



Representing Vocational  
Education Committees

**Date: 13 September 2012**

**NATIONAL CONVENTION OF EDUCATION PARTNERS  
ESSENTIAL TO ENSURING QUALITY OF EDUCATION SYSTEM  
IS NOT ERODED**

**The President of the Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA), Noel O'Connor, in his address to the 108th Annual Congress of the IVEA in Cavan, today said that while IVEA supported the**

**According to Noel O'Connor .....**

**Indiscriminate effects of employment control frameworks undermine the work of schools and further education and training services....**

- ‘The indiscriminate effects of employment control frameworks (ECFs) and the dismantling of a significant proportion of middle-management posts in schools’ is putting the quality of education and training at risk.
- Unreformed, employment control frameworks will ‘erode public services’ and it is ‘students’ futures that are put at risk’.

**Congress calls for national convention of education partners...**

- ‘We need now to look again, without prejudice, at the management infrastructure in our schools.
- ‘This Congress **calls for the convening of a national convention of education partners** with you, Minister, and your officials, **so that, working in partnership, we may agree an approach capable of supporting a world-class education system**, in the context of available resources, with adequate management and administrative supports.’
- ‘The **time has come to wipe the slate clean and devise a new fit for purpose, and cost effective, model of school management** and leadership that guarantees, the best possible educational outcomes for our learners. This cannot await a return to prosperity: it must be commenced now’.

## School management is stretched to the limit...

- **‘School management is stretched to the limit’** and functions that should be undertaken by post holders keep landing on principals’ desks, **as they are being asked to lead’ critical educational reforms**, that ‘will not be realised, unless school leaders are freed up to lead them’.
- **‘Posts essential to the effective delivery of education and training must be maintained. Teachers will need to be flexible**, management will need to be resourceful, and we all will have to make the best possible use of ICT to facilitate the learners’ journey – indeed, to underpin everything that we do’.

## ICT key to educational and economic progress...

- **To recover our prosperity we need to modernise our education and training system and ‘the key here is committing fully to using Information and Communications Technology (ICT) as a learning tool in all schools’.**
- **‘We need to develop the capacities of schools, colleges and centres to deliver learning experiences through digital technologies’.**
- **‘We need to transform the way learners learn, provide more flexible learning pathways; and remove barriers that hinder access to education and training. Adults should be able to learn at the times and places that suit their particular circumstances, rather than those that suit the provider’.** ‘The appropriate **exploitation of the power and ubiquity of ICT ... can more than anything else, facilitate this change.**
- **‘No school student or no adult learner should miss out on what ICT can do to enhance teaching and learning.** Neither, can Ireland afford to lose pace with the rest of the world. Even developing countries are already in the race. For example, in 2009, **Uruguay became the first country in the world to equip every primary pupil with a laptop’.**

## Call for new strategic funding framework for ICT...

- **‘IVEA calls for the development of a new strategic funding framework for technology in education and training**, one that maintains the State’s investment and facilitates partnerships and matching funding, from the technology industry, to complement the State’s investment.’ .

## Significance of China in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)...

- ‘Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) has been the **principal driver of economic growth**’ but we **pay insufficient attention to China**, which ‘has accumulated 30% of the world’s total foreign reserves and is looking for a congenial place in which to invest them’.

### **Importance of Chinese language and culture courses...**

- ‘If we want attract Chinese investment, we **need to convince the Chinese that we understand and respect their culture** and we **need the language skills** to communicate with the Chinese’.
- **Producing a ‘significant number** of professionals, across a wide range of disciplines, **with a fluency in Chinese**’... **demands strategic leadership from the DES** – a leadership focused on clear, time-bound outcomes’.

### **Time to reallocate curriculum resources to Mandarin...**

- It may be time ‘to **reallocate some of the resources currently allocated to other areas of the curriculum towards the teaching of Mandarin**, in our schools and in our third level institutions? Sweden is committed to teaching Chinese in all primary schools by 2021, and in all schools eventually’.

### **Manifest need for more resources to ensure that guidance and training needs of unemployed are appropriately met...**

- ‘**While we need to restructure our FET system** to make it more efficient and effective, **this, of itself, will not enable us to meet the needs of all who need upskilling**’
- ‘If we are to **realise the objective of providing unemployed people with a skills assessment, followed by appropriate training** to give them employability, ...**more resources must be made available to deliver a significantly greater number of FET places** ...and we will need a significant increase in the number of career guidance professionals – both in NEES and in ETBs’.
- ‘There is **little point telling the unemployed to retrain, if they cannot access training** that is relevant to their particular needs and aptitudes, and the needs of the job market’.

### **Decision to remove schools’ entitlement to ex-quota guidance counsellors regrettable...**

- **Removing ‘the ‘entitlement of schools to ex-quota guidance counsellors’ resulted in principals this summer having to ‘choose between providing appropriate subject options to students and providing them with guidance and counselling.’**
- **‘The stark reality is that, even prior to the budget decision; second level students were not having their counselling needs met’.**
- **The Irish Journal of Psychological Medicine’s recent report** on the mental health of second level students is alarming, as is the 2012 *My World Survey of 14.500 12 to 25* year olds and the claim of **Dr Ian Gargan**, clinical director of the Imagine Health clinics, that, in the last two years, there has been a **30% increase in the number of people under 18 seeking treatment** at some frontline clinics for mental health issues.
- **‘Students have a myriad of non crisis needs for guidance and counselling** on a daily basis but **if these ‘run-of-the-mill’ needs are not met** as they arise, they **can seriously affect the capacity of these young people to make the most** of their education and their **lives’.**
- **‘The guidance and counselling needs of students have changed significantly over the years’**

### **Call for Task Force to review guidance and counselling in schools...**

- **Congress calls on the Minister to ‘establish a task force ... to review guidance and counselling in schools and to provide a set of specific and achievable recommendations for ensuring that the guidance and counselling needs of second level students are met satisfactorily – in a cost effective manner’.** This task force ‘to publish a draft report by the end of this school year’.

### **Concluding Comments**

In concluding his remarks, Noel O’Connor said:

- **‘We do not have the option of telling this generation of learners that many of their needs have to go unmet – until prosperity returns. Because it is the meeting of those needs today that will ensure tomorrow’s prosperity’.**
- **‘Of course, resources are an issue, but if we all work together constructively, government, management and unions, to find ways of confronting our challenges, we have every chance of confounding challenges that currently dazzle us with their intensity’.**

**ENDS**

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The Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA) is the representative body for the 33 Vocational Educational Committees (VECs) in Ireland, and works to protect, promote and enhance the interests of vocational education and training within the wider education sector and the country at large.

VEC/PLC Colleges have developed a range of programmes and courses in response to the needs of industry and commerce which are certified by FETAC at levels 3 to 6, and by the professional bodies which set standards for entry into the professions.