclusion of the voice of students (and parents) in school self-evaluation processes' (p. 9). The document also echoed the UNCRC in that… due account is taken of students' views and opinions in accordance with their age and maturity (p. 42).

It is significant also that these guidelines located student voice, for the first time, in the context of classroom practice where it was placed within the self-evaluation criteria for teachers, thus underscoring the pedagogical importance of engagement and

consultation with students. Teachers were encouraged to evaluate student voice in their classrooms based on descriptors focusing on … students' contributions and questions' that 'are encouraged and welcomed in the classroom'.

School self-evaluation arguably represents the most significant and visible policy-driven and mandated advance for the voice of students in pedagogy and in consultation in school decision-making in Ireland to date. Encouraging 'students' contributions and questions' and 'students' views and opinions' within an official educational policy document is a significant advance on 'involvement of students in the affairs of the school' as envisaged by the Education Act, (1998, 27:3).

STUDENT VOICE INITIATIVES – NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US!

The clarion call for student voice, beyond the aforementioned mandated and evaluation motivations, has most recently come from the third-level schools of education, often in partnership with organisations such as the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) and the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD).

The School of Education, Trinity College Dublin (TCD), with others, has led the way since 2008, in working towards, and in researching, a culture of listening and responding to the voices of students in schools, initially in research with students with emotional and behavioural difficulties and inclusion. This work extended into 'The Learner Voice Research Study' focused on working directly in post-primary schools in partnership with the NAPD. This project was then further extended into partnership with the NCCA. All three bodies are now working together with schools around the country

listening to and engaging with students on school-based student voice activity and curriculum design.

NCCA, arising from these partnerships, has now mainstreamed a student voice of consultation through focus-group discussions with students in schools, on curricular development and co-construction, in the context of junior cycle reform, and particularly, in consulting students within the process of developing new subject specifications.

The Department of Education and Professional Studies in the University of Limerick is leading a student-voice focus on the Negotiated Integrated Curriculum (NIC) project with both primary and post-primary schools in the mid-west involving students and teachers negotiating the curriculum, and teaching approaches, based on the students concerns, and on the prescribed curriculum. The work emphasises students' decision-making, co-operative practices and the experience of participatory democracy at classroom level.

Since 2008, the Irish Second-Level Students Union (ISSU) has worked to become a national umbrella body for student councils. It has represented the voice of second-level students within initiatives and policy developments across the education system and has worked to protect and develop students' rights and democratic practice as an organisation representing student voice at second-level.

The NCCA National Student Voice Forum is a clear outcome of the collaborations by of all of these bodies, as was the International Learner Voice Conference held in June 2015 and hosted by TCD. This brought together international leaders in student voice advocacy and research, with Irish students, parents, researchers, academics and policy makers. 'Nothing about us without us' was the refrain that echoed through the conference.

Dáil na nÓg, organised and run by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA), is a further construct for student voice. Founded in 2001 under the National Children's Strategy, the Dáil, and its associated committees and working groups, has been very effective in articulating and representing the views of children and students while also paralleling the structures and procedures of parliamentary democracy.

Junior cycle reform has emerged as the most recent vehicle for student voice and at the interface with teachers and schools is Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT), the professional development support service for the implementation of the new Junior Cycle Framework. This reform, and the work of the JCT team, has the potential to awaken the consultative and participatory voice of the student through developing and facilitating active, interactive and collaborative pedagogy in schools and classrooms. This should, for example, engage students and their teachers, in developing and negotiating learning intentions and success criteria, and in formative assessment conversations, at classroom level.

STUDENT VOICE – A CACOPHONY OF VOICES OR A CHOIR?

This short paper has attempted to capture the range of student voice initiatives that are, and that have been, active across the Irish education system since the UNCRC that was ratified by Ireland in 1992. Motivation for student voice has always been contested. What is clear however is that student voice is underpinned by children's rights and democratic practices. Student voice is a culture and not simply a series of actions or initiatives. This author argues strongly that a student voice, situated in the classroom relational space between student and teacher will grow trust and relationship, will grow a culture of inclusion, engagement and meaningful participation, and will grow a culture of co-construction of learning. Similarly, the student council, as the existing and mandated student voice construct at whole-school level, should be facilitated to become a meaningful instrument for student voice for active citizenship and prefigurative democratic practice at whole-school level.

Whether the acoustic of student voice is a cacophony of competing voices, as coined by Arnott and Reay (2007), or a choir singing in unison, what can emerge is a chorus of trust, inclusion, engagement, participation and positive relationships within a person-centred and democratic school culture.

Dr Domnall Fleming is a senior inspector with the Department of Education and Skills and is a researcher and advocate for student voice.

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Ireland's Implementation of the Convention on Children's Rights

By Ruth Griffin, Cork ETB Youth Officer and member of ETBI Youth Work Forum

Ireland signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1992. When a State ratifies the Convention on the Rights of the Child, it takes on obligations under international law to implement it. Article 4 of the UNCRC imposes a general obligation on State parties to 'undertake all appropriate legislative administrative and other measures for the implementation of the rights recognized'. As part of Ireland's commitment to the implementation of the UNCRC, it is committed to providing periodical reports to the UN; it has done so in 1997, 2005 and 2013. On 14th January 2016 a high-level and multi-sectoral Irish delegation, led by Minister for Children and Youth Affairs Dr James Reilly, met with the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child with respect to Ireland's implementation of the UNCRC. Following that meeting, the Committee's concluding observations were received on 4th February 2016.

The concluding observations identify many areas for improvement for individual government departments and agencies relating to the rights and protections available to children. These are to be referred to government departments and agencies for attention in the context of their work as it relates to children and with a view to Ireland's future reporting obligations to the UNCRC. This article primarily focuses on the observations with respect to the Education Sector.

The UNCRC Committee's first concluding observations in 1998 highlighted that Ireland was failing to meet its International commitments as identified in the Convention. The Committee's conclusions made a series of recommendations which have undoubtedly provided the backdrop to policy and legal reform in children's services over the last fifteen years. The primary outcome of the

UNCRC's first report was the establishment of the National Children's Office in 2001, which subsequently became a stand-alone Department under Minister Francis Fitzgerald, the first full senior Minister for Children in Ireland. The UN Report also provided an impetus and commitment which resulted in Ireland's first National Children's Strategy (2001) and subsequently Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures. It also created the stimulus for the establishment of the Ombudsman for Children Office.

The 2016 Concluding Observations of the Committee acknowledged and welcomed the adoption of the Teaching Council (Amendment) Act 2015, which provides a clear statutory basis for the role of the Teaching Council in the statutory arrangements for the vetting of teachers. The Committee also welcomed the establishment of the Forum on Pluralism and Patronage to attempt to address the need for diversity in the types of schools available to children in Ireland. However, the Committee remains concerned at the very small number of non-denominational schools.

The Committee also expressed concern that the right of the child to have their best interests taken as a primary consideration has yet to be fully implemented as a positive obligation in all relevant legislation, administrative procedures and decision-making processes. The Committee recommended that Ireland strengthens its efforts to ensure that this right is appropriately integrated and consistently applied in all legislative, administrative proceedings and decisions that are relevant to and have an impact on children. Therefore Ireland is encouraged to develop procedures and criteria to provide guidance to all relevant persons in authority for determining the best interests of the child in every area and for giving it due weight as a primary consideration.

1   In this regard the Committee specifically recommends that the Education Act is amended to ensure the right of the child to be heard in individual cases.
2   The Committee gave particular regard to schools continuing to practise discriminatory admissions policies on the basis of the child's religion and/or whether his or her parent(s) are former students of the school. An incomplete complaints-handling structure in the education sector was also highlighted as an issue for concern.

The Committee also expressed concern regarding the absence of a comprehensive strategy for the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream education and for encouraging their autonomy. Furthermore the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act has yet to be fully commenced and implemented.3 The Committee highlighted that accommodation such as Braille and sign language is not provided to all children with special needs. There is no clear and objective framework for the State Examination Commission for providing reasonable accommodation for children with disabilities in the context of State examinations.

The Committee recommended that Ireland expeditiously undertakes concrete measures to:

- Amend the Education Act 1998 to ensure the right of the child to be heard in individual cases;
- Significantly increase the availability of non-denominational or multi-denominational schools and to amend the existing legislative framework to eliminate discrimination in school admissions, including the Equal Status Act;
- Establish an effective complaints mechanism for students in schools;
- Consider reforming the Leaving Certificate Examination with a view to reducing the stress caused to children by it;
- Develop a curriculum of physical leisure activities which can be enjoyed by all students;
- Ensure that sexual and reproductive health education is part of the mandatory school curriculum and targeted at adolescent girls and boys;
- Conduct a thorough assessment on the extent to which legislation affecting children's rights complies with the Convention and implement specific legislation and/or legislative amendments to ensure that the Convention is respected, including in administrative proceedings and decision-making processes.

Minister James Reilly commented, "Regardless of the composition of the next government, there is a clear commitment on the part of the Irish people, on behalf of whom the State is party to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, to strengthen the prospects for better outcomes for our children into the future". He went on, "The Committee's concluding observations together with implementation of major cross-government collaborative strategies now in place form a strong platform for future work".

The UN Committee has invited the State to submit its combined fifth and sixth periodic reports by 27th October 2021 and to include therein information on follow-up to the 2016 concluding observations.

The full report is available to download from the DCYA website.

Ruth Griffin recently graduated with a Masters in Child & Family Law from University College Cork. Ruth is a youth officer with Cork ETB.

PROFILE:
The Glen Youthreach, Cork ETB

By Eugene O Callaghan

The Glen Youthreach offers a safe, friendly place for young people to gain skills and confidence to become active and responsible young adults in their community. Working with a professional, caring team, young people develop educational, vocational and social skills.

Recently ETBI General Secretary Michael Moriarty paid a visit to the Glen Youthreach in Cork to see our Centre in operation and to view our new premises, which we moved into in July 2014. The Glen Youthreach was set up in 1986 and in 2007 we became a SENI (Special Education Needs Initiative) Centre. The SENI programme has increased the capacity of the Centre to provide for and meet the needs of students on an individual basis. Staff members are mentors and relationships between staff and students are unequivocally positive. The SENI programme has had a positive impact within the Centre for both staff and students. This is evident in improved attendance, increased student engagement within the programme, academic certification and higher expectations for all.

Structures of the SENI include direct one-to-one work with students using the Web-Wheel Model, which results in the development of an Individual Learning Plan for each student. Through the SENI programme we also employ a psychotherapist and youth worker on a part-time basis, to complement the work carried out by full-time staff. This is essential to the development of informal social education on a structured basis, with a focus on the holistic development of each individual student. In 2015 the Centre introduced 'Soft Skills' measurement to assess and validate the non-academic development of all students within the Centre. The Centre's multi-agency approach to working with students has been successful in providing extensive supports to the students in the Centre in their progression and transition into further education. We work closely with agencies such as Foroige, Adult Based Literacy Services, Neighbourhood Youth Projects, Education Welfare Officers, Juvenile Liaison Officers, Fast-track Information Technology, TUSLA, Addiction Services, Local Music Drama and Sport Organisations and other Youthreach Centres. Having the services of an Advocate has been integral in developing our work experience program while supporting our students transitioning on from the centre.

We place huge value not just on our academic successes but on the physical and mental wellbeing of our students. We actively promote healthy eating and physical activity for all. Our students engage weekly in auricular acupuncture and mindfulness sessions with a view to developing self-regulation and coping skills.

Images of the recent visit by ETBI General Secretary Michael Moriarty to Glen Youthreach in Cork

As a Centre of Education, we offer programmes at QQI Levels 3 and 4, Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA). Going forward in the academic year 2016-2017 we will be phasing out LCA and developing further our QQI Level programmes. We feel this is important as it creates more independent learning for students whilst easing their progression into further education. Also in 2016 we decided to improve our Literacy and Numeracy strategy by introducing the BKSB Program, an online resource in which students are assessed when enrolling in the centre. This produces a comprehensive literacy/numeracy programme which students can work on throughout the year, independently or under supervision, via their mobile phones, tablets or home computers, or the Centre's PCs.

One of the highlights of our year so far has been the first official Cork ETB Youthreach Graduation Ceremony, which took place in November, to recognise the excellent academic work achieved by not only our students but all Cork Youthreach students.

Roisin Rogers from Lucan Community National School at the launch of the DDLETB iTunes U site at Rua Red, Tallaght

DDLETB LAUNCHES ITUNES U SITE

'Tradigital' learning merges the best education techniques with digital technology

Pupils and students across 16 schools, colleges and further education centres will benefit from a digital approach to learning by Dublin and Dún Laoghaire Education and Training Board (DDLETB).

DDLETB's new iTunes U Site was launched at an impressive exhibition of digital learning projects in Tallaght involving students from DDLETB Community National Schools, Colleges, and Further Education centres who are piloting the initiative.

iTunes U is Apple's collaborative learning app which can house multiple resources in a streamlined learning environment. An initial group of over 50 teachers in 16 centres of learning have undertaken professional training to create, edit and manage entire courses for the iTunes U platform. They are also sharing their ongoing course work with each other.

A library of iPads has been made

available for teachers to use. With resource materials prepared especially by iTunes U skilled teachers, students will be taught using a mix of traditional and digital means. They can also collaborate with teachers and students in an open learning environment.

Over 20 courses are housed on the DDLETB iTunes U site, available through iTunes. iTunes U also enables anyone to download free video and audio lectures from the world's leading universities, including many in Ireland.

DDLETB's iTunes U service has already had over 6,000 downloads and over 22,500 individual viewers of its coursework from all over the world and most notably in the United States, with a course on Energy now also featured as a standout item on the global iTunes site.

iTunes U provides user-friendly technology with a wide choice of options to suit the needs of a class.

Courses on the app can vary in length and format depending on the needs of the learner. Teachers can deliver classes in an organised and streamlined manner with a new easy-to-use app which learners can access on their iPads. iTunes U allows users to access courses and notes at any time, receive course updates directly onto their iPads and submit assignments to their teacher and get direct feedback.

Paddy Lavelle, CEO of the DDLETB, launching the programme, said: "This is exemplary of the forward looking approach to skills development that we want to see for every pupil and driven by our teachers. It's truly exciting to be at the forefront of the merging of traditional teaching methods with advanced digital technologies that will underpin and support the skills of our teachers and are easy to use for our students. It will be really interesting to see how students react to it and the long term results iTunes U will have on teachers and students".

Donegal school has become one of the **TOP-RANKING** in Ireland after ditching focus on 'chalk and talk', moving to Canadian student-led model

The Irish Times has taken a close look at the remarkable success of a Donegal ETB school, Magh Éne in Bundoran. Education Editor Carl O'Brien wrote this article, which appeared in the Times in January.

The first thing that strikes you is the classroom. There are no symmetrical lines of desks facing a whiteboard. Instead, there are small pods of four tables grouped together.

In another classroom, chairs are arranged in a big U to facilitate discussion. Then you notice coloured pages open on students' desk during class. The so-called traffic-light system – with red, amber and green pages – allows pupils to give unobtrusive feedback to the teacher on whether they are following what is going on.

"We don't focus on 'chalk and talk' any more,' says Pat Tighe, acting principal of Magh Éne College, a second-level school in Bundoran, Co Donegal. "The old approach was teacher-led. Students weren't active participants They were told what to do, and they did it ... Now, there's a big focus on partnership."

This takes the form of group work and creating an active learning environment where everyone feels involved. "It makes the classroom come alive," he says. It is yielding impressive results.

Feeder-school lists, which rank secondary schools based on the proportion of students that progress to third level, are typically dominated by fee-paying or high-achieving schools in affluent areas.

Yet, Magh Éne College, a school under the patronage of the Education and Training Board (formerly the Vocational Education Committee), has vaulted towards the summit of this year's list.

It ranked third nationally out of the State's 700-plus secondary schools, ahead of long-established bastions of privilege and high achievement.

It was followed in fourth place by another ETB-run school, Coláiste Gleann Lí in Tralee (formerly Tralee Community College), which is using the same learning techniques.

Both schools put much of their high performance down to a quiet revolution in teaching and learning prompted by a Canadian professor, Barrie Bennett.

ROOTS IN 1980S CANADA

The roots of his "instructional leadership" go back to the 1980s in Canada. A ministry of education report at the time found that Durham school district, east of Toronto, was one of the worst in the province of Ontario. Bennett was part of a team that fundamentally changed the way teaching and learning took place in the classroom.

"The old approach was teacher-led. Students weren't active participants They were told what to do, and they did it ... Now, there's a big focus on partnership."

A decade later, Durham was recognised as one of the most innovative school districts in the world, when it was awarded a major international prize by the Bertelsmann Foundation. At the heart of the approach is research that indicates that a teacher's "instructional repertoire" is one of the single biggest predictors of a student's performance.

"I've found the vast majority of teachers really do want to make a difference in the classroom," says Bennett. However, he points out that most training programmes only get teachers out of the starting blocks. They do not place enough emphasis on the repertoire of instruction approaches that can fully engage students.

To do it well, Bennett says, requires time and patience. Research indicates that it takes about 10 years for anyone to become an expert in a field that is reasonably complex.

"Slower is faster, and less is more," he says. "Most school districts work on the idea of 'let's have a good year'. The key is to stay with it long enough to build the internal capacity to have your own teachers doing the workshops for other teachers."

Bennett first came to Ireland almost a decade ago following an invitation from a Department of Education official, Dr Finn Ó Murchú, who was impressed by his research findings.

Tighe recalls going to Bennett's first workshop for teachers in Ireland, at the Mount Wolseley Hotel in Co Carlow in 2008. Most training days tend to involve changes to subject material or the curriculum. But this was different: the focus was on the very building blocks of teaching and learning.

"It was unlike anything I had come across in my day," Tighe says. "It was based on students seeking information themselves, sharing it and problem-solving, all under the gentle guidance of a teacher."

PILOT SCHEME
At Magh Éne College, teachers gradually piloted the new methods with first-year classes. Outside school hours, teachers shared their experiences of what worked and what did not.

"We didn't have to sell it," says Tighe. "Teachers found classes were easier and outcomes were better. There were far fewer discipline issues."

Now, all 28 teachers at the school are trained in new methods of teaching and learning.

Students are enthusiastic about the new approach and say it makes classes more engaging. "We learn from each other," says Eimear Colreavy (15), a transition year student. "No student can be the best at everything, so we share what we know when it comes to group work, under the guidance of the teacher."

Teachers, too, are rediscovering a professional pride in their roles and say classes are filled with energy, experimentation and enthusiasm.

Students at work in a classroom at Magh Éne College in Bundoran, County Donegal, with desks grouped together and a 'traffic light system' – sets of red, amber and green pages so that students can show the teacher they are following what is going on. Pictured from left are Alannah Hamrogue, Hannah McNulty, Conor Herrity and Matthew Duffy.

"It's magical," says Joan Russell, project officer for instructional practices with the ETBI. "The days of teachers closing the door behind them are going. They are sharing their practice and their experience. They have the skill and the courage to try new methods."

There has been no formal evaluation of the impact of training so far. Anecdotally, however, many teachers say it is transforming the classroom and maximising the potential of students of all abilities.

Nationally, more than 900 teachers in about 220 schools have been trained in instructional leadership [instructionalleadership.ie]. There is a waiting list of schools seeking to take part in instructional leadership training, with a series of new sessions due to begin in March.

Bennett says plans to roll out the approach nationally in Ireland are by far the most ambitious of any of the projects he has been involved in.

"They are doing an excellent job of attending to the research related to what works; they are also researching and assessing themselves as they move along," he says.

The involvement of boards of management and education leaders at universities, he says, will be vital to sustaining its success in the longer term.

"What happens at the top is always what makes the project survive or die," he says. "Staying connected to key players and stakeholders is essential. So, getting unions involved in finding ways they can support teachers to make their work more effective is key."

With thanks to the Irish Times for permission to reproduce the article, which is also online with additional material at http://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/a-teaching-revolution-that-makes-the-classes-come-alive-1.2488446

Idirbhliain Nuálaíoch i nGaeltacht na nDéise seolta

ag an gCoimisinéir Teanga, Rónán Ó Domhnaill

Gráinne Ní Lúbaigh, Meánscoil san Nioclás, An Rinn, Dún Garbhán, Co Phort Láirge

D'fhreastail slua mór, ó chian agus ó chóngar ar ócáid stairiúil i gColáiste na Rinne Dé Sathairn 16 Eanáir 2016 seo caite, nuair a sheol an Coimisinéir Teanga, Rónán Ó Domhnaill, Idirbhliain i nGaeltacht na nDéise.

D'fháiltigh an Dr Mícheál Ó Drisleáin, Leas-Bhainisteoir Choláiste na Rinne roimh an gCoimisinéir Teanga agus thug Liam Suipéil Bainisteoir Choláiste na Rinne cur síos gonta ar stair an Choláiste ó bunaíodh é ag tús an chéid seo caite. Ag trácht dó ar an Idirbhliain nua a bhí le seoladh dúirt sé go raibh

'áiseanna den chéad scoth anseo i gColáiste na Rinne, a chuireann ar ár gcumas freastal ar lucht na hIdirbhliana go héifeachtach' agus luaigh go raibh *'an Coláiste ag coinne go mór leis an Idirbhliain seo i nGaeltacht na nDéise a chur chun cinn i gcomhpháirtíocht le Meánscoil San Nioclás a bhfuil dlúthcheangal láidir, fónta againn léi le fada an lá, chun leanúint leis an dea-obair atá ar siúl ag Coláiste na Rinne ag caomhnú oidhreacht agus chultúr mhuintir na nDéise leis na cianta cairbreacha.'*

Ina dhiaidh sin thug Séamus Ó Cadhain, Príomhoide Mheánscoil San Nioclás cur síos ar Chlár an Chúrsa Idirbhliana agus leag sé béim ar an tábhacht a bhaineann le *'dea-cháil na Meánscoile agus Choláiste na Rinne mar dhá institiúid oideachais a sholáthraíonn taithí iomlánaíoch ar ardchaighdeán do dhaltaí.'* Lean sé air a rá go dtuigeann *'an dá institiúid an ról lárnach atá acu i nGaeltacht na nDéise agus tá siad tiomanta do leas an phobail áitiúil, don Ghaeltacht agus don Ghaeilge'*.

Tá seisean go láidir den tuairim *'go bhfuil Idirbhliain eisceachtúil nuálaíoch á tairiscint ag Meánscoil San Nioclás i gcomhpháirtíocht le Coláiste na Rinne agus go bhfeictear sa togra seo teacht le chéile mórán de bhuanna ilghnéitheacha Ghaeltacht na nDéise, a chuirfidh neart leis an Idirbhliain cheannródaíoch seo agus a leagfaidh bunchloch dhaingean fúithi'*.

Cuireadh na múrtha fáilte roimh Rónán Ó Domhnaill ansin agus é ag tréaslú *'cur chuige spreagúil, iomlánaíoch'* an tionscnaimh seo le Meánscoil San Nioclás agus le Coláiste na

Rinne. Dúirt An Coimisinéir Teanga go mbainfeadh na daltaí idir thaitneamh agus thairbhe as an Idirbhliain ildánach seo i nGaeltacht na nDéise, cois mara thoir sa Rinn:

'Cuirfidh an taithí seo lena bhforbairt phearsanta mar aosaigh óga agus mar shaoránaigh óga agus músclóidh sé iontu, chuile dhuine acu, meas agus cion ar an nGaeilge agus ar an dúchas'.

Agus áiseanna iontacha Choláiste na Rinne agus réimse leathan na gcúrsaí agus na ngníomhaíochtaí a bhíonn ar siúl ann ar son na Gaeilge á moladh go hard aige, dúirt an Coimisinéir Teanga go mbíodh

'Coláiste na Rinne ariamh ar dtús cadhnaíochta i mbearta fónta nuálaíocha ar son na Gaeilge 'agus dúirt cé gurbh *'iomaí constaic agus dúshlán a thug Coláiste na Rinne aghaidh air ó chroch Pádraig Ó Cadhla clár dubh.....i mBaile na nGall ag fíorthús an chéid seo caite, nár chlis riamh ar an bhfís sin ná ar a misneach'*.

Ag labhairt leis ar an nGaeltacht mar a bhíodh nuair a bunaíodh Coláiste na

Rinne, luaigh sé *'gur shín Gaeltacht na nDéise chomh fada siar le Baile Mhic Códa i gCo Chorcaí agus chomh fada thuaidh leis an gCaisleán Nua i gCo Thiobraid Árann'* ag an am sin agus *'gur éachtach gur anseo a mhair an Ghaeilge i mbéal an phobail. Níl aon dabht ach go raibh baint an-mhór ag Coláiste na Rinne leis an éacht sin'.*

Mhol sé an Coláiste mar gurbh é a *'chuir ainm na Gaeltachta bige seo in airde fud fad na hÉireann agus níos faide i gcéin. Chonaiceadar an luach san oidhreacht chultúrtha a bhí i dtaisce na teanga sin. Spreag sé sin misneach in áit an éadóchais'* a dúirt An Coimisinéir Teanga.

Beidh sé i gceist leis an Idirbhliain nua seo ag Coláiste na Rinne i gcomhair le Meánscoil san Nioclás, go mbeidh daltaí ag cur fúthu i gColáiste na Rinne chun feabhas a chur ar a gcuid Gaeilge i gcroílár Ghaeltacht na nDéise. Clárófar daltaí mar dhaltaí na Meánscoile agus leanfaidh siad cúrsaí acadúla agus curaclaim de réir chlár idirbhliana na Meánscoile. Cuirfear lóistín iomlán ar fáil do dhaltaí i gColáiste na Rinne cúig oíche sa tseachtain agus is ansin a thabharfaidh siad faoin iliomad cúrsaí seach-churaclaim tar éis uaireanta scoile. Beidh socrúchán oibre cheithre seachtaine mar chuid dhílis den chlár iomlán seo. Tapófar gach deis chun cúrsaí spóirt, cúrsaí oirfide, turasanna agus imeachtaí a eagrú agus a roinnt le daltaí na Meánscoile, a rachaidh chun tairbhe agus chun leasa an dá dhream.

'Tá an-éileamh ar a mhacasamhail de chúrsa ' dar le Liam Suipéil, Bainisteoir Choláiste na Rinne *'agus ó bunaíodh Scoil na Leanaí in 1919 bíonn Coláiste na Rinne lárnach agus gníomhach i nGaeltacht na nDéise chun gach iarracht a dhéanamh easnaimh sa mhargadh a líonadh agus cúrsaí a chur ar siúl do dhaoine gur mian leo an Ghaoluinn a fhoghlaim'*

Is trí mheán na Gaeilge go hiomlán a reachtálfar clár na hIdirbhliana seo agus tabharfar gach tacaíocht do dhaltaí, chun cabhrú leo ar a gcúrsa teanga. Leanfar leis an gcúrsa aitheanta TEG (Teastas Eorpach sa Ghaeilge) le deimhin a dhéanamh de go dtabharfar dúshlán do dhaltaí a mianach a bhaint amach ag an leibhéal cuí. Eagrófar ceardlanna sna meáin agus i léiriúchán scannáin / teilifíse

An Coimisinéir Teanga: Rónán Ó Domhnaill

"Gur chuimnigh na daoine seo ar uair nó ar ócáid chinniúnach ina saol a mhúscail ina gcroíthe cion agus dílseacht don teanga agus a mhúscail iad le cur lena gcumas sa teanga sin agus feidhm phraicticiúil a chruthú di ina saol, mar theanga bheo'.

mar chuid lárnach den chúrsa.

Leag Séamus Ó Cadhain, Príomhoide Mheánscoil San Nioclás béim ar thábhacht agus ar bhuntáistí aitheanta an Tumoideachais don fhoghlaimeoir Gaeilge agus *'mar a chumasaítear an dalta tríd a leithéid de thaithí, taithí a chuireann go mór lena fhorbairt phearsanta, acadúil agus shóisialta go fadtréimhseach'.*

Beidh an Idirbhliain ildánach seo an-oiriúnach go deo do dhaltaí a bheidh ag tabhairt faoi scrúdú Gaeilge na hArdteistiméireachta agus do dhéagóirí gur suim leo an Ghaeilge, cúrsaí cultúrtha agus oidhreachta. D'oirfeadh sé go seoigh do dhaltaí a mbeadh suim acu gairmeacha beatha a leanúint i réimsí an oideachais, an dlí, na meán, na hiriseoireachta, na teangeolaíochta agus an aistriúcháin agus i ngairmeacha eile nach iad. Ag tagairt dó d'Oireachtas na Samhna ó chianaibh agus ar an tuarascáil a sheol sé faoi Nua-chainteoirí na Gaeilge, luaigh An Coimisinéir Teanga, Rónán Ó Domhnaill *'gur chuimnigh na daoine seo ar uair nó ar ócáid chinniúnach ina*

saol a mhúscail ina gcroíthe cion agus dílseacht don teanga agus a mhúscail iad le cur lena gcumas sa teanga sin agus feidhm phraicticiúil a chruthú di ina saol, mar theanga bheo'.

Dar leis go mbeidh an Idirbhliain seo i nGaeltacht na nDéise mar cheann de mhórócáidí cinniúnacha na ndaltaí seo agus ghuígh sé gach rath agus beannacht ar an gcúrsa:

'go raibh líon mór de chainteoirí Gaeilge amach anseo a bheidh ag smaoineamh siar le cion agus le comaoin ar an tréimhse iontach, aoibhinn sin a chaitheadar anseo ar an gcúrsa Idirbhliana, ar na cairde a rinneadar, ar an fhoghlaim a rinneadar, mar cheann de na heachtraí móra ina n-óige'.

Tá an-éileamh ar áiteanna ar an gcúrsa Idirbhliana seo cheana féin, ach tá líon áirithe d'áiteanna fós ar fáil.

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GALWAY COMMUNITY COLLEGE HOSTS
1916 "VOICES OF FREEDOM"
PUBLIC EVENING

The History Department in Galway Community College coordinated a 1916 "Voices of Freedom" evening on Proclamation Day on 15th March in the College's newly refurbished auditorium. The event was free and well attended by members of the public.

There was an exciting and diverse schedule, with something for every taste. GCC's Art department had an art display inspired by this pivotal period in our nation's history with some students dressing in costume from that era.

Staff members and Senior Cycle History students were available to document any archive letters, photos or stories from members of the public relating to their family connections during this era, all of which will be curated for an online archive and posted on the college website. In keeping with the Historical theme, foods and snacks from the early 1900s were served in the college café.

Galway Community College were gratified to have Galway Bay FM and The Connacht Tribune as media partners, and were proud of the calibre of speakers for the "Voices of Freedom" event:

◆ **EAMON O'CUIV TD:** *"The role of Eamon De Valera during the 1916 Rising"*

◆ **GCC SENIOR CYCLE HISTORY STUDENT ERIN FLAHERTY WHITE:** *"Jane Shanahan modest Revolutionary"*

◆ **NOEL GREALISH TD:** *"The Rising in Carnmore and East Galway"*

◆ **DR CONOR MC NAMARA, NUIG 1916 SCHOLAR IN RESIDENCE:** *"A Nation Rising"*

◆ **GCC SENIOR CYCLE ART STUDENT SHAUNA GILL:** *"My great grandfather Pat Keane – forgotten veteran of Boland's Mills"*

Damien Dempsey, Keith Finnegan, Galway Bay FM, and Philip Cribbin, Head of History in Galway Community College

Launch of 1916 GCC Voices of Freedom

◆ **JEFFREY LYNSKEY, GCC ADULT EDUCATION OFFICER & GALWAY MINOR HURLING MANAGER:** *"Liam Mellowes – Galway's adopted son"*

◆ **SENATOR TREVOR O'CLOCHARTAIGH:** *"The significance of The Proclamation in today's Ireland"*

◆ **DEREK NOLAN TD:** *"James Connolly, Socialist revolutionary"*

Further details about the evening can be viewed on www.galwaycc.ie or the College Facebook page. For further information, email Philip Cribbin, Head of History philip.cribbin@gretb.ie.

Kinsale Community School hosts Féilte Beag CPD workshops

Innovative teaching practices based on Edison and Instructional Leadership programmes

By Ger Hogan and Niall Murphy

Kinsale Community School has engaged in the Entrepreneurial Education Programme, *Edison,* and the *Instructional Leadership Programme*, both run by ETBI.

Arising from this engagement, Ger Hogan and Niall Murphy formed a committee to promote innovative teaching practices in all classrooms across the school. The first task they engaged in was to organise a two-hour professional development programme based on the pedagogies espoused by both the *Edison Programme* and the *Instructional Leadership Programme*.

They uniquely developed a 'Féilte Beag', as it took place the Wednesday after the Teaching Council's Annual Féilte was held in Dublin on 7th October 2015. It was based on a workshop style and ran for two hours. During this time teachers, organised into groups and moving from one workshop to another, were afforded the opportunity to attend a total of six workshops:

- The skill of questioning and mindmaps (*IL Programme*)
- Placemats and fishbone diagrams (*IL Programme*)
- Numeracy and literacy strategies for all subjects
- Lego Serious Play (*Edison Programme*)
- Strategies to support students with SEN
- Using IT to be innovative in the classroom e.g. Edpuzzle, Schoology (*Edison Programme*)
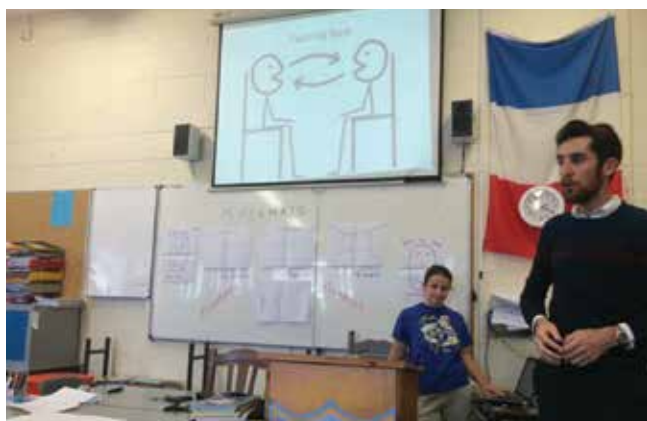
Staff were encouraged to reflect and note, in a booklet that was produced and issued on the day, how they could use the different strategies, tactics and skills within their own subject area and classroom.

We invited guests from the Maltese Department of Education, members of the Teaching Council, and representative from ETBI and UCC Education Department. Our guests were fulsome in their praise for the event.

Overall the day was hugely successful and received positive feedback, and we plan to run a similar event again next year with other teachers sharing practices with their colleagues.

The Féilte Beag workshops at Kinsale Community School, Cork

Naas Community National School exhibit at
RDS BT Young Scientist Primary Science Fair

Which physical activity has the most positive influence on our overall fitness?"

Last January, Naas Community National School's sixth class received an award at the BT Young Scientist Primary Science Fair for the fifth year in a row. Their project was based on answering the question, "Which physical activity has the most positive influence on our overall fitness?" The judges highly commended the project, the organisation, the scientific process and the children's ability to present their display. The children were interviewed by RTE, numerous journalists and at length by the RDS judges.

The project was led by their committed class teacher Múinteoir Ruairi and under close co-ordination and guidance from their science qualified Principal, Caroline Colleran.

With 3,305 primary schools in the country, receiving one of the 180 places for exhibiting at the *Primary Science Fair* is never guaranteed. This year the BT Young Scientist saw a 10% increase on applicants to exhibit and it was 40% over subscribed. Only seven schools in Kildare were accepted, and few schools can rival Naas Community National School's record of exhibiting five years in a row.

The project is of particular interest in the promotion of Health Sciences for primary school children. The 6th class children aimed to identify which sports activity influenced one's overall fitness. A series of tests were conducted at the outset measuring Agility, Speed, Distance, Strength and Balance. The children were divided into six groups. Each group focused on one of the following activities: Athletics, Games, Dance, Gymnastics, Weight Training and a Control group. After a 6-week

Naas CNS students with their winning project at the BT Young Scientist Primary Science Fair

programme of activities the children were re-tested for fitness. It was observed that gymnastics, closely followed by dance, increased the overall fitness of the children most. This changed the boys' perception of these primary school curricular areas!

The children also studied human anatomy with particular focus on the muscular, skeletal and circulatory systems. They integrated ICT and numeracy in their analysis and presentation.

The project commenced in September 2015 with children posing their questions and drafting a project proposal. This was submitted in early October for evaluation by RDS Primary Science Fair judges who decided if it was a viable project worthy of exhibiting. The school was notified at the end of October that they had been successful. During Science Week, the children began working on their investigations and data interpretation continued up until Christmas.

The children at Naas Community National School are encouraged to work collaboratively and scientifically by all of the motivated and dedicated teaching staff. Our focus is to develop a positive attitude to STEM in order for the children to broaden their interest in the scientific field from an early age. The benefits to our children can be observed in Literacy, Oral Language and Numeracy. However, involvement at the RDS Primary Science Fair improves their self-esteem, self-confidence and communication skills.

We are very proud of our children and teachers who worked so diligently on presenting a highly commended project. Naas CNS strives to lead excellence in Science Technology, Engineering and Maths. We will continue to promote a love of learning for STEM and raise the profile of our school. Our next collective goal is to achieve our *fifth* Discover Primary Science and Maths Award of Excellence and to participate in the Sci-Fest Competition for Primary Schools this Spring.

WWETB student wins trip to Strasbourg in
SWEETMAN TRUST COMPETITION

Report by Jonathan Wall, student at Tramore Youthreach

The Michael Sweetman Educational Trust, (MSET) with the generous assistance of the ETBs and the European Parliament's Dublin office, and the administrative support of ETBI, awards a trip to Strasbourg, France, to 24 Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) students who attend an ETB School, College or Centre (e.g. Youthreach). They are accompanied by four teachers.

The successful students represent their school/centre, ETB, The LCA Programme and Ireland in the European Parliament in Strasbourg. While in Strasbourg the winning students visit the European Parliament and have a unique opportunity to meet, work and socialise with students from other European States. The winning students must be willing to commit to taking an active part in a forum in the European Parliament with their European peers, which takes place during the educational trip (EUROSCOLA).

The competition is based on the LCA contemporary social issue task chosen by the student. The competition requires entering students to make an oral presentation to the MSET Assessors on the students' chosen task. This presentation must incorporate a European dimension.

ETB students enjoying their trip to Strasbourg in January

On December 23rd I won a trip to Strasbourg for completing a contemporary issues task on homelessness for the Michael Sweetman Trust Competition. The prize consisted of flying out to Strasbourg on 27th to 29th January to debate in the European Parliament on contemporary issues concerning Europe and the world.

On January 26th the Tramore Youthreach Co-ordinator Gerry McManus and myself, Jonathan Wall, travelled to Dublin on the train to Heuston Station. We then got a double decker bus to the airport and it was my first time seeing Dublin City. Then we got another bus from the airport to the airport hotel which was the Clayton Hotel. We stayed there overnight, as the flight was the next day. That night the group that was going to Strasbourg from Ireland had a meeting in the hotel before dinner to help get to know each other. After we all got to know each other we went to our rooms for a sleep and a rest until the next morning.

The next morning we went back to the meeting area. We were put into groups and given certain contemporary issues to discuss. Then we had lunch and we packed our bags. We went to the airport at 2pm, because our flight was at 5pm. It was my first time flying and my first time being away from Ireland. I was nervous but once take off from the airport was over I was settled in my seat and was enjoying the flight to Frankfurt.

Once we got to Frankfurt and got our luggage, we then boarded a coach from Frankfurt to Strasbourg. On the way we stopped at a diner. We had schnitzel and chips which was better than I expected. It was a good 3 hours on the bus to our stay in Kiel just outside Strasbourg. We stayed there overnight and woke up at around 6:30am and headed to the European Parliament.

In the European Parliament we went through two security checks. We could not leave the building once we were in there until the day was finished. We then entered the canteen area where we were handed stickers for what group we were to be in. We were also given information on what was happening for the day. We went to the chamber for the morning of the parliament, where people asked questions on contemporary issues. We then had lunch and from 2pm onwards we discussed our contemporary issues in separate rooms until 4pm when then each group talked about their contemporary issues. In the separate debate rooms we elected two people to talk on behalf of the group in the chamber about our contemporary issues. Our contemporary issue topics were migration and integration in European countries. I liked voting in the parliament on topics and I actually felt like I could make a difference.

We went to Strasbourg city after the parliament. We had 2 hours to sight-see and I may have taken a bit longer to find the restaurant but eventually got there.

I want to thank all the teachers and supports on the trip. My co-ordinator Gerry McManus was very supportive with my first time flying and also my first time being outside of the country. The students I was with from Ireland as they were very supportive and respectful to me and to each other. I honestly wish I had longer time with the group as I feel the group of us are only starting to get to know each other and getting to build friendships.

I am honoured and ever so thankful to the Sweetman Trust for offering me the opportunity to be on this journey and to meet these people, see these places and to be a part of the European continent and to represent my country.

I want to thank all of the Tramore Youthreach teachers and learners for helping me and supporting me to do this. I want to thank the biggest help to me this year with overcoming anxiety and fears. I want to thank John Frost my Social Ed teacher, this would not be possible without him.

ASHBOURNE YOUTHREACH
NOMINATED FOR
AONTAS STAR AWARD

Ashbourne Youthreach received another accolade having been shortlisted for a prestigious Aontas Star Award at the Adult Learners' Festival hosted by Aontas, the National Adult Learning Organisation in February last. The awards acknowledge the fantastic work undertaken by adult learning projects throughout Ireland and celebrate the positive contribution that these projects make to individual adult learners, local communities and wider society.

Ashbourne Youthreach were shortlisted for their Advanced Media Programme designed by Aaron Fowler, which develops skills in Computer Building and Maintenance, Website building and Design, Coding and Media Production. Students from the centre Dylan Smith, Milosz Gastol and Ross Gunn showcased their skills to a judging panel earlier in the month, which led to the course being shortlisted.

Last year, Ashbourne Youthreach had written and developed a short film for Aontas for the promotion of the 10th Annual Star Awards. The finished film can be viewed on the Aontas Youtube channel https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t51v0aW3WIs.

TRIM YOUTHREACH WINS AWARD
IN 1916 CENTENARY PROGRAMME ART COMPETITION

Kieran McDonnell, Woodwork Tutor at LMETB Trim Youthreach

Trim Youthreach, Quality Centre of Education funded by Louth Meath Education and Training Board, are delighted to have won an award in the 1916 Centenary Programme Art Competition with their submission titled '1916', which is currently on exhibition in Trim Library. This installation is the culmination of a project involving students from the Centre who worked tirelessly to create a representation of what 1916 means to them in the modern context. The Competition forms part of the County Council's countywide 1916 Centenary Programme under the strand 'Youth and Imagination' aimed at providing an opportunity for young people to become actively involved in and experience the national ceremonial event in Ashbourne and increase appreciation of events of 1916. This competition is run through the library in Trim.

Participating students from the Centre approached the project with great enthusiasm and interest in the theme from the start, working together as a team, and after much discussion and brainstorming they unanimously agreed on the design collaborating with their art tutor Michael Duffy and their woodwork tutor Kieran Mc Donnell.

The team of five students from the Centre wanted to produce a design that was both organic and original. The project took on a life of its own after sourcing a piece of Beech wood that quite naturally took the form of the shape of a flag and provided the inspiration for the basis of the design. This gave impetus to the idea of projecting an image of the figure of 1916 onto tracing paper and using it to etch the design onto the wood. With the guidance of their tutor, the students worked together to etch the design using basic techniques and tools, mainly a mallet and a chisel.

The image creates a three dimensional effect which represents transition and change in Irish society from 1916 to the present day. The use of wood gives the installation its historical reference, symbolising this period of history, and the carvings expresses the timeless significance of the events of 1916 in shaping the political and cultural landscape of Ireland after the events of the Easter Rising. The three-dimensional effect of the design is symbolic of modern Ireland incorporating the theme of the Centenary Celebrations of Remembering, Reconciling, Presenting, Imagining and Celebrating.

The students were also very keen to express the dramatic events that took place in 1916 and the considerable sacrifice of the volunteers. They felt this could best be expressed by burning or singing the edges of the wood to represent conflict and rebellion, while the clarity and dimension of the figure '1916' represents the new Ireland almost emerging from the ashes of the old

Ireland. The students felt that this design has greater impact in expressing the significant effects of the aftermath of the rebellion in shaping the history of the state.

When asked what they enjoyed most about the project, all of the students agreed that designing and creating the idea was the best part of it. The group had to work closely, and even though they did not always agree on every aspect of the project, it gave them some flavour of what it must have been like to organise the rebellion in a time without the use of social media, mobile phones, or indeed flip charts! When asked about their experience working on the project, one student noted, "We were all trying to get along at the start because we all had different ideas for the project and different views on 1916 and then when the final design was agreed we just went for it".

The installation is currently on display in Trim Library, and enquiries about the project are welcome and may be directed to Kieran McDonnell on 046 9431203, at KMcdonnell@lmetb.ie or youthreachtrim@lmetb.ie.

Margaret Whelan, Paula Whelan, Daniel Whelan and Kieran Mc Donnell at Trim Library Art Competition Awards Night

Left: Trim Youthreach's submission. Above: Kieran McDonnell, Craig Gaynor, Daniel Rattigan, Daniel Whelan, Caroline Lynch and Michael Duffy at the Awards Night.

THE PROFILER PROJECT:
CDETB is developing digital tools to identify the education, training and support needs of its students

Report by Do-IT Solutions, CDETB & H2 Learning

Over the past five years City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDETB) has been seeking to create a set of digital screening and profiling tools to enable its colleges, schools and centres to better meet the education, training and support needs of its students.

To develop this set of profiling tools fit for purpose and contextualised for the Irish setting, CDETB worked closely with Do-IT solutions and H2 Learning to define the education, training and support needs of learners at Post-Primary, Youthreach and Further Education levels.

WHERE DID IT ALL BEGIN?

It all started in 2010 when Dublin schools were identifying more and more children with special needs, services were being cut following the economic crisis, and the use of technology in schools was being hampered by all schools having to share a single 2Mb line. It was against this background that CDVEC, as it was called in 2010, began to explore the potential of using computers as a form of screening to help the early identification of those with additional learning needs, particularly in the transition phase from primary to post-primary.

From this CDVEC partnered with Professor Amanda Kirby and Dr Ian Smythe, founders of of Do-IT Solutions, to develop a tool which allowed an individual to be understood and supported in a holistic way. Working in collaboration with Professor Kirby and Dr Smythe, a small team was put together to facilitate development of assessment tools aligned with the needs of CDETB schools. The team included teachers, psychologists and other professionals.

The team's intention was to provide information to the post-primary teachers, to help them rapidly identify students who may need additional support, and what that should be, i.e. targeted intervention strategies. Alongside this they sought to investigate the potential of using computers to identify children with learning support needs. The key specifications for the tool developed to ensure effective roll-out were as follows:

- The system is user-friendly and intuitive to use.
- Tests are appropriate for the local population.
- The delivery system should be through the internet, to provide the potential for central data management.
- Testing should be in a group setting, with minimal teacher support.
- Available reports would identify individual strengths and weaknesses as well as suggesting interventions.
- There should be the option for grouping children with similar needs.
- It must provide a low cost solution.
- It must be sustainable and scalable within a wider community.

During this time, the Profiler system has evolved in line with a deeper understanding of how best to identify and support individuals who previously had fallen through the gaps. In collaboration with schools in Oxfordshire, modules have been developed to provide more in-depth information about the individual from an emotional, social and psychological perspective, providing a more rounded approach.

THE DO-IT PROFILER SYSTEM

The CDETB Do-IT Profiler system is accessed through the internet, and following log on, a series of modules is presented to the student. Some of these are assessment modules, which look to quantify student strengths and weaknesses in key areas such as literacy and numeracy. Others are survey modules, which gather additional information about students, including emotional well-being and background demographics. There are also screening tools for study skills and specific learning difficulties.

The background analytics analyse the student's input in the assessment modules and help to identify underlying patterns. The outcomes of that analysis, along with the survey results, produce a series of reports – for the student, class teacher and management. These are made available immediately after the modules are completed. It is important to highlight that the CDETB Profiler assessments are using

JOINING THE DOTS
IN A JOINED UP SERVICE

A joined up service has two sides: 1) bringing together information to make a holistic view of the individual, and 2) all aspects of the individual are presented to the relevant sections of the multidisciplinary team.

- Time to gather, input and analyse this information makes it often difficult to achieve.

- The rationale for CDETB is to identify the areas that should be targeted through a triage approach, and consider what information was required to make appropriate decisions.

- The use of technology was aimed at making the gathering and analysis easier, saving time and providing information at individual class, and school levels.

- By expanding beyond the traditional academic centred approaches using literacy and numeracy as the key measures, the team has been able to identify those most in need of support, and the type of support needed. This helps reduce waiting time, delivers support immediately, and identifies those who would need to be referred to more specialist assessments.

- It allows a greater understanding of how specific learning difficulties and social settings can interact in a complex mesh, but can provide a more complete picture.

local Irish content and are based on local norms.

With students who have been signalled as encountering challenges in certain areas, further assessments can then be administered to investigate where these difficulties may lie and in what particular sub-skills. For example, for a student showing to have significant difficulties in initial literacy assessments, the support team may then do further assessments in syllables and sounds.

EXPANDING THE USE OF THE TOOL

Over time the tool was seen to have significant potential in the Youthreach setting. In order to explore its viability in Youthreach centres, a project was initiated to analyse the needs of the sector and to develop the tool to respond to those needs. This initial phase of development resulted in the CDETB Profiler being successfully rolled out across all 10 Youthreach centres in Dublin city.

Following the success of this phase, a second phase was initiated to pilot the development of the Profiler in both the Adult Education Services and the Further Education and Training colleges. This project is currently in pilot stage. Both the initial phase of development and the current pilot phase have been funded and supported by the J P Morgan Chase Foundation.

PROJECT IMPACT

The project has already demonstrated its potential for improving support services to students. It allows for the production of detailed individual student learning plans; improved retention rates; better matching of a learner to training needs; improvement in student study skills; mapping a student's emotional wellbeing and identifying barriers to employment and providing appropriate guidance to address this. Overall it is helping CDETB move towards a more holistic service for students.

Additionally, the use of a digital system is making the gathering of data and analysis easier, saving time and providing crucial information at individual, class and centre or college level. The Profiler allows for a triage approach to meeting student needs. Concentrating on those with the highest needs, it allows crucial aspects of an individual student profile to be presented to the multi-disciplinary Care Team so that particular needs can be addressed or referred on to more appropriate outside services. In June 2016, a full report on the impact of the project will be produced

A few words from the teacher's and student's perspective

"Profiler has been an excellent addition [to the centre] to capture new information and measure progress, the banding makes ILP creation and evaluation a lot simpler and easy to follow for staff that do not use the Profiler on a regular basis."
(Oisin Costigan, Cabra Youthreach)

"I feel that The Profiler has had a significant impact on the progression of the students. They love checking on what improvements they have made from one test to the next."
(Ron Houghton, Kilmore Youthreach)

> "Profiler has been good for the opportunity to see where the students measure themselves (often quite low band) in relation to things like literacy and numeracy. Whereas the actual assessments can come out a little or in some cases much higher and in showing the graphs to the students and pointing out the contrast – it's great for building their confidence in themselves as individuals."
> (Angelique, Youthreach Coordinator)

> Profiler has fed directly into student ILPs and looks at a student across a range of aspects which may present barriers to learning, not just cognitive ability, but also their self-perception. It has also signalled where some students need further assessment.
> (Amanda Redmond, Post-Primary Resource Coordinator)

CURRENT THINKING

In 2013 The National Council for Special Education made recommendations for students with Special Educational Needs. One in particular chimes with the work in CDETB. This was to "have an individualised assessment which informs teaching and learning and forms one part of an ongoing and cyclical process of assessment, intervention and review of outcomes." A recent element that has been built into the Profiler system is the means to measure progress both in skills and distance travelled in 'soft' skills such as confidence and self-esteem.

Another point made was "The level of additional supports provided should be in line with the needs of the child rather than being linked to a diagnosis of a particular category of disability." This more holistic model is in line with providing the Profile of the individual, capturing specific aspects that may be impacting on the individual and taking a less 'label led' approach.

NEPS has advocated an "interactionist/ecological" approach to assessment which builds up a picture of how an individual student is interacting with all aspects of their educational and social environment and identifies barriers to participation, as well as providing guidance on the support needed to overcome those barriers.

Moving from a narrower, somewhat limited, testing process aligned to a more medical model, to a more holistic approach is central to The Profiler system and is in line with this thinking. It enables individual educational plans to be delivered at the click of a button and monitoring without the requirement of manual input. What this provides is more exact data-driven decision-making, allowing educators to spend more time on intervention and less time on testing for testing's sake.

Times of transition, e.g. from primary to post primary, require information which is easily captured and delivered to new schools so time is not wasted in targeting those students with greatest need.

BUT IS IT "FIT FOR PURPOSE"?

Fit for purpose goes beyond a tick list of standard content. While Do-IT Profiler has already demonstrated success in other countries such as England, Wales, South Africa and Malta, it is most important to ensure it meets the needs of the teachers and the students here in Ireland that it aims to support. **When making choices, ensure your chosen test ticks the right boxes.**

PROFILER TICKS THE BOXES

- Does it have Irish norms?
- Were Irish teachers involved?
- Is terminology Irish based?
- Are there Irish examples?
- Can it be adapted to account for changes in Irish legislation and needs?
- Is it scalable and could it be used across all sectors and across Ireland?
- Can it identify student's specific needs- learning and emotional and provide personalised guidance and guidance for the educator?
- Can it monitor and track soft and hard skills over time?

NEXT STEPS

Working with H2 Learning, CDETB is continuing to use Profiler in colleges, schools, and centres, to better meet the education, training and support needs of its students. Working with principals, practitioners, resource and support staff from across the settings has resulted in the adaptation of the tools to be appropriate for the Irish context and increased confidence taking this approach. As we go, further improvements and developments are being made to Profiler. If you would like to find out more about Do-IT Profiler, contact H2 Learning at 014806208 or by email to info@h2.ie.

WHO ARE H2 LEARNING?

H2 Learning offers a selection of high-quality professional services in the field of technology enhanced learning all education levels. These services include the creation and provision of accredited ICT-based CPD, educational resources, project management services, and evidence-based consultancy services to policy-makers and a broad spectrum of organisations, including higher education and ministries in Ireland and across Europe.

The Storysacks Project in KCETB

By Helen Walsh

The Storysacks[1] idea was created by Neil Griffiths, a former Primary School Head teacher in the UK and author of many children's picture books and educational publications. The Storysacks award-winning products have received international acclaim and fame, helping to bring stories to life worldwide.

KILKENNY AND CARLOW ETB

Kilkenny and Carlow ETB Adult Education Service operates a series of programmes and services all of which respond to the needs of those seeking to return to learning. These programmes are designed to meet the overall learning needs of the participants from a practical, social, academic and personal perspective, and offer a holistic educational approach. Programmes can be unaccredited as well as offering accreditation, and each programme provides learners with an opportunity to progress on to further learning.

Word Aid, the Adult Literacy Service in Kilkenny, provides a variety of learning opportunities and supports to assist the increasing number of adults returning to education. Programmes are provided at numerous venues throughout the county and have been developed in co-operation with a wide range of partners e.g. Adult Guidance Service, Home School Community Liaison, Department of Social Protection, HSE, SOLAS and local community groups, to access specific groups of adults with low levels of formal education. These programmes are targeted at learners with very little confidence in their own literacy skills and as a consequence are reluctant to be involved in their children's education or social activities.

OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT

The Word Aid group who developed this Storysacks project are part of the Interagency Programme, a programme set up to provide support to parents/primary care givers of young children, aimed at improving their own literacy, numeracy and ICT skills while encouraging them to support their children's learning. This programme was funded through ITABE and Literacy resources.

The programme endeavours to encourage lifelong learning and assist in breaking the cycle of intergenerational disadvantage. The programme seeks to assist participants to develop their interpersonal and communications skills for use in their daily lives and to equip learners with the appropriate skills necessary to make informed choices about progression to further vocational education, training and employment.

It also provides participants with the skills and knowledge to demonstrate a high standard of personal health, hygiene, appearance and confidence that can contribute to good personal care and presentation in their daily lives. It introduces participants to a wide range of local support agencies/services in local area and encourages them to avail of the services, as well as encouraging and fostering active citizenship. All participants are linked into the Adult Guidance Service and are offered an opportunity to avail of QQI accredited modules in a wide range of topics from Levels 1 to 3.

Word Aid adult literacy tutors worked in close consultation with Ailish Hogan (Home School Community Liaison Co-ordinator) St. John's Primary School (Kilkenny City) and it was agreed that a Storysacks Project would be a good way to encourage parents/carers to become more actively involved in their children's education while updating and improving their own literacy, numeracy and IT skills[2].

TEAM WORK

A team of up to 15 adult learners were involved in the project at different stages and to varying degrees. The teamwork was vital to the success of the programme. They chose as their story theme, Going on a Bear Hunt, and a wide variety of skills were needed (sewing, knitting, painting, imagination to use household items to make props, storytelling skills, computer skills, laminating and cutting skills). A number of the participants were from different backgrounds and

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1   Storysack is a trading name of Demco Europe Limited, registered address: Grange House, 2 Geddings Road, Hoddesdon, Hertfordshire EN11 0NT, United Kingdom. Registered in England and Wales No. 2067190

2   In the past, many successful projects have been undertaken e.g. A Scrapbooking Project, A Teddy Bear Project, a Family Book Project (as used in Animo TV programme) and Healthy Lifestyles Project. At all times literacy, numeracy and IT are an integral part of the work

cultures, so it was an excellent opportunity to share and compare skills and stories.

BENEFITS OF THE PROJECT

+ Relaxation: The task of making the characters and props was enjoyed individually, as part of the group, and with children at home. The entire project had a personal achievement and accomplishment factor contributing to improved self-esteem.
+ Learners rekindled their knitting and sewing skills to enhance the Storysacks.
+ It encouraged parental involvement through fun activities.
+ The project encouraged intergenerational activities between children, parents, grandparents and other family members.
+ At all times during the project learners were improving their literacy, numeracy and IT skills.
+ The project was a great bonding exercise for all, as each learner was able to bring different skills to the table.
+ The learner involvement in planning the project was excellent, and brainstorming exercises in the planning stages were wonderful. It promoted the recognition in participants that they are their children's first and most important educators, and provided ideas on how to further support their children's learning.
+ The learners improved their own literacy, numeracy and IT Skills as a result of the project.

LITERACY, NUMERACY AND ICT BENEFITS

This project

+ Fostered a passion for reading.
+ Encouraged reading with children at home as they shared their stories.
+ Encouraged learners to use everyday household items as props to encourage reading and play.
+ Improved listening and speaking skills by working together.
+ Reinforced basic maths: measuring, comparing size, ratio, shapes.
+ Reinforced the skill of comparing prices and quantity/ quality of materials.
+ Used computers/internet to research the story 'Going on a bear hunt'.
+ Downloaded and edited activity sheets for the Activity Pack.
+ Researched factual materials on bears to be included in the pack.
+ Took photographs and uploaded to record the construction process.

ON-GOING FOLLOW UP

+ Presentation **to St. John's Junior School**: A group of parents went to St. John's Junior School and presented the Storysacks Project to the Junior Infant Class. They read and used the props to tell the story. It proved to be a hugely successful activity. The HSCLC Ailish Hogan included the initiative in her end-of-year submission to Home School Senior Management, and it was chosen as one of the projects to be exhibited at the NALA Annual Family Learning Conference. A number of learners travelled to Dublin to present the Storysacks on the day. As a direct result of the presentation, NALA asked two

Some of the KCETB adult learners who took part in the Storysacks Project

learners if they would be interested in speaking at NALA events in the future. They have now been selected to speak at the NALA Annual Student Day in May.

+ **HSCLC Induction:** Ailish Hogan was asked to facilitate two Induction Days for newly appointed HSCLC in February 2016. She included the Storysacks as an important element in the success of her work. Attendees of the event included representatives from the Department of Education, Regional Managers of the Educational Welfare Services and Home School Senior Management.

+ **New Family Learning Groups**: Following on from this Storysacks project, a new group has formed in St. John's Junior School for parents of junior classes. The theme of this Family Learning Project is bedtime routine and hygiene. It has been decided to work on another Storysacks and work the topic in through the story. The facilitators are Word Aid Literacy trained tutors and resource workers. A second Storysacks project was created in Ferrybank Library, in South County Kilkenny. This project was shortlisted for the Aontas Star Awards (February 2016).

+ **Neil Griffiths**: Word Aid and St. John's Primary School are investigating the possibility of joint-hosting a Neil Griffiths workshop in Kilkenny in June 2016. The workshop offers training for teachers and tutors and an interactive storytelling session for children.

Helen Walsh joined Word Aid (then Co Kilkenny VEC) Adult Literacy Service as a part time ESOL tutor in 2003, and became a full-time Resource Worker in 2007. While her back ground is in business, she is currently working towards Higher Certificate in Arts in Literacy Development. To date Helen has been involved in a number of programmes with Word Aid, including ESOL, The Adult Refugee Programme and Storysacks, as well as Interagency (literacy and numeracy programmes), Family Learning and Employability Skills Programmes. She feels the success of these programmes is largely due to working in cooperation with other agencies in Kilkenny, including Department of Social Protection, Garda Immigration Services, Family Resource Centres, Community Support groups and services. With other resource workers and the AEO for KCETB, she is currently involved in the tutor training process for volunteer tutors.

Top National Accountancy Award
for St Brigid's College Loughrea Student

Sara Finnerty, a past pupil of St Brigid's College Loughrea, achieved first place in the Leaving Certificate Honours Accountancy examination in Ireland for 2015. This is a fabulous achievement in the context that approximately six thousand students sat the Leaving Certificate Accountancy Examination in June 2015.

Sara who is studying Pharmacy in Trinity College, along with her parents James and Mary, as well as her Accountancy teacher Carmel Mannion and school principal Sean Connolly, were guests at the Business Studies Teachers Association of Ireland awards ceremony held recently in the Banking and Payments Federation Head Offices in Nassau Street in Dublin.

The gold medal was presented to Sara by Mr Eddy Collier, CEO of Bord Gais, to mark this outstanding accomplishment.

Pictured at the BSTAI Academic Achievement Awards are L to R, Mr. Jonathon Lowey (Chairman of the Federation of International Bank in Ireland), St. Brigid's College student, Sara Finnerty, Mr. Sean Connolly (Principal), St. Brigid's College Accountancy teacher Ms. Carmel Mannion, Mr. Ultan Henry (Honorary President, BSTAI), Mr. Eddy Collier (CEO, Bord Gáis).

Left: Students and staff from VTOS Bunclody who received their QQI Major Awards in Employment Skills and General Learning, with Mary Walsh AEO, WWETB and Cllr Barbara Anne Murphy, Chairperson of VTOS Board of Management, WWETB.
Below: VTOS Bunclody Simon Community.

VTOS Bunclody First Year students Teamwork Project: SIMON COMMUNITY

As part of our Teamwork project we decided to support the Simon Community in the South East for Christmas. We set up a Facebook page asking for donations of warm clothes and toiletries and received donations at the VTOS Centre in Bunclody. We were delighted with the response: we received ten bags of clothes and two bags of toiletries.

We also took to the streets of Bunclody with collection buckets. Various businesses gave us donations as well. We collected a grand total of €372. All of this was loaded up and delivered to the Simon Community's head office in Waterford. They were delighted with all of it and they sent us a lovely letter of thanks. It was a very worthwhile experience. We were glad we could help such a worthy cause.

Education and Training Boards (ETBs) in Ireland

Donegal

Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim

Cavan and Monaghan

Louth and Meath

Longford and Westmeath

Co Dublin and Dun Laoghaire

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ETBI

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Kerry

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