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SPRING
2017

Education and Training Boards Ireland

What are **Community National Schools?**

Mental Health and Wellbeing

- ▶ **Learner Mental Health** in FET
- ▶ **Community Education Peer Mentoring** in Mental Health Recovery
- ▶ ETBI's **Breathe Programme**
- ▶ Imaginative **Wellbeing Strategy Initiative** for Schools

Report on the ETBI

FET Conference 2016



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

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Editorial

The advent of 2017 appears to be heralding a more positive and upbeat agenda in the education and training sector. Minister Bruton and the Department of Education and Skills kick-started the year with announcements on ICT infrastructure grants for schools, a new model for allocating resource teachers to schools and proposals to reform the school admissions system in relation to religion. The future roll-out of multi- and non-denominational schools in the context of divestment of schools by church bodies will also continue to be high on the agenda in 2017. The Minister also announced in February an expansion of existing apprenticeship programmes.

ETBI is looking to the future as both a challenge and an opportunity. The pace of change for ETBI and member ETBs over the past 18 months has been phenomenal. ETBI has to up its game as it becomes more accountable for how it functions and fulfils its roles and responsibilities. The ETBI Board has recently approved the Strategic Plan for 2016-2020 which charts the course for the organisation over the next three years. The Strategic Plan is the product of months of planning and dialogue with staff and stakeholders. The plan outlines where ETBI will focus its efforts and resources and sets out the progress that it hopes to achieve. It also reflects the interests of our member ETBs and their anticipated needs for the next three years. The plan includes targeted strategies and actions that support the needs of the membership while complementing and reinforcing the core strengths of our organisation.

So 2017 seems to be starting far more positively than previous years in terms of strategies and initiatives. Ongoing evolution, enhancement and development are features of recent initiatives in the education sector. Embracing and accommodating change is a challenge for us all in the education sector. In this context ETBI hopes that in the context of Junior Cycle reform the ASTI will embrace a future which brings change. The education sector needs to have all unions, management, agencies and government departments working together and in partnership if we are to realise the targets set by Minister Bruton in the Action Plan for Education to have the best education and training system in Europe within a decade.

In the context of Europe also, ETBI has been very active in recent years. Membership and leadership of the European Federation of Education Employers and membership of EUproVET has significantly broadened the horizons of ETBI. Our staff are actively engaged in a number of European working groups, projects and initiatives which continues to enrich our work and inform our future vision. ETBI is engaged in the ET2020 working group on Adult Learning, the European Quality Assurance Network Forum, European Skills Forum, Edison Entrepreneurial Programme as well as apprenticeships and work-based learning.

The process of transformation within ETBI has been phenomenal over the past two years. Staff have been tremendous in adapting to new pressures and responsibilities. This capacity to positively accommodate and respond to change has always been a core value and strength of the ETB sector. That is how we change the world so that we can play our part in building a world-class FET sector (to paraphrase former Minister Quinn) and the best education and training system in Europe (to paraphrase Minister Bruton). In the words of Edmund Hillary "it is not the mountain we conquer but ourselves".

**Michael Moriarty,
General Secretary**

What are Community National Schools?

By Séamus Conboy, ETBI Primary Schools Support Officer



The Community National School ethos is centred around four cornerstones.

Community National Schools have featured quite a lot in the media recently, and people have been asking this question: what exactly is a Community National School? The short answer is that they are State-operated, child-centred, inclusive, multi-belief primary schools. Here are the answers to the other questions people are asking about Community National Schools.

What is a Community National School?

Community National Schools (CNS) are state-operated, multi-denominational, inclusive schools that welcome all children from the local communities they serve. Historically, schools have been managed by private patrons who are also responsible for the ethos of the school e.g. Church bodies, Educate Together. The State has now developed its own primary school model with the Community National Schools.

Why is there a need for a Community National School?

Ireland is changing. It used to be a significantly homogenous country with most people identifying as Roman Catholic. The religious identity of many Irish people has changed in recent years. Ireland has also morphed into a richly diverse country because of the migration experienced during the boom years. Due to these changes, the current school system, which is 96% Church-run, no longer fully reflects Irish society. Even with their best efforts, many Church-run schools are struggling to fully meet the needs

of all of their children due to the constraints of their ethos.

Who is the patron of these schools?

The patrons of CNS schools are the Education and Training Boards (ETBs). ETBs, which were formerly known as VECs, are statutory authorities which have responsibility for education and youth work. ETBs manage and operate Community National Schools, Second-level schools such as Community Colleges and a range of adult and further education centres. They have developed an excellent reputation for their provision of inclusive, innovative education that meets the needs of the entire community.

What is the difference between Community National Schools and other school types?

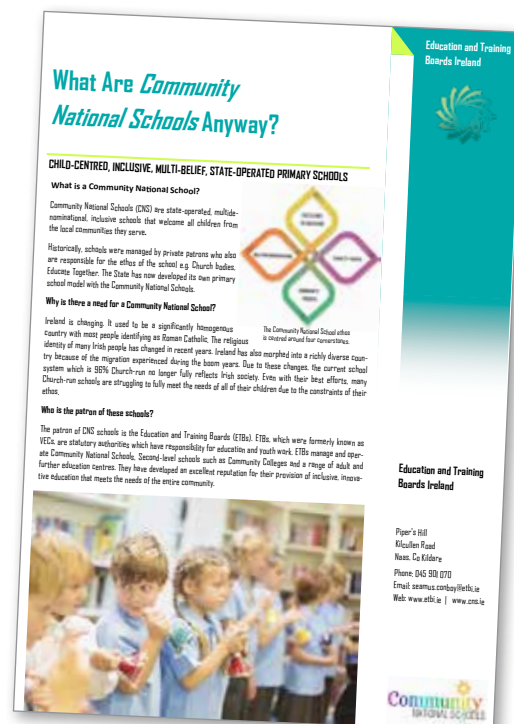
Faced with a number of choices, parents can be comforted knowing that every school, regardless of its patron, follows the same national curriculum. Schools mainly differ in what they call their 'ethos' or characteristic spirit. Many parents describe a Community National School as somewhere between the traditional denominational school and a secular school. Although Community National Schools do not prioritise any one religion over another, space is made within the school day for children to be nurtured in their own faith or secular belief while learning more about their friends' beliefs too.

Although CNS schools pride themselves on their commitment to inclusion and equality for all, their

main commitment is to providing a child-centred education that helps children to live their lives to the full. A focus on both academic and hands-on learning, IT and the nurturing of children's well-being ensures that they are prepared to thrive in and beyond their education journey.

CNS schools are progressive schools rooted in the best of tradition. CNS schools are similar to traditional schools in that the children wear a school uniform and the teacher is referred to formally e.g. Mr. Murphy, Múinteoir Orla.

CNS schools are similar to Educate Together schools in that they have inclusive enrolment policies which do not prioritise any one group over another, are multi-denominational



and have equality central to their ethos.

Unique to each school type is what is known as their 'Patron's Programme'. This is done for 30 minutes a day and underpins the ethos of the school. In a Church-run school, it is a single faith formation programme. However, in a Community National School, it is a multi-belief and values education programme called *Goodness Me! Goodness You!*

How do Community National Schools cater for religious/ secular belief diversity?

Unlike single-denominational schools, Community National Schools have a multi-belief and values education programme that caters for children of all faiths and secular beliefs. The programme is called Goodness Me, Goodness You! or GMY. This programme was developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) which is the statutory body charged with the development of national curricula. It is a belief-nurturing programme where children, with the help of their teacher, parents and belief communities learn more about their own beliefs and those of their friends.

Children learn together about the same theme - the schools communicate with parents about the theme and they talk about it at home from their own faith/belief perspective. Children then share their perspective or experience of the same theme with their class and therefore learn more about themselves and each other.

Does the school support children preparing for special rites of passages e.g. the Sacraments?

Community National Schools also offer Belief Specific Teaching (BST) where parents can request additional supports around specific rites of

passage. For example, many Catholic parents want some support from the school around the sacraments. The schools work with the parents and parish around how they can support them, bearing in mind the limitations they have as they are primarily multi-denominational schools. This support is open to all families from all religions and beliefs. It is different in every Community National School, depending on the needs of the school community and the practices of local belief communities.

Does the GMY Programme deal with topics other than religions and beliefs?

The GMY programme is also a values education programme. Children learn all about ethics and the values of the school, such as equality and justice. They also do what is called 'Thinking Time' where the children learn to think critically and philosophically about different issues. A very nice part of the programme is what is known as 'Quiet Time' where children are encouraged to fall still and think

about all that they have learnt that day in GMY and to consider how that relates to their lives as individuals.

Where are the current Community National Schools and how are they doing?

To date, there are 11 Community National Schools in Dublin, Wicklow, Meath, Kildare and Cork. Each CNS has thrived in the areas they are in and have developed reputations for their inclusive ethos and commitment to excellence in education.

Where can I find out more information about these schools?

For more information or to express an interest in enrolling your child in a new Community National School, please visit www.cns.ie. Each school has its own individual website that can be accessed from here. For more information on Goodness Me! Goodness You! please visit www.gmy.ie.





Learner **Mental Health** in FET



By Dr Marie Rooney, education consultant in supporting mental health and wellbeing in FET

“I really felt after ending up in hospital and everything that my life was over, that ... this was kind of the end of the line for me, I was never going to work again ... and I had met so many people who’d never returned to work. I kind of thought am I ever going to be able to get back on my feet and have a normal life.... I thought I was never going to come out the other side”.
(Karen¹, VTOS student)

Karen, after a mental health crisis was hospitalised and became unemployed, saw a leaflet in the post office advertising a VTOS programme run by the local ETB adult education service, applied and enrolled on the course. Three years later and working again, she says she now feels “part of society” again and wonders “what would have happened to me if I hadn’t seen that leaflet? Would I be still at home in

the house every day?” She might have engaged with another route to recovery, but the educational opportunity she took worked very well in supporting her recovery, rebuilding her confidence, building up her skills and bringing her back into mainstream life. Benefits such as Karen’s from participation in FET are not an uncommon story for people recovering from mental health difficulties.

In this article, informed by what I have learned from research and from issues discussed at in-service training with FET staff over the past few years, I will discuss the relevance of learner mental health issues to FET and outline how participation in FET can be of significant benefit for many people who have experienced mental health difficulties.

A Growing Concern?

Mental health issues among learners are increasingly named by FET staff as a matter of concern. (a) Has incidence increased? Or (b) is there more awareness/disclosure of the issues?

(a) There are no reliable statistics as to the incidence of mental health difficulties among FET learners. The World Health Organisation² states that at least one in four of the general population will experience significant mental health difficulties in their lifetime. It can be assumed that the FET learner population may have particular vulnerabilities, based on the following facts:

1. Persons in unskilled occupations are four times more likely to be admitted to psychiatric hospital than professional groups³. This likelihood increases significantly for those who are unemployed. Internationally, statistics repeatedly demonstrate that socio-economic class is the most significant predictor of mental health difficulties.
2. The national percentage of recipients of disability benefit/allowance who are awarded the payment on mental health grounds is 33%, increased from 25% in 2010⁴. A significant proportion of adult learners are receiving disability benefit/allowance, so it can be assumed that approximately one third of these have experienced mental health difficulties.

"Some applicants are afraid disclosure might prejudice their chance of being offered a place, others are embarrassed by or ashamed of their experience."

The above facts imply a significant incidence of mental health difficulties among FET learners.

(b) The question of disclosure is an interesting one. Mental health difficulties are becoming more commonly disclosed and discussed in Ireland. In recent years, several well-known Irish people have 'come out' and publicly disclosed their history of mental health difficulties. Among these are sporting figures such as Conor Cusack and Alan O'Mara and music/media personalities such as Niall Breslin (Bressie) who has established an excellent website to give support and information on mental health⁵. These brave people have certainly made a difference in giving encouragement, inspiration and support to others, and are making a significant contribution to reducing stigma.

In considering stigma, it is worth remembering that Ireland has a particularly strong history of exclusion and segregation of people with mental health difficulties. In the late 1950s (only 60 years ago) 0.7 per cent of the population of Ireland were in mental hospitals or asylums, apparently the highest rate in the world⁶. And stigma is still a real issue, borne out by surveys such as those carried out regularly by the National Disability Authority⁷ and St Patrick's Hospital⁸. The National Disability Authority consistently finds more negative attitudes towards people with mental health difficulties than towards people with physical or intellectual disabilities, with regard to work, relationships and living as neighbours.

The St Patrick's Hospital report on

its 2015 survey of attitudes among the general public stated that "Every year we carry out this survey in the hope that stigmatizing attitudes relating to mental health issues will reduce but unfortunately year after year they remain the same despite the continued work by many organisations ... For the last three years, the percentage of Irish people who view being treated for a mental health difficulty as a sign of personal failure has remained consistent at 67%." This survey also found that only 21% of people believe that Irish employers would be comfortable employing someone with a mental health problem.

In view of these attitudes, it is not surprising that many FET learners do not disclose their mental health difficulties when applying or enrolling. Some applicants are afraid disclosure might prejudice their chance of being offered a place, others are embarrassed by or ashamed of their experience. In fact, staff report that it is quite common for learners to disclose their history after a few months, when they feel more comfortable, have established some trust and realise that the education setting is a supportive one.

Recovery

The mental health recovery model has developed since the late 20th century, initiated by US mental health service users who reacted against being labelled and limited for life by a medical diagnosis. One of these was Pat Deegan⁹, who writes about how, at the age of 18, her 'already fragile hopes and dreams and aspirations' were crushed by a psychiatrist telling her that 'my

life, by virtue of being labelled with schizophrenia, was already a closed book... the best I could hope for was to take my medications, avoid stress and cope'. Her 'angry indignation' fuelled her decision to 'get a powerful degree and have enough credentials to run a healing place myself... Starting with one course in English Composition at the local community college I slowly made my way' to a PhD. in clinical psychology. She is now a respected speaker on recovery at national and international level.

Recovery means that a person with a mental health difficulty moves from being a passive patient in receipt of medical treatment towards assuming primary responsibility for their own recovery process. Recovery is not the same as cure. It has been described as 're/claiming a socially valued lifestyle and social empowerment, rather than becoming symptom-free'.

The individual still has to deal with mental health difficulties, but does so with a sense of involvement and control over their lives. As Deegan writes, 'To me recovery means I try to stay in the driver's seat of my life. I don't let my illness run me'.

This approach does not necessitate abandoning medical treatment, but rather means working with medical personnel instead of being a passive recipient of treatment. In fact, many Irish mental health services now offer recovery programmes, e.g. WRAP (Wellness Recovery Action Planning)¹⁰, which has proved extremely helpful for many people. The last twenty years have seen a large number of personal writings and academic research reports and papers on mental health recovery. The journey of recovery is an individual one and what works for one person may not for another. However, there seem to be some

generally agreed factors which are essential to the process. Three of the most important of these are Hope, Empowerment and Social connectedness.

It is easy to see how relevant and applicable these factors are to the experience of participation in FET:

- *Hope*: by undertaking an education or training course, an individual demonstrates some level of hope for themselves and their future. It is important that education staff also have a hopeful and encouraging attitude towards the learner.
- *Empowerment*: The experience of mental health difficulties usually has a very detrimental effect on a person's self-confidence. Achieving learning goals, whether ambitious or modest, can be hugely empowering, both



psychologically and perhaps practically in opening up employment opportunities.

- *Social connectedness*: it is all too easy for a person with mental health difficulties to become isolated. In Ireland, only 15% of people with long-term mental health problems are in employment. It is easy to see how participation in FET can be a significant step away from the possibility of marginalisation – both through participation and being part of a class/group, and also through potentially attaining qualifications to enter employment.

Another important factor is the intrinsic benefit of learning in itself. Some years ago, for an Education Doctorate entitled *Learning is my Prescription: Adult Education and Mental Health Recovery*⁷, I carried out research by interviewing people who had experienced mental health difficulties and were taking part in ETB (then VEC)-run education programmes. These learners reported many benefits of returning to education – gains in self-confidence, in feelings of empowerment and in aspirations for the future. These gains might well have been expected, or at least hoped for, but more striking was the value that these learners placed on the experience of learning in and of itself, rather than merely as a means to an end, such as qualifications or employment. The value placed on learning ranged from *occupation* ('Studying is a way of occupying my mind and stopping it turning in on itself') to *affirmation* ('I kind of thought I'd never be able to learn anything again – you feel like you're losing your mind when you're depressed... Once you feel that coming back you feel so much more normal again') to *salvation* ('Being here in VTOS has been my saviour

and studying – it's my therapy... Basically it's my prescription'). The path to mental health recovery is an individual one. Return to education will not suit all, but for those who go in that direction it can be a wonderful step towards recovery.

Support for Learners

Learners with mental health difficulties experience the same range of barriers to learning as other learners. However, they may experience particular challenges. When people have been part of the mental health system for some time, or when they have experienced processes of labelling and diagnosis, their confidence in themselves may be eroded. They may have experienced underestimation of their abilities by themselves and others. In view of these factors, it is not surprising that learners with mental health difficulties report that encouraging and positive attitudes from staff are the most important support. I heard this from every learner who took part in my research. The support that was most valued by participants came in the form of staff attitudes. The significance of a welcoming and inclusive environment should not be underestimated. Frank, one of the participants in my study, found that the staff in the college of further education he attended 'don't look down on you... they give you a bit of confidence, you know what I mean?'. Frank mentioned several times during his interviews how out of place he felt in the college at first. 'When I got into here... I met people I never thought I'd meet – people that I probably would have thought of mugging them... I never met them before, end of story'. But he found that '[the college] is kind of homely. That's the way I can explain it, you know, everyone is down to earth. And it's a grand little bleedin' college'. Not alone did Frank come from an inner-city

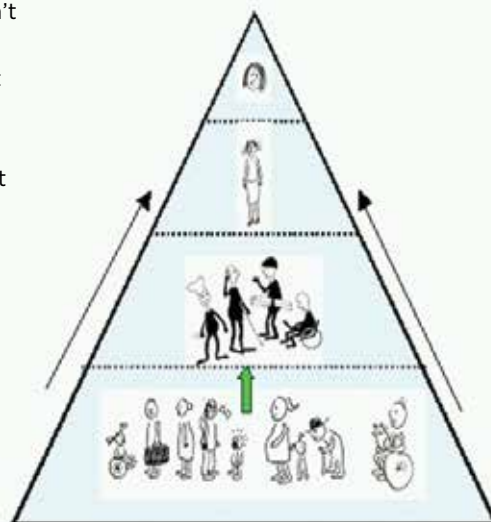
background, but he had been 'on the skids', living rough for years. It was a remarkable move for him to take on further education, but one that would not have worked without a very non-judgmental, accepting and welcoming attitude from college staff. This attitude is important for the flourishing of adult learners generally, who very commonly, even if their story is not as dramatic as Frank's, feel like 'fish out of water' in an FET environment.

The central importance of staff attitudes is corroborated in other studies. For example, the report from the *Inclusion, Equality and Mental Health: Mental Health in Education Project*¹² states that key supports from staff include

- Supporting the learner in feeling valued and understood
- Being kind
- Being flexible
- Giving confidence
- Encouraging and motivating

Universal Design

The Universal Design pyramid¹³ is a helpful way to look at the issue of support:



- **Level 4 (top of pyramid):**
Personal individual assistance
e.g., sign language interpreter,
personal assistant
- **Level 3:** Reasonable adjustments
for the individual, e.g., assistive
technology
- **Level 2:** Adaptations for groups
with similar needs, e.g., accessible
literature for student with reading
difficulties
- **Level 1:** Universal design:
including most students in the
ordinary solutions

The support which will help most learners with mental health difficulties who access FET is at level 1 – Universal Design. In other words, what will support learners with mental health difficulties is mainly good adult education practice. Practices which learners with mental health difficulties find supportive are, for the most part, those that should be in place for learners generally. The following is a sample from a longer list of supports which can be accessed in an article entitled *Wellbeing in the FET Environment* on the Further Education Support Service website¹⁴.



- Providing time and non-threatening activities to settle learners in and enable them to start to get to know one another....
- Spending time agreeing some group ground rules to promote respect for diversity within the group, respect for everybody's right to learn, etc....
- Supporting organisation of work and time management including providing study
- Skills support/ tools e.g. planning structure, revision timetables....
- Providing positive and encouraging feedback....
- Showing where progress is being made....
- Ensuring you never humiliate or embarrass the learner....
- Being friendly and interested....
- Providing notes, e.g. on Moodle

All of the above would generally be recognised as good practice in FET settings. Some, e.g. providing notes on Moodle, while useful for all students, may be particularly beneficial for students with mental health difficulties who may find it difficult to concentrate in class or may miss some classes.

The additional list below may apply to students with particular problems, including those with mental health difficulties (a longer list is available on the FESS website, see above):

- mentoring and learning support – support in planning and organising work, study skills, time management (see note on Fund for Students with Disabilities below)
- flexibility re time off for medical or counselling appointments
- help to negotiate leave of absence, part-time attendance or extension of course
- support and liaison to organise successful return to course
- Possible modifications to assessment:
 - alternatives to group work assignments
 - extension of assignment deadlines
 - extra time or separate room for examinations

It should not be assumed that any individual learner with mental health issues will avail of all or any of these supports. Some will prefer not to, others won't need to. This includes extensions of assignment deadlines. Some teachers assume that a student who has declared mental health issues will automatically be late for deadlines. However, it is much more positive and empowering to assume that the learner will have assignments in on time and that extension of deadlines under compassionate consideration or other procedures should be the exception rather than the rule.

Fund for Students with Disabilities

Funding for support of learners with mental health difficulties on level 5 or 6 full time courses in FE Colleges is available through the Fund for Students with Disabilities (FSD). (See Higher Education Authority website)¹⁵. As with other disabilities, documentary evidence from a medical consultant (in this case a psychiatrist) must be obtained and filed confidentially in the college for auditing. There are two closing dates for applications – October and December – the latter to give a chance for applications to be submitted on behalf of learners who disclose or supply information after their course has started. Late disclosure is a common occurrence with learners who have mental health difficulties. Of course, the earlier that disclosure takes place the earlier that support can be put in place. To encourage early disclosure, inclusive publicity materials and application procedures are important.

Mentoring and learning support are acknowledged to be the most useful support for learners with mental health difficulties, and are the best way to use FSD funding. This learning support does not need to be subject-specific but rather generic, giving support in relation to organisation, study skills and planning. Also, it does not have to be one-to-one but could be organised in small groups. A college in Dublin which has started using the fund in this way for learners with mental health difficulties finds that it works very well because the group itself can be supportive. Also if the learner is absent and misses the learning support session, the tutor's time and payment for that hour will not be wasted.

There is an inequity in that this fund applies only to learners in FE colleges and not to learners in other settings. Also, from my CPD sessions in many FE colleges around the country, I have the impression that funding could be accessed more, and also that it could sometimes be used more effectively.

Conclusion

FET staff do not need specialist knowledge or skills to support learners with mental health difficulties. Knowledge about particular mental health conditions or their symptoms and treatments is not necessary – that is for health professionals. What staff do need are an understanding of the issues, some knowledge and information to underpin their teaching skills and inform their practice and the confidence that, if they are good teachers providing empowering and inclusive learning experiences, they are likely also to be meeting the needs of learners who have mental health difficulties.

Footnotes

- 1 All learner names in this article are pseudonyms
- 2 <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/noncommunicable-diseases/mental-health/data-and-statistics>
- 3 http://www.hrb.ie/uploads/tx_hrbpublications/HRB_Statistics_Series_22_-_Irish_Psychiatric_Units_and_Hospitals_Census_2013.pdf
- 4 Department of Social Protection
- 5 www.alustforlife.com
- 6 *Hearing Voices: the history of psychiatry in Ireland* (2016) Brendan Kelly. Irish Academic Press
- 7 <http://nda.ie/Publications/Attitudes/Public-Attitudes-to-Disability-in-Ireland-Surveys/Public-Attitudes-to-Disability-in-Ireland-Survey-2011.html>
- 8 <http://www.stpatricks.ie/survey-only-53-agree-people-mental-health-difficulty-are-trustworthy>
- 9 <https://uk.video.search.yahoo.com/search/video?fr=mcafee&p=youtube+pat+deegan#id=2&vid=743231f8145cef7a58a6e487709d0924&action=view>
- 10 <http://mentalhealthrecovery.com>
- 11 http://nuim.summon.serialssolutions.com/search?spellcheck=true&keep_r=true&ho=t&sq=mental+health+recovery#!/search?ho=t&l=en&q=marie%20rooney
- 12 Inclusion, Equality and Mental Health: Mental Health in Education Project (Schizophrenia Ireland and Liberties College) 2005
- 13 <http://universaldesign.ie/What-is-Universal-Design/> National Disability Authority website www.nda.ie
- 14 http://www.fess.ie/images/stories/Learner_Well_being/WellbeingInTheFETEnvironment.pdf
- 15 <http://www.studentfinance.ie/mp7575/fund-for-students-with-disabilities/index.html>

A new Community Education programme for mental health recovery involving Peer Mentoring



Brenda Healy, UCC
Programme Coordinator



Michelle Anne Houlihan,
Kerry ETB Community
Education Facilitator

A Case Study in Mental Health Recovery – The Kerry Experience

by Brenda Healy, UCC Programme Coordinator & Michelle Anne Houlihan,
Kerry ETB Community Education Facilitator

A Community Education programme can be defined as a locally-based education programme that is responsive to the local community's needs, is developed in consultation with the local community, is accessible, inclusive and culturally appropriate, takes place in the community and embraces the principles of empowerment, consideration, collective consciousness, social justice and equality of access.

“Learning for Life”, The White Paper on Adult Education (2000), identified the values and theory that underpin Community Education programmes, which include the following.

- Community Education is systematic learning, deliberately undertaken by adults, which can be formal or informal, and has value even when not formally accredited;
- Community Education embodies an openness to alternative structures and a critique of existing ones, featuring:
 - an emphasis on sharing in learning rather than competing in it;
 - a blurring of distinctions between the ‘teacher’ and the ‘taught’;
 - an endeavour to locate

personal individual experiences within the broader social and political context;

- the elimination of hierarchy;
- an orientation towards enhanced educational and vocational progression for the participants;
- A challenge to the dominant modes of assessment and accreditation; and
- An emphasis on the importance of working in partnership with other community groups and statutory bodies to ensure inclusivity.

The White Paper was the first document to define the role of informal education in Ireland and the value in resourcing and researching the impact of including the learner at all stages of the learning programmes.

Kerry ETB has actively supported the development of Community Education programmes and new models of learning in order to engage with difficult-to-reach groups. This has resulted in the piloting of new learning models in partnership with deaf learners, people with disabilities, people on environmental projects, asylum seekers, Travellers and other groups for whom there are recognised

barriers to participation in mainstream education and training opportunities. Having recognised the value of such programmes, in early 2010 Kerry ETB initiated discussions with the HSE and Kerry Mental Health Services on developing a mental health recovery education programme.

Early stages

During the development process, which involved service users of the Kerry Mental Health Services, family members, professionals, and community members, a gap in existing community services and supports was identified. There were no current programmes in Kerry aimed at providing recovery education and facilitating the development of recovery literacy for participants. “Recovery literacy” refers to the instilling of values and beliefs about mental health and wellbeing which aids individualised, holistic, transformative approaches to personal recovery. An educational approach permits the exploration of personal recovery and the development of strategies for wellness and recovery.

Further discussion resulted in a vision for the programme that would be organic, with all stages of the initiative being peer-led, as it became clear that the support and guidance of peers would be

a key factor in helping individuals to establish wellness and recovery. Therefore from the outset, space and time was built in for the shapers of the Recovery Education programme to build confidence, to reflect on their own experiences, to engage in dialogue on recovery literacy, to develop the skills to support others and to shape future delivery.

Locating the learning in a community-based setting was also considered a critical factor in the recovery education process, as it recognised the value of community development in this process, its collective social purpose and inherently political agenda – to promote trust and tolerance between community members, and to break the ‘them and us’ mentality that perpetuates stigma and self-stigma.

Under the leadership of the Kerry ETB Community Education Facilitator, Michelle Anne Houlihan, a partnership agreement between Kerry Mental Health Services, University College Cork (UCC), Tralee Mental Health Association and Kerry ETB was formed, to deliver a community-based education programme to enhance personal capacity and to start the dialogue on recovery education. Kerry ETB also provided funding support.

Designing the programme – curriculum content and delivery

The curriculum was designed and delivered by Brenda Healy, programme coordinator for UCC with expertise in recovery education, and Joe Keane, an expert through experience in recovery education, with Dr Darra Phelan, Consultant Psychiatrist, and Mike Riordan, Clinical Nurse Manager of Killarden House.

An eight-week Peer Mentoring programme within an informal,

collaborative, learning environment, was devised. The programme took place in a community setting (Tralee Community Development Project) rather than in a healthcare building. The initial programme participants were recruited from users of mental health services in Kerry, identified as having been advocating for a change in the way services were delivered and for an understanding and use of recovery language.

The concept of ‘mentoring’ was chosen as a pedagogical approach, with the aim of enabling people to find their way by looking at what works for others in their recovery journey.

Peer support offered a different way of thinking and talking about emotional and mental distress. The peer leader embodies hope and recovery, through their willingness to share their story with others with similar life experiences, and to relate what they have learned during that journey. Being a peer leader involves a transformative re-framing of the lived experience of mental distress while supporting others in a relationship of mutual reciprocity, which can lead to personal recovery and wellness outcomes, as well as community healing. The peer-to-peer approach is based on the principles of equality, empathy and interpersonal trust, leading to individual and collective empowerment and enhanced personal capacity and resilience for mental health recovery.

A recovery approach as recommended in the national mental health strategy document “Vision for Change” (2006), was incorporated into the design of the programme, which emphasised the important role community education can play in initiating individual and collective empowerment. The curriculum encompassed and fostered many of

the recovery principles, encouraging participants to:

- Find hope and meaning in life. This can happen even while symptoms exit.
- Tell their personal narrative, as opposed to medical descriptions of experiences of distress.
- Give meaning and expression to those experiences – foster the lived experience, their hopes and dreams, potential and growth.
- Reclaim personal power, learn to become an expert in their own wellness and take back control over their own life. Take ownership and personal responsibility for maintaining wellness and working on their own personal recovery plan.
- Learn to take positive risks to mobilise their internal strengths and external supports.
- Become an ambassador and leader of good mental health in their community.
- Eliminate feelings of stigma and social exclusion through civic engagement on issues that concern them in their recovery.
- Share information through a process of reciprocity, mutual support and collective empowerment, learning about what works in their own recovery, learning from others what works for them.
- Accept vulnerabilities. *It’s okay not to be okay.*

Individual learning goals and a group contract were negotiated at the outset with the participants, to initiate learner empowerment and to enhance group trust.



While facilitators guided the group to work towards goals of recovery from a personal, as well as a community, perspective, the curriculum was at all times led by the participants' needs. In a participant-led learning environment, the lines between tutor and facilitator are blurred and the hierarchical relationship is often overturned. Peer-to-peer processes are nurtured, encouraging the co-construction of learning through mutual reciprocity. Hence the programme changed along the way as it was influenced by the participants. The principle of 'readiness', a core concept in recovery education, was critical in this process.

Experiential processes encouraged participants to draw on their strengths through reflecting on and valuing their lived experience, and making their own experiences and insights the basis of all their learning, emotionally, psychologically and cognitively (Connolly, 1996). The promotion of personalised learning and flexibility within the learning group encouraged the development of critical self-reflection and fostered the capacity for transformative learning.

"...by telling our story of mental health difficulties and our journeys to recovery and leading positive lives each of us have so much

to offer... that there is hope for recovery for everyone no matter how dark and bleak things seem."
(member of Tralee Recovery Group)

Success

Following the completion of the initial eight-week Peer Mentoring Programme, the twelve participants trained in Peer Leadership identified a need to develop their skills further to help them support other adult mental health service users in Kerry. They requested additional training, and were further funded by Kerry ETB to undertake a Community Education Facilitation Skills course. A Peer-Led Recovery Group was created. They currently hold weekly

Peer-led Recovery meetings which focus on a topic of recovery chosen by the Peer Leaders. Meetings are open to the community, and no referrals are necessary. Participants are encouraged to share their story in a mutually respectful, empathetic environment.

“The Recovery Group is somewhere for me to go to connect... share your story, help others, inspire others through my own story. Tell people there is so much you can do for yourself. Comes down to education and seeking out help....working your way out of depression rather than thinking your way out”
(member of Tralee Recovery Group)

In a follow-up to the initial Peer Mentoring training and the Facilitation Skills course, the project made a successful application for

Genio¹ funding. This was the catalyst for the establishment of the Kerry Peer Support Network (KPSN) and the promotion and extension of the language of Recovery in Kerry. Not only did the funding provide the KPSN with the opportunity to expand, it empowered members to access further progression opportunities in education. In 2015, six members progressed to third level education and successfully completed a Level 6 Certificate in *Mental Health in the Community* delivered by Adult Continuing Education in UCC.

“...there are many benefits of getting involved with KPSN. You can just be a participant in their groups and workshops if you wish, but if you feel ready and want more there is a wonderful opportunity to grow.”
(KPSN member)

Three members of the KPSN were selected by the HSE to deliver training on recovery principles to staff working in Kerry Mental Health Services.

Another KPSN member is now the WRAP Co-ordinator for the Network and co-ordinates workshops throughout Kerry, delivered by trained WRAP facilitators. WRAP (Wellness Recovery Action Plan²) is an internationally renowned educational programme, accredited by the Mary Ellen Copeland Foundation, that supports the development of personal recovery plans.

Another KPSN member sits on the Recovery Committee of the HSE in Kerry. Through her involvement with the Kerry Mental Health Services, her voice is now influencing policy at local level. She was also a guest



speaker at the Kerry ETB Education and Training Fair in 2015 and received the greatest number of responses from the live radio show, inspiring many people to pick up the phone to ring in and share their own stories or seek support for a family member.

Six members of KPSN delivered a presentation about their involvement with the Network and shared their experiences of recovery at the ARI seminar in Kerry in February 2016, organised by the local Area Management Team of Kerry Mental Health Services.

"I entered as a stranger and leave as a friend...I have met the most interesting people willing to share their lives with me and each other... my understanding of mental health has been dramatically enhanced. KPSN has changed my life and my perspective on life"
(Tralee Recovery Group member)

Expansion

In 2014, a second Recovery Group began at the Mental Health Unit, University Hospital Kerry.

In autumn 2015 the Kerry ETB Community Education Facilitator received requests from the Kenmare area to deliver a community-based course on mental health in Kenmare. Based on the success of the Tralee group, a Peer Mentoring Programme for Kenmare was established with the support of HSE staff, members of the local Family Resource Centre, UCC and the Social and Health Education Project (SHEP) Cork, as well as the KPSN. The collaborative work and trust of the participating organisations resulted in Kerry ETB Community Education Programme funding the programme in May 2016.

"... on bad days you can feel as if you will never have good days and it's good to know that it's okay not to be okay."

(Kenmare group member)

Following the completion of the first training programme, a new Peer Support Group called PRESS (Peer Recovery Extended Support System) was set up by the members, which holds weekly meetings, has developed its own vision and mission statement and runs its groups with full autonomy. The group's needs are now supported by a South Kerry Forum comprising Kerry ETB, the Community Mental Health Team, the Social Work Department, the Kenmare Family Resource Centre and KPSN.

Representatives from the PRESS group in Kenmare attend monthly KPSN Executive meetings. PRESS members also completed WRAP Facilitator training in August 2016 to further their skills in recovery education. This and other training opportunities are provided by KPSN and are available to all its members.

"It's powerful to have someone listen to you with empathy."
(PRESS group member)

In 2016, a project to set up a Peer Mentoring Programme in Caherciveen was established, with plans to roll out the Peer Mentoring Training Programme and WRAP training to prospective participants from the local area in the autumn 2016.

National policy and the Kerry experience

The work of KPSN in advocating and promoting a Personal Recovery approach is in line with current national policy on mental healthcare, which is being driven by the Advancing Recovery Ireland (ARI) Action Plan³, which supports local

mental health services and initiatives in bringing 'Recovery Principles' into the heart of how they provide care.

The Personal Recovery process is defined as

"... an individual process of discovering one's own strengths, values, meaning and aspiration; a self-determined journey that can take place inside or outside the mental health system, through personal development, through partnership relationships with professionals, through peer support or through community support. It is a process of reconnecting with life that can happen for some with the continuation of symptoms while for others, a reduction in symptoms is important. In contrast, clinical recovery is an observable, objective state recognisable by a medical practitioner... generally including the reduction or elimination of symptoms."
(McDaid, 2013)

A most welcome national policy development is the establishment of Recovery Colleges⁴, now being adopted by mental health services around the country. The Recovery College initiative aims

"... to empower people with mental health difficulties, their families, friends and the broader community, to improve quality of life and to promote community involvement through the provision of unbiased, co-produced and co-delivered learning and dialogue. The college recognises the equal importance of professional expertise and lived experience, so each of the modules is co-produced and co-delivered by health professionals and people with personal experience of mental illness."⁵

Currently, there is on-going discussion in Kerry to embrace the Recovery College concept and to work in partnership with educators, health professionals, experts by experience, and most importantly, people with mental health problems. This national policy development is an opportunity for the recovery concept to be researched and resourced, which up to now has been beyond our means in Kerry, due to lack of resources. The established KPSN and the work undertaken through the Community Education Programme gives us a context within which these developments can grow.

Lessons learned

We have learned many valuable lessons since the beginning of this initiative. In the absence of resources to complete in-depth research on the project, we can identify several key components to the success of this county-wide initiative.

- Community Education Programme was a key tool in influencing and promoting this model of Recovery Education.
- The location of Recovery Education training in a community setting rather than a healthcare facility was essential.
- The role of mentoring as a pedagogical approach in the programme(s) was highlighted.
- This initiative was a bottom-up response to mental health recovery: doing with people as opposed to doing for them.
- This initiative identified the value of listening to and meeting the felt needs of individuals and community groups and allowing established groups to grow organically.

- Partnership and co-authorship were invaluable. Every new Recovery Group was offered the opportunity to be the authors of their own programme. In the absence of a national vision up to recently, the values and theory of community education were used to develop a consultative, inclusive partnership approach, understanding that the adults who use mental health services are the authors and co-producers of future education programmes.
- All developments were informed by recovery principles: a strength-based approach, to develop capacity in participants for readiness, self-advocacy, self-responsibility, hope, education, self-determination, and peer support. The Personal Recovery approach recognises that participants are at different stages of recovery and allows them to dip in and out of supports, giving them the time and space they require on their recovery journey.

Conclusion

KPSN has developed from being a single Community Education programme aimed at providing a community-based response to mental health recovery, to becoming an established county-wide project which now has two functions:

- KPSN is a hub for Peer-Led Education and Support in Kerry, promoting an educational and mentoring approach to enable people to become experts in their self-care on their recovery journey and providing progression opportunities for members who choose to become Peer Leaders.
- KPSN provides support for other Kerry areas that wish to set up their own Peer-Led groups.

This is an exciting time in Kerry. While there is now a national commitment to develop the Recovery College concept, we have an ideal scenario in Kerry in that the stage has already been set. Many of the lessons have been learned through process and valuing a bottom-up approach. We could claim that real empowerment through participation occurred when there was no national vision. It's important now that the national vision includes the very people they aim to support.



Recommendations

With the aim of continuing the dialogue on Recovery Education that has commenced in Kerry, the following recommendations are made.

- Up to now, the work has been supervised by a voluntary steering group. The establishment of a more formal arrangement needs to be considered.
- In order to develop the initiative and ensure its sustainability, time and resources must be given to allow it to develop and grow. The initiative would benefit from a strategic business plan on how it will be supported into the future.
- A county-based plan to promote the Recovery College concept needs to be developed to respond to the inevitable and organic growth of the further educational needs of the Recovery Group Networks. The plan should be based on local needs and not be Centre-based. Kerry is a rural county where transport can be an issue. Locating Recovery Education in only one venue would automatically exclude the majority of service users and may perpetuate further institutionalisation of those currently using services. Organisers of Recovery Colleges must build in time and space into their structures to allow Recovery Education to be organic, and must ensure that all partners are equal co-producers. While striving to ensure that the service users are the future advocates, it must be appreciated that this may take time, and that this will differ depending on the group's abilities. The needs must be resourced.
- Valuing and nurturing the lived experience are of greatest importance in informing future delivery of programmes and enhancing recovery literacy, as is valuing informal learning. While this can be a difficult concept for funders, it is essential that the programmes are process-based rather than syllabus-focused.

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Footnotes

- 1 Genio is a registered Irish charity working to bring Government and philanthropic funders together to develop better ways to support disadvantaged people to live full lives in their communities. See www.genio.ie.
- 2 See the WRAP website <http://mentalhealthrecovery.com/>.
- 3 See http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/Mental_Health_Services/advancingrecoveryireland/.
- 4 Recovery colleges are places where the people who use mental health services and those who support them create and deliver services along with mental health professionals. People can choose to attend these courses as part of their recovery journey. See http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/Mental_Health_Services/advancingrecoveryireland/recoverycolleges/.
- 5 See <http://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/mental-health-happy-to-enrol-in-college-of-recovery-1.1945397>
- 6 <http://www.studentfinance.ie/mp7575/fund-for-students-with-disabilities/index.html>

Is your school or centre breathing more freely...?

ETBI's Breathe programme can show you how



By Ger Canning, Adult Education Officer, Cork ETB

Many of our young people are fine, they manage, they cope, they prosper and they go on to live healthy lives, but many others find themselves walking a very rocky road. Research highlights statistics that claim one in four of our young people are self-harming, while other statistics claim a significant increase on those suffering from anxiety. In Cork ETB, we noticed a significant shift in the referrals to our Youthreach Centres, with only 38% now coming from schools and a noticeable increase in those presenting with multiple behaviour issues and mental health difficulties. We have completely changed our curriculum to facilitate this shift.

I believe our school culture can change, indeed, must change too, if we are to turn the tide. We need to be there for our young people. They need to know we are there. Everyone needs a significant other, a caring adult who can listen. Young people spend 35 to 50 hours each week in school or Youthreach, so it is imperative that the staff in these educational settings understand the need to care and foster resilience and empathy within their centres.

Contact with caring adults and a sense of connection with the school/centre are major protective factors against a variety of disruptive behaviours including: substance abuse, interpersonal violence and suicide. Building a more supportive culture in the school/centre involves emotional, structural and problem-solving support. Staff as well as parents are key caregivers in the lives of our young people and therefore, they are essential components in any programme that will increase and

improve Emotional Intelligence, that may help build resilience. Schools should develop a suicide prevention policy along with other policies as part of the school development planning.

Some staff in school and Youthreach centres already feel under pressure to perform to our results-based system. It is difficult to ask them to engage further. Some believe their primary function is to teach. The challenge for all of us involved though, is to try and understand the variables that affect effective learning. According to internationally renowned Professor of Educational Leadership at St Marys University London, John West Burnham, these include: Social Relationships, Intelligences, Family/Community Health & Well-Being, Neurological Factors, Individual Learner and a Learning Culture.

How could we create a more embracing learning culture that might help stem the tide and enable our young people to cope?

Breathe was established as a not-for profit organisation, under the aegis of ETBI, with the purpose of creating awareness on positive mental health, supporting *The Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention* issued by the Department of Education and Skills (http://www.nosp.ie/Well_Being_PP_Schools_Guidelines.pdf).

The Breathe programme specifically addresses elements in the Prevention Guidelines through creating a creative learning environment. Moreover the structure and rationale of this programme addresses

the reality that problems arise in everyone's lives but coping with them is a strategy that can be learned. Breathe, unlike other programmes in the suicide prevention field is not dealing with students who are at the cliff edge; rather it is teaching them to cope in order to avoid ever getting there.

A young person's capacity for successful learning can be greatly enhanced by developing their ability to learn about themselves and make informed decisions regarding their social development, their personal lives and their own health. Self-worth, a sense of security and a positive self-image can be fostered through the objectives of the Breathe programme and further instilled with the SPHE curriculum which can have a positive effect on the young person in all walks of life. "With such support, students can be enabled to participate as active and responsible adults in the personal and social dimensions of society and to make responsible decisions that respect their own dignity and the dignity of others" (pg.3).

Parents, and staff, too, will develop new skills in listening and engaging in dialogue with their children. Dr Fergus Heffernan (PhD Neuro Science, MSc Cellular Molecular Biology, MSc Family Therapies, BSc Clinical Psychology) leading psychologist in RD Consult Kilkenny, insists that the greatest value the Breathe project has to offer is that it is rooted in the family; biological family, environmental family and school community family. It comprises four workshops for parents, teachers, management and students. Workshop 1 discusses the

rationale for a prevention policy in every centre/school. Workshops 2, 3 and 4 are facilitated by trained personnel and constantly evaluated and reviewed. The school community is an extension of the family unit and we must ensure the core is healthy. We must adopt a unified approach based on knowledge and common sense in order to bring about change. Pause. Breathe. Play.

“A life without the arts is a life without insight into what it means to be human.” John Dewey, the influential American philosopher, psychologist, and educational reformer, suggested that once we begin to create and respond to the arts, we open up our emotions, perception and appreciation.

The foundation of the Breathe programme is creative drama, an approach specifically developed for educational and awareness-raising purposes. It is an improvisational, non-performance-driven and process-oriented form of drama. Learner-participants are guided by a facilitator to imagine, enact and reflect on experiences that may be real or hypothetical scenarios designed to raise specific issues in a space where thoughtful engagement with difficult subjects can occur. In practice, individuals and groups set out to resolve problems and seek solutions through the medium of exploration and expression.

“What a simple notion, and what a powerful one too! Coláiste Daibhéid is a Gaelcholáiste in the middle of Cork city... Like all ETB schools we strive to ensure that our young adults leave equipped for all the challenges that life will throw at them – skills and traits that sometimes are often overlooked in other sectors: communication, resilience, cooperation, understanding of others, understanding of difference.

The Breathe programme takes the form of half-day workshops during which students work on resilience skills, role-play, communication, and confidence development, all through drama, paint, (yes it does get messy) and laughter. It also works well in bonding a class, in allowing themselves to be foolish and funny for a bit without wondering what others might think, because everyone is involved. However the impressive aspect of this workshop is that when the students leave with a yellow band around their wrist they have now opened the door to a formula for dealing with stress, anxiety, conflict, worry. A simple formula: Pause. Breathe. Play. A formula that doesn't mean that the stress or anxiety or self-doubt or conflict won't occur but means that if it does occur, the student/teacher/parent/Principal will take that one breath so that the issue can be dealt with in a more balanced state of mind.”

Tadhg Ó'Laighin, Príomhoide, Coláiste Daibhéid (Cork ETB)

Success

The programme has now been successfully introduced in over 200 schools and feedback from students, parents, psychologists and staff has, in the main, been very positive. A small piece of academic research was also carried out and some of the findings have influenced the continuing structure of the programme.

The most consistent finding was enhanced engagement and



Pause. Breathe. Play.

connection between students. Engagement and connection were enhanced by:

- Establishing rapport
- Making connections
- Establishing appropriate levels of trust
- The programme reached students who were otherwise not being reached. Communication was enhanced by:
- Articulating opinions clearly
- Listening to others

Showing respect

We tend to respond to issues rather than focus on preventing them. We deal with each issue in isolation offering a quick-fix. Emotional well-being is the key to unlocking the door. A whole school/centre approach towards positive mental health is critical to the well-being of our students. We must approach the emotional well-being of our young people through a planned and consistent programme. Bullying, alcohol, substance abuse and suicide are often results of an unhealthy society. It is time to stop thinking only of our economic capital and start investing in our social capital – our young people. This is what the Breathe initiative aims to do. Find more information on www.justbreathe.ie.



Well-known personalities who believe in www.justbreathe.ie!



Handing over the Report to Anne O'Donnell, Department of Children and Youth Affairs, October 2016

Kilkenny Comhairle na nÓg takes imaginative wellbeing initiative

By Dr Gerry Jeffers, Educational researcher and lecturer, Education Department, Maynooth University

Many schools are proactive in addressing mental health issues. Young people in Kilkenny Comhairle na nÓg recently devised an imaginative framework to support schools in this important work. They followed this up with a pilot project in selected schools. 'The evidence from participants in the pilot project points to the effectiveness of the framework in supporting schools to address wellbeing issues. In particular, the contributions of the students in the focus group interviews confirm the relevance and immediacy of the initiative,' concluded a recent evaluation.²

One of the teachers in a pilot school remarked:

'I suppose we were already doing quite a number of things suggested in the mental health project. The framework helped us focus on doing the right things. The students were centrally involved. It was very much a partnership. Indeed, often they were proactive, making good

suggestions, putting the pressure on us teachers to take action.' One strategy involves Transition Year students mentoring first years. A TY student in one of the pilot schools remarked:

'We had training as mentors and we learned games you can play with first years and this was really good as there were some people who didn't know anyone because they came from a different primary school and they were kinda forced to talk to people they didn't know. It was good.'

A classmate added:

'Being a mentor brought me back to when I was a first year myself. I remember how scared I used be on the bus. It's easy to forget all that. So, you want to make the first years comfortable.'

According to another TY student:

'When you get training as a mentor it does make you think a lot more about people's feelings. You also

learn to look out for people on their own.'

FRAMEWORK

- The framework begins with the suggestion that each school appoints a mental health co-ordinator. This person should be supported by a committee that represents the whole school community, and committee members should engage in relevant training. Continuous raising of awareness of mental health within the school is seen as vitally important. The framework poses some very relevant questions, for example:
- Do pupils have clear, private and accessible sources of information regarding supports for mental health issues relating to bullying, sexual orientation, separation, family or other issues?
- Do pupils have and know they have access to a non-teaching adult to talk about an issue whilst protecting their anonymity from their peers?

- Does the school have a buddy system in place for First Years?
- Does the school host events that encourage quieter / shy / marginalised pupils to positively participate in the school community, be more aware of issues, etc?
- Has the school delivered mental health tuition as set out in SPHE?
- Has each year group been able to avail of a retreat outside of the school premises?
- Has the school provided additional supports for students to help them cope with exam pressure?
- Has the school delivered workshops to Transition Year students relating to mental health, using outside agencies such as GROW, Kilkenny Lifeline, Foróige, The Samaritans, AWARE, Ossory Youth, etc?
- Has the school a clear anti-bullying policy and evidence to show that the policy is being thoroughly implemented?
- Has the school raised awareness on behalf, and in support, of the LGBT student population and the issues affecting them in coming / not coming out?
- Can the school evidence a wide and varied curriculum of non-academic activities that encourages niche participation and diversity of pupils?
- Has the school organised mental health workshops for parents?
- Has the school a dedicated 'quiet' 'chillax' room for pupils to sit, read, listen to music and recreate?

- Does the school diary display information on accessible, free and confidential services for young people with mental health issues?

WIDER CONTEXT

A key 2012 Irish study³ noted that: 'The number one health issue for young people is their mental health.' According to that report, 'Good mental health in adolescence is a requirement for optimal psychological development, the development and maintenance of productive social relationships, effective learning, an ability to care for oneself, good physical health, and effective economic participation as adults⁴⁷.

The *My World Survey* concluded that between the ages of 12 and 25, young people are particularly vulnerable. While a majority were found to be functioning well across a variety of mental health indicators, the researchers noted that mental health difficulties emerged in early adolescence and peaked in the late teens and early 20s. They state:

'This peak in mental health difficulties, in general, was coupled with a decrease in protective factors such as self-esteem, optimism and positive coping strategies.'

Dooley and Fitzgerald identified five themes related to key mental health indicators. They are:

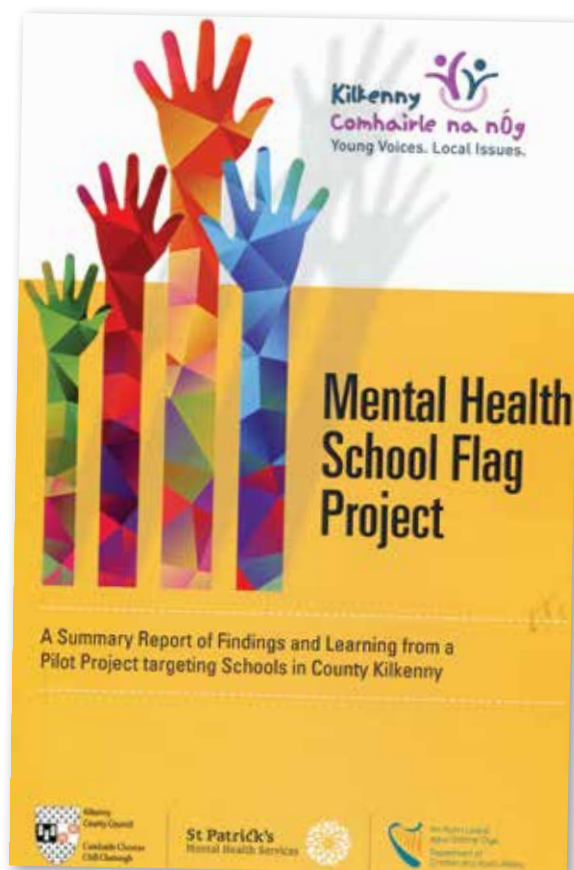
- 'One Good Adult' is important in the mental well-being of young people.
- Excessive drinking has very negative

consequences for the mental health and adjustment of young people.

- Young adults' experiences of financial stress are strongly related to their mental health and well-being.
- Rates of suicidal thoughts, self-harm and suicide attempts were found to be higher in young adults who did not seek help or talk about their problems.
- Talking about problems is associated with lower mental health distress and higher positive adjustment.

VARIED VIEWS

The urgency of the project for Kilkenny Comhairle na nÓg members was driven partly by concern about their own school experiences. One young man recalled:



'We had SPHE in school but my memory is of teachers going through stuff because they had to, often just reading from the book. Ten minutes on depression is not enough and nobody wants to be the guy in SPHE who admits to having problems. I'd like to see more initiatives that get people talking, even among friends.'

The Kilkenny Comhairle members were impressed with how the Green Schools Flag project had succeeded in raising environmental awareness. They proposed a mental health flag for schools that implemented the framework. A former member of the Comhairle says:

'One of the things I really like about the Comhairle na nÓg project is that it offers activities that can work with all years throughout the school. I like the idea of getting a flag to make a public statement that the school has taken mental health issues seriously.'

Her views are echoed by Gordon Lynch, a psychotherapist who advised the group. Gordon is also aware how school principals, teachers and parents might have reservations about the idea. He says:

'Many have conflicted attitudes and mixed emotions, sometimes because of how people they know have been affected. I am aware from elsewhere in the country of how tragedies and critical incidents can be overwhelming for schools. As I see it, a flag is a way of making a statement that, as a community, we encourage the idea of positive mental health. The fact that, despite everyone's best efforts, incidents occur, doesn't negate the value of making the statement.'

Paul Fields, Director of the Kilkenny Education Centre is well positioned to observe the pressures on schools. He says:

'It is as if they are swamped by mental health initiatives. There are a lot of very well intentioned individuals offering all sorts of things to schools but the quality is uneven. It's like a big load of apples were tipped into the school grounds. You have to take a bite to see which ones taste good.'

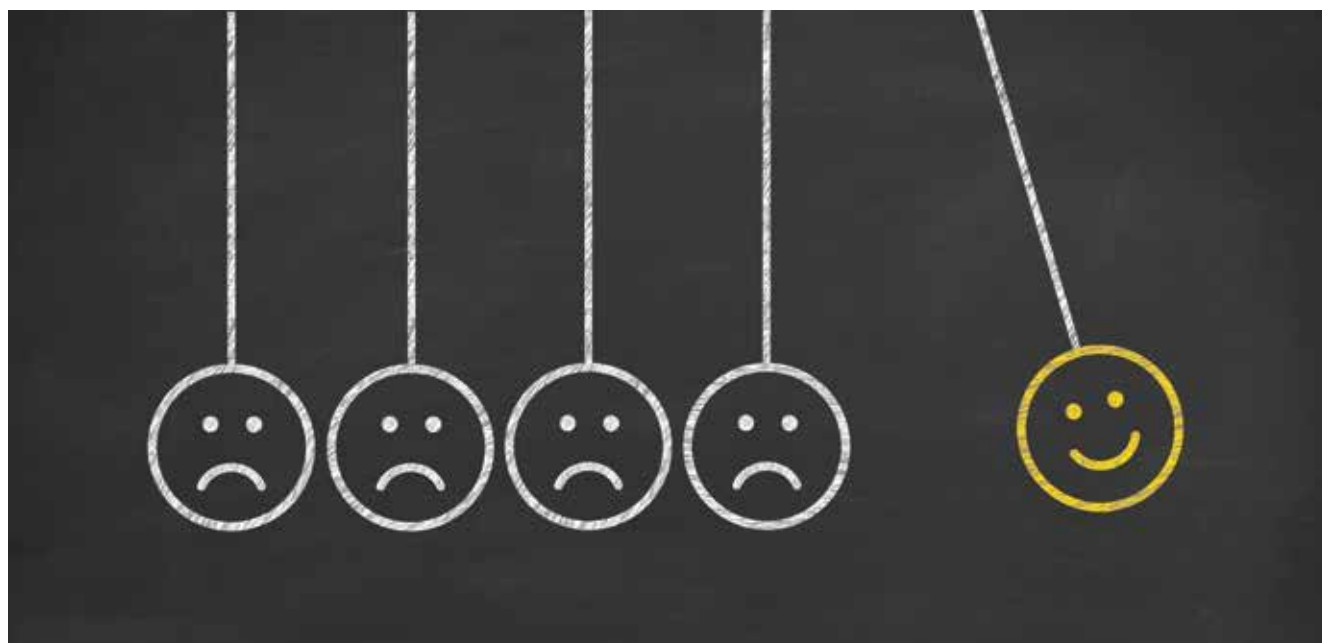
PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS

Students and teachers in the schools that took part in the pilot project were enthusiastic about the framework while those in other schools had more mixed views. According to one of the participating teachers:

'We have noticed a change in the school environment as a result of the initiatives we have taken. Senior students come to us teachers more often and say they are concerned about this or that fellow student. It's driven by concern and is a very positive development.'

She adds that that the flag project has made the staff more aware of the signs of a mentally healthy school. Angela Campion, who was employed as project manager during the pilot stage, remarks:

'One of the things that impresses me about the project is the peer support dimension. Whether the issues are to do with bullying, exam stress, loss or death, or LGBT, peer support can make a big difference. The need is to have school as a safe environment for everyone, especially the more



vulnerable young people. The goal is schools where all are accepted, where bullying is not acceptable, particularly if you are non-white, gay or from a Traveller background’.

CHALLENGES

The schools that took part in the pilot project have few illusions about how difficult it can be for schools to get mental health initiatives right. Limited time, and the need for adequate planning, present big challenges. While most agree that engaging with agencies outside the school is important, one of the guidance counsellors noted that ‘sometimes people outside the school system have very good ideas but they don’t always “get” how schools actually work.’

Schools were keen to point out that they are already engaged in a range of activities that can be grouped under a ‘wellbeing’ or ‘mental health’ umbrella, particularly through curricular activities and pastoral structures. While the framework adds further impetus and focus, the schools were quite nuanced in how they regard the issues. While many welcomed ‘outside’ speakers, some also expressed a wariness about ‘well-intentioned’ individuals and organisations. Such reservations are rooted in poor previous experiences of invited guest speakers.

Interviews with school principals underline how traumatic critical incidents such as a suicide can be for the whole school community. Some contend that the sensitive nature of the topic of ‘mental health’ demands greater care about language usage; ‘wellbeing’ is sometimes suggested as a more appropriate term. Such sensitivity also leads to discomfort among students: some about awarding a ‘flag’ for addressing a core part of a school’s mission; the negative connotations of ‘flag-waving’ were mentioned. However, reservations

about a flag are often accompanied by very positive opinions about the framework. Strong support for a wellbeing award, perhaps with more focus on intentionality and processes than on achievements, emerges from the evaluation. The project provides strong support for the viewpoint that states:

‘Schools play a vital role in the promotion of positive mental health in young people. Schools can provide a safe and supportive environment for building life skills and resilience and a strong sense of connectedness to school. The fostering of healthy relationships with peers, teachers and school staff is essential to a young person’s positive experience of school and their cognitive and emotional development. The needs and well-being of school staff also need to be considered and supported. Education about mental health and well-being is an integral part of the school curriculum. It is especially important to address the myths and stigma surrounding mental health and suicide, which for many young people are barriers to seeking support^{5,7}’

CONCLUSION

The Kilkenny Comhairle na nÓg project challenges schools to look at their current policies and practices regarding well-being and mental health, to recognise the continually changing environments in which young people live and to be imaginative and innovative in their curricular, pastoral and extra-curricular responses. Rather than rely on *ad hoc* arrangements, this project makes the case for well-structured, systemic, whole-school interventions. Following this initiative, opportunities now exist, for government departments in particular, to advance an award-related framework for positive mental health in schools at regional and national levels. Following an official launch in

October 2016 by Dr Niall Muldoon, Ombudsman for Children, both report and evaluation were formally handed over to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

According to Paul Gilligan, CEO of St Patrick’s Mental Health Services, which commissioned the evaluation, ‘This report highlights the need for a national approach for mental health education, and offers a framework on how to achieve this.’ And Councillor Malcolm Noonan, Chairperson of the Kilkenny Comhairle na nÓg Steering Committee, adds that the project ‘... challenges all of us who hold positions of responsibility for the wellbeing of young people to work tirelessly towards a common aim of putting in place stuff that works and is proven to work.’

Dr Gerry Jeffers is an educational researcher and lecturer who wrote ‘Kilkenny Comhairle na nÓg Mental Health School Flag project – an evaluation.’ He is also the author of Transition Year in Action, Liffey Press, 2015.

Footnotes

- 1 Comhairlí na nÓg are child and youth councils in the 34 local authorities of the country, which give children and young people the opportunity to be involved in the development of local services and policies.
- 2 The full evaluation is available at [kilkenny-comhairle-mh-full-report-sept-2016](#) For a summary report go to [summary-report-mhsf-project-kilkenny](#)
- 3 Dooley, B and Fitzgerald, A (2012) My World Survey: National Study of Youth Mental Health in Ireland, Dublin: Headstrong and UCD School of Psychology, p.vii
- 4 (ibid, p. vii).
- 5 DES, HSE, DoH, Ireland (2013) Well-being in Post-Primary Schools, Guidelines for Mental Health
- 6 Promotion and Suicide Prevention, Dublin: Department of Education and Skills/Health Service Executive/ Department of Health.



ETBI Further Education and Training Conference 2016

ETBs Working Towards a Best-in-Class Further Education and Training Service for 21st Century Ireland, November



Rapporteur: Dr Dermot Stokes, Adjunct Professor, DCU Institute of Education

Much has happened in the twelve months between the first and second ETBI FET Conferences. A year ago, we contemplated the new architecture. Now the process of construction is much advanced. New structures have bedded in at both national and ETB level. The plans have been published: we have an updated Pathways to Work and Action Plan for Jobs, the National Skills Strategy 2025, the Action Plan for Education and the Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019.

A central intention behind ETBI's FET conferences has been to nurture communication and constructive consideration so that the conversion of plan into action is informed by the real-world, professional and local knowledge of the ETBs, colleges and centres.

In his opening remarks **Michael Moriarty** acknowledged that we are in an era of constant change. Building skills and flexibility represent a continuing challenge for FET, he said, and hence the

importance of both programme innovation and continuing professional development. He introduced a video of **Prof Mark Brown**, Chair in Digital Learning and Director of the National Institute for Digital Learning (NIDL) in DCU who cited UNESCO's four pillars of learning¹. These are described by UNESCO as fundamental principles for reshaping education”:

- **Learning to know;**
- **Learning to do;**
- **Learning to be;**
- **Learning to live together;**
- To these, and with reference to the task in hand both globally and in Ireland, Dr Brown suggested adding **learning to change and transfer**, and he emphasised the importance of **learning together**.

In his address later in the afternoon, SOLAS Chief Executive Officer Paul

O'Toole stressed that learners are at the centre of our mission. How do we serve the learner? And how do we meet the needs of Irish society in our sector? This is a shared responsibility and a shared mission. He said that FET should now be seen as the fourth pillar of the education system, that is, not an also-ran but a first choice. It is a massive task but also a massive opportunity. FET links skills for the economy and active inclusion. But if the learner is at the centre of the mission, how do we develop and deliver an experience that is consistent in quality and outcome? In this regard he spoke of universal design, and this proved a recurring theme.

Building bounce-back-ability

The first conference session focused on learners' wellbeing, mental health and special education needs. Dr Anne Cleary from the School of Sociology in UCD pointed out that when we speak about health we tend to think of illness; but in fact most people experience life with mostly good health, and in ill health the vast majority of people are

resilient. However, educators must be cognisant of what is happening in society. *Women get sick and men die*, she said. There has been significant change in the pattern of suicidal behaviour in Ireland in recent years. Males predominate in completed suicide, but rates of deliberate self-harm (DSH) amongst men are also increasing significantly. Females have higher rates of DSH but the gap is narrowing. Women predominately present with anxiety and depression, men with substance abuse.

Dr Cleary conducted a follow-up study of individuals who had attempted suicide. Her research identifies a number of factors that are of direct interest to FET policymakers and providers. Suicide is rarely an impulsive action. Reactions to survival are mixed, between relief, disappointment, fear and unreality. Disclosing problems is seen as weakness. Many don't have the knowledge, language and space to express their problems. There are increasing levels of distress and self-medication. Of the group she followed up, 52% had no subsequent episodes or presentations, 36.5% had a subsequent episode but are still alive and 11.5% completed suicide. Of direct relevance to FET, those most likely to repeat or complete suicide had less educational resources, were of lower socio-economic status, and were more likely to misuse alcohol

and to have been in trouble with the law.

As regards prevention and intervention, Dr Cleary pointed out that "everyone is vulnerable to mental health problems". Entering Higher Education or FET can be a shock. Individuals can be lonely and disoriented. Expectations may not have been met. It is imperative to normalise problems and prevent abnormal reactions. Educational environments and teachers are central to developing a more positive environment as regards mental health, and to developing a knowledgeable and systematic approach. This will demand training in identification (of problems) and referral as well as a school /centre/ college approach.

Caroline Martin is Chief Psychologist in CDET. This ETB is untypical in having its own (long-established) Psychological Service. She presented "Case Studies in supporting the mental health of FET learners". Caroline began with the World Health Organisation definition of mental health: "*A state of well-being in which the individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.*" This is "*not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.*" She added a definition of resilience: "The

ability of the individual to handle various challenges or 'Bounce-back-ability'". The onset of mental health problems peaks in the 12-to-25 year age group. However, those at risk also include staff and therefore the entire school/college/centre community.

There are many risk factors and no two situations can be presumed to be the same. Caroline emphasised that while we can be mindful of *our circle of concern*, we need to boundary our response within *our sphere of influence*. But with so many variables and groups, how do we respond? She said the only way is to adopt the universal design approach - what you do for one cohort of the population can benefit the whole of the population. She also pointed out that the physical environment is important too, that is, having spaces in which to interact, connect and feel free.

Caroline then gave two examples of practice, the first being CDET's approach to critical incidents and the second being student support teams. The training and preparation involved in their Critical Incident Management System reduces fear and increases competency and improves communication. It increases staff capacity and resiliency, thus reducing the likelihood of being overwhelmed. With the care teams, working along with others increases self-efficacy, reduces likelihood of burnout,



prompts personnel to look at policies and procedures and develops more reflective teachers and staff AND students.

Finally, Caroline Martin pointed out that just as there are risk factors, so too are there protective factors, in particular a positive tutor-student interaction. Headstrong's *My World* identified the importance of "One good adult" with the caveat that they be one *well* adult.

An alternative approach – using an external service – was outlined by **Gavin Megaw** and **Dr David Cameron** of Carecall who work with all colleges and universities in Northern Ireland to provide counselling to students. Carecall is a social enterprise owned by a mental health not-for-profit organisation. There has been a 50% increase among students declaring a mental health condition in UK universities since 2007 and there is growing concern regarding psychopathology amongst students. This prompted the move to a partnership approach where colleges avail of an external service. Carecall provides 24-hour telephone support for staff and students as well as a drop-in counsellor. Structured counselling is offered as is a critical incident response. For clinical management, there are in-house counsellors. They also provide student/staff workshops and other specialist support.

Outsourcing such a sensitive function is a challenge for management and accountability and Gavin and David described regular structured meetings, detailed reporting and shared clinical responsibility. They stressed the importance of relationship-building and communication. Also, outcome measurement is very important, not only to generate feedback but also to support the business case for counselling services.

In the third presentation of this session **Suzanne McCarthy** Educational Psychologist at the National Learning Network (NLN) spoke on the topic of **Meeting the Needs of SEN Learners in FET**. NLN is the education, training and employment access division of Rehab Group and provides individualised and personalised rehabilitative and vocational training and education support services. Suzanne gave an overview of NLN Educational Support Services at FE and HE, and an example of a Universal Design approach to teaching and learning on a third level campus, the IT Blanchardstown.

She said that students are presenting with more complex learning needs than ever before, and with overlapping diagnoses – and numbers – there has been a significant increase in the number of students with mental health conditions, ADHD and ASD across third level education (FE and HE).

NLN has implemented a universal design approach at ITB. All students are profiled and academic support is tailored to student needs. She added that often those with undiagnosed needs are the most vulnerable. The process supports all students on campus and works with students and staff. It is recognised that social and emotional issues are intertwined with academic performance.

In the profiling process, students are introduced to the profiler during induction. They complete an online programme – this takes approximately 20-30 mins in a computer lab. The project is supervised by the Educational Psychology team. The student receives immediate personal, health and wellbeing and academic supports. Students are invited to access further intensive support if required.

Suzanne argued that this is the best approach as it views the students holistically, seeks to develop a profile of strengths and to further their understanding of behavioural, emotional and learning difficulties; it gathers data from a diverse range of areas and uses this information to problem-solve; it puts forward a specific intervention for each problem dimension and signposts the student to other internal or external services. She listed the lessons from the NLN/ITB approach as

- Partnership – “the relationship between NLN and ITB has been key, and to students’ benefit”
- Expertise – “Academic, social and emotional supports are tailored to meet the individual needs of students”
- Continuum – “it is targeted at all students who feel they need support”
- Outcome – “better outcomes for students and they are more effectively supported. It is sustainable, cost effective and could be replicated”

These presentations generated considerable interest and debate. Table 1 commented that the model of student support team in CDETB should be rolled out to all ETBs but added that it “Needs to be resourced; needs an integrated FET guidance strategy to bring all those in the support area together, i.e. guidance, counselling, special needs, pastoral care, educational psychologist; that there should be “a systematic approach to supporting students’ wellbeing” and “Investment in an integrated guidance/counselling service”. These remarks were echoed by many. Table 4 said that “CPD (is) required for staff in the area of mental

health". Delegates at Table 9 noted a number of challenges including "Short hours of staff members/short programmes delivered by outside agencies" and the "Withdrawal of funding for counsellors". Table 24 advocated a focus on holistic and social skills of FET students (that is, not simply skills/outcomes) and that this be achieved through "a whole staff/service approach - developing a sense of community i.e. not just a once off talk but integrated in all subjects / training". Those at Table 27 called for the development of a framework to lead to referrals to counsellor/ psychological services. However, one of the most salient observations came from the delegates at Table 31 who pointed out that "There is a variety of psychological services and supports in different ETBs" adding that "Models of best practice should be identified and all ETBs should be brought to that standard". Rory O'Sullivan (Killester) pointed out that PLCs can't appoint access officers because they are historically tied into second level allocation. Yet, they have no access to the National Council for Special Education which services the second level schools. He recommended a general allocation model.

Believing in what we do

Introducing the second session of the conference, Paul O'Toole spoke of the importance of believing in what we do and demonstrating and proving how we do it and of inculcating an ethos of continuing improvement. External review and feedback is fundamental to this and a series of programme evaluations is planned for 2016-2019. Of course, external evaluation is already embedded in FET as the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills has conducted evaluations of Youthreach centres for a decade. However, on this occasion Dr Bryan Fields, Director of Strategy



and Research in SOLAS focused on the initial findings from the PLC Review conducted on behalf of SOLAS by the ESRI.

The study comprehended a number of lines of enquiry. The first was desk-based research analysing PLC enrolments data from the DES, analysis of data from the Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) and analysis of existing survey data (School Leavers' Survey). The Provider Survey profiled the sector, types of courses, staffing and facilities, and so on. The Survey of Learners compared characteristics of PLC leavers with those taking other pathways (HE, other education/training, labour market), canvassed their experiences of the course and their outcomes and perspectives and assessed the impact of PLC participation on employment chances and job quality at two points in time (2012 and 2015). The third line of enquiry was Consultative Research, consisting of four workshops with Government Departments and Agencies, CEOs of ETBs, providers and representative bodies, learners, employer and trade union representatives as well

as engagement with PLC Research Oversight Group. At just 26% the response rate from learners was poor whereas that from providers was very high (over 80%).

The initial findings suggest that PLC provision has remained relatively stable and is not responsive to changing economic or labour market conditions. There is heavy emphasis in the areas of early childhood care and education, community and health services, and hairdressing.

The provider survey reveals that just over a third of leavers enter employment, 28 per cent progress to HE, 19 per cent remain in FE and 12 per cent become unemployed. PLC Principals' decisions around course provision appear most heavily related to meeting the demands of students and available teaching resources rather than responding to strategic need. The study also shows a majority (56%) of teachers in PLC colleges have qualifications in Arts and Social Sciences, 18% are qualified in Services and 13% in STEM and Agriculture.

The learner survey component of

the study reveals that PLC learners are more likely to be female and are less likely to come from higher socio-economic groups. The majority of PLC leavers are in the 200-400 points band. Some 70% of learners undertook work experience during their PLC studies. Their primary objective on completing their PLC course was (i) get a place on a HE course (39%) and (ii) employment (39%). Relative to those attending HE, PLC learners are less likely to report getting what they wanted on leaving school, have lower dropout rates and are more likely to report regret with their chosen pathway. There appear to be positive impacts on employment, progression to HE and possibly earnings. However, PLC learners were 5½ times more likely than those who went to HE to say that they did not achieve their preferred pathways and PLC learners were 2½ times more likely than those who went to HE to say that they regretted the choices made (PLC). More than anything else, this probably reflects the extent to which Irish young people and their parents are 'addicted' to third level education.

As with the first session, the presentation engaged and challenged delegates. There was clear appreciation of the idea of review and feedback but also a concern to clarify and explain why things are as they are. For example, Table 8 identified teacher contracts

as an issue and Table 17 asked "What do SOLAS propose that providers who have staff with specific skills which are not in demand do? Re-training to in-demand areas may not be possible depending on sector/skills set." Table 19 commented that "improving learner outcomes is constrained by fixed subject/discipline teachers; no guidance, or very little; funding and meeting local demographic needs". Table 21 asked "How do you tackle all the IR issues (etc. etc.) regarding duplication?" For Table 22 "To address relevance of PLC programmes, re-training re-skilling is paramount (CPD strategy is critical)". They add that "Teaching Council restrictions on the availability of expertise and skills to PLC needs to be examined/addressed", there should be "networking of providers to prevent duplication". Delegates were perturbed by the finding that PLC learners were more likely to say that they did not achieve their preferred pathways and that they regretted the choices made (PLC). There were some initial thoughts on this. For example, Rory O'Sullivan suggested that it may not in fact be to do with the course itself so much as an individual's regret or disappointment at not being in the same college as former school friends or at not having achieved a particular CAO choice. It was also suggested that rather than expressing disappointment with a "preferred pathway" or regret at the choice made the respondents might

have been reflecting the lower status of FET in Irish society.

Some delegates also worried that the outcomes chosen for measurement do not address the development of personal and social aspects such as insight or self-awareness or employability competences such as the ability to work with others. In a study canvassing employer opinions which was commissioned by the HEA, SOLAS and Quality and Qualifications Ireland May 2015², 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.

Refreshing our own skills

The third session of the conference focused on professional development. **Mary Lyons, Director of National Innovation, SOLAS**, presented the new Professional Development Strategy for the FET Sector. She acknowledged the strong sectoral culture, the highly qualified and committed staff and appetite for CPD. There is an opportunity to create a professional identity for the sector. However, there is no international comparator for developing a strategy for the professional development of FET staff. While certain priorities were easily identified such as the need for a strategic and coordinated approach and for infrastructural resources, SOLAS had to begin from scratch.

To start it was imperative to establish a skills profile. This was accomplished by survey. The new architecture has drawn together what were two separate systems and some 10,000 people. They found



150 job titles. Their survey received 4,400 responses (47%) with a 95% confidence level. They coined terms to organise the many different job descriptions: FET practitioner (73%); manager (14%); admin and support (13%). Of respondents, 74% were female, 26% male. Arising from the long-term effects of the public service embargo, the workforce is older: a high percentage is aged over 35/44, 25% are over 55 and only 11% are under 25. As regards staff qualifications, 67% are qualified at Level 8+; 78% at Level 7+ and 93% at Level 6+. "Qualifications are not an issue", commented Mary Lyons. 54% are fulltime and 46% are part-time and occasional.

However, staff confidence varies significantly regarding addressing literacy and numeracy within the learning environment, project management and dealing with challenging behaviours. Also, in addition to continuing professional development there is a need for initial training and that must also be included.

The **Professional Development Strategy 2017-2019** has three Strategic Goals:

- Strategic Goal 1: Creating the infrastructure and delivery systems for high quality professional development.
- Strategic Goal 2: Increasing FET sector capability through relevant, targeted CPD
- Strategic Goal 3: Sustainable funding and resourcing of professional development.

Miriam O'Donoghue, Deputy Curriculum Development Unit and National Manager (FESS) then presented FET practitioner professional development exemplars. The first of these is the FESS

Externship Visiting Programme (EVP). This was inspired by the Skills4Work Erasmus+ project (2014-2016) which shared work-based learning approaches (Externship/ internship). The project envisages that a participating individual would undertake a group visit to a company or organisation and gain an overview of the roles, range of work, practices, processes, technologies and methodologies as well as insight into recruitment, roles and positions. These externships would also provide the company or organisation with knowledge about the FET sector.

There were 23 EVP participants: 19 teachers, 1 person from SOLAS eCollege, 1 from Business in the Community and 2 from FESS. The target group was IT practitioners. The model was piloted in November 2016. It was hosted by Cisco Systems who facilitated a group visit. The company has proven very responsive. The programme included an Introduction to CISCO, Digitisation, Security and Cybercrime, Telepresence Solutions Experience (TSEC) and a Virtual reality demonstration.

Miriam emphasised that this is a mechanism to connect staff with the world of enterprise and, very importantly, vice versa. It was very well received by the staff and their hosts.

She also spoke about the CDETb's PAL project (Promoting Accreditation of Learning). This also derives from an Erasmus+ project. Here the objective is to recognise the experience staff already possess and in turn an organisation's aggregate skillset. It is not always necessary to seek expertise from outside an organisation to facilitate CPD sessions for staff. Various approaches can be used to support professional sharing of knowledge, skills, practice and experience amongst colleagues.

Participation in the PAL model is on a **voluntary** basis. Individuals can...

1. Use the PAL **toolkit of methodologies** as a source of inspiration for sharing knowledge
2. Choose to add a further dimension by **tracking their PAL participation and application**.
3. Choose to take a more formal approach and maintain and **submit PAL tracking logs / reflection tool for recognition** within their organisation.
4. Undertake an accredited **Learning Module**

Mary and Miriam's presentations were warmly received. Delegates at Table 13 said "Great to see the development of the Professional Development Strategy - and its potential for the future. (It's a) Positive development with regard to professional exchange networks. Table 1 said that "The EVP model needs to be replicated in other sectors" while Table 12 asked for "PAL model to be rolled out and supported, resourced nationally". Table 16 said "PAL seems like a really good practical programme", though they also noted potential obstacles: "Timing of training - how to combine this with daily work duties?" and "Payment of part-time tutors for attendance?"

Table 26 saw the glass half empty. "Currently there is no provision for substitution for teachers in FET for when they attend CPD events - Primary and post-primary teachers are provided with substitution for attending CPD events - why is the FET sector being discriminated against?" They continued "There is a shortage of skilled substitutes", "No incentive for people to participate in CPD - Primary Teachers get personal days in lieu of CPD participation in their own time", "There is insufficient remuneration for staff in the sector, one participant at the table had a

staff member who opted to get a job in a supermarket as it would pay the same money as 37 hours per week in Youthreach and would have a fraction of the responsibility.” “PAL would be problematic for part-time teachers as they are often running to another job... nearly half the FET staff are part time.” “We are described as the Cinderella of the sector – we want to be Cinderella the princess, not Cinderella the kitchen maid!!”

An illustration of the complexity of the task comes with a comment from Table 9 that “1997 agreement instructors have access to a 3-month work placement over a 5-year span – this is still in place”. This applies to former FÁS staff...

Making learning visible

The penultimate session looked at the recognition of prior learning. **Andrina Wafer**, Head of Access and Lifelong Learning QQI presented on **Validating Non-formal and Informal Learning (RPL) - New Frontiers**. Following on from an EU Council recommendation of 2012, Member States have set targets for 2018. The European term is “validation”: to value and make visible the outcomes of learning at work, home, during leisure time, in voluntary activities. There are four stages: identification, documentation, assessment, validation. All make learning visible. There is a strong official commitment to RPL and a number of exciting projects exploring its development and the practical challenges it presents. Andrina told delegates it was a tricky issue and responses vary across Europe.

Martina Needham, Basic Education Coordinator, Donegal ETB, gave a presentation on one of these projects, based in the Defence Force’s Finner Camp. The aim was to recognise the skills the soldiers had acquired in the course of their work. The Defence Forces submitted detailed sub-files to ETB staff. These outlined the training,

skills and experiences of each participant in the Defence Forces. Examples included: military courses, tours of overseas duty, aid to the civil power and civil authority and roles and responsibilities in respect of their current rank.

The situation was new for both ETB tutors and participants. The acquisition of some of the skills and outcomes had occurred through events that had taken place more than five years previously. The linking and mapping did not fall into place as easily as had been hoped. It is a challenge for tutors to document skills they haven’t taught. In the end, they achieved:

- 3 Major Awards at Level 3 in Employability Skills (2 with the same modules and the third with some differences in composition of modules)
- 2 Major Awards in ICT
- 1 achieved 5 modules at Level 3
- 1 achieved 4 modules at Level 3

There is strong support for the idea of RPL, but many conference participants also saw quite serious practical problems with widespread implementation; for example that it is resource intensive and time-consuming, that at present cross-moderation is subject to a TUI embargo at present (in a PLC college) and that if the 5-year limit was increased it would facilitate RPL to focus where it is most required.

Another new frontier

The final session was devoted to another new frontier, that of technology-enhanced learning (TEL). There was a presentation via video from **Prof Mark Brown**, PhD, Chair in Digital Learning and Director of the National Institute for Digital Learning (NIDL) in DCU: **Supporting the Lifelong Learning Agenda: The Force**

of Technology-Enhanced Learning Awakens (TEL). He emphasised that TEL is about enabling, amplifying, enhancing. We, and our students, are drowning in data but starved of knowledge. Information is not knowledge, he said. This is not about pumping, it’s about empowering, about using technology, at many levels of sophistication, to enhance the learning experience and extend the reach of education provision.

Michael Mooney, Manager, SOLAS eCollege, introduced the **ETBI - SOLAS Strategy for Technology Enhanced Learning 2016-2019** and explored the Implications for the FET Sector. Success is not linear, he said, it’s jagged, forward/back, etc. He favours nudging things forward. He instanced electrification – the technology is just there in the background. We are getting to the point where software is becoming irrelevant but programmes need to be designed. There are “huge possibilities” in the development of learning content, the technology can address individual learning gaps/needs, virtual labs and virtual classrooms allow expertise to be shared, and can reach dispersed locations, and so on. He cited the SAMR model for technology integration.

He was followed by **Dr Michael Hallissy**, Partner in H2 Learning, who led and moderated the session and presented on **Exemplars of good practice in TEL**. Blended learning is one such good practice, using apps and freely available programmes. He also instanced Citizen Maths, emphasising the very large amounts of materials, sites and apps that can be used. And the connections and applications are increasingly sophisticated. The real issue, he said, is for learning practitioners to be confident. There is excellent practice out there but it needs to be collected and disseminated.



Feedback on TEL was very positive though, as Table 31 put it, there was “Quite a lot to absorb in such an intense session!!!” In fairness, they added that “Our eyes are open to further opportunity to utilise tech tools”. They wondered might the students lead the teachers and whether “our current teacher graduates are ‘tech smart’ teachers?” Table 21 pointed to the age profile of FET practitioners and wondered about whether old dogs could learn new ricks. Table 4 acknowledged that learners who are involved in an Erasmus project on integrating technology into Adult Basic Education are very enthusiastic, but cautioned that we should also maintain the social aspect of education. They, and others, were acerbic on the subject of rural broadband.

Concluding remarks

And so to conclude, this conference took the debate on FET to the next stage, to the point where we look past big pictures and aspirations towards concrete actions, realities and concerns. Promoting wellbeing, and doing so coherently and consistently across the country, is a major challenge. As was noted at

the conference, few ETBs have a psychological service comparable to the CDETB service. Of course, they don’t necessarily have to have one. As we learned from Northern Ireland and NLN, such services can be contracted out. The critical need is for an agreed, universal standard and blueprint so that learners will get the same support wherever they are. Such a blueprint should take account of existing legal frameworks such as the Education Act, the Education Welfare Act, the Education for Persons with Special Education Needs Act and the Disability Act. The majority of Youthreach learners are also covered by the Children Act and other related legislation.

While there is considerable support for initial screening, more debate is needed. Universal screening offers the prospect that no learner gets left behind. Yet, there is a risk that in the clamour to profile and measure we will lose sight of those most in need. Testing can generate hyper-awareness and may lead to exclusion if teachers argue that they cannot accommodate particular learners without extra supports. The resource hours at second level are not an effective approach. Might a

general allocation model be more appropriate?

Aspirations for quality and consistency are reflected in the interest shown by conference participants in universal design. Getting our approach right for particular groups is likely to mean we get it right for all. One recalls that some years ago, NESC coined the term “tailored universalism”³ under which services and supports, such as education and health, are available to everyone but for people with certain needs, and in certain circumstances, additional payments and entitlements to services are tailored to meet their needs. These tailored services address the specific barriers which prevent people from realising their potential. A useful concept.

There may be roadblocks and landslides on the road ahead. Yet, here we are, focusing on the wellbeing of learners and staff, on constantly renewing teaching skills, knowledge and understanding, on ensuring quality and effectiveness and on maximising the contribution from technology. There’s work to be done and we start where we can. It’s a good sign.

Footnotes

- 1 LEARNING: THE TREASURE WITHIN http://www.unesco.org/education/pdf/15_62.pdf
- 2 National Employer Survey: Employers’ Views on Irish Further and Higher Education and Training Outcomes. Commissioned by the Higher Education Authority, SOLAS and Quality and Qualifications Ireland May 2015
- 3 NESC (2009) *Well-being Matters A Social Report for Ireland Volume I* The National Economic and Social Council, Dublin Internet: http://files.nesc.ie/nesc_reports/en/NESC_119_vol_1_2009.pdf

Profiling Youthreach learners



Results of a 2015 national survey of social context and of literacy and numeracy competencies

By Dr Mary Gordon, Senior Psychologist, National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)



A survey of centres delivering the Youthreach programme was carried out by NEPS in 2015. It looked at two specific areas: a) the social context of the learners and b) their literacy and numeracy attainments. The subjects of the research were all the learners enrolled in centres on the last day of October 2014.

There are two kinds of centres that deliver the Youthreach programme to young early school leavers in Ireland: Community Training Centres (CTCs) and Youthreach Centres. With somewhat different origins, both are now funded by SOLAS and managed locally by ETBs. The learners who attend them are generally aged between 15 and 20 years, with most in the 16 to 18 year range. In 2015 there were 35 CTCs and 109 Youthreach Centres nationally. All the managers or coordinators of these centres were surveyed.

The first part of the survey used the same format as the one designed by the Education Research Centre (ERC) for its 2014 survey of primary and post-primary schools, which was conducted for the purpose of assisting the Department in the development of educational profiles for schools. The second part sought learners' scores in word reading, sentence comprehension, spelling and maths computation from a recently administered standardised test.

Response to survey

Compared to the response from primary (96%) and post-primary (85%) schools to the ERC survey, the

response from centres at 48% was disappointing. Some coordinators and managers expressed a reluctance to provide personal information on families served by their centre, possibly because of concerns about data protection issues or because they simply did not have the information.

Learners' social context

Part one of the survey gathered information on the location of centres, the learners' families' socio-economic contexts and their parents' / guardians' level of engagement with their education.

The first question asked for the location of the centre, using the categories employed by the Central Statistics Office (CSO). The results showed that the 92% of the centres were located in urban settings and 8% were rural-based (compared to a geographical urban / rural split in the national population of 62% / 38%). The majority of centres (65%) were located in cities and large towns with just under a quarter in small towns and rural communities.

Respondents were next asked to give an estimate of the percentage of their participants who complied with a number of socio-economic indicators (unemployment, one-parent family, medical card, local authority accommodation, large family, dependence on social welfare payments, member of the Traveller community, English as an additional language). The responses suggested a very high level of economic disadvantage in the families of learners².

When the centres' responses to these socio-economic variables were compared with those obtained from post-primary schools, it was apparent that the level of socio-economic disadvantage in centres was significantly higher than in post-primary schools across all of these variables, including in schools that were designated disadvantaged (i.e. in the DEIS scheme). This indicates that centres cater for a community of young people who experience a particularly high level of social exclusion.

The final question sought information about factors that might impact on learners' ability to engage fully with the education being provided by the centre, including variables relating to family support and engagement. The age of learners in the Youthreach context, however, made the significance of this question less relevant that it might be for children in primary schools or the earlier part of post-primary.

Learners' attainments in literacy and numeracy

Centres were then asked to provide attainment scores in relation to literacy and numeracy skills for learners who had been tested between 1 Apr 2014 and 31 Mar 2015. Most centres were not actually in a position to provide standardised scores in literacy and numeracy as they were not in the habit of using normed tests. Some centres provided standardised scores in respect of a small number of their learners but as these learners could not be

assumed to be typical of their total cohort – perhaps being assessed precisely because they had particular difficulties with learning – it was decided to examine the scores from centres where at least 40% had been tested. Twenty-five centres (2 CTCs and 23 Youthreach Centres) fulfilled this criterion and the results were based on an analysis of just their scores. Just over a third of the centres, then, provided a sufficient number of scores across their learner cohort to allow for an analysis of the literacy and numeracy levels of their learners.

Analysis showed that the scores indicated that significantly high numbers were scoring below the level that would be expected for their age group in the population at large. Many of the learners were achieving quite low scores in each of the basic skill areas. The results showed 40% of the learners achieved scores below the norm in word reading, 46% in sentence comprehension, 37% in spelling and 61% in maths computation. The particularly weak performance in maths computation is striking (but not inconsistent with national and international research findings in relation to mathematical performance in Ireland³). In the literacy subtests, however, the majority (58% in word reading, 52% in sentence comprehension and 59% in spelling) scored within the broad average range. A very small minority – less than 4% – performed above this level.

It is also significant and concerning that the majority of centres were not in a position to give standardised information on the literacy and numeracy attainments of their learners. Most centres do not use normed attainment tests and those that do, do not necessarily test all their learners in a systematic way. This indicates that the level of expertise in centre staff teams in the assessment and teaching of literacy and numeracy is a matter urgently requiring attention, with implications both for the initial qualifications of tutors specialising in literacy and numeracy and for general staff CPD.

In their analysis of the data from the post-primary schools the ERC looked at the relationship between the socio-economic variables and educational

outcomes in third year students. They found a clear association between home backgrounds and achievement, with all of the socioeconomic variables correlating negatively and significantly with performance in the Junior Cert, both overall and in terms of the individual subject areas of English and mathematics⁴.

If attainment outcomes are to be improved in centres providing the Youthreach programme, the very high levels of educational disadvantage among learners needs to be addressed and adequate resources provided to increase significantly their literacy and numeracy competencies.

The full report is available at www.youthreach.ie/web-wheel/reports/.



Footnotes

- 1 CSO (2012). *Profile 1 Town and Country*. http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/census/documents/census2011vol1andprofile1/Profile1_Town_and_Country_Entire_doc.pdf
- 2 There was a considerable degree of internal consistency among the variables in this question, with many of them showing substantial and statistically significant correlations with each other. This internal consistency was also found by the ERC in relation to its surveys of primary and post-primary schools.
- 3 DES (2016). *Review of national and international reports on literacy and numeracy*. <https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Literacy-and-Numeracy/Review-of-National-and-International-Reports-on-Literacy-and-Numeracy.pdf>
- 4 Weir & Denner (2016) A survey of the socioeconomic profile of all post-primary schools in 2014 in the context of developing a new resource allocation model: Report to the Department of Education and Skills / National Council for Special Education. http://www.erc.ie/wp/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/NCSE_survey_Post-Primary_schools_2014.pdf

Conference: Healthy Workplaces for People of all Ages

By Rosemary Ryan, Manager, Client Enterprise Risk Management Services, IPB Insurance

On 26th October 2016, as part of European Safety Week, IPB Insurance, in partnership with Education and Training Boards Ireland and the Local Government Management Agency, delivered a conference on the theme of *Healthy Workplaces for People of all Ages*. As Europe's workforce is ageing, with the number of older workers making up a growing proportion of the total workforce, and as the official retirement age is increasing, many workers are likely to face longer working lives and more exposure to work hazards, as well as having to cope with a changing world of work. The conference emphasised that in order to prevent higher incidences of ill health, efforts have to be made to ensure safe and healthy working conditions throughout the whole working life. Topics such as workplace wellbeing and behavioural safety were discussed, with sports commentator Brent Pope delivering the keynote speech on managing mental health.

In his opening address, Frank Curran, Chief Executive of Leitrim County Council, talked about the changing employment landscape over the last ten years, with a decrease in the number of employees in all sectors, shifts in the competency base and escalation in the demand for services.

The number of Local Authorities and Education and Training Boards (ETBs) have been reduced to 31 and 16 respectively and these organisations are now larger and far more complex.

With all these changes come risk which, when managed appropriately, can create opportunities and can result in added value for the Local Authority and for the ETBs. Frank referred to the higher quality of services delivered today with fewer resources, which demonstrates the professionalism of those who plan and deliver services. This is evidenced by the number of people accessing and availing of services by agencies meeting, and in some cases, exceeding the key performance indicators set by funding bodies and by the ability to show through evidence bases, the quality of the service and the demonstration of good governance to Audit Committees and relevant Government Departments. Frank spoke about recent changes in legislation such as the Local Government Reform Act, 2014, the Education and Training Boards Act,

2013 and the Education and Training Act, 2013 as well as the updating of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work compliance universe, and the publication of the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies (September 2016) and a new Code of Practice for the Governance of ETBs (March 2015), which clearly place the management of risk and the necessity of creating a healthy workplace on the management agenda. In closing, Frank highlighted the importance of collaborative working across public bodies such as the Local Authorities and the ETBs, and ensuring that all opportunities are exploited so as to add value at every level.

A very stimulating presentation was provided by Sheila O'Malley, a professional trainer and wellbeing expert, who discussed Building Resilience, with emphasis on the value of an individual managing his/her own wellbeing and developing emotional resilience so that they have the correct reserves and competency to manage all situations that arise in both their personal and work life. The



Brent Pope (right) being interviewed by Alan Shortt



At the IPB Healthy Workplaces Conference (L-R): Ivor Heavey, Risk Advisor, IPB Insurance; Stephen Geary, Risk Advisor, IPB Insurance; Frank Curran, Chief Executive, Leitrim Co Co; Peter Kelly, Risk Executive, IPB Insurance; Sheila O'Malley, Professional Trainer, Emotional Health and Wellbeing; Alan Shortt, Communications Consultant; Brent Pope, Sports Commentator; and Rosemary Ryan, Risk Manager, IPB Insurance]

engagement from the delegates was excellent, with a lot learned during the discussion.

Alan Shortt, as Chairperson of the conference, interviewed Brent Pope about his experience of depression, the methods that he uses to recognise depression, and the importance of having the tools and techniques to manage depression when it arises. He emphasised that medication is not always the answer, but that much of the management tools were present within the individual. Brent did commend the many healthcare professionals and charitable organisations that support people who do experience depression and emphasised the importance of accessing such services if and when the need arises.

After the interview with Brent Pope, Gavin Lonergan, Head of Communications and Customer Relations with the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) and Chairman of the National Focal Point, presented on the conference theme of Healthy Workplaces for People of all Ages. Gavin described the Focal Point Pan-European campaign of Healthy Workplaces for People of all Ages which is coordinated by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA). The Focal Point in Ireland is facilitated by the HSA and supported by a network of partners from all European Union countries. Gavin focused on the changing age profile from 2010 – 2060 as presented

below in figure 1.

He explained that by 2030, workers aged 55-64 are expected to make up at least 30% of the total workforce in many countries, which means that a higher proportion of older workers will have chronic health problems and will therefore have specific support needs. Policy makers and employers will need to focus on disability prevention, rehabilitation and return-to-work policies as there will be increased concerns about employee productivity and absenteeism. They will also need to be aware of and manage the possible risk of age discrimination.

To ensure that an organisation is prepared for the changes that lie ahead, it is recommended that a risk assessment should initially be undertaken with consideration given to the following key points:

1. Carry out or review risk assessments regularly
2. Consider the tasks involved in specific jobs
3. Corrective measures should be based on capabilities and objective risks
4. Provide regular health checks to identify problems.

For older workers, Gavin advised that the following hazards, among others, require special consideration: ergonomic hazards, such as repetitive movements, manual handling, awkward, uncomfortable postures, static postures; shift work; hot, cold or noisy work environments, vibration; and working at height. The role of

policy makers should be geared towards the provision of tools for managing occupational safety and health in the context of an ageing workforce and the facilitation of information exchange and good practice.

In the afternoon Annette Tierney, Theatre at Work, facilitated a workshop on Behavioural Safety in which a professional theatre group performed a very real and engaging performance, 'Overloaded', which showed how easily a serious incident can happen and how devastating the consequences are when they do occur. In this performance a worker was fatally injured and the circumstances leading up to the event were acted out to show all the contributing factors. The audience concluded that a number of elements led to the situation arising, including human ego; human vulnerability as they fail to prevent their personal life interfering with their work life; the dangers of distractions such as mobile phones; the disregard by an employee to the instructions of management and the failure by the manager to ensure that all procedures and policies were strictly complied with because of the nature of their relationship with the employee. The play was thought-provoking and generated great discussion, highlighting real issues, considerations and learnings that the delegates were able to take with them and apply in their own work places.

John Kearney, Chief Executive of Cavan & Monaghan ETB delivered the closing remarks. He referred to the changing education curriculum at Junior Certificate level and the importance now placed on wellbeing for all, which includes staff, students and contractors, and how students can take this learning with them through life. He was confident that, from the subjects presented at the conference, from the attention given by all delegates to the topics discussed, and the level of engagement by delegates during the panel discussions, everyone would be able to take away at least one key action to make their own working life better, and also that of their colleagues, because it is by working in a team, that we all support each other, and learn together, and have better quality lives.

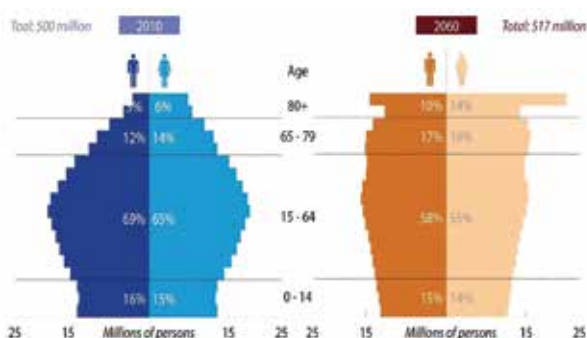


Figure 1: changing age profile of workers across the European Union 2010-2060

IQAVET - Putting the 'Irish' into EQAVET!

Collaborating for impact in Quality Assurance – at home and beyond...

By Dr Niamh Lenehan, Quality Assurance Enhancement Manager, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)

What does the European Quality Assurance in VET or EQAVET network have to offer Irish further education and training providers? How can we access resources developed by EQAVET and incorporate them into our daily work? Also, and very importantly, how can Irish policy-makers and practitioners impact and influence the work on EQAVET with our own unique and rich experiences to benefit colleagues both nationally and internationally? These questions, amongst others, were stimulated when a call for funding proposals was issued in 2015 by the European Agency for Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) to National Reference Points (NRP) for the EQAVET network.

IQAVET, the Irish network for Quality Assurance in VET is the National Reference Point (NRP) for EQAVET, based at QQI. The close working relationship between QQI and ETBI and our common cause in promoting quality in VET richly informed the work of the NRP in drafting a proposal for funding to develop the network and to support the deeper embedding of QA and its ownership amongst all colleagues, not just QA practitioners. An important aspect of the project was to help promote and leverage EQAVET principles and indicators to enhance quality in ETB and other VET provision.

The project proposal was accepted, Erasmus+ funding granted and activity began in April 2016, facilitated by QQI through the ETBI Quality Assurance Forum and the Further Education Support Service

(FESS). A very enthusiastic steering group was formed, comprised of Martha Bolger (KCETB), Anne Higgins and Eithne Ní Dhonnchadha (GRETB), Alan Hogan (LCETB) and Siobhán Magee (FESS), to help navigate and advise on implementation of the project plan, ensuring relevance to practitioner needs and questions. Marie Gould of ETBI also provided advice in a consultative capacity.

The work plan provided for what has been three well-received, informative and thought-provoking seminars, each with a specific focus. The Use of Data, and gathering evidence in the context of QA, was the theme of the first seminar in June 2016, followed by seminars on Self-Evaluation in November and Governance in December. Each seminar involved case studies from

provision nationally on each theme, interpreted within local concerns, all of which resonated with other practitioners, regardless of sectors or scope and scale. Speakers with experience in similar issues from other jurisdictions and sectors, including outside of education and training, also contributed. All presentations are published on www.QQI.ie.

At each seminar, small groups worked on a draft 'tool' relevant to the seminar's theme, aimed at assisting in using EQAVET indicators and building blocks in tandem with national guidelines, requirements and concerns. The tools will be published when final refinements are agreed.

Highlights of the IQAVET Network project include:



Speakers at the first seminar were Treasa Brannick Ó Cillín (CDETB), Alan Hogan (LCETB), and Louise Clarke (CMETB)]

- The dialogue with practitioners, particularly in workshop sessions, has been frank and inspirational, and has changed the direction of travel for us against the original project plan.
- Participants are keen to participate at EU level in the EQAVET network and to support quality assurance in VET.
- There is strong interest in the EQAVET indicators, building blocks and tools, but also a degree of uncertainty about how to use and embed them routinely.
- While the indicators are embedded in many data instruments at policy level, optimising that consciously in practice is an area of interest for many practitioners.
- Open dialogue across sectors in the IQAVET network is enabled greatly by the strength of collaboration that characterises the ETB sector and is highly valued by the NRP.
- The building of strong and supportive working relationships amongst colleagues involved and increased awareness of the IQAVET Network, and has given a voice for QA practitioners in particular to engage as a community of practice with EQAVET on Irish terms.
- In addition, the opportunities available to both leverage benefit from the EQAVET Network and to impact on European developments in this area through showcasing Irish systems and experiences were highlighted through a number of international visits and opportunities.

In May 2016, the Irish NRP welcomed

a study visit to Ireland by the Croatian NRP. Delegates were given an overview of the Irish approach to quality assurance by representatives of QQI and SOLAS. This was followed by a 'VET in action' field trip hosted by Dublin and Dún Laoghaire ETB. Delegates received an overview of the QA system at ETB level, followed by a visit to Tallaght Youthreach and to the Further Education Institute in Dún Laoghaire. Enthusiasm was palpable as differences in modes of provision were investigated, such as why we do not mix young people at risk with adult learners.

A return visit was made to a Peer Learning Activity (PLA) hosted by the Croatian NRP in June, attended by nominees of a range of ETBs, on the theme of the Quality Assurance of Work-Based Learning and Self-Assessment of VET Providers. Participants presented on approaches to quality assurance of work-based learning. One of the questions for discussion at the PLA was around the training needs of employers in conducting assessment and in the provision of a learning and working environment, and how this liaison might be best achieved.

Dr Fionnuala Anderson of DDLETB, informed by discussion with Irish colleagues, presented on some of the challenges in an Irish context around this topic, such as balancing employers' needs and objectives with those of learners, programmes and lifelong learning objectives, the scale and scope of employer's activities affecting the experiences available to those in training, the challenges where economic recovery outpaces the austerity measures impacting on public sector provision and the fundamental concern of how nimble can FET really be, yet retain strength in quality?

Andrina Wafer of QQI presented, again in consultation with ETB

colleagues, on the national approach to self-evaluation, locating it in our shared perspective of the useful contribution of the EQAVET indicators, but acknowledging the careful deliberation by the ETBs on how best to approach self-evaluation at institutional/ ETB level. Of those participating in the PLA, all countries represented used self-assessment in some way, half had a national strategy and three-quarters published outcomes of self-assessment in some way and felt it was important to do so. Many shared a nervousness about the use of self-assessment and the purposes to which it might be put; and the extent of development of systems, guidelines and processes varied. Drawing employers and learners from outside of formal provision into this dialogue and engagement with networks was seen as valuable in driving the agenda forward.

The EQAVET Secretariat hosts an EQAVET Annual Forum and a number of working groups. The Forum, attended by representatives of ETBI and QQI as well as ETB representatives of the ETBI QQI IQAVET Steering Group, took place in December 2016 as part of the first European Vocational Skills Week. Irish delegates found it useful to connect with the work of other NRPs and to begin consideration of a possible work plan for the new funding call for 2017-19.

Alan Hogan, Quality Officer in Limerick and Clare ETB has been the Irish representative on the European Working Group, Complementing EQAVET+. EQAVET+ has two types of indicative descriptors – some of which are at system level and others which operate at the level of providers. The Working Group set out to develop indicators and/or descriptors which complement the EQAVET Recommendation and respond to quality assurance issues

relating to seven areas, including work-based learning. The seven priority areas include:

- apprenticeship and work-based learning provision and in-company training,
- the processes of defining, describing and assessing learning outcomes,
- qualification design, assessment, and certification,
- the pedagogical processes associated with learning outcomes,
- the teachers' and trainers' role in the quality assurance process,
- procedures which are used in the validation of non-formal and informal learning in line with EQF /NFQs,
- planning and improving the review phase of the quality assurance cycle.

Alan has volunteered to devise a case study as part of this work, focusing on the indicative descriptor relating to the quality criteria: 'Implementation plans are devised in consultation with stakeholders and include explicit principles'. Having Alan on 'the inside track' and making this contribution is a real asset at national level and assists in both navigating and using the EQAVET indicative descriptors well. The Group's work completes in 2017, and IQAVET as a network will provide opportunities to learn from the process, insights and outcomes of the work.

"IQAVET as a network is at an early stage of development, but the value of connecting to the experiences of other practitioners in different countries with different traditions and challenges is invaluable."

The Erasmus+ funded project which led to the establishment of the IQAVET network, illustrates the ability of the FET sector to both embrace and lead change. The project will conclude following a dissemination event in Dublin in March 2017. This event will be used to launch a publication based on the rich experiences and insights of all the colleagues who participated in the three seminars and delivered thought-provoking and informed presentations and case studies. Additionally, the project will produce innovative tool-kits, developed by the sector, for the sector.

Maria Emilia Galvao, contracted by EQAVET to draft guidelines on 'VET providers' self-monitoring by using the EQAVET toolbox of indicators' will deliver a keynote speech on how to harness EQAVET resources in your work. Dr Arancha Oviedo of the EQAVET Secretariat will outline some key directions and developments at European level for the Secretariat and will respond to the work of IQAVET to date.

This networking event will afford opportunities both to identify how this project and EQAVET may facilitate your work and to contribute

to the future work plans of the IQAVET network. The full agenda in addition to registration details will be circulated soon.

IQAVET as a network is at an early stage of development, but the value of connecting to the experiences of other practitioners in different countries with different traditions and challenges is invaluable. Seminar participants have acknowledged that the wealth of material, resources and expertise available to us through EQAVET was immense.

Network members plan to explore these resources together in practical ways as part of future meetings. With the support of the Steering Group, the network's agenda will look at specific topics of mutual concern that are echoed across Europe and shared nationally, work on plans for implementation of new policies for validation and quality assurance, and uniquely, look beyond one single sector or grouping in FET at differences in approach, real and perceived, working together to 'make VET more attractive'.

Over 2016, the approaches taken together have supported incremental change in partnership and mirrored quality assurance concerns of the ETB sector in particular. Continued systematic approaches to development and continuous improvement of quality right across VET nationally remain an invitation to work towards together in 2017.

For further information on this project and ongoing work of the IQAVET network, contact Andrina Wafer (awafer@qqi.ie) or Niamh Lenehan (nlenehan@qqi.ie) at QQI.

Footnote

- 1 www.eqavet.eu/Libraries/Quality_cycle_websites/GUIDE_-_VET_providers_self-monitoring_by_using_the_EQAVET_toolbox_of_indicators.sflb.ashx

Peer Mediation

effective conflict resolution in Castlerea Prison

By Peter Fleming, Castlerea Prison School. GRETB

Early last September the teachers of Castlerea Prison worked in partnership with the Midlands Traveller Community Mediation Initiative (MTCMI) to develop a course in Mediation. The aim was to empower inmates with the skills and confidence to effectively communicate through Peer to Peer interaction with inmates who are experiencing conflict and violence in the prison.

The school identified from an earlier programme of conflict awareness, that violence was a regular occurrence in the prison and could start from something small or from an on-going feud that may have started prior to a person entering the prison. Consequently, the risk of violence erupting would be high; measures were needed to tackle prisoner-on-prisoner violence.

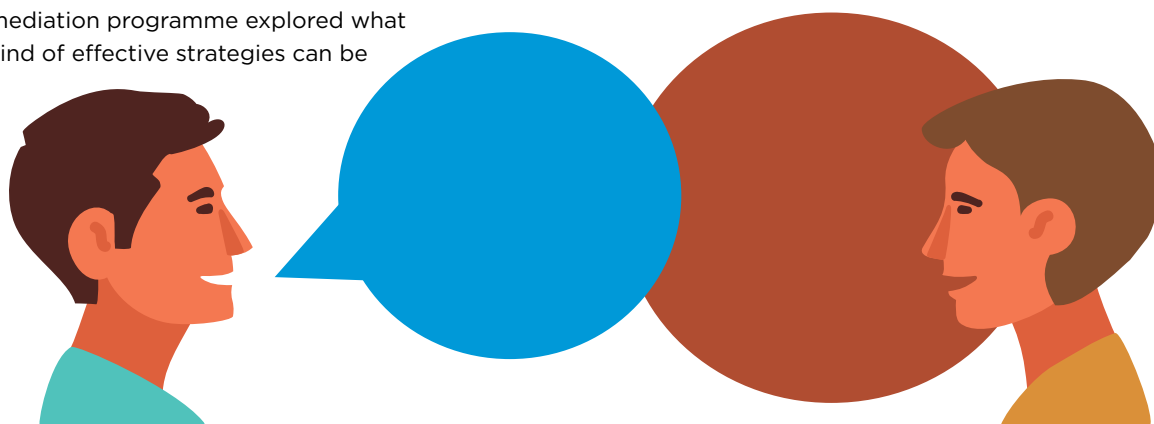
The school recognised that a new approach was needed and sought advice and guidance from the Irish Prison Service (IPS), the Travellers in Prison Initiative (TPI) and the MTCMI on how to approach this. Through consultation with both entities, the mediation programme explored what kind of effective strategies can be

implemented to diffuse situations of conflict and unrest in the prison. The nature of a prison environment is both intimidating and volatile; therefore, the programme had to teach the skills of non-violent communication, interpersonal skills, understanding empathy and feedback skills. These skills would give students the confidence to speak with inmates who are in a dispute and by applying these new skills would enable them to effectively mediate between the two parties to guide them into making well-considered decisions to resolve their differences.

The Peer Mediation programme (see box) began with 16 inmates undertaking a six-week training schedule that explored how mediation can be effectively used to diffuse and to change the mindset of violence. After the six weeks, the students said they would need additional training and practice to feel sufficiently confident to be recognised mediators. They were

offered the option of engaging in more intensive training to become a qualified peer-to-peer mediator, which would entail further training and a final practical assessment; or leaving the course and receiving a certificate of attendance of a mediation workshop. Ten left after six weeks and six remained to continue their studies.

The programme is quickly gaining recognition throughout the prison. Officers are now requesting the services of the trained inmates to mediate between feuding parties, and prisoners are aware of the role of the mediators. This has resulted in prisoners arranging meetings to resolve their issues and disputes. The process has quickly established itself in the prison as a means of preventing and resolving violence.



The Castlereagh Prison Peer Mediation programme works through a five-stage process. stage process.

STAGE ONE - INTRODUCTION

The following approach should be adopted when introducing yourself at the start of the mediation:

- Explain your role
- Highlight confidentiality
- Agree to be impartial
- Agree to participate
- Agree to listen to both parties
- Explain the role of one person speaking at one time
- Give the disputants a level of autonomy (They make the decisions)

STAGE TWO - HEARING THE STORY

The following approach should be adopted when allowing both parties to speak:

- Listen to each party tell their story about what happened
- Confirm and clarify what has been said

- Engage in what they are saying
- Show understanding to both parties
- Encourage talking through open questions

STAGE THREE - HOW THEY FEEL

The following approach should be adopted when reflecting on the disputants' personal feelings:

- How do you feel about what has happened?
- Do you understand why he feels the way he does?
- Explore the feelings of the disputants
- Clarify the disputants' feelings
- Explore why these feelings are causing a problem

STAGE FOUR - FINDING SOLUTIONS

The following approach should be adopted when looking for options on where a solution may lie:

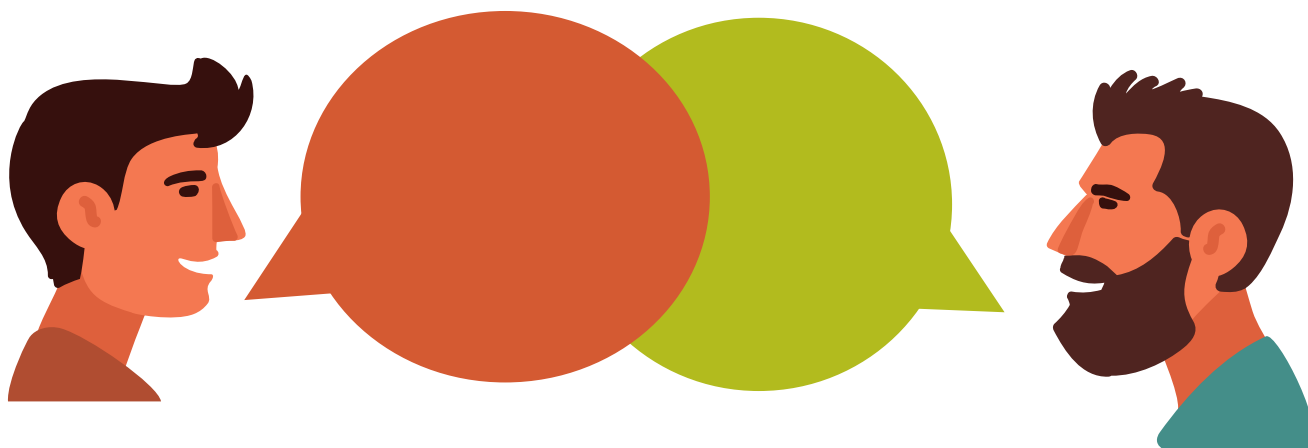
- Thank them for being willing to tell their stories
- Ask them if they have any ideas that might help

- Give them autonomy over the decision making
- Explore how things could move on
- Take your time...Observe body language
- Establish if the solutions discussed are reasonable

STAGE FIVE - CHOOSING A RESOLUTION

The following approach should be adopted when looking to form a resolution that suits both parties:

- They decide the ideas suggested
- Clarify and reflect what has been agreed
- Ask what will work for both parties
- Reinforce that mediation will always be there to help and support both parties
- Do they require another session?
- Thank them for taking part in the mediation



The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme and Lifelong Learning

By Lucy Pyne, Pobal Programmes Co-ordinator



This article gives an overview of the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme¹ and outlines how it provides education and training supports and engages with ETBs. After reading this article you should have a better understanding of the programme and how it can help you to meet your strategic objectives. Follow the link below to a short YouTube video² which is a good introduction to the programme. SICAP Origins and Outcomes

The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) is delivered locally by Programme Implementers across Ireland and it supports and delivers lifelong learning and training courses, engaging closely with ETBs in many counties. SICAP is a key tool for government to reduce poverty and strengthen communities. SICAP provides funding to tackle poverty and social exclusion through local engagement and partnerships between disadvantaged individuals, community organisations and public sector agencies. The new national social inclusion programme was launched in April 2015. SICAP has specific parameters and targets to ensure value for money, but also has the flexibility to tailor actions to local need. In its first year of operation, the evidence has shown that SICAP has delivered positive outcomes and has been effective in targeting those in need.

Three-Pronged Approach

SICAP is a targeted, holistic programme for those who are most

disadvantaged and less likely to use mainstream services. A multi-faceted initiative, it assists both individuals and local community groups through a three-pronged goal approach.

Goal 1 is designed to support disadvantaged communities and groups representing specific issues or target groups to engage with stakeholders in addressing social exclusion. SICAP supports local community groups to set up or expand and in 2015, 2,500 local community groups were assisted by the programme. For example, Carlow County Development Partnership worked closely with a Lithuanian community development group to

help it meet more regularly and plan local events such as a Halloween party and a carol service.

Goal 2 supports people who have experienced educational disadvantage to engage with lifelong learning opportunities and progress using community development approaches. 16,700 individuals received Goal 2 educational supports in 2015, 81% of whom had Leaving Certificate level or below. Monaghan Integrated Development set up life-coaching workshops to support people in education by building their generic skills. It was targeted at people who had never worked and with mental health issues who



needed help in building up their self-confidence.

Goal 3 is employment focused. It engages with those who are unemployed, economically inactive or in low paid jobs to improve their work readiness. It supports people to access jobs or become self-employed, or to explore social enterprise opportunities. 23,500 individuals received SICAP employment support in 2015. In one example, Westmeath Community Development designed a course to train local people for nearby job vacancies which included technical training and CV and interview skills preparation.

Programme Delivery and Funding

45 Programme Implementers (known as PIs) deliver SICAP across the country. Programme Implementers are primarily Local Development Companies – not-for-profit companies which provide a bottom-up approach to addressing community needs. Local Community Development Committees manage the programme in each local authority; they are the key decision-makers in terms of annual planning and monitoring. These committees were established in 2014 by government to bring about a more co-ordinated approach to local and community development and funding, and the majority include an ETB representative. SICAP is funded by the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government. Pobal acts on behalf of the Department to provide ongoing management and oversight, and organises training and capacity building events. The 2016 programme budget is €35.8 million which includes co-funding from the European Social Fund and a special allocation under the Youth Employment Initiative.

SICAP Clients

SICAP has a large and diverse caseload and each client must be from a specific ‘target’ group to be eligible for assistance. Over the nine months of operation in 2015, 36,900 people registered with the programme. The programme is centred on:

- The unemployed (either on or off the live register) and young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs).
- Those in work but who have a relatively low income or are living in households with a combined low income and at risk of poverty.
- People living in areas which have been classified as disadvantaged according to the Pobal HP Deprivation Index, including children and families.
- People with specific circumstances or from particular groups: lone parents; new communities including refugees and asylum seekers; people with disabilities; Roma and Travellers.
- SICAP also works with children by running activities such as summer camps and after school clubs, with a specific focus on preventing early school leaving.

Accessing SICAP

Participation in SICAP is voluntary and people can walk into their local partnership office to enquire about SICAP and what is on offer. Alternatively they can be referred by another organisation such as an Intreo office, the Local Employment Service, or an ETB. In 2015, 40% of all clients were referred to SICAP from a state body, demonstrating its interconnectedness with other state services. SICAP can also refer people to other supports and services: almost 1,000 people were referred

from SICAP to lifelong learning and further education and training providers in 2015.

Some SICAP Lifelong Learning Statistics

SICAP clients are supported to access short and longer training courses but the majority of provision is short-term. Training might be provided by the PI using SICAP funding or funding is leveraged from other agencies such as ETBs or private providers. In most cases there is likely to be an element of co-funding whereby, for example, the PI covers the costs of course marketing and registration while the ETB provides the tutor or room costs. Below are some headline statistics from SICAP course provision for 2015 which show the scale of engagement and the types of programmes availed of:

- 18,972 people were assisted by SICAP onto a course. There was a slightly higher portion of women (51%) than men. There were 24,605 course placements.
- A course outcome was recorded for 77% of course placements and 90% of these placements were successfully completed.
- One fifth of course placements were categorised as general programmes courses (20%), followed by personal development (19%), and health and welfare (16%).
- 47% of course placements were on courses provided by the PI, while private providers supplied 22% and ETBs provided 9%.
- 23% of course placements were NFQ accredited and Level 5 was the most common NFQ Level. After participating in SICAP, almost 3,000 people gained a higher level qualification.

SICAP and the Education and Training Sector

The role that SICAP plays within the education and training space varies and to a certain extent is dependent on the local infrastructure and relationships. Engagement between SICAP implementers and ETBs is more developed and formalised in some counties than in others and where strong relationships are evident these tend to have developed over many years and pre-date both the establishment of ETBs and SICAP.

Some PIs and ETBs run joint initiatives which provide a more integrated and locally informed response to a particular need, and this co-developing and co-funding can create a greater synergy and symbiotic relationship on the ground and be a better use of national funding. SICAP has three broad strategic advantages in the education and training sector and these are mutually beneficial to the PIs and ETBs in helping them to meet their strategic objectives.

SICAP uses outreach to identify people who would benefit from training supports and helps them to access these, and these people tend to be more marginalised and less likely to be picked up by other training services. In this sense SICAP implementers act as recruiters for ETBs and this can lead to higher participation rates. This outreach and local engagement means they often have a more fine-grained knowledge of local needs and gaps on the ground, which in turn can influence the types of courses that ETBs roll out. The programme implementer maintains contact with clients during their time on a course, and through this ongoing engagement and follow-up work it is more likely that someone will enjoy their experience and successfully complete their course.

SICAP provision fills a gap by providing training opportunities for people who are not equipped to commence an ETB course and for whom a community education approach is more appropriate. They work in-house with more marginalised and isolated individuals by providing shorter, unaccredited programmes and over time this can serve as a stepping stone to ETB engagement. Anecdotally some PIs report that clients are reluctant to approach an ETB as a result of bad memories from their formal education years. Local development officers reassure the clients and assist them to take the first steps and participate in something locally, carrying out what is often very resource- and time-intensive pre-development work.

ETBs also engage with PIs to leverage broader community development expertise from Local Development Companies and link in with the wider array of programmes they offer such as Tús, the Community Employment scheme or local training initiatives. ETBs value Local Development Companies for the specific skills, knowledge and expertise they bring to providing community education supports. Local Development Companies can also be a good space to trial a new approach and pilot an initiative, with the objective that if successful, it could be picked up and mainstreamed by the ETB.

Examples of Joint SICAP – ETB Working

Collaborative working results in improved information exchange and better planning. Duplication in provision is avoided through ongoing communication between ETBs and SICAP implementers, perhaps via joint annual planning processes or on a more informal basis, checking in with their respective counterparts before launching a

new course. It is also common to have an ETB member on the board of a Local Development Company. The key to successful and lasting engagement is communication and both organisations being able to offer something and having a positive approach to co-working. Some examples of joint working are given below. They reflect a diversity and flexibility in approach and good partnership working:

In Limerick Ballyhoura Development Ltd. worked in partnership with Limerick and Clare ETB to deliver needs-orientated education and training initiatives. The SICAP staff and methodologies were found to be critical in identifying suitable people to take part in part-time, non-accredited education using an outreach approach in partnership with the ETB, and this was facilitated through the East Limerick Education and Training Network.

In Donegal, the Donegal Local Development Company leveraged Donegal ETB funding to provide a range of training programmes which were focused on specific rural-orientated supports including farm safety, pesticide spraying, and IT training for farmers. They found that many people were reluctant to commence an ETB course and preferred to learn initially in a community setting. According to Inishowen Development Partnership it could not have delivered its range of training supports without the support of Donegal ETB, which has been a very important partner and allowed them to develop programmes to meet the needs of learners.

Westmeath Community Development engaged with Longford and Westmeath ETB to provide English classes for the Roma Community in a RAPID area, a need which was identified through

SICAP engagement with this target group. Westmeath Community Development provided the room facilities and the ETB funded the tutor costs.

There is strong engagement between the Laois Partnership Company and Laois & Offaly ETB. The ETB has found it invaluable to work with the partnership which identifies the need locally while the ETB funds the tutor costs. One very successful programme has emerged from this collaborative approach (which also involves HSE and DSP funding) – the Birchgrove Programme. The programme works with parents whose children may have poor school attendance and provides training three times a week in areas they enjoy. There has been a major improvement in school attendance rates and many of the parents have progressed into other modules provided by the ETBs.



How can we work with SICAP?
The ETB Community Education Facilitator is often the best placed person to make the link with the Local Development Company and explore SICAP opportunities. The Adult Guidance Officer as well as the literacy and adult guidance services in your ETB may also have connections with the SICAP implementer. We encourage ETB staff to make contact with their local Programme Implementer and vice

versa to explore the potential for closer engagement with SICAP – you can download a full PI contact list³ from the Pobal website. If you have any questions please email SICAP@pobal.ie.

More information

The Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government and Pobal will be launching a consultation process in early 2017 to plan for SICAP

2018-2020. Relevant stakeholders, including ETB representatives, will be invited to participate in this process. The main programme information can be found on the SICAP Funding Programme page⁴ and the Supports and Resources page⁵. The SICAP 2015 End of Year Report⁶ provides more comprehensive programme analysis than the overview provided here, and you can also download the executive summary⁷.

Footnotes

- 1 The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) 2015-2017 is funded by the Irish Government and co-funded by the European Social Fund and includes a special allocation under the Youth Employment Initiative.
- 2 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BphJIOVzJMM>
- 3 <https://www.pobal.ie/Publications/Documents/SICAP%20PIs%20contact%20list%20for%20Web%20Sept%202016.pdf>
- 4 [https://www.pobal.ie/FundingProgrammes/Social%20Inclusion%20and%20Community%20Activation%20Programme%20\(SICAP\)/Pages/default.aspx](https://www.pobal.ie/FundingProgrammes/Social%20Inclusion%20and%20Community%20Activation%20Programme%20(SICAP)/Pages/default.aspx)
- 5 <https://www.pobal.ie/Beneficiaries/SICAP/Pages/Social%20Inclusion%20and%20Community%20Activation%20Programme.aspx>
- 6 <https://www.pobal.ie/Publications/Documents/SICAP%20End%20of%20Year%20Report%202015%20FINAL.pdf>
- 7 <https://www.pobal.ie/Publications/Documents/SICAP%20End%20of%20Year%20Report%202015%20Executive%20Summary>.

Context, collaboration and Key Skills: integrating Literacy and Numeracy support into GRETB Training Centre

By Alison Jones, Adult Literacy Organiser, GRETB

In September 2015, one of the Adult Literacy Organisers in Galway City was transferred to the GRETB Training Centre, charged with embedding Literacy and Numeracy support into the range of apprenticeships that were on offer there. The move was guided by the FET Strategy 2014-2019, point 2.2, which aimed to *'devise and implement a strategy to promote literacy and numeracy across FET.'* The aim of this move was to provide a system of support that would be sustainable and applicable to all Apprenticeships in the Training Centre and that would improve exam pass rates and reduce dropout rates.

Now, in January 2017, Literacy and Numeracy support is very much part of the fabric of the Training Centre. It is embedded into the

apprenticeships, and the apprentices see it as an intrinsic part of what is on offer. None of them needs to struggle in their studies without knowing who and where to turn to for help. It is a natural part of the service.

Work started with just a couple of groups and with a few individual apprentices to see exactly where the difficulties lay. After three months or so, the picture was clearer and these were the findings:

- **Study Skills:** needed by all in each group
 - Possibility for **support at Phase 1** (on the job) prior to arriving at the Training Centre (Phase 2)
 - Using this information, and with the help and co-operation of the instructors, the following supports were devised in response. They are in place currently, with the collective knowledge and experience of all concerned increasing all the time.
 - There are four main areas of support as follows:
- **Maths difficulties:** 1 in 4 (sometimes 1 in 3) out of a group of 14
 - **Literacy (reading comprehension primarily):** 1 in 5 (though this figure is variable depending on the group)

1. Maths Support

In collaboration with the instructors, specific, context-related maths assessments were created which are



Alison Jones with students in the Student Support Room in GRETB Training Centre

given to each group at the start of each apprenticeship attending the Training Centre. The results allow us to see not just who needs support, but in which specific area it is needed. (See example result chart). Following this, a maths support class targets these topics and the apprentices who need it. Often these sessions are just needed as 'warm up' classes, but in some cases additional support is needed and this is given on a one-to-one basis. Attendance is voluntary, but the take-up is very good and very encouraging. Classes are held at the end of the day in order not to interfere with regular classwork, with up to five classes a week going on in the centre after class.

The apprentices themselves appreciate the streamlined, targeted classes, and are well motivated, as two of them stated recently:

'I kind of gave up on Maths at school. Now I want to learn it because it means more to me. I can see why I need it.'

'When you know what you're going to use it for, it makes more sense and it's easier to learn it.'

2.Literacy Support

Literacy skills are at a higher level than those typically encountered in the Literacy service, but difficulties exist nonetheless. Most of these centre around reading comprehension, particularly in relation to text books, that can include complex sentences, full of technical vocabulary. Instructors play a key role in identifying who needs help, and often send any apprentice who is struggling to meet the Adult Literacy Organiser for one or more sessions. However, to avoid feelings of stigma, the whole group is informed of the availability of this support and told

how and why it is offered. In this way, any apprentices with difficulties are invited to come forward for help, with a clear reason for doing so. They work with the Adult Literacy Organiser on a one-to-one basis, who finds bespoke solutions for learners with particular difficulties, and use different techniques with different learners. Sometimes these involve different reading techniques or word attack skills, sometime learning to create glossaries, or sometimes the learners simply need to know how to create notes. At other times, technology is used, such as Quizlet, to create flashcards, or the Voice Recorder app, to record notes. There is also a separate drop-in service which is open to all. If there were a motto, it would be 'no one is left behind'.

3.Study Skills

As a natural development from the type of literacy support outlined above, it soon became apparent that all the learners would benefit from study skills, particularly 'learning how to learn'. So, in conjunction with the Motor Mechanic instructors and their apprentices, a 'Study and Learning Guide' was devised and piloted. This is now an integral part of each apprenticeship course in the Training Centre. The booklet is an interactive workbook and is delivered over three half-hour sessions to each group at the start of Phase 2. It is an ideal way of imparting the skills the learners need and the instructors want them to have, and it also helps with establishing motivation and identifies reasons for studying. There are tips on how to prepare for exams, how to take notes and



This handbook is a workbook and is covered over three half hour sessions with the apprentices at phase 2.

how to be organised. Having a sense of purpose is key, as two learners attest:

'I never studied but now I study every day. Once you're interested, you want to study. It's like watching something you want to watch.'

'I'm thinking how has this happened. It's going in and not out again. This is the first time that's happened to me.'

4.Support at Phase One: a work in progress

With support now established in Phase 2 (in the Training Centre) it is an obvious next step to offer support at an earlier stage as well, in Phase 1 (on the job). So at induction, when all new apprentices are registered and meet in the Training Centre for the first time, they are given an informal assessment in Maths and Reading Comprehension. Anyone who is worried about their skills levels can then avail of a class such as a 'Maths for Trades' evening class, or a class in their local Adult Basic

Education Centre. To date around a dozen Phase 1 apprentices have taken up this offer, and it would be an ideal nationwide initiative, one that would mean that all apprentices in Phase 1 would have had the chance to warm up and brush up ahead of time if they want to, and is something that is being worked on.

Conclusions and Observations

This has been and continues to be a thoroughly worthwhile programme. It is important to note that a 'whole centre' approach has been taken, with the full support of management, staff and instructors. All staff in Kerry ETB are aware of the literacy and numeracy support that is available. Literacy Tutor Training Courses have taken place in the Training Centre and have been attended by GRETb staff from other departments, including Reception, Services to Business (STB) as well as Instructors. An additional booklet, entitled *'Ideas for Integrating Literacy into Craft Apprenticeships'* is available to all, and is full of ideas and examples on how to adapt difficult texts or concepts to make them more accessible to those with literacy or comprehension difficulties. Dyslexia testing using the Lads Plus disk is also available. The support is holistic, as it is in Adult Basic Education, with self-confidence and self-esteem visibly improving alongside the results. Parents have contacted the Training Centre to express their gratitude and apprentices certainly appreciate the support now available. There is a sense of purpose among them. As one said:

'School didn't mean much to me. But this is what I want to do and I want to learn it.'

But what about the actual exam results? There is now direct evidence to show that this multi-faceted support is working. This is a snapshot of the results from eight

groups from the Motor Mechanic department, both before and after the support was available and the figures are as follows:

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
1	Names										
2	1. addition	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
3	2. addition	1		1		1	1		1	1	1
4	3. subtraction			1	1	1	1	1		1	1
5	4. subtraction			1	1	1	1	1		1	1
6	5. multiplication					1		1		1	1
7	6. multiplication										1
8	7. division			1	1		1	1			1
9	8. division			1	1			1			1
10	9. brackets	1			1	1	1	1	1		
11	10. problem solving			1	1	1	1	1			1
12	11. percentages			1	1	1	1	1			1
13	12. percentages			1	1	1	1	1			1
14	13. fractions	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		1
15	14. fractions			1	1						1
16	15. algebra	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		1
17	16. squared numbers	1		1	1	1	1	1	1		1
18	17. decimals			1	1			1			
19	18. area of a rectangle			1	1			1			1
20	19. angles in a triangle			1	1	1	1	1	1		1
21	20. circle		1	1		1	1	1			1
22		6	5	17	16	14	16	17	7	5	18

This is a snapshot of the results from eight groups from the Motor Mechanic department, both before and after the support was available.

	Average number achieving a Merit per class	Average number being referred (unsuccessful) per class
Four groups prior to support (October 2013-August 2015)	31.5%	31.25%
Four groups after receiving support (October 2015-September 2016)	79.25%	0%*

*no learners have failed in any of the four classes since the support was offered

Collaboration has taken place not only within GRETb Training Centre, but with other Training Centres around the country as well, and this type of support programme is being developed in an ongoing manner. There is a wide-ranging sharing of materials, such as the Maths Electrical Assessment, induction materials and the Study and Learning Guide, and this certainly increases the potential to develop and improve resources for everyone to use as time goes on.

As such, this is a model that could work in any setting for any FET course, using assessments that are devised in context, with the collaboration of all concerned, and with the key skills placed at the heart of any support.

For additional information, visit: <http://gretbtrainingcentre.ie/pages/about/adultsupport.php>.

Recent research by Kerry ETB indicates that participation in further education is an effective pathway to jobs or higher education



By Sharon Browne, Adult Education Officer, Kerry ETB

Recent research by Kerry ETB indicates that participation in further education is an effective pathway to jobs or higher education. The study highlights that courses originally set up either as a bridge from basic education or as an alternative route to college are now in fact playing an additional role in helping people to find employment.

The study reveals that about a third of all adults who take up full time further education courses with Kerry ETB go straight into employment, and close to a half of all Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) students go on to further or higher education,

according to the findings of a new study launched as part of National College Awareness Week which took place in November 2016.

Traditionally, education providers have always looked at the number of students that sign up for courses and what qualifications they leave with. But typically, it was not always known what people actually did with those qualifications afterwards. This new study, just completed by Kerry ETB, examined the destination of learners some months after course completion, as well as retention and certification rates.

Project staff conducted a follow up telephone survey with over 600 PLC learners across some 46 courses and almost 80 VTOS (Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme) learners in eight different courses.

Almost 80% of all PLC students and 100% of VTOS had completed their course, with the majority of them achieving a Major Award in their chosen field of learning.

PLC Further Education Colleges were set up to provide further education and skills training for jobs as well as an access route to further and higher education, so in



PLC Colleges provide further education and skills training for jobs as well as an access route to further and higher education



many ways the results here were to be anticipated. VTOS, however, is a two-year bridging programme aimed at adults and young people over the age of 21 who either do not have a Leaving Certificate or need to up-skill. The high numbers of people exiting the VTOS programme directly into work was an excellent result.

The results in the individual Kerry ETB centres around the county are all a little different from the global county-wide statistics and in fact are an interesting reflection of the demographic profile of Kerry.

PLC Demographics

The population of the PLC Colleges in Kerry is two-thirds female and one-third male. Kerry College of Further Education (KCFE) in Tralee has the highest male participation rate, followed by North Kerry College (NKC) in Listowel. County-wide figures show that most learners were under the age of 26 years, one in five was between the age of 26-40 and only one in ten

was over the age of 40 years. But each town tells its own story. Tralee had the youngest population, while a quarter of PLC learners in Listowel were over the age of 40 years and in Caherciveen half of all PLC learners were over 40 years, reflecting the demographic makeup of the county.

The study also found that young males (under 26 years) were more likely to enter employment whereas females of this age were more likely to progress to further or higher education.

VTOS Demographics

VTOS presents a different image, with the majority of the learners over the age of 41 years, suggesting that the programme is playing a vital role in up-skilling / re-skilling and providing second chance education for early school leavers or people who found that their skills needed updating. Killarney and Tralee VTOS had the youngest population, while almost half of all South Kerry VTOS learners were in the over 40s bracket. This

reflects the aging rural demography of Kerry. It also points to the important role of VTOS in providing opportunities for people to develop and maintain skills for the labour market and everyday living, through courses such as Employability Skills, ICT Skills and General Learning as well the option to achieve a strong academic outcome by completing a Leaving Certificate as an adult. Owen O'Donnell, Kerry ETB Director of FET (Further Education and Training) said, "We are delighted with the positive outcomes, because they give us empirical evidence of what we knew was happening. Our managers and providers will be using the findings for internal analysis as part of our on-going continuous improvement approach to quality and to the relevance of our programs to the needs of our learners. The real benefit of directly talking to past learners is that we get direct feedback from our past participants."

STARTING UP A NEW SCHOOL – SCOIL AOIFE COMMUNITY NATIONAL SCHOOL’S JOURNEY



By Stacey McAuley, Principal, Scoil Aoife CNS

It began with a statement from the Department of Education and Skills (DES) that three new community national schools would open to serve the area of west Dublin. Subsequently Scoil Niamh CNS (now known as Citywest and Saggart Community National School) opened in 2012; Scoil Oscair (Lucan CNS) opened its doors in 2013; and then in 2014, Scoil Aoife CNS opened in September 2014 in temporary accommodation in Brookfield, Tallaght West.

Scoil Aoife CNS opened its doors ... and only one student arrived. “How can you have a school with one student?” was the question voiced over and over again in various quarters. In reality, it was a bit surreal and I was asking myself the same question. The Department was optimistic that the school would grow quickly, and I was assured by colleagues in DDLETB that they had witnessed other CNS schools develop from similar humble beginnings. Still I asked myself if I had I made a wise decision, leaving behind a Deputy Principalship of a large school where I had already proved myself as an effective teacher and leader of a well-established team.

I was, however, drawn to this exciting new model in primary education which I believed would offer a welcome alternative to traditional denominational schools. The ETB was perceived as a pioneer in so many different areas of education and I thought that having the support of such an experienced organisation would prove to be

of great value. I welcomed the opportunity to “make a difference” and help create a school of excellence, following in the trail of other Community National Schools, which were very impressive. The journey began in Head Office with a list of names which evaporated within weeks as I immersed myself in marketing strategies, crest creation, uniform choices and following a well-informed “roadmap” presented to me by the ever-patient and encouraging Single Manager Ian Murphy. His boundless energy brought us on a tour of all the existing CNS schools where I was welcomed aboard and offered support by my colleagues. What struck me was that each school had a strong individual identity but yet they shared a common vision and were rooted in their differing communities in similar ways. The innovative projects were abundant and the Principals were vibrant people, each with their own areas of expertise. They were all planning summer holidays and preparing for new entrants in September.

I, on the other hand, was facing an

uncertain summer, wondering how best to recruit some pupils. The encouraging staff in Head Office kept asking the dreaded question whenever I came near them, “How many have you now?” The number changed from day to day, but never really rose above 5. And so on September 1st, that was the number of students I expected, but alas... only one arrived. She was very enthusiastic and excited and Mum was very keen to purchase a uniform. On the third day, the enthusiastic child asked me, “When will my friends be here?” and I mumbled incoherently that I wasn’t sure but that I hoped it would be soon. I struggled to find activities that were interesting for her to do alone while being chaperoned in light of Child Protection legislation. It was a very intensive week and I wondered how viable this school really was.

By Day Four, an article had appeared in a provincial newspaper, wondering how a small Dublin school was permitted to remain open by the Department of Education when many small rural schools were being systematically closed down. The Department advised me to



Scoil Aoife is growing!

refer all press queries to them, and DDLETB advised the same. My phone was hopping and of course I was compelled to answer it in case it might concern a prospective pupil. It was however, always the Echo, the Herald, the Independent, all looking to write about "Ireland's Smallest School". After much deliberation, I took an executive decision to talk, and the rest is history...

Following an article in the Evening Herald, a reader recognised me and decided to contact me about enrolling her son. She didn't believe he was ready for an average sized class because of his extreme shyness but would benefit from being in a smaller class. He settled in very quickly and was soon followed by another pupil who was in a similar predicament. We painted and sang and bought books and games and jigsaws and puzzles and LEGO and construction toys and whiteboards and slowly turned our dance studio into a classroom. Following radio interviews and local press releases over a period of 4 or 5 weeks, we enrolled seven pupils. By Christmas we had nine, and by then we even had pupils choosing the school because they were impressed with the CNS model.

It was a challenging time. We opened with a preschool table and four chairs and a handful of books and games. There was no kettle or waste bin, so I became a shopping maniac, resourcing the school from scratch and simultaneously drawing up schemes and developing policies. We had security issues and were the victims of burglars on three occasions. My laptop with 20 years' worth of teaching resources *and* the backed up hard drive were stolen. The playground surface was destroyed over a weekend and the long awaited interactive whiteboard was rendered useless when the projector was removed from the



Getting the key to our new school building in Citywest In September 2016

ceiling. But we survived... and by the end of the first year we had created a warm safe environment where learning was a positive experience for all involved.

We enrolled another eight children for September 2015 and we appointed an SNA for a child with Special Needs. It was great to have another adult on the team! By the end of September with a total headcount of 19, the Department sanctioned a second teacher. In September 2016, we moved into a state-of-the-art building in Citywest, Dublin 24.

Building futuristic purposeful schools comes easily to DDLETB, and now we are charged with building a school community deserving of this wonderful building. We now have 65 students and a dedicated team of four teachers and an SNA. We have enthusiastic parents supporting us in many different ways. We will be opening a Special Needs Unit in September and it looks like we could have to turn away some pupils because the demand will be greater than the number we can accommodate.

Scoil Aoife CNS is a very busy place, just like the other Community National Schools. We have purchased violins and all our children are learning to play an instrument. The children are having singing lessons through the Music Generation Programme. We have dance lessons, yoga and mindfulness sessions. We

are pursuing our first Green Flag and we have registered for an Active flag. We are engaged in the Active Youth Challenge sponsored by DDLETB and we *Drop Everything And Dance* whenever there is an extra minute in the day. We are reading, writing, spelling, creating investigating, discussing, drawing and exploring.

Our school is underpinned by adopting the caring habits: we listen, encourage, accept, respect, support, trust and negotiate differences. We have developed our own sign language for these chosen behaviours and we encourage our parents to use these habits at home also.

There is never enough time in the day but most days are truly rewarding. It is a privilege to be part of a new movement in education which will reflect the diversity and celebrate the differences between us and yet draw us together to embrace our similarities.

We still have one principal but the first pupil, who always referred to herself as Number 1, unfortunately left us before Christmas. She was one of the many homeless children presently struggling in 2017. This child and her family faced numerous personal obstacles to remain part of Scoil Aoife and we hope that she may even return some day. I hope she will be the success story that she deserves to be and that the unusual start to her formal education will stand to her in some way. I hope to someday to tell *that* story.

ETBI and Department of Children and Youth Affairs sign historic Memorandum of Understanding

The signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on 18th January 2017 by Clare McNamara PO on behalf of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA), and Michael Moriarty, General Secretary, on behalf of ETBI, is the culmination of more than a year's consultation between the ETBI Youth Work Forum and the DCYA. The MOU has been put in place to ensure strategic co-ordination between the DCYA, ETBI and member Education & Training Boards, and effective policy and service provision for children and young people, including youth work provision.



Michael Moriarty, General Secretary of ETBI and Clare McNamara PO at DCYA, signing the MOU between ETBI and DCYA on January 18th

New state-of-the-art campus for Comeragh College Community School in Carrick-on-Suir (Tipperary ETB)

The new €13m campus of Comeragh College Community School in Carrick-on-Suir was officially opened in November by Cllr John Hogan, Chairman of Tipperary Education and Training Board.

Construction of Comeragh College's new campus began in January 2015 and was completed in March 2016. The students and staff moved in after the Easter holidays in early April 2016. The building accommodates up to 500 students and comprises 16 specialist classrooms, 11 general classrooms, a 600sq.m. sports hall, a general purpose hall and a Special Needs Unit. There are five ball courts, a full-size GAA playing pitch and a 48-space car park.

Cllr Hogan described the new school, located on a 16-acre site at Tinvane, Carrick-on-Suir, as a fantastic facility and the best, newest, and brightest school in the county. "I would have just loved to be in it as a student. It's the culmination of so much work," he said.



(L-R) Kevin Langton, Comeragh CC Principal, Cllr John Hogan, Chair of TETB, and Fionuala McGeever, CE of TETB



Cutting the ribbon at the opening of the new Comeragh College Community School campus

ETBI Training Schedule Spring 2017						
Title of training or public information session(s)	Provided by	Target audience, maximum number (if any)	Date(s) & times	Venue(s)	Deadline for registering if any	Contact name and email for registration and further information
Developing a Communications Strategy Workshop	ETBI	ETB Communications representatives	19 January (Session 1 9.30am-1.00pm; Session 2 1.30pm-5.00pm)	ETBI Offices, Pipers Hill		ETBI Tel 045 901 070
Briefing on QQI New Validation Policy and Criteria	ETBI, QQI, FESS	QA Representatives	1 February 2017 11am	ETBI Offices, Pipers Hill		Information from ETB QA Forum Representative
Contact Persons' Training under the Bullying and Harassment/Sexual Harassment Prevention Policies	ETBI	Contact Persons	6th and 7th February 2017	ETBI Offices, Pipers Hill		Deirdre Keogh ETBI 045 901 070
PLSS Learner Database Training	ETBI	Training Centre personnel	10/01/2017 and 11/01/2017	Finglas		Fiona Maloney ETBI 045 901 070
			23/01/2017	Kilkenny		
			24/01/2017 and 25/01/2017	Cork		
			07/02/2017 and 08/02/2017	Portlaoise		
			21/02/2017	Sligo		
			22/02/2017	Ballina		
			25 th January 2017	Galway Education Centre		
28 th January 2017	Limerick Education Centre					
4 th February 2017	Waterford Education Centre					
11 th February 2017	Kilkenny Education Centre					
Child Protection Training for ETB Board of Management Members	Delivered in conjunction with the DES PDST Unit, JMB and ACCS	ETB Board of Management Members	25 th February 2017	Drumcondra Education Centre	n/a	Niamh Ginnell ETBI 045 901 070
			1 st March 2017	Blackrock Education Centre		
			2 nd March 2017	Athlone Education Centre		
			9 th March 2017	Vienna Woods Hotel, Cork		
			14 th March 2017	Donegal Education Centre		
			15 th March 2017	Navan Education Centre		
			1st-3rd March 2017	Mount Wolseley Hotel, Tullow, Carlow		
Instructional Leadership Programme - Cohort 7 Instructional Leadership Programme - Cohort 8 Instructional Leadership Programme - Cohort 9	ETBI	110 Registered Participants 100 Registered Participants 130 Registered Participants	6th - 8th March 2017	Mount Wolseley Hotel, Tullow, Carlow	n/a	admin@instructionalleadership.ie
			8th - 10th March 2017	Mount Wolseley Hotel, Tullow, Carlow	n/a	admin@instructionalleadership.ie
					n/a	admin@instructionalleadership.ie

LCETB Hospitality Education and Training Centre serves up Irish First with European Quality Award



220 jobs created through sector-wide collaboration

The Hospitality Education and Training Centre (HETC) based at Limerick's Enterprise Development Park has become the first centre in the Republic of Ireland to be awarded a European Framework for Quality Management (EFQM) Centre of Excellence Award. The EFQM 'Centre of Excellence' is an assessment and recognition scheme that helps training centres and organisations deliver improved results. It is an action-based learning project that entails identifying, prioritising and implementing improvement projects using the EFQM Committed to Excellence Framework. The coveted EFQM award is granted to Europe's best performing organisations, following an in-depth audit of an organisation's business processes and procedures.

Operated by Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board (LCETB) and supported with funding received from SOLAS and Limerick City and County Council, the Hospitality Education and Training Centre is a partnership project involving the Department of Social Protection, PAUL Partnership, Limerick Enterprise Development Partnership, Limerick Institute of Technology, Limerick College of Further Education, Fáilte Ireland, and representatives from the Hospitality and Tourism sectors.

The HETC provides skills training in various sectors of the hospitality industry including Bar Operations, Hospitality Skills, Commis Chef Programme, Career Traineeship Programme and a Level 5 Professional Cookery Course. Since the centre opened in autumn 2014, 220 full and part-time jobs have been created. More than 100 of these jobs went to people from regeneration areas of Limerick City.

Bernadette Enright, Centre Manager of the HETC said, "Our centre is unique in that it delivers specific skills training directed at finding future employment in the hospitality sector. We operate under the auspices of the LCETB, and are both QQI and City & Guilds certified. The secret to our success is the collaboration between all the different partners. We are very industry-focused and regularly liaise with the sector to see what skills are needed."

The HETC has become the first recipient of the EFQM Centre of Excellence Award in the 26 counties. The centre underwent a rigorous assessment to benchmark its performance against EFQM principles. One of the factors highlighted in the assessment was the unique partnerships and collaborations that have been established with industry employers. It also focused on industry

involvement with the skills that are currently required in the sector and delivered through the hospitality curricula. The award acknowledges HETC as a centre committed to the highest level of achievement, as it engages with its stakeholders - trainees, staff, industry and education partners as well as government agencies and the local authority.

Dr Tony Lenehan, Executive Director of EFQM Ireland, said: "The EFQM Award to the Hospitality Education and Training Centre in Limerick recognises the professionalism of the centre in fulfilling its remit, but also provides a valuable benchmark for other Hospitality Training Centres around the country as they prepare individuals for valuable employment opportunities in the hospitality sector in their region. The benefits of accreditation are substantial as it provides an international symbol and benchmark of operational excellence for the Training Centre." He continued, "Regardless of sector, size, structure or maturity, organisations such as the Hospitality Education and Training Centre in Limerick need to establish appropriate management and business systems in order to be successful. The EFQM Excellence Framework is a practical tool to help them achieve this by measuring where they are on the path to excellence; helping them

to understand the gaps; and then applying innovative solutions.”

George O’Callaghan, Chief Executive of LCETB said: “The Hospitality Education and Training Centre is a real example of what can be achieved through the effective partnership between further education and training and industry partners. The EFQM award is an acknowledgement of this partnership and the real beneficiaries are those learners who have successfully progressed to employment or further training.”

Carmel Kirby, Director of Social Development with Limerick City and County Council said, “The Centre is

a highly visible and very effective demonstration of the work that Limerick City and County Council and others are doing for residents and communities in the four regeneration areas. By creating jobs we are helping to build our suitable communities, one of the central tenets of the Limerick Regeneration Framework Implementation Plan.” Ivan Tuohy, General Manager at Shannon Heritage said: “Shannon Heritage is very proud of our association with the LCETB. We acknowledge all the good work that the Hospitality Education and Training Centre is providing the wider tourism industry in terms of training and employee placements. We look forward to further

collaboration with LCETB.”

Elaina Fitzgerald, Chair of the Shannon Region Branch of the Irish Hotels Federation said: “Our members have benefitted hugely from the Hospitality Education and Training Centre. When you employ a quality recruitment process and quality training, the resultant quality graduates ensure service excellence in the Shannon Region’s hotels. As a federation, we are proud to support the centre and look forward to developing the relationship between the region’s hotels and the centre further. Congratulations to all involved. It is a great model that should be replicated throughout the country.”



Pictured from left: Simon Coveney TD, Minister of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government; Bernadette Enright, Centre Manager, Hospitality Education & Training Centre and Dr Tony Lenehan, Executive Director, EFQM Ireland.

Cork Training Centre awarded “Outstanding Centre of Excellence”

By Gillian Cannon, Marketing Officer, Cork Training Centre

In December 2016, Cork Training Centre was presented with the award of “Outstanding Centre of Excellence” from Andrew Flood from Prodigy Learning Ltd. Cork Training Centre operates a Pearson Vue & Prometric testing centre which allows internal and external clients access to all available international on-line exams from major companies, e.g., Microsoft, CompTia, Oracle, VMWare and Cisco. The test centre delivers exams in many other subject areas – not just ICT – such as Project Management, SHL Aptitude Tests, UKCAT, ISB and CIMA.



Cork Training Centre received the Centre of Excellence Award from Prodigy (L-R) : Enda McWeeney, Cork Training Centre Manager, Donal Cronin ,Test Centre Co-ordinator and Andrew Flood, CEO of Prodigy Learning Ltd]

Pobal Conference 2016: Creating an Inclusive Labour Market

By Matthew Ryan, Training Services Manager, Tipperary ETB

In November 2016, Tommy Coleman, Senior Training Advisor, Tipperary Education and Training Board, attended The 2016 Pobal national conference, which had the theme of Creating an Inclusive Labour Market. The conference brought together employment service providers from the statutory, community, local development and private sectors to discuss challenges and good practice regarding the creation of inclusive labour markets in Ireland. The conference aimed to support greater co-ordination between the various sectors in creating a more inclusive labour market for disadvantaged groups and communities.

The conference commenced with

introductions and welcome by Seamus Boland, Pobal Chairperson, and Brain McCarthy, President of DCU. The first Plenary Session considered How Inclusive is Today's Labour Market?, and included Anne Vaughan, Deputy Secretary of the Department of Social Protection, Leo Varadkar, Minister for Social Protection, and Marianne Thyssen, EU Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility.

Paul O'Toole of SOLAS and Tommy Coleman represented the Apprenticeship sector and hosted a workshop and question and answer session which examined the value of apprenticeships and how they operate locally. Apprenticeships have

been an area of reform in Ireland in recent years with the establishment of the Apprenticeship Council and the launch of new apprenticeships.



Paul O'Toole, CEO of SOLAS, and Tommy Coleman, Senior Training Advisor, Tipperary ETB]

TEDxShannonED event in Co Clare – Re-imagining Further Education and Training

By Nikki Gallagher, Director of Communications & Secretariat, SOLAS



On December 7th, 2016, eight high-achievers came together to share their insights on the different paths to success at the TEDxShannonED event in Co Clare. They took to the stage in a darkened room at the brand new Atlantic Aviation Training Institution for TEDxShannonED and helped ignite a conversation on re-imagining Further Education and Training.

Many Paths to Success – Re-imagining Further Education and

Training was the umbrella theme for the event and every speaker interpreted this in their own way to tell their story and share a big idea.

TEDxShannonED was an independently organised event supported by SOLAS, the Further Education and Training Authority, in partnership with Atlantic Aviation. At TEDxShannonED, TEDTalks videos and live speakers combined to spark deep discussion and connection in a small group.

Speaking to a packed audience that included industry and education providers, the eight speakers were:

John Walshe, award-winning education journalist, author and special adviser to former Minister for Education and Skills Ruairi Quinn, dared the audience to change the way they look at Further Education and Training in Ireland.

Brendan Kavanagh, a serial entrepreneur, who recently launched HiUp, a recruitment app that helps jobseekers develop their skills and



TEDxShannon speakers with Paul O'Toole, CEO of SOLAS (L-R): Adam Harris, Brendan Kavanagh, Margaret Reilly, Michael Mooney, Patrick Jordan, Paul O'Toole, Mairéad Healy, John Walshe and Mairéad Crosby

boost their earning power through appropriate online training, declared that formal education is broken and technology is the answer.

Margaret Reilly, an apprentice cabinet-maker turned businesswoman, highlighted the importance of apprenticeships and not taking 'no' for an answer.

Adam Harris, founder of ASIAM, ie, an organisation working to build an Ireland where every person with autism can 'live and succeed as they are' challenged flawed definitions of success and shared the ingredients of real success for the Autistic community.

Mairéad Healy, founder of Future Voices, a programme empowering disadvantaged and marginalised young people to pursue third level education, highlighted the importance of instilling self-belief in young people so that they can overcome barriers and access further and higher education regardless of their backgrounds.

Michael Mooney, manager of SOLAS eCollege, the National Online Learning Service, shared his vision of online learning in the 21st century and how the mass customisation of learning is the next step.

Mairéad Crosby, regional director of IBEC's Mid-West Office, emphasised that success means something different to each person and encouraged the audience to find their own path.

Patrick Jordan, owner of Atlantic Aviation Group, which he bought out of examinership in 2015 and has since managed to put back on solid ground, shared his insights on the rejuvenation of a 50-year-old business.

TEDxShannonEd took place at the Atlantic Aviation Institute as part of European Vocational Skills Week.



The state-of-the-art training facility at Shannon for aerospace and aviation training officially opened at the event. It is equipped with a dedicated training aircraft, has the latest aeronautical education and training equipment and is near to a live aircraft maintenance environment. Atlantic Aviation has a long and proud tradition of training aircraft engineers to a world-class standard, with their prestigious apprentice programme producing the last two WorldSkills champions and the last three IrelandSkills champions.

Speaking at the event, Paul O'Toole, SOLAS CEO, said: "Today's meeting shows that there are many different paths to success, and many different education and training options for people looking to achieve success, not just the traditional route. The education system needs to be

responsive to different strengths and offer diversity of learning to help people achieve their potential. Some of our speakers today left school early, some did apprenticeships, some went to third level and some pursued many different careers before finding success in their current field. The over-riding lesson from the event is that there is no one, defined path to success. Different education, training and career options suit different people, and we must be open to considering diverse opportunities in order to achieve success in our own lives." TEDxShannonED was the first TEDx event to be supported by SOLAS and it proved a great success with many of the audience of education providers, adult learners and business leaders, commenting on how insightful it was and how the format lent greatly to discussion and idea sharing.

Wexford teachers present new induction programme for second level students at Féilte 2016

By Maria Nolan, Communications Officer, WWETB

Féilte, the Teaching Council's Festival of Education in Learning and Teaching Excellence, has become one of the largest annual gathering of teachers in Ireland. It is a celebration of teaching which showcases the work of teachers who are leading innovative learning projects. Now in its fourth year, Féilte 2016 provided a platform for teachers to share their stories of innovation with each other and the public. It featured a mix of over 50 showcases and workshops spanning projects from across the education sector, demonstrating the innovation happening in teaching and learning in schools across the country.

Teachers Vanessa Murphy and Mary Whelan from Kennedy College, New Ross, presented for the third year in a row, showcasing their GET... SET... GO... Induction Programme. Specifically targeted at first year students, GET... SET... GO... helps to

facilitate the successful transfer and induction of students into secondary school. It features an eight-module workbook dealing with issues such as coping with change, new school, new expectations, new organisational skills, learning, homework and study, behaviour for learning, making new friends, forming new relationships, being safe and happy in school, new subjects and thinking skills and teamwork.

In the previous two years, Vanessa Murphy presented the Next STEP Programme (Second-Level Transfer Programme), designed by HSCL New Ross Co-ordinators, Milo Walsh, Pat Purcell and Vanessa Murphy, to prepare sixth class students for transfer into secondary school. Noting the importance of this preparation while in the HSCL role, Ms Murphy co-ordinated the development of the GET... SET... GO... Programme in Kennedy College,



New Ross, and Colaiste Abbain, Adamstown, with the support of strategy teams in both schools and Nuala Moore from Gorey Community School.

The programme was supported by the National Behaviour Support Service and part-funded by New Ross and Enniscorthy Credit Unions. Although only in its second year of implementation in both schools, the GET... SET... GO... Programme has been a huge success. It was very well received at Féilte.

Louth & Meath ETB Annual Youthreach Conference

by Stephen McArdle, Co-ordinator, Ardee Youthreach

The D Hotel in Drogheda was the venue for LMETB's annual Youthreach conference on November 16th last. All Co-ordinators, Resource and teaching staff from LMETB's nine Youthreach centres and Community Training Centre attended the conference, which this year had a focus on mental health and

wellbeing. The keynote speakers were Dr Harry Barry, who delivered a presentation on "Flagging the Screenager" and PDST's Niamh Digan, whose presentation focused on staff mental health. Other contributors included Philip James of the HSE, a specialist in the area of motivational interviewing and substance abuse, and Patrick

Jarratt of Kells Youthreach, who delivered a presentation on paperless assessment. The day also included presentations on the European projects LMETB's Youthreach centres are currently involved in as well as networking opportunities.



LMETB AND MAYNOOTH UNIVERSITY'S EMPOWER 2016 CONFERENCE



By Angela Rickard, Lecturer in Education, Maynooth University

If you look at the logo for the Empower project, you will see that the M depicts two figures holding hands. It is a fitting emblem for the ideas that inform the creative and ambitious WorldWise Global Schools-funded project led by St Peter's College, Dunboyne, and involving ten schools in the LMETB region. Unlike the traditional, charity-based 'helping hand' offered by Irish schools towards the so-called 'Third World' in the past, the simple gesture of holding hands conveys instead notions of equality, friendship and solidarity. These qualities permeated the Empower 2016 project at a number of levels.

The brainchild of two dynamic teachers from St Peter's College (LMETB), Sinéad Edmonds and Aideen Flood, the aim of the Empower project is to empower second level students to learn more about the imbalanced world we live in, and to explore the causes of global inequality and injustice. It provides a space for second level students from schools across the region to work together on creative ideas; to think as active citizens and explore ways to address issues of local and global injustice. Collaboration rather than competition is a key aspect of the work: symbolically, schools are working hand-in-hand, to build networks among students and among teachers with a view to consolidating relationships over time. The evocative symbol of hands held in friendship and solidarity also works across sectors, with Maynooth University working as a collaborator and friend of the project. As the closest university to many of the schools in the region, it was an ideal place to bridge the second level/

third level divide. In early September last year, Maynooth University's Education Department hosted the Empower 2016 Conference on campus. The themes addressed resonated with the 350-plus second level students who attended from schools across LMETB, and with the University of Maynooth's Education Department students, where Development Education has a long tradition.

The Conference was launched by Liz Lavery, former Education Officer with LMETB; and she was followed by a keynote presentation by author, film-maker and activist Zlata Filipović. *Zlata's Diary: A Child's Life in Wartime Sarajevo* was started when Zlata was eleven and was written over two years during the war in Bosnia. Zlata's story is a powerful reminder of the devastation of war and Zlata herself has dedicated her life as an activist: writing, making films and working with others to raise awareness about global injustice.

Following her moving keynote address, the students selected one workshop out of twelve in the morning and another in the

afternoon. In these, they explored a range of topics in the areas of Development Education, Education for Sustainable Development, Human Rights and Social Justice.

The model of learning that informs the Empower project assumes that young people are not mere passive recipients of information, but shapers of ideas and capable of making change in the world. They are encouraged to develop ideas and in turn deliver workshops in their own schools.

An additional innovation stemming from the Conference, *'Flipping the Tables'* saw TY students from LMETB schools becoming the teachers of student teachers in Maynooth as part of the Education Department's Development Education Week in November. The student teachers enjoyed having the tables flipped and were inspired by the young people.

Participants from both LMETB and Maynooth University felt enriched by their Empower project experience and look forward to further opportunities to connect with this outstanding project.



Apprentices receive Advanced Certificate Craft Awards on completion of their apprenticeships



By Eimear Smith, SOLAS Communications Unit

Graduating apprentices who successfully completed their apprenticeship were presented with their Advanced Certificate Craft at ceremonies around the country recently.

The Advanced Certificate Craft presentation ceremonies which are co-hosted by SOLAS and the local Education and Training Boards are an occasion to recognise the hard work, commitment and efforts of apprentices in achieving this distinction and to celebrate the achievement of being recognised as highly skilled craftspeople.

The Irish Apprenticeship system has proven extremely successful in developing highly skilled workers like those who received the Advanced Certificate Craft at the recent presentation ceremonies. Former apprentices have gone on to have successful careers, whether that is starting their own business, progressing with their current employer or progressing to further education. This year some ETBs invited former apprentices back to address newly qualified craftspeople at the Advanced Certificate Craft presentations. Each told their story from when they started as an apprentice to where they are now and how they now have a successful career.

Tipperary ETB, WWETB and KCETB invited David Halligan, a former electrical apprentice now employed with Kentz as Project Manager to share his story with graduating

apprentices. David's career began with Kentz, a family-run business established in 1919 in Clonmel. By the 1970s Kentz was one of the largest construction companies in the country. In 1977 the company started working in Middle East and by 2000 had operations in over 30 countries, with approximately 20,000 staff employed worldwide. 2013 saw Kentz listed on the FTSE London Stock Exchange and in August 2014 it was acquired by a Canadian company called SNC Lavalin for US\$1.9 billion.

David started working with Kentz where he was employed on a job in Waterford Regional Hospital that was to last three months. Twenty-two years later, he is still with the company. David explained how he had worked his way up through the ranks, eventually becoming a manager. On completion of senior trade exams, David progressed to the role of estimator. From there he went back on site in an engineering role and gained a huge amount of experience, seeing projects through from tender, to construction, all the way through to completion and handover.

David offered the graduating apprentices advice for their future careers. He told them that they should discuss with their employer what

they want to do and identify a career plan for themselves; they should enquire if there are opportunities for other roles within their organisation; and they should keep pushing for development and letting people know that they are ready for more responsibility. He also recommended that the graduates keep up to date with technological advances and avail of any training opportunities.

Another inspiring story was from Margaret Reilly, who spoke at the Louth and Meath ETB Advanced Certificate Craft presentation ceremony. Margaret started out as an apprentice cabinet maker in 1998 with the Regional Skills and Training Centre, formerly FÁS Dundalk, qualifying in 2002. Having worked in several sales and manufacturing companies, Margaret saw an opportunity to manufacture and supply bespoke kitchen and bedroom furniture to the trade,



and set up CTR Manufacturing Ltd in 2009. In 2011, Margaret opened a second business, Grand Designs Kitchen & Bedrooms Showroom Ltd, which facilitated the showcasing of their custom designed kitchen and bedroom furniture. In August 2015, a new factory showroom was purchased, allowing for the integration of both businesses under one roof. The company is growing and developing, with seven staff currently employed. Margaret is planning to employ an experienced sales person in the near future with a view to expanding into the North of Ireland.

These are just two examples of how successful the Irish apprenticeship programme has been in developing highly skilled workers like these recent graduates. Their stories were

both encouraging and inspiring for the graduating apprentices, and gave them a real insight into the opportunities open to them as they start the next phase of their career, and into the success that can be achieved.

Over the last year there has been an increased focus on apprenticeships. Under the guidance of the Apprenticeship Council, the apprenticeship system in Ireland is expanding. At the moment over 20 new apprenticeships are being developed in new sectors, including Financial Services, Insurance, HGV Driving and Baking. Alongside this, we are seeing an increase in the number of new apprentices being registered across all of the current trades. This is a testament to the high regard in which the

apprenticeship system in Ireland is held. It has long been respected as a comprehensive and successful career and education route for people of all ages.

The presentation of Advanced Certificate Craft is an occasion to recognise graduating apprentices as craftspeople and acknowledge the hard work and commitment of all involved in getting through a thorough and testing programme successfully.

SOLAS looks forward to once again working with the ETBs on the 2017 Advanced Certificate Craft presentations, ensuring a great occasion for graduating apprentices, their families, employers and all involved in the apprenticeship programme.

Some photographs from the Advanced Certificate Craft Presentations held around the country in recent months.



Cork TC CEO and Centre staff



A total of 135 apprentices graduated through City of Dublin ETB. Among these was Andrew Bushe who represented Ireland in the World Skills Olympics in San Paulo, Brazil, as a Motor Mechanic, where he was awarded a Bronze Medal of Excellence (front row, far right). Pictured above with the graduating apprentices are (front row, starting third from left): Peter Heffernan, Ballyfermot Training Centre; Blake Hodkinson, Education Officer, CDETB; Paul O'Toole, CEO, SOLAS; and Paul Fennelly, Manager, Training Services, CDETB.



LMETB graduates Darren Smyth (Heavy Vehicle Mechanics), Ross Johnston (Construction Plant Fitting) and Aaron Kane (Mechanical Automation and Maintenance Fitter) celebrate after their Apprenticeship Award Ceremony.



Graduate apprentices from Cork Training Centre

Youthreach Progression Awards Ceremony 2016

By Eileen Gargan, Co-Ordinator, Youthreach Progression, Navan (LMETB)

LMETB's annual Youthreach Progression Awards Ceremony took place in the Newgrange Hotel in October 2016.

The Ceremony was opened by the Minister for Housing and Urban Renewal, Damien English, who praised Youthreach Progression for the work they do with young people and the young people themselves for their participation in the programme. The Ceremony was attended by Sadie Ward McDermott, Director of Further Education at LMETB and Imelda Prunty, Adult Education Officer. Councillor Wayne Forde was also present. The ceremony was well attended with over 60 people present, including students, parents,

friends and invited guests.

QQI Certificates were presented to 22 students, with nine students achieving Level 5 Major Certificates, four in General Learning, two in Early Childhood Care and Education and three in Graphic Design. Fifteen students received certificates for completing their Leaving Certificate Applied, while six students received First Aid Certificates. Students also received extra-curricular awards in Poetry and Debating and certificates were presented for participating in the Young Social Innovators 2016, the Sweetman Trust Competition 2015 and 2016, Show Racism the Red Card and a Super Chef Competition.

The whole event was organised by the Centre's Event Production Team and MCs for the evening were students Aaron Power and Katie McDonagh. The evening was a wonderful display of academic, social and cultural achievements.



YR Progression Awards Night 2016 in LMETB

Minister Zappone launches the Cork ETB Profile of Youth Work Services

By Ruth Griffin, Youth Work Officer, Cork ETB Ruth.griffin@corketb.ie

Last September, Minister for Children and Youth Affairs Dr Katherine Zappone launched Cork ETB's Profile of Youth Work Services, which embraces the vision set out in Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures:

'for Ireland to be one of the best small countries in the world in which to grow up and raise a family, and where the rights of all children and young people are respected, protected and fulfilled; where their voices are heard and where they are supported to realise their maximum potential now and in the future.'¹ ETBs were given legislative responsibility to support the provision, coordination and administration of youth work services under the Education and Training Board Act 2013. This role complements ETBs' other functions

in further, community and continuing education.

Cork ETB is committed to advancing social cohesion, active citizenship, equality and area generation, and youth work is an essential element in achieving this while complementing



Minister Katherine Zappone launching Cork ETB Profile of Youth Work Services report with Jim Daly TD, Chair of the Oireachtas Committee on Children & Youth Affairs

formal education. In Cork, over thirteen agencies deliver youth work services on behalf of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) and Cork ETB.

The DCYA's 2014 Value for Money Review of Youth Programmes² recommended that all existing youth programmes be amalgamated into one funding stream³ and that additional governance capacity for the programmes would be sourced within ETBs⁴; work on implementing these recommendations has already commenced.

After a difficult few years for the youth work sector, during which cuts of almost 31% were endured, Cork ETB looks forward to building a sustainable, outcomes-based model of youth work for Cork.

PLENTY OF SUCCESS FOR GRETB STUDENTS IN THE 2017 BT YOUNG SCIENTIST AND TECHNOLOGY EXHIBITION

By Brian O'Maoilchiarain, Coláiste an Eachréidh, Sinéad Ní Neachtain, Merlin College, and Emma Ryan, Coláiste Bhaile Chláir

Students from GRETB schools entered the 2017 BT Young Scientist Exhibition in the RDS in Dublin last January, and many took away some impressive prizes. Here is a selection of their projects.



to be back representing his school at next year's Young Scientist Exhibition.



Coláiste Bhaile Chláir

First, Second and Third Year students from Coláiste Bhaile Chláir devised a selection of technological and lifestyle projects they hoped to impress with.



Ciara Ní Ghríofa - Coláiste an Eachréidh

Ciara Ní Ghríofa, Fifth Year student at Coláiste an Eachréidh, won not one, not two, but three national awards for her project. Ciara developed an app to help children with autism. Her work so impressed the judges that she was awarded:

- **RTÉ Best Social and Behavioural Science Project Overall**
- The Abbott **"Life to the Fullest award"** award - the sponsors have offered Ciara's class a visit to Abbott's medical devices lab in Longford
- **First place** in the senior individual social and behavioural sciences
- Ciara's project has been picked as one of thirty to be part of the **BT Business Boot Camp**

All at Coláiste an Eachréidh are hugely proud of her achievements!!!

Ian McDonagh - Merlin College

Castlepark native Ian Mc Donagh represented his school Merlin College once again at this year's BT Young Scientist Exhibition. Last year Ian's project on mares and the lunar cycle was awarded second place in its category.

Ian's project for the 2017 Exhibition was entitled "A Scientific Investigation of the Cures and Folklores of the Irish Travellers", and he catalogued 29 separate remedies that are still in use by the Traveller Community. Ian visited UCD and the Galway Traveller Movement, and conducted 134 surveys to gather information for his project.

His project attracted plenty of media attention: Ian was interviewed by the Irish Times, the Irish Independent as well as TV3's Vincent Browne show and RTE Radio's Countrywide. Links for all of these can be found on the school's website and Facebook page. Ian's project received the **Jack Restan Displays Award** for the project which presents the concepts, details, images, research findings etc. in the most clear, interesting and professional manner.

Ian already has plans to extend his research and he hopes to travel the length and breadth of Ireland during his Transition Year next year to write a book on the Cures and Folklores of the Irish Traveller. Ian also hopes

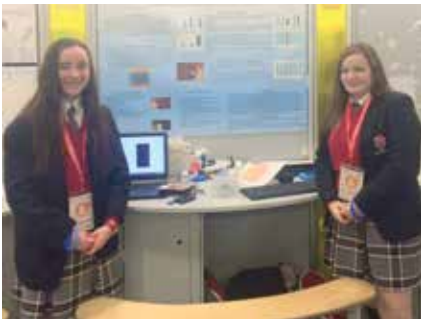


BT Young Scientist Pres Higgins

Bhí deis ag na buachaillí Michael Moroney, Finn Regan agus Emmet O'Shea buaileadh le Uachtarán na hÉireann ar an gcéad lá den taispéantas. Mhol an tUachtarán Michael D Ó hUiginn an sáróbair atá déanta acu.

"Smart Plug"

First Years Emmet O'Shea, Finn Regan and Michael Moroney devised a smart plug that allows users to have a greater understanding of their electricity consumption with a view to better controlling their bills.



“The Hox Project - Using RFID technology to advance medicine” - 1st place Intermediate Technology Winners and winners of the HPRA (Health Products Regulatory Authority) Award

Last year’s winning students Alaidh Fox and classmate Deirdre Hughes had double success at the Exhibition, with a further development of their mission to enhance supports to the visually impaired. This year they created several devices to help the elderly and visually impaired to administer medication safely through an audio device that can read labels and a separate wristband containing a patient’s entire medical history.



“Home is where the smart is - use your sensors!” - Highly Commended

Second Year students Niamh King, Alannah Murphy and Lauren McMahon developed an app that connects with sensors to enhance and improve daily living. A rain sensor alerts users by text that they should bring in laundry from outdoors, while a pet feeder allows animals to be fed remotely using a rotating device that tops up food and water bowls.



“The Bike Collision Sensor” - Poster Display Award

Maeve Farragher, Katherine Corbett and Roisin Joyce had road safety in mind with their bike collision sensor. The Second Year students created a sensor that alerts cyclists when they come within 1.5 metres of a vehicle. The sensor can also send a signal to a special app that detects if the sensor has become damaged, and can alert emergency services of the location of the cyclist if necessary. Congratulations to these students and to all the students who entered, and their teachers and mentors and supporters, for all the hard work preparing and presenting their wide-ranging projects at the 2017 Young Scientist Exhibition -well done, everyone!

Waterford Student is Youth Ambassador to the World

By Maria Nolan, Communications Officer, WWETB

Imelda Morrissey is a student in Waterford College of Further Education, studying Photography and Journalism. She was one of five participants who represented Ireland as a youth ambassador in Panevėžys, Lithuania, in October as part of the No Hate Speech Movement. There were 30 participants from countries including Turkey, Poland, Ireland, Lithuania, Italy and Hungary. According to Imelda, “It was an amazing opportunity, an even better experience and a trip I will never forget.” Eurobug International and Erasmus Plus run and fund this event. The No Hate Speech Movement is a youth campaign of the Council of Europe for human rights online. The objective is to

reduce the levels of acceptance of hate speech and to develop online youth participation and citizenship, including an Internet governance processes. In Lithuania, Imelda had the opportunity to mobilize other youth activists and challenge racism, religious intolerance and islamophobia, sexism, homophobia, disablism and all forms of intolerance. In addition, participants examined a counter narrative that fights the prevalence and tacit acceptance of hate speech in all its forms. Participants focussed on ensuring that no minority group is left out even when conflict arises around such differences based on religion, sexual orientation, and membership of ethnic groups. Building solidarity across all marginalized



groups as part of youth activists work was also addressed. Imelda had the opportunity to facilitate workshops on leadership and communication, along with another Irish delegate, Emmanuel. Imelda was also part of a group which made a video campaign on refugees titled, “What would you do?”. This video is now on YouTube and has been shared all around the world. Imelda has continued spreading the word of the No Hate Speech Movement around Ireland by making presentations to youth councils and in schools.

Busy, busy, busy!

the students of Blanchardstown Youthreach Centre have had an exciting few months

By Sandra Bagnall, Resource Manager, Youthreach The Brace Centre, Blanchardstown

The students of Youthreach Blanchardstown have been extremely busy over the last few months being educated, informed and entertained by visitors, field trips and workshops. Senator Lynn Ruane visited the Centre and discussed her life's journey from early school leaver and single mother, and highlighted that a person's background does not have to dictate their future. Students attended the Youth Summit on Migration and Sustainable Development of Goals hosted by National Youth Council of Ireland where they had the opportunity to hear from organisations dealing with migration, inequality, injustice and poverty, young people from Somalia and South Africa who had made the journey to Ireland, and a member of the Irish Naval Services who had been involved in the rescue missions in the Mediterranean. The students also attended the Zeminar event which focussed on young people's wellbeing, while the B4 U Decide team came to the Centre and worked with the students to create street art pieces and encourage discussion on themes related to healthy choice-making in the area of sexual behaviour. The students even participated in Irish dancing,



bread-making and bog-jumping at Causey Farm. Here are a few more Blanchardstown YR projects and events.

Community Computer Project

Having successfully completed their QQI level 4 IT Skills module, the Centre's students were in a position to give back to their local community. Eight retired neighbours have been visiting the centre on Thursday afternoons to upskill in areas of technology that they were interested in. Students worked with each person on an individual basis, helping them to book hotels, download apps and music and to send emails to family and friends abroad. The project was a great success, with both sides learning a lot from each other.

Pen Pal Programme

As part of the Centre's literacy programme, a number of students are participating in a pen pal project with Abendreal Schule in Germany, a second-chance education centre for 17- to 22-year-olds. The first phase of the exchange involved Centre students introducing themselves through handwritten letters. The German students then chose a person that they would like to reply to. There was great excitement when the first batch of replies came in the post, along with a photograph of our new German friends. We are looking forward to continuing this cultural exchange throughout the year.

Tour of Croke Park

The students recently took a



fantastic tour of Croke Park Stadium and the Skyline Walk. Most had never been to the iconic stadium, and they really appreciated learning about GAA Sports and the history of the GAA. They were told how and why the GAA was formed and the history of the individual stands and the famous Hill 16. The students got to go behind the scenes of Croke Park, visiting the changing rooms, the players' lounge and warm-up area and walking through the same tunnel that the victorious All Ireland Dublin football team ran out from only last September.

Then came the long walk up to the top of Croke Park for the Skyline Tour. From the top, the students had a view of all over Dublin, made even better by the beautiful clear day, which enabled them to see Dublin Bay from Howth to Dún Laoghaire and as far out as the airport. As the students walked around the top of the stadium, they reached a dizzying height over the pitch where all that separated them from a very long drop was a pane of Perspex glass. Lots of screams but great fun had!

Finishing the tour, the students got to visit the museum, which displayed medals from Katie Taylor, Sonia O'Sullivan and many other Irish heroes. Finally, they had the opportunity to work on skills in the interactive zone, with football target practice areas, speed test areas for hitting the sliotar with a hurley, and many more.

Top Engineering Award for St Brigid's College, Loughrea, at World Finals

By Sean Connolly, Principal, St Brigid's College, Loughrea (GRETB)

St. Brigid's College, Loughrea, celebrated world success last October when six students from the school won major honours at the Formula 1 in Schools World Finals in Austin Texas.

Supermac's Racing won the prestigious Scrutineering Award for the accuracy and quality of the engineering on their World Finals Formula 1 Car, beating the best teams from thirty-nine other countries from around the globe. The F1 in Schools competition is widely recognised as the premier global competition for second level students.

The awards were announced by compère and Sky Sports F1 commentator David Croft at the F1 in Schools Gala Awards Ceremony in front of an audience of some of the top dignitaries from the World of F1 Racing. This is a great achievement for the St. Brigid's students, who picked up their specially commissioned trophy at the F1 in Schools Gala Awards

Ceremony in Austin following four days of intense competition. The competition encompasses all the key STEM subjects (Science-Technology-Engineering-Maths), as well as aspects of business, entrepreneurship and innovative thinking.

The delighted students and their teachers Mr Monaghan and Mr Cleary enjoyed their ten-day trip and also attended the American Grand Prix on their last weekend in Austin. A major highlight of their experience, the team

members were guests of honour at the Scuderia Ferrari garage, where they spoke at length with the Ferrari team's top engineers, and had an opportunity to chat with four-time World Champion Sebastian Vettel, during qualifying for the American Grand Prix at the Circuit of the Americas in Texas.

You can follow the team's journey and view all their photos and videos on Facebook: Supermac's Racing or Twitter: @SupermacsRacing.



Pictured at the F1 Awards Gala Ceremony in Austin Texas are (L-R) Formula 1 in Schools Head of Scrutineering Willie McKnown, Eibhlin Lee, Lucy Doyle, Daniel Mahony, Conor Flanagan, Caimin Darcy and Adam Fahy



St Brigid's College students meet four times Formula 1 champion Sebastian Vettel during a visit to the Ferrari garage before the American F1 Grand Prix

Youthreach Tuam fundraiser for Tuam Tidy Towns

By Fiona Dempsey, Resource Person Youthreach Tuam, GRETB

Youthreach Tuam runs a voluntary work programme in which students choose a community organisation and carry out voluntary work with them one day a week. Some of our present students chose Tuam Tidy Towns as the organisation for which they would carry out their voluntary work, helping to clean up and improve the

appearance of Tuam town. Last December they joined the fundraising efforts of the Tuam Tidy Towns Committee by forming a Tuam Youthreach Choir to sing carols and Christmas songs in the Square in Tuam with other local groups. The Carol Singing fundraiser raised nearly €300 for Tuam Tidy Towns - a very tidy sum!



Youthreach Tuam Carol Singers

Hope Springs Eternal: "Humans Sharing Space"

Installation Project, at Castlerea Prison, Galway Roscommon ETB

By Joanne Foley, Malachy Costello and Mary O'Shea, Art teachers in the Education Unit, Castlerea Prison

As part of an Artist in Prison Scheme, textile artist Brigitta Varidy was invited by the Art teacher Joanne Foley to deliver a felt-making workshop at the Education Unit, Castlerea Prison, during December 2016. The aim of the workshop was for the participants to create a textile sculpture based on the them 'Humans sharing spaces', which is the title of an upcoming exhibition in Dublin.

The students, the artist and Joanne came up with the idea that they would create a piece of work in silhouette using the 'Nuno' felt technique; this is a technique in which merino wool is applied onto silk panels creating a transparent affect. The students planned to create four 'story' panels, each telling their own individual story, but all four connected. The first three panels were based on the idea of a Family, in Nature, on Life's Journey, and being confronted with the Harsh Reality

of Prison; the last panel would be all black with a large white circle in which a bird is silhouetted, signifying hope and the promise of freedom.

Over the course of the two weeks, the art room was a hive of intense activity, as felt-making of this size (each panel was 6 feet in height) and scale is unusual and presents many technical challenges, However all was overcome by the enthusiasm, energy and eagerness of the students.

This was a truly collaborative piece of work, with woodwork teacher



Vincent Hunt lending a hand. The finished piece, which the students had sewn together in a circle, was suspended from a ceiling and lit from underneath, thereby creating the desired silhouette effect. The result is a stunning piece of work which is a credit to all those involved in its creation.



Ireland's Professor of Poetry visits Deansrath Community College

Irish poet Eiléain Ní Chuileannáin received a very warm welcome recently when she visited Deansrath Community College, Clondalkin. Trinity College's Ní Chuileannáin was recently appointed Ireland's latest Professor of Poetry, taking up the mantle in November 2016. During her visit, Ní Chuileannáin read and discussed some of her

most well-known poems and enthusiastically answered questions from students. Matt Corbett, the College's recent recipient of the Inspirational Teacher award from Maynooth University, commented that students in attendance 'were inspired by the poet's passion and received excellent writing tips during the talk.'



Irish poet Eiléain Ní Chuileannáin with Matt Corbett, teacher at Deansrath Community College, Clondalkin

Putting learning into practice:

Youthreach Bantry provides Christmas Dinner at St. Goban's

By Stephanie O'Donovan, Teacher at Youthreach Bantry, Cork ETB

The Catering Support students of Youthreach Bantry organised and prepared a wonderful Christmas Dinner at St Goban's in Bantry, catering for about 50 guests including Youthreach students and staff, and invited members of CO-Action and the YMCA.

The dinner was followed by a graduation ceremony. Councillor Mary Hegarty, who was among the Dinner guests, awarded certificates to the students for their academic achievements of 2015/16.

The food and its presentation were outstanding. Everything there that one could possibly ask to see at a

traditional Christmas Dinner graced the groaning table, and the dessert buffet was truly impressive. The decoration of the Christmas log with dark chocolate leaves was amazing. Throughout the event there was a wonderful Christmassy atmosphere and everyone enjoyed themselves.

Since September 2016 Youthreach Bantry has been offering students a major award at QQI Level 4 in Catering Support with the aim of providing them with a broad range of skills aimed towards employment in the hospitality industry, or progression to further education or training. The current group of students has worked hard and with great enthusiasm. The

Christmas Dinner at St Goban's was their first public event and was a great achievement. Well done!



Still Life on a plate! The Catering Support Students of Youthreach Bantry with their highly decorative dessert buffet.

Templemore CFE hosts Screening of 'Commemorating Templemore 1916-2016'

By Noel Collieran PhD, Principal of Templemore College of Further Education (Tipperary ETB)

In November last, Templemore College hosted the official screening of the 'docu-movie' *Commemorating Templemore 1916-2016*, a collaboration between Templemore's St Patrick's Day Committee and the Media Department in the College.

The movie captures some of the important celebrations and events surrounding the town's commemoration of 1916, including the contribution of the musicians of the JK Brackens Scór group, Loughmore Primary School Drama, the Blessing of the Shamrock, a Library Exhibition by Aisling Hassett, St Patrick's Day Parade, as well as interviews with a number of the town's senior citizens. There was general agreement among the guests that this movie was an important contribution to the history of the town.

The double DVD box set is available for purchase for €10 from Shortt's Drapery 0504-31127 and Crafty Sew

and Sew 0504-56014 Templemore. All proceeds from the sales go directly to the Templemore St. Patrick's Day Parade Fund.



FAI Cup comes to Cork Training Centre

By Catherine Fox, Communications and PR Manager, Cavan and Monaghan ETB

Cork City FC battled it out for the FAI Cup against Dundalk FC at the Aviva Stadium back in early November, emerging the eventual winners. Cork Training Centre funds the FAI Soccer Academy courses which take place in Cork City, so the Training Centre got a visit from Cork City FC Manager John Caulfield with two past FAI Academy students who are currently Cork FC Players. Pictured are Enda McWeeney, Cork Training Centre Manager, with Centre staff and the FAI Cup.



CMETB Careers Event attracts over 1400 students

CMETB Careers Event attracts over 1400 students

By Catherine Fox, Communications and PR Manager, Cavan and Monaghan ETB

Over 1400 second level students attended a Careers Fair in Monaghan organised by Cavan and Monaghan Education and Training Board (CMETB) for secondary schools in the region. Over forty universities and colleges from Ireland and the UK were represented at the event, with information and advice on third level or further education and apprenticeship options available.

Monaghan Institute and Cavan Institute, CMETB Institutes of Further Education, reported an increase in demand for information on using their courses to progress to higher education degree courses.

Rosie Croarkin, Career Guidance Counsellor at Ballybay College, Monaghan, and Chairperson of the organising committee, said that students and teachers at the event especially valued that the exhibitors had the time to talk to the students in detail. "The Career Guidance Counsellors across the region worked

with their students in advance so that they were well prepared to ask all the necessary questions, from course entry requirements to campus accommodation. By running this event locally, the students did not have to travel to all the different open days throughout the country and they got the opportunity to speak with university and college representatives in detail. All the information that students required was available on the day, from grants to details of courses, alternatives educational pathways, and

opportunities to work while studying through the apprenticeship route."

Large demand for apprenticeships places was also evident according to Sinead McKenna, Training Standards Manager with CMETB. "As the construction industry recovers, there is an increased demand from both employers and students for apprenticeship training. Following the transfer of training to CMETB there has been a growth in demand for apprentices, especially by employers."



Pictured at the Cavan and Monaghan Educational and Training Board Careers Event are Rosie Croarkin, Career Guidance Counsellor at Ballybay College and Chairperson of the organising committee, John Kearney, Chief Executive CMETB, Paddy Flood, Director of Schools

INSPIRING AND INFORMING: SOLAS and ETBs celebrate College Awareness Week

By Eimear Smith, SOLAS Communications Unit

Further Education and Training featured in College Awareness Week this year far more than ever before. Participation in the campaign this year surpassed expectations with over 1,200 events organised around the country, a number of which related to FET. Other events included third-level institution open days and presentations to schools, school-based activities, library events and community events, to name but a few.

In collaboration with the Education and Training Boards, SOLAS set out to significantly increase the number of FET events organised as part of College Awareness Week. The objective was to provide students with an opportunity to learn more about their FET options, to inform and inspire them as they consider their career path and to equip them with information that would help in their post-secondary planning. Once again the strong working relationship between SOLAS and the ETBs proved invaluable in achieving this objective. College Awareness Week aims to inspire and inform all students about the importance of having a post-secondary plan and advocates for students to have the choice to pursue the course best suited to their interests, abilities and future plans, whether that is a PLC qualification, an apprenticeship or a university degree. The variety and creativity of events and the positivity and support among all those involved in organising and taking part was fantastic. There was great enthusiasm from all those involved in organising events resulting in inspiring, informative and enjoyable days for those attending. Organisers from colleges and training

centres really got into the spirit of the campaign with centres decked out with College Awareness banners and posters and staff donning College Awareness t-shirts. This all added to the events and allowed for a great atmosphere during the week. Working together, SOLAS and the ETBs ensured that events were not only informative but also inspiring – a key objective of College Awareness Week. The involvement of current and past apprentices and students was a great asset to FET during the campaign, providing students with a real insight into courses, careers and career paths. Current apprentices provided skills demonstrations and were on hand to answer questions from students and tell their FET story as were former apprentices and FE students. Ros Wynne, WorldSkills Gold Medallist in Aircraft Mechanics, and Ashling Mooney, a nursing student who herself took the FE route to nursing having completed a PLC before progressing to Trinity College, both offered advice and guidance to young people in care at an event organised as part of College Awareness Week.

Events such as Farriery Education Days, when students had the opportunity to experience, hands-on, the work of a farrier; Beauty Therapist Job Shadowing where a student shadowed Darragh O'Sullivan, Winner of IrelandSkills Beauty Therapy Competition, learning the technique of beauty therapy and gaining a deeper appreciation of the multi-faceted industry; a Techathon, at which students engaged with the latest technologies reshaping our society; as well as numerous open days and school visits, where skills



demonstrations and information sessions were provided, all demonstrated in a creative way, what FET has to offer.

As a national campaign, College Awareness Week was publicised across national media. Following public relations activity by SOLAS, a number of FET events were covered in local press and radio. To be associated with a national campaign was of great benefit to the FET sector, the ETBs and the individual colleges and training centres, and the coverage provided great exposure of FET to local communities.

College Awareness Week is supported by the Higher Education Authority, SOLAS—the Further Education and Training Authority, the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals and the Institute of Guidance Counsellors. Many other organisations such as The National Parents Council Post-Primary, the Irish Union of Second Level Students and Irish Business Employers Confederation also lent their support to the initiative.

College Awareness Week 2017 will take place during 20-26 November 2017 so "Save the Date". For more information on College Awareness Week 2017 and how you can get involved, please contact the Communications Unit in SOLAS on 01 533 2500 or email communications@solas.ie.

Music Generation launches a new €3m phase of expansion



€3m in funding available through an open call for applications from new Music Education Partnerships

by Aoife Lucey, Communications Manager, Music Generation

Music Generation has announced the launch of a brand new phase that will see the programme expand into new areas of Ireland over the next five years, creating access to vocal and instrumental tuition for thousands more children and young people.

'Phase 2' has been made possible through philanthropic investment by U2 and The Ireland Funds, as well as through the ongoing commitment of the Department of Education and Skills and local Music Education Partnerships to sustainably co-fund this pioneering initiative into the future.

€3m in funding for this next phase will be made available through an open national call for applications from Music Education Partnerships (MEPs) – locally-based groups of people and organisations, led by an **Education and Training Board** or a Local Authority, that come together to establish music programmes in their communities.

For Phase 2, local MEPs are eligible to apply for 50% seed funding up to a maximum of €200,000 per year for an initial three-year period. Partnerships selected for participation will raise the other 50% locally to establish the programme in their area.

Initiated by Music Network in 2010, Music Generation is Ireland's national music education programme that creates access to high-quality, subsidised vocal and instrumental tuition for children and young people in their own locality. From 2020, the Department of Education and Skills will replace the philanthropic

donations to ensure programmes are sustained on a long-term and lasting basis, alongside ongoing local funding. The Department of Education and Skills currently supports 'Phase 1' of Music Generation, which is established in 12 areas of Ireland, with an investment of €2.5m per year. This is matched on a 50/50 basis by local partners, many of which are **Education and Training Boards**.

Welcoming the announcement, Minister for Education and Skills, Richard Bruton TD, said: *"I am delighted that my Department currently invests €2.5 million to support this educational programme. This programme plays an enormous role in providing children with access to a music education. We are delighted to work in partnership with U2 and The Ireland Funds to enable the expansion of the Music Generation programme and to ensure the future of non-mainstream music education in Ireland. Our ongoing co-funding of Music Generation's first phase and our commitment to the long-term future of Phase 2 mark a significant investment by Government in the musical futures of Ireland's children and young people."*

U2's Adam Clayton said: *"We're so proud of Music Generation's great achievement – and the government's commitment is so important – in bringing this programme to 38,000+ children across the country. The sky is the limit over the next five years."*

"Music Generation is a terrific example of what can be achieved as a result of visionary public-private partnership," said Kieran McLoughlin, Worldwide

President and CEO of The Ireland Funds. *"The initial philanthropic investment in the programme is already yielding extraordinary results, inspiring and enriching the lives of 38,000 children and young people across Ireland. We look forward to working with U2 and the Department of Education and Skills to establish this new phase of Music Generation on a sustainable footing."*

Currently Music Generation offers more than 100 different programmes across all genres and styles of music, reaching 38,000 children and young people annually and creating over 330 employment opportunities. National Director of Music Generation, Rosaleen Molloy said: *"Music Generation believes passionately that it is every child and young person's right to have the choice of access and the chance to participate as a musical citizen. The launch of this next exciting phase means that Music Generation's reach will grow even further, coming closer to our ultimate vision of universal access. We are so grateful to U2, The Ireland Funds and the Department of Education and Skills for making this possible and we look forward to working with new Music Education Partnerships in establishing the programme in new areas of the country over the next five years."*

Funding Applications: New Music Education Partnerships must register their interest in applying to Music Generation by Friday 17 February, 2017. The closing date for completed applications is Wednesday 31st May 2017. Full details and application guidelines are available at www.musicgeneration.ie/apply.

Education and Training Boards (ETBs) in Ireland



Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI)
Piper's Hill
Kilcullen Road
Naas
Co Kildare
Ireland

Phone: +353 (0)45 901 070

Fax: +353 (0)45 901 711

Email: info@etbi.ie

 www.etbi.ie

 [etbireland](https://www.facebook.com/etbireland)

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